

WhatCar? verdict



For:

The 9-3 is a stylish and desirable premium convertible with decent space. Its Biopower engines offer green appeal, too.

Against:

It's not especially incisive to drive and it can't compete on build quality with its German rivals.



On the road verdict

Performance



Turbo engines provide plenty of punch

There are four petrol, two diesel and two BioPower engines to choose from, and there are no real slouches among them.

The petrols range from 148bhp for the turbocharged 2.0-litre (called the 1.8t) to 252bhp for the 2.8-litre V6 TurboV6. Of the two 1.9-litre diesels, one offers 148bhp and the other offers 178bhp, thanks to a second turbocharger. The 1.8-litre and 2.0-litre BioPower cars offer 25bhp more power than their petrol equivalents at 173bhp and 197bhp respectively.

Ride and handling



Way off the class pace

The 9-3 is based on the same chassis as the old 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 car isn't much fun to drive.

Refinement



Noises are reasonably well suppressed

Most of the engines deliver strong mid-range punch, so they rarely have to be worked hard. The twin-turbocharged diesel is far smoother than the lesser-powered diesel. With the roof up, wind noise is noticeable at anything over 50mph, but not excessive. When the top is down, wind buffeting is well isolated. The optional rear deflector reduces bluster considerably at motorway speeds.

In the cabin verdict

Behind the wheel



One of the best

As we've come to expect from Saab, the driver's environment is superb thanks to comfortable seats and a no-nonsense

Ownership verdict

Buying



A better investment than the 9-3 saloon

The convertible is much more desirable than the 9-3 saloon or estate, so resale values are considerably better. The lower insurance ratings and cheaper running costs of the lesser-powered versions make them better buys.

Quality



Okay, but quality no match for German rivals

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 and security



No stability control on basic models

All models are fitted with twin front, side and curtain airbags, and anti-whiplash head restraints as standard. Stability control is also standard across the range. The security provision is comprehensive, but a car with a fabric hood will never be as secure as a folding tin-top version.

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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 and practicality



A proper four-seat convertible

Access to the 9-3's rear is easy thanks to wide-opening doors and sliding front seats. The front seatbelts are also integrated into the seats to minimise snagging, and this makes them easier to reach, too. There's enough room in the back to make it a proper four-seat cabriolet. Luggage space is limited when the soft-top is folded into the boot, although a couple of overnight bags can be squeezed in.

Equipment



Matches most rivals for kit

All 9-3 Convertibles are well stocked with dual-zone climate control, electric windows, CD player, alloy wheels, cruise control and rear parking sensors. Vector Sport cars have stiffer suspension and stability control. Range-topping Aero cars have remodelled bumpers, twin exhausts, bi-xenon headlamps and heated front seats.

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