

Vauxhall Antara Road Test

by Ian Lamming



Sherwoods

I KNOW what you are thinking – the last thing this world wants is another 4X4.

But then if you lived in my village during the great floods it is probably the first type of vehicle you wish you owned and the only way to get off the island.

It is hard to believe that it is more than ten years since Vauxhall launched an off-roader for its customers; back then in the form of the ubiquitous but often maligned Frontera.



At that time the world was different and 4x4s only accounted for four per cent of the market. Today, things have changed and that figure has doubled. No wonder General Motors felt the need to add not just one but two to its collection.

There is a certain irony that this particular brand of car is being criticised at a time when we could really do with them. They are branded as gas guzzlers and polluters, the causes of global warming and whacky weather. Bicycle riding critics say they are unnecessary and they clog up our streets – but then they are not speaking from experience and can't appreciate the benefits – particularly when you live towards the top of the country.



Well, quick on the heels of the other GM off-roader launched this summer – the Chevrolet Captiva – comes the Vauxhall Antara, hopefully with everything needed to silence the critics and attract even those hell bent on reducing their carbon footprint. It gets off to a good start for the greenies by sipping rather than guzzling fuel. The 2.0 Ecotec diesel engine will return close to 40mpg and has a sophisticated particulate trap to stop any soot reaching the atmosphere.



But the 150PS engine is able to do this while also being exceptionally smooth, refined and powerful. For a diesel it's also quiet so there is not even any noise pollution to worry about. The 320Nm of torque is welcome and it will fly up hills and tow heavy loads with consummate ease.



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It is a fairly big car, yes. But what's wrong with that. Space is good. We generally choose to live in the biggest house we can afford so why not opt for the biggest car?

The height advantage over normal cars is a great benefit all round. It allows a different perspective on the world providing great views over walls

and hedges – and into people's homes if that is your bent. The extra ground clearance means you can ford deep water and travel off the asphalt. So it gives you greater choice in life.

The interior is spacious and comfortable for the driver and maximum four passengers the Antara can carry. There are cubbyholes galore and a gargantuan load area – made bigger still by dropping down the asymmetrically split rear seats. Underneath the loadbay floor there's a useful storage compartment to hide valuables from prying eyes and a roller blind security cover.

Off-roaders have offered drivers this for years but the new breed of soft-roaders add the benefits of a conventional vehicle, such as accurate steering, comfortable and controlled ride and the handling dynamics of a car.

Even the 4x4 system is much cleverer. Most of the time it runs in front wheel drive mode. Only when sensors detect a loss of traction does it automatically switch to all wheel drive and even then for just long enough to sort the problem out. This helps use less diesel.



Vital Statistics

Engine: 2.0litre CDTi 16v, four cylinder turbo diesel

Drivetrain: Five speed manual, on command four wheel drive

Top speed: 111mph

0-62mph: 11.1secs

Insurance group: 12/13

Miles per gallon (combined): 37.2

CO2 (g/km): 198

Price: from £19,955.00

On the road Antara really is an easy vehicle to drive with safe and secure handling, a silky smooth engine and a nice five speed gearbox – though it could easily pull six-speeds.

There are three trim levels E, S and SE each offering generous amounts of toys and the range starts at under £20,000 for the 2.4 litre petrol. The interior is very car-like too, in fact it is recognisably Vauxhall and looks like a pumped up Corsa, which is no bad thing.

There is stiff competition in the segment – in fact some would say when it rains it pours 4x4s. Vauxhall claims there will not be any conflict with Captiva as this is designed to appeal to young families with children, especially as it offers the option of seven seats. By contrast Antara is designed to appeal to a slightly older market – rebels apparently who are sick of running company cars off a mind bogglingly dull list. Whatever the hype, it certainly represents a welcome and worthy return to the segment by Vauxhall.