

Best of Friends



Ian Lamming drives himself out of a hole thanks to a little help from his friends

FOR more years than I can remember a man in a pinstripe suit has stood before a variety of gatherings.

His open gambit of 'hello, my name is Alasdair MacConachie and I'm your friendly Vauxhall dealer' never had greater meaning than when I was left in the lurch.

As the bright orange Nissan disappeared over the horizon like a setting sun it quickly became apparent there had been a mix up with the next test vehicle – the same driver, working for another manufacturer, was supposed to drop it off, exchanging key for key.

He knew nothing about it which left me stranded in Darlington, a camera bag in one hand, a child's car seat in the other and a lap-top bag over my shoulder. Like all times of malcontent of course, it was also raining, hard.

I took shelter in said Vauxhall dealer's showroom – Sherwoods of Darlington – where the ever so friendly managing director Mr MacConachie was only too pleased to help.

By coincidence, in the school car park at drop off, his son Simon, who is general manager of the same friendly dealership had asked me to test the new Insignia, which by all accounts was a startling drive.

So killing two soggy birds with one wet stone, he lent me his SRi turbo diesel until the missing test car arrived five days late.

Now I know what you are thinking. How could

I be objective when this act of friendly kindness had helped me out? Well, obviously, road tests are not objective, they are my opinion and mine only, purely subjective in fact, so here we go and don't be put off.

Truth is I'd been impressed straight away when I saw the new Insignia in the school car park. It is an incredibly striking vehicle, huge, long, wide, low and very, very sleek. It looks like a coupe belonging to an expensive premium brand and oozes quality way beyond its affordable price tag. It exudes pure class.

There is so much space inside too, in the hatch, in the rear seats, in the front, it's just so large, comfortable and accommodating; what a brilliant family-friendly car.

New dash and infotainment are user-friendly and impressive too. You can Bluetooth or plug in your devices and whatever you need comes up on the touch screen mirroring the smartphone in your pocket. If you don't opt for satnav, you can just use the Google maps and all your music is there at the dab of a digit. Genius.

Home is a bit of a trek from Sherwoods nowadays but not to worry as this is one friendly, cossetting motor. Driver's seat is firm and supportive and keeps aches and pains at bay. The steering wheel, pedals and gearlever are beautifully spaced for my 5ft 7in frame so I simply sit back, let the Insignia take the strain

and enjoy the music. Cheers buddy.

Helping this Vauxhall do just that is great suspension, which keeps everything SRi sharp, and an excellent 136PS turbo diesel, offering surprising pep and superb economy. It's not a motorway drive home; most of it involves twist, turns and many hills, so it's impossible for me to drift along on a whiff of throttle, yet Insignia manages to return 55mpg; that will do chum.

Kindness and gratitude apart, if there is one thing these words should surely do is encourage prospective buyers to go and have a look at the new Insignia for themselves.

I'm sure they will not be disappointed. If you are not sure where to go, I know a very friendly Vauxhall dealer in a town near you. Tell them I sent you.

Fact File

Vauxhall Insignia SRi

Engine: 1.6 diesel

Power: 136PS

0-62mph: 10.9 secs

Top speed: 127mph

Combined MPG: 74.3

Transmission: six speed manual

CO2 g/km: 109