



Vauxhall Vectra GSi



What's different?

Dynamic motorsport-derived GSi with 192bhp and near 150mph performance spearheads revised range of sporty production Vectras.

VAUXHALL'S UPDATED VECTRA HAS been on sale since last March, but the company reckons that it's saved its best version of the model until last. Cue the range-topping GSi. This race-inspired sporting flagship (available as a hatchback, saloon and estate) takes over from the previous model – and, indeed, mirrors it very closely.

As before, each car starts life as a 2.5-litre V6 SRi and is whisked off to beautiful downtown Milton Keynes, where MSD (that's Motor Sport Developments) give it an aggressive looking BTCC-style body kit, seven per cent-stiffer and 20mm-lower suspension (with stouter anti-roll bars) and 17in alloy wheels.

The 24-valve engine is then tuned to give an entertaining 192bhp by replacing the standard camshafts with those from the Omega three-litre Ecotec power unit, fitting a revised ECU and bolting on a modified exhaust system, terminating in a businesslike pair of chromed tailpipes.

Not much change from the old GSi, then – or so it would seem. In this case, however, the change of *exhaust* camshaft gives an increase of 9 lb ft of torque at no less than 1500rpm lower. It's a ploy that gives the engine not only greater mid-range muscle, but also goes some way in disguising the obvious gap between second and third gears that Vauxhall says only an expensive new gearbox would eradicate.

There's no difference in performance between old and new models, however (0-60mph in 7.6sec and a maximum speed of 148mph being claimed), but that's all right, because this remains a really rapid motor that's a joy to hustle along your favourite winding road. A soul-stirring underbonnet howl on full song confirms that the engine loves to rev as you slick-shift through the gears, but it's also one of the most remarkably tractable

power units in and around town. It proves a quiet motorway cruiser, too, thanks to highish overall gearing.

Tyre noise is often quite prominent, but that's obviously the price you pay for the excellent grip afforded by the ultra-low-profile 215/45ZR Yokohama tyres. They don't do any favours to the ride, either, which has a decidedly stiff-limbed feel with short, sharp reactions to road faults. But it's taut without being painfully harsh and is well suited to the GSi's character. Body roll is tightly controlled and the steering has been made just that bit sharper and more communicative on this latest model by a "quicker" rack and revisions to the valving.

The ABS-equipped brakes are superb and improved, in this case, by upgraded pads for greater consistency under hard use, and airflow to them has been increased by revised ducting.

Inside, it's all very Vectra, except that here, the front occupants enjoy the comfort and support of superb Recaro seats with electric adjustments and inflatable lumbar thrust. It's a pity, though, that the steering wheel isn't adjustable for reach (only rake) for maximum comfort, and you still catch your elbow on the central storage box when changing gear. Beyond the leather and aluminium-effect wheel (complete with audio controls) is a trio of clearly legible dials, while an alloy gear knob and fascia trim add a sporting touch to a somewhat sober cabin.

That said, it's a spacious interior which offers uncompromised comfort to those in the back, courtesy of a well-shaped seat that provides sound posture support. Luggage space is good, too, especially, of course, in the roomy estate – a fleet-footed freighter if ever there was one.

Satellite navigation is available as an extra, but switchable traction control, air conditioning, Trafficmaster navigation assistance, CD autochanger and a factory-fit telephone wiring loom are all standard in the GSi. Protection is provided by remote-control central deadlocking, an alarm and an engine immobiliser.

VERDICT

We were impressed with the earlier GSi and like this one even more. not only does it benefit from the Vectra's mid-life make-over, its pace and poise have been improved considerably by that boost to the mid-range grunt and the sharper handling.

Extroverts will love its full-blooded performance, aggressive body kit and the way it sounds. Maturer types will also appreciate its versatility (three body styles, remember) and its tractability and tranquillity in everyday use.

All will agree that it's one keenly priced and entertaining family express.

FACTS AND FIGURES

ENGINE

Type and size transverse V6, 2498cc. Four valves per cylinder, twin overhead camshafts per bank. Multi-point fuel injection

Power 192bhp at 6000rpm

Torque 193 lb ft at 3750rpm

TRANSMISSION

Type five-speed manual (no automatic option), front-wheel drive. Electronic traction control

Mph per 1000rpm 23.5 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension lowered 20mm all round. Front: MacPherson struts with uprated coil springs and gas-filled dampers. Rear: multi-link system with uprated coil springs and gas-filled dampers. Larger diameter anti-roll bars front and rear

Steering rack and pinion with hydraulic power assistance; 3.0 turns between full locks

Wheels 7½J alloy with 215/45 ZR17 Yokohama AVS Sport tyres

Brakes discs all round with upgraded pads and increased ventilation. ABS standard