Vauxhall Classics No. 7 – XVR Concept, 1966

Published: May 14, 2020

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/vauxhall-classics-no-7-xvr-concept-1966/

In our seventh feature in this series looking at significant Vauxhall models through the decades since the company's inception, we focus on a product from what was, for 20 years, the UK's leading design facility: Vauxhall's Design & Engineering Centre. The XVR was so nearly a production reality, but Opel's GT – a similar design and concept – failed commercially, which gave Vauxhall cold feet.

(And since the XVR is inextricably linked with what was to become Griffin House in Luton, Vauxhall also pay tribute to that building, for the employees who vacated it last year).

(All information and photographs from Vauxhall).

VAUXHALL XVR CONCEPT

Built to showcase Vauxhall's design innovation and autonomy in the mid-Sixties, the XVR project was managed by the legendary Wayne Cherry at Luton's industry-leading Design & Engineering Centre, later to become Vauxhall's Griffin House HQ.

Inspired by parent company GM's work with concepts in the US – including the 1965 Mako Shark II – the XVR (Xperimental Vauxhall Research) had a simple purity of line, gull-wing doors forming a unique split windscreen, a clam-shell bonnet and pop-up headlights.

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Three cars were built, including a 100 mph driveable vehicle with a 1.6 litre engine producing 74 bhp (see photograph). And while the car never reached production, design cues like the ultra-slim rear lights could later be seen in Vauxhall's Viva HC and Firenza models.

'Uncompromising in its styling treatment, the XVR shows the future trend in world automotive design', said Vauxhall's Director of Design, David Jones, when he revealed the Luton company's radical concept at the Geneva Motorshow in 1966.

VAUXHALL MOTORS LTD., PUBLIC RELATIONS DIVISION, LUTON, BEDS.

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FOR RELEASE Not Before March 10, 1966. 666

XVR, the first of Vauxhall's experimental design projects ever to be shown in public, is among the company's exhibits at the Geneva Motor Show.

Designed and constructed in Vauxhall's Engineering & Styling Centre, the car is a 2-seater coupe. "It expresses in form and proportion the inherent functions of a vehicle of this type", says David Jones, Vauxhall's Director of Styling. "The design of this car offered us a chance to get away from the stringent demands of convention and create a vehicle expressing the future trend in world design as we see it".

"The car is uncompromising in its styling treatment", says Mr. Jones. "Its balance of line and subtle relationships of aerodynamic forms were possible only because this is a total concept".

XVR is designed to combine speeds above the 100 m.p.h. level with front-rank handling, and a high degree of driver and passenger safety with comfort unpenalised by the very low overall height.

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Technical Data:

Body: 2-seat sports coupe

Engine: 4 cylinders in-line, 1,595cc

Top Speed: 100 mph

Transmission: RWD, 4-speed all-synchromesh gearbox, limited slip differential

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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