

Vauxhall Calibra 2.0i 16v



THE STUNNING LOOKING CALIBRA represents Vauxhall's big-time return to the sporting coupé market – a sector largely dominated by the Japanese since the demise of old favourites like the Ford Capri and Opel Manta.

The Calibra is effectively a 2+2 Cavalier, yet its sleek, aerodynamic looks give it a strong identity all of its own. There are three models on offer, all 2-litre fuel injected: the first has an eight-valve head and produces 113bhp, the second model has a superb 16-valve power unit from the Astra GTE, which delivers a distinctly more vigorous 148bhp. Unlike most multi-valve engines, though, this manages to provide impressive mid-range performance, too. Topping the range is a four-wheel drive version of the 16-valver.

A catalytic converter is standard on all three models, as is a five-speed, close-ratio manual gearbox; a four-speed automatic (with switchable driving modes) is also available, although only on the eight-valve version.

Inside the Calibra, the fascia betrays its Cavalier parentage, but the driving position is more laid back. Despite the racy coupé styling, headroom and seat travel are reasonably generous up front, but the

Calibra really scores by being spacious in the back, too, where seat room is similar to an Escort's. In comparison, back seat space on rivals is more like that of small superminis – at best. Your head comes a bit close to the tailgate glass if you're tall, though.

Passenger room isn't achieved at the expense of load space, either. The Calibra's high-tailed looks conceal plenty of room for the luggage, too, although a prominent sill and a long reach to the far corners make loading hard work.

The Calibra's gutsy engine makes it a real delight to drive; it really thrives on fast cross-country runs, yet the strong mid-range pull makes it just as happy when trickling around town.

Flat-out, it's good for almost 140mph, although, of course, its 30-70mph acceleration in a brisk 7.4sec is much more relevant. This beats the Honda Prelude and 16-valve VW Corrado, for example, although Toyota's mid-engined two-seater – the MR2 – is a shade quicker through the gears.

But most impressive of all is the Calibra's miserly fuel consumption – we averaged an excellent 37mpg overall. The 16-valve engine clearly shows that performance and economy don't necessarily have to be mutually exclusive.

Living with the Calibra . . .

The firm, well-controlled suspension nicely complements the taut, grippy handling, although the front-wheel drive 16-valve can call for a firm grip on the wheel at times; it also needs a degree of driver restraint in the wet. Nicely weighted power steering is standard on all versions, as are anti-lock brakes, an electric sunroof, electric windows and door mirrors, central locking, plus a comprehensive factory-fitted alarm system to look after it all.

You usually have to pay more for a sporty coupé than for the hot hatch or family saloon it's based on, but the Calibra is almost an exception. Currently, the coupé premium is a very reasonable £300 or so for the 16-valve; the eight-valve is actually cheaper than top spec Cavaliers.

We think the Calibra is a real winner. It's got that superb 16-valve engine, head-turning looks, class-beating back seat and luggage space, together with fine handling and excellent fuel economy. It's also very well equipped, but, try as they might, the exquisite power unit and stylish looks can't completely disguise the Calibra's Cavalier origins.

At the Wheel

Driving position

The Calibra's driving position is lower-slung than the Cavalier's, but the controls and displays will all be familiar to a Cavalier owner 'graduating' to the Calibra.

Headroom is reasonably generous, the steering wheel is adjustable for reach (though not rake) and there are height adjusters on both front seats to tailor comfort at the wheel. Neither seat is equipped with lumbar support adjustment, however.

Controls and displays

The chunky leather-clad wheel,

crisp if slightly notchy gearchange and pedals perfectly placed for heel-and-toe changes, make the keener driver feel immediately at home. The clear instruments are easy to read, and a comprehensive array of warning lamps is readily visible to the driver. Our test car's speedometer was disappointingly optimistic, though.

Vision

The whereabouts of the Calibra's front and rear extremities can be a bit of a mystery, particularly for shorter drivers; the coupé's acutely angled pillars tend to be obstructive at times, too. Despite their slim size, the electrically adjusted and heated door mirrors provide a reasonable view to the rear, and the ultra slim 'double ellipsoid' headlamps produce excellent main beam illumination at night; dipped-beam performance is rather myopic, in comparison. Headlamp load-levelling is provided by neat electric adjustment from the fascia.

Driver satisfaction

The Calibra is not only a real head-turner, it also possesses a rewarding chassis and a real beauty of a 16-valve engine, with strong 'top-end' performance (as you might expect), but with almost uncanny vigour lower down the rev range, too. On top of this, the Calibra emits a suitably crackly rasp from its twin rectangular tailpipes (a hallmark of Vauxhall's performance-oriented cars), although this becomes a mite intrusive at times.

Space & Comfort

Getting in and out

Entering or emerging from the back of the Calibra presents the usual single side-door difficulties, although the front seatbacks tip well forward to make life as easy as possible. They won't spring back on you mid-manoeuve

because the release catch has to be used again to return the backrest to the upright position.

The Calibra sets new standards for rear passenger space – it's a full four-seater, whereas its rivals are more like 2+2s. However, six-footers will find headroom marginal in the back; they sit with their heads out under the tailgate glass, which gives an airy feeling, but things can get a bit hot in the sun.

Seating and ride comfort

The Calibra's heavily side-bolstered front seats prove comfortable and supportive, with ample headroom and legroom for all but the very tallest drivers.

The ride – always on the firm side – is generally well controlled, although at lower speeds, badly rutted town roads lead to rather lumpy, bumpy progress.

Tyre roar from the chunky 205/55 Pirelli P600s is quite well suppressed, but the pillarless side windows struggle to keep wind noise totally at bay at higher speeds.

Luggage and oddments stowage

The Calibra has a spacious, neatly-lined boot under the large, easy-to-lift tailgate, although height under the shelf could be more generous, and loading is hampered by an awkward 14in-high sill (needed to preserve structural strength). For bigger loads, the 50/50 divided backrests can be dropped forward on to the fixed, one-piece cushion, while the normally unusable space over the rear wheelarches is neatly enclosed to form a couple of stowage areas – handy for tools, a first-aid kit and so on. There's a neat warning-triangle holder, just inside the rear panel, too.

A decent-sized, lockable glovebox and smallish door bins are supplemented by three 'pillar-box' cubbies (all conscientiously rubber lined), plus pop-up storage for four cassettes at the rear of the centre console. Annoyingly, though, its trigger-happy releases

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PERFORMANCE

Acceleration time in seconds

STANDING START	0-30mph	0-60mph	0-100mph	1/4 mile
	2.9	7.9	21.4	16.1

mph	30	40	50	60	70
THROUGH THE GEARS		1.3	2.9	5.0	7.4
IN 5TH GEAR		5.7	11.0	16.0	21.4
IN 4TH GEAR		3.8	7.4	10.9	14.4

20 mph	30	40	50	60	70
5TH/4TH SPEED RANGES		11.7/8.1	10.3/7.1		10.4/7.0

Maximum speeds

REVS PER MINUTE	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
	36	6500*	6780	6220	137
	59	117	86	5	

* for best acceleration

FUEL CONSUMPTION

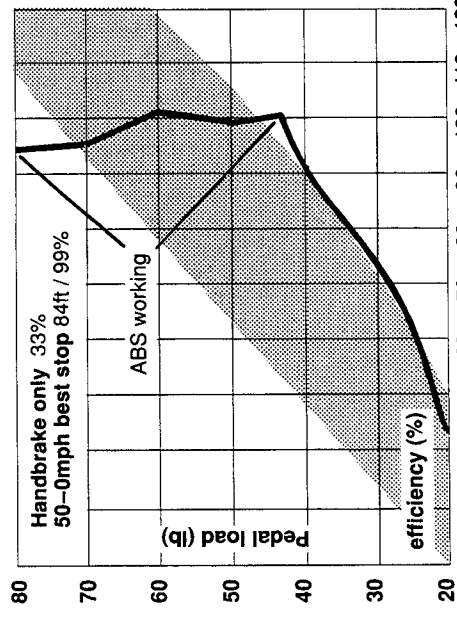
Fuel grade for tests: unleaded, 95 octane

Normal range	mpg
Hard driving, heavy traffic	31
Short journeys in the suburbs	29
Motorway – 70mph cruising	40 1/2
Brisk driving, mixed roads	36
Gentle driving – rural roads	41 1/2
Typical mpg overall	37
Realistic tank range*	58 litres/470 miles

* based on gauge/warning lamp and filling station experience

SAFETY

Brakes How pedal loads affect braking



Braking efficiency shown as a percentage of gravity (ie 100% = 1.0g). Ideally the braking curve should fall within the shaded zone of this graph. If it's above, the brakes are too heavy; if it's below, they are too light – particularly on cars without ABS. When the curve becomes broken, the wheels are skidding.

Fade test

How hard use or water affects braking. (Ideal brakes show no change.)

Pedal load needed for 75% stop (lb)

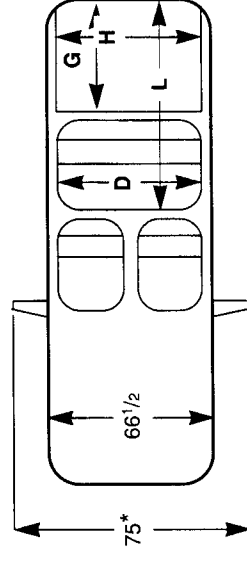
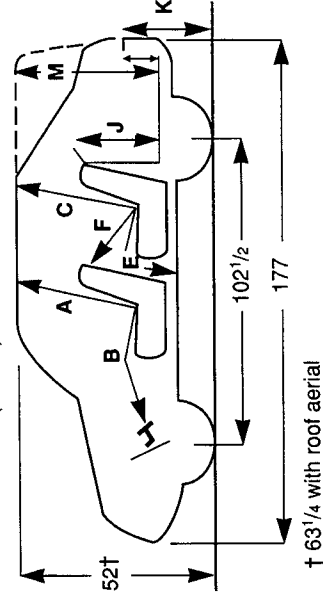
37	At start of test
35	After constant use
42	After severe use
NA	After watersplash
NA	Number of stops to recover

Safety check list

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Steering true 'feel' of the road?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Brakes powerful?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	sensible effort?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	fade resistant?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Seatbelts front – effective?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	convenient?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	rears – effective?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	convenient?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Head restraints front – effective?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	rear – effective?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Interior thoroughly padded?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fuel shielded filler?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	protected tank?

MEASUREMENTS

Dimensions (inches)



* mirrors don't fold

Kerb weight in lb (full of fuel)

Inside (inches)

2794	36-37 1/2	35-42	35 1/4	49	38 1/2	29 1/2	26 1/4
	G Load length	H Load floor width (min - max)	J Load height	K Sill height (inner/outer)	L Load length	M Load height (to tailgate hinge)	
	A Front headroom	B Front legroom (min - max)	C Rear headroom	D Back seat width (between armrests)	E Typical rear * legroom	F Typical rear * kneeroom	

* 'Typical' represents the mean measurement behind the driver's seat set at 39in legroom and the passenger's seat set at 41in

are perfectly placed for inadvertent elbow-prodding.

Heating and ventilation

The heating and ventilation system employs sliders, as opposed to the now more-fashionable rotary controls, though there's little else to complain about. Unlike most previous Vauxhalls, the centre vents now turn warm with the heater, although only beyond mid-way settings. The blower fan is quiet on all but its fastest settings – fortunate, as the large expanse of near-horizontal glass can place heavy demands on ventilation throughput in warmer weather.

Vauxhall has cleverly managed to squeeze a sunroof into the Calibra's short roofline – the electrically operated tilt-and-slide panel retracting externally, which helps to preserve reasonable headroom. The optional air conditioning (which cools the glovebox, too!) would be a worthwhile choice for drivers in warmer climes.

Money Matters

In service

Servicing is required at 9000-mile/one-year intervals (whichever occurs first), but oil changes are required more frequently for arduous operating conditions. Electronic fuel injection and ignition, together with hydraulic tappets, reduce the service load and, although the engine room is well-filled, items such as the dipstick and translucent reservoirs are all reasonably accessible.

Warranty and insurance

The Calibra comes with one-year/unlimited-mileage mechanical cover plus a six-year anti-perforation warranty, with no periodic checks required to keep it in force. Vauxhall Assistance provides full roadside rescue and recovery service (including 'at home' cover) for the first year of ownership.

Coupés are never cheap to

insure, nevertheless the Calibra attracts a not-unreasonable Group 6/7 rating – generally Group 6 for the eight-valve and 7 for 16-valve versions – the latter typically one group higher than for the equivalent Cavalier.

Fuel economy

The 16-valve Calibra is an impressive driving machine in its own right, which makes its well-controlled thirst doubly impressive. It has the legs of virtually all the rivals in our comparison chart, yet it's comfortably the most economical, too, beating the notably abstemious Corrado – albeit by a fairly slim margin. On top of that, all Calibras come catalyser-equipped as standard, and the fair-sized tank, combined with excellent fuel economy, allows a range approaching 500 miles between forecourt visits for refills.

Value for money

As the eight-valve Calibra provides the much-admired looks and does most of what the 16-valve does (admittedly at a somewhat gentler pace) for some £3000 less, the 16-valve looks quite expensive in comparison.

However, that would be to overlook the glorious multi-valve engine, plus numerous items of equipment, such as alloy wheels and wider tyres, up-rated springs and dampers, a 'check-control' panel (monitoring fluid levels, bulb failures and so on), and the tell-tale dual rectangular tailpipe – all of which the eight-valve lacks. On the other hand, whichever model you choose, the price includes ABS brakes, a tilt and slide sunroof, power steering and electric windows and central locking.

Safety

Accident avoidance

It's reassuring to have the ABS brakes as standard, and the power steering manages to convey at least

some feeling of what the front tyres are up to – a little too well in the case of our test car. This was prone to rather enthusiastic 'tramlining', particularly under moderate braking. Perhaps this hopefully untypical trait was the legacy of a previous user's indiscretion with a kerb. In the dry, the Calibra offers high levels of grip and, when it's driven sensibly, getting the power down on the road is rarely a problem. Of course, there's always the 4x4 version for more reassurance in the wet, or for hard-charging drivers.

Injury prevention

On this score, the Calibra looks generally reassuring inside, although the proximity of taller passengers' heads to the tailgate glass could be worrisome in a rollover. Front seatbelts have height-adjustable mounts, but there's no centre lap belt in the rear.

Security

Short of chaining each one to a lamppost, Vauxhall has done all it reasonably can to ensure that Calibras remain in their rightful owners' possession.

Central locking covers the doors, tailgate and fuel-filler flap, and there's a security-coded radio and high-security deadlocks (which prevent the doors from being opened even if a window is smashed). Calibras are also equipped with a sophisticated, factory-fitted anti-theft alarm system which is armed by simply deadlocking the vehicle using the normal door key. This secures against opened doors, bonnet or tailgate, it arms interior sensors protecting the cabin, and immobilises electrical circuits to prevent the car from being driven away. The interior sensors can be overridden (if you want to leave a pet in the car, for instance), and the system is a good deal more user-friendly than some we could mention – it won't wake the dead, for example, if you key-open the boot once the system is armed.

Durability

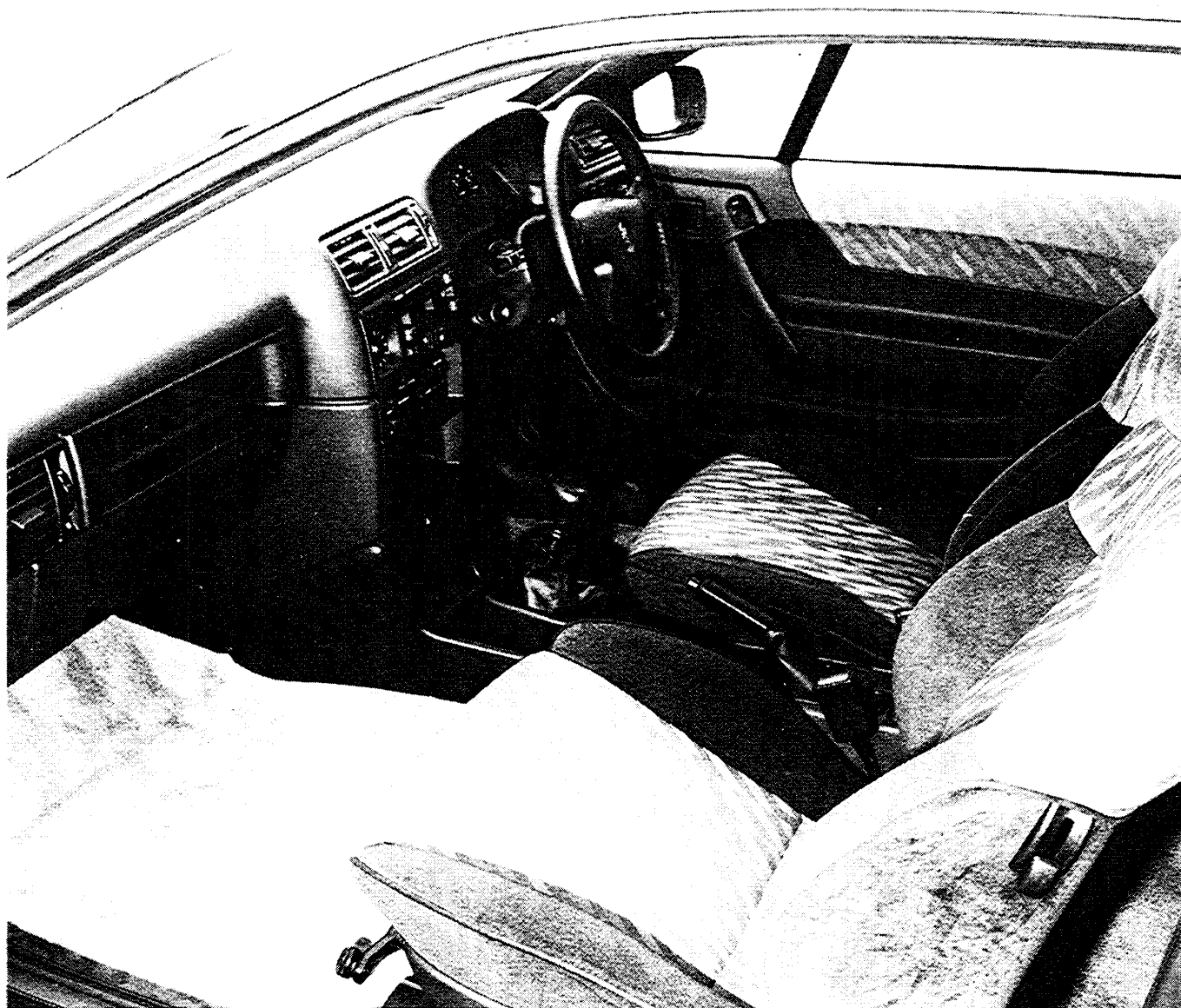
Build quality

Our test car had a good solid feel, excellent body fit and finish and was commendably free from any annoying rattles and creaks,

although some of the plasticky interior fittings are a little disappointing at this price level.

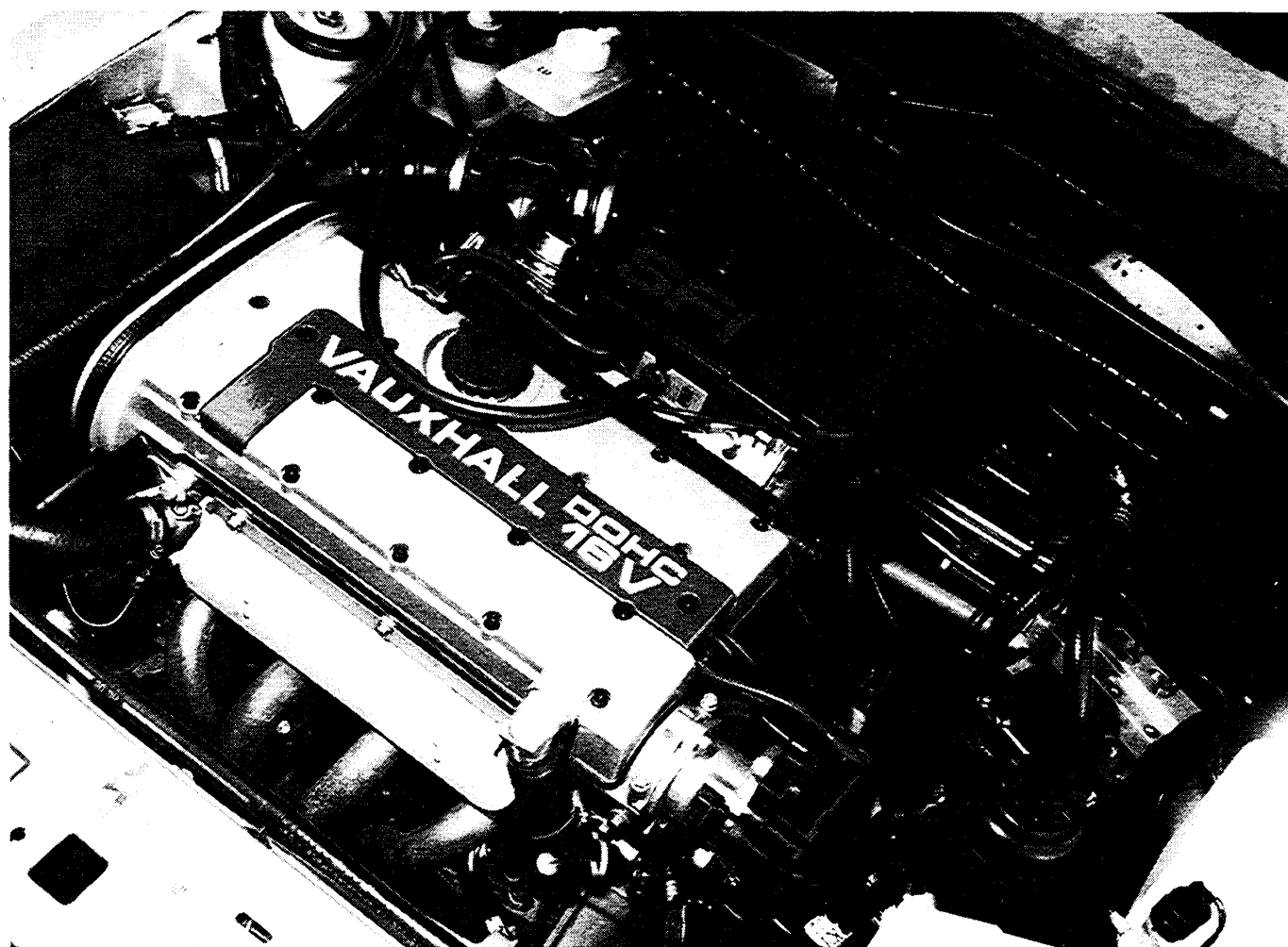
Plastic bumper/valances at each end, conscientiously lined wheelarches, and a reassuring-looking underbody treatment should all help to keep the Calibra looking its best. The

16-valve's 'shin-bashing' aerodynamic sill skirts also help to reduce stone and dirt spray along the lower flanks. The Calibra's reliance on much of the Cavalier's floorpan and running gear should ensure that reliability is at least as good as the parent vehicle's.



HOW IT COMPARES

	Engine cap/power (cc/bhp)	Max speed (mph)	30-70mph through gears (sec)	30-70mph in 5th/4th gears (sec)	Fuel economy (mpg)	Brakes best stop (%g/lb)	Maximum legroom – front (in)	Typical leg/ kneeroom – rear (in)	Steering turns/ circle (ft)	Overall length (in)
Vauxhall Calibra 2.0i 16v	1998/148	137	7.4	21.4/14.4	37	101/45*	42	38 1/2/29 1/2	3.4/36(p)	177
Honda Prelude 2.0i-16 4WS	1958/148	129	8.1	22.4/16.7	33	86/60*	45 1/2	34 1/4/25 1/2	2.8/32 1/2(p)	175 1/2
Mazda MX-5	1597/114	117	8.7	22.5/15.2	35 1/2	101/80	43	–	2.7/31(p)	156 1/2
Toyota MR2 GT	1998/156	135	7.0	20.1/13.8	32	110/40	43	–	3.7/33 1/4	164 1/4
VW Corrado 16v	1781/136	129	8.6	23.7/17.4	36	102/35	43 1/2	35 1/2/26 1/2	3.3/33 1/2(p)	159 1/2
Volvo 480 1.7LE*	1721/107	114	9.4	22.9/15.9	32	105/40	41 1/2	36 1/2/27	3.0/33 1/2(p)	167 1/2
* tested in non-cat form						* with ABS		(p) = power assisted		



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

ENGINE

Type and size front-mounted, transverse 4 in line; water-cooled. 86.0mm bore x 86.0mm stroke = 1998cc. Iron block and aluminium alloy head; 5 main bearings

Compression ratio 10.5:1

Valve gear twin belt-driven overhead camshafts actuating four valves per cylinder via hydraulic tappets

Fuel system Bosch Motronic M2.5 sequential electronic multi-point fuel injection, three-way catalyser and Lambda sensor. 63-litre (13.9-gallon) tank, with low fuel level warning lamp. Fuel required: unleaded only, 91-98 octane

Ignition system fully programmed electronic, integral with fuel injection control via coil and distributor, with knock sensing

Maximum power (DIN-net) 148bhp at 6000rpm

Maximum torque (DIN-net) 145 lb ft at 4800rpm

TRANSMISSION

Clutch 9in diaphragm-spring, dry-plate; cable-operated. Pedal load/travel: 23 lb/5¹/₂in

Gearbox 5-speed manual (all synchromesh) and reverse.

Ratios: first 3.55, second 2.16, third 1.48, fourth 1.13, fifth 0.89 and reverse 3.33:1. (Electronically controlled 4-speed automatic available on 2.0i 8-valve only)

Final drive 3.55:1 to front wheels

Mph per 1000rpm 22.0 in top, 17.3 in 4th

Rpm at 70mph 3180 in top gear

CHASSIS

Suspension front: independent by MacPherson damper/struts, coil springs, lower wishbones and an anti-roll bar. Rear: independent by semi-trailing arms, coil springs and an anti-roll bar. Dampers: telescopic all round (gas-filled on 16v and 16v 4x4)

Steering power-assisted rack and pinion with 3.4 turns between full locks. Turning circles average 36ft between kerbs, with 58³/₄ft for one turn of the wheel

Wheels 6J x 15 alloy (standard) with 205/55R15 87V tyres (Pirelli P600 on test car). Spare: Continental CST 14 T125/85R15 97M temporary-use tyre on 4J x 15 steel rim

Brakes 10.1in ventilated discs front, 10.6in solid discs rear, with vacuum servo. Bosch ABS anti-lock control standard on all models