

Vauxhall

Sold and Serviced by
Pontiac Dealers
All Across
America

by Tim Dye



Vauxhall is nearly an unknown name among Pontiac enthusiast today. Only those old enough to qualify for an AARP membership have ever heard of them, and even then sometimes I get a blank look when the name Vauxhall is brought up. When visitors come to my house and I am showing them around, before I pull the cover off the Vauxhall I say “remember how Buick used to sell Opels?” I always get an affirmative response, then as I pull the cover off I follow up with “well, Pontiac used to sell Vauxhalls.” The response is usually always the same, they had never heard of them. They then are further surprised when I mention that Vauxhall exist today and continues to manufacture cars.

Vauxhall, located in Luton, England, first started manufacturing cars in 1903 and was purchased by General Motors in



Vauxhall
porcelain
sign.

1925. General Motors introduced the Pontiac the following year as a companion car to the Oakland. No one could have imagined at that time that many years later their paths would cross. This would happen in September 1957, and was part of the response from GM to capture their part of the increasing market share small cars were getting. Rather than tooling up to manufacture a new small car, GM imported cars from their European companies Vauxhall and Opel to fill the void here in the U.S.

In a press release printed on Pontiac letterhead, this is what part of the announcement had to say. "Destined to win immediate popularity with American motorists is GM's British made Vauxhall Victor "Super" a four-cylinder sedan now being offered by Pontiac dealers in this country." There are some other interesting facts found in the small stack of press releases in my library. Another one dated 5-5-58 lists the prices at various ports of entry. New York City was \$1,812.50, Detroit \$1,881.36 and San Francisco \$1,994.64. It went on to say that the Vauxhall was being offered first on the East and West Coasts.

Another announcement with that same date introduced the Vauxhall Victor Station Wagon, indicating that it was not available initially. The wagon's pricing was as follows, New York City \$2,194.45, Detroit \$2,263.31 and San Francisco \$2,376.59. Another release dated January 31, 1958 gives us a little insight into the number of Vauxhalls brought into the U.S. It states "More than 1,600 Vauxhall Victor Supers have been marketed in this country by Pontiac Motor Division since the British built GM economy car went on sale last September (1957). Although the rate of import from England has been increased recently to 1,500 Vauxhalls per month, there is still a waiting period for delivery in some sections of the country".

So, how well did Vauxhalls really sell in this country? Jack McGinnis is a friend who for many years worked out of the Pontiac zone office in St. Louis. The early part of his tenure there was during the Vauxhall/Pontiac era. I asked him to relate some of his memories of the Vauxhall and this is what he wrote. "When I was

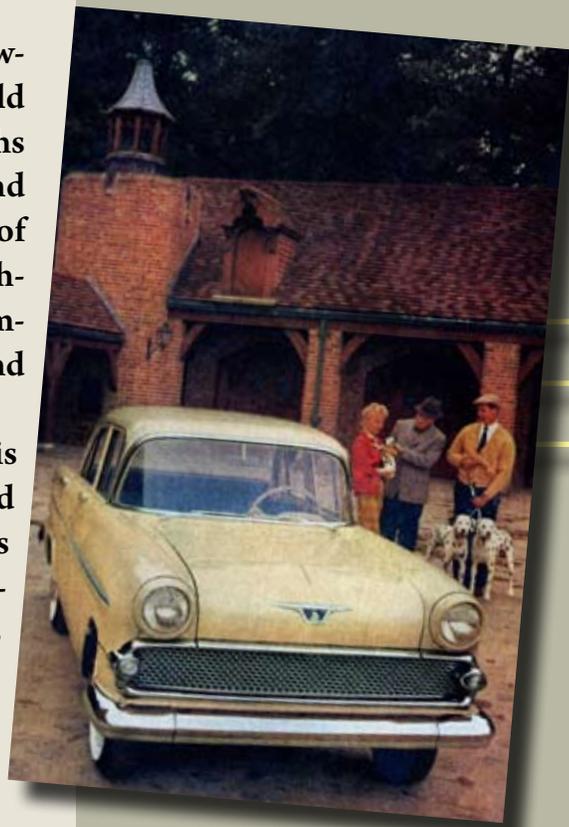


Photo from 1959-'60 magazine advertisement.

**PONTIAC DEALER
CONFIDENTIAL PRICE LIST
VAUXHALL ACCESSORIES**

Description	Part No.	Dealer Net	Sugg. List
Visor Vanity Mirror	984666	.99	1.65
Tilt Mirror	988647	3.57	5.95
Cigar Lighter	988950	2.57	3.95
Antenna (Manual)	988954	3.42	4.90
Radio	989578	41.90	59.85
Exterior Sun Visor	6301526	13.32	20.50
Clock (Electric)	6304245	22.05	31.50
Hood Emblem	6305095	5.65	8.70
W/S Washer	6318217	11.57	17.80
Trailer Coupling (Ch. 132000)	6321659	14.85	22.85
Trailer Coupling	7144828	14.85	22.85
Glove Box Lamp (Ch. 132000)	6321660	1.14	1.75
Glove Box Lamp	7144951	1.14	1.75
Heater	6333360	60.45	93.00
Spare Wheel Cover	6334337	6.44	9.90
Package Shelf	6324791	3.38	5.20
Glove Box Lock	7116843	2.15	3.30
Coat Hook (Pair)	7123945	.78	1.20
Gas Tank Door Lock	7132509	2.15	3.30
Trunk Lamp	7135161	2.40	3.70
Roof Rack	7141648	17.10	26.30
Wheel Trim Rings	7142602	4.10	6.30
O/S Mirror	7143384	4.71	7.25
Underhood Lamp	7145964	2.57	3.95

transferred from Pontiac, Michigan to St. Louis in 1958, Pontiac was selling Vauxhalls. These came in one model, Vauxhall Victor four-door sedan.

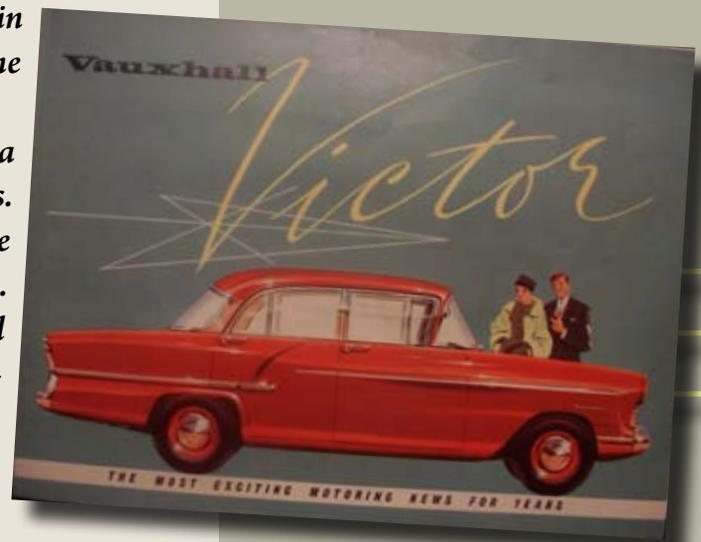
It was necessary for Pontiac dealers to sign a separate selling agreement to handle these cars. Most of the dealers in the St. Louis zone did have the selling agreement to sell and service these cars. While some dealers did stock one or two, some did not stock any of them. Lou Fusz Pontiac in Richmond Heights would stock one of each color - six I believe. He sold more than any other dealer because he also handled a couple of British sports cars.

The cars were stored at the 18th street garage across from Union Station. These came standard with a 4-cylinder engine and 3-speed manual transmission on the column. They also had a radio and heater as I remember.

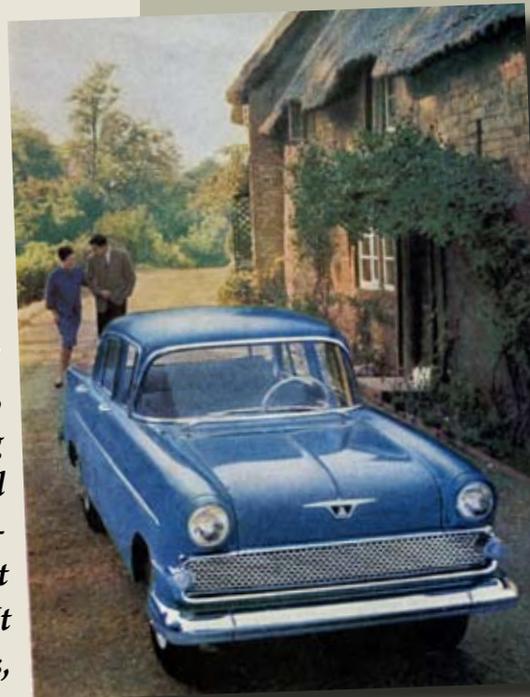
These cars were not real "hot" merchandise and Pontiac only imported them for 1958, 1959 and I believe part of 1960. Sales got slower and slower as our dealers were happy to sell "big cars".

One day late in the Spring of 1961, our zone manager Walter Knocke, called all six district zone managers into a meeting in his office. By this time I had been promoted to district sales manager in Quincy, Illinois. This was district number 6 and was the smallest in volume. Mr. Knocke assigned each sales manager his fair share of Vauxhalls based on district volume sales of Pontiacs, my share was three. These cars had been sitting so long that many of the tires were flat, carb gaskets were dried up and the cars would not start. The resident service instructor from the GM Training Center, Russ Gilchrist was sent to the warehouse to get all of them running. It was necessary to air up the tires, replace carb gaskets, charge the batteries and other minor things to make them go.

Mr. Knocke made it very clear to all of us that we were to sell these to dealers or we would be driving them as our company cars! We were getting close to summer and those Vauxhalls did not have A/C. Needless to say, we made it a top priority getting this job done.



1958 Vauxhall Victor sales brochure for the North American market.



Ads almost always depicted people behind the cars and not in them, so the car would appear larger.

I left the meeting and went to the warehouse and picked up my first Vauxhall and started driving. Several dealers turned me down, when I arrived at Roseville, Illinois our dealer Pat Bagles agreed to buy the one I was driving, but only after much arm twisting! Later that evening he took me to Havana, Il where we were having a Parts & Service Managers club meeting. I got a ride back to Quincy with the parts & service managers from Dave McCormick Pontiac in Quincy.

The next morning I boarded the train from Quincy to St. Louis and walked across the street from Union Station to the warehouse and picked up my second car. Again, after a few refusals, I arrived at Ongida, Il. and talked "Curly" Johnson into taking the Vauxhall, only after I promised him many favors. He told me he had it pre-sold to his brother-in-law. Curly took me to Galesburg, Il. where I could catch a train back to St. Louis.

While in Galesburg, I talked Harold Inman of Inman Pontiac-Cadillac into taking my third and final Vauxhall. Again, I "sold my soul" with promises of favors to come. It was not easy, but my three cars were sold and gone. I am glad that they did not have more to get rid of."

I found Jack's story very interesting, and a rare inside glimpse of how the Vauxhalls were handled here in the U.S.

Victor's were marketed in both the U.S. and Canada and the years they were offered in the U.S. were from 1958 through 1960, or so I thought for a long time. And this all made sense as the Tempest was introduced in 1961 which filled Pontiac's need for a smaller car. Then I found a March 1962 issue of Safari Magazine, which was sent to Pontiac own-



In 2008 Al Robles purchased this Vauxhall Victor Estate Wagon. He picked it up on the East Coast and drove it to his home in San Antonio, Texas.

A page from a Vauxhall dealer album. The album was very similar to the Pontiac version containing illustrations of the various models with cloth and paint samples.



ers as a promotion. The centerfold has a big two-page spread of a 1962 Vauxhall. This blew my theory out of the water. Of the hundreds of 1961-62 Pontiac pieces I have this is the only mention of Vauxhall in those years. If you are thinking that it was sent to a Canadian resident, not so, it was sent from a Pontiac dealer in Lima, Ohio. However, as Jack noted in his letter, sales of Vauxhalls declined over time. I imagine that after the Tempest came out, it really dropped off.

The Victor was not Vauxhall's only model, they produced two larger cars. One was the Velox, and on the same body style was a deluxe version called the Cresta. I have no evidence to prove that these two models were ever offered in the U.S. They were available in Canada, and I wonder if a person had the right connections, could they have pulled some strings and had one delivered to a U.S. dealer? There are very few of these known to exist in the U.S. I own a 1960 Cresta left-hand drive, and the title is dated 1962 where it was registered in Omaha, Nebraska. I just can't account for those first two years, but it is interesting to ponder.

I hope you enjoyed this look into a unique and brief period of Pontiac history.

U.S. Vauxhall memorabilia is pretty scarce. This is a 1958 printing plate for a letterpress, a very rare piece. I flipped it and adjusted the color so you could see it better. This was for a newspaper advertisement.



1959 Vauxhall Victor sales brochure for the North American market.



1960 Vauxhall Cresta.

