

Vauxhall Corsa

Featured model: 1.2 16v Comfort Easytronic (Auto)



NOW HERE'S A CONUNDRUM. With ever-increasing traffic congestion and the need to downsize to reduce pollution and fuel costs, the small automatic should be in terrific demand. But it's not – partly because the extra first cost seems steep on a small car and, worse, most small autos are significantly thirstier, as well as slower, than their (cheaper) manual alternatives. So we go from one town snarl-up to the next, pumping the clutch and waggling the gear lever to and fro, on the left side of the gate.

Vauxhall-Opel has found a Third Way, however. Easytronic is simply a normal manual transmission that's controlled by a micro-computer, instead of the driver. It commands hydraulics to do the actual shifting and clutch work. Alternatively, in manual sequential mode, it will change up or down in response to the driver's nudging the selector fore and aft.

To be honest, it doesn't possess the slickness or smoothness of a conventional torque converter-type automatic (such as you can opt for in the Corsa 1.4), but it's a third of the price to buy and leaves performance and mpg virtually unscathed. If there were an additional "economy" mode on the selector, mpg really would be the same as the manual's, but at 45mpg overall, we're not complaining. In any case, you can manually override the 'box to the same effect; this clutchless manual mode

is a very pleasing halfway house. Easytronic comes with 'shorter' gearing (19 instead of 20mph/1000rpm) so its in-gear times will have the edge on the manual.

The 1.2-litre engine in the new Corsa makes a major contribution to driver enjoyment. It isn't as snappy as we had hoped from a 75bhp motor, but it's docile at low speed, virtually inaudible at any legal speed and remarkably frugal. Expect over 50mpg when touring.

It's a pity that, front seats excepted, the Corsa doesn't cosset in any other respect. Rear accommodation, trim details and especially the ride, all disappoint and the handling was spoilt again, on one of our two test cars, by the electric power-steering's inert feel from straight-ahead; we met the same problem on a Honda Civic recently.

VERDICT

We developed a healthy respect for Easytronic after our carefully researched tests. It's easy to criticise its langour in up-changes and its occasional uncertainty away from corners, but with familiarity, you can circumvent these glitches. What it will do is to provide you with a small automatic with small costs – up front and in service.

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 double overhead camshafts, 16 valves

transmission 5-speed synchromesh gearbox with automatic shifting; front wheel drive; 18.9 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 15.1 in 4th

suspension front: sub-frame mounted wishbones with damper/struts, integral coil springs. Rear: torsion beam (dead) axle with compound-link location and coil springs

steering electric power assistance; 2.9 turns lock-to-lock; 10.35m diameter turning circle between kerbs (14.75m for one turn of the wheel)

brakes ventilated discs front, drums rear, with optional extra electronic anti-lock control on test car

wheels/tyres 5in steel or alloy with 175/65R14T tyres; full-size spare

LIKES ...

electric windows/mirrors std for 2002
beam trimmer/dial dimmer set apart
screen/face vents work simultaneously
clear bold gear position display

and GRIPES

just paint on rear seatbacks
door and facia mouldings scuff easily
rear screen heater switch has no timer
bad buffeting with window open (3dr)

THE CORSA RANGE

size and type 3 and 5 door supermini, mid-priced

trim levels Club/GLS, Comfort, Elegance, SXi, SRi

engines petrol: 3 cylinder/1.0 litre/60bhp 4/1.2/75; 4/1.4/90; 4/1.8/125. diesel: 4/1.7/65; 4/1.7/75

drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (auto shift synchromesh option on 1.2; 4-speed with torque converter on 1.4)

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★☆☆○○					
<i>This technology means virtually no loss of acceleration compared with a conventional manual gearchange; disappointing through-the-gears times the engine's fault.</i>					
acceleration in seconds	auto shift to 6000rpm	manual hold to 6000 rpm	in 4th	in 5th	
20-40mph	4.5	4.5	10.2	14.6	
30-50mph	5.9	5.9	10.0	14.1	
40-60mph	7.4	7.4	10.1	15.0	
50-70mph	8.5	8.5	10.7	16.6	
30-70mph	14.4	14.4	20.7	30.7	
max speed in each gear (*using autoshift to 6000rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	27	47	71½	90	106

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★☆☆	
<i>Driver's seat now height-adjustable. Three-door has less quarter vision. Like Punto, less rear space than predecessor, but two-position rear backrests help load adaptability. Prominent boot sill</i>	
<i>in centimetres (3-door hatch)</i>	inside († with optional sunroof)
outside	front - legroom 86-106
length 382	- headroom 90-97†
width - inc mirrors 196	rear - typical leg/ 95/
- mirrors folded 167	kneeroom 70
height (no roof bars) 144	- headroom 94
load sill height 24/	- hiproom 124-126
(inside/outside) 66	load space (all seats in use)
steering	(litres/cu ft) 295/10.5
turns lock-to-lock 2.9	load length 55-122
turning circle (metres) 10.35	full length to fascia 213
easy to park/garage? ★★☆☆○	load width 100-109
	load height (to shelf/ to top of aperture) 52/ 87

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★☆☆
Neat, accurate dials with clear markings. As a clutchless sequential/manual shift, Easytronic scores, as normal H-gate alternative can balk. Supportive driving seat – lumbar adjuster absent but not missed



HOW THE CORSA 1.2 EASYTRONIC COMPARES	engine cyl/cap/power (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/ circle (m)	overall length (cm)
VAUXHALL CORSA 1.2	4/1199/75	3700	14.4	30.7/20.7	45	24/14	106	95/70	2.9/10.35	382
Peugeot 206 1.4	4/1360/75	3330	12.7	30.3/20.2	43	25/13	108	94/66	2.8/10.1	384
Skoda Fabia 1.4 8v	4/1397/68	3310	15.3	31.8/21.5	40	24½/27	108	100/72	2.8/10.25	396
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
Fiat Punto 1.2 Speedgear	4/1242/80	2500	14.2	39.7/26.7	38	26/13½†	111	96/68	2.8/10.8	384
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
Renault Clio 1.2 8v	4/1149/60	3600	18.8	34.0/23.5	45	27/15	106	93/65	3.4/10.4	377

SAFETY ★★★☆☆	
<i>Active head restraints, five inertia belts and airbags look promising, but brakes would feel over-servoed without test car's ABS option</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance
pedal feel ★★★☆☆	<i>from 50mph (with optional ABS)</i>
in emergency ★★★★○	pedal load distance
handbrake ★★☆☆○	(unhurried)10kg 30m
	sudden 14kg 24m best stop
	+4kg ie 18kg 26m

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
 New Corsa not yet tested

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★☆☆
Steering's electric power-assistance can feel inert, sticky from straight-ahead; grippy and poised cornering otherwise



COMFORT ★★☆☆○
Comfort's bump suppression acceptable – just, but SXi's isn't. Good front seats help, though and 1.2 engine very smooth and refined; could easily handle longer gearing

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★○
May not be rapid in overtaking, but all is forgiven at the pumps! Apart from motorway cruising, another 2-3% improvement is possible using manual hold – the auto-brain delays up-changes unnecessarily

type of use (air conditioning off) - using auto shift	AA test (mpg)
urban (17mph average/heavy traffic)	29½
suburban (27mph average/6.4 miles from cold start)	37½
motorway (70mph cruising)	43
cross-country (brisk driving/20 miles from cold start)	47
rural (gentle driving/20 miles from cold start)	53
typical mpg overall	45
realistic tank capacity/range	37litres/365 miles
official mpg (urban/extra urban/combined)	35.3/54.3/45.6
CO ₂ emissions 149g/km	car tax band A

†no ABS