



Chevrolet Spark

Art on the square inch

Review | It is easy to build the best car in the world. Give the engineers carte blanche and they will use the best materials and the most advanced technology. But unlimited resources come with an unlimited price tag as well. The real art is to build the best possible small car, because there's little room to work with and an even smaller budget. With the Spark, Chevrolet wants to prove it can turn building small cars with excellent value for money into an art. Did they succeed?

Chevrolet set itself another challenge: their latest base model should not only offer good value for money, but also look good. The Spark should not be just another cute city car, but a compact car with the same allure and presence as the larger Chevrolets.

Responsible for the looks of the car is the American designer Rich Scheer and he said: "a five-door car is what people need, but a three-door is what people want". This is why the rear doors of the Spark are hidden, so it looks like a three-door. The door handles have been integrated in the black plastic edge around the rear windows and are therefore hardly visible. This also gave the designers a few extra inches of space, which have been used to give the Spark broader shoulders. It all makes this little car look solid and sleek.



Also details like the circular tail lights and curvy headlights make the Spark into a work of art among small cars. The version shown here is the absolute base model and even this one looks cheeky ‐ only those wheel covers could do with a bit more creativity.

Room

The Spark is designed in height, rather than width. Thanks to the extra height, the occupants can sit more upright and so the seats can be placed together more closely without any problem. The rear seat offers more space than usual in this segment.

Officially the Spark is a five-seater car, because it has three seat belts and three headrests in the back. Because of the limited width this is rather optimistic. To put it mildly: three adults should really like each other to fit comfortably in the back. In real life the rear seat offers space for two adults or three (small) children; and even that is quite an accomplishment for a car this size.



The above average space in the back doesn't go at the expense of the boot. It measures 170 litres and that's decent for a car like this. Loading and unloading isn't easy because of the high threshold. On the other hand, if the boot lid went all the way down into the bumper, it would be more exposed in the event of an accident. It goes without saying that the costs of repairing both a rear bumper and a boot lid are higher than just fixing a bumper.

Trim level

In the front the Spark offers plenty of head and legroom, even to tall drivers. Again it is noticeable that the Spark is a small car. Driver and co-driver sit so closely together that it is hardly possible to shift gears

without touching the passenger's leg.



The Spark doesn't have a traditional speedometer and rev counter in the dashboard. Instead the instrument cluster is put in a separate unit. This looks rather cheap, but the big advantage is that the entire unit moves along with the adjustable steering wheel.

The rest of the cabin looks like it is from a bigger car. Build quality is fine and the materials look and feel just right. Just about every free inch has been used to create storage space and/or cubby holes, which makes every day life with the car more pleasant. Also very nice: every Spark is fitted with a radio/CD-player that features both an AUX and USB-connector.



Engines

The Chevrolet Spark is available with a 1.0 and 1.2 litre petrol engine. This is always connected to a manual

five-speed gearbox, for now an automatic gearbox is not available.



As stated before, for this road test the base model was driven which means it has the lightest engine. As soon as this 1.0 litre engine is started, it is noticeably more quiet than most competitors. This is because its rivals use three-cylinder engines, while the Spark has four-cylinders. Although this makes the Spark more comfortable, a three-cylinder engine tends to use less fuel.

According to specifications the Spark 1.0 uses 5.1 litres of fuel per 100 km (55 mpg) and turns out 63 PS / 93 Nm. Because the engine is so quiet, the driver intuitively handles the throttle very gently. It then seems like the Spark is underpowered. But this engine needs to be revved to perform!



Performance

On the highway it is necessary to accelerate in low gear. Only when the desired cruising speed has been reached, fifth gear can be engaged. Then again the Spark stands out because of its low noise levels: the sound from the wind and tyres is very low. Only when driving in mountainous areas the 1.0 litre engine lacks power. On steep hills it doesn't suffice to shift down from fifth to fourth gear, but sometimes only third gear will keep the car climbing.

An emergency stop at highway speeds is handled with a lot of drama. Although ABS comes as standard, the Spark comes to a standstill with screeching tyres. The braking distance is well within all legal limits, but other small cars have more stopping power.

Handling

In city traffic the Spark comes alive like a sports car does on a racing track. Yet again it is important to make the engine work. From about 3,000 revolutions per minute the Spark 1.0 feels willing and eager to perform.



Chevrolet fitted the Spark with relatively advanced suspension. This is why the car doesn't just offer lots of comfort on poor surfaces, but also handles very well. Fast cornering is no problem and even in panic situations the vehicle handles safely and predictably.

Because of the boxy shape and rather large mirrors it is easy to switch lanes. In city traffic the small width makes it easy to cut through traffic and simply quicker than most big cars. It is predictable: at the end of each drive the little Spark can be parked onto the square inch!



Conclusion

Did Chevrolet succeed to build a car that is small yet roomy, economic yet complete and even looks good? Yes, without a doubt.

To start with the space: the Spark offers more

legroom in the back than most other minis. This small Chevy can also be used as a cheap family car. The comfort level is also above average, this goes for both the ride quality and sound levels. The design isn't cute and cuddly, like most of its rivals, but sleek and self assured.

Even the base model driven here convinces on all these points. However the base model lacks some basic necessities like a clock, height adjustable seat belts and a boot that can be unlocked from inside. So go for a slightly higher trim level. That also comes with light alloys which really suit a designer space miracle like this. Then the Chevrolet Spark is literally and figuratively art on the square inch. ■



Specifications

Chevrolet Spark 1.0

Size and weight



Length x width x height	364 x 160 x 152 cm
Wheelbase	237 cm
Kerb weight	832 kg
Trailer	unknown
Trailer - braked	unknown
Fuel capacity	35 l
Luggage space	170/568 l
Tyre size	155/80R13

Engine and performance



Capacity	995 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	68 PS @ 6400 rpm
Max torque	93 Nm @ 4800 rpm
Drive	front wheels
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	15.5 secs
Top speed	154 km/h
Average mileage	5.1 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	6.6 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	4.2 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	119 gr / km

Price

Price	Â£ 6,945
Price base model	Â£ 6,945