

COURTENAY NOVA

PRIMA

Words: Dave | Photos: Dan Pullen



- * The first Nova 2.0 16V turbo
- * Courtenay Hi-Torque cams
- * Bilstein shocks
- * Quaife differential
- * Hi-Spec brakes

ALSCREAM

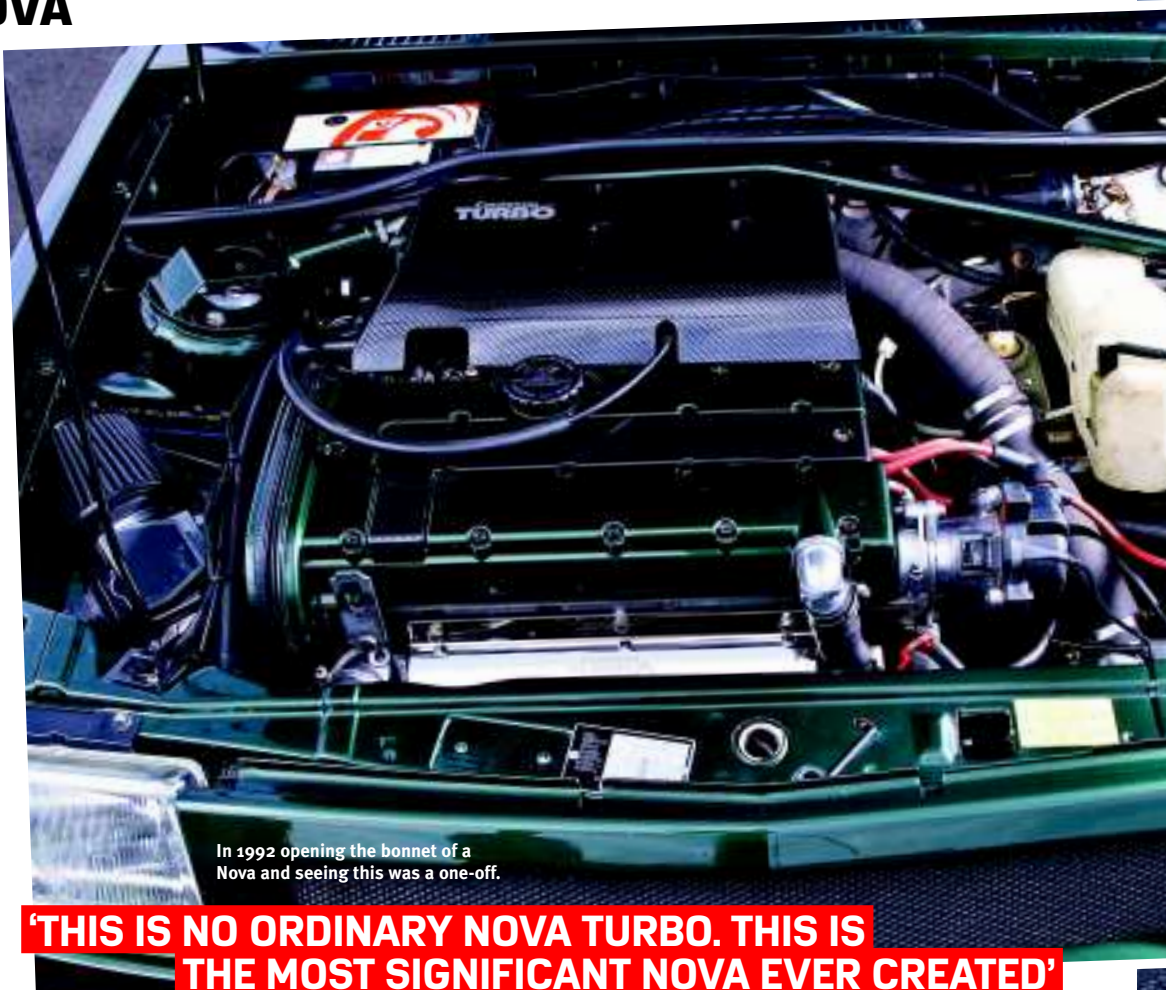
This is the car that started it all off - the first Nova turbo and it's still as significant and manic today as it's ever been.

You may already recognise this Nova, but it's understandable if you don't. It was after all, built 18 years ago and some of you won't even be that old! There will of course be those who have recognised the car, know what it is and the history behind it. For those of you who have no idea, let us explain: this is no ordinary Nova turbo (if there is such a thing). This is arguably the most significant Nova ever created. We all know the story and the appeal behind Nova turbos. Take the C20LET engine from an ill-fated Cavalier or Calibra turbo, shoe-horn it into the front end of Vauxhall's smallest hatchback, add some uprated brakes and suspension then scare yourself silly with something that for as little as £2000, will give even the most serious piece of kit cause for concern. That's nothing new, so you'd be right for thinking 'yeah, and so what?' but have you ever sat and considered where did it all started, who was the first person to turbo a Nova and where that car is now? ▶

COURTENAY NOVA

It all began in a garage in Norfolk in 1992. Jon Shield, now owner of Courtenay Sport was the first person to turbo a Nova and almost unbelievably, it's here before you on the pages of *Total Vauxhall*. Several weeks ago we were sat planning this 'Legends' issue when we received an envelope for Hall of Fame. Inside were five small images and a brief specification. Several moments of stunned silence followed as the realisation set in - we were indeed sat looking at Courtenay's Nova turbo, the holy grail of Nova turbos. A Nova turbo we presumed was long gone. Needless to say, current owner Steve Lomas received a very excited phone call and after some military planning, several hundred miles, an airfield, photographer and a Lotus Carlton... here we are today.

It's difficult to put into words just how special this car is, so instead we're going to let its original owner and builder Jon Shield, and its current owner Steve, do that for us. But for those of you still sat thinking 'yeah, but it's just a Nova turbo' then consider this: this was to Vauxhall tuning what Concorde was to air travel or what Neil Armstrong was to space travel. This was the first Nova turbo ever created and we are delighted that the car remains in such a fantastic, original condition. Welcome to the world's most legendary Vauxhall Nova.



In 1992 opening the bonnet of a Nova and seeing this was a one-off.



STEVE LOMAS

Age I'm 27

Occupation I'm an events manager.

What's your previous car history?

My first car was a standard Nova SR which I soon sold, then I bought a highly modified Nova GTE. I went away from Vauxhall for a while and had a couple of Golf GTis then a Series 2 RS turbo which I sold to buy the Nova.

So how did you come to own such a legendary car?

After Jon built the car, he ran it for a couple of years then sold it on to a chap called Deano. The car was used as his daily driver for another two years then was put up for sale. At that time, my brother Paul was looking to buy a Nova turbo and found this one. Back then neither myself nor him really knew the significance of the car, it wasn't until we started doing some research that we learned of its history. Paul owned the car for 10 years, right up to 2009 until the hankering for 4x4 took over. We had a chat, did some arguing and in the end I sold my RS and bought the Nova from him... he went off and bought an Escort Cosworth.

It's now 17 years since Jon built the Nova, what's changed since then?

To be fair, very little. When my brother first bought it in 1999, it was pretty much as it was when it was first built, but as it'd been used daily by the previous owner, it needed some tidying. Paul used the car daily for the first year but then he decided it was having a detrimental effect so he decided to limit how much use it got. Over the time he had it, he basically returned it to its former glory. The chassis has been stripped back and undersealed again along with lots of cleaning.

Mechanically, it was in excellent shape when Paul got it so needed very



Nothing on this car is lairy and the bonnet vents are a subtle addition.



BACK TO THE OLD SCHOOL

Check out this old Performance Nova Group newsletter from back in the mid-90s. Loads has changed since back then, but one thing's for sure - the Nova continues to thrive!



little work. My brother used to take it back to Courtenay once a year for a service plus some mild changes. It's had the Hi-Torque camshafts fitted, the Aquamist water injection, bigger front discs and has been through a few different management setups. The only mechanical aspect Courtenay haven't been involved in was the exhaust, that was done by JP Exhausts. Aside from that, the rear spoiler was changed over to the later GSi-spec item and that's it really, it's all remained true to the original concept.

In terms of performance Novas and tuning, this car set the bar for years to come, how do you feel about that and is it something you're keen to preserve?

Indeed, this car was the first Nova ever to have a 2.0 16V turbo fitted and so became the fastest Nova and one of the fastest FWD cars of the early '90s. Back then it created a media storm, nobody could believe it had been done and nobody could believe a Nova

was capable of such speeds. Jon took it to Millbrook and with Tim Harvey driving, it clocked 150 mph, then ran a 13.4 second quarter and hit 60 mph in 5.3 seconds. That was just epic back then, it still is today!

Although I haven't really had the chance to drive it in anger, I only bought it last year and it's only just been put back on the road, my brother Paul used it hard throughout the time he owned it. God knows how many quarter-mile runs it's done or how many 0-60 mph challenges it's been involved in, but it's a lot! Granted these days there are numerous faster and more powerful Novas, but this was the one that started it all and that's something special.

What lies ahead for the Nova?

I'm reluctant to do anything mechanically. I bought the car for what it is; it's such a significant car and I want to carry on where my brother left off, basically keep it true to the original



It still looks awesome and set the standard for Nova turbos.



The interior is pretty standard, but has Courtenay leather trim.

WATCH THE TOP GEAR VIDEO ON YOUTUBE!

Remember old Top Gear? Well, you can check out the video of the Nova, where presenter Steve Berry interviews Jon and there's shots of the Nova in action. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zoy7F8LwfoI>



build. I'm going to get some cosmetic work done though, refurbish the wheels and sort out any imperfections. I don't use it much, I've got a diesel knacker for daily driving so the Nova leads a pampered life although it will be at the shows this year and it never did make it to the Nürburgring... yet!

Paul, you were with us on the shoot, do you ever regret selling the car to your brother? Ha ha, sometimes yes... but the thing is, when I owned it for all those years, Steve was always involved with work on the car or when we went to shows or events, so I know it's gone to a good home. If anything he looks after it more than I did, I know if it rained today it wouldn't have been out of the garage! Plus, with my brother owning it now, it means I can still get to drive it from time to time. It makes my standard Cosworth seem a little bit tame in comparison!



Was this also the car that started the trend for Speedlines on Novas?



Seats are from a Mk2 Astra GTE.

COURTENAY NOVA



It's still got the raw feeling that it had all those years ago.



ORIGINAL OWNER JON SHEILD

Age 42

Occupation Owner of Courtenay Sport

As the car's original creator, where did it all begin? It started back in 1987 when Courtenay was a Vauxhall dealership who also specialised in turbo conversions. The Nova started life as one of our demonstrators, a D-registered SR with all the options. The car was sold to a customer who had it for a couple of years, but when it came up for sale again I bought it. I made some changes - LX alloys, lowered it, fitted GT/E brakes and made some cosmetic touches then sold it. The chap kindly rolled the car into somebody's garden soon after. As he was only insured third party, I decided to buy the car back from him and went from there.

The shell was too badly damaged so I bought a diesel Nova van and then began to think about what I could do with it. I considered both 1.3 and 1.8 turbo conversions, but then the idea of the 2.0 16V conversion came about. Back then only a handful of cars had the XE fitted, so I put the new shell in my Mum's garage and started the build. Courtenay had been carrying out turbo conversions on the C20XE since 1988, so Chris [Courtenay, founder of Courtenay Sport] laid down the challenge: if I fitted an XE, he'd carry out a turbo conversion. Who could resist that!

Turbo conversions were unheard of back then, what issues did you face? Back then nobody had ever fitted a 2.0 turbo into a Nova, it was the first one ever done and so yes, there were a lot

of challenges! The engine was actually a brand new C20XE; bear in mind when I started this project the C20LET engine wasn't even available, the Cavalier and Calibra Turbo weren't even launched yet! I fitted a turbo to the XE engine, lowered the compression ratio using a spacer plate but because the IHI turbo was so bulky in the Nova, I had to fit a remote actuator by the battery as it simply wouldn't fit.

Once the engine was in, it produced about 200 bhp but by the time it reached the road in late 1993, the C20LET engine had been launched. I removed the IHI turbo and fitted the KKK unit from the C20LET along with the inlet manifold assembly and the Bosch 2.7 Motronic management. By this point, Courtenay as a company had moved more toward the tuning side of things and so the car became the focus of our attentions, we started looking into the complete package and not just turbo conversions.

On that basis, did you have a plan for the car from day one? Not really. I always wanted a 2.0 16V however Chris offered to turbo it and as new technologies became available the car was developed and hence it's now in effect a C20LET as we know it. Other aspects of the car were also developed over time. The brakes and suspension were all bespoke and we'd never carried out the rear disc conversion before, so it too was a first for us. Other little things such as the bee sting aerial, and the mesh front grille were also a first too. We actually had a Cavalier GSi and wanted to replicate the grille. The heater in the reception had mesh on the front, provided some inspiration and so became the Nova mesh grille.

The only thing that I did have planned was that I always wanted the car to be as if Vauxhall themselves had done it. Rather than strip out the interior, lower it massively and fit a big stereo, we concentrated on making it as civilised as possible. When the van shell was stripped for painting I also waxoyled every inch of it, pumped expanding foam into a lot of body cavities to help reduce the noise and Dynamatted the dash and doors. I then

fitted the leather interior and by running with a fairly compliant suspension setup, the car was pleasant to drive. Off boost obviously!

How important was this car to Courtenay Sport as a company?

Very important. It was always my car but we developed a lot of products on it and used it as a promotional tool. When it was on the road in 1993, it really did change things forever as the media went crazy over it, largely due to the performance figures. Nobody could really believe what we'd done nor the performance of the car, so yes, the Nova was hugely beneficial to us as a company. It was also the fastest car we'd ever built - for a long, long time, it held the 40 - 100 mph record until we built a highly tweaked VX220 Turbo with a modified final drive.

Knowing how significant it's become, how does it make you feel to see the car today? It's just brilliant. There's a lot of memories attached to that car and I put so much time and effort into it, I'm just delighted to see it's still alive and still in such wonderful condition. I can't believe 18 years have passed since it was first built. I think there's a big part of me that would want the car back if the opportunity to buy it came up. It was an absolute animal once the 280 conversion was fitted. It was that on the edge feeling every time I drove it. Today's cars are equally fast, but the Nova just has that insane, near death feeling every time you're in it!

Do you think there will ever be a car like this ever again? I honestly don't think so. The car was so groundbreaking in its day and provided so much inspiration to others, plus did so much for us as a company, I just don't think that'll ever be repeated. It just arrived at the perfect time, it really helped push the Vauxhall into the modified scene and certainly made the Nova into what it is today. In terms of tuning, I doubt we'll see a car that has had such an effect on the Vauxhall tuning scene as A 16V TB. It's still a car that's talked about, 18 years on. That's something special.

TECH SPEC

ENGINE

1998cc C20XE 16V DOHC, Coscast cylinder head, custom spacer to lower compression ratio, Courtenay Hi-Torque camshafts, Courtenay 280/300 system, reworked cylinder and cam cover to improve breathing, KKK turbo with reworked intake path, Courtenay uprated actuator, Courtenay alloy air to air intercooler, Bosch Motronic 2.7 management with EDS software, Aquamist water injection system, JP custom fabricated 2.5 inch exhaust with 4 inch tailpipe, K&N induction kit, Bailey twin piston dump valve, FSE power boost valve, adjustable boost controller (13 - 26 psi) Magnecor 8.5 mm HT leads, Ecotek valve, Unifin radiator assembly with fan override.

TRANSMISSION

Vauxhall F20 five-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive, Courtenay Group-N clutch assembly, Quaife limited slip differential, Courtenay heavy-duty driveshafts, 16V inner and outer CV joints with modified hubs.

SUSPENSION

Bilstein shock absorbers with ASW uprated progressive springs all round, genuine rally-spec Nova front lower arm bushes.

BRAKES

Front: Hi-Spec custom two-piece 300 mm drilled discs with 16V callipers, uprated pads, rear: Astra GT/E rear discs conversion with standard friction material.

WHEELS + TYRES

Speedline Alessio 16 inch alloys with Courtenay centre caps, Yokohama 195/45 tyres.

BODY

1992 diesel Nova van shell converted to car-spec, full bare shell respray in Emerald Green metallic, fully seam-welded and strengthened, Waxoyled and undersealed, expanding foam in body cavities, Nova GSi bodykit, carbon-fibre bonnet vents, carbon-fibre wing mirror covers, custom Courtenay grille, clear front and side repeaters, clear rear clusters.

INTERIOR

Astra GTE front seats and Nova rear bench retrimmed in Courtenay leather, Courtenay instrument cluster and boost gauge, CD head unit and uprated speakers in doors.

PERFORMANCE

0 - 60 mph in 5.3 secs (recorded at TRAX 2004), 150 mph top speed, (recorded at Millbrook Proving Ground with ex-BTCC racer Tim Harvey driving), standing quarter-mile in 13.4 seconds at 111 mph (recorded at Santa Pod).