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DUNLOP SPORT MAXX CUP

We caught up with the Vauxhall racers in this fast-paced new production car championship.

Words: Dougie, Derek Binsted | Photos: Derek Binsted.

We've often mentioned that VXR range has such a wealth of talent, you'd be hard pushed to use it to its full capability on the road. There's potential to go faster. Much faster. This is where the Dunlop Sport Maxx Cup comes in. The cars racing in this series are close relatives to their glossy show-room counterparts. It's a great stepping-stone for those seeking to reach the heights of touring car racing, or more.

Four Vauxhalls compete in the championship: two Astra VXRs run by

888 Race Engineering, along with one Astra and one Corsa VXR run by Thorney Motorsport.

The ethos of the championship is about going racing with a car that is virtually showroom standard. There are a variety of cars on the grid apart from Vauxhalls and they all give drivers the opportunity to pick up valuable experience before taking the step up into a full-blooded BTCC car or similar.

There's three classes of car, divided by power to weight ratio. Class A cars run a yellow sunstrip, Class B black and Class C white, to help identify the cars on TV. The series is shown on Motors TV and Sky Sports.

Driver	Car	Team/Class
Paul Lund	Alfa Romeo 147	Autografix C
John Thorne	BMW E46 M3	Thorney Motorsport I
Martin Wallbank	Vauxhall Astra VXR	888 Performance Vehicles A
Quentin Laithwaite	Renault clio	Deefab B
Simon Gusterson	Renault Megane R26 230	Simon Gusterson A
Leyton Clarke	Vauxhall Corsa	Thorney Motorsport B
Shaun Hollamby	SEAT Leon Cupra	Shaun Hollamby A
John Allison	Vauxhall Astra VXR	888 Performance Vehicles A
Michael Weidner	Ford Focus ST	Driver A
Mark Weidner	MG ZR	Moorside Motorsport B
Jim Edwards	MG ZR 160	Team Edwards B
Jade Edwards	MG ZR 160	Team Edwards B
Simon Shaw	Vauxhall Astra VXR	Thorney Motorsport A
Jonathan Howes	Volkwagon Lupo GTi	STR B
Adrian Miller	Renault Clio Sport	172 B
Guest Car	SEAT Leon FR	AmD Technik MilltekSport Dunlop SEAT B



POINTS:

In each class with four or more competitors: 12, 10, 8, 7, 6 and 5 for all other finishers listed in the results. Any non-finishers: 1. Plus 1 for fastest lap.

Should there be three starters or less in a class, reduced points will be awarded as follows: 8, 7, 6 and non-finishers 1, plus 1 for fastest lap.



John Allison's Astra gets white paint to promote the 'Ring Edition special.

MARTIN WALLBANK

888 ASTRA

36 year-old Martin has a wealth of experience in racing from karting through to autocross. Some of his winning achievements include three championships: The 2001 Formula Renault, 2004 Mini Cooper and 2007 Sports Maxx. With racing in his blood he would also like to make it to the BTCC. Martin raced last year in the Sport Maxx series with an Astra VXR.



TYRE BONUS

Dunlop issue free tyres at mid season (after Castle Combe) to the top six drivers in each class championship, and the same amount at the end of the year.

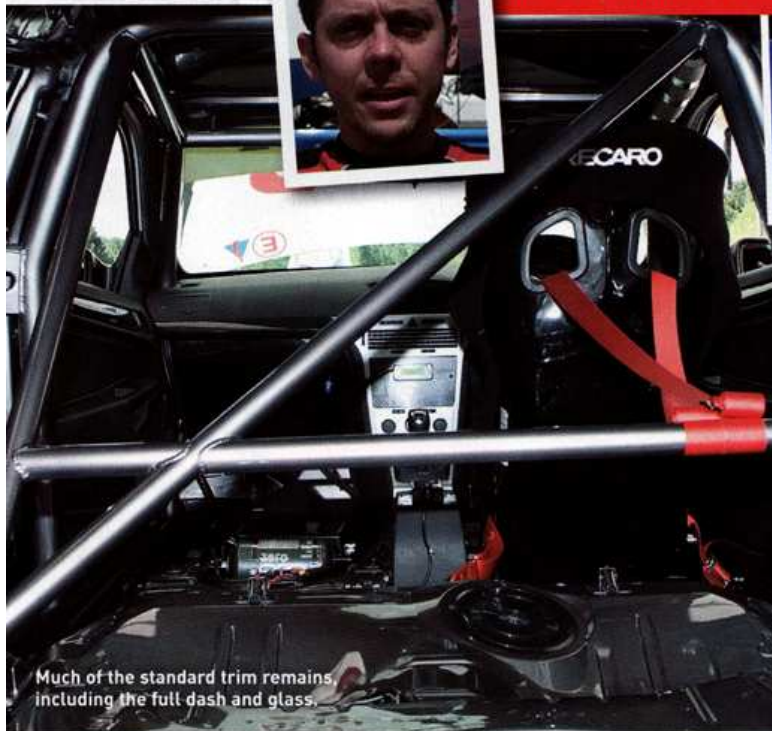
MID YEAR REWARDS PER CLASS:
1st 8 tyres, 2nd 6 tyres, 3rd 4 tyres,
4th 3 tyres, 5th 2 tyres, 6th 1 tyre



JOHN ALLISON

888 ASTRA

John is the current VXR driver of the year and before he won the 2007 competition he had never raced! During the week, John is a mortgage consultant. His ambition now he has got the racing bug would be to ultimately get into the touring cars. He is adapting well to the pressures of driving and being involved in the team. John is considered a level-headed driver with a lot of talent and the ability to learn quickly.



Much of the standard trim remains, including the full dash and glass.



ON TRACK

With two qualifying sessions the fastest Vauxhalls in order from fastest were: Wallbank, Shaw, Allison, then Clarke. The time of 1:09.230 for Wallbank was an average speed of 75.70 mph for the circuit which measures 1.45 miles in length.

Wallbank was fourth on the grid closely followed by Shaw in fifth, Allison sixth and Clarke in tenth. John Thorne's BMW was on pole position.

The first race was fifteen minutes long. A clean start was made by Thorne with the chasing pack not far behind. Once the race settled down the best performing Vauxhall was the Astra of Shaw in second, who was beginning to catch his team mate. Shaw made his move and took the lead. The Renault Megané of Simon Gusterson and both Seat Leons were in hot pursuit, but he kept his cool and avoided any mistakes for the rest of the race. At the chequered flag Shaw took first with Wallbank fifth,

Allison sixth and Clarke tenth. Wallbank had the fastest lap of the race in Class A.

The second race of the day was longer, with a 30-minute duration. A couple of the cars never made it to the grid but all the Vauxhalls were present. Gusterson in the Megané took the lead being pursued by a Seat Leon. John Allison lead the Vauxhall charge in his 888 Astra. Simon Shaw had a mechanical problem and pulled up after only a few laps. An engine problem for Wallbank also meant his car never finished the race. The Renault took the race win with Allison securing an excellent third place and his first ever podium finish. The Corsa of Leyton Clarke was the only other Vauxhall to finish the race.

It's a competitive, fast paced series, and with Shaw winning the first race it shows that there is opportunity for the private teams to match the factory-backed entries.



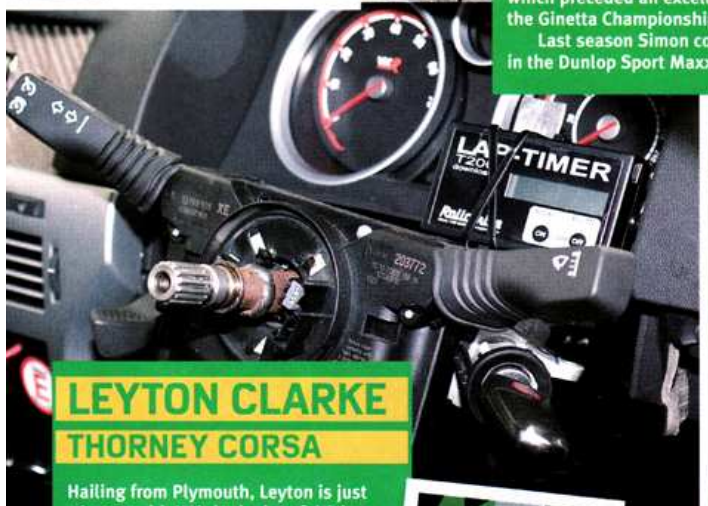


SIMON SHAW THORNEY ASTRA



Simon was the 2005 Dunlop race academy winner. A 25 year-old from Warrington he also won rookie of the year in a Ginetta. Simon works as an instructor for track day companies. He won the Dunlop Race Academy in 2006, which preceded an excellent season in the Ginetta Championship.

Last season Simon convincingly won the B class in the Dunlop Sport Maxx Cup in his Renault Clio.



LEYTON CLARKE THORNEY CORSA

Hailing from Plymouth, Leyton is just 16 years old. He's had a lot of driving experience thanks to two years racing Saxos. Leyton's ambition for the future is to drive in the LMA saloons or to progress to the world touring car stage. Leyton is brimming with ambition and is definitely one to watch for the future. "He's made the jump from a light weight 800 kg Saxo to a much heavier, more powerful Corsa with ease, we've got big hopes for him" commented team boss John Thorne.



The Thorney Corsa SRI is the first race going version of the car in the world!



VXR RACERS

RECARO

888 ASTRAS

888 Race Engineering became involved in the championship when they were approached by Vauxhall to showcase their VXR Driver of the Year winner.

The Astras, one in white to promote the Nürburgring Edition, one in red, are new cars direct from the factory. Team boss Tony Pilcher explained the changes made to the cars. "We took delivery of the cars last autumn and carried out the build over winter. The championship is for production saloons, so there is a limit on what you can change."

"The suspension used is Bilstein, with stiffer springs and race spec shocks. The eight point roll cage is a design we derived from our experience with the Astra BTCC car. We use our AP racing four-pot brake kit, along with braided hoses and race fluid. The Remus exhaust system is the same the Nürburgring's."

With many road-going Astra VXRs now producing horsepower figures far in excess of the standard 240 bhp, the irony of the championship regulations is that teams have to almost restrict the cars to prevent them exceeding a power-to-weight ratio of 210 bhp. "We have a specially modified map to cope with these parameters" said Tony, "and the cars also run on 100 octane Sunoco race fuel."

The cars are extensively stripped out, with only the dash, and standard VXR steering wheel (albeit minus the airbag) remaining. Replacing the trim is a Recaro race seat and a fire extinguisher. All glass is retained. In the quest to lose weight, 888 even acid dipped the shell to remove all the rust protection.

The Dunlop tyres are 225/40x18, fitted to mandatory standard spec alloys.

Due to weight regulations, the cars have to run special maps to keep the bhp low enough!



DATES

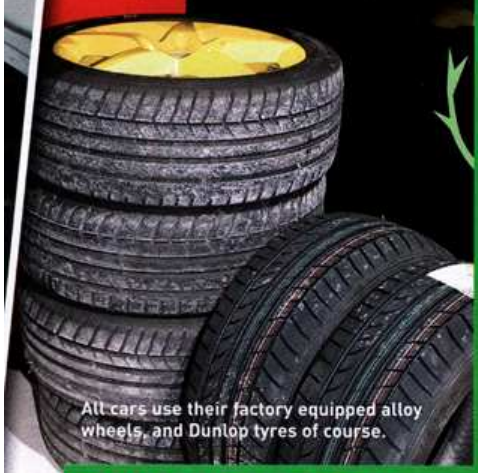
The championship takes place on the following dates:

- Snetterton 26-27 april
- Pembrey 11 may
- Croft 14-15 june
- Castle combe 19-20 july
- Donington park 02-03 august
- Brands hatch 25 august
- Thruxton 7 september
- Rockingham 27-28 september



Lap timer, and extra gauges are mounted in middle of dash.





All cars use their factory equipped alloy wheels, and Dunlop tyres of course.



THORNEY ASTRA

Thorney Motorsport's Astra is a distinctive sight on track, with its team-trademark bright yellow alloys. The Z20LEH engine runs a Thorney Motorsport remap produced in conjunction with Superchips and a Milltek exhaust system designed specifically for the race series. John told us about some of the development work on the car. "The exhaust is a new range developed between Thorney and Milltek called Milltek Race. The new system does away with the back box, and has a black tip." You can buy one for your VXR road car too.

"We began developing the car in September last year" said John, "The Safety Devices cage is a brand new design, as is the KW coilover suspension. We worked with both companies closely on these products. The build was complete by the end of February and we did three days of testing at Snetterton."

The Astra was actually a car owned by a customer of Thorney's, tuned to Stage 3. "We had to downgrade it to make it a race car" John laughed, "the big intercooler had to go, among other things. It was making over 300 bhp."

With weight being an issue, the engine has a wide range of maps available for various scenarios, all produced in partnership with Superchips. "We've taken about 350 kg of weight from the car, it now weighs 1198 kg, but we still have to maintain the rule of 210 bhp" said John.

One of the major sponsors of the team is Tesco and their 99 octane super unleaded, and the team report that the fuel performs excellently right across the rev range.

The Astra has proven to be so capable this year, that the team have actually withdrawn their BMW from the championship to concentrate on getting the most from the Vauxhalls.



THORNEY CORSA

Here is the first Corsa D race car, ever. This being the case, it meant that a much larger than normal level of development was necessary. John told us about the car. "It's a Corsa SRI, rather than a VXR as the engine is mechanically identical. We bought it new from Vauxhall last October, so didn't have much time to work on it."

The Corsa runs in class B, where output is capped at 167 bhp per tonne.

John continues: "It's running about 185 bhp at the moment, but a road car can make 225 bhp. We had to build

everything from scratch though, it was a lot of hard work!"

The early results would indicate that this has been worthwhile, with Leyton improving with every race. "The Corsa, although it's a heavier car for its size than the Astra" says John, "is actually stiffer, and it handles better."

As with the Astra, Thorney have developed all parts of the car with their partners Safety Devices, Superchips, Milltek and KW Suspension. The brakes on the car remain standard though, with the 308 mm discs retained.

