





2008 Saturn Astra 5 Door XE

The Good :) Cool exterior and interior styling. Dynamic road handling. Fun to drive.

The Bad :(Only black interior color choice. Should get 40 mpg or more. Base model XE lacks many bells and whistles.



Engine	4Cyl 1.8 Liter	Videos: A Video of this vehicle can be found at the bottom of this page. For higher quality click on the links below.
Output	138 hp @ 6300rpm 125 lb-ft@ 3800rpm	 Watch this vehicle in Quicktime format and watch on your iPod or watch our Podcast (.mov format) Click Here
Top Speed	110 mph	
0-60 mph	10 sec (est.)	
Weight	2,833 lbs	
Price As Tested	\$16,995	Download Apple QuickTime viewer here .  YouTube Channel - Click Here To download this article in pdf format to your computer, click here .



Saturn has been given a new life with an all new vehicle lineup in under two years. We are glad to see GM finally bringing European models to America under the Saturn brand which will bring to our shores some great cars that are well built and fun to drive. The Astra is based on the Opel brand from Europe and offers exciting exterior looks with a firm and sporty driving character. What is lacking is the high gas mileage found in most European diesel engine vehicles. However, it scores well in all other areas from styling to road handling.



“To put it simply, it is a hot-looking car,” said Friedhelm Engler, Astra’s chief designer. “It is both restrained looking and bold, which is due to a design package that looks tightly wrapped over the car’s chassis.”



Although the Astra is a compact car, it appears quite long and wide when compared to most other cars in its category. Similar in size to a Mazda 3 and the VW Rabbit, the Astra is 170.5 inches in length and 69 inches wide. Wheelbase is 102.9 inches with a overall height of 57.4 inches. Compare this to a Rabbit and the Astra is about five inches longer and almost exactly the same in all other dimensions.



Wheels are pushed to the corners offering a wide stance. Headlights offer a three beam design with a curvaceous and beautiful lens. Body panels are angular offering clean yet sharp lines. The Astra feels like it is moving even when it is sitting in your driveway. Bright trim work offers a feeling of a high-end vehicle. The rear is also quite sporty with wrap around tail lamps in a clear lens and a LED third brake lamp. The smooth windshield and rear window look great with a frameless design.



Inside the design is quite different from other vehicles we have tested. The Astra has Zen like simplicity yet is stylish and functional. Materials used are good quality with a leather grain texture on the dash and doors and plastic used most everywhere else. The central dash is set low and is perfectly vertical at 90 degrees. Though some will find this layout hard to use in daily life, others may like the feeling of a modern art-deco space that makes you concentrate on driving. A forward slant to the design of the front doors and roofline also looks sporty and quite nice.



The steering wheel is thick and sporty with the only downside being that it doesn't come with leather. It does offer tilt and telescoping functions so many different sized drivers can find the right fit. The instrument cluster is set nicely with large dials offering a nice glow at night. The night time interior color is amber and the large digital display in the center of the dash is nicely lit and displays radio station information and miles per gallon in bold letters.

Because this vehicle is from Europe, parts feel very solid and well built. When compared to some domestic vehicles, the Astra's door handles feel better, the shift gate feels better and so does the parking brake. Upon entering you have a good thump to the doors as you open and close them. Even the pull type door handles are nicely styled. The front passengers have two sunglasses holders above their seats instead of the regular two grab handles. What Americans may not like is the lack of bottle holders in the doors, no cup holders in the front compartment and only two small ones placed in the rear seat bottom cushion.

Seating is firm and sporty but not overly hard. We found them supportive in both front and rear compartments even though they are all manually adjustable. The driver's seat is height adjustable but the passenger seat is not, even though it is set to a good height for the vehicle. Front legroom is 42 inches with 38.9 inches of headroom. The rear seats offer deep bottom cushions for a very supportive ride. Rear passengers have 35.3 inches of legroom and 38.3 inches of headroom. The rear seats also fold 60/40 to extend the trunk compartment giving you a total of 44.7 cubic feet of storage space. However, with the rear seats up the cargo volume is rather small at 12.2 cubic feet.

The standard powertrain combination in all models is the 1.8L Ecotec DOHC four-cylinder engine and a five-speed manual transmission – a four-speed automatic is optional. The Ecotec engine is enhanced with variable valve timing to optimize power output and fuel efficiency, delivering 138 horsepower (103 kW) at 6,300 rpm and 125 lb.-ft. of torque (170 Nm) at 3,800 rpm.

The engine feels quite good and is relatively free flowing for the amount of horsepower it has. You can quickly attain fast speeds when you need to even with low horsepower, a trait coming from the existence of the autobahn. The transmission is a five speed manual that offers relatively long shift points. We would opt for the automatic as driving in a city with a manual is tiresome and pointless. A manual would be best in all cars today giving you the ability to have fun and relax when you desire.

The Astra feels good on the road going fast. It is stable and there is little wind noise at highway speeds. Its firm suspension also is great for daily curvaceous driving. The suspension system comprises a MacPherson strut design in the front and a sophisticated torsion beam axle in the rear. Gas-charged preloaded twin-tube struts and shocks provide quick and controlled responses to road bumps, enhancing the driver's feeling of directness. A direct-acting front stabilizer bar, also brings a more immediate feel to steering inputs. Hydraulic engine mounts help reduce noise and vibration and this feature is not found on many other models in this segment. The Astra offers an electro-hydraulic steering system which provides good road feel and precision. There is very little vibration or shake and the ride is quite stable at all speeds. This is where European cars excel due to not having speed limits on the Autobahn. "Developed in Europe, the Astra's driving dynamics were tuned to perform on narrow, twisting roads," said Jürgen Schöwer, control systems project leader. "At the other end of the performance spectrum, it was also designed to perform on Germany's famous autobahn expressways, where stability and a confidence-inspiring driving feel are imperative." Hopefully someday US law makers will learn from this and remove our speed limits so we too can have better and better automobiles in the future.

All models offer such items as rain sensing windshield wipers and a tire pressure monitor as well as front windows which automatically go down when you touch and hold the button for a bit. The Astra also offers automatic headlamps and power adjustable outside rearview mirrors.

Missing is a leather wrapped steering wheel, e-brake handle as well as a leather shift



knob. These parts which we touch daily would make a real difference had they been leather wrapped. This should have been standard on all models.

Optional equipment includes the following:

- * Four-speed automatic transmission
- * Air conditioning
- * Sixteen-inch alloy wheels
- * StabiliTrak vehicle stability control system
- * Dual-panel sunroof
- * Heated front seats (cloth)

The Astra XR model offers more in standard features such as :

- * Air conditioning
- * AM/FM stereo with CD/MP3 player and seven speakers
- * Steering wheel audio controls
- * Sixteen-inch alloy wheels and all-season touring tires
- * Projector beam fog lamps

Safety features include many airbags, from dual front to roof head curtain bags and thorax/pelvic air bags for the front. Rear side airbags are not available. Active head restraints help stop neck injuries. Onstar is also included which offers many helpful features like turn by turn navigation, automatic crash notification and the vehicle comes with one year of this service for free.

Our test car started off at a base price of \$15,375. The small options list included an air conditioner and air filtration system for \$960. We think that you could buy a very large home air conditioner for this much money. This is probably subsidizing the car somehow. Destination charges of \$620 bring our total to \$16,995.



Our test car is made of 35% German parts and 17% Hungarian parts. The final assembly point is Antwerpen, Belgium with the engine coming from Hungary and the transmission from Austria. Our window sticker shows 24 miles per gallon in the city and 32 on the highway and we got on average 27 miles per gallon. What is great is that the smog index is quite low at 0.39, meaning it's quite clean.

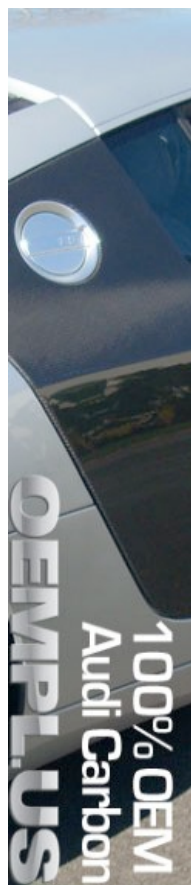
The 2008 Saturn Astra is a very good car in terms of performance, styling and price. For the driver it is both fun-to-drive and economical. There is enough room to fit your friends or coworkers and you won't be embarrassed driving around town in a compact. Both the exterior and interior styling is top-notch and the quality of the parts means the car will hold up well even five years down the road. The Astra does everything you want it to and saves you money as well, what more can you ask for.



PRICING	INVOICE	RETAIL
Base Pricing	\$14,843	\$15,875
Destination	\$620	\$620
4-Speed Automatic Transmission	\$1,219	\$1,325
Sunroof	\$1,104	\$1,200

Air Conditioning	\$883	\$960
StabiliTrak	\$455	\$495
Heated Seats	\$230	\$250

	COMPARISONS	2008 Saturn Astra XE 4dr Hatchback (1.8L 4cyl 5M)	2008 Volkswagen Rabbit S 4dr Hatchback (2.5L 5cyl 5M)	2008 Mazda MAZDA3 New s Touring 4dr Wagon (2.3L 4cyl 5M)	2008 Honda Fit 4dr Hatchback (1.5L 4cyl 5M)	2008 Kia Spectra5 Spectra5 SX 4dr Wagon (2.0L 4cyl 5M)
						
						
						
						
						
						
MSRP		\$15,875	\$17,575	\$18,425	\$13,950	\$15,995
Invoice		\$14,843	\$17,045	\$17,246	\$13,453	\$14,955
Basic		3 yr. / 36000 mi.	4 yr. / 50000 mi.	3 yr. / 36000 mi.	3 yr. / 36000 mi.	5 yr. / 60000 mi.
Drivetrain		5 yr. / 100000 mi.	5 yr. / 60000 mi.	5 yr. / 60000 mi.	5 yr. / 60000 mi.	10 yr. / 100000 mi.
Roadside		5 yr. / 100000 mi.	4 yr. / 50000 mi.	3 yr. / 36000 mi.	Being Researched / Being Researched	5 yr. / 60000 mi.
Rust		6 yr. / 100000 mi.	12 yr. / Unlimited mi.	5 yr. / Unlimited mi.	5 yr. / Unlimited mi.	5 yr. / 100000 mi.
Base Engine Type & Cylinders		inline 4	inline 5	inline 4	inline 4	inline 4
Base Engine Displacement		1.8 liters	2.5 liters	2.3 liters	1.5 liters	2.0 liters
Valvetrain		16 Valves double overhead cam (DOHC)	20 Valves double overhead cam (DOHC)	16 Valves double overhead cam (DOHC)	16 Valves single overhead cam (SOHC)	16 Valves double overhead cam (DOHC)
Horsepower		138 hp @ 6300 rpm	Being Researched	156 hp @ 6500 rpm	109 hp @ 5800 rpm	138 hp @ 6000 rpm



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Torque	3000 rpm 125 ft-lbs. @ 3800 rpm	Being Researched	3000 rpm 150 ft-lbs. @ 4500 rpm	3000 rpm 105 ft-lbs. @ 4800 rpm	3000 rpm 136 ft-lbs. @ 4500 rpm
Tires	P205/55R16 all season	195/65R15 H all season	P205/50R17 V all season	P175/65R14 81S all season	P205/50R16 all season
Driver Seat Height Adjustable	Standard	Standard	Standard	Not Available	Standard
Passenger Seat Height Adjustable	Not Available	Standard	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
One-Touch Power Windows	4 DOWN ONLY	4 Up and Down	1	1	1
Traction Control	Optional	Standard	Standard	Not Available	Not Available
Stability Control	Optional	Optional	Standard	Not Available	Not Available
SPECS					
Handling	Astra	Rabbit	MAZDA3	Fit	Spectra
Turning Circle	34.4 ft.	Being Researched	34.1 ft.	34.3 ft.	33.3 ft.
City	24	22 mpg.	22 mpg.	28 mpg.	23 mpg.
Highway	30	29 mpg.	29 mpg.	34 mpg.	30 mpg.
Length	170.5 in.	165.8 in.	176.8 in.	157.4 in.	171.3 in.
Width	69 in.	69.3 in.	69.1 in.	66.2 in.	68.3 in.
Height	57.4 in.	58.2 in.	57.7 in.	60 in.	57.9 in.
Weight	2921 lbs.	3072 lbs.	2930 lbs.	2432 lbs.	2833 lbs.
Wheel Base	102.9 in.	101.5 in.	103.9 in.	96.5 in.	102.8 in.
Front Headroom	38.9 in.	39.3 in.	39.1 in.	40.6 in.	40 in.
Rear Headroom	38.3 in.	38.5 in.	38.4 in.	38.6 in.	38.8 in.
Front Shoulder Room	53.9 in.	54.7 in.	54.9 in.	52.8 in.	55.1 in.
Rear Shoulder Room	52.8 in.	54.6 in.	54 in.	50.6 in.	53.9 in.
Front Leg Room	42 in.	41.2 in.	41.1 in.	41.9 in.	42.8 in.
Rear Leg Room	35.3 in.	35.3 in.	36.3 in.	33.7 in.	35.4 in.
Maximum Luggage Capacity	12.2 cu. ft.	15 cu. ft.	17.1 cu. ft.	21.3 cu. ft.	18.3 cu. ft.

**You
don't
even
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to
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