



TURBO BOOST, EURO FEEL

2013 BUICK VERANO TURBO

MSRP: \$23,080 (VERANO);
\$29,105 (TURBO) AS TESTED: \$32,360

Introduced last year, Buick's compact Verano returns for its sophomore season with an available, turbocharged engine. What a difference a drivetrain makes.

The addition of the new turbo for 2013 gives Verano an entirely different feel. Imported from the Buick Regal, intercooled and turbocharged, the power output of the direct injection, Ecotec four belies its size. The 2.0-liter turbo makes 250 horsepower @ 5,300 rpm, and 260 lb. ft. of torque @ 2,000 rpm. That's plus 70 and 89, respectively, compared to the 2.4-liter four that's offered in standard Veranos, and it translates to a 0-60 mph time of 6.2 seconds, in the 3,300 lb. Buick. Quick it is, with a smooth, lag-free power flow. The power boost doesn't extract a perceivable penalty at the pumps, either. Whereas the EPA expects standard Verano models to return between 20-21 mpg's city, 30-32 highway, Turbo versions rate 21/30.

Ablissantly assisting the turbo is the 6-speed manual transmission. Drivers have their no-cost choice of either the stick or a six-speed automatic. We've reached the point where a manual transmission is rarely found on anything but a sports car or an econobox.

So finding a three-pedal option on the Verano Turbo comes as a happy surprise. The turbo four/six-speed stick combination really wakes the car up. Carving my way through a curvy road at the Verano's launch event, I used the stick to plant the engine right in the middle of its sweet spot, and held it there. Great fun. And once that road was ironed straight, a couple of crisp shifts through the remaining gears set the car up to cruise at highway speeds.

I drove both engine/transmission combos, by the way, and if you want an automatic, this one works nicely with the turbo, too. The only caveat is that it is not a dual-clutch unit, so even if the car had paddle shifters (which it doesn't), you wouldn't have the grin-inducing sensation of instantaneous gear changes, when you shift it yourself.

A quick word here about quiet. Like all Buicks,



Verano undergoes a combination of treatments aimed at reducing, absorbing or blocking out noise and vibration. Collectively, Buick refers to this as Quiet Tuning, and it does make for a noticeably low noise level in the cabin. So when I set the

car into that twisting road at 3,500 rpm, I could feel the power on tap under my foot, but engine noise was a non-issue. The use of laminated glass in particular (everywhere except the backlight) seems to be particularly effective at stifling exterior sound.

Quiet Tuning is one thing; chassis tuning is something else. Buick has done both, tweaking the Verano Turbo's suspension and electric power steering calibration to sharpen its reflexes. The Verano is positioned as a luxury sedan, not a sport sedan. But, turbocharged

and with chassis tweaked, it's clearly athletic enough to be very fun to drive. At the same time, it maintains a level of ride comfort that buyers expect of an upscale compact car.

The Turbo model enters at the head of the Verano class. This means that beyond the amped-up powertrain and beefed-up suspension, Verano Turbo is packing a generous complement of standard equipment — fully contented, as they say.

Skimming some highlights from the Turbo's roster of gear: dual exhaust, sport pedals, rear spoiler, a Bose, 9-speaker premium sound system, leather-appointed upholstery, push-button start, rear park assist and rearview camera, side blind zone alert and rear cross-traffic alert, heated front seats and a heated steering wheel. About the only options are a power sunroof, a navigation system and some special, exterior colors.



Also standard is Intellilink, which connects your smartphone to the color, touch screen display, using a USB port or Bluetooth. Smartphones can then be controlled by voice command or steering wheel mounted switchgear. The system also allows streaming audio through your phone via services like Stitcher or Pandora.

Verano Turbo's interior will suit virtually any height passenger up front. With six footers up front, like-size passengers can fit in back (snugly), with some compromises.

Visibility is generally good, and the army of electronics mentioned above has your back when parking, changing lanes or just trying to back out of a parking lot spot, without getting clipped. Interior fit and finish is nicely done, with an upscale look and feel. HVAC controls on the center stack are easy to reach and operate. Above them, other controls are clustered together, and harder to pick up at a glance. That starts with the starter; the push button for which is less prominent than it ought to be.

Inside storage is limited (small center console, door pockets, glove box), however, the trunk is usefully sized (14.7 cu. ft.) and shaped. Trunk hinges impinge on the contents, but there's an extra, small, hidden storage space below the load floor. Rear seatbacks fold (mostly) flat for extra cargo-carrying options.

Verano Turbo is cleanly styled, quiet and well appointed. And, particularly in manual transmission guise, the Buick has a distinctly European driving feel. One of the goals for Verano is to bring new people to the brand. On that score, after one year, the numbers are impressive. Some 52 percent of Verano buyers are conquests from other manufacturers. That was before the debut of the Turbo.

The addition of this model pretty much guarantees a new pool of Buick shoppers; ones who favor a sportier sedan. I think they'll find a lot to like here.

A regular contributor to the Times Union for the past 20 years, Dan Lyons is the award-winning author of six books, and photographer of 135 calendars. Read Dan's recent reviews on line anytime at www.timesunion.com/cars.