

## Great Griffins

By Jim Mc Cauley

Think Vauxhall and the mind immediately springs to their mainstay passenger ranges, but along the line there was frequently a very desirable model at the top. The company preserve a fine range of cars in their Heritage collection and maintain them in running condition. Recently I had the opportunity to drive a pair of their mid sized marvels - one that didn't sell as well as expected and the other that could have well outsold its limited production run, and in both cases no choice of colour.



In 1973 Vauxhall topped their Firenza range with the High Performance (HP) model which quickly earned the nickname 'Droopsnoot' which featured a GRP nose not unlike that of the Renault Alpine A310. The model was only available in silver and took ownership of the Firenza badge while the standard car from which it was derived became the Magnum.

Under the bonnet was a carburettor-fed 2.3 litre engine which produced 131 bhp and to deal with the extra power there were uprated brakes and lowered suspension. The Heritage example is impeccably presented and one of only 204 road-going examples sold, despite the track variants featuring well in saloon car racing in the hands of Vauxhall legend Gerry Marshall.

The appearance of the car belies its age and with no attempt to confirm its original 0-60mph sprint of 8.0 seconds, an assertive touch is required for both steering and brakes while any irregularities on the road confirm the firmness of its sports suspension. Fitted with a 5-speed ZF gearbox, 1<sup>st</sup> is down and opposite reverse, but no problem for someone who learned to drive in a 100E Ford.

A quarter of a century on, and the distance in engineering is apparent behind the wheel of the Bertone designed Astra Coupé 888. This time round the model was only available in blue including large swathes of the interior. Only 100 examples of this heritage example were built by Triple Eight Engineering, again linked to the model's track success.





The car is very much in the modern mode – lighter, more eager to respond to throttle input and much more forgiving on poor surfaces. The 2.0 litre turbo unit delivers 192 bhp and sees 60mph from rest in just 7.0 seconds. Twin front airbags, air conditioning, electric windows, trip computer and frameless doors are part of the package, confirming how advances the car was in 1999.