



## New Vauxhall Astra GSe – First Impressions

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Chris Adamson test drives this newcomer in the Astra line-up from Vauxhall...

*(All words and photographs by, and copyright, Chris Adamson).*



One of the longest established names to be found in British showrooms is the Vauxhall Astra, a venerable and big-selling model that has been at the heart of the Vauxhall product line for eight generations since 1980 with many of them being built at Ellesmere Port in Cheshire.

The latest generation to carry the Astra badge (the reigning Top Gear magazine Best Family Hatchback) has just been given a sporting shot in the arm with the introduction of the five-door hatchback GSe which, as the name (Grand Sport Electric) suggests, combines a petrol engine with a plug-in electric motor to gain the dual benefits of performance and economy.

The already sharp and rakish lines of the current Astra range are enhanced on the GSe with the profile having been lowered by 10mm (nearly half an inch) due to revised suspension settings and damping adjustments.

All round it, lots of sharp angles, a flat bonnet and slim-line styling which reinforced by the addition of 18inch Commodore wheels and a bespoke lower front bumper. To distinguish the GSe from its stablemates, Vauxhall also adds in a black roof and black Griffin logos.

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Inside, Alcantara trimmed sports seats and a grippy leather steering wheel are part of the GSe upgrades while the cabin still suffers from standard plastics and trim materials that are a little hard to the touch and frankly cheap looking.



Better news is the wraparound one-piece dashboard that has everything nicely integrated; all the information and controls are close at hand and it all feels a cohesive combination. From here the driver can control lots of on-board gadgetry such as the infotainment and air conditioning to attract younger tech savvy drivers.



While front seat occupants are well accommodated, the roof line in the rear is a little tight for taller passengers and rear leg room isn't particularly generous - as was ever the case on the Astra.

Boot space at 352 litres (12.43 cu.ft) is down compared to the standard Astra average due to the installation of the hybrid system.

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As you would expect from a range-topping model costing more than £40,000, the GSe is



packed with lots of clever tech features, such as Forward Collision Alert, Active Emergency Braking, Pedestrian Detection, Lane Departure Warning, Traffic Sign Assist and Automatic Speed Assist.

On the Road:



Motive power for the GSe comes from a 186 PS four-cylinder turbocharged 1.6 litre petrol engine accompanied by an 81.2 kW (110 PS) electric motor; these work together for a combined total power output of 225 PS and maximum torque of 360 Nm (266 lb.ft) and apply this to the front wheels via an eight speed automatic transmission.



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This is a mild hybrid combination in which both the petrol and electric motors are quiet and smooth - in some ways this is a little disappointing as you used to be able to guarantee a little bit more exhaust excitement from a performance model.

And, in operation, the GSe suffers from carrying the extra weight of the electric motor - a sprint time of 7.5 seconds to 62 mph isn't particularly impressive these days, but it is still the quickest Astra currently on sale.

Drivers can select from three driving modes: Sport, Hybrid and Electric. In Sport the power is punchy and responsive although there is some slight delay through the eight-speed transmission which can be overridden into a manual option using the steering wheel-mounted paddles for more aggressive gear changing.

In Hybrid setting the GSe still feels very lively and is probably the best option for most driving situations, especially if you are looking to obtain the best return on fuel consumption.

In full electric mode all the power comes from a 12.4 kWh battery which, in real world driving conditions, is worth about 30 miles of battery life based on my short driving experience (despite Vauxhall's claims of a possible 40 miles).

The additional advantage of the electric motor is that Vauxhall can claim lowly CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 25 g/km which have all the benefits of low taxation. The official fuel combined fuel consumption figure is a totally unrealistic 256 mpg - expect closer to 50 mpg if you use the electric motor to its maximum capacity.

For comparison the all-electric Astra uses a 114 kW electric motor and 54 kWh battery and achieves 258 miles between charges.

The GSe promises and, in part delivers, sharp and responsive steering which has been



recalibrated for a quicker response that is reportedly nine per cent faster than the standard Astra, while the electronic stability control has been set to come in slightly later for a more engaging driving experience.

Vauxhall has fitted 11 per cent stiffer springs for the GSe and KONI Frequency Selective Damping which makes for pliant suspension, firm enough to be sporty but soft enough to be comfortable.

## VERDICT

If Vauxhall was aiming to recreate the prowess of the VXR model then they have fallen a little short with the GSe which is more of a warm hatch than a truly hot hatch with the advantages over either the all-petrol or all-electric options of fuel economy, low emissions and performance.

It is also premium priced and in a very competitive sector with more prestigious brand names, but none-the-less this is a very attractive and welcoming addition to the Astra heritage.



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Wheels-Alive Tech Spec:

Vehicle: Vauxhall Astra GSe

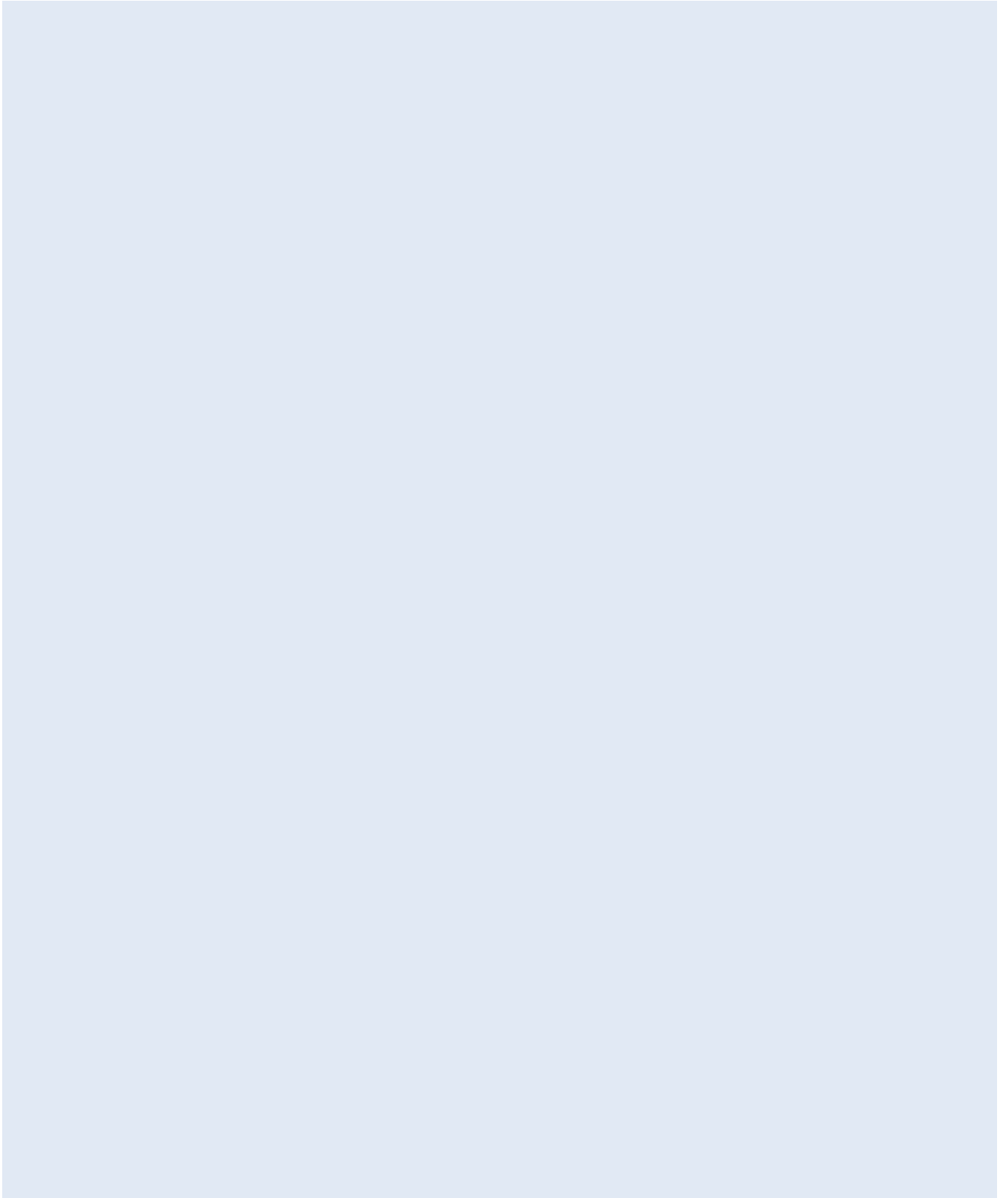




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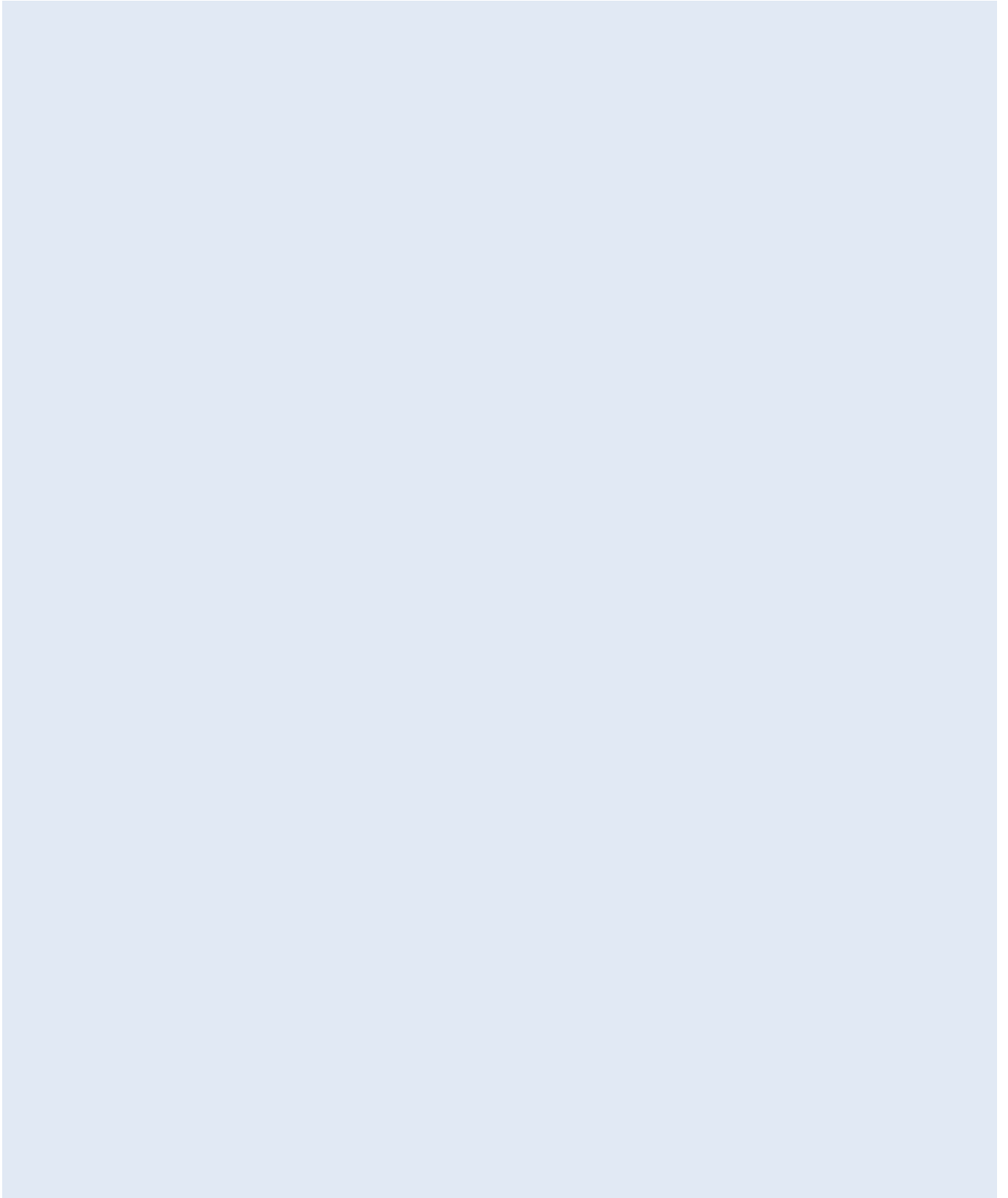




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Engine: 1.6 litre petrol & 81.2 kW electric motor

Transmission: Eight-speed automatic

Power: 225 PS (combined)

Torque: 360 Nm (266 lb.ft)

Performance:

0 - 62 mph: 7.5 seconds



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Top Speed: 146 mph

Fuel Consumption (Official Figures):

Combined: 256.8 mpg (52 mpg on test)

CO2 Emissions: 25 g/km

Price (On the Road) from: £40,550