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201BHP, 152MPH, FOUR-WHEEL DRIVE, SIX-SPEED GEARBOX, £20,950

## Calibra Turbo 4x4

**We drive  
Britain's cheapest  
150mph car**



DM 8.50

**T**he Calibra is a great one for sending out confusing signals. Up to now, the message seems to have been: Style is everything. That's why one of the sexiest-looking cars on earth drives with all the knee-trembling charisma of, well, a Vauxhall Cavalier. It's a bit like Superman in reverse: beneath the sleek suit of rippling muscle there's a string vest and thermal underpants.

It isn't that the Calibra is a wimp: its two-litre 16-valve engine growls throatily and kicks like a mule. But performance (137mph top speed and a 0-60mph time of 8.1secs) isn't the main selling point. Looking gorgeous with space to spare is the Calibra's bag—a philosophy of pragmatism which has allowed Vauxhall to cut itself a man-sized slice of the UK coupe market, leaving more dynamically adept rivals to fight over the crumbs. So the Calibra isn't a driver's car. One is tempted to say Vauxhall should worry.

But then you look at the Calibra 4x4 and the signals change. Far from encouraging its mid-market coupe to live off the beauty and four-seater practicality of its body, it seems Vauxhall *does* want the open-backed leather gloves brigade on its books. After all, the sophisticated, viscous-coupled all-drive hardware isn't there in case the Calibra strays into the odd muddy field, but to give the tarmac grip and balance the front-driver lacks. Except that, in the process, the performance loses its sparkle (0-60mph slumps to 9secs) and so, to a large extent, defeats the purpose.

As of now, however, the Calibra is shedding its half-heartedness and penchant for ambiguity. The old £18,938 4x4 becomes the £20,950 4x4 Turbo and its message could hardly be more emphatic: 152mph and 0-60mph in 6.4secs. If the claims are substantiated, the Turbo joins the ranks of the Ford Sierra Cosworth (£20,558), Toyota Celica GT4 (£23,824) and Lancia Integrale (£23,249)—that elite band of competition-inspired road rockets that, beneath a relatively sober ▶

PETER BURN

# 152 for four

**David Vivian drives  
Britain's cheapest 150mph car,  
the £20,950 Vauxhall Calibra  
Turbo 4x4**

# Vauxhall Calibra Turbo 4x4





Calibra Turbo's fascia is pure Cavalier but six-speed 'box hints at huge performance



Leather front seats shapely, comfortable



More space in back than most rivals

◀ exterior, conceal a super-car-felling punch.

Apart from a rear 'turbo' badge and slightly different wheels, Vauxhall's fastest car (now that the Lotus Carlton has ceased production) is identical to its normally aspirated counterpart. While this is clearly good for the well-being of what most people agree is a stunning shape, it's not so thrilling for those who want to advertise their extra firepower. Vauxhall says it won't put them off, but we're not so sure.

Inside, the shapely new

leather seats (refreshingly, not by Recaro and not overtly pseudo-rally) contrive to make the unimaginative Cavalier fascia look even more incongruous. They have heating elements in their cushions, a feature which joins a seven-function trip computer in a long list of standard equipment that includes power steering, anti-lock braking, electrically operated front windows, sunroof and door mirrors, and remote central locking with deadlocks and an ultrasonic alarm.

The Calibra's mighty leap up the performance ladder is easier to understand once you've studied the statistics. A 36 per cent hike in power takes the maximum figure from 150bhp to 201bhp at 5600rpm. Torque is up by a massive 42 per cent, peaking at 207lb ft at just 2400rpm, although the flatness of the torque curve means that there's 148lb ft available as low as 1500rpm.

Of equal significance is Vauxhall's claim that the Calibra has a lag-free turbo. By having the turbo's turbine

## Factfile

### Vauxhall Calibra Turbo 4x4

#### How fast, how thirsty?

0-50mph	0.4sec
Top speed	152mph
MPG: urban	24.4
56mph	40.9
75mph	34.0

All manufacturer's claimed figures

#### How much?

£20,950

On sale in UK End of April 1992

#### How big?

Length	4493mm
Width	1689mm
Height	1321mm
Wheelbase	2601mm
Weight (claimed)	1375kg
Fuel tank	63 litres

#### Engine

Max power 201bhp/5600rpm  
 Max torque 207lb ft/2400rpm  
 Specific output 101bhp/litre  
 Power to weight 148bhp/tonne  
 Installation transverse, front, four-wheel drive  
 Capacity 1998cc  
 Made of aluminium head, iron block  
 Bore/stroke 86/86mm  
 Compression ratio 9.0:1  
 Valves dohc, 4 per cyl  
 Ignition and fuel Bosch Motronic 2.7 sequential injection and management

#### Gearbox

Type 6-speed manual  
 Ratios 1st 3.57 2nd 2.16  
 3rd 1.45 4th 1.10 5th 0.89 top  
 Final drive ratio 3.72/3.70:1 (front/rear)

#### Suspension

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar  
 Rear cross-member with semi-trailing arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar

#### Steering

Type rack and pinion, power assistance

#### Brakes

Front vent disc Rear solid disc  
 Anti-lock standard

#### Wheels and tyres

Size 6x16ins Made of cast aluminium  
 Tyres 205/50 ZR16

#### Sold by

Vauxhall Motors Limited, Griffins House, PO Box 3, Luton LU1 3YT, Tel: 0582 21122

**"A solid, exhilarating slug of acceleration can be used to blast out of tight bends"**



Already muscular two-litre 16V is formidable with turbo

housing in-unit with the exhaust manifold, the hot exhaust gases travel a shorter distance between valves and turbine impeller. Also, because the integrated design eliminates the need for a turbocharger flange, it allows the exhaust bypass junction to be located away from the turbine housing. These features permit quick warm-up and unhindered gas flow to the turbine inlet, reducing lag and sharpening throttle response.



Four-wheel drive is a boon in snow but helps grip and stability on dry tarmac, too. Steering lacks feel, though

The intercooler and three-way, closed-loop catalytic converter are conventional, but the Bosch Motronic M2.7 engine management system is an advance on the M2.5 used with the normally aspirated engine. It not only controls the sequential fuel injection and prevents knock (allowing a high 9.0:1 compression ratio), but also allows an element of 'over-boost' for short durations, when the throttle is floored, by closing off the wastegate. This gives around 10 per cent more boost pressure.

Given the engine's broad torque spread, one might have thought that five speeds were adequate, but GM's engineers have developed a close-ratio six-speeder for the new car. Based closely on the existing five-speed unit, it's the same size and required no body or chassis modifications. The gate pattern is the same as the five-speeder's but with sixth beneath fifth.

The brakes are bigger (284mm vented discs at the front) and wheel diameter up to 16ins, but the chassis is

otherwise unchanged from the regular 4x4's with struts at the front and semi-trailing arms at the back.

In broad terms, the Calibra Turbo carves out a strong argument for itself. Four-wheel drive always makes more sense when it's asked to work for its living and the two-litre turbo certainly does that. The engine's an unequivocally hard hitter, with a big plateau of torque and the gear ratios to exploit it. As Vauxhall claims, turbo lag is virtually non-existent and a firm prod of the throttle elicits a solid, often exhilarating, slug of acceleration which can be used to blast out of tight bends or dispatch clumps of dawdling traffic to the rear-view mirror. All of this is accomplished with a hollow growl from the engine which is more fun when you're in the mood for hard driving. Unfortunately, you're stuck with it when you're not, and before too long it becomes wearing. Turbos are usually quieter than this — even ones with 201bhp.

Although long on grip and stability, the chassis lacks feel and finesse. Helm responses are progressive and smooth but inert; the steering feels aloof and vaguely artificial. The ride is mildly disappointing, too — fine overall control but prone to checking harshly over transverse

ridges and expansion joints.

For all that, the Calibra Turbo at least deserves praise for being a genuinely rapid car with an impressive engine and effective ground-covering capability. One wonders, however, what heights this engine might have scaled in a Lotus-developed chassis. ■



**BILL EOBERY**  
VAUXHALL DIRECTOR

**Q&A**  
Given that you'll only sell 500 Calibra Turbo 4x4s a year, why is it important to Vauxhall?

It's all to do with image. The Calibra range needed a performance version to meet and beat the Japanese and to pre-empt the next wave of super coupes.

**Why will enthusiastic drivers buy this car?**

The Calibra's always been good on design but, with turbo power, it's good to drive, too. Moreover, it's a European alternative to the Japanese machinery.

**Why isn't there a Lotus badge on the Calibra Turbo?**

We're still searching for the right relationship with Lotus. Perhaps some way down the road there will be a Lotus Calibra but it will be a matter of finding the right balance between engineering and price.

**If Ford was making this car, it would have given it a strong visual identity. Why haven't you?**

The Calibra Turbo 4x4 is a low-production vehicle. For that reason, we didn't want any sheet metal changes on this version of the car. It wouldn't have been cost effective.