



Vauxhall Astra GTC

Old wine in new bottles?

A TV commercial wants the viewer to believe that the Vauxhall Astra GTC is a desirable dream car that will be admired by many generations to come. A fleeting glance at the car gives the impression that the newcomer is no more than a 3-door Astra of which only the name is something special. Is the Astra GTC merely a smart marketing trick or is this "Grand Turismo Compact" truly a special car?

The first doubt is eliminated when getting into the car. This "Sport"-version has firm leather sport seats with good sideways support. The low roofline immediately gives the snug feeling that is characteristic for a coupé. It does mean however that the seat has to be adjusted to the lowest position for the 1 metre 90 tall test driver. Even then the headroom is limited.



Once comfortably seated the driver's seat offers a view of a dashboard that is hardly any different from the normal Astra. This example has a few more buttons (e.g. seat heating) than the last test vehicle but is otherwise, to details like the kevlar decorative striping, identical. A pointless but nice oil pressure meter or other whiz bangs are not included for the GTC-driver. Even a cooling water temperature gauge is missing, just like the normal Astra. The "CD50" system

comprises of an on-board computer, telephone and audio-system as an optional extra. It sounds good and it also knows, as one of the few factory radios, how to deal with MP3-files.

In the back

The back seat of this coupé can be used for more than just luggage. The front passenger seat hinges so far to the front that it almost ends up in the dashboard. A small designer's mistake: when the headrest is in the top position it hits the roof and the seat gets stuck. The backseat offers enough room for adults if it is only for a short drive. Children are comfortable and enjoy the cosy feeling in the back of this GTC.

Looking out is restricted because of the small side windows. This is also a problem for the driver because it limits the visibility of the GTC, like many other coupés. Especially parallel parking takes some practice. Many metres were left behind the car on the first days where the driver thought to have parked quite tightly.

Pricelist

The feeling of exclusivity is shattered at studying the pricelist, for the GTC is available in the same models as the normal Astra. This means a basic model with a least potent 1.4-litre

petrol engine and "enjoy" basic equipment. A not very sensual 1.3-litre diesel is one of the possibilities too.



The 'ready-to-drive' model should be the 1.8-litre petrol engine driven for this test. The performance is satisfactory and if pushed it makes the GTC reasonably fast. In practice the GTC is mostly sold with a 200-horse powers strong 2-litre turbo engine. Only this version has the performance that suits its much promising exterior.



Regardless of the engine power, the road holding of the GTC differs noticeably from that of the normal Astra. This is not surprising because only the hood and the front mudguards are the same as the 5-doors version. The coupé is longer, wider and lower. Free interpretation: nicer, more stable and faster.

Unfortunately the (optional) panoramic windscreen, that should combine the feeling of a convertible with the comfort of a closed car, is not yet available. This is strange, because in almost every advert particularly this version is shown.

Sport

The Astra GTC is 1.5 cm closer to the road than the 5-doors version and the chassis is adjusted for a more dynamic handling. However, this is not immediately noticeable. The GTC steers stiffer than the normal Astra but that is more or less it. As opposed to coupés of different makes, the GTC doesn't shout it out. Therefore it takes a while for the GTC to actually convince the driver (hint: a perfect excuse to ask for an extra long test drive).

With one push on the button the steering, the reaction of the accelerator and the chassis can be adjusted. Different cars, including the normal Astra, have such a provision, but with the GTC the effect is the largest by far. All of a sudden the GTC changes into a real driving-machine that continuously challenges. Every bend has to be and can be taken faster than the previous one. There is a better feeling for what the GTC can do and now it really feels like travelling with a special car.

A "Grand Turismo", a car that makes effortless travels trans-Europe. Even in Sport-mode Amsterdam, Milan and Paris in one day doesn't sound inviting. GTC however stands for "Grand Turismo Compact" and suddenly Amsterdam, Brussels and Luxemburg sounds quite appealing!



Conclusion

Is the "Astra GTC" a nice name for a well known 3-door family car or is it really a special car? The answer depends entirely on the chosen model. The basic models are no more than a well-known Astra in a nice outfit. After all, three doors and a nice chassis with poor visibility do not make a sportcoupé.

The models with "Sport"-button are a step in the right

direction. Thanks to this provision the GTC is, if so desired, either comfortable or very sporty. In the latter case the steering and road holding are absolutely sublime. Whoever has chosen a fast engine (faster than the 1.8 of the test vehicle) can then also enjoy a performance that leaves nothing to the imagination. ■



Specifications

Vauxhall Astra GTC 1.8 16v SRi

Size and weight

Length	429 cm
Width	179 cm
Height	142 cm
Wheelbase	261 cm
Kerb weight	1165 kg
Trailer	630 kg
Trailer - braked	1300 kg
Fuel capacity	52 l
Luggage space	380/1300 l

Engine and performance

Capacity	1796 cc
Cylinders / valves	4/4
Max power	125 bhp @ 5600 rpm
Max torque	170 Nm @ 3800 rpm
Drive	voorwielen
Acceleration 0 - 62 mph	10.7 secs
Top speed	200 km/h
Average mileage	7.7 l / 100 km
Mileage urban	10.4 l / 100 km
Mileage extra urban	6.1 l / 100 km
CO2 emissions	185 gr / km



Price

Price	£ 16,300
Price base model	£ 14,415