



## Auto EXPRESS Road test

### STYLING

★★★

RECENT facelift has kept the Skoda looking fresh, with neat detailing such as the chrome grille and Octavia logo in the headlights providing extra appeal. While shape is more conservative than rivals, it's stylish and well proportioned.

### INTERIOR

★★★★

LARGE glass area helps the car feel larger inside than its competitors, while quality is excellent. Fit and finish would put more expensive models to shame, plus the massive load space makes it the most practical of our contenders.

### DRIVING

★★★★

SMOOTH and refined 2.0-litre diesel engine provides ample performance, while pleasingly weighted steering and positive controls inspire confidence. Octavia rides bumps well and displays strong body control.

### COSTS

★★★

THE £18,650 Skoda is the most expensive car in this test, with a hefty £1,455 premium over the better-equipped Chevrolet. However, stronger residuals and greater efficiency should help to offset any extra cash outlay in the showroom.

### GREEN

★★★★

A FUEL return of 33.6mpg makes the Octavia the most efficient choice, although this is still well short of the firm's claimed 58.9mpg figure. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 126g/km are by far the lowest here.



# SKODA OCTAVIA

Hatch is one of our favourite family cars, and will take some beating

 THE Skoda Octavia is the oldest of our contenders, having made its debut back in 2004. But a mid-life refresh in 2009 has ensured the capable hatchback looks every bit as modern as its younger rivals.

Its styling is much more conservative, though, and it doesn't exactly stand out when parked alongside the Cruze and Lancer. Still, it's handsome and well proportioned, and helps to relay a more grown-up image than the other cars here. On

paper, the Octavia is marginally the smallest choice – although you wouldn't know it once you're sat inside, as the interior is one of the most spacious in the class.

A large glass area and low shoulder line help to create a bright and airy atmosphere, while there's plenty of scope to adjust the driver's seat and steering wheel. The dash looks a little plain, but it's logically laid out and beautifully built from top-quality materials. All the switches and controls operate

with precision, the clear black-on-white instruments look great and the stereo's large touchscreen is simple to use. However, you'll have to pay £180 extra for a leather-trimmed steering wheel.

Lift the huge tailgate, and you're greeted by a vast 585-litre luggage compartment – that's a massive 241 litres bigger than the Lancer's. As with the Chevy, it's let down by its high load lip, but this is a small price to pay for the Octavia's estate-rivalling carrying capacity. Boosting its credentials

as a family friendly holdall are numerous load securing eyelets and a shopping bag hook that folds out from beneath the parcel shelf.

With 138bhp, the Octavia's 2.0-litre diesel trails the Cruze on power. But it never feels slow on the road, and the smooth and linear power delivery means effortless progress and useful overtaking urge. The precise six-speed transmission's well chosen ratios also help make the most of the available performance.

Away from the track, the Skoda is just as capable. All the controls are well weighted, plus the steering is direct with decent feedback. And while there's a fair amount of roll, the smooth-riding Octavia is still the most composed and engaging companion on a twisting B-road.

Running costs also impress; they promise to be lower than those of the Chevy or Mitsubishi. During its time with us – which included performance testing – our test car returned a creditable 33.6mpg. Plus, its 126g/km CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are by far the lowest here, and mean £95-a-year road tax. Consistent top four finishes in our annual Driver Power satisfaction survey mean it will be great to own, too.

On this showing, the Skoda still has what it takes to beat more expensive cars from mainstream manufacturers. Against value-for-money competition, its case for victory is even stronger.



Ride is smooth, and Skoda is composed on the road



Boot is biggest here, and with seats folded, it extends its advantage. While dash is rather plain, it's superbly put together





**J**JAPANESE manufacturer Mitsubishi is famous for its firebreathing Lancer Evo supersaloons, but the regular Lancer hatchback shouldn't be overlooked. It benefits from a sprinkling of glamour from its performance brother, and offers strong practicality and top value.

At the front is the same aggressively gaping grille and swept-back headlamps as on the Evo X, while a large roof spoiler adds to the visual menace. Sadly, these additions fail to disguise the car's awkward proportions and slightly dumpy looks.

It's more attractively styled inside. The dashboard design is refreshingly simple and features chunky controls for the air-con, together with sporty-looking instruments. But it's let down by the cheap-looking dot-matrix display between the dials, plus the basic stereo, scratchy plastics and dated rocker switches.

Finding a comfortable driving position is tricky, as the steering wheel offers rake adjustment



Simple dash design sets Mitsubishi apart, although some of the plastics feel scratchy. Boot is tight, too

## Road test →



only, while the seats are flat and unresponsive. In the rear, there's plenty of legroom, but the sloping roofline means taller occupants will find their head brushing the ceiling.

The Lancer also has the smallest boot of our trio, with a disappointing 344-litre carrying capacity. At least the neat false floor allows you to hide valuables out of sight, as well as creating a flat load lip. From the moment

you start the 2.0-litre diesel, it's clear the Lancer isn't as refined as the Skoda or Chevy. The VW-sourced engine clatters at idle and sounds rough all the way through the rev range, while harsh vibrations can be felt through the pedals and wheel.

The notchy, imprecise six-speed manual box doesn't help, and is made worse by the sharp clutch. Short gearing helps boost acceleration, although motorway

progress is less relaxed as a result. There's also noticeable torque steer when accelerating hard on bumpy roads, while the steering suffers from kickback in corners.

Plus, the suspension causes the Lancer to crash uncomfortably over poorly surfaced roads. And ESP is a £400 optional extra – it should come as standard on a family hatchback.

The Mitsubishi returned 31.3mpg in our hands, trailing the Skoda by 2.3mpg. But it was way behind both rivals with its filthy 163g/km CO<sub>2</sub> output. The trade-off is a great-value £450 three-year pre-paid servicing deal, plus 37.5 per cent residuals.

Distinctive looks, a flexible load area and value price stand in the Lancer's favour, but a range of flaws threatens to consign it to the bottom step of our podium.

On the road, poor ride and body roll let Lancer down



# MITSUBISHI LANCER

Super-reliable five-door brings some rally-bred glamour



## STYLING

★★★

**AGGRESSIVE** design takes inspiration from rally bred Evo X saloon, while wedgy hatchback tail helps the Lancer stand out. The large rear wing, deep front bumper and alloys add to sporty appeal, but shape isn't as attractive as rivals.

## INTERIOR

★★★

**SIMPLE** design looks good, but materials are poor and it can be awkward to find a comfortable driving position. Flat seats offer little in the way of comfort or support, and boot is smallest. Yet there's plenty of kit, with air-con and an iPod connection.

## DRIVING

★★★

**SHORT** gearing helps give the Lancer impressive performance, but engine is coarse and torque steer is an issue on bumpy roads. Body roll, a sharp clutch and an overly firm brake pedal further spoil the driving experience.

## COSTS

★★★★

**ALTHOUGH** it costs £204 more than the Cruze, the £17,399 Mitsubishi feels much cheaper. High CO<sub>2</sub> emissions mean big road tax bills, but the £450 servicing deal is reasonable and 37.5 per cent residuals are the strongest in this test.

## GREEN

★★

**AS** the Mitsubishi doesn't have any green tech, it struggles to make its eco-friendly mark. CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 163g/km are by far the highest here, while our fuel return of 31.3mpg falls between those of the Octavia and Cruze.



## DETAILS

### CHEVROLET PRACTICALITY

GIVEN the Cruze's family friendly credentials, it's no surprise that the cabin is filled with storage cubbyholes, trays and compartments. The only problem is, they are all too small, shallow or narrow to be of any real use.



### CHEVROLET CONTROLS

A LACK of precision in the major controls is what lets the Chevrolet down in this company – it just can't match the Skoda for feedback and weighting. Prime culprit is the gearbox, which has a slow and notchy shift action.



### SKODA SPECIFICATION

OVERALL standard specification on the Octavia is generous, but you'll have to pay £395 extra if you want the ESP system fitted to entry-level S and SE models. We think this is an unforgivable oversight in a car that's aimed at family buyers.



### MITSUBISHI STYLING

THE design is rather bloated, but the Lancer clearly takes its cues from the company's wild rally bred Evo X saloon. Up front, there's an aggressive upright trapezoidal grille, while the tailgate is marked out by a neatly integrated spoiler.



## DATA BANK

	CHEVROLET CRUZE HATCHBACK LT 2.0 VCDI	SKODA OCTAVIA SE 2.0 TDI CR 140PS	MITSUBISHI LANCER 2.0 DI-D GS-2 SPORTBACK
<b>On the road price/total as tested</b>	£17,195/£17,605	£18,650/£19,950	£17,399/£17,784
<b>Residual value (after 3yrs/36,000)</b>	£5,107/29.7%	£6,248/33.5%	£6,525/37.5%
<b>Depreciation</b>	£12,088	£12,402	£10,874
<b>Annual tax liability std/higher rate</b>	£748/£1,497	£669/£1,339	£922/£1,844
<b>Annual fuel cost (12k/20k miles)</b>	£2,582/£4,304	£2,267/£3,779	£2,434/£4,056
<b>Ins. group/quote/road tax band/cost</b>	22/£385/F/£130	20/£488/D/£95	21/£508/G/£165
<b>Cost of 1st/2nd/3rd service</b>	£299 (3yrs/30,000)	£252/£303/£325	£450 (3yrs/37,500)
<b>Length/wheelbase</b>	4,510/2,685mm	4,569/2,578mm	4,585/2,635mm
<b>Height/width</b>	1,477/1,797mm	1,462/1,769mm	1,515/1,760mm
<b>Engine</b>	4cyl in-line/1,998cc	4cyl in-line/1,968cc	4cyl in-line/1,968cc
<b>Peak power/revs</b>	161/3,800 bhp/rpm	138/4,200 bhp/rpm	140/4,000 bhp/rpm
<b>Peak torque/revs</b>	360/1,750 Nm/rpm	320/1,750 Nm/rpm	310/1,750 Nm/rpm
<b>Transmission</b>	6-spd man/fwd	6-spd man/fwd	6-spd man/fwd
<b>Fuel tank capacity/spare wheel</b>	60 litres/foam	55 litres/foam	59 litres/sp. saver
<b>Boot capacity (seats up/down)</b>	413/833 litres*	585/1,455 litres	344/1,349 litres
<b>Kerbweight/payload/towing weight</b>	1,480/513/1,200kg	1,320/675/1,400kg	1,465/505/1,400kg
<b>Turning circle/drag coefficient</b>	10.9 metres/0.35Cd	10.2 metres/0.30Cd	10.0 metres/N/A
<b>Basic warranty/recovery</b>	3yrs (100k)/1yr	3yrs (60k)/3yrs	3yrs (unltd)/3yrs
<b>Service intervals/UK dealers</b>	12,000 miles (1yr)/95	20,000 miles (2yr)/135	12,500 miles (1y)/142
<b>Driver Power manufacturer/dealer pos.</b>	34th/N/A	1st/2nd	21st/17th
<b>Euro NCAP: Adult/child/ped./stars</b>	96/84/34/5	4/4/2/81**	81/80/34/5
<b>0-60/30-70mph</b>	8.8/7.8 secs	9.0/8.6 secs	8.9/8.6 secs
<b>30-50mph</b>	3.6/5.9 secs	3.9/5.7 secs	3.2/5.2 secs
<b>50-70mph</b>	6.8/9.4 secs	7.1/9.5 secs	6.4/8.7 secs
<b>Top speed/rpm at 70mph</b>	127mph/1,900rpm	131mph/1,800rpm	127mph/2,100rpm
<b>Braking 70-0/60-0/30-0mph</b>	51.9/38.5/9.6 metres	49.7/36.7/9.5 metres	55.2/40.1/9.9 metres
<b>Noise levels outside/idle/30/70mph</b>	65/44/58/64dB	64/45/59/67dB	64/49/60/68dB
<b>Auto Express economy/range</b>	29.5mpg/389 miles	33.6mpg/407 miles	31.3mpg/406 miles
<b>Govt urban/extra-urban/combined</b>	36.6/64.2/50.4mpg	46.3/70.6/58.9mpg	34.4/56.5/45.6mpg
<b>Actual/claimed CO<sub>2</sub>/tax bracket</b>	257/147g/km/22%	225/126g/km/18%	242/163g/km/27%
<b>Airbags/Isifix/rear parking sensors</b>	Six/yes/yes	Four/yes/£300	Seven/yes/DF0
<b>Air-conditioning/leather/heated seats</b>	Yes/no/yes	Yes/no/£275	Yes/no/no
<b>Automatic box/stability/cruise control</b>	No/yes/yes	No/£395/£225	No/£450/yes
<b>Metallic paint/xenon lights/keyless go</b>	£410/no/no	£440/£645/no	£385/no/no
<b>Sat-nav/USB connection/Bluetooth</b>	No/no/no	£1,660/£185/£745^	No/yes/yes

## Running costs in detail £

**CHEVROLET CRUZE**  
 THE £17,195 Chevrolet is the cheapest car in this test, undercutting the Mitsubishi by £204 and the Skoda by £1,455. Yet it comes loaded with equipment, and is the only model to feature ESP as standard.  
 Adding to the Cruze's showroom appeal is a five-year warranty, plus a great-value servicing package that provides three years' worth of mechanical maintenance for a mere £299. The one fly in the ointment is the heavy depreciation; our experts predict the car will hold on to only 29.7 per cent of its value over three years and 36,000 miles.

**SKODA OCTAVIA**  
 TRADITIONALLY, Skoda is viewed as a budget brand, but its model is the most costly in this test. And the £18,650 Octavia feels even more expensive, thanks to its classy, solidly built cabin and decent haul of standard equipment.  
 Low 126g/km CO<sub>2</sub> emissions mean tempting tax bills for private and company users, while our Driver Power satisfaction surveys show buyers can expect strong reliability and impeccable dealer service. Mind you, the latter comes at a price, as our quotes suggest maintenance costs will be the highest of our trio.

**MITSUBISHI LANCER**  
 ON the face of it, the Lancer looks like decent value in £17,399 GS2 trim. But the special-edition Juro model makes even more sense; it adds leather seats, sat-nav and a reversing camera to the generous kit tally, and costs £1,000 less.  
 Sadly, you'll still get the same 2.0-litre diesel engine and 163g/km CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, which means the Mitsubishi is a costly company car choice.  
 Helping to lighten the load on your wallet are respectable residuals of 38.3 per cent and a £450 servicing deal that will cover all dealer visits for the first three years.

## VERDICT

CONQUERING the competitive family car sector is a big ask for the Chevrolet Cruze hatch. The good news is that the newcomer gets a lot of things right.

It's better looking than the saloon version and is impressively practical. On top of that, it boasts the most powerful engine, is the cheapest to buy and comes with a decent haul of kit. The icing on the cake is the company's five-year warranty and great-value fixed-price servicing.

Even so, the Cruze hasn't done enough to topple the Skoda. The Octavia is a polished performer, with the neatest handling, the strongest engine refinement and the most spacious cabin in this test. Better still, top-notch build quality and classy materials make it feel like a model from the class above. Yes, it will cost you more to buy – but we reckon it's worth every extra penny.

That leaves the Mitsubishi bringing up the rear. Its sporting heritage and aggressive looks flatter to deceive, as the Lancer is way off the pace in this sector. Although it's well equipped and should prove reliable, we would recommend spending your money on something else in this class.

### 1 SKODA OCTAVIA

SPACIOUS, comfortable Octavia is simply unbeatable in this sector. It costs more than its rivals here, but the superb quality, composed chassis and smooth drivetrain mean it feels like a premium offering in this company. ESP should be standard, though.

### 2 CHEVROLET CRUZE

PRACTICAL hatch adds another string to the Cruze's bow, and the price makes it hard to resist. Diesel engine is strong, while the five-year warranty, fixed-price service deal and generous equipment list make the Chevrolet a great choice. Yet driving dynamics let it down.

### 3 MITSUBISHI LANCER

GREAT performance, aggressive looks and decent value mark out the Mitsubishi. But that's about it. Put simply, the Lancer feels a generation behind its opponents here in terms of road manners, refinement and engineering.

\*Measured to window line. \*\*Old-style Euro NCAP test. Bold = equipment fitted to our test car. ^As part of pack. DFO=dealer fit option. Insurance quotes from AA (Tel 0800 107 0660 or www.aa.com) for a male, aged 42, living in Banbury, Oxon, with three penalty points.