Vauxhall Classics No. 6 – 1950s/60s PA Velox and Cresta, plus Bedford CA commercials

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In this sixth article looking back at milestone models through the decades of Vauxhall's history, the Luton-based company recognises not only the heavy design influence from their then US parent, but also the growing importance of Bedford – Vauxhall's commercial vehicle division – to the business. So, we have two vehicles for your delectation today: The PA Velox/Cresta, and the Bedford CA panel van (also available as a chassic cab).

(All information and photographs from Vauxhall, with the exception of the Ardennes forest picture, taken by Kim).

VAUXHALL PA VELOX AND CRESTA



The 2.25-litre, six-cylinder PA Velox and Cresta arrived in 1957 and were built, with minor styling changes, until 1962. Illustrating the company's huge growth in export sales at the time, a PA model became the two-millionth Vauxhall to roll off the Luton line.

A large car by post-war British standards, but diminutive compared with GM's Stateside behemoths on which its design was based, the PA Velox/Cresta was the perfect antidote to the UK's largely grey and austere 1950s motoring landscape.

Vauxhall's famous 'flutes' made a final appearance (though they were only represented in concave chrome side-strips), but in every other respect the PA embodied a brave new world for Vauxhall. Tail fins, swathes of chrome, a bright body-colour palette and wrap-around front screen gave it the scaled-down look of a '57 Chevy Bel Air, while inside, bench seats and a column gear-shift completed the US feel.


Velox

Almost all PAs were saloons, but Friary produced a stylish estate version, one of which (pictured) was used by HM The Queen, fitted with a gun rack and vinyl floor covers for her corgis.





The PAs were rallied too… Here's one in action on the 'Monte Carlo'.

Technical Data:

Body: 6-seat saloon
Engine: 6 cylinders in-line, overhead valve (pushrod)
Engine Capacity: 2,262cc,
Top Speed: 90 mph
0–60 mph: 16.8 seconds
Fuel Consumption: 23 mpg
Transmission: RWD, 3-speed all-synchromesh gearbox (auto optional)

Kim adds: Although I have never driven the lovely PA Cresta in Vauxhall's Heritage collection (TWV 849), I have had the pleasure of driving 'in convoy' with it on several occasions and for hundreds of miles on overseas classic car events, notably in Brittany in

June 2001 (when my wife and I were in our Austin A35), and on an excursion to France and Belgium in the summer of 2012 (when my wife and I were travelling in our 1964 Austin A60). On each occasion the Cresta has looked splendid on the road! My photograph below was taken when the PA and my A60 were resting on a forest road in the Ardennes, Belgium.



BEDFORD CA VAN



The van to own in the fifties and early sixties was the Bedford CA. It was arguably the UK's first purpose-built light commercial vehicle and was introduced in 1952 as both a panel van and chassis cab.

It proved popular for delivery drivers and roundsmen, who loved its sliding doors, and the cab-only version provided bodybuilders with many opportunities for specialist coachwork such as dropsides, milk floats and mobile shops. The Dormobile was the first of many conversions carried out to the CA, complete with an elevating roof to liberate extra space inside, bringing the joys of motor-caravanning to the masses.



Over a quarter of a million CAs were produced between 1952 and 1969, when it was replaced by the larger Bedford CF.

Technical Data:

Body: Panel van/chassis cab/bespoke variants
Engine: 4 cylinders in-line, overhead valve (pushrod)
Engine Capacity: 1595cc
Fuel Consumption: 23 mpg
Transmission: RWD, 3-speed column change

VAUXHALL MOTORS

They say:

Vauxhall Motors started making vehicles in the UK in 1903. Today, as the oldest and most familiar of Britain's automotive manufacturers, its philosophy is to build vehicles that are relevant to all. Vauxhall's two manufacturing plants in Ellesmere Port and Luton produced 206,000 cars and vans in 2018, and its sales accounted for nine per cent of the UK market.

Vauxhall has been a Groupe PSA brand since 2017. By 2024, each of its models will offer an electrified version, part of the company's PACE! plan to become sustainably profitable, global and electric. www.vauxhall.co.uk

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