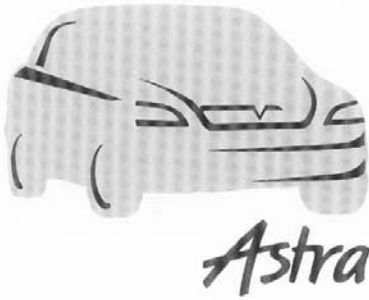


## A PERSONAL VIEW OF ASTRA LAUNCH AT MARRAKECH



**Astra**

Two years in planning, 280 fit-up crew on site, 27 seafreight containers and 16 truckloads of set equipment. What sounded like the organisation of a world tour by the Rolling Stones was in fact the biggest event ever to be held in Morocco - the launch of New Astra.

450 new Astras were transported on one roll-on, roll-off ferry, and Royal Air Maroc has been on standby for the entire event to carry more than 16,000 delegates from 54 different countries spread over 33,000 flights, in turn split up into three-day sessions for groups of up to 800 people. And not a Top Gear presenter in sight!

Northern trip number two from Manchester was our designated group for Astra Launch at Marrakech. Having fought with the best morning peak-time traffic the M56 could throw at us, we arrived bright and bushy-tailed at Terminal 1. I suspected that this launch was not going to be any old common-or-garden launch when it dawned that transport was not a 1950's relic with an extra-large rubber band and an outside loo, but an Air Maroc Boeing 747 complete with stainless steel cutlery and real Champagne!



Disembarkation at Marrakech International Airport (one runway, one terminal building and one customs officer) saw us greeted by a local band, casually (well it sounded casual to me) beating their drums, rattling their rattles and doing the traditional Arabic high-pitch tongue wail that would later become the trademark of a group of enthusiastic Retailers from the North East.

And so to the Hotel Mansour Eddahbi Hotel, an establishment which certainly couldn't be accused of being one of Africa's smaller hotels, occupying as it did an area possibly twice the size of the entire Griffin House (head office, Tech Centre and staff car park!) site in Luton. All in the convoy of buses were keeping their eyes peeled for a sighting of the new Astra. It would later turn out that the new Astras were in fact the only GM cars in the region.

INFORM!

### SHOWS, EXHIBITIONS AND LAUNCHES

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Action Required:  
Retail Operator,  
Sales Manager and Team

*"Vauxhall takes over the airport at Marrakech"*

27/02/98

S.09.100

After lunch and a brief facilitation rehearsal for my part in the following morning's Astra briefing sessions (Premium Quality - zinc galvanisation and torsional stiffness - I could have done with some of that at Manchester Airport!) we were lead to the Congress Centre for the Astra Launch Presentation. Sitting comfortably in the presentation theatre, you couldn't help but think that you were sitting in some fancy American theatre, with its incredibly high ceiling, couch seats and (not utilised this particular evening) individual language translation facility.



*"The Hotel Mansour"*

The Launch Show was knockout! A high-tech theatrical spectacular embracing Astra's brand strengths (details below) and the cars were then driven on to the stage to gasps of approval and delight from the audience. Following the Launch Show, the audience retired to the resplendent ballroom for a four-course banquet with dancing to the Casablanca Boys, a talented band of male and female musicians from Hull (where else?), who delighted in playing to an audience which could actually understand what they were singing.

And so to business the following morning. Following a breakfast buffet of powdered scrambled eggs, semolina porridge and decidedly coffee-flavoured tea (the local delicacy, mint tea, was, surprisingly not available), the assembled multitude were to hear about Astra in animated detail. The Astra Drive Experience briefing featured 'techno rooms', each describing Astra's brand strengths, each facilitated by a Vauxhall staff member. With their morning-after-the-night-before sparkling countenances, video cameras in one hand, 'Drive Time' voucher in the other, guests were given a short yet detailed brief on the Brand strengths.

To refresh your memories, the Brand strengths covered:

The car's distinctive styling which extends to the estate. All agreed that is a decidedly upmarket, sporty and modern car with quality, strength and durability built in through precision, advanced technology and quality engineering.

Full zinc galvanisation offering a protective layer on each and every one of the car's panels with a 12-year anti perforation warranty. 100% torsional stiffness improvement to reduce squeaks, rattles and booming.

Lightweight components including advanced magnesium steering wheel and new-compound torsional beam rear axle design. Fewer parts with a 140kg reduction in weight. Electro-Hydraulic Power Steering standard across the range allowing power on demand and subsequent saved fuel.

A higher level of refinement than would be expected in this class, with a smoothness achieved by decreasing vibration. Improved dimensions with wheelbase extended by 4 inches to improve ride (now longest in class), windscreen moved forward by 5 inches, increase in tread, an increase in front and rear passenger space and an increase in storage space.

And so to the test-drive itself. All guests, in an orderly and organised manner, made their way to the fleet of sparkling new Astras parked at the rear of the hotel. The left-hand drive meant accustoming ourselves to not changing the **non-existent** gear lever which **wasn't** situated between the seat and door on the left-hand side! Old habits die hard.

There were four routes available for our delight. We opted for the "orange route" which took us through the city "plains" out into the countryside and up into the Atlas Mountains. While the roads were adequate "B to C Class" in comparison with the UK (with spectacular open drops on one side!), driving was easy by virtue of the fact that the only other drivers on the roads appeared to be foreigners - namely Vauxhall Retailers in their Astras!! We were also helped along by the friendly and salutary Police Force who had been specially drafted in from the regions by the powers that be in Marrakech, and who stopped the traffic to give Astra the complete right of way. Oh how I envied having the same treatment on the A38 in the Midlands!!!!

Our test car was a 1.8 litre 5-door hatch, and despite a road surface which certainly wasn't the best in the world, we were amazed at the quietness, comfort and ride of the car. So much so, that I actually started believing the presentation I had made not more than an hour previously! Despite the obvious Vauxhall connection, I felt the comfort, space, ride and handling were "class-beatingly" second to none!

Following a rest break in the mountains (or should I say, in the middle of nowhere) some 48km from Marrakech, we once again set off on the road. Avoiding a group of children playing "chuck the puppy at the car" (must have been a feature on Moroccan TV's equivalent of 'Blue Peter'), and returning the salutes from all the policemen who stood to attention along the route, we were sad to have to return our cars to the compound.

The evening event at a specially constructed tourist trap in Borj Bladi offered a traditional Moroccan theme, with local foods, local entertainers (including the by-now regular beating of drums, rattling of rattles and high-pitch tongue wail) with a spectacular mini-



*"The sun setting over the Astras"*



*"Parked in the Atlas Mountains"*

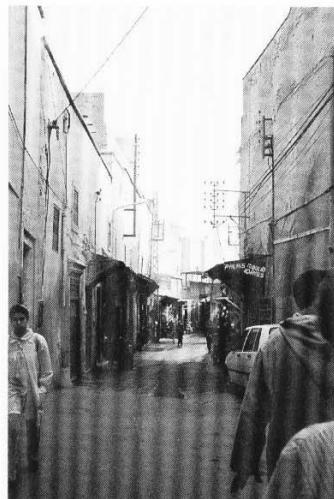
cabaret to round off the evening - a rifle charge by men on horseback, firework display, fire-eating display and Zafira! Yes, the new Zafira (due for launch in September) made a very stunning entrance along the parapets of the castle enclosure as a great surprise to round-off a highly enjoyable evening.

The following morning's business meeting rounded off the formalities of what was one great launch event. Marketing details were discussed and the official launch music played. You will receive full details of the marketing communications activities for new Astra as and when they are rolled-out, but in the meantime, do get working on your own local launch to ensure you make it your best ever!

Finally, there's absolutely no truth in the rumour that Luton is being twinned with Marrakech!



*"The famous Djemna el Fna square in Marrakech where (allegedly) the market scene from Romancing the Stone was shot"*



*"The equivalent of Oxford Street in Marrakech, but without the McDonalds"*



*"Typical lane in the Souk with shops containing hand-made local goods"*