



Vauxhall Insignia (2008 - 2017)

It's a dog eat dog world

First impression | It's a dog eat dog world. That's a catchy way to say that if you don't keep developing your product, someone else will put you out of business eventually. This is particularly relevant for the Vauxhall Insignia. In 2008 Vauxhall's top model was first launched and immediately it distinguished itself by its noble appearance and innovative technology. Since then Vauxhall have kept developing and they now presents the next generation Insignia.

A "revolution" may be too strong a word, but merely "a wind of change" also doesn't do justice to the frenzy the Insignia caused when it was first launched in 2008. Although Vauxhall doesn't want to hear it, the Insignia is in fact the successor of the Vectra. The Vectra was a fine company car with very little downsides, but it hardly managed to stand out from the crowd.

The Insignia looks so posh that Vauxhall want to compete with prestigious marques and cars from a higher segment. To date the Insignia has always had a strong personality and distinguished looks, so the visual design has not been altered for 2012. The only visible news is a new, daring colour called "Luxor" which is something between dark blue and deep purple. The photographer loved it!



To emphasise more on luxury, a new kind of leather upholstery is now available. Optionally the Insignia can be executed in high-quality nappa leather. A spokesperson advised to both feel and smell the leather of the test car. That seems odd, but it quickly turned out that this is the best way to appreciate this top quality material that was only available on cars from the absolute top segment until now.

Combine that leather with the "ergonomic" seats (developed in cooperation with the German institute

for healthy backs) and one has a seat so fine it alone is a reason to choose the Insignia.

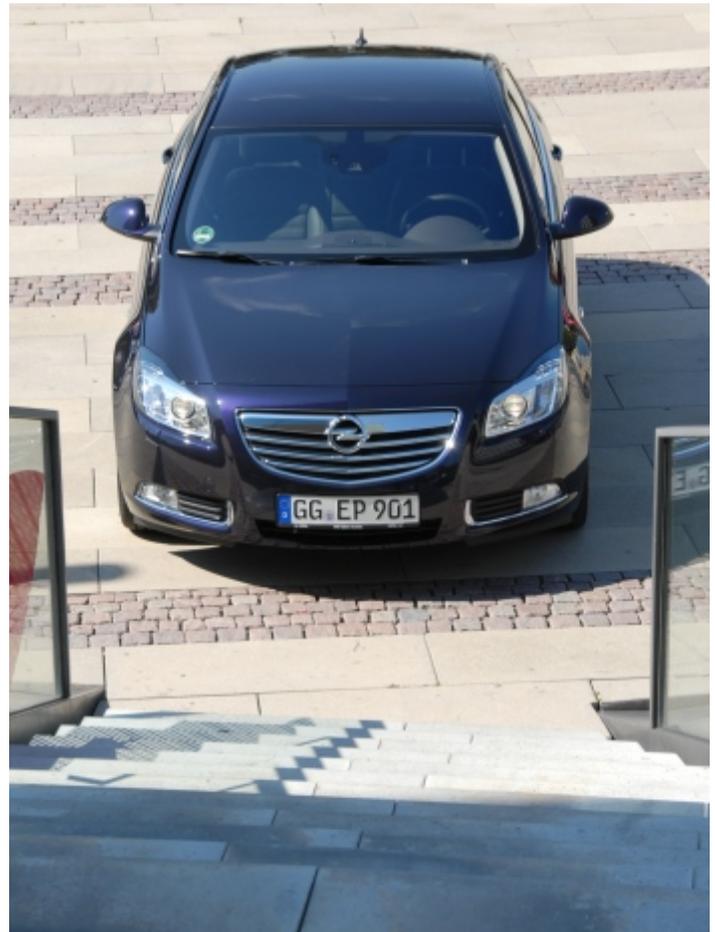
Vauxhall Eye

What made the Insignia so innovative in 2008, was its advanced electronics. The "Vauxhall Eye" reads traffic signs and shows the current speed limit as a reminder in the display between the speedometer and rev counter. That same camera is now also used to warn the driver when he/she accidentally (read: without indicating) crosses the markings on the road. Regrettably, during the test this system hardly worked at all; despite swerving from left to right, most of the time no warning was issued at all.



The camera is also used to determine the distance from the car in front. In the display, the distance remaining between both cars is shown. However, this is expressed in seconds rather than yards, so it doesn't mean much to the average driver. It is only when almost rear ending the car in front, that a (cartoon-like) warning is shown and an alarm sounds.

Just like with other new Vauxhalls, the satnav can now display tourist information.



1.4 Turbo

The important news for 2012 is under the bonnet. Several of the available engines are now stronger yet more fuel efficient at the same time. In some cases the decrease in CO2 emissions is tens of grams per kilometre.

The fuel economy is also improved by streamlining the underbody of the vehicle, by tyres with low rolling resistance, a shift indicator and a stop/start mechanism (which works very well), as well as various other minor mechanical tweaks to lower internal friction of the engine.

The most important new power train is the 1.4 litre turbo engine. It replaces the 1.8 litre petrol engine which developed the same power, while guzzling much more fuel. Vauxhall not only manages to get more power than others out of this small engine, it

also offers better fuel economy than its rivals.

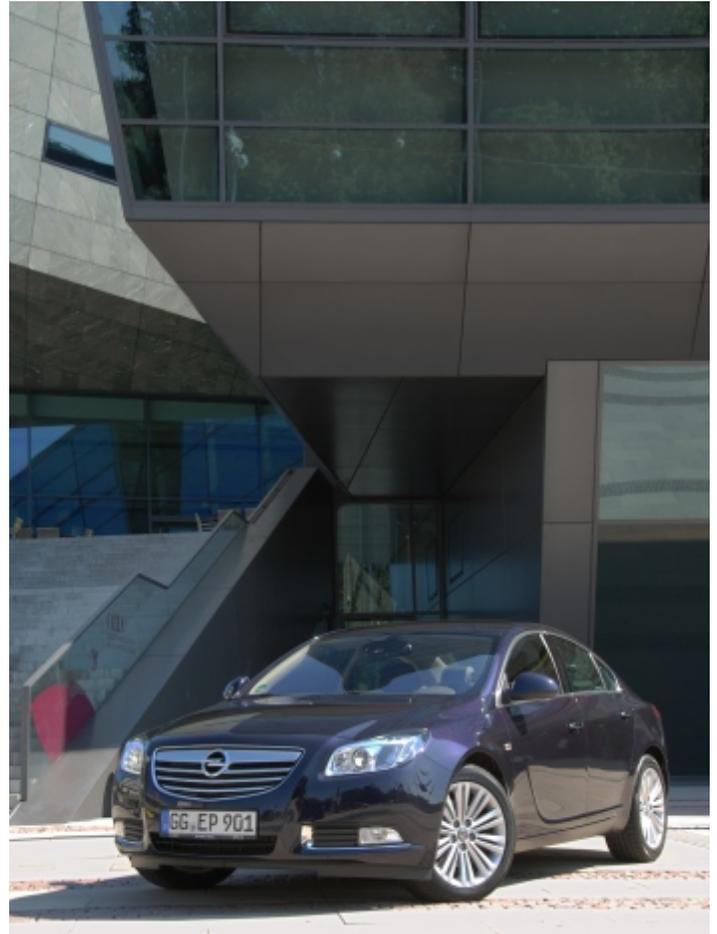


The 140 PS / 200 Nm is sufficient to come along with traffic. It's only when the needle of the rev counter enters the red zone, that the "Insignia 1.4 Turbo" can outperform the other traffic. At this point a surprisingly sporty noise sounds from the engine bay.



Given enough room, even this base model can easily travel at very high cruising speeds. Then the cabin remains remarkably silent. However, the grandeur that is expected from a car in this segment (and with these looks) is nowhere to be found.

Vauxhall promises the Insignia can do 49 mpg, but during the test drive it was hardly possible to achieve this. Even when driving exceptionally slowly the trip computer didn't show any value better than 42 mpg.



2.0 Turbo 4x4

Worldwide, almost a quarter of all Insignias are sold with an engine that develops more than two hundred horsepower. According to the technicians, the 2.0 litre turbo engine in combination with four-wheel drive lacked power. Therefore, it has been tuned to deliver 250, instead of 220 PS. However, this is only available at high engine speeds. Thanks to all-wheel drive this power is converted into performance safely and effectively; the word "wheelspin" is not in this Insignia's dictionary.

At low revs the engine has some trouble delivering. The vehicle doesn't accelerate in one fluent motion; instead it seemed like the brand new test car had a dirty petrol filter or was running on the wrong fuel.



Once the engine can rev, the 2.0 litre turbo is seriously quick and gives the Insignia the superior feeling that belongs to a car like this. No matter what engine speed, the 2.0 litre turbo has a beautiful soundtrack. At low revs this four-cylinder engine sounds like a six-cylinder! Because this car seems to want the driver to speed, the average fuel economy of 33 mpg was nowhere near achieved.

Handling

Despite all improvements, the Insignia doesn't behave differently than before. The eco tyres do not affect handling or comfort. To save fuel, the "ecoFLEX" models now feature electrical power steering. The more traditional mechanical power steering uses a pump that always consumes energy, even when driving straight for hours on end. Electrical power steering only uses electricity when actually cornering.

Vauxhall's electric power steering performs above average: the driver has sufficient feeling with the front tyres. Yet, the mechanical power steering in the more sporty models does noticeably better: the driver knows and feels what is happening under the front wheels.



In both cases handling is fine. This is thanks to an oldy but a goody: "FlexRide". Depending on the driving style (or by the push of a button) the characteristics of the suspension are adopted to the situation. This makes the Insignia comfortable when necessary, and sporty whenever possible.

Conclusion

The competition never rests, so an innovative car like the Vauxhall Insignia therefore has to improve constantly. When the vehicle was first introduced in 2008, design and comfort came first. For 2012 the design hasn't been changed. Comfort is supposed to be increased by several electronic driver's aids, but during this test they didn't work very well.

To keep up with time, most engines are now stronger and at the same time more fuel efficient. The 1.4 litre turbo petrol engine is even the strongest and most frugal in its class. With this small engine the Insignia performs adequately, but the wealthy feeling is gone. The improved 2.0 litre turbo engine does perform very well. Despite the chosen engine, handling is still fine. ■

