

James Mills

GET ready for the most powerful Vauxhall ever – and the supercar bargain of the year! Auto Express is first to drive the mighty Monaro VXR 500, and we will let you into a secret: its phenomenal performance left us short of breath.

Even better, while this 500bhp muscle machine has the ability to set your pulse racing faster than any heavy-metal workout, its price won't get supercoupe drivers breaking into a sweat. How so? Well, at £35,995, the VXR 500 is nearly half the cost of the next nearest 500bhp two-door. Amazingly, it is even cheaper than the standard Monaro VXR, which is £37,040!

Vauxhall has teamed up with specialist tuner Wortec to develop the new-comer, and is limiting sales to one dealer only, Greens Vauxhall of Kent. Choose from red, silver or black, but whatever you do, order fast – only 50 cars are available in the UK, ensuring exclusivity the likes of which Ferrari drivers could only dream of.

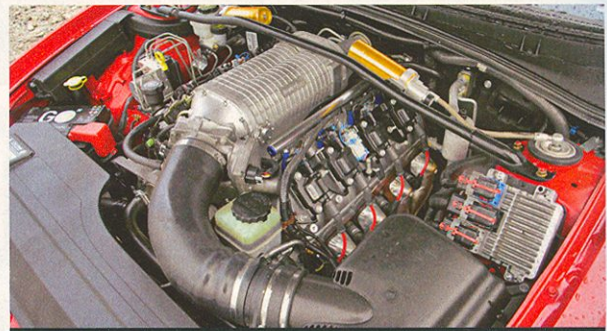
Yet what about the driving experience? It may be half the price of similarly potent machinery, but is it half as thrilling? With its existing 6.0-litre V8 (shared with Chevrolet's Corvette) boosted by a supercharger, the VXR 500's headline stats climb



At a glance
OUR VXR 500 test car could be heard coming from miles away. It was fitted with an optional sports exhaust system (£960), which is well worth the money. Popping and gurgling on the over-run, it's up there with TVRs as far as acoustic sessions go!



Drilled pedals inside among the few clues to Monaro's true potential



Supercharger boosts 6.0-litre V8 unit's power and torque to new levels

THE FULL MON-TY



Vauxhall Monaro VXR 500
Engine: 6.0 V8 s'charged, 500bhp
0-60ph: 4.8 seconds (claimed)
Price: £35,995

from 403bhp to 500bhp, and from 530Nm to 677Nm. But it's the way this engine goes about its work that impresses most. Pick a gear, any gear, and the car hauls in the horizon as if capable of defying the laws of physics. Torque is the secret to its unrelenting urge, the supercharger giving the V8 bigger lungs than ever.

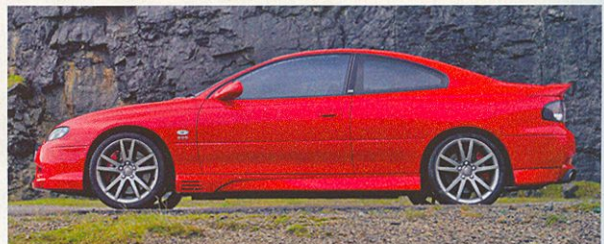
So the performance is mighty. But what of the handling and, more importantly, the brakes? Again, our car was fitted with options in both these areas. Adjustable sports suspension is £1,695 and strikes just the right blend of fluidity and tautness, ensuring the VXR 500 is never less than entertaining, but without giving cause for discomfort.

Up-rated six-piston AP Racing brakes keep all that performance on a tight leash. They're £2,595, but with 190mph potential, are definitely worthwhile.

Criticisms? Well, the VXR 500 is hardly the last word in sophistication, and Vauxhall would have been wise to recalibrate the traction control, which struggles to keep check of the power in the wet. But then, it's precisely because this Monaro is such an anti-cool car and a riotous ride that buyers will love it.



With only 50 Monaro VXR 500s available – and at a bargain price – you will have to move as fast as the car itself in order to get one



Rival

THE Shelby name makes it back on to the Mustang after 37 years. Available via personal import only, this is another true muscle machine, but the chassis disappoints compared with the VXR 500's.

Shelby Mustang GT500
Engine: 5.4 V8 s'charged
0-60mph: 4.6 secs (claimed)
Price: £60,000 (est)



First opinion

FOR the Monaro to make an even bigger noise than when it was first launched in the UK is quite staggering. True to the Vauxhall model's appeal, the powerhouse VXR 500 wears its heart on its sleeve – and it's a giant one at that. Throw in the firm's full three-year warranty, and the VXR 500 is a seriously tempting route to supercar sensations at a fraction of the price.

Rating: ★★★★★



Optional up-rated brakes and suspension cope admirably with extra power