

Vauxhall Astra VXR

Road Test by Ian Lamming

IF YOU are fainthearted or if speed offends stop reading now...don't say I didn't warn you.

Vauxhall's Astra VXR is built for speed, it's its raison d'être, heck it even looks fast at rest.

An extended tarmac-sniffing snout, bodyskirts and a centrally mounted exhaust can mean only one thing – VXR is the Astra range's sporting flagship. And if you don't like it, tough, it doesn't like you either and it's harder than you are.

Take a look at its spec sheet if you are not convinced: 240PS and 320Nm of torque from the 2.0 litre turbo; 0-60mph in 6.2 seconds and a top speed of 152mph.



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The only two things that don't quite fit the scene are the fuel consumption – an amazingly good for the performance 30mpg – and the price –an amazingly cheap for the performance £19K. Otherwise this is one red hot hatch to look at and to drive.

A rally driver once told me the value of pointing the driving wheels in the direction you wish to travel. Seems obvious but when you are on a boulder strewn track with next to no traction you soon get the drift, so to speak.



It's a bit like that with the VXR on greasy, wet, cold, fifthly, wintry roads. Traction is at a premium with that much poke going through the front wheels, so there is a tendency to torque steer and another to plough straight on.

The best way to over come both is to keep some power on through the bends and let the scrabbling front tyres drag you around the corner. Drive it otherwise and it can get out of shape – though there is the excellent vehicle stability control to back you up should things go awry.



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Vauxhall Astra VXR

This all sounds a bit gung-ho, a bit irresponsible, a bit 'isn't this motoring hack a bit too hold to go hooning round'? Well, on the one hand it does but then you try driving this particular fire-breather and you will see what I mean.

There is just so much power at so few revs that it is remarkably easy to give it slightly too much wallop and things become interesting on the handling front.

You really do need a deft touch. It needs very few revs on the clock before wave after wave of brutal torque come flooding in. Press the "sports" button on the dash and you get even more.

Now none of this is to say the car is dangerous because the feedback from the chassis and tyres is very good. The driver is never left in any doubt what he or she has requested and what is being delivered by the bucket full. The result is that the chances of being caught out by the ferocity of the power are pretty slim.

Power is also really useable and just the thing when you want to overtake slow moving traffic in perfect safety. Get into motorway mode and the VXR is happy to be a caring cruiser gobbling up the miles with alacrity.

Inside the VXR is nice and sporty too with superb

Vital Statistics

Engine: 2.0 litre turbo

Top speed: 152mph

0-60mph: 6.2 seconds

Power: 240PS

Torque: 320Nm

Miles per gallon 30mpg

Price: from £19,000

Recaro seats, chunky steering wheel, and decent trim, controls and dashboard.

Specification is high and the satnav, climate control and hi-fi are all excellent.

But VXR does live for speed and care must be taken if the average VXR driver is not to fall foul of the law or cause physical harm.

The Astra is not for the fainthearted but it is an incredibly rewarding drive and for those who are offended by speed, it is at least very practical too.

