

Vauxhall Zafira

Featured model: 2.2 Elegance



THE SEVEN-SEAT ZAFIRA HAS always been one of our favourite mid-sized MPVs. If it had a shortcoming, though, it was that it lacked an engine that could match the power and torque of the two-litre, 140bhp Renault Scenic. But no longer, courtesy of the all-alloy 2.2-litre unit that also powers the VX220 roadster and has the galloping Gaul pipped on both accounts.

It has the edge on performance, too, and is a sweeter, more refined engine than the Scenic's. It's no more economical, though. The clever thing is that it not only produces sparkingly swift acceleration beyond 4000rpm, but will also happily trundle along country lanes without the driver constantly having to resort to the notchy gearchange.

But there's more to this Zafira than its performance. It also displays particularly good road manners with a firm but comfortable ride and deft handling, thanks to the light, positive steering and roll-resistant cornering. All in all, the Zafira gives a more rewarding driving experience than its similarly sized rivals.

That said, the driver's seat doesn't give everybody the correct support and the fascia is as coal-hole gloomy as ever. Still, it's a congenial cabin with the major controls, instruments and switchgear well placed. Vision is fine once the hard-to-remove head restraints are taken off, but the thick pillars and wipers that suit left-hand drive aren't ideal.

Passengers enjoy high seating, including those on the split-fold centre bench, for whom both legroom and kneeroom are

excellent – though no better than those of close rivals, it has to be said. Headroom is generous, as well. Those in the centre row even have their own heater/air conditioning vents, although we were unimpressed by the heater's inability to give warm-feet, cool-face tiering up front.

The Zafira's clever party piece is the way that the two rearmost seats simply fold away into the floor to convert the back end into an estate car-like luggage area. And, of course, they are always on board should you need them. They are comfortable enough for youngsters who won't have difficulty getting to them.

The centre bench slides fore and aft to apportion space between passengers and luggage. With its cushion folded up it will snuggle flat against the front seats to give a protected van-like cargo platform. However, with all the seats in use there's room for only a couple of soft bags in the tail – hence the roof rails, standard on Comfort and Elegance models.

VERDICT

Apparently, only eight per cent of the owners of mid-sized MPVs regularly travel seven-up. If you're among this minority you'll not only appreciate the Zafira's unique seating, but will also bless the extra urge that the smooth and refined 2.2-litre engine delivers. Although lacking several of the Scenic's surprise and delight features, the Zafira is a clever and rewarding MPV, with the Comfort version our best buy.

AT A GLANCE

considering size, price and rivals

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

SPECIFICATION

engine 2198cc, 4-cylinder, petrol; 145bhp at 5800rpm, 150 lb ft at 4000rpm; chain-driven double overhead camshafts, 16 valves
transmission 5-speed manual, front-wheel drive; 21.4 mph/1000rpm in 5th, 17.7 in 4th
suspension front: independent coil spring/damper struts, lower wishbones, anti-roll bar. Rear: coil-sprung torsion beam with trailing arms
steering electro-hydraulic power assistance; 3.2 turns lock-to-lock; 10.9m diameter turning circle between kerbs (16.8m for one turn of the wheel)
brakes ventilated discs front, solid discs rear, with electronic anti-lock (ABS) and brake force distribution (EBD)
wheels/tyres 6in alloy with 195/65R15H tyres (Michelin Energy XHI on test car); full size (steel) spare

LIKES ...

steering adjusts for rake *and* reach
 plenty of courtesy lamps
 seats fold without belts impeding
 handy exterior bonnet release catch
 good rear view when reversing
and GRIPES
 os wiper leaves blind area by pillar
 driver's seat tilts forward when raised
 head restraints difficult to remove
 poor bi-level heater tiering
 no kickplates to protect lower sills

THE ZAFIRA RANGE

size and type lower medium (mid-priced) MPV
trim levels Club, Comfort, Elegance
engines petrol: 4 cylinder/1.6 litre/100bhp, 4/1.8/115, 4/2.2/145 diesel: 4/2.0/100
drive front-wheel drive, 5-speed manual; (4-speed stepped automatic available on 1.8)

OVERTAKING ABILITY ★★★★★					
<i>Smooth-revving engine always eager, but lights up like a turbo from 4000rpm to give spirited acceleration. A flexible friend when lane pottering and a subdued cruiser despite low overall gearing</i>					
acceleration in seconds	through gears*	④ th gear	⑤ th gear		
20-40mph	3.1	8.0	10.7		
30-50mph	3.6	7.8	10.2		
40-60mph	4.7	8.3	10.4		
50-70mph	5.7	8.6	11.7		
30-70mph	9.3	16.4	21.9		
max speed in each gear (*using 6000rpm for best acceleration)					
gear	①*	②*	③*	④*	⑤
speed (mph)	29	52	77	106	122

SPACE AND PRACTICALITY ★★★★★				
<i>Practical Flex7 system means you can ring seating changes mid-journey and not leave back seats at home. Minimal luggage space with seven up, but there's acres of room otherwise when you play musical chairs</i>				
<i>in centimetres (5-door MPV)</i>		inside († with sunroof)		
outside		front	- legroom	81-103
length	432		- headroom	93-98†
width - inc mirrors	200	mid/	- typical leg/	102/76
- mirrors folded	174	rear	kneeroom	75/61
height (inc roof bars)	168	rows	- headroom	98/92
load sill height	0/57	⊙	- hiproom	129/110
(inside/outside)		load space (7 seats:5 seats)		
steering		(litres/cu ft)	130/4.6:480/17	
turns lock-to-lock	3.2	load length	25:92 (107*)	
turning circle (metres)	10.9	full length to fascia	267	
easy to park/garage?		load width	101-108	
	★★★★★○	load height (to shelf/	50/	
⊙ mid row bench fully rearwards		to top of aperture)	94	
* mid row bench slid forwards				

CONTROLS AND DISPLAYS ★★★★○
Nasty lurch after clutch take-up has to be "tuned out" by driver, and gearshift rather notchy. Several tiny warning lights easy to miss. Clear dials, though, and radio controls on wheel. Pipsqueak horn



HOW THE ZAFIRA 2.2 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 ZAFIRA 2.2	4/2198/145	3270	9.3	21.9/16.4	30	27/23	103	102/75	3.2/10.9	432
Chrysler PT Cruiser 2.0	4/1996/140	3100	10.8	31.3/23.5	28	26/41	108	105/75	2.8/11.85	429
Citroën Picasso 2.0HDi (d)	4/1997/90	2480	14.0	27.0/18.6	50	26/16	106	95/72	3.3/11.95	428
Daewoo Tacuma 2.0	4/1998/119	3350	11.0	24.4/17.0	29	28½/20	103	103/77	3.0/10.4	435
Fiat Multipla 1.6	4/1581/103	3800	12.7	29.2/20.6	29	27½/20	106	114/83	2.8/11.1	399
Renault Scenic 2.0 16v	4/1998/140	3120	9.7	26.9/17.6	30	24/50	106	102/76	3.5/10.6	413
Toyota Picnic 2.0 (auto)	4/1998/126	2880	11.9	Auto	29	27/18	107	102/80	3.3/11.4	453

(d) diesel * all with ABS

SAFETY ★★★○○	
<i>Side airbags extra and lap strap only for middle centre seat. Traction control and impressive ABS brakes standard, as is pedal-release system. Pillars are wide, but vision is fine (without headrests)</i>	
braking	dry road stopping distance from 50 mph (with standard ABS)
pedal feel ★★★★○○	pedal load distance
in emergency ★★★★★○	10kg 42½m
handbrake ★★★★★○	23kg 27m best stop
	+4kg ie 27kg 29m ABS on

EURO NCAP CRASH TEST RATINGS
 Zafira not yet tested

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

HANDLING AND STEERING ★★★★○
Well-weighted, nicely geared electric steering with a tightish turning circle. Cornering roll well controlled and Zafira feels steady and stable, but with occasional crosswind waver



COMFORT ★★★★○
Feels all of a piece with a comfortable ride. Modest tyre noise. Heater vents front and centre, with sunroof and air con standard. Driver's seat not without niggles; rear pair are best suited to youngsters

FUEL ECONOMY ★★★★○	
<i>Not a bad result for a seven seater with tempting acceleration - and it's a match for the 140bhp Scenic. Expect about 11mpg more from diesel version. Highest tax band and group 12 insurance rating</i>	
AA test results (mpg)	official figures (mpg)
worst (hard/urban) 19	urban 23.2
best (gentle/rural) 37	extra urban 40.4
overall mpg on test 30	combined 31.7
realistic tank capacity 51 litres	CO ₂ emissions 214g/km
typical range 340 miles	car tax band D