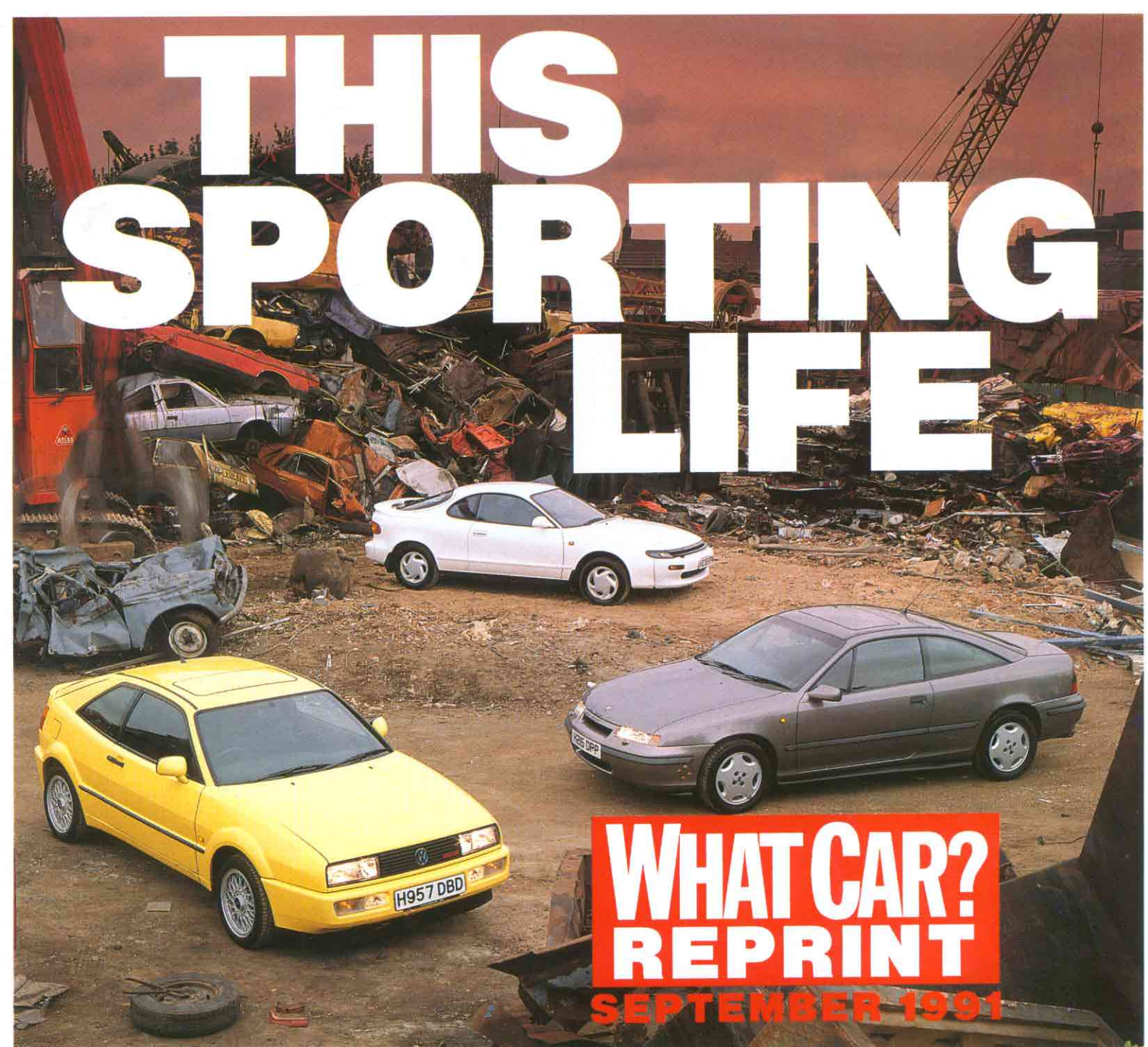


THIS SPORTING LIFE



**WHAT CAR?
REPRINT**

SEPTEMBER 1991

**VOLKSWAGEN
CORRADO
TAKES ON
CELICA
AND CALIBRA
IN COUPE CLASH**

■ THREE SPORTS COUPES

Volkswagen's Corrado should have had it made. Its chunky coupe looks shout Volkswagen solidity and sporty desirability in equal measure; its handling is first-class and it's a lot roomier than it looks.

So where was the problem? With its 136bhp, 16-valve engine, the Corrado as first sold here wasn't quick enough to cut it with the opposition. And it was too expensive, especially given its mean level of standard equipment.

But that was in the past. The latest Corrado 16v offers more goodies for less money. And for just £970 more, at a price of £18,851 against £17,881, you can now have a Corrado G60 with a 160bhp supercharged engine.

Based on the eight-valve, 1.8-litre Golf GTi engine, the G60's power unit features Volkswagen's eccentric-spiral G-charger. Because it is driven directly from the crankshaft instead of by the flow of exhaust gases, it's claimed to give all the power advantages of forced induction with none of the disadvantages, such as a delayed response to the accelerator, found with the more usual turbocharger. A bigger version of the unit already seen on the Polo G40, it works by compressing the engine's intake air with a motion not unlike that of a pair of hands kneading dough.

Two of the Corrado's closest rivals are Toyota's Celica GT (£19,128 with ABS but no cat), and Vauxhall's Calibra 16v (£18,520 which has both). The Vauxhall is part of Britain's best-selling coupe range, a range which has taken over from where the Ford Capri and



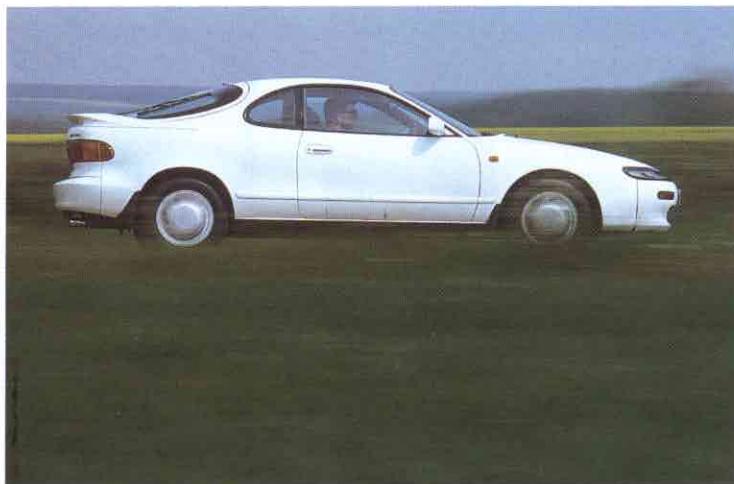
A SPORTING SCRAP

A supercharger and more equipment means Volkswagen's Corrado is now a real sporting rival to the likes of the Toyota Celica and Vauxhall Calibra in the sub-£20,000 coupe class.



TOYOTA CELICA 2.0i GT

£19,128



Celica's looks are trend-breaking but attractive. Handling is balanced and controllable, engine quickest on outright acceleration. Excellent driving position is infinitely adjustable, fascia curves match exterior's

VAUXHALL CALIBRA 16v

£18,520



Sleek, slippery shape partly accounts for Calibra's frugal fuel figures. Performance is good and gutsy but handling feels rather inert. Interior benefits from well-designed Cavalier fascia, yet wheel poorly positioned

VOLKSWAGEN CORRADO G60

£18,851



Chunky Corrado's handling has always been first-class, supercharger now provides punchy pulling power it deserves. Cabin is dark, sombre but controls are sensibly laid out and driving position feels just right

Opel Manta left off.

Under its sleek, ultra-aerodynamic styling the Calibra is essentially a Cavalier GSi 16v, except that it sports the more sophisticated semi-trailing arm rear suspension found in the 4x4 Cavalier and Calibra. Its 2.0-litre engine uses twin cams and 16 valves to help achieve its 150bhp.

The Toyota's engine is of similar size and design, producing a tad more power (158bhp) but less torque (140lb ft against 144). Neither can flex such big biceps as the Volkswagen, though. As well as its 160bhp, the Corrado musters an impressive 165lb ft of torque – and, because it arrives at a lower engine speed than the other two engines' peak torque outputs, that solid pulling power is always on tap when you need it most.

TOYOTA CELICA GT

When the restyled, re-engineered Celica was launched 18 months ago, our reaction was lukewarm. Here was a car

THREE SPORTS COUPES

offering less room than its shapely predecessor, within a body whose 'organic' curves (so said Toyota) looked decidedly ungainly to most eyes.

Perhaps that was just a standard reaction to a car whose styling was anything but standard. Familiarity can breed contentment, and we've found ourselves starting to like the Celica's trend-breaking looks. Judging by the healthy numbers of Celicas seen on

Britain's roads, many of you agree.

If a Celica's a cornucopia of curves on the outside, it's no less so inside. The instrument panel is made up of two arcs shrouding the three clear dials (which include a rev counter calibrated to no less than 9000rpm), with push-button heater controls to their left which have a shape distorted to suit. It works well, both visually and in use.

But the Toyota's interior is the most

claustrophobic of the three cars. The high waistline and small rear side windows make rear passengers, in particular, feel hemmed in, and there isn't much room for their legs either. The rear hatch has a very high sill, too.

Provided you're not worried by this, though, the Celica has a lot going for it. In terms of outright acceleration, it's the quickest of the three cars right through the speed range. A 30-70mph time of

7.3sec proves the point, though the pulling power in the higher gears doesn't quite match that of the Corrado. Largely academic it may be, but the maximum speed of 132mph is the lowest of the three.

To drive, the Celica GT feels just as lively as the figures suggest. Not only is this an engine that loves to rev, it also pulls lustily in the mid-speed range. On the downside, the crisp engine note gets boomy at speed or when the throttle is open wide, though the engine is always smooth.

It is not so economical, though, returning an average of 24.4mpg during our test. That's not a bad result considering the Toyota's pace, but the Calibra's 28.1mpg return shows what can be achieved.

Pace is matched by poise when the corners come up. The Celica's steering isn't the most informative in a straight line, and at speed over bumps the Toyota can feel fidgety, but its responses are alert and the handling balance is delightful. It turns into bends with gusto, and flows through them exactly according to the driver's steering and throttle inputs. It grips tenaciously, too.

And it's matched to a ride that's supple over small bumps and disciplined over large ones. It makes the Toyota a relaxing car to drive, helped for the driver by an excellent driving position and a comfortable seat adjustable for cushion tilt, lumbar support and the width between its side bolsters. Less appealing is the rather detached-feeling, cable-operated gearchange, though the brakes are first-class.

VAUXHALL CALIBRA 16v

Best-selling coupe the Calibra might be, but in our experience of it to date it hasn't shone brightly when it comes to handling, ride or refinement. Its trump cards have been those seductive looks, its generous accommodation, its low running costs – and, no doubt, the convenience of Vauxhall's well-populated dealer chain.

Certainly, the Calibra is the best car of the trio for carrying a family. There's decent rear legroom, a lowish waistline and a large window area, plus the rear seat is less deeply sculpted for two. The boot is a good size, too, though once again the hatchback opening has a high sill.

Fronted by the familiar and well-designed Cavalier facia and a chunky four-spoke, leather-rimmed steering wheel, the driver is nevertheless not quite as comfortable as the sporty-shaped seat suggests. The problem is that while both seat and steering wheel adjust for tilt, the wheel is too far away to tie in with the reclined driving position the Calibra's low build encourages. That said, the seat itself is fine.

Myth has it that high-revving 16-valve engines need to be worked hard to make them go and that they're gutless at low revs. In the Calibra, as in the Celica, the reality is different. Outright performance is slightly down on the Toyota's, apart from the top speed which benefits from the Calibra's slipper shape, but it still feels good and gutsy. Its response to small throttle

HOW THE CARS COMPARE

	TOYOTA CELICA 2.0i GT £19,128	VAUXHALL CALIBRA 16v £18,520	VOLKSWAGEN CORRADO G60 £18,851
PRICE			
RUNNING COSTS			
Max in top (mph)	132	135	140
in 4th	121	111	115
in 3rd/2nd/1st	94/61/38	85/58/35	85/54/31
30-70 through gears (sec)	7.3	7.7	7.4
0-30	2.9	3.0	3.1
0-40	4.5	4.3	4.4
0-50	5.8	6.0	5.9
0-60	7.6	8.1	8.1
0-70	10.2	10.7	10.5
0-80	13.0	13.7	13.1
0-90	16.4	17.9	17.3
30-50 in gears, 3rd/4th/5th	5.2/7.6/10.6	5.4/8.5/12.6	4.2/7.5/10.1
40-60	5.3/7.6/10.8	5.1/8.0/12.1	4.0/6.5/9.3
50-70	5.4/7.3/11.0	5.0/7.9/11.7	4.1/6.1/9.3
60-80	5.8/7.6/11.2	5.7/7.7/12.3	4.5/6.4/9.4
Top gear rpm/speedo at 70mph	2800/70	3200/78	3050/75
PERFORMANCE			
What Car? test mpg	24.4	28.1	23.2
Touring mpg ¹	35.7	35.8	31.7
Gov't mpg: Urban/56/75	28.5/48.7/37.2	27.2/49.6/39.2	22.6/47.1/34.4
Fuel grade/capacity (galls)	UL/13.2	UL/14.0	UL/12.0
Range at touring mpg	471	501	380
Insurance Group	7	7	9
Warranty (months/miles)	36/60,000 ²	12/UL	12/UL ²
Anti-rust (yrs)	6	6	6
What Car? cost per mile (p)³	48.5	52.5	n/a
EQUIPMENT AND COST OPTIONS			
Electric windows	yes	yes	yes
Central locking	yes	yes	yes
Auto transmission	£1026	no	no
Adjustable mirrors	elec	elec	elec
Sound system	s.rad/cass	s.rad/cass	s.rad/cass
Split/fold rear seat	yes	yes	yes
Anti-lock brakes	yes	yes	no
Leather upholstery	no	no	£942
Air conditioning	no	£790	no
Catalytic converter	no	yes	yes
DIMENSIONS			
Length/wheelbase (in)	176/99	177/102	159/97
Width (inc mirrors)/Height (in)	75/51	76/52	76/52
Headroom front/rear (in)	35/30	38/33	36/33
Legroom front (max)/rear (min) (in)	41/20	41/24	41/22
Rear shoulder room (in)	54	52	52
Boot capacity (cu ft)	11	11	10
Turning circle (ft)/lock turns	35.8/3.1	33.3/3.3	34.4/3.2
Kerb/towing weight (kg)	1183/1200	1219/1200	1115/1200
MECHANICAL SPECIFICATION			
Cyls/cc/fuel system	4/1998/inj	4/1998/inj	4/1781/inj, s-charger
Bore/stroke (mm)	86/86	86/86	81/86
Valvegear/Compression ratio	dohc 16v/10:1	dohc 16v/10.5:1	sohc 8v/8.0:1
Power (bhp/rpm)	158/6600	150/6000	160/5600
Torque (lb ft/rpm)	140/4800	144/4800	165/4000
Brakes F/R	Vdisc/disc	Vdisc/disc	Vdisc/disc
Suspension front	strut/coil/anti-roll	strut/coil/anti-roll	strut/coil/anti-roll
rear	strut/coil/anti-roll	semi-trailing arm/coil/anti-roll	trailing arm/torsion beam/coil/anti-roll
Tyres	205/60VR14	205/55VR15	195/50VR15

¹ Calculated at 'Euromix' mpg (1/2 Urban + 1/4 56mph + 1/4 75mph)

² Plus three years' paint warranty

³ Cost-per-mile figure calculated over three years and 36,000 miles. Includes fuel, depreciation, servicing and funding costs (figures supplied by Fleet Management Services Ltd, Shrewsbury)



Calibra's ultimate grip proved the least impressive of this trio



Calibra offers most room and works well as a family car



Corrado: one of best-handling front-drive cars around. Rides well, too



Okay for four adults, but Corrado is a little claustrophobic in rear



Again, Celica's rear passengers feel hemmed in; legroom lacking

openings is terrific – which probably accounts for the fuel frugality, because you don't need to mash the throttle to the floor in search of performance.

With its throaty rasp, the 16v engine sounds as though it means business, and the good gearchange feels less loose and rubbery than a Cavalier's, thanks to a shorter lever.

Unlike our original test car, this Calibra came fitted with Pirelli P600 tyres. Perhaps because of this, the steering felt more positive and there was much less torque steer, or tugging from side to side, under acceleration. But the Calibra still trails the trio in handling and roadholding terms. It feels rather inert, and under fast cornering the front wheels run wide soonest and ultimate grip proves the least impressive.

Not only that, but instead of coming back into line if you back off the accelerator, which is the sort of failsafe reaction you'd expect, it continues to run wide until you haul it back with the steering. At least this Calibra, unlike our last one, didn't show any sign of rear-end waywardness if you decelerated suddenly when near the limit of grip.

The ride has improved, too. The Vauxhall is still fazed by big bumps, and you'd never call it supple over small ones, but the body movement is less restless now. There's still a lot of thumping through the suspension, though. Here, the Celica is streets ahead.

VW CORRADO G60

So, has the Corrado changed its spots? To sit in, it's familiar enough. The driving position is just right – like the others, it has tilt adjustment for steering wheel and seat – and the Passat-like facia, though as dark and sombre as the rest of the cabin, is sensibly laid out.

Like the Calibra, the Corrado is viable transport for four adults. It's more claustrophobic for the rear passengers, with the upward-sloping rear waist line and a prominent bolster dividing the rear seat into two, but both headroom and legroom are fine. A first-aid kit lives in this central divide, incidentally.

So far, so familiar. Drive off in the G60, though, and this Corrado instant-



Toyota's road responses are alert, supple ride makes for relaxing drive

ly feels different from its 16-valve sister. There's little of the normally-aspirated car's eager buzz at high revs, and equally little need to use those revs in order to go quickly. Instead, the G60 is all about near-relentless pulling power.

It will rev, and very smoothly too, but there's seldom any need. A glance at the performance figures reveals the VW's secret: throughout the speed range, the Corrado's acceleration in third, fourth and fifth gears leaves its rivals gasping. And, unlike in a turbo car, there's just a perceptible delay in throttle response at low revs. However, when you do need to shift gears, the cable-operated gearchange slips cleanly through its gate yet has a more pleasingly mechanical feel than the Toyota's shift.

It all helps give the Corrado a satisfying flow when you're cracking on. So do the roadholding and handling. The Corrado has the best grip of the three, and makes use of it to create a truly inspirational chassis balance. Put simply, the Corrado does exactly what you want in a bend, no more and no less. Its steering paints a precise picture of the road surface, while its clever rear suspension – which steers the rear

wheels into the bend as the cornering speed rises – ensures the VW's nose always points where you intended.

This controllability, chuckability and communication mark out the Corrado as one of the best-handling front-wheel drive cars there is. By comparison, the Celica feels detached from the driver, the Calibra plain wooden. The Volkswagen rides well, too. It's a shade firm and clonky at low speeds, but the body movements smooth out as the pace goes up to become taut and tightly-controlled. We're less keen on the brakes. They feel rather inert until they've warmed up, and can lock prematurely without sending messages to your right foot that it's about to happen.

And the rear wing? It rises automatically above 45mph, and sinks back below 12mph. Nor is it just a gimmick, for it plays a part in the Corrado's imper-turbable stability in high winds.

RATINGS AND VERDICT

	VW	TOYOTA	VAUXHALL
PERFORMANCE AND ECONOMY	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○
HANDLING AND RIDE	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○
BEHIND THE WHEEL	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○
ACCOMMODATION	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○
QUALITY AND EQUIPMENT	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○
SERVICE AND COSTS	●●●●○	●●●●○	●●●●○
VERDICT	●●●●●	●●●●○	●●●●○

All three cars offer much to the coupe buyer. They are well built, with the Corrado coming across as marginally the most expensively finished. They're well equipped, too, each having electric sunroofs, one-shot drivers' windows, decent stereos and power steering. The Calibra also benefits from security deadlocks on its doors, so it's more thief-proof.

So it's down largely to considerations of styling, space and driver appeal. In a world of lookalike saloons and hatchbacks, all three look distinctive, dramatic even. The Toyota falls down in space terms,

which is where the Vauxhall shines the brightest, but the Volkswagen passes muster too when it comes to transporting four adults. The way the coupes drive, then, clinches the deal – provided the running costs aren't too high.

Which means it's the Corrado. Running costs chip away at its advantage, for the G60 is marginally the thirstiest on fuel and easily the most expensive to insure, but that lusty engine and the ever-rewarding handling make those costs a fair price to pay. That's the measure of the Corrado's fun factor. We think it looks great, too. Thank you, we'll take the yellow one.