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# Wheels: Opel's New Astra Adds Speed to an Old Standard

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The Opel Astra coupe's small size and good fuel economy make it a natural choice for discerning city drivers.

Editor's note: Wheels is a  section featuring car reviews.

Today, it seems that straight lines are frowned upon in car design.

An advocate of this trend is the Opel Astra, which started life as little more than a box over 30 years ago. Introduced in 1979, over time this angular hatchback has developed into a curvaceous beauty, as witnessed when the sixth generation was launched in 2009.

Due to its age, many of us will undoubtedly have come into contact with an Astra or its earlier sibling, the Opel Kadett, available in Russia. For instance, when I was growing up, my family had a version with a trunk, the Vauxhall Belmont, and I recall it had a poor three-speed auto transmission and embarrassing performance, if you could call it that. Friends' parents had

standard hatchback Astras and often mentioned their reliability and the fact that they were good workhorses. Others, with more cash, owned the sportier, more tasteful black or red GTE version, typically as a powerful second car.

Opel Astra GTC

**New Price Range:**
716,000 RUB —
1,150,000 RUB
$22,853 — $36,705
**0- 100 kph:** 8 seconds
**Top speed:** 220 kph
**Power:** 177 bhp
**Economy:** 16.6 kpl

*Source: Opel*

The Astra has evolved, and as I'm presented with the GTC Turbo SRi, it is a pleasing package. This is the modern equivalent of the old GTE, and its sweeping curves and bright red paintwork command attention as it sits in the car park. It is a supremely sporty car, and its slightly protruding rear haunches help it look the part and allude to great performance. In fact, this increases expectations that it is at least fitted with a sluggish 2-liter gasoline engine. However, to my surprise there's a modest 1.6-liter 16-valve unit under the hood. But then you learn that Opel has fiddled with it to produce 177bhp. It takes just eight seconds for this hot coupe to reach 100 kilometers per hour from standstill and its top speed exceeds 200 kph. But you don't need to worry about such stealth, especially if you live in Moscow where you'll be lucky to travel at 10 percent of that speed! This vigorous performance allows me to safely overtake a car and a slow-moving truck as I move away from a roundabout, up a hill. In these days of high fuel prices, it will return over 16 kilometers per liter even with enthusiastic driving. Its smooth, six-speed manual transmission and excellent driving position help ensure that this Opel delivers an enjoyable driving experience time and time again.

With its comfortable cabin and leather seats, driver and passengers are sure to arrive relaxed and invigorated at the end of a journey. The driver's seat is particularly comfortable with an excellent lumbar support, making driving a pleasurable experience for someone with a temperamental back, like me. The front seats are even heated, a really useful feature on a cold morning. But the driver has to really stretch back to reach the seatbelt. Despite having just three doors, it is possible to place two bulky child seats in the rear, as you can see from the video. Simply pulling a lever at the top of the front seats slides and tilts them forward and allows for access to the back. The trunk only seems to open by pushing the button on the keychain.

Opel's updated
Astra provides
the same old
reliable

performance
and functionalit
y while adding
many modern
amenities.

Fitted with an electric handbrake, there is automatic anti-roll, but it does still seem to roll a little on occasions, requiring some nifty footwork with the clutch and accelerator, which is slightly unnerving. I still prefer a traditional handbrake. Cruise control is simple to use — just push the small lever on the left of the steering wheel down to set the speed — but it doesn't prevent it from picking up speed when traveling downhill.

"This striking brute is the third incarnation of the current shape of Astra, lining up alongside the five-door and Sports Tourer models," says Parkers, the car experts. "It has its sights set on the likes of Volkswagen's Scirocco and the Renault Megane Coupe; both attractive three-door hatchbacks with serious style and decent driving dynamics. Opel's offering has an emphasis on driving enjoyment, with the high-tech front suspension set-up from the Insignia VXR employed and a wider track utilized to vastly improve traction and agility."

Read more reviews at testdrives.biz. Contact the author at bizreporter@imedia.ru

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