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Design Analysis - Revisiting the 1980s zeitgeist with the Opel Corsa SR

Lead

In the latest episode of our new Design Analysis article series, automotive designer Robert Forrest takes a closer look on the forgotten qualities of the Opel Corsa SR.



Black is the magic used by designers to alter your perception of a vehicle. Windows, grilles, wheels and lights: all can coerce the appearance of a car with deft pen strokes. Black cut-outs gave us the Alfa Romeo Montreal and, liberally applied, the early BMWi cars. It also gave us the Opel Corsa SR.

If Opel had corporate colours, they would be yellow and Magic Marker grey. Which is fortunate, as after photodegradation, that is what black becomes. Over four decades, this palette has pigmented many notable products. It started with the soft-scoop Opel Junior concept, which brought aero tendencies to a petri-dish scale in 1983. Drag reduction is not a requisite for urban roving, however, leaving the angular Corsa to slot neatly alongside rivals from Ford and Austin Rover.



Black can also be economic: before the advent of body-coloured bumpers (see: special editions of the Nineties), widespread use of unpainted plastics kept costs down, even allowing cars to claim two-tone. The grey-cladding of the Corsa mirrored the zeitgeist at the time, punctuated by yellow stripes; some might go so far as to prefix with 'go-faster'.

Beside the yellow and the grey, the Corsa's square-jawed lamps could have alluded to a Carlsson Mercedes C124 (or a Talbot Horizon). Black masking spans windows, seals and cutlines for an uninterrupted graphic that conceals the unpainted mirrors. Blisters above each wheel-arch characterise the bodyside, while the frame-cum-spoiler widens the back, delineating the SR from its domesticated brethren. Beneath, natty cut-outs from the black mask reveal unexpected creativity, diverting attention from the stuck-on rear wiper. The later GSi would enshroud the whole rear surface in black.



Yellow details abound inside, from snazzy seat fabrics to the grab-handles and sunroof. Opel at the time sported neatly perfunctory interiors that borrowed from Braun -a generous muse in a budget car. Fans of the Junior concept, of which there were many, would recognise the modular interior, consolidated in the Corsa as a whole. Even the handbook is yellow-grey.

While the design of the Corsa may no longer excite, the sense of conviction remains strong. In this way, each detail speaks to the whole – a feat hard to achieve in any company, let alone one GM’s size on a car so whose price tag is so small.

Gallery

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