



Vauxhall Cascada

Classic beauty

Car review | It is inevitable. At some time you will realize you're all grown up. No longer is a car a toy or a means to impress others. That doesn't mean you cannot appreciate a special car. On the contrary! Your taste has matured and is now more refined. So a Vauxhall Cascada may be more attractive than ever before.

Shortly into the test drive something comes to mind: the Vauxhall Cascada has a certain grandeur that is unusual for a car in this price range. Driving the Cascada isn't exciting, instead it is relaxing.

Four persons

A glance at the spec sheet shows why: the design is modest, as is the price tag. Yet, when comparing the numbers it turns out this Vauxhall is as large as an Audi A5 Cabrio or a Mercedes-Benz E-Class Convertible! If the Cascada has to be compared to another Vauxhall, it is more like an Insignia than an Astra.



Vauxhall presents the Cascada as a true four-seater car and not without reason. The space in the front is ample. The headroom in the rear is much better than the design of the car suggests. It is the legroom in the rear that makes it a bit cramped for tall adults (still on short distances this should not be a problem).

Optionally the front seats can be adjusted electronically rather than manually. Moving forwards to make space to get into the back is also done

electronically. Because of safety regulations this happens so slowly that it becomes annoying. A smart detail: when the seat detects any resistance while sliding backwards again, it concludes it must have hit the passengers knees and stops moving.



Drop top

The Cascada is fitted with a traditional, cloth drop top. The reason for this is that a cloth roof can be folded more easily than a metal top and that gave the designers more freedom, resulting in a more striking silhouette. Just as important: textile is much lighter than metal, which benefits both handling and fuel efficiency.

The roof is tensioned to the extreme around its frame to prevent it from deforming while driving at high speeds (the lower air pressure behind the car could affect the shape of the roof). Also, do notice the beautifully integrated rear window. It isn't mashed between the layers of the roof, but flush mounted instead.



If desired, the roof can be opened or closed while driving at speeds of up to 30 mph. This takes 17 seconds. More important is the refinement of the mechanics responsible for operating the top. All electric motors, hinges and other parts operate very quietly.

Regrettably, the quality of the roof leaves something to be desired. The test vehicle was equipped with the optional layer of extra sound insulation. Despite this, noise of the other cars penetrated the cabin more clearly than in other convertibles. Noises from the Cascada's own engine or tyres are hardly audible at all.



When driving with the roof open, the Cascada is quieter and more comfortable than its rivals. Again the engine and other mechanical parts cannot be heard at

all. Wind or turbulence is also hardly noticeable. Even loose papers on the passenger seat hardly moved while driving on the open road. The high comfort levels are owed to the windscreen which almost extends above the heads of the driver and co-driver. The downside is that the Cascada doesn't quite offer the same feeling of freedom as some other convertibles.



Engine

The Cascada is meant for cruising, not for performance. This is proven once more by the newly developed 1.6 litre turbo engine. This engine offers no new technologies at all. Still, Vauxhall had a good reason to develop a new power-train: this time emphasis was on smoothness rather than performance. To achieve this, all existing technologies have been refined, with an exceptionally quiet and smooth engine as a result.

The 1.6 Turbo petrol engine can be driven like a diesel. From around 2,000 rpm the Cascada rides on a wave of torque. When all 170 horsepower come to life the Cascada performs so effortlessly that it seems slower than it actually is. Only the fact that other cars disappear in the rear-view mirror, proves that the Cascada is going fast.



Efficiency

Some brands ignore fuel efficiency when it comes to big engines, as if all is lost anyway. The Cascada is the exception and features all of the same fuel-saving technologies as the economic models. This includes an idle stop system as well as a shift indicator to help the driver save fuel.

According to Vauxhall the "Cascada 1.6 Turbo" consumes 6.2 litres per 100 km (46 mpg). The first test drive took as much as 9 litres per 100 km (31 mpg). Only after an economy drive did that number improve to an average of 6.9 litres per 100 km (40 mpg).

Handling

It won't come as a surprise: when it comes to handling, the Cascada again chooses comfort over performance. This doesn't mean the suspension is sloppy or the steering is devoid of feedback. The underpinning is as firm and steering as sharp as that of more sporty convertibles. The difference is that the Cascada doesn't reward fast driving and prefers to be handled with grace and dignity.



Thanks to "FlexRide" a push of a button is enough to change from a normal to either a more sporty or comfortable character. This influences the reaction on the throttle, the alertness of the steering and the firmness of the suspension. Do not expect too much of this; the difference between the three settings is much smaller than the brochure says.

No matter what version of the Cascada is chosen: the front suspension has been carried over from the sporty Insignia OPC. This is why every Cascada doesn't feel heavy, but instead is as agile as a small convertible.



Conclusion

Vauxhall wants to be an exciting and desirable brand. That is why it recently introduced the young and hip Adam. Now Vauxhall presents the more mature,

refined and elegant Cascada. The Cascada costs as much as a compact cabriolet, but is in fact as large as the big four-seater convertibles from other brands. This alone makes for a unique offer.

The Cascada also convinces with its good looks and fine handling. The design is classical and elegant, which emphasizes that this car is not meant to impress others, but to be enjoyed by the driver. The choice of materials, the noises from the mechanics (or lack thereof) and equipment levels all add to a feeling of class and high quality. When it comes to driving, yet again the Cascada doesn't choose sportiness but instead spoils its occupants with comfort and refinement. ■

