

Saab 9-3 Saloon



ON THE ROAD

Performance ★★★★★

There's a dizzying choice of engines on offer. Petrol choices include a 120bhp 1.8, three turbocharged 2.0-litre units with 148bhp, 173bhp or 207bhp, and a 252bhp 2.8-litre V6. A 277bhp V6 with four-wheel drive arrives in early 2008. There are two 2.0-litre Biopower engines that run on petrol or eco-friendly bioethanol. These develop either 173bhp or 197bhp. The 1.9-litre diesels are the pick of the bunch, and have 118bhp, 148bhp or 178bhp.

Ride & handling ★★★★★

The 9-3 is based on the same chassis as the latest Vauxhall Vectra, but doesn't ride with the same fluency. Poor body control means it never feels settled over patchy surfaces and it thumps too easily over sharp bumps. The 9-3 is competent, but dull steering and soggy handling mean the 9-3 isn't much fun to drive.

Refinement ★★★★★

The 9-3's cabin is reasonably quiet. Some wind and road noise can be heard at motorway pace, and models with sports suspension and more powerful engines let in more noise than the lesser versions. It's not too intrusive, though. The entry-level 1.8-litre engine is a bit too rowdy, however.





OWNERSHIP

Buying & owning ★★★★★

The 9-3 is aimed at the German compact executive competition. Saab's prices mean that buyers will have more powerful engines for less cash, although the diesel is heavier on carbon dioxide emissions than those in the Audi A4 or BMW 3 Series. However, the petrol engines are as good as or better than the Germans'. Resale values aren't great for the class

Quality & reliability ★★★★★

The 9-3's build quality is below par compared with its German rivals. The cabin materials are fine in isolation, but don't have the classy feel of rivals such as the Audi A4 and BMW 3 Series. Saab has a good record for reliability and the 1.9-litre diesels are proven Fiat units.

Safety & security ★★★★★

All models are fitted with twin front, side and curtain airbags, and anti-whiplash head restraints as standard. Only Vector Sport models and above have stability control, though. The security provision is comprehensive and historically 9-3s have had an excellent reputation for keeping thieves out.

Behind the wheel ★★★★★

As we've come to expect from Saab, the driver's environment is superb thanks to comfortable seats and a no-nonsense dash layout. There's plenty of adjustment in the seat and steering wheel to give you a fine driving position, and the instruments are a paragon of clarity.

Space & practicality ★★★★★

Passengers in the rear have good headroom and decent legroom. Three adults can fit across the rear bench, although shoulder space is a little tight. The large boot can swallow plenty of luggage and the rear seat splits 60/40. The 9-3 doesn't have a hatchback variant, although the big boot still makes it capable of hauling sizeable loads

Equipment ★★★★★

All 9-3s are well stocked. Standard equipment includes dual-zone climate control, four electric windows, a CD player and cruise control. Linear SE models add rear parking sensors, an extra cupholder, a driver's armrest and carpet mats. Vector Sport models have sports suspension and a leather steering wheel, while range-topping Aero models have sporty front and rear bumpers, twin exhausts, bi-xenon headlamps and heated front seats.