

Vauxhall Meriva MPV

WhatCar? verdict



For:

The space and versatility of the Meriva are amazing for such a small car. It's good to drive, too.

Against:

The visibility is poor and some models have big gaps in their equipment.



On the road verdict

Performance



All are sprightly; 1.6 16v is the most flexible. Petrol power comes from 1.4, 1.6 and 1.8 engines, which are sprightly enough, although the recently revised 1.6 is the most flexible and is now more frugal. There's also a powerful 1.6 turbo in the VXR model. A 1.3 diesel offers good pulling power, while the 1.7 has plenty of mid-range punch.

Ride and handling



Well controlled handling and comfortable ride. Despite having an MPV-style body, the Meriva handles well with relatively little lean around corners. The suspension is supple and the ride comfortable. The VXR has lowered, stiffened suspension for sharper handling.

Refinement



Road and wind noise well suppressed. The 1.6 engine remains quiet whatever the driving condition, while the 1.8 is a noisy motorway companion. The 1.3 diesel is impressively hushed. There is some wind noise from the front windscreen pillars, but the Meriva provides a fairly quiet drive.

In the cabin verdict

Behind the wheel



High driving position but poor visibility. The driver's seat is easy to adjust and most people should be able to achieve a good level of comfort, and there are plenty of storage spaces dotted around the cabin. However, on the downside, the thick windscreen pillars significantly block the driver's view of the road ahead, and the Meriva came last in our Visibility Tests 2003.

Space and practicality

Ownership verdict

Buying



Running costs should be reasonable. Next to its rivals, the Vauxhall's list prices are on the high side. Running costs are good, though, with all petrol models returning mid-30s mpg or better. Thanks to the Meriva's excellent safety provisions, it should be cheap to insure, too.

Quality



Solid cabin and materials. The Meriva feels remarkably sturdy inside and out, and its controls all work well. Engines and mechanical components are all proven in other vehicles, so owners should have no major worries.

Safety and security



Generous list of safety and security kit. There's plenty of active and passive safety kit – all models have anti-lock brakes, driver and passenger airbags and ISOFIX child-seat mountings on the two outer rear seats. Security equipment in the Meriva includes an immobiliser and visible vehicle identification number (VIN), but an alarm is a cost option on all models.



Clever seats gives superb practicality

The Meriva's main selling point is its FlexSpace system that allows the three rear seats to be moved independently. All three slide forward and back, and the outer two can be slid from side to side to maximise shoulder room. They can also be folded into the floor to provide a large, flat loadbay that's capable of swallowing 1410 litres.

Equipment



Many luxuries will cost you extra

Entry-level Expression offers remote locking and a radio-cassette player, but that's it. Life trim has a CD player, and air-conditioning becomes available as an option. Club makes this standard, along with electric mirrors. Design models add twin electric sunroofs, alloys and cruise control. They also come with the Twin Audio system, which allows rear-seat passengers to listen to their own music independent of those in the front. Special-edition Active models offer reasonable equipment at a lower price.