

Vauxhall Agila

Featured model: 1.2i 16v



THIS BABY FROM LUTON IS really a clone of the essentially similar Suzuki Wagon R, and both are built in Eastern Europe. They compete with the Hyundai Atoz Amica, the Yaris Verso and perhaps the Daihatsu Move in their attempt to pour a lot into a little.

The idea is to build up rather than out, to ensure an easy-to-park town car that has plenty of interior space. The original Wagon R was even smaller, but this latest effort is truly impressive because the four-seater space is really generous, it's easy to enter and exit, and the way the back seats disappear from view is an object-lesson to others – including the new Corsa.

Luxurious cord carpet coats everything that folds, while the load platform is plastic-lined and illuminated in a way that makes a Fiesta look shabby. Anyone can keep their hat on inside and there are oddments areas everywhere, though objects slide about on hard plastic.

The heater doesn't extend its favours to the rear footwells, but at lower heat settings the face-level vents will deliver cooler air than those to the front footwells. Both air conditioning and our car's pleasant sunroof are optional extras, as is the superb central locking.

This covers all five doors and will work on either front door, with a second twist of the key to engage deadlocks – well worth having. So, too, might be the roof bars and the passengers airbag, but thus equipped,

the Agila will finish up more expensive than the Wagon R, which has all these as standard. This also applies a three-year warranty – another £320 on the Agila.

The main reason for preferring the Vauxhall is its more mechanically refined 1.2-litre engine (though past 55mph it begins to sound gruff), and its seats and ride comfort, that have been tweaked to advantage by Vauxhall-Opel.

Both the engine and the seating on this Vauxhall are better than the 1.3 Suzuki's. In small but subtle ways, the ride is smoother, the seating more supportive and at lower speed, the power unit is more tractable and user-friendly. Incidentally, the alternative three-cylinder one litre Agila is a plucky, willing performer that cruises, even on the motorway, with discretion but takes its time getting there.

VERDICT

Though it's wider than the Atoz and Amica, the Agila is no longer, yet finds those extra few centimetres inside and that extra bhp under the bonnet, both of which make all the difference. The Agila may not be a status symbol, but on ever-more-congested roads, it really makes sense.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

Overtaking ability	☆☆☆☆○
Space/practicality	☆☆☆☆☆
Controls/displays	☆☆○○○
Safety	☆☆☆☆○
Handling/steering	☆☆☆☆○
Comfort	☆☆☆☆○
Fuel economy	☆☆○○○

SPECIFICATION

engine 1199cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 75bhp at 5600rpm, 81 lb ft at 4000rpm; chain-driven twin overhead camshafts, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 18.8 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 15.9 in 4th

suspension front: independent damper/struts with integral coil springs. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle, coil springs and a Panhard rod.

steering electric power assistance; 3.3 turns lock-to-lock; 10.35m diameter turning circle between kerbs (16.2m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes solid discs front, drums rear, with ABS anti skid control optional extra.

wheels/tyres 4½in steel with 155/65R14T tyres (Kleber C651TK on test car); full-size spare

LIKES AND GRIPES

the way the back seat folds
rear radio speakers in the roof
two courtesy lamps, worked by any door
quality cord carpet everywhere

floppy, token load cover
no intermittent setting for rear wiper
imprecise gear selection, changing down
no unpainted bumper option

THE AGILA RANGE

body mini/city 5 door MPV (Suzuki Wagon R very similar)

trim levels one only

engines petrol: 3 cylinder/1.0 litre/58bhp; 4/1.2/75

diesel: none

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (no automatic available on Agila yet)

OVERTAKING ABILITY ☆☆☆☆○					
<i>"House-brick" aerodynamics results in mediocre acceleration times for a 75bhp motor, despite "busy" overall gearing. Flexible at low speed</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	4.4	11.4	15.1		
30-50mph	5.3	11.4	14.9		
40-60mph	7.0	12.4	16.7		
50-70mph	9.4	13.3	19.3		
30-70mph	14.7	24.7	34.2		
max speed in each gear (*using 6000rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④	⑤
speed (mph)	27	49	72	96½	97

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ☆☆☆☆☆				
<i>As a strictly four seater, room and ease of seat folding put larger cars to shame. Parking is a doddle, too. Central locking works well</i>				
<i>in centimetres (5-door mini-MPV)</i>		inside	<i>(† 99 with sunroof)</i>	
outside		front - legroom	94-107	
length	350	- headroom	105†	
width - <i>inc mirrors</i>	194	rear - typical leg/	98/	
- <i>mirrors folded</i>	175	kneeroom	68	
height (+4 with roof bars)	166	- headroom	97	
load sill height		- hiproom	123	
<i>(inside/outside)</i>	4/64	load space <i>(all seats in use)</i>		
steering		<i>(litres/cu ft)</i>	280/9.9	
turns lock-to-lock	3.3	load length	48-114	
turning circle <i>(metres)</i>	10.35	full length to fascia	210	
easy to park/garage?		load width	112-132	
	☆☆☆☆○	load height <i>(to shelf to top of aperture)</i>	48/ 98	

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ☆☆☆☆○	
<i>A clunky gearshift spoils an otherwise excellent driving stance; generous driver legroom and easy access, but no seats or wheel-height adjustment</i>	
	

SAFETY ☆☆☆☆○	
<i>Stops well but some fade in arduous use. Only four belts, but passengers airbag and ABS on options list. Decoupled pedals and force limiters on front belts</i>	
braking	
pedal feel	☆☆☆☆○
in emergency	☆☆☆☆○
handbrake	☆☆☆☆○
dry road stopping distance	
<i>from 50mph</i>	<i>(without ABS)</i>
pedal load	distance
10kg	38m
27kg	28m best stop
+4kg ie 31kg	34m <i>skidding</i>

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
Agila not yet tested

SECURITY FEATURES	
central locking	✓
remote control	✗
auto window closure	✗
deadlocks	✓
alarm	✗
immobiliser	✓
luggage security	☆☆☆☆○
✓ standard 0 factory option ✗ not available	

HANDLING AND STEERING ☆☆☆☆○	
<i>Only high-set seat deters quick cornering, otherwise stable, though some nibbling and wobbling, directionally, on the straight</i>	
	
COMFORT ☆☆☆☆○	
<i>Pleasingly absorbent ride and four good seats, with excellent rear access and room. Lower- and mid-range refinement marred by raucous note at speed</i>	

FUEL ECONOMY ☆☆○○○	
<i>Below-par mpg, especially at high-speed cruising; range respectable, despite absence of low-level lamp. "Can't lose it" fuel filler cap, and easy brimming</i>	
type of use <i>(air conditioning off)</i>	AA test (mpg)
urban <i>(17mph average/heavy traffic)</i>	29½
suburban <i>(27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)</i>	36
motorway <i>(70mph cruising)</i>	36½
cross-country <i>(brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)</i>	44
rural <i>(gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)</i>	51
typical mpg overall	42
realistic tank capacity/range	36 litres/330 miles
official mpg <i>(urban/extra urban/combined)</i>	35.3/49.6/43.5
CO ₂ emissions 156g/km	car tax band B

HOW THE AGILA COMPARES	engine cap/power (cyl/no/cc/bhp)	revs at 70mph (rpm)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	fuel economy (mpg)	brakes - best stop from 50mph (m/kg)	maximum legroom - front (cm)	typical leg/ kneeroom - rear (cm)	steering turns/ (p) circle (m)	overall length (cm)
VAUXHALL AGILA 1.2	4/1199/75	3720	14.7	34.2/24.7	42	28/27	107	98/68	3.3/10.35	350
Hyundai Amica	4/999/55	3740	17.6	35.0/26.5	46	29/17	99	99/63	3.0/9.6	350
Daewoo Matiz	3/796/50	4300	21.8	45.6/29.0	44½	25½/27	105	101/66	3.2/9.3	350
Toyota Yaris 1.0	4/998/68	3850	14.8	32.5/23.3	47	26½/12	105	102/70	3.3/10.1	362
Peugeot 106 1.1	4/1124/60	3790	14.1	29.6/20.8	46½	29/27	106	89/64	3.7/10.7	368
Daihatsu Move*	3/847/42	4240	26.0†	45/31†	48	27/18	102	109/69	4.2/9.4°	329

*1997 model

†approx

°manual steering