

# VXR220



**TOTAL VAUXHALL**

**FAST FACTS**

- \* Astra VXR injectors
- \* Hybrid turbo
- \* Custom Courtenay remap
- \* Bespoke geometry set-up
- \* Brembo brakes

# no going back

Words: Dave | Photos: Darren Maybury

**The birth of the VX220 signalled a new dawn for Vauxhall making performance cars, and for Jimmy White, owning and tuning VX220s has become a habit he can't break.**



**W**hen Lotus launched the Elise way back in 1995, nobody in the Vauxhall world paid much attention to the little two seat sports car with its glued together aluminium chassis, razor sharp handling and impressive performance figures. The Elise was an immediate success for these exact reasons it didn't go unnoticed for very long. In 2000 and thanks to increasingly strict crash test standards, the Norfolk based company needed a partner in order to develop its second-generation chassis. Step forward Vauxhall. Things were never the same again. All of a sudden, Vauxhall were no longer producing family hatches, 4x4s and vans, they now had a true drivers' car complete with a 145 bhp mid-mounted 2.2-litre engine which thanks to a positively anorexic kerb weight of 870 kg, provided serious performance.

In 2003 things were stepped up a gear when the VX220 was fitted with the 200 bhp 2.0 16V turbo, stolen from the Mk4 Astra range and although slightly heavier, the Turbo's performance potential was phenomenal. Reaching 60 mph took 4.9 seconds and the car could easily hit 150 mph, if you were brave enough. A certain tall, curly haired TV presenter loved the VX220 Turbo and it quickly established itself as one of the fastest cars the company produced. But Vauxhall weren't finished there. In 2004 and ahead of the launch of their new 'VXR' performance brand, the VX220 was launched. Based on the Turbo, the VXRs were predominantly available in red with contrasting black Speedline alloys but more importantly had a power increase to 220 bhp thanks to a free-flowing air filter, exhaust and revised turbo along with an ECU remap. To harness the power, the VXRs had uprated brakes, suspension and ultra sticky Yokohama tyres. The 0 - 60 mph dropped to 4.2 seconds, faster than a GT3 RS.





VXR220

Oz Superturismos are lightweight and look good on the VXR220.



‘How did I come to have a VXR220?’ ponders Jimmy White, as he stands by his subtle yet heavily tweaked example. ‘I initially had a 2.2 VX220 back in 2007 and really enjoyed it. After a year or so I began to feel it was a little gutless and by that stage I was right in the deep end of VX220 ownership as I’d agreed to organise our annual track meeting. A month or two before the meet, I decided I needed something a little faster so I could keep up. I initially thought about the Turbo but then decided I wanted a VXR.’ With only 65 VXR220s produced, finding one was going to be a challenge. ‘I looked at a few and amazingly, most of these were really quite rough which was surprising. I eventually found one in Belfast, it was big money but it had only done 11,000 miles and was immaculate. I flew out with a rucksack full of cash, bought it and drove back in the rain. That was an interesting trip!’

With the car back home, there was no time before its first track outing at the VX220 National meet where it exceeded even Jimmy’s expectations. ‘It was absolutely flying round the track, I pretty much lapped everybody in my group. Thing was, although I’d vowed to keep it standard and mint it wasn’t long before I started thinking about those “must do” types of modifications for the track,’ he says, knowing full well that was the start of things to come. With the VXR220 already benefiting from uprated brakes and suspension, the first thing on the agenda was to release a little more power. A 2bular 3 inch exhaust was fitted along with Astra VXR injectors and an uprated plenum, then the car was taken to Courtenay Sport for a custom remap. The results were significant, taking the power to 250 bhp and the torque to a whopping 280 lb/ft. That’s a power to weight ratio of 273 bhp per ton, more than a Ferrari 360.



A toe hook. Not to be confused with the climbing technique.



With a plaque recessed in carbon-fibre so you know it’s the real deal.

‘A lot of guys focus on power and go for the Stage 4 (300+ bhp) and beyond, but with the amount of track work I was doing by that stage, I decided the money would be better spent elsewhere. The handling is superb on these as standard but for heavy track use, there was a lot that could be improved.’ Following a discussion with Chris Randall at Hofmann’s Motorsport, the VXR’s suspension underwent a major overhaul. ‘Chris races a Lotus Europa in the GT Cup and really knows

his stuff. We based the suspension around Nitron shocks built to my own specification matched to Eibach springs, but then took it a step further and fitted uprated wishbone bushes, a Plans Motorsport anti-roll bar and a Phoenix Motorsport toe link kit. The car was then properly set-up, including full race geometry, bump steer and corner weighting. It was worth it,’ smiles Jimmy. ‘On track it was just unbelievable, the handling is so precise and I could really throw the car around



**OWNER** JIMMY WHITE

**AGE** 31  
**OCCUPATION** Engineer  
**FIRST CAR?** A Mk2 Golf Ryder.

**Ace car!**  
**WHAT MADE YOU BUY THE VXR220?** I wanted to start track driving and wanted a capable car, a VX220 made the most sense.  
**DO YOU EVER GET MISTAKEN FOR JIMMY ‘THE WHIRLWIND’ WHITE?** Nah, but I do get people thinking they’re clever and taking the piss, ha ha!

and it would just stick. Even cars with massive power were acting as mobile chicanes as I was able to carry so much speed through the corners!’

Along with the suspension upgrades, Jimmy turned his attention to the brakes but given the car’s light weight, they are relatively understated. ‘The brakes are very good as standard, so all I’ve done is fit new discs along with Carbon Lorraine SP5+ pads and track-spec brake fluid. My biggest issue was staying in the car round the bends,’ Jimmy laughs, ‘it creates so much cornering force I was almost falling out of the standard seatbelts. Needless to say I changed them for Safety Devices five-point harnesses which made such a difference.’ With the car at the stage where Jimmy was happy, very little changed over the following years (yes, years... not just months) and the pair racked up numerous track days and perhaps even more



Work includes a hybrid turbo, Astra VXR injectors, ported intake and a 3 inch exhaust system.



**'I VOWED TO KEEP IT STANDARD BUT IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE I STARTED THINKING ABOUT MODIFICATIONS'**

Now that is what we call a diffuser!



VXR220

The five-point harnesses aren't for show - this 220 can generate serious corner force.

Surprising was that there were almost no issues. 'What can I say? It was great and never put a foot wrong despite the amount of track days it covered. The only issue I had was the inlet pipe kept collapsing under heavy boost so I fitted an aluminium one that solved the problem. That was all that ever went wrong.'

In June of this year, Jimmy organised for a group of 20+ VX220 owners to make the trip to a 'Lotus on Track' event at Le Mans. Needless to say with

#### THANKS

Next season I will be driving in the Time Attack series in my supercharged VX220 so anyone who would like to help out with sponsorship and car preparation should get in touch. I'm confident we will be competitive and hope to take a few stage wins.

one of the fastest track VX220s in the country and the Bugatti Circuit to play on, the trip went down in history as one of the best. It did however mark a dramatic change in the VXR220's life. 'While we were over there I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to drive a supercharged 2.2 VX220 owned by my good friend and long standing track rival, Cliffie. It was an absolute revelation for me and after three of four laps I was convinced that due to the lighter weight and the smoother power delivery, I could lap quicker in his car than I could in my own. As superb as the VXR was, it was heavier than the 2.2 and also the turbo's power delivery could be quite spikey at times. As a result, I did sometimes find the car a struggle against the likes of the lighter Lotuses and Caterhams.'

Within two weeks of returning from France, the inevitable happened and

Jimmy sold the VXR220 (within one hour of advertisement) and replaced it with a supercharged 2.2. With Jimmy's supercharged VX220 project still in its early days, rest assured there will be a lot to come from both him and the car, especially when you consider the remarkable performance and track attacking abilities he achieved with the VXR, which brings us neatly onto the future plan. 'Well... I'm going to take this one step further than the VXR and I'll be entering the Time Attack series in 2011. So if there is anybody out there who is willing and able to assist with sponsorship or help with the car's preparation for the project, give me a call!' On that basis, it looks like we'll be cheering on both Bo Neilsen and Jimmy White as they fly the flag for Vauxhall in 2011. We wish them both the best of luck for the future, we'll be there.

## TECH SPEC

### ENGINE

1998cc Z20LET 2-litre DOHC 16V, VXR hybrid turbo and ported intake, Astra VXR injectors, ITB air filter, NGK iridium high temp spark plugs, uprated inlet plenum, Pro-Alloy aluminium intake pipe and radiator, 2bular 3 inch exhaust system with 100 cell race catalyst, Courtenay Sport custom remap, 248 bhp, 280 lb/ft.

### TRANSMISSION

Standard F23 five-speed gearbox and clutch assembly, Plans Motorsport gearbox breather, rear-wheel drive.

### SUSPENSION

Nitron coil-overs (Hoffmann's Motorsport-spec with modified valves) 450/600 lb Eibach springs and helper springs, Plans Motorsport anti-roll bar, Phoenix Motorsport toe link kit, SuperPro polyurethane wishbone bushes, Hoffmann's Motorsport suspension and geometry set-up (corner weights/bump steer).

### BRAKES

AP Racing/Brembo callipers with Carbon Lorraine SP5+ brake pads and drilled and grooved discs, ATE SuperBlue racing brake fluid.

### WHEELS + TYRES

Oz Superturismo lightweight alloys with Yokohama A048 semi-slick tyres.

### BODY

VXR220 two door, Red, MMG Performance braced diffuser.

### INTERIOR

Standard VXR220 with ProBax lightweight race seats, Safety Devices five-point harnesses.

## 'I FLEW TO BELFAST AND DROVE BACK IN THE RAIN. THAT WAS INTERESTING!'

With its stance and aggressive lines, you can't deny this looks good.

