



ARRIVA Meriva

VAUXHALL'S MERIVA WAS IN NEED OF AN UPDATE, BUT THE MARQUE HAS TOTALLY REINVENTED IT INSTEAD. THE DISTINCTIVE DOORS ARE ONLY THE BEGINNING

There appears to be a lot of 'retro' styling in evidence at the moment. The fashion world is taking a cue from the vintage looks, and some aspects of interior design have gone all sixties. Therefore it seems fitting that Vauxhall have decided to re-introduce a style from the early days of the motor car on its new Meriva; the backward opening doors.

In fact, it is not a totally new reintroduction. Mazda have had the concept on their RX-8 for a few years, so too have Rolls Royce. Still, those are in specialist vehicle sectors – sports car and high end, yet Vauxhall have made it mainstream. However, there is another 1.3 tonnes of vehicle around this special feature, and the question

has to be asked; is it good enough to beat its rivals?

The old Meriva was dependable, but had been left behind somewhat, as Vauxhall worked hard on the Insignia, and then the new Astra. Yet once these projects had been passed to production, the re-invention of the model began. The new Meriva is longer than its predecessor, and taller too, and that makes it much more accessible.

ENGINE

The model tested had the 1.4-litre turbo lump sitting beneath the sleek exterior, pushing out 140PS of power with 200nm torque. The turbo adds around 40PS to the power figures and that is certainly noticeable, plant your

foot on the accelerator and the Meriva will fire forward and on to 60mph in a shade under 10 seconds. However, this is still a small engine, and as such, will struggle on steep inclines, where the turbo won't be able to pull the car along. It is more suited to long haul driving where the car is in the mid range, top gear. Don't let the low capacity fool you into thinking the Meriva is fuel efficient too. On our tests, we averaged around 31mpg, which is more into the 1.6-litre territory.

EXTERIOR

Taking its cues from the Insignia, and the new Astra, the Meriva follows the new family pattern with a curvy grill working around the new Griffin

badge. The car is taller than other Vauxhalls, and this does show from the front with a more boxy appearance. There is nothing too dramatic in the front styling however, all providing function over form. Along the side, the window line sweeps up gently, but to enable the rear passengers to see more, it dips again halfway along the door. This is done in a nice sweeping motion, looking rather pleasant. Of course, notice of these design cues is rather lost in the effect of having two handles right next to each other. The rear window on the tailgate is followed along its lines into a gloss black piece of bodywork, which rounds off nicely into the numberplate recess. It really is well detailed for a family car, and will certainly stand apart from other, plain and functional designs. However, the styling is not too aggressive, which could leave it open to attack from other manufacturers who can offer sporting looks at family levels.

Of course, the main talking point is the Flexidoors. These open wider than any front hinged alternative, which makes access easier, especially for parents and carers who need to lift into the back seats. One concern to note is the lack of protection once sitting. It is easy for a child to put



their fingers beside the hinge, and should the door be shut at this point, it does shut tight.

INTERIOR

The interior does, unfortunately, let the Meriva down. The seats, driving position and general ambience when sitting there are all comfortable and pleasant, but the quality of the dashboard and centre console is cheap. The visor above the instruments will flex with the lightest of touches, while the centre console unit is puzzling. Vauxhall are as proud of their FlexiRail system as they are of their doors. However the unit, which has a large storage box on top, a cup holder beneath and allows them to slide into the best position, felt cheap, and prone to breaking. For myself, the best

position, using the storage box as an arm rest, meant I couldn't use the cup holders. Getting it into that position also involved a lot of pulling and frustration, and I was unable to do it one handed.

The front seating is comfortable, and sitting in the drivers seat certainly feels snug and secure. All the essential controls are there to hand, including the electronic parking brake, a button which needs only a push to activate, and nothing but pulling away to deactivate. The rear seats can work as a bench, or the middle can fold down, allowing the two outer parts to come closer to the front. This can aid comfort amongst rear passengers. When working as a bench however, there are large gaps at the back of the seats, which can easily swallow small loose items, such as children's toys.



The Facts

PRICE From £12,995

MOTABILITY ADVANCE From £Nil

0-60MPH 9.8 seconds

ENGINE TESTED 1.4-litre 16v Turbo

ECONOMY (TESTED) 31.8mpg

CO2 156g/km

POWER 140PS

TORQUE 200nm

FOR MORE INFORMATION visit motability.co.uk

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Verdict

Overall the Meriva does exactly what it should, carry a family or a number of passengers in safety and comfort. The rear doors are indeed a bonus, allowing for greater access to those who need it, as long as precautions are made for those who are sitting. Vauxhall's FlexiRail system, in my view, does not work, which is a shame as there is plenty of room to accommodate a storage box and cup holder between seats if it were not there. It certainly won't win any speed trials, but there is much more to it than a set of doors, and that makes it a worthwhile purchase.

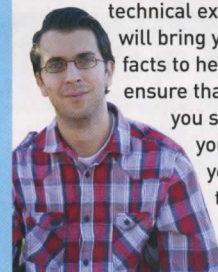
Yet finding them should be fairly easy, thanks to the amount of light let in by the panoramic roof on the model tested. The glass top runs virtually the length of the car, so on a bright day, everyone can enjoy the weather. On a typical British day however, one push of a button, and a heavy cover will automatically slide to hide the rain, snow or heavy clouds.

ON THE ROAD

The handling of the Meriva is spot on. From a standing start, it pulls well

through the gears, and is very much suited to main road long distance driving. With a comfortable interior offering a slightly higher vantage point than a standard car, it will not become tiring to drive. There is a degree of body roll, as there would be with any car of this height. It never felt unstable going around a corner, but at the same time, it never felt particularly exciting either. There certainly was need to slow down if carrying speed at a bend. In terms of stopping power, this model featured discs all round. Braking was nice and smooth in both wet and dry conditions. It is quite apparent that this is a car which is designed to carry a family, and not run around a track. A shame, as some manufacturers are able to balance the two.

Phil Curry has tested vehicles from mopeds to motorhomes, and knows what makes a car work. Having built engines, played with electronics and worked on two large motoring title as both a reviewer and technical expert, Phil will bring you the facts to help you ensure that when you spend your money, you make the right choice.



The Competition



FORD FOCUS C-MAX

Launching at the end of the year, the new C-Max will our first look at the platform for the 2011 Ford Focus. With the design taken from the Fiesta and now filtering its way through the marque, there will be aggressive looks, but it is yet to be seen as to whether these will translate to the road. One advantage is a sliding door for rear passenger access.



CITROEN C4 PICASSO

One of the pioneers of the mini MPV revolution, the latest Picasso is based on the C4 platform. A nice and tidy runner with lots of interior space, and good styling on the front, as all Citroen's have. Yet the handling is rather lacking, with a large amount of body roll in corners. A dependable runner, but not terribly exciting on the road.



PEUGEOT 5008

The French manufacturer launched the 5008 to some fanfare this year, and with reason. Able to seat seven, it is available with some impressive gadgetry on the options list, such as head-up display. Unfortunately, the options also include parking sensors, which given its size would be better fitted as standard. Still, impressive as a family car.