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What Do You Need?

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Selecting a new car *should be* the result of comparing cold, hard facts, evaluating data, features, options, performance and prices. Unfortunately, that's not reality. The principal force behind most new-car purchases is

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What Do You Need?

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosby1m.dib}emotion, usually driven by a car's looks.

Browsing in lots isn't effective. To find the right car for you, think about your driving habits and vehicle needs. It will also be enlightening. Consider driving environments like freeways, stop-and-go traffic, open highway, foul weather, dirt roads. Consider the importance of details like fuel range (not mileage, but the actual distance between fill-ups).

How does your social as well as professional life affect your driving requirements? How many people will be driving the vehicle? Does it fit each of



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What Do You Need?

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosby1d.dib}their needs? Single, married, kids, more kids coming, in-laws, car-pool, out-of-town guests, hobbies and household projects? How important is fuel economy, safety, performance, ease of use, cargo space, people space? Will there be physically challenged or senior passengers? Do you transport a baby?



What Can You Afford?

The actual price tag on the car is interesting, but what's more important is the monthly payment. At today's interest rates, you'll find that it costs about \$200 per month to finance {ewl MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, photosby1h.dib}; \$10,000 worth of new car with a typical 5-year loan. A \$20,000 car will cost you \$400 per month, a \$30,000 car will cost \$600 per month, and so on.

The average new car sold in America this year will have a price tag of just over \$19,000. The average owner will drive it 15,000 miles a year. It'll cost him or her about \$400 a month for car payments, plus \$50 for insurance and \$100 for gas, oil and repairs. Or a total of \$550 per month. On the next screen, use the calculator to compute your monthly costs.



Page 1 of 2

Calculating the Cost

This estimator helps you calculate the monthly payment for the vehicle you plan to purchase. It also tells you the maximum you can spend on a new vehicle.

Start by clicking on the calculator below to bring up a list of costs. Enter the first two figures and your [monthly costs](#).

In the main calculator, enter the average number of miles you drive per month, and your [monthly car insurance payments](#).

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[Click here to access calculator](#)

Click on the Monthly Costs button to access a list of monthly income and expenses. Enter all expenses in the boxes to the right. When you're done, click OK. The calculator will move the total amount to the main calculator.

Use \$50 per month as an average for monthly car insurance. If you're under 25, have a bad driving record or are buying a high-performance car, double that figure. If you're under 25 and buying a high-performance car, triple it.



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Minimizing Depreciation

Depreciation is a fact of life. But like all facts of life, there are exceptions. Exotic sports cars, like the Porsche 911 Speedster depreciate only minimally, if at all. Don't count on this happening with your 1995 Hyundai. Instead, figure on losing 10% of your new car's value the second you drive it home, 20% after one year, 30% after two years, 40% after three years and 50% after four years.

Happily, there are some decisions you can make before you buy to minimize your losses from depreciation.

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2,
[macro=`PI(qchPath,"buy_a_car_you_like_then_keep_it_forever")']bitmaps.dib} Buy a car you like, then keep it forever

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Maintain your car

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{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2,
[macro=`PI(qchPath,"pick_a_high_performance_car")']bitmaps.dib} Pick a high-performance car

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [macro=`PI(qchPath,"go_topless")']bitmaps.dib} Buy a convertible

From a purely statistical point of view, you will spend far less for transportation if you buy a 1995 car and keep it for at least 10 years or 100,000 miles. Even if you spend more money than you really want to, even if you have to pay for major repairs like a new engine or transmission, it will still be cheaper than buying a less expensive car that you trade in every three or four years.

A used car's worth is determined by mileage and condition. A neglected car will ultimately cost you more in repairs. It's cheaper to do frequent oil and filter changes, routine maintenance, cleaning and waxing as you go along, than to spend a fortune to salvage a car after years of abuse.

Within reason, cars that top various customer satisfaction indexes should remain desirable as they age. Think of inexpensive cars that are now desirable collector's items cars like the Model T Ford, '57 Chevy, '65 Mustang. Each was wildly popular in its day. Take a look at the Owners Reports to see the kind of vehicles that make people happy.

Whether a muscle car, a sports car, or even a hot sedan such as the legendary Mercedes 6.3, a high-performance car holds its value far better than a comparable, but less exciting, machine. Besides, you'll have more fun driving it.

A station wagon depreciates more quickly than a comparable sedan, even though the wagon was originally the more expensive vehicle. A coupe depreciates less than a sedan, but a convertible holds its value best of all.



Evaluating Options

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosby1c.dib} On the typical 1995 model, options represent about 30% of the total price, so choosing options is not something to take lightly.

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [macro=`PI(qchPath,"special_option_packages")']bitmaps.dib} Special option packages

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{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [macro=`PI(qchPath,"trim")']bitmaps.dib} Trim

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [macro=`PI(qchPath,"heavy_duty")']bitmaps.dib} Heavy-duty

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [macro=`PI(qchPath,"antilock_brake_systems")']bitmaps.dib} Antilock brake systems

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [macro=`PI(qchPath,"car_sound_systems")']bitmaps.dib} Car sound systems

Every new-car manufacturer offers packages that contain a group of congenial options. If you want the hottest engine, no doubt you'll also want the heavy-duty handling suspension, fat tires on alloy wheels and antilock brakes.

If you're going to tow, you'll want not only the trailer-towing suspension, but the heavy-duty electrical system, transmission cooler and oversize radiator. Buying options as part of a package is almost always cheaper than ordering them separately.

No choice is more important than color. Color determines the whole personality of your car. Unusual color schemes may seem glamorous at first, but they'll have less resale value when you try to trade in your car 5 years from now. The most popular colors are white, black, silver/gray and medium red. Bright red is most popular on small cars and sports cars. If you have trouble deciding, choose the one that the manufacturer uses in the brochures and advertisements for that model. It'll be the color in which the car looks best.

White is popular because it always looks crisp and clean and seems to say "high class." White also reflects heat, so your air-conditioner works less and you save fuel. White is also the most durable paint color, the easiest to touch up and the easiest to clean. According to studies performed by Daimler-Benz engineers, white is also 1200% more visible than dark colors, so it's even safer than other hues.

Considered the interior furnishing of a vehicle, trim includes the seat, floor and sidewall coverings, hardware, lights and armrests. Always order the highest available trim level you can afford. The price is not that much different, and you'll get most of the difference back when you sell. Blue, gray and black are the most durable interior colors. Red is the most apt to fade unevenly.

Check the option box next to almost any option described as heavy-duty. Prices for a longer-lasting battery, larger alternator, larger radiator or oil cooler are dirt cheap compared to fancy sound systems or cosmetic items. Unlike a CD player, they'll also save you money in longer life and less maintenance.

Heavy-duty suspension parts like shock absorbers, sway bars and brakes will not only make your car a lot more fun and safer to drive, they'll save you money on replacements and maintenance. And the added cost to upgrade when you order your new car is miniscule.

Antilock brake systems are the safest thing to happen to driving since the radial tire. They don't necessarily shorten stopping distances, but they do prevent skidding and allow you to steer while braking. If the car you want has an ABS, pay whatever it costs. ABS can save your life.

Only a few years ago, if you wanted a truly high-quality car sound system, you had to buy it in the aftermarket. Not anymore. The best factory-installed equipment systems are now comparable with aftermarket systems. Indeed, they're often the same system, thanks to tie-ins like Delco/Bose or Ford/JBL.

The factory system has been acoustically engineered for your specific model. You can get it repaired at any dealer, it's covered under warranty and you can include the price in your new-car loan. The price difference between an adequate system and a really topnotch system is not that much, and you'll get most of it back when you resell your car. Buy the best. You'll enjoy it every minute you're in your car.

How to Read a Warranty

Every new-car manufacturer offers some sort of warranty. But the provisions of {ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosby11.dib} these warranties vary widely. The fine print may say something very different from what the warranty first implies. Read the entire contract carefully before making your purchase decision. Here are some terms to know.

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [macro=`PI(qchPath,"basic_coverage_bumper_to_bumper")`]bitmaps.dib} Basic Coverage (Bumper to Bumper)

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [macro=`PI(qchPath,"drivetrain")`]bitmaps.dib} Drivetrain

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Deductibles

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Routine Maintenance

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Transferables

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Extended Service

Basic coverage takes care of everything except "consumables" like oil and filters. The normal bumper-to-bumper warranty is 36 months or 36,000 miles. Tires are always covered under separate warranty from the tire company. Batteries usually have a separate warranty, too.

Every new car also comes with an emission warranty that covers every part of your engine's emission control system. The car manufacturers are required by the federal government to warranty their emission control systems for five years or 50,000 miles to ensure air quality.

The drivetrain consists of the parts that propel the car: the engine, transmission, driveshaft and drive axles. The drivetrain warranty covers damage to hard parts such as pistons or bearings, but not damage to soft parts like hoses, plug wires or filters. The normal powertrain warranty is three years/36,000 miles, though some manufacturers offer up to seven years or 70,000 miles.

Corrosion here means rusted through. If your car develops surface rust, no matter how severe, you won't be covered. But if the rust goes right through the sheetmetal and perforates the body, the dealer has to repair and repaint the damaged area. Thanks to new coatings, galvanized steels and factory undercoating, any new car should go 5 or 6 years without perforation. Many manufacturers offer 10 year or 100,000 mile protection.

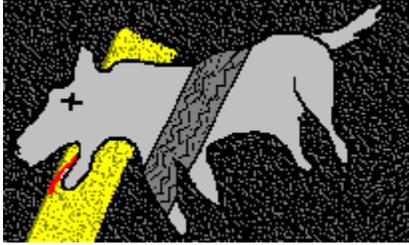
After the initial warranty period is over, you will probably be forced to pay \$100 per repair to get your car fixed, even under an extended warranty. It's a way for the manufacturer to advertise a comprehensive warranty without actually having to absorb all the costs.

Routine maintenance warranties cover the cost of oil and filter changes or other consumables at the initial regularly scheduled service. From your point of view, you save money. From the manufacturer's point of view, you're more apt to start using the dealership's service department and taking better care of your car. Everybody wins.

Transferable warranties mean the remaining warranty can be transferred to the new owner when you sell your car. Virtually every new-car manufacturer now makes the warranty transferable, but many charge a \$100 fee for the privilege.

Extended service warranties are not really warranties at all. They are insurance policies on your car with a fee determined by actuarial tables, just like life insurance. Statistically, extended service plans on any appliance are not worthwhile. They are a profit center for the manufacturer or insurance underwriter. If you're a good driver who properly maintains your car, an extended warranty plan is wasted money.

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Tricky Price Variables

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosby2a.dib} All sorts of financial dealings occur between the manufacturer and the dealer that aren't shown on the factory invoices we give you. There may be a 5% rollback to the dealer, another 3% for advertising, even incentive profits if the dealer sells a certain number of cars by a certain date or unloads a particular slow-selling model.

The dealer is a businessperson who can't afford to



Tricky Price Variables

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosby1f.dib} give you the car at cost. Your goal as an informed car shopper should be to arrive at a price that's fair to both of you. Realistically, the lowest price you'll ever pay is around \$100 to \$200 over the true dealer cost you calculated. The average is more like \$500 to \$800 on factory-ordered cars, \$600 to \$1000 for a car bought off the lot. These figures are true of high-volume cars in the \$15,000 to \$30,000 price range.

What a dealer is willing to sell a car for is dependent on a number of factors, including the state of the economy, the time of the month and the dealer's 10-day statement. Many dealers will accept a smaller profit during December, January and February, especially in the Snow



Tricky Price Variables

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosby1j.dib} Belt. In the dog days of August and early September, you should also get a better deal.

Nearly all dealers set a monthly quota for their salespeople to meet, as well as weekly sales goals. Theoretically, you should get a better deal at the end of the month and on Saturday afternoons. There may also be special promotions that dealers want to see succeed, so they'll be more willing to deal during that period.



Picking a Dealer

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photos.dib} Call your local Better Business Bureau to see if the dealer you're interested in has had any customer complaints. Then talk to your friends, neighbors and business acquaintances. Even perfect strangers will tell you what they think of their car and the dealership behind it.

Once you're there, chat with the service manager. You'll see the salesperson once, but you'll see the service manager repeatedly over the next five years. The service department should be a clean, well-lighted place. Look for signs and uniform patches on the mechanics that say "ASE Certified Automobile Technician."



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Knowing How to Bargain

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosc.dib} Dealers have a price they must get for each car. The minimum profit a dealer must make is \$300-500 per car. Salespeople earn a percentage of that profit. When you bargain with them, you're actually reducing their commission. But they'd rather earn a small commission than none at all, so your job is to find that point.

Here are some helpful tips:

You may have heard about The System, a game played between the salesperson and the customer. The System is designed to intimidate you and make you feel as



Knowing How to Bargain

though the dealer is doing you a favor to let you buy the car at all. Your best defense is to know exactly how much you want to spend and stick to your guns. This program tells you the invoice price for each vehicle -- that's the dealer's cost. Use this price as a bargaining tool.

Sometimes salespeople agree to your price and write up the paperwork. When you pick up your car, they have added "Dealer Prep and Transportation" to the tune of \$250 to \$400. Wrong! That should be included in the price you're originally quoted. Demand your deposit back and walk out immediately.



Knowing How to Bargain

Make it clear right from the beginning that you will sell your present car privately and not trade it in. You will always get more for it, and it will greatly simplify your new-car negotiations.

Always try to find a salesperson with whom you feel comfortable. There's no point in doing business with someone who's rude to you. If you feel uneasy, leave. You can always come back another time.

Never bring your children car shopping with you. They are always a distraction. And plan enough time to really shop. It may take a couple of weekends before you find what you really want.



Page 1 of 1

No Hagggle Dealerships

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosa.dib} A recent trend is the "no-hagggle" dealership, where dealers will determine the lowest price on every car in the showroom and lot and post that price. That's the price. Take it or leave it. They won't go lower. There is no pressure whatsoever. But expect to pay more than you might in a conventional dealership.



Page 1 of 2

Special Order Vehicles

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosd.dib} Should you buy a car off the lot or have one special-ordered? It comes down to whether the one you want is on the dealer's lot and how soon you need your car. Ordering a car "built for you" usually takes 8 to 12 weeks.

Sometimes you can get a great bargain on an off-beat special-order car that another customer ordered, but didn't buy. Dealers will eat that car unless they can unload it. If it's a chartreuse E500, wish him bon appetite. But it might be something tasty for the right buyer, who might be you.



Page 2 of 2

Special Order Vehicles

You may want a set of options that the dealer does not have in stock. Good dealers will first try to {ewl MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosb.dib} obtain the exact car you want by contacting other dealers in the area. It's common practice to purchase the car from the other dealer and resell it to you.

If they can't find the exact car you want, the dealer can special order the car to your exact specifications and it will literally be built on the assembly line. You will get exactly what you want but you will have to wait anywhere from 8 to 12 weeks.



Page 1 of 6

Picking Up Your Car

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You should drive home from the dealer with a Shiny New Car and all this stuff: two complete sets of keys (with replacement key codes); a spare tire, jack and lug wrench; state title or a copy of the title application; the vehicle registration certificate and license plates (check to make sure all the numbers agree, especially the VIN); finance or leasing paperwork or a paid receipt for the car purchase;



Picking Up Your Car

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosc.dib} a paid receipt for the sales tax; the warranty and/or the extended service contract with a paid receipt; the warranty for the tires and battery and the owner's manual. Write down the names and phone numbers of the dealership, the salesperson, the sales manager and the service manager.

Before you leave, compare the equipment that's actually on your car with the list of options that are supposed to be on it. Inspect every inch of your new car, looking for flaws in the fit and finish, the paint, the interior and the trunk. Sight down the fenders to make sure the car hasn't been repaired.

Check under the hood for flaws. Check all the fluid levels, and try every operating system. Look at the mileage on the odometer. If there are 2 miles, that's



Picking Up Your Car

okay. If there are 200, the dealer is trying to pass off a demonstrator as a new car. That's illegal.

Before you hand over the money, demand that any flaw be repaired before you accept the car, even if it means taking a cab home. Once your car leaves the dealership, it'll be a lot harder to get it fixed the way you want. If you still have your money {ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photose.dib} and the dealer still has your car, repairs will get done a lot quicker.

The most important miles you'll ever drive are the first 500. Some hot-rod motorists think you should drive your car hard and fast to "get it used to high speeds." That's nonsense. Even high-performance racing engines are gently broken in on the dynamometer before they ever get near the track.

Bring your new engine carefully up to temperature before you do any highway or high-rpm driving. Your



Picking Up Your Car

tach needle should never get anywhere near the redline during the first 500 miles. Use only part-throttle acceleration. Operate the clutch and shifter smoothly and precisely. Brakes should be warmed up gradually when new, then allowed to cool. Put them through two or three gentle cycles before subjecting them to panic braking.

There is a possibility, admittedly remote, of harmful bits left over from the machining or assembly process being lodged inside your engine. Changing the oil and filter after 500 miles is an inexpensive way to obtain peace of mind.

Your 1995 new-car owner's manual has a recommended oil-change interval. Usually it's 7500 miles, though some manufacturers allow 15,000 miles between oil changes. But there's always an asterisk next to the mileage figure, and the footnote always reads, "Change the oil and filter more often if you drive under arduous conditions."



Picking Up Your Car

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosby2b.dib} In the lingo of owner's manuals, "arduous conditions" mean stop-and-go driving, sustained high-speed driving and driving in dusty conditions or in extremes of heat and cold. In other words, any time you leave your driveway. Realistically, you should change the oil and filter every 3000 miles or six months, whichever comes first.

As soon as you bring your new car home, wash and wax the finish with a good wax. Everywhere in North America, air pollution is so bad that acid rain or other pollutants

Picking Up Your Car

will stain your paint almost immediately, even when your car is sitting in the garage.

When your first warranty service comes around, bring a written list of everything you want done. Don't be embarrassed to be thorough. Today's insignificant noise could develop into tomorrow's replacement engine.

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Pre-Sale Cleanup

Now that you've decided to sell your old car, put in a little time so you can get top dollar.

Start by doing inexpensive mechanical maintenance. {ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosa.dib} Put in new spark plugs, do an oil and filter change, add new radiator coolant, maybe even new ignition wires if your car is running poorly. You'll more than get your money back when you trade in or sell. Conversely, if you have major rust-out or body damage, internal engine or transmission problems, the repairs could easily cost more than the car



Pre-Sale Cleanup

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosa.dib} is worth. Cut your losses and bail out.

After you've done the regular maintenance items, wash your car on the outside, and vacuum and spritz it on the inside with household cleaner. Don't forget the trunk. If the engine compartment is messy, ten minutes with a spray-on degreaser can take years off its looks.

Now look the car over with a critical eye. Some glaring faults are easy and



Pre-Sale Cleanup

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosb.dib} inexpensive to rectify. A cracked taillight lens can be replaced with one from the junkyard. Burned-out lightbulbs or worn drivebelts are easy to spot and inexpensive to fix.

On the outside, use chrome polish on all chrome and stainless steel, and Armor-All or Son Of A Gun spray on all rubber and plastic, including the tires. Faded paint can be brought back by hand buffing with "finish restorer" or a very



Pre-Sale Cleanup

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosc.dib} fine polishing compound, then waxing. Before waxing, touch up any paint chips using touchup paint from a auto-parts store.

Wash all the windows inside and out with glass cleaner and paper towels. Cloth towels leave streaks. If your inner wheel wells are dirty, clean them with a wire brush, and then give them a quick spray of flat-black paint. Your car will look so good, you may not want to sell it.

Selling Techniques

Use the same techniques that work on you when you buy. Don't oversell your car, but {ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosc.dib} describe it accurately and let the buyer decide. If you have an older car that's hard to start after sitting all night, and it puffs out oil smoke from worn valve guides on first starting, start the car before the buyer arrives, so that it will be quick-starting and smoke-free when the buyer tries it.

Service records, receipts and other paperwork lend an air of legitimacy.

Don't get discouraged if the first person who looks at it doesn't buy your car. With patience and a good sales technique, you'll eventually find someone who'll give you more than if you had traded it in.

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Trends in Car Buying

As new cars become more and more expensive, more and more will, out of necessity, be leased. Some auto experts predict that within 20 years, everyone will lease their personal transportation module. You'll budget the monthly expense just as you now do for The Disney Channel or your home mortgage.

Not everyone will be able to afford to lease a new car, of course, so used-car leases--now a relatively small market--will grow more common. Indeed, in the future, an individual car may be leased a half-dozen times in its lifetime, slowly making its way down the income chain.

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Trends in Car Buying

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photos.dib} Why lease? If you're planning to buy a car that costs more than \$30,000, you should know that most banks won't finance more than \$30,000 on a new-car loan. Also, the IRS disallowed the interest tax deduction on those loans, so there is no longer a tax incentive to buy. The monthly payment for a lease can be literally half the payment to purchase the same car. With many leases there is no down payment, and you get a new car every three to five years.

Most auto manufacturers are underwriting costs through special lease programs. You should be able to lease almost any new car for a rate factor that equals about 1%



Trends in Car Buying

interest. Compared to a new-car loan at 8.0%, this is a fabulous bargain.

Why are they being so generous? Well, look at it from the manufacturer's point of view. The market is so competitive that either the manufacturer or the dealer is going to have to give you some sort of steep discount. This comes right off 1995 income.

On the other hand, let's say the manufacturer provides you with a lease that's so attractive, you can't pass it up. The manufacturer does this by inflating the residual value that it predicts the car will be worth when it comes off lease. Let's say your new car lists for \$45,000, and you pay \$20,000 for the four years you lease it, with a residual of \$25,000.

Theoretically, four years from now, the lessor--who is usually the manufacturer--has to



Trends in Car Buying

resell this used car for \$25,000 to get its money back. If the car is really only worth \$15,000 by then, the car has been discounted \$10,000. But the loss comes off the manufacturer's 1998 income. Who knows? By then, the manufacturer may be selling so many cars it'll need a tax write-off. Like Scarlett O'Hara, the manufacturer says, "I'll worry about that tomorrow."

Leasing experts recommend that you don't use a down payment, if possible, and that you lease for 42 months to get the best price. Shorter or longer lease terms are usually not as economical. They also say you should purchase "gap" insurance to pay off your lease's residual amount, should you have a serious accident with your leased car.

Most leases are written for an average of 15,000 miles of driving per year. The going rate is around 15 cents a mile for every mile over that limit. If you drive substantially



Page 5 of 5

Trends in Car Buying

more or less than 15,000 miles a year, be sure to inquire about special short- or long-term leasing programs.

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Lease versus Buy

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Leasing

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Buying

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Owning the car

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When you lease a car, you pay only for its depreciation during the three or four years you use it. When you finance a car, you pay a portion of the full value each month. But at the end of the finance term, you own the car. It still has some residual value left. You should be able to drive payment free for years, the way you live free in a house after the mortgage is paid off. Remember, the average 1995 car will provide faithful service for at least 10 years if you maintain it properly.

Pay it off quickly. If you pay off the same amount in a shorter period, each payment is going to be more. That's only logical. But your total payment will be less, because you'll be paying less in interest and carrying charges. It's the same type of savings you realize by having a 15-year home mortgage rather than a 30-year mortgage.

There are no unhappy surprises in the way of car repairs. Leasing also provides clear records of your yearly driving costs that the Internal Revenue Service will accept without question, should you be invited to explain how you made \$100,000 last year and still showed a loss.

Since leasing requires a low down payment and low monthly payments, you optimize cash flow and financial leverage, with minimum risk. That means you have more cash at the end of the year to spend on something worthwhile, like taking your mother to Aruba.

If you must have an expensive car, leasing is the only practical way for most people to obtain it. Most banks will just laugh if you ask to borrow more than \$30,000 for a new car.



Page 1 of 2

Tips for Reading Contracts

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photos.dib} Contracts are scary things, and it's hard to read between the lines and understand what you're getting. Here are a few things to watch:

"Capitalized cost reduction" is another way of saying "money you pay the manufacturer to offset depreciation." By careful shopping, you'll find dealers and manufacturers who don't require this upfront payment. You could save yourself \$5000 or more by avoiding capitalized cost reduction.

Unscrupulous dealers sometimes try to figure lease charges against an unfairly low residual, making you pay more than you should for the time you use the car. Any library has publications that will tell you the residual



Tips for Reading Contracts

price on a particular model.

Be aware of unspecified additional charges for "excess wear and tear," excessive penalties for early termination of the lease and unusually high extra-mileage charges. Obviously, the lessor is entitled to something extra if you abuse the car or rack up 50,000 miles a year.

Right now, there are unbelievable leasing deals just waiting for you. Nearly all manufacturers are trying hard to move cars off their dealers' lots, and they are willing to risk future profits for short-term gain. Before you pay cash for that new car, investigate leasing. Particularly in 1995, you might be very glad you did.

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[macro='PI(qchPath,"closed_end_or_walk_away_lease")']bitmaps.dib} Closed-end or walk-away lease

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[macro='PI(qchPath,"open_end_or_equity_lease")']bitmaps.dib} Open-end or equity lease

At the end of the lease term, you return the car to the leasing company and walk away. Or you can call a cab. If you've driven more miles than agreed--usually around 1500 miles per month--you'll be charged extra. Same goes for abnormal damage such as bullet holes in the fenders or dead fish in the trunk.

You must purchase the car at the end of the lease for a pre-agreed amount. This is often called a commercial lease because salespeople who rack up high mileage are forced to take this type of lease since they use up the car more quickly than normal drivers.



Should You Buy?

Leasing is the equivalent of renting an apartment in the city. Buying is the equivalent of buying a house in the country. We're talking major lifestyle decisions here. It's not {ewl MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, [dither]photosby1i.dib} that one way is inherently better or worse than the other, but they sure are different.

Most commercial banks charge about the same interest for a new-car loan as they charge for a home mortgage, currently about 7% to 9%. To finance a normal new car, you'll usually be expected to put down 10%. On an expensive car, you may have to plunk down 20-25%. You may be able to find a credit union or more liberal bank that will still loan you 100% of the price of a new car, but in this era of tight credit, don't expect a free ride.



Should You Buy?

For most people, a fixed-rate new-car loan using the car as collateral is the cheapest way they can finance a new car, though loans against savings or CDs are always less expensive. Most banks offer loans at 2% more than the face value of their CD, which equals about 6% in most parts of the country right now. That's roughly 25% less than a conventional car loan. Loan companies or auto-company-owned lenders are usually more expensive sources of money than banks.

If you're buying an expensive car--more than \$30,000--you may have to lease, put down a larger down payment, negotiate alternate financing with a balloon payment at the end or consider an adjustable-rate home-equity loan. As you'll see, if you're buying an expensive car, there will probably be a tax advantage to financing it with a home-equity loan.



Paying Taxes

{ewl MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, photos.dib} Since you can no longer write off automobile loan or lease costs on your personal income tax, there is no tax advantage or penalty one way or the other. But 100% of the interest payments on a home-equity loan are deductible up to a balance of \$100,000, even if you use that loan to buy a Ferrari rather than redo the kitchen.

BIG WARNING! Default on your home-equity-loan payments, and the bank will seize your house, not your car. It can get kind of cramped living in a Ferrari. If you plan to default on your home-equity loan, better buy a Winnebago instead.

If you're lucky enough to have your company pay for your car, corporate tax law is totally different and surprisingly complicated, despite the "simplification" of



Paying Taxes

tax reform. Leases and purchases are treated similarly. All deductions are based on the percentage of business use, whether the vehicle is used for business less than 50% of the time or more than 50% of the time. All vehicle expenses are also deductible, using the same percentage.

For cars used less than 50% of the time for business, depreciation is calculated over 12 years using a straight-line method multiplied by the percentage of business use. For vehicles used more than 50% of the time for business, depreciation is calculated over six years using a complicated, modified, accelerated cost-recovery system.

Depreciation was originally legislated to encourage corporations to buy American luxury cars instead of more expensive foreign models. At the time of the legislation, the full six-year depreciation allowance, of \$13,535, was coincidentally the purchase price of a Chrysler New Yorker Fifth Avenue.

Paying Taxes

Today, of course, this restricted depreciation is almost meaningless--\$5000 less than the average price of new cars sold in America and a fraction of the price of the meanest luxury car. Some change in this depreciation schedule could occur in the future. The only way to be sure, however, is to have a nice heart-to-heart chat with your accountant--before you buy or lease.

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To receive your personalized Armchair Repair Report for only \$19.95, simply call 1 (800) CAR BOOK (1 (800) 227-2665), ext. 222. Please be prepared to provide the following information:

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, bitmaps*.dib} Make, model, condition and year of the car you plan to trade in.

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, bitmaps*.dib} How many miles per year you drive on average (used for the various expense calculations, like expected depreciation, maintenance, etc.).

{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, bitmaps*.dib} Make, model, year, body style and number of doors of the two cars you are interested in comparing. The Armchair Compare provides valuable information even if you are only interested in one car, but you may ask for information on two cars at no additional cost.

You may also fax in your order. Just be sure to include all the information above, plus your name, address, phone number, credit card number and expiration date, and fax it to (408) 866-1470.

Your Armchair Compare Report will be mailed to you the same day your order is received. If you prefer, your report can be faxed back to you that same day for an extra fee of \$3.00.

[Click Here to return to the main IntelliChoice page.](#)

About IntelliChoice

IntelliChoice, Inc. develops and markets automobile selection, purchase, own ownership cost information. It is the original and sole source of comprehensive, objective information on automobile ownership costs for consumers. The company uses its extensive, proprietary computer database to deliver information to customers in an easy-to-understand fashion, by means of books, custom reports, software and other media.

[Click Here to return to the main IntelliChoice page.](#)

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, bitmaps.shg} **Getting Started in the Showroom**

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Search for an initial list of vehicles. You can click on one of the Stock Searches, or you can click on Design Your Own Search to create your own. (Click on Customizing Tips to learn more about creating your own search.) The list resulting from your search will be displayed in the *Vehicle List Screen*.

View individual vehicles. Double click on any vehicle in the vehicle list to see its *Vehicle Information Screen*. This screen describes your choice in detail, including specifications, model information, and price. Add vehicles that interest you to the Compare list.

Select your favorite options and calculate costs. Click on the Features & Options button to see a list of standard and optional equipment. Choose the options you want. Then click on the Purchase Info button to use one of the Estimators to calculate your monthly payments, evaluate whether to lease or buy, or find your annual fuel cost.

Compare the finalists. Click on the Compare Specs button to create a comparison chart of the vehicles you selected for the compare list.

To get back to the Showroom from here, click on **Return**.

{ewr MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2, bitmaps.shg} **Customizing Tips**

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If you don't want to use one of the Stock Searches, you can design your own. You decide what's most important in choosing a vehicle. If it's price and anti-lock brakes, for example, the program will show you only the vehicles that meet those requirements.

To create your own search:

Click on Design Your Own Search, in the Showroom. The *Search Criteria Screen* will appear.

Create your list of Criteria. To add a requirement, click on one of the nine Preference buttons. A *Search Criteria Window* corresponding to that button will appear in which you can click on your required specifications, then click on OK.

To change or remove a requirement, double click on it. The appropriate Search Criteria Window will appear. You can click on the requirement to deselect it, and add or remove other requirements in that window, then click on OK.

Start the search by clicking on Done.

NOTE: To get back to the Showroom, click on **Return**.

Select an Owners Report

[Buick LeSabre](#)
[Buick Park Avenue](#)
[Cadillac De Ville](#)
[Chevrolet Caprice](#)
[Chevrolet C/K Pickup](#)
[Chevrolet Lumina](#)
[Chevrolet S-10](#)
[Chevrolet Suburban](#)
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[Subaru Legacy](#)
[Toyota Camry](#)
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Buick

LeSabre Owners Report

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Thanks to its shorter rear deck, the LeSabre presents a less-formal profile than the larger Park Avenue. The conservative, clean lines were not a major buying motivator.

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Dashboard controls drew many nays.

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Almost everyone opted for the power seat.

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Summary

The 1994 Buick LeSabre looks exactly like what it is--the Buick Park Avenue's kid brother. Both Buicks share a body/chassis platform sitting on the same 110.8-in. wheelbase. Interior dimensions are either identical or within fractions of an inch. The doors, cowls, floor pans and most body panels interchange. Both cars use the same 3.8-liter 170-horsepower V6 engine and front-wheel-drive transaxle drivetrain, same basic suspension and same instrument panel.

So what, you ask, is the difference? For starters, the LeSabre is about 5 in. shorter than the Park Avenue. That translates to a smaller trunk--LeSabre holds 17.1 cu. ft. versus 20.3

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Summary 2 of 8

for the Park Avenue. The other major difference is that LeSabre comes with less standard equipment and costs about \$6500 less. Part of the "less equipment" equation for the LeSabre is the lack of availability of a supercharged engine, which is standard in the Park Avenue Ultra.

Those differences are enough to increase the LeSabre's popularity over its larger, upscale brother. In fact, LeSabre was Buick's best-selling nameplate in all of the 1993 model year.

The LeSabre comes as a 4-door sedan only, in two flavors: Custom and Limited. Both

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Summary 3 of 8

come standard with dual airbags, antilock brakes and a 4-wheel independent strut suspension. There's an optional Gran Touring package that includes an automatic load-leveling feature, firmer damping, 16-in. alloy wheels and performance tires. Steering is variable-ratio, and traction control costs \$175 extra, but is available only in top-of-the-line Limited models.

In addition, every LeSabre comes equipped with a 4-speed automatic attached to the V6 engine, as well as air conditioning and an AM/FM stereo. However, more than half of our respondents upgraded the sound system. The vast majority also increased their comfort

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Summary 4 of 8

levels by opting for Buick's luxury package and nearly everybody (more than 90%) went for the 6-way power seat.

Nearly 40 percent of our LeSabre owners were repeat Buick customers. More than half of them proudly admitted to being over 65 years old. And they had solid reasons for buying their LeSabres, and the hard-earned experience to be ultra critical of their cars.

One of the least-liked features on the LeSabre is the 14 fussy little buttons that control the cabin's climate and ventilation. These dimly lit buttons are positioned low toward the center of the instrument panel

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Summary 5 of 8

and can be difficult to find even in daytime.

Some LeSabre drivers complained that even with the 6-way power seat set as high as it would go, "It's like sitting on the floor." You can't please everybody--some owners felt that the seats were too mushy and lacked support while others said they were too firm, particularly in cold weather.

But the majority found overall comfort one of the LeSabre's great strengths. "This is my third LeSabre," a New York retiree told us, "and I like the ride. All seats, front and rear, are deep enough so you don't have your knees hanging off the edge. Ride is very smooth and quiet, and the car handles easily." Ride and

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Summary 6 of 8

handling comprised another category for high marks all around.

The LeSabre also came in for its share of mechanical complaints, with noisy transaxles, out-of-true brake rotors and recalcitrant windshield wipers tied atop the list.

The Buick dealer technicians cured these problems the first time in 72.2% of all cases. Interestingly, that's the same figure for Park Avenue fixes. More interesting is that in our survey of Park Avenue owners, dealer service was rated as excellent more often than in our survey of LeSabre owners by 10 percentage

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Summary 7 of 8

points. Either LeSabre owners are more critical of their treatment or the dealerships' service managers treat Park Avenue owners better than they do LeSabre drivers.

Then, when we asked buyers to rate their cars' overall quality, Park Avenue owners rated workmanship as excellent--a healthy 12 points higher than the 64.1% of LeSabre owners who gave the same rating. Again, either LeSabre owners are pickier than their Park Avenue-owning colleagues, or the Wentzville, Missouri, plant that built the Park Avenues did a better job than the Flint, Michigan, plant that built the LeSabres. (Since we did this survey, Buick has swapped the

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Summary 8 of 8

plants that build these cars.)

When our respondents made unsolicited direct comparisons between the LeSabre and Park Avenue, they fell into two broad categories: those who moved down because they felt that the cars weren't all that different, and those who aspired to move up.

So when it came to deciding whether to buy another LeSabre next time, 4.9% reported that they wouldn't and another 23.9% said maybe. A lot of those who weren't sure hinted at moving up to a Park Avenue. The rest just didn't want to commit before they'd shopped the competition.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Give credit where it's due. And it's due in Flint, Michigan, at the headquarters of Buick Motor Division. By understanding the wants and needs of its customers and fulfilling same, Buick has steadily marched toward the leading ranks of various quality and customer-satisfaction surveys. This GM division has also accumulated solid sales success--without a single sport/utility vehicle or minivan in the fleet. Leading this march to prosperity is the LeSabre, which fairly well defines Buick's formula.

This car can deliver more than adequate comfort, performance and elegance for under \$25,000. Well under, in fact. This car

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

provides solid value with an adequate, if not startling, V6 engine and well-matched 4-speed automatic. The spacious interior comes complete with all the requisites from 6-passenger seating to air conditioning to AM/FM stereo sound. The four doors all open wide, and the trunk is commodious enough for most families. Styling is pleasant if not leading-edge. What can be bad?

Well, according to the LeSabre owners who responded to our survey, not too much, really. There's a fair share of elements that could be better to be sure, but all in all the LeSabre delivers on its promise of solid, comfortable transportation.

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

Of course, it's interesting to note that while Buick has the big stuff figured out--ride, handling, performance--for the majority of the folks who are attracted to the marque, the designers in Flint seem to be oblivious to the less obvious but still critical needs of their customers. The folks at Buick know that with its hard-to-beat combination of styling, size, comfort and value, the LeSabre is a favorite of the mature crowd. Much of the car's advertising and marketing thrust is directed at this ever-growing audience, and rightly so. So how come the LeSabre is equipped with a climate-control system that requires the eyesight of an astronaut and the dexterity of a

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

neurosurgeon to operate? As our respondents noted, the tiny, partially hidden and dimly lit climate-control buttons are an annoyance.

On the other hand, once you've got the interior's temperature set where you like it, and the cruise control set at a comfortable cruising speed, the LeSabre is quite an amicable ride. While the softness of the ride and the casual responsiveness of the handling--even with the optional Gran Touring package--are not close to our tastes, they do appeal to the broad spectrum of Buick buyers. And though the naturally aspirated version of the 3.8-liter V6 lacks the pleasing rush of the supercharged version to be found in the Park Avenue

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

Ultra, the drivetrain has no trouble propelling the LeSabre to freeway speed in an appropriate amount of time and maintaining that speed over hill and dale.

Like I said, give credit where credit is due.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE BUICK LESABRE*

Total miles driven 1,197,776

Average miles driven 4889

Purchase price:

Average \$22,120

Range \$18,000-

\$28,000

Why did you choose the Buick LeSabre?

Owned Buicks before 39.9%

Liked the styling 27.5

Good price/value 17.2

Reputation for quality 13.3

Rides well 9.9

Great comfort 8.2

6-passenger size 6.4

Good handling 6.4

Model choices:

LeSabre Custom 58.4%

LeSabre Limited 41.6

Options/Accessories:

6-way power seat 91.9%

Premium sound system 63.0

Luxury package 60.2

Gauge cluster 43.9

Automatic ride control 40.0

Traction control 29.4

Prestige package 25.4

Heated drivers seat 20.6

Gran Touring package 10.3

Trailer package 3.4

Average miles per gallon:

In town 20.5

On the highway 27.4

Specific likes:

Riding qualities 41.9%

Handling 39.4

Styling 35.9

Comfort 31.3

Engine power 18.7

Overall economy 18.7

Specific dislikes:

No complaints 22.2%

Instrument panel, 14.6

switches

Low/uncomfortable 12.9

driver seat

Noises and rattles 5.3

Central climate controls 4.1

Lack of storage bins, 3.5
pockets

Suggested changes:

Revise instrument panel 17.6%
No changes, leave as is 14.4
More comfortable seats 8.5
Add storage bins, 5.9
pockets
Higher-quality materials 5.9
Simplify climate 5.2
controls

Performance opinion:

Engine power:

Excellent 63.8%
Good 35.0
Average 0.8
Poor 0.4

Handling:

Excellent 69.9%
Good 28.0
Average 2.0
Poor 0.0

Braking:

Excellent 70.2%
Good 28.2
Average 1.2
Poor 0.4

Overall performance:

Excellent 67.3%
Good 31.9
Average 0.4
Poor 0.4

Ergonomics and driving convenience:

Layout of controls:

Excellent 43.0%
Good 41.0
Average 12.3
Poor 3.7

Instrumentation:

Excellent 44.4%
Good 36.9
Average 14.9
Poor 3.7

Driver sightlines:

Excellent 46.7%
Good 41.0
Average 8.6
Poor 3.7

Overall convenience:

Excellent 45.5%
Good 44.2

Average	9.5
Poor	0.8
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	64.1%
Good	32.7
Average	2.4
Poor	0.0
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	65.0%
Good	25.6
Average	5.3
Poor	4.0
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	
Excellent	60.1%
Good	34.5
Average	4.9
Poor	0.4
Had any mechanical trouble?	
No	84.1%
Yes	15.8
What type of trouble?	
Transmission noise	12.8%
Pulsing brakes	12.8
Windshield washer/wipers	12.8
Power windows	10.3
Air conditioner	10.3
Electrical system	7.7
Repair it yourself?	
No	94.9%
Yes	5.1
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	72.2%
No	27.8
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	56.5%
Good	36.9
Average	4.8
Poor	1.8
Dealer sales policy:	
Excellent	58.5%
Good	36.3
Average	4.3
Poor	0.9
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	37.3%
Two vehicles	44.8
Three vehicles	12.7
Four or more	5.2
Principal driver:	
Male	49.0%

Female	45.3
Both equally	5.7

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	0.0%
30-49	11.8
50-plus	88.2

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Buick LeSabre if you had it to do over again?

Yes	71.3%
Maybe	23.9
No	4.9

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Owners Report

Buick Park Avenue

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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The stately lines of the Buick Park Avenue have remained basically unchanged since 1991. The conservative styling was not a prime sales motivator.

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Gauges are a trifle hard to see for many.

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Ultra offers dual-zone front temp settings.

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Summary

For the 1991 model year, Buick gave the Park Avenue full-series status and a new, modern look. Under the new Park Avenue's body were the former Electra's mechanicals--front-wheel drive and 3.8-liter V6.

Soon after its 1991 introduction, Buick announced that 150 buyers of the upmarket Park Avenue Ultra model would be able to order their cars with a supercharger. By 1992, the supercharger became standard on the Park Avenue Ultra. Why only 150? Because the Eaton Corp., supplier of the Roots-type blower, didn't yet have the capacity to build more. Besides, no one at Buick knew whether the mature audience that Buick appealed to

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Summary 2 of 8

would cotton to a hot-rod option like a supercharger. The blower initially raised the V6's horsepower from 170 to 205 and then, for 1994, to 225 horsepower. As opposed to a turbocharger, the supercharger raises midrange torque for passing and merging. Since most drivers need full-throttle bursts of acceleration less than 1% of the time, the supercharger freewheels until a computer-controlled solenoid shuts an air-bypass valve. The computer bases its decision to shut the valve based on input from throttle-position and engine-speed sensors. With the bypass shut, the blower immediately starts stuffing a charge into the intake manifold

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Summary 3 of 8

and, within milliseconds, the car takes off like a moderately scorched cat. With the supercharger freewheeling, there's virtually no power loss, so it barely affects fuel economy. In fact, the EPA gives the supercharged engine the same highway rating as the Park Avenue's normally aspirated V6: 27 mpg. But there's a 2-mpg penalty in the EPA's city mileage--19 mpg for the base V6 versus 17 mpg for the supercharged engine. In our survey, the supercharged Ultra delivered about 1.5 fewer mpg overall, city and highway. Most owners appreciated their cars' performance whether supercharged or not, and several pronounced it "outstanding."

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Summary 4 of 8

Just over 80% of our respondents chose the base Park Avenue, which retails for \$27,164, or \$4700 less than the Ultra. Standard equipment in all models includes ABS, dual airbags, air conditioning, automatic load leveling and power just-about everything. In addition to the supercharger, the Ultra adds an alarm system, leather dual 6-way power seats with optional memory (the base Park Ave has 6-way only for the driver's seat), lighted rear swing-down vanity mirrors, keyless entry, and on and on and on--way too much to list. In short, both versions are nicely topped up with standard equipment and there's almost nothing you can't order additionally.

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Summary 5 of 8

The Ultra also has an interesting dual-temp climate-control system that allows the driver and front passenger to individually set the temperature on their side of the car. There's one set of climate controls on the instrument panel, a second set on the front passenger's door plus an optional third set on the steering hub. Steering-wheel touch controls come only with the Prestige package--an additional \$1245 to \$2496. Those who ordered them considered the hub-mounted switches a great convenience and safety factor.

Nearly 45% of our respondents had owned Buicks before. Clearly they were happy with their previous cars since satisfaction with

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Summary 6 of 8

earlier Buicks ranked as the No. 1 reason for choosing a new Park Avenue. Only 31.5% listed styling as their main purchase motivator--surprisingly few, considering. Another 14.7% cited comfort and 13.4% mentioned price/value as important reasons for buying. Workmanship rated excellent with 76.2% of our owners, and another 22.1% gave quality a rating of good. Only 17.7% of all our respondents' Park Avenues needed service. It would certainly seem that Buick's high ratings in J.D. Power and other customer surveys are justified.

The Park Avenue would also seem to be a status symbol for many older Americans. More than half the respondents listed their age

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Summary 7 of 8

as over 65--most happily confessed to being retired. These owners liked their cars a lot, specifically praising comfort and roominess, the warehouse-size trunk and all those standard conveniences. However, there were complaints about details: too dim turn-signal arrows, the profusion of small, black central climate-control buttons that are hard to see--particularly with bifocals--the high trunk liftover sill, and the small, crowded instrumentation. Several owners pointed out that they didn't need or want the tachometer and that this space might be better used to make the other dials larger.

However, just because Park Avenue buyers

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Summary 8 of 8

are mature doesn't mean they don't want to enjoy driving their cars. A full 20% equipped their base Park Avenues with the \$224 Gran Touring package (standard on the Ultra). This includes 16-in. alloy wheels, grippier tires and firmer shock settings. There's also an FX-3 "automatic ride control" suspension that senses body yaw and roll at low speeds and firms up the damper settings accordingly. And nearly half had ordered traction control at \$175 additional.

Clearly, most of our respondents were very up on their cars--more than 80% said enthusiastically that they'd buy the Park Avenue again next time. Only 2.6% gave us an unequivocal "no thanks."

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EDITOR'S REPORT

The Buick Park Avenue stands as a paradigm of what's evolved into the old guard of automotive Americana. Its softly angular lines are stately, tasteful and--certainly by today's standards--eminently conservative. Its front-wheel-drive powertrain boasts a traditional pushrod engine--albeit with state-of-the-art electronics and fuel injection. The large rear overhang accommodates a proper American-family-size trunk. And the 6-person passenger compartment easily swathes a half-dozen full-grown people in cushy elegance. The car's ride is boulevard comfortable, and its handling is predictable if less than nimble.

When equipped as a Park Avenue Ultra, the big sedan boasts a supercharger to help its V6 pull the car around with a pleasing rush of mid-range torque--kind of like the big-block V8s of Buick's near past.

All said and done, there is really not much wrong with the Park Avenue, and there's even less wrong with the Ultra. In fact, the folks who flock to Buick dealerships with \$25,000 or so in hand do appreciate all of this car's solid, traditional qualities.

Clearly, the Park Avenue--and its smaller sibling, the LeSabre--appeals to older, traditional-minded buyers and drivers, drivers who relish the large, smooth and isolated feel

that American sedans were famous for decades ago. These Buicks are far nimbler, smaller and more efficient than their forebears, for sure, but they are closer to their roots than so many other models on the market.

But basically, life behind the wheel of this big Buick is good. The Park Avenue represents simple point-and-shoot motoring at its best.

Unfortunately, there's a growing number of drivers who want something different. So if your tastes are closer to ours, you may find the comfort of the Park Avenue's interior diminished somewhat by the lack of firm, lumbar-loving seating. You also may be

frustrated by the car's difficult-to-read instrument panel and even more difficult-to-operate minor controls.

Further, the performance potential of the supercharged V6 in the Ultra is seriously compromised by the direction of the Park Avenue's chassis tuning. Now don't get us wrong, to our way of thinking, any car with a supercharger is already pointed in the right direction. But when you're driving a car with a blower on the engine, you should be able to totally enjoy that car's performance. That means more than simply stabbing the throttle and keeping it straight. Unfortunately, to our tastes, the softly sprung Park Avenue simply

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

does not want to be driven as quickly or with as much élan as the 200-plus horses under the hood encourage you to. However, if you accept the Park Avenue's mission as one of comfortable, quiet, competent and even elegant transportation for a driver and up to five of his or her closest friends, then the Buick Park Avenue is an excellent representative of the American automobile industry.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE BUICK PARK AVENUE*

Total miles driven 1,642,668

Average miles driven 5248

Purchase price:

Average \$27,278

Range \$22,000-
\$34,000

Why did you choose the Buick Park Avenue?

Owned Buicks before 44.9%

Styling 31.5

Comfort 14.7

Price/value 13.4

Ride 11.6

Handling 7.5

Model choices:

Park Avenue 81.3%

Park Avenue Ultra 18.7

Options/Accessories:

Luxury package 74.2%

Premium sound system 74.0

Automatic ride control 64.6

Traction control 48.5

Prestige package 47.8

Heated drivers seat 20.6

Gran Touring package 20.0

Astro roof 7.9

Trailer package 2.6

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

170-hp V6 20.2/27.2

Supercharged 225-hp V6 18.7/25.4

Performance opinion:

Engine power:

Excellent 64.3%

Good 33.4

Average 2.3

Poor 0.0

Handling:

Excellent 74.2%

Good 24.2

Average 1.3

Poor 0.3

Braking:

Excellent 77.5%

Good 20.3

Average 2.3

Poor 0.0

Overall performance:

Excellent	72.2%
Good	27.2
Average	0.6
Poor	0.0

Control layout:

Excellent	57.3%
Good	35.8
Average	5.9
Poor	1.0

Instrumentation:

Excellent	53.8%
Good	36.7
Average	7.2
Poor	2.3

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	51.8%
Good	36.8
Average	9.4
Poor	2.0

Overall convenience:

Excellent	54.5%
Good	40.5
Average	4.3
Poor	0.7

Specific likes:

Comfort	47.9%
Ride quality	38.1
Size	36.2
Handling	35.0
Overall economy	16.7
Power	15.6

Specific dislikes:

No complaints	21.8%
Noises and rattles	8.7
Instrument panel	8.7
Obstructed rear vision	7.3
Price too high	5.3
Unfriendly climate controls	4.9

Suggested changes:

No changes	14.4%
Better instrument layout	6.7
Yearly styling updates	6.7
Fewer squeaks and rattles	6.6
More powerful engine	6.1
Better rear vision	5.0

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	76.2%
Good	22.1
Average	1.3

Poor	0.3
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	78.6%
Good	19.5
Average	1.9
Poor	0.0
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	
Excellent	70.2%
Good	28.4
Average	1.4
Poor	0.0
Any mechanical trouble?	
No	82.3%
Yes	17.7
What type of trouble?	
Transmission (various)	11.1%
Electrical system	9.3
Heater slow to warm up	9.3
Fuel-filler door wouldnt open	7.4
Alarm system	5.6
Oil leaks	5.6
Valves	5.6
Repair it yourself?	
No	98.1%
Yes	1.9
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	72.7%
No	27.3
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	66.2%
Good	29.5
Average	3.0
Poor	1.3
Dealer sales policy:	
Excellent	68.6%
Good	28.1
Average	2.6
Poor	0.7
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	28.1%
Two vehicles	50.2
Three vehicles	13.2
Four or more	8.4
Principal driver:	
Male	57.8%
Female	36.8
Equal	5.4
Age distribution of owners:	
Under 29	0.3%
30-49	7.9

50-plus 91.8

**Based on your experiences, would you
buy a Buick Park Avenue if you had it to
do over again?**

Yes 80.6%

Maybe 16.8

No 2.6

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Cadillac DeVille Owners

Report

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Formal, square roof and angular lines give the front-wheel-drive Cadillac DeVille a look similar to the larger, rear-wheel-drive Fleetwood.

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Steering wheel obstructs some controls.

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Many found seats comfortable but low.

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Summary

Hard to believe, but the big 6-passenger Cadillac DeVille family sedan shares body platforms with the Seville and the Eldorado. Except for body size and style, all three cars are basically the same. Cadillac engineers stretched the Eldorado's wheelbase 3 in. to fit the Seville, then stretched the Seville's wheelbase another 2.8 in. to produce the DeVille.

What makes the commonality hard to see is this trio's styling. The conservatively styled DeVille seems more like the rear-drive Fleetwood--a totally unrelated car--than its two sportier front-drive cousins.

The 1994 DeVille's styling wasn't the big

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Summary 2 of 10

purchase factor that it is with so many other luxury cars. Actually, looks ranked a distant second behind why most respondents bought this car, namely that they had owned Cadillacs before--some for decades, often trading in the car every year or two.

The typical DeVille owner in our survey was retired, male and well off. Two-thirds were over age 65. They prized comfort and roominess. An Ohio retiree probably wrote the majority opinion when he noted, "This Cadillac's comfort and ride are near the big-car feel of the 1970s." Yet handling and steering are vastly improved over those cars he remembers so nostalgically.

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Summary 3 of 10

The Cadillac DeVille comes in two series--base DeVille and DeVille Concours. The upmarket Concours costs exactly \$5000 more than the standard DeVille. For the extra green you get Cadillac's 32-valve dohc Northstar alloy V8, surface-sensing suspension, traction control, an 11-speaker premium sound system, leather upholstery, dual 6-way power seats, and extra touches like an automatic day/night driver's outside mirror.

Obviously, the biggest difference between the standard DeVille and the Concours is the engine. The regular DeVille uses Cadillac's 4.9-liter aluminum pushrod V8 at 200 hp. The 4.6-liter Northstar in the Concours pumps out

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Summary 4 of 10

270 hp, which is 25 fewer horses than what that same engine develops in the Seville/Eldorado. Both cars use the same 4-speed automatic transaxle, but the base car has a higher final ratio than the Concours: 2.73:1 versus 3.11:1. This results in identical 16-city/25-hwy. mpg EPA fuel-economy ratings.

Both series use an all-independent suspension system with self-leveling action and variable damping. The front struts and rear shocks have three firmness settings. In the base De Ville, these settings relate directly to speed. The faster you go, the firmer the ride. The Concours, on the other hand, has a surface-sensing feature that uses little

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Summary 5 of 10

accelerometers at each corner. These are tied into a microprocessor that registers differences between suspension and body oscillations. It also senses turning rate and road speed. Algorithms adjust damping at each wheel to compensate for various driving conditions and surfaces, giving firmer valve settings over rough roads or through hard corners and softer settings on smooth pavement.

These two types of variable damping are part of what Cadillac calls its Northstar System. None of our respondents--0%--noted the presence of either type of damping, apparently unaware of the subtleties. But 34%

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Summary 6 of 10

specifically said they liked the way their Cadillacs handled and rode.

Speed-sensitive power steering and antilock 4-wheel disc brakes are standard in both DeVille models. The Concours comes with full-time traction control, which is available for \$175 extra on the base DeVille.

Nearly 70% of our surveyees rated workmanship excellent. Yet approximately one in five reported mechanical problems. Most common was the automatic emergency-brake release not working. This was because of a loose vacuum fitting and it was easily corrected by a dealer. The 4T80-E automatic transmission sometimes didn't shift properly.

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Summary 7 of 10

And then little things went wrong that could turn into big headaches: nonreleasing fuel-filler doors and decklids, balky cruise controls and electric door locks. Dealer repairs were done quickly and correctly the first time in 76.4% of all cases, and 95.3% of our owners rated dealer service good to excellent.

Some drivers--and not just short ones--complained about what they called "too-low seating." Even with the standard 6-way electric seat raised to its uppermost position, they felt they were sitting too low for comfort.

Dual airbags proved an oft-cited reason for choosing these 1994 models, especially since the passenger-side airbag deploys into

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Summary 8 of 10

a horizontal rectangle large enough to protect the center passenger as well as the person sitting at the far right.

Arriving at the bottom line, these Cadillac owners generally felt they'd gotten good value. A New York developer stated, "Show me an import for \$35,000 that can transport six people as comfortably, safely and reliably as this Cadillac DeVille."

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EDITOR'S REPORT

The DeVille is a remarkable testimony to the design and engineering skills of GM, specifically of the folks at Cadillac. From a distance, heck not even from a distance but right up close--like from the driver's seat--this car could be the son of Fleetwood. But scratch beneath its carefully shaped, corpulent sheetmetal or padded, cushily isolated interior and you'll find you're dabbling in the same gene pool that begot the Seville. In fact, if you want to get down to specifics with the DeVille Concours, you're actually finding many of the same chromosomes that define the STS. Yet the soul of the STS could be no further from that of the Concours if one of them were built on Jupiter.

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

With the DeVille, Cadillac has developed a competent, comfortable and luxurious front-driver that emulates all of the good qualities of its larger rear-drive siblings. Better than that is the fact that the DeVille still boasts the stability and sloppy-weather traction that has won millions of front-drive converts. Maybe best of all is that when dressed as the Concours, the DeVille does all of the above in a very smart and throttle-responsive fashion.

There is something here for most everyone who's wanted a Cadillac. There's enough here for those who never thought they wanted one.

For starters, there is no denying the

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

DeVille's heavy look. Hey, if you want a Cadillac that looks like what you think a Cadillac ought to look like, then the DeVille has all the sheetmetal folded and welded in all the right places and at all the proper angles. But unlike some corpulent Caddies of yore, the DeVille's girth is only skin deep.

The happy result is a car that responds to the driver's inputs as the driver makes them, rather than one that may or may not finally respond after a disconcerting lull. Don't confuse the DeVille--even in Concours trim--as any kind of sport sedan because it is not one. But despite the old-world luxury bent of its suspension tuning, it is more than respectable

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

at hustling down the road. When powered by the Northstar, as in the Concours, it actually hustles more quickly than you would have imagined.

Of course, there's more to the DeVille's big-car feel than just the exterior sheetmetal and the chassis tuning. There's also that, let's call it traditional, interior. There's just something big and rear-wheel-drive about those seats beneath your butt, the broad expanse of car-width dashboard in front of you and the isolated quiet that surrounds you. The bonus here is that because of the car's front-drive layout, there's actually quite a lot of room inside the DeVille.

In total, despite any preconceptions you may have about the DeVille and your place

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

in the world of Cadillac, this car--especially the Concours--is a wonderfully balanced, luxurious cruiser.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE CADILLAC DEVILLE*

Total miles driven 1,151,708

Average miles driven 4143

Purchase price:

Average \$35,340

Range \$30,000-
\$42,000

Why did you choose the Cadillac DeVille?

Previous Cadillac ownership 54.4%

Styling 28.9

Northstar V8 System 9.5

Comfort 8.0

Quality and workmanship 4.2

Ride quality 4.2

Size and 6-passenger capacity 4.2

Model choices:

DeVille 60.9%

DeVille Concours 39.1

Options/Accessories:

Antitheft alarm system 74.0%

Traction control 67.4

CD player 48.6

Heated windshield 40.1

Heated seats 23.4

Astro sunroof 5.4

Average miles per gallon:

In town 16.0

On the highway 25.0

Specific likes:

Styling 42.7%

Comfort 37.2

Handling 34.3

Ride quality 33.9

Engine power 25.9

Overall performance 19.7

Specific dislikes:

No complaints 10.8%

Quibbles with styling 9.2

Headrests cut rear vision 9.2

Noises and rattles 8.2

Price too high 7.7

Seating comfort 6.2

Ride too harsh 6.2

Suggested changes:

No changes	14.5%
Different styling	10.3
Better rear vision	7.3
More comfortable seats	6.1
Car should be smaller	6.1
Softer, smoother ride	4.8

Performance opinion:

Engine power:

Excellent	81.4%
Good	17.2
Average	1.1
Poor	0.7

Handling:

Excellent	78.6%
Good	19.6
Average	1.1
Poor	0.7

Braking:

Excellent	80.8%
Good	18.2
Average	1.0
Poor	0.0

Overall performance:

Excellent	79.4%
Good	19.9
Average	0.3
Poor	0.3

Ergonomics and driving convenience:

Control layout:

Excellent	63.4%
Good	30.8
Average	4.7
Poor	1.1

Instrumentation:

Excellent	60.0%
Good	30.9
Average	6.5
Poor	2.5

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	53.6%
Good	34.5
Average	9.0
Poor	2.9

Overall convenience:

Excellent	57.1%
Good	38.5
Average	4.0
Poor	0.4

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	69.9%
Good	28.0

Average	2.1
Poor	0.0
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	71.3%
Good	23.1
Average	3.1
Poor	2.4
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	
Excellent	70.6%
Good	26.8
Average	2.6
Poor	0.0
Mechanical trouble?	
No	78.7%
Yes	21.3
What type of trouble?	
Emergency brake wouldnt release	16.4%
Transmission (various)	11.5
Fuel-filler door wouldnt open	9.8
Air conditioner leaked	8.2
Balky trunk release	8.2
Cruise control didnt work	6.6
Door locks didnt work	6.6
Repair it yourself?	
No	98.3%
Yes	1.7
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	76.4%
No	23.6
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	62.8%
Good	32.5
Average	4.3
Poor	0.4
Dealer sales policy:	
Excellent	66.3%
Good	28.4
Average	3.2
Poor	2.1
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	27.0%
Two vehicles	47.8
Three vehicles	16.3
Four or more	9.0
Principal driver:	
Male	60.7%
Female	33.5
Equal	5.9
Age distribution of owners:	

Under 29	0.0%
30-49	4.1
50-plus	95.9

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Cadillac DeVille if you had it to do over again?

Yes	82.1%
Maybe	16.1
No	1.8

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Owners Report

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Radical styling and past Chevy experience help to sell the new Caprice.

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Wheel-mounted airbag became standard equipment in Caprice redesign

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Chevy's 5.0-liter pushrod V8 inspired confidence of Caprice owners in survey.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the November 1991 issue of Popular Mechanics)

Change comes slowly in Chevy's full-size Caprice line. The last major redesign occurred in 1977, when the cars were significantly reduced in size. So when a new edition of this all-American standard finally came along for 1991, we immediately started getting in touch with the new owners, to see how this dramatic styling departure would rate.

And we emerged with the feeling that Chevrolet's product planners have struck a well-conceived balance between new and tried-and-true.

Fundamentally, the Caprice blends old with

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Summary 2 of 11

new. Although it's 2 in. longer and 2 in. wider, it still uses the same chassis, with body-on-frame construction and rear-wheel drive. It also carries over Chevy's solidly established small-block V8, in this case the 170-hp 5.0-liter with throttle-body fuel injection. The only available transmission is the L60 4-speed over-drive automatic with lockup torque converter. Air conditioning and most power-assisted equipment remain standard.

On the new side of the ledger, the redesigned Caprice also offers anti-lock brakes, a driver's airbag and 3-point shoulder harnesses--front and rear--as standard equipment. The restyled body improves the

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Summary 3 of 11

Caprice's aerodynamic efficiency by 27%, going from a barnlike Cd of 0.42 to 0.33.

The new Caprice affords driver and passengers a better view of what's going on, with 50% more glass area. The base wheels and tires are wider, and power-steering assist has been recalibrated to improve road feel.

More glass and more sheetmetal add up to more weigh--at 3900 pounds, the new Caprice is about 300 pounds heavier than the old. That's a lot of weight, but it was interesting to learn that many of the Caprice owners in our survey viewed it as a plus in the old road-hugging sense.

The new Caprice comes in only two body

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Summary 4 of 11

styles--sedan and station wagon. The 2-door is history. The wagon, with seating for up to eight, is similar in form to the Buick Roadmaster and Oldsmobile Custom Cruiser. All three of these full-size wagons share mechanical components and even some sheetmetal.

Our questionnaires revealed some interesting information about the new Caprice owners. For example, nearly half of them are 65 or older. That's not the audience Chevrolet had in mind for the new body style. The product planners were hoping to attract a yuppie crowd.

We also learned which features the owners valued most, and found that they're not the

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ones we've come to expect from younger owners. The new car's styling, though positively received, wasn't the big persuader it is with so many cars. What Caprice owners value is just what they've always valued: a big, roomy, traditional American car with storage to rival a warehouse, a feeling of safety and the sense of cruising down the highway in a Barcalounger--a car that's worth its asking price and holds its resale value. The Caprice delivers on all counts.

Asked whether they'd buy the same make and model again, 72.1% of our owners said yes, a very solid response. And most of the would-buy-again group told us they *wouldn't*

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Summary 6 of 11

be interested in any of Chevy's smaller sedans, like the Corsica or even the Lumina. We are talking Caprice faithful here. We might even be on to a new kind of cult car.

This is not a group to be seduced by sports-car handling. Nevertheless, 65% of the owners in our survey ordered either the F41 or FE2 suspension option. The F41 handling package adds a very modest \$49 to the bottom line. The FE2 is part of the towing package. Both come with meatier tires, stiffer shocks and heftier antiroll bars.

We conclude from this that Caprice traditionalists do put some stock in a car's ability to respond. Overall, the Caprice's

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Summary 7 of 11

handling ranked fourth on the list of owners' specific likes.

The Caprice's fuel economy left most owners smiling. EPA ratings for this car are 17 mpg city/26 highway, but our respondents beat the city number by 10% at 18.6 mpg. On the highway, though, the real-world Caprice came in 0.7 mpg less than the EPA projection.

Not surprisingly, roominess and ride quality got excellent reviews from virtually all our owners, as did interior comfort. Those wide seats make this car a favorite for family vacations, and the 23-gallon fuel tank (22 gallons in the wagon) provided good driving range between fillups. The owners in our

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Summary 8 of 11

survey also gave us positive comments on the Caprice's towing performance.

Of course, even America's classic can skip a heartbeat now and again. For example, while most owners acknowledged that dealers treated them right, many felt they had to go back to the shop for repairs too often. Fully a third of our sample group reported mechanical problems, compared with only 20% for the 1991 Buick LeSabre (see Owners Report, page 39, June '91).

The Caprice's most common headaches were electrical, and required only one trip to the dealer to fix in 77% of all cases reported. Like the buy-again index, that's a good mark,

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Summary 9 of 11

and surveyed owners gave overall dealer service a combined good or excellent rating of 85.8%.

Early-production Caprices had problems with water leaks due to ill-fitting door and trunk seals. Window moldings, too, would sometimes ride down in their channels and allow water to seep through into the cabin.

Several owners complained that trunk space was smaller than in previous Caprices. That's because the spare tire, which bolts to the center of the trunk floor, took up valuable space.

A handful noted that the fabric seats, Scotchguarded at the factory, felt sticky if the

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Summary 10 of 11

driver or passenger was wearing shorts. Another minority complaint had to do with the front doors, which seemed heavy and unwieldy on sloping driveways or hillsides to some owners. Wheel covers, held on by plastic clips, were easy to knock off against curbs. And a number of drivers offered wry congratulations to Chevy for its success in hiding the two small horn buttons.

But those criticisms paled beside the warm feelings most Caprice owners expressed for their vehicles. Size and weight notwithstanding, they seemed to regard this car as a design that's totally up to date in technology, safety and styling.

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Summary 11 of 11

And perhaps even more important, they seemed united in their conviction that the Chevy Caprice beats all of its competitors in terms of roominess, comfort, reliability, durability and dollar value.

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Editor's Report

Although we've accumulated lots of Caprice seat time, thanks largely to our recently completed long-term evaluation (page 32, June '91), this Owners Report gave us a chance to spend some time with the Caprice LTZ. When we returned it, we were convinced that this is the Caprice we'd most like to own.

The heart of the LTZ option is a suspension package designed to make this big sedan a little more responsive in terms of handling. Specific elements are stiffer shock valving, higher spring rates, a rear antiroll bar and a heavier-than-stock front anti roll bar. Tires are 235/70V-15 Eagle GT+4s, compared to the standard Caprice's 215/75-15s, and there are

bigger drum brakes, with cooling fins, at the rear, 11.0 in. versus 9.5.

Chevy has quickened up the LTZ's steering, reducing the number of turns lock to lock from 3.16 to 3.06, and the level of power assist has been reduced, improving feel.

What all this adds up to is a Caprice that's much more responsive, with more roll stiffness and consequent reduction in weight transfer.

It's also a little quicker than the rest of the Caprice lineup. Chevy has achieved this without doing anything under the hood--the LTZ's 5.0-liter V8 is rated the same as the standard Caprice. However, the LTZ rolls out with a 3.23:1 rear axle ratio, considerably

lower than the stock 2.56:1 and peppier than even the 3.08:1 that goes with the towing package.

While this adds a few rpm to the LTZ's engine speeds in highway cruising, it has no effect on fuel economy, and it knocks a few tenths off the LTZ's 0-to-60-mph performance. The standard Caprice manages this run in about 10.5 seconds, while the LTZ gets the job done in the high 9-second range. That's not exactly neck-snapping, but it's not bad for a 2-ton sedan.

Elsewhere, the LTZ has the same virtues that our Caprice owners love so well--lots of space inside, living-room comfort, solid

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

construction and world-class reliability. Solidity is a quality that has long set this car apart from most family sedans. Our long-term Caprice absorbed all sorts of New York City punishment with never a squeak or rattle, and other encounters with the new model, including the LTZ, suggest that Chevy has done well in carrying this most important trait forward to the new generation.

As for reliability, there's something to be said for an engine with almost four decades of development behind it. Chevy's evergreen small-block V8 may not have quartets of valves or duets of overhead camshafts, but it's quiet, smooth, torquey and unbreakable. About

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

the only criticism we can level is excessive intake noise at wide-open throttle.

As we said, the LTZ is our kind of Caprice. But with or without the LTZ option, it's easy to understand why owners love this big Chevy. It combines the best qualities of another age in American motoring with a wholly contemporary standard of durability. How many of today's cars do the same?

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE CHEVROLET CAPRICE*

Total miles driven: 2,107,966

Average miles 6274

driven:

Purchase price:

Average \$18,359

Range \$13,965-

\$22,529

Avg. mpg, 18.6/25.3

city/hwy:

Why did you choose the

Caprice?

Styling 43.4%

Owned other 34.7

Chevrolets

Size 15.9

Rear-wheel 12.2

drive

Chevrolet V8 9.4

Price/value 9.4

Model choice:

Caprice Classic 78.5%

Standard 21.5**

Caprice

Major options:

Power door 98.5%

locks

Preferred 82.7

package No. 1

Preferred 77.1

package No. 2

Premium sound 72.4

system

Handling 65.0

suspension

Limited slip 51.9

Leather upholstery 28.6

Specific likes:

Ride 48.5%

Styling 40.8

Overall comfort 35.9

Handling 31.4

Roominess 20.7

Economy 15.9

Specific dislikes:

No complaints 17.3%

Squeaks and rattles 6.6

Boring instrument 5.9

panel	
Paint quality	5.9
Doors too heavy,	5.1
bulky	
Fuel economy	5.1
Quality of materials	5.1
Suggested changes:	
No changes	31.7%
Revise instrument	3.8
panel	
More manageable	3.8
doors	
Improve horn	3.8
buttons	
Reduce dashtop	3.8
glare	
Reduce windshield	3.8
glare	
Eliminate squeaks,	3.5
rattles	
Improve fuel	3.5
economy	
Improve overall	3.5
quality	
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	49.9%
Good	44.2
Average	5.3
Poor	0.6
Comfort opinion, front	
seats:	
Excellent	65.6%
Good	30.9
Average	2.6
Poor	0.9
Comfort opinion, rear	
seats:	
Excellent	59.5%
Good	38.6
Average	1.6
Poor	0.3
Mechanical trouble?	
No	66.9%
Yes	33.1
What type of trouble?	
Electrical problems	22.8%
Transmission	14.0
Engine oil leaks	12.3
Wheel alignment	9.6
Brake squeal	8.8
Balky power door	7.0

locks	
Shift-point adjustment	7.0
Did you repair it yourself?	
No	96.5%
Yes	3.5
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	77.0%
No	23.0
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	42.7%
Good	43.1
Average	9.3
Poor	4.9
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	33.4%
Two vehicles	42.4
Three vehicles	14.0
Four or more	10.3
Principal driver:	
Male	45.4%
Equal	31.6
Female	23.0
Age distribution of owners:	
Under 29	0.6%
30-49 years	14.5
50-plus	84.9
Based on your experience, would you buy a Caprice again?	
Yes	72.1%
Maybe	19.4
No	8.5

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

** Station wagon and LTZ models not available at time of survey.

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[macro=`Jl(qchPath,"lumina_ownrep")']bitmaps.dib} **Chevrolet C/K Pickup**
Owners Report

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Chevy C/K 1500 styling and past Chevy truck experience led the list of purchase motivations. Over 82% of surveyed owners said they'd be happy to repeat their choice.

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Owners criticized the climate controls.

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Front-seat comfort drew lukewarm review.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the February 1994 issue of Popular Mechanics)

As you're probably aware, America's best-selling cars aren't cars at all. They're pickups: Ford and Chevrolet half-ton full-size pickups. The question is, what's so great about pickups? What makes them so popular? What gives them such wide--and steadily growing--appeal?

According to the Chevrolet C/K 1500 owners we surveyed, utility doesn't seem to have much to do with it. We noticed the same phenomenon among the Ford F-150 owners we surveyed in April 1991.

It's a matter of style. Full-size pickups, like Corvettes and Harley-Davidson motorcycles,

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Summary 2 of 8

say something about their owners. There's a certain panache. That's what the owners keep telling us.

Even so, the buying public has assigned its own perceptions to the Big Three pickup offerings. The Dodge W/D-150 has generally been seen as a farm truck, although the new T-300 may change all that. The Chevy and GMC C/K trucks are perceived as more carlike. Ford's F-150 fits somewhere in between.

With most C/K 1500 buyers, styling clinched the deal. The majority of our respondents also chose the upmarket Silverado version over the standard Cheyenne. This reinforces the notion that looks and luxury had a lot to do with the

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purchase decision.

The second most common reason that people bought C/K 1500s: They owned one or more Chevy pickups before. Repeat buyers made up 32.3% of our survey. Why did they repeat? For one thing, Chevy dealers seem to be treating their customers very well these days, especially in terms of service. No fewer than 95.8% of our respondents said their mechanical problems--minor to begin with--were repaired quickly and properly on the first visit. That's one of the highest first-fix percentages we've ever recorded. By way of contrast, owners of F-150 Fords reported that only 60.6% of their trucks' mechanical problems--similarly minor--were put right

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on the first try.

The majority of C/K 1500 owners also felt they'd been treated fairly on price. Price ranked third as a reason for deciding on a new Chevy pickup, and 12.3% mentioned price/value specifically. Another 10.1%, though, felt that Chevy pickups were too expensive. Incidentally, a fourth competitor, Toyota's T100, carries a base price almost \$2400 higher than the base Chevy C/K and \$2860 more than the base F-150.

One of the first things a pickup customer notices when he sits down with a Chevy--or GMC Truck--salesman is the tremendous number and variety of choices this line capacities, plus a staggering array of options,

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extras and special packages. The option lists for pickups far exceed any for passenger cars. Therefore, the C/K 1500 buyer has to be especially patient, careful and knowledgeable.

In our survey, a mere 0.5% opted for the \$18,585 high-performance 454 SS package (which has since been discontinued). Chevy's intermediate 305 V8 turned out to be another wallflower, the choice of only 7.3% of our respondents. And a mere 0.9% of our owners chose the 6.2-liter diesel V8.

More than 15% of our respondents expected better fuel economy. V6 owners did most of this expecting. Some V6 drivers were also disappointed with their engine's 165 hp.

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Summary 6 of 8

Actually, the V6 delivered quite respectable gas mileage, averaging 3 mpg more than the 350 V8. A few respondents voiced power/mpg complaints about the V8, but then much of this response has to do with rear-axle ratio and load. A majority of owners teamed the popular 5.7-liter version of Chevy's 350 V8 with GM's electronically controlled 4-speed automatic.

On the topic of comfort, a Texas driver called his C 1500 a "Cadillac with a bed." Overall ride quality was judged excellent by 54.7% of our respondents, and front seating received a similar endorsement. The rear seats of extended cab C/K 1500s, however, came in for a few frowns, 31.6% rating rear-seat comfort only fair.

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Another, more general complaint offers. First, the salesman explains that C means 2-wheel drive and K identifies the 4x4 version. After this decision, buyers have to choose between two cabs (regular and extended), four seating configurations, two bed lengths, Fleetside and Sportside boxes, four wheelbases, five engines, three transmissions, a variety of load and towing had to do with the relatively large turning circle of K 1500 4wd pickups, especially those on longer wheel-bases. A number of owners further suggested replacing the rear-only standard antilock brakes with 4-wheel ABS, especially since the present system works in 2wd only.

A handful of drivers grumbled about the

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Summary 8 of 8

heater and air-conditioner controls being too small, overly complicated and hard to balance for temperature. Another handful mentioned that the door-lock and power-window switches ought to be reversed. Yet fewer than a handful noted the absence of airbags.

Basically, despite these niggling nits and equally minor mechanical problems (covered by Chevrolet's 36-month/36,000-mile bumper-to-bumper no-deductible warranty), 82.2% of our C/K 1500 owners ended up saying they'd still buy a Chevy pickup if they had it to do over again. All in all, it sounds like a good testament to Chevrolet loyalty.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Generally speaking, we refrain from styling critiques in our new-vehicle evaluations. While there may be some pertinent remarks to make on this topic from time to time, our feeling is that most people can--and will--make up their own minds on this issue. So it is with the Chevy C/K pickups, along with their GMC Truck clones.

Our only observation here is that, at a glance, it might seem amazing that styling plays such an important role in pickup purchase decisions. However, the truth is that with such a myriad of product options for each of the Big Three half-tonners, functional distinctions get pretty blurry. Perhaps that's why utility doesn't show up as a buyer priority. Thanks to their

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option lists, each of the Big Three full-size pickups can be equipped for hard work, and their general capabilities are quite similar. So along with brand loyalty, something that's still a part of truck-buying, styling is one of the few real distinctions to be made. It is interesting to note, though, that in our most recent Ford F-150 report our owners cited previous experience as their top purchase motivation. Styling ranked third.

Our own experiences with Chevy and GMC Truck pickups over the years have been generally positive, and our list of possible improvements is short. We agree with owners who criticize the climate controls, which are difficult to adjust for blend. And we certainly

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agree with owners who think 4-wheel ABS should be standard. Then there's the issue of roominess. Standard cab pickups have been short on legroom since time out of mind, and the current Chevy and GMC trucks are nothing if not traditional on this score. Ditto the Ford.

However, one of the few truly competitive points of the Toyota T100 is its roomy standard cab. And the new full-size Dodge Ram trucks seem likely to rewrite the standard cab rulebook for roominess. We're going to be seeing changes on this score. Extended cab versions of the Chevy and GMC pickups cure the cramped-cab syndrome, of course. But if you're looking for roomy rear seats in any

pickup, you're likely to be frustrated.

This brings us to another cautionary note: If you're thinking of buying a truck as a personal image-enhancer, you're setting yourself up for disappointment. While today's pickups are more civilized than at any time in the past, they're still designed as cargo-haulers. And rear springs designed to accommodate a half-ton of cargo don't provide the best ride quality when the cargo bed is empty.

That said, we think the Chevy and GMC Truck C/K 1500 pickups should be on your full-size shopping list. The small-block V8 has more development behind it than any engine in the world, the dealers are working hard to

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please and the full-size universe is small. You can check 'em all in a day.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE CHEVROLET C/K PICKUP

Total miles driven 1,608,859

Average miles driven 7380

Purchase price:

Average \$18,314

Range \$11,000-

\$24,900

Why did you choose the C/K 1500?

Styling 46.2%

Previous ownership 32.3

Price/value 12.3

Performance 7.7

Comfort 6.7

Power 6.7

Model choices:

C 1500 2wd 53.9%

K 1500 4wd 46.1

Trim level choices:

Silverado 79.2%

Cheyenne 20.4

454 SS 0.5

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 95.0%

Tilt steering wheel 81.9

Fleetside bed 81.1

Premium sound 76.8

system

Short bed 64.1

Heavy-duty cooling 54.0

Tow hooks 51.7

Regular cab 50.5

Extended cab 50.0

Sliding rear window 38.2

Flexible Duragrille 37.8

Trailer package 36.4

Long bed 35.2

W/T-1500 work 30.3

equipment

Cold-climate package 29.6

Off-road package 25.0

Sport performance 21.2

suspension

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

4.3-liter V6 17.1/20.6

5.0-liter V8 15.5/19.2

5.7-liter V8 14.1/17.4

5-speed manual 16.2/19.2

4-speed automatic 14.9/18.3

Engine choices:

5.7-liter V8	61.1%
4.3-liter V6	29.7
5.0-liter V8	7.3
6.2-liter diesel V8	0.9
7.4-liter V8	0.5

Transmission choices:

4-speed automatic	87.2%
5-speed manual	9.6

5-speed manual:

extra-low First gear	3.2
----------------------	-----

Engine power:

Excellent	56.8%
Good	36.5
Average	5.7
Poor	1.0

Handling:

Excellent	63.2%
Good	32.1
Average	4.7
Poor	0.0

Braking:

Excellent	60.6%
Good	37.8
Average	1.6
Poor	0.0

Overall performance:

Excellent	60.4%
Good	36.5
Average	3.1
Poor	0.0

Control layout:

Excellent	50.5%
Good	38.9
Average	5.8
Poor	4.7

Instrumentation:

Excellent	61.8%
Good	30.9
Average	6.3
Poor	1.0

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	62.3%
Good	34.6
Average	3.1
Poor	0.0

Specific likes:

Styling	50.8%
Ride quality	45.4
Handling	28.4

Comfort	25.7
Performance	19.7
Power	18.0
Specific dislikes:	
No complaints	15.7%
Mpg lower than expected	15.1
High price	10.1
Handling	7.5
Needs more power	6.3
Noises and rattles	4.4
Suggested changes:	
More interior space	14.4%
No changes	9.8
Improve seating comfort	6.1
Night-visible controls	6.1
More power	6.1
Reduce noises and rattles	5.3
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	58.9%
Good	35.5
Average	4.2
Poor	1.4
Front seat comfort:	
Excellent	55.2%
Good	38.7
Average	4.7
Poor	1.4
Rear seat comfort:	
Excellent	28.2%
Good	37.7
Average	31.6
Poor	2.6
Any mechanical trouble?	
No	73.5%
Yes	26.5
What type of trouble?	
Front-end alignment	19.0%
Rough-shifting automatic	13.2
Air conditioning	6.9
Door-lock pin	6.9
Repair it yourself?	
No	96.5%
Yes	3.5
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	95.8%
No	4.2
Dealer service opinion:	

Excellent	41.4%
Good	50.7
Average	7.2
Poor	0.7

Dealer sales policy :

Excellent	51.9%
Good	40.0
Average	8.1
Poor	0.0

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	17.2%
Two vehicles	41.9
Three vehicles	24.7
Four or more	16.4

Principal driver:

Male	86.7%
Female	11.0
Equal	2.4

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	9.8%
30-49	48.9
50-plus	41.4

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Chevrolet C/K 1500 pickup if you had it to do over again?

Yes	82.2%
Maybe	15.0
No	2.8

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Chevrolet Lumina Owners

Report

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Styling strongly influenced Lumina buyers. Car has a pleasing aero shape and is more angular than its Taurus rival. Fit and finish received high marks.

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Dash layout is clean, but gauges are small. The speedometer is especially difficult to read.

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Fuel-injected 3.1-liter V6 pulls strongly, but is noisy when pressed hard.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the April 1990 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

Chevrolet set its sights high when designing the Lumina as a 1990 model. The objective was to create a world-class vehicle in terms of customer features -- things the owner comes in contact with in the car, things he can touch, see and smell. Chevy's idea was to take the collective features gleaned from other cars and integrate them into a new car with a character all its own.

That's a tall order by any standard. And all too often, a car that seems destined for perfection on the drawing board has taken its lumps from corporate bean counters looking to trim production costs.

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Then again, design visionaries have little control over what actually happens to the car as it rolls down the assembly line. So it's interesting to note how actual owners see the Lumina in light of Chevrolet's professed lofty world-class standards for the automobile.

Chevrolet appears to have done its homework in designing a car that's relatively trouble-free, if our survey of owners is any indication. More than 70 percent of Lumina owners indicated that the car gave them no mechanical problems. Chevy continues to shine in the dealer service area. Of those who drove back (or were towed back) to the dealership because they experienced mechanical difficulty, 77 percent indicated

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that the dealer was able to correct the problem on the first try.

The Lumina also gets high grades from owners in workmanship. Here, more Lumina owners rated the car as "good" (50.5 percent) than "excellent" (45.6 percent).

But when you combine the ratings for a composite excellent/good score, the picture gets much rosier with the Lumina chalking up a 96.1 percent average. Lumina is a big car with room enough for six passengers. Riding on a 107.5-in. wheelbase, Chevy's version of the GM-10 platform is the largest front-wheel-drive Chevy ever produced. Big cars provide more interior room and usually

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Summary 4 of 7

are heavier -- all the ingredients it seems that are needed for a very comfortable automobile.

Far from being an econo-stripper, Lumina comes with a host of standard features including 4-wheel power disc brakes, basecoat/clear-coat paint, 2-side galvanized body panels, full stainless-steel exhaust, wet-arm wipers and Scotchguard fabric protector on the upholstery.

But many Lumina owners felt that Chevy didn't go far enough with its comfort engineering , specifically when it came to the front seats. Only 62.8 percent of those surveyed gave the front seat an "excellent" rating. Some owners felt that the Lumina seats

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were too firm. Related complaints included criticism of the small glovebox and a problem with the shoulder harness rubbing on necks -- a common complaint with many 1990 cars. Government safety regulations changed and so did shoulder harness pivot points.

As in most surveys we take, styling was still the primary reason for buying the car. Some owners noted that the Lumina came out late in the game in the area of aerostyling. As one owner put it, "Chevy has another winner, but why did they wait so long?"

Handling also came in for considerable praise, especially on snow and ice, where drivers agreed that front-wheel drive

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Summary 6 of 7

really comes into its own. And several owners volunteered that the Euroversion corners as if mounted "on rails." Another area of solid satisfaction had to do with the Lumina's riding qualities. Power and performance, especially with the 3.1-liter V6, pleased most purchasers, 22.0 percent citing that aspect of the Lumina as a specific like. Owners generally characterized the car as "economical and snappy."

Chevrolet reaped the benefits of a stronger Iron Duke 2.5-liter, fuel-injected 4-banger for the 1990 model year. Cylinder head and camshaft changes punched up horsepower an additional 12 percent to 110 at 5200 rpm. But

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Summary 7 of 7

the Lumina really wakes up when fitted with the new 3.1-liter V6 with multiport fuel injection. This engine delivers 135 horse-power at 4400 rpm, and comes standard in the Euro model and is optional in standard Luminas.

The big question, the one that really asks owners to lay out their overall opinion on a car, remains: Would you buy this car again next time? A positive response by only 59.0 percent of the owners indicates that all is not well in Luminaland, despite high satisfaction with most of the specific areas we survey.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Bread-and-butter family transportation usually means boring cars with boring styling and boring performance. But though Chevy's Lumina, with the Euro option (the car we evaluated), may not be perfect, it's far from boring.

Take styling, for instance. The Euro version, with its optional 16-in wheels, fat tires and full-deck rear spoiler reminiscent of those on earlier Pontiac Firebird models, gives the Lumina a muscle look. The muscle image is backed up by the car's 3.1 liter V6. While lacking some of the tire-shredding torque of a big-cube V8, the Lumina does feel its Wheaties when the stoplight turns green. But there's also a downside to the plucky engine,

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Editor's Report 2 of 4

and that is noise. Punch the loud pedal into the carpeting and you really hear it. The volume of sound entering the passenger compartment might be acceptable for a sporty car, but may be inappropriate for a family hauler.

Handling is one are where the Lumina Euro excels. There is minimal body roll when pressed in the corners. The big rubber puts a serious footprint on the ground and it's used to good advantage. But the price of the Euro's strong handling is stiff ride qualities. We felt it to be too stiff. Suspension technology has come a long way since the days when the accepted wisdom was to use super stiff springs to nail the car to the pavement. We

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Editor's Report 3 of 4

felt the Chevy engineers could have done a better job in their damping and bushing calibrations. Of course, a base Lumina without the Euro option would have a whole different ride and handling profile.

Steering, compared to Lumina Euro's good handling characteristics, come up lacking. The ratio is quick and there's no slop in the rack or linkage. But the feel is stiff and not spot-on precise. There is not enough power assist at low speeds, and not enough road feedback comes through to the driver. Still, overall performance of the Euro is excellent. Its lack of torque steer, balanced handling and ability to perform aggressive maneuvers would make a Camaro IROC-Z pilot feel at home.

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Editor's Report 4 of 4

Inside, the ergonomics, for the most part, are very good. There's plenty of room, and entry and egress in our 2-door coupe was especially comfortable. Our biggest complaint here is the positioning of the climate control panel -- square in the middle of the upper dash. Unless you've got long arms or like to drive with your seat so far forward that your nose leaves vapor marks on the inside of the windshield, you won't like it.

All the gauges are laid out very neatly, but are on the small side. The speedo with its crowded dial is especially difficult to read.

In spite of some shortcomings and details, the Lumina still will haul the family to its destination with alacrity and in style.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE CHEVROLET LUMINA*

Total miles driven: 1,507,837

Average miles per gallon:

With 2.5-liter Four

In town 23.0

On the highway 29.6

With 3.1-liter V6

In town 21.3

On the highway 28.2

Series chosen:

Standard Lumina 58.4%

Lumina Euro 41.6

Body styles chosen:

4-door sedan 97.7%

2-door coupe 0.3

Engine selection:

3.1-liter V6 83.7%

2.5-liter Four 16.3

Major options chosen:

Air conditioning 99.3%

Premium sound system 78.9

Power door locks 74.9

16-in. wheels 50.0

Why did you choose the Chevrolet Lumina?

Styling 59.8%

Roominess 19.2

Size 17.8

Price is right 13.0

Good handling 12.7

Specific overall likes:

Exterior styling 53.0%

Handling 43.3

Riding qualities 34.7

Comfort 33.2

Power 22.0

Roominess 19.0

Specific dislikes:

Rattles and noises 14.0%

Glovebox too small 12.8

No complaints 12.8

Shoulder harness rubs 7.4

neck

Front bench seat 6.2

Upholstery hard to clean 6.2

What changes would you like?

No changes 26.2%

Bigger glovebox	15.2
Greater silence	9.0
Reposition shoulder harness	6.6
Make power seat available	5.3
Buckets instead of bench seat	5.3

How much did you pay?

Average	\$14,448
Range	\$11,500-\$18,000

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	45.6%
Good	50.5
Average	3.9
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion:

Front seats:	
Excellent	62.8%
Good	32.2
Average	4.0
Poor	1.0
Rear seats:	
Excellent	52.8%
Good	40.6
Average	5.6
Poor	1.0

Had any mechanical trouble?

No	71.6%
Yes	28.4

What type of trouble?

Electrical system	23.5%
Rough shifts	14.1
Brakes	10.6
Fuel injection	7.1
Power steerin	7.1
Cold starts, balkiness	7.1

Did you repair it yourself?

No	95.2%
Yes	4.8

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	77.0%
No	23.0

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	39.9%
Good	44.4
Average	11.2
Poor	4.5

Number of vehicles owned:

This car only	33.6%
---------------	-------

Two cars	36.8
Three cars	19.1
Four or more cars	10.5

Would you buy a Lumina again?

Yes	59.0%
Maybe	35.2
No	5.8

Would you buy a Chevrolet product again next time?

Maybe	64.2%
No	22.3
Yes	13.6

Principal driver:

Female	49.0%
Male	41.8
Equal	9.2

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29 years	5.0%
30-49	34.5
50-plus	60.6

*Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Chevrolet S-10 Owners

Report

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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More of our respondents bought this truck based on the appeal of its sporty, brutish looks. The rest of the package and its low price kept them happy.

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Redesigned dashboard is easily legible.

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Comfort is good really for only two.

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Summary

Pickups have come a long way since the Reo Speedwagon, and millions of urban Americans who 10 years ago wouldn't have dreamed of owning a truck now do. Anesthesiologists and archeologists, hunters and housewives bought pickups for all sorts of reasons. Utility did enter, but if pickups weren't fun to drive, most of these workhorses would still be down on the farm.

The Chevy S-10 came out originally as a 1982 model and didn't change much until 1994. That year Chevrolet restyled the compact S-10 bumper to bumper, stretching overall length 10 in., widening the vehicle 3 in. and adding nearly 2 in. to the height. The regular and

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Summary 2 of 8

extended cabs got bigger, seats and instrument panel grew more comfortable and harmonious, designers pushed the windshield forward and raked it more, and a lot of work went into sealing, insulating and tightening. What the Bowtie Boys and everyone else in the industry recognized was that buyers craved as much comfort and performance in a pickup as in a car and truck utility and toughness. So those were some of the attributes the 1994 S-10 took on.

Though we surveyed Chevy owners, the GMC Sonoma shares the S-10's DNA and shares all of its attributes.

Our Owners Report covers the 1994 S-10

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Summary 3 of 8

but could just as easily apply to the 1995 model. Important changes for 1995 include a driver's-side airbag--something our 1994 owners asked for--and a drop in base price. The base 1994 S-10 carried a \$10,125 sticker while its '95 counterpart lists for \$9655, even with the airbag, side-impact door beams and high-mounted stoplight. However, not many people in our survey bought stripped S-10s. They paid an average of \$14,211.

The most popular engine in our survey was the 165-hp iteration of GM's 4.3-liter Vortec V6. There's also an "Enhanced" version of this same engine that delivers 195 horses. The high-output V6 attracted 22.5% of our

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respondents. The base 2.2-liter Four, rated at 118 hp, ended up powering 30.6% of our S-10s. And while most owners of the Four said it had enough power for their needs, 7.3% told us they wished they'd opted for one of the V6s instead. The 165-hp V6 costs \$850 more than the Four in 2wd models and includes 4-wheel antilock brakes instead of rear-only ABS. (The Four with 2wd comes with rear-wheel ABS while V6s and/or 4wds all now have 4-wheel ABS.)

The S-10 offers a daunting menu of equipment choices. Basics include the two cab sizes, long and short boxes, two engines in three power ratings, 5-speed manual or 4-

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speed automatic transmissions, 2- and 4-wheel drive with manual or electronic shift, plus nine different suspension packages. That's not all, you still have to decide about the LS appearance and trim group, the 195-horse 2wd SS performance/trim package, the ZR2 on/off-road package, the cold-climate package, trailering equipment, premium sound system, air conditioning, bucket or bench seats, sliding rear window and on and on.

The main reason most owners put themselves behind the wheel of an S-10 was its very bold, sporty new look. More than half listed styling as the reason they bought this pickup.

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What they liked, after styling, was the S-10's ride and seating comfort. "There's a lot of room to get comfortable," commented a Massachusetts financial planner. A West Virginia contractor noted, "Interior size is great. I'm 6-4 and weigh 300 pounds and I'm comfortable driving this S-10." A few owners pointed out, though, that the fold-up side seat in the extended cab was strictly for one kid on a short hop.

The truck's comfort goes beyond interior room. "It's quieter than most cars I've driven," wrote a Texas engineer. That's because there's more than the usual amount of weatherstripping on the double-walled doors.

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Summary 7 of 8

There's also semiflush glass, wind-tunnel-silenced outside mirrors plus lots of sound deadener throughout the cab and under the hood.

Workmanship was rated excellent by 61%, and only 29% of our respondents reported any type of mechanical problem. Brakes tended to grab after the pickup had been outside overnight in cold, wet weather. A few drivers also reported sponginess in the brake pedal. Dealers were judged good but not great.

One statistic that surprised us was the "Yes, I'd buy it again" figure. Even acknowledging that most S-10 owners felt deeply about their trucks, we didn't expect 71% to tell us they'd

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go for the S-10 again next time. The S-10 is, after all, a 2+1 seater at best, and lots of owners have growing families. So where did they plan to put future offspring? And then we looked at the responses to how many cars and trucks they owned in total. All but 22.6% already listed two or more vehicles in the family. So the S-10 became a "second car" of sorts. In some cases, a third or fourth car. And that's why these guys (87.6% male ownership) could be so cavalier. It seems like the passion that put them in trucks will keep them in trucks.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

While nobody was really looking, something very interesting happened in the fun-to-drive auto market. The compact pickup truck has become the inexpensive sportster of the '90s. A passenger compartment that's equipped (typically) with a couple of bucket seats, a potent engine, maybe a 5-speed and rear-wheel drive that lets you break out the rear end, all in a package that's priced under most passenger cars, is just hard to resist.

But in reality, the pickup has actually transcended all of the sporty cars that have been. The pickup offers something that no sports car ever could. Just add up the practicality of the whole thing--not only is a

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

compact pickup less expensive to buy than just about any sporty car, it's also less expensive to insure and maintain than a sporty car. And there's all of that utility available--compliments of that cargo bed sitting above the rear wheels.

Then in the case of the Chevy S-10, and its kissing cousin, the GMC Sonoma, you add the undeniable sex appeal of its sporty sheetmetal and the allure of a modern interior. That interior, of course, can be adorned with such important amenities as a/c, a respectable sound system and power windows. Hey, this is a very hard-to-resist have-fun driving package.

Naturally, to have even more fun, Chevy

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

(and GMC) offers more for some more green--more power with a stronger V6, off-road capability and on-road seriousness with various suspension and tire packages. And regardless of which option boxes you check off when ordering one of these--extended cab or regular, hot motor or cool, AM/FM or cassette--you automatically get that cargo box in back. No matter what your pals at the club may say, no matter how crazy your mom or your wife may think you are, this thing is practical. There are just a myriad number of uses for that cargo box. Or leave it empty all the time and just enjoy the drivetrain and the cab.

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

If you don't want to leave the cargo bed empty--like when someone calls your "practical" bluff--Chevy has added a clever touch. Notches in the sidewalls of the cargo bed accommodate 2 x 6s upon which you can lay a sheet of plywood to create a second floor in the cargo bed.

The compact pickup is definitely the sportster of this time and Chevrolet (and GMC) has absolutely figured out the formula. The S-10 is fun, responsive and sporty. Oh sure, it's still a truck, so the steering is slower than you might like, and the ride--especially when the cargo bed is empty and the road is rough--can be harsh. But the fun of driving,

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

and even riding in, this well-designed well-executed small truck more than compensates for those complaints. And don't forget, there's all that potential utility sitting there behind you.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE CHEVROLET S-10*

Total miles driven	1,515,520
Average miles driven	6827
Purchase price:	
Average	\$14,211
Range	\$9310-\$21,154
Series and drivetrain choices:	
S-10 LS 2x4	55.7%
Base S-10 2x2	28.3
S-10 LS 2x2	13.9
Base S-10 2x4	2.2
Engine choices:	
4.3-liter 165-hp V6	46.8%
2.2-liter 118-hp Four	30.6
4.3-liter 195-hp V6	22.5
Transmission choices:	
4-speed automatic	62.8%
5-speed manual	37.2
Cab type:	
Regular	55.4%
Extended	44.6
Bed type:	
Standard 6.05 ft.	91.7%
Longbed 7.38 ft.	8.3
Why did you choose the S-10 pickup?	
Styling	50.5%
Price/value	21.6
Previous ownership	18.6
Power/performance	9.3
Economy of operation	8.3
For hauling	8.3
Roominess	8.3
Options/Accessories:	
Air conditioning	84.1%
YC5 Appearance package	65.6
Premium sound system	62.7
Alloy wheels	57.7
Sliding rear window	23.8
Locking differential	22.1
Cold-climate package	20.9
Electronic-shift transfer case	16.4
SS performance/trim package	16.4
Trailer equipment	12.9
ZR2 on/off-road package	8.3
ZM6 off-road package	4.6

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

2.2-liter Four	22.4/26.9
165-hp 4.3-liter V6	18.7/22.7
195-hp 4.3-liter V6	18.7/22.9
5-speed manual	21.3/25.5
4-speed automatic	18.8/23.0

Specific likes:

Styling	58.7%
Ride quality	29.6
Comfort	28.0
Handling	24.9
Powerful engine	24.9
Economy	20.1
Roominess	14.3

Specific dislikes:

No complaints	16.2%
Not enough power	12.2
Mpg lower than expected	10.1
Brakes grab, spongy pedal	8.1
Paint chips easily	6.1
Road and wind noise	4.7
Seating comfort	4.7

Suggested changes:

No changes	15.6%
Make airbags available	8.3
More powerful engine	7.3
More comfortable seats	6.4
Greater interior space	6.4
Fix wet brake performance	4.6
Offer more options	4.6

Engine power:

Excellent	48.4%
Good	39.6
Average	9.8
Poor	2.2

Handling:

Excellent	52.4%
Good	43.6
Average	3.6
Poor	0.4

Braking:

Excellent	50.4%
Good	39.3
Average	8.5
Poor	1.8

Overall performance:

Excellent	51.6%
Good	44.4
Average	3.1

Poor	0.9
Control layout:	
Excellent	53.5%
Good	44.2
Average	2.2
Poor	0.0
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	54.9%
Good	42.9
Average	1.8
Poor	0.4
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	60.9%
Good	36.0
Average	2.7
Poor	0.4
Overall convenience:	
Excellent	57.2%
Good	40.5
Average	2.3
Poor	0.0
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	61.0%
Good	33.6
Average	4.9
Poor	0.4
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	64.0%
Good	32.0
Average	3.1
Poor	0.9
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	
Excellent	22.3%
Good	33.9
Average	25.0
Poor	18.8
Any mechanical trouble?	
No	71.0%
Yes	29.0
What type of trouble?	
Misc. electrical	13.4%
Automatic transmission	13.4
Alternator	10.4
Brakes	10.4
Manual shifter	9.0
Vacuum hoses	6.0
Windshield wipers	6.0
Repair it yourself?	
No	98.5%
Yes	1.5
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	

Yes	66.1%
No	33.9

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	47.4%
Good	40.7
Average	9.1
Poor	2.9

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	43.9%
Good	39.5
Average	13.6
Poor	3.1

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	22.6%
Two vehicles	47.3
Three vehicles	15.0
Four or more	15.1

Principal driver:

Male	87.6%
Female	11.0
Equal	1.4

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	22.0%
30-49	38.1
50-plus	39.9

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Chevrolet S-10 pickup if you had it to do over again?

Yes	71.0%
Maybe	23.7
No	5.4

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Owners Report

Chevrolet Suburban

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Form follows function. The Suburban looks just like what it is: a very big, truck-based station wagon. Lines are clean, doors open wide and step-up height is truck-size.

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For '95, steering wheel gets an airbag.

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Big seats mean it's a stretch to the radio.

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Summary

They call them "Texas Cadillacs" in the Lone Star State. Elsewhere they're Suburbans. Chevrolet (and GMC) builds Suburbans as roomy as barns and every bit as useful. Owners find them great for towing in style.

Actually, towing boats and trailers turned out to be the main reason most people in our survey bought Suburbans. All versions of the vehicle come with a 42-gallon fuel tank. For an extra \$345 you can order the optional trailering package that includes a weight-distributing platform hitch, oil coolers for engine and transmission, trailer wiring harness, heavy-duty flashers and a deeper axle ratio.

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Summary 2 of 10

The Suburban used to have direct competitors, like the old International-Harvester Travelall and Dodge W100 Power Wagon. Now it's the last of a breed. Next year it will have some competition in the form of a smaller but still full-size 4-door Chevy Tahoe and GMC Yukon. Soon after there will be a 4-door Ford Bronco. But for now, the Suburban's main competition consists of full-size vans.

Most of our respondents chose the Suburban K2500, meaning the 3/4-ton version with 4-wheel drive. In GM-speak, K indicates 4wd, C means 2wd while 1500 designates 1/2-ton and 2500 signifies 3/4-ton. And nearly

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Summary 3 of 10

everyone selected the Silverado trim level, an option that's part of "preferred equipment" groups costing \$3812 to \$5581 extra. The base K2500 4wd with the 350 V8 lists for \$24,158 and includes Chevy's Insta-Trac shift-on-the-fly 4wd. The only transmission available is the 4-speed Hydra-matic, but in two forms: the standard 4L60E for Suburbans under 8500-lb. GVWR and the heavy-duty 4L80E for vehicles over that weight rating. Of the two, the 4L60E has slightly lower (numerically higher) gear ratios.

If all this sounds truck-like, it is, because Chevy builds Suburbans on their full-sized pickup chassis. All running gear--engines,

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Summary 4 of 10

transmissions, frame, suspension, wheels, etc.--plus the body and interior from the back of the front seat forward, are basically the same as Chevy's C/K pickups. However, Suburbans get different suspension tuning. And 4wds use torsion bars up front instead of the 2wd's coil springs.

The Suburban seats five, six or nine, depending on which configuration you choose. A front bench and a split 60/40 folding second seat are standard. Or you can order front buckets instead of the bench plus a removable bench third seat. A few of our owners suggested that the second seat be shoved rearward slightly for more legroom,

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Summary 5 of 10

but overall comfort received excellent marks, especially in the front seat.

There are three engines available in the Suburban. The most popular is the standard L05 350 V8, which delivers 200 hp and 310 ft.-lb. of torque. Then there's the 454 V8 at 230 horses and 385 ft.-lb. Both have new intake manifolds with "quarter wave tuners" that cut engine roar at full throttle by knocking the harmonics half a wavelength out of phase. And finally there's the 400-cu.-in. turbodiesel V8 that's rated at 190 hp and 385 ft.-lb.

The 454--the Suburban's least-ordered engine--ended up taking the most verbal flak. "The 454 V8 isn't as peppy as I expected from

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Summary 6 of 10

so much displacement, and the mileage was horrible at the beginning," said a Michigan tool- and diemaker. Most of the 12% who wanted better fuel economy had chosen the 454. This engine delivered roughly 3-mpg less than the 350 V8 and 5 to 6 fewer mpg than the diesel. As for the diesel, several owners of previous models noted that lower gearing in the 1994 Suburban also caused a decrease in fuel economy.

Nearly 10% of our respondents wished for airbags, which weren't available for 1994 but are in 1995. One safety feature mentioned by several surveyees was "the security of size." Standard on all '94 Suburbans were 4-wheel

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Summary 7 of 10

antilock brakes, and while many owners praised this feature, others found the pedal a little mushy. A few said the normal rasping noise the ABS makes when activated surprised them the first time they heard it and that their dealers should have warned them about it.

As for handling, well, listen to the folks who drive them. "Handles like a 3/4-ton sports car, not a truck," wrote a Wyoming machinist. "This Suburban handles and drives as well as my parents' Lincoln Town Car," commented a Mississippi nurse. "Behaves like a vehicle half its size," opined a North Carolina design engineer.

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Summary 8 of 10

A few off-roaders, though, found the Insta-Trac a little slower than instant, especially when cold. "The 4wd mechanism takes too long to engage, needs a more positive arrangement," volunteered an Arkansas retiree.

Several owners remarked that the high seating position gave them a commanding view of the road, but others mentioned that the radio and tape deck were hard to see and reach "way out there in right field."

Nearly 60% of our respondents gave an excellent rating to workmanship, and another 38.6% marked it good. "This is the best American vehicle I've ever owned," concluded

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Summary 9 of 10

an Illinois public-safety officer. A Massachusetts stock selector stated, "Chevy is putting pride into its workmanship, and it shows in this product."

Almost two-thirds of our owners had no mechanical problems, and only minor woes plagued the other one-third. Bad alternators and other electrical troubles were the most prevalent, followed by poor wheel alignment, brake pull and differential leaks. Everything was repaired under warranty, and dealers usually lent customers loaners if their Suburbans had to stay in the shop overnight.

Many owners took cheer in the excellent resale value of their Suburbans,

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Summary 10 of 10

and 84.1%--an unusually high number--told us they'd buy Suburbans again next time. Only 1.6% said they wouldn't, and that's one of the lowest such figures we've recorded to date.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

For those who appreciate the ultimate in versatility, the Suburban has no equal. Whether it's wearing a Chevy bowtie or a GMC logo in its grille, the Suburban is unique in the marketplace. And for those who can afford to buy one and keep it fed, it is an absolutely wonderful vehicle.

The caveat about affordability is an important one. First of all, to fully appreciate the Suburban's virtues, you'll want one with 4wd, a very strong V8, the necessary trailering equipment, at least 8-person seating with air conditioning and stereo music all around. So you're looking at a mid-30-grand purchase price. You're also looking at a 5000-pound

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

vehicle that's geared to pull the Sun across the sky if need be, which translates into a thirst for fuel that's about twice as voracious as your basic subcompact sedan. It's not by happenstance that the Suburban comes ready to carry 42 gallons of no lead.

Nor is it by happenstance that the Suburban has such a broad appeal to those who have the money to own several other vehicles as well as a Suburban. Of course, the Suburban's appeal is not limited to those who can afford whatever they want. Truth is, it's not limited at all. With its incredible interior volume--after all there is still a huge amount of cargo room left over after you've put eight or nine full-

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

grown people inside--and bodacious pulling power, who wouldn't find the Suburban appealing? I mean, you can carry the starting lineup for the Detroit Tigers and all of their gear inside a Suburban--and still tow a trailer large enough to haul the rest of the team.

Okay, the Suburban is far from nimble and it's hardly the first choice for the urban dweller. But given the Suburban's girth, it handles remarkably well. Remember, it's a truck at heart. When the moves come quick and fast, the steering starts to lag in relation to your inputs at the wheel, but the truck tracks well and stays planted on the road. And despite the pickup-truck chassis beneath the

big body, the ride is comfortable and well-controlled. Even when unladen, there's much less harshness and chop than you get with the pickup that begat the Suburban.

Also remember that since the Suburban is big, and it takes up so much room on the road, some drivers can feel intimidated--either when they are behind the wheel or when they are on the road next to it--and it may not fit in every garage. And with all that room inside, some drivers may have trouble leaning all the way over to adjust the stereo. Forget about making it to the glovebox.

Personally, those are the kinds of problems I

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

can put up with, knowing that I'm behind the wheel of the best all-around vehicle in the world.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE CHEVROLET SUBURBAN*

Total miles driven	2,249,881
Average miles driven	8893
Purchase price:	
Average	\$28,399
Range	\$21,000-
	\$34,500

Why did you choose the Chevrolet Suburban?

Towing capability	40.4%
Owned Suburbans before	26.1
Spaciousness	24.1
Styling	12.7
Overall size	12.2
Comfort	11.4
4-wheel drive	10.2

Series choices:

Suburban K2500 4wd	35.0%
Suburban C2500 2wd	27.6
Suburban C1500 2wd	20.9
Suburban K1500 4wd	16.5

Trim level choices:

Silverado	92.4%
Upfitter	4.8
Cheyenne	2.8

Engine choices:

5.7-liter 350 V8	52.1%
6.5-liter 400 turbodiesel V8	24.1
7.4-liter 454 V8	23.7

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning	98.9%
Folding center and rear seats	94.4
Trailer package	86.2
Premium sound system	85.8
Locking differential(s)	67.9
Rear-area heater	67.2
Alloy wheels	53.2
Wheel flares	42.1
Roof-marker lamps	16.1

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

6.5-liter diesel V8	15.5/18.8
5.7-liter V8	13.3/16.2
7.4-liter V8	10.3/12.9

Specific likes:

Comfort	41.9%
Styling	33.5

Roominess	29.5
Ride quality	28.6
Handling	26.9
Power	22.5
Towing capacity	20.3
Specific dislikes:	
Poor fuel mileage	25.2%
No complaints	14.9
Noisiness	6.9
Brakes pull	5.4
Instrument-panel design	5.0
Price too high	5.0
Harsh ride	5.0
Suggested changes:	
Better fuel mileage	12.0%
Make airbags available	9.6
Improve dash design	6.6
Rear earphones for CD	6.0
Child safety door locks	6.0
No changes	5.4
More powerful engine	5.4
Engine power:	
Excellent	59.9%
Good	34.6
Average	3.9
Poor	1.6
Handling:	
Excellent	67.3%
Good	29.6
Average	2.7
Poor	0.4
Braking:	
Excellent	56.4%
Good	32.3
Average	8.2
Poor	3.1
Overall performance:	
Excellent	61.0%
Good	36.2
Average	2.8
Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	55.6%
Good	33.6
Average	7.0
Poor	3.1
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	60.4%
Good	34.1
Average	5.5
Poor	0.0

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	62.7%
Good	34.1
Average	2.7
Poor	0.4

Overall convenience:

Excellent	61.0%
Good	35.0
Average	4.1
Poor	0.0

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	59.8%
Good	38.6
Average	1.6
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	77.3%
Good	20.3
Average	2.0
Poor	0.4

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	53.6%
Good	40.9
Average	4.8
Poor	0.8

Mechanical trouble?

No	65.8%
Yes	34.2

What type of trouble?

Misc. electrical	14.9%
Wheel alignment	12.6
Brake pull	11.5
Leaking differential	10.3
Air conditioner	8.0
Power windows	6.9
Transmission	6.9

Repair it yourself?

No	98.9%
Yes	1.1

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	75.0%
No	25.0

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	52.8%
Good	32.5
Average	11.7
Poor	3.0

Dealer sales policy opinion:

Excellent	62.0%
Good	32.5
Average	3.1

Poor 2.4

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only 9.7%

Two vehicles 40.7

Three vehicles 27.1

Four or more 22.6

Principal driver:

Male 68.0%

Female 32.0

Equal 7.5

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29 2.4%

30-49 55.9

50-plus 41.7

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Suburban if you had it to do over again?

Yes 84.1%

Maybe 14.3

No 1.6

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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[macro=`JI(qchPath,"mini_ownrep")']bitmaps.dib} **Chrysler Concorde Owners
Report**

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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The windshield starts at the front axle centerline. The wedge starts at the front bumper. The design started a trend and lured many customers to Chrysler dealerships.

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Fake wood doesn't detract from dash.

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Comfort and roominess get raves.

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Summary

We're talking here about the Chrysler Concorde. It's one of a family of Chrysler LH-platform cars that also includes the Dodge Intrepid, Eagle Vision, Chrysler New Yorker and Chrysler LHS. The New Yorker and LHS have bigger trunks and C-shaped C-pillars, but other than that you'll find only cosmetic differences between the five LH nameplates: different end caps, instrument panels and trim. So our owners' remarks apply pretty much across the board.

In the Chrysler Concorde, the driver sits at the exact midpoint of the wheelbase, and, viewing the car in silhouette, the base of the windshield thrusts out to the front-axle

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Summary 2 of 9

centerline. That spatial relationship gives the Concorde an illusion of remarkable roominess, which makes the "cab-forward" concept so clever.

This and the overall styling of the LH cars had a great impact on our respondents. More than 60% cited styling as their cars' key feature, and almost 67% named styling as the main reason they chose the cars initially. It had a positive effect on a retired couple in Florida. "Our Concorde gives us the feeling of youthfulness and being stylish," they said. "We had a Dodge Dynasty before, and while it never gave us a moment's trouble, I always felt it was made for older people."

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Summary 3 of 9

Chrysler has tried to give the different nameplates individual identities and character. The Dodge Intrepid stands for traditional virtues: value, dependability, comfort and durability. The Eagle Vision has a more European flavor: sportiness, good handling. And the Concorde pampers its owners with luxury. While the cars are different in those and other subtle ways, they're all built on the same platform, offer the same two V6s, the same 4-speed automatic transaxle, the same strut-type 4-wheel independent suspension, disc brakes all around (except on the base Intrepid), the same steering. In other words, all the same mechanicals on the same

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Summary 4 of 9

underpinnings.

The cars do have differences in suspension damping and rollbar rates. Each one of the nameplates, in fact, offers several suspension options, and handling ranked as the second-best-liked attribute. Unfortunately, a few of our owners had misordered suspension systems--opting for the more aggressive types--and as a result complained of excessive ride harshness.

Road and wind noise bothered 16.1% of our surveyees. This had to do partly with the tires but also with poorly installed door seals and a general lack of sound deadening. A Florida retiree: "Considering the triple seal around the

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Summary 5 of 9

doors, the noise level should be much lower." A New York manager: "Ride is good, but noise isolation needs a lot of work. My car has the handling package, and the road noise is very, very irritating."

Performance garnered good reviews, even with the smaller V6. The two available engines are a 3.3-liter pushrod V6 rated at 161 hp and a dohc 24-valve 3.5-liter V6 that delivers 214 hp (1 hp per cubic inch). Both V6s are built by Chrysler, both have cast-iron blocks and aluminum heads, and both mate with an electronically controlled 4-speed overdrive automatic. Engines stand longitudinally ahead of the front axle, allowing equal-length axle shafts.

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Summary 6 of 9

The 3.3 V6 offers flex-fuel capability, meaning it's equally satisfied with straight gasoline or a 15% methanol mix. Average fuel consumption ranged from 19.3 mpg around town to 26.3 mpg on the highway--not bad for a 5- or 6-passenger sedan weighing 3300 pounds. The fuel penalty for the 3.5-liter's 53 extra horses came to 2 mpg in the city and 1.3 mpg on the highway, again a very decent tradeoff. As to the cost of purchasing the larger engine in, say, the Dodge Intrepid: The price of the 3.5-liter V6 is \$725, but then you also have to order about \$1650 worth of mandatory options that include 4-wheel discs,

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Summary 7 of 9

8-way power driver's seat and message center.

Quality was judged excellent by 62.9% of our owners, and 76.6% reported absolutely no mechanical difficulties. Of the 23.4% who did have problems, 28% mentioned that the automatic climate control didn't work right. This was mostly because of miscalibrated thermostats or bad control modules. At times the air conditioner came on when it wasn't supposed to, and in other instances the heater would go off and blow cold air into the cabin. Dealers repaired these and other flaws under Chrysler Corp.'s 3-year/36,000-mile warranty.

Potential safety hazards mentioned by our owners included poorly adjusted headlamps

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and hard-to-find horn minibuttons. During freezing weather, windshield wipers tended to stick under sheets of ice. A Texas salesperson called attention to "fumbly little controls for the radio and climate controls." And shorter drivers had trouble seeing the front and rear of the body when backing up or parallel parking.

Problems of a less serious nature: The trunk hinge arms sometimes crushed large cargo when the decklid was slammed. And we heard a few complaints of water leaking into the trunk, again caused by improperly installed rubber seals.

The vast majority of owners, though, brushed aside all complaints as minor and

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enthusiastically endorsed their LH cars for quality and modern refinement. "It's the latest engineering in great style," smiled a Florida retiree. A Minnesota maintenance engineer observed, "The Dodge Intrepid is built around the driver's seat." A New York executive: "My greatest experience with an American automobile since the 1960s!" And a Florida engineer summed it up with an opinion shared by many: "My Concorde proves that Chrysler Corp. has made a quantum leap to the top!"

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EDITOR'S REPORT

The advertising says that Chrysler changed everything with the LH sedans. And it did. Nobody can kick sand in Chrysler's face anymore, and the Chrysler Concorde--and its sibling cousins from Dodge and Eagle--have a lot to do with that.

Know what we like best about the Concorde? It's not a copy of anything else. It's a true original and one beautiful car. When the LH sedans were introduced in 1992, we gave them a PM Design & Engineering Award. We subsequently experienced a Dodge Intrepid ES in our long-term test fleet for a year. In both cases, we were not disappointed. The cars certainly lived up to their press releases after

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we presented the award, and our long-term test car proved the mettle of the design.

With a shared platform, powertrain and even many body components, it was an incredible challenge for Chrysler's designers to give each of the five LH cars its own identity and personality. Yet, remarkably, they have done it. The Chrysler Concorde is as unique to its customer base as is a Jeep Grand Cherokee sport/utility vehicle to its customers.

Sitting on the showroom floor, the Concorde exudes a luxury/performance aura that would allow it to move even farther upmarket--perhaps even to Lexus LS 400 and Infiniti Q45 levels--if it had the V8 horse-

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

power. As it is, the Concorde sits neatly in the near-luxury segment and with its 214-horsepower V6 holds its own against its major competitors.

There are three suspension tuning levels available on LH sedans. Level I, the softest calibration, is standard on the Concorde. Level II is available as an option. Level III, the stiffest calibration, is not available on the Concorde. By comparison, all three levels are available on the Dodge Intrepid and only Levels II and III are available on the Eagle Vision.

While Level I cars are the softest LHs available, even they are not floaty or wallowy. A Level II car firms up nicely and you'll find a

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

more taut, more controlled ride under you while giving away nothing in the ride department. Those survey respondents who complained about ride quality need to pay more attention to the order form next time.

The Concorde's powertrain allows it to cruise smoothly and there's plenty of power for passing. Some of you might find it a little lethargic off the line, but 214 horsepower only goes so far. Once up and running, you'll have no complaints.

The Concorde's interior can only be described as sumptuous. Leather seating areas have as much eye appeal as they do comfort, and you'd be hard put to find anywhere near

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this level of luxury anywhere else at a similar price. The fake wood on the dash still bothers some industry observers. We don't object.

In fact, we don't object to much of anything when it comes to the Chrysler Concorde and its corporate cousins. After two years, the LH sedans are still cars to be reckoned with in their market segments.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE CHRYSLER CONCORDE*

Total miles driven 1,505,639
Average miles driven 4920
Purchase price:
 Average \$21,442
 Range \$16,400-
 \$27,140

LH model choices:
 Chrysler Concorde 36.1%
 Eagle Vision TSi 18.4
 Dodge Intrepid ES 17.1
 Base Dodge Intrepid 14.9
 Eagle Vision ESi 13.6

Engine choices:
 3.3-liter V6 54.2%
 3.5-liter V6 45.8

Why did you choose the Chrysler Concorde?

Styling 66.9%
 Chrysler Corp. reputation 25.5
 Handling 21.2
 Roominess 15.9
 Price/value 15.6
 Standard equipment 13.9
 Comfort 11.9

Options/Accessories:
 Cruise control 99.1%
 Power windows and locks 98.1
 Power seats 87.6
 Antilock brakes 86.3
 Keyless entry 76.4
 Premium sound system 66.6
 Ride and handling package 60.4
 Antitheft alarm 55.0
 Traction control 52.8
 Integrated child seat 7.7
 Moonroof 2.9

Average miles per gallon:

With 3.3-liter V6
 In town 21.3
 On the highway 26.3

With 3.5-liter V6
 In town 19.3
 On the highway 25.0

Specific likes:

Styling	60.5%
Handling	52.2
Comfort	35.7
Roominess	29.2
Ride quality	24.1
Overall performance	19.2
Engine power	17.5
Specific dislikes:	
Road and wind noise	16.1%
No complaints	10.2
Hard to see perimeter	7.5
Misaligned headlights	5.9
Cup holder location	5.1
Windshield wipers	4.7
Disappointing fuel mileage	4.3
Horn-button location	4.3
Instrument panel layout	4.3
Suggested changes:	
Better noise control	13.6%
No changes	8.2
Extend headlight beam	7.7
Relocate cup holders	5.9
Better driver vision	4.5
Bigger horn buttons	3.6
Better-sealed trunk	3.6
Engine power:	
Excellent	61.4%
Good	37.0
Average	1.3
Poor	0.3
Handling:	
Excellent	77.7%
Good	21.0
Average	0.9
Poor	0.3
Braking:	
Excellent	66.9%
Good	30.3
Average	2.5
Poor	0.3
Overall performance:	
Excellent	71.3%
Good	27.4
Average	0.9
Poor	0.3
Control layout:	
Excellent	57.0%
Good	39.6
Average	3.4
Poor	0.0

Instrumentation:

Excellent	60.1%
Good	36.8
Average	3.4
Poor	0.0

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	54.4%
Good	33.4
Average	11.3
Poor	0.9

Overall convenience:

Excellent	57.5%
Good	39.6
Average	2.6
Poor	0.3

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	62.9%
Good	35.6
Average	1.6
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	67.8%
Good	28.1
Average	3.1
Poor	0.9

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	66.3%
Good	32.7
Average	0.6
Poor	0.3

Mechanical trouble?

No	76.6%
Yes	23.4

What type of trouble?

Climate-control problems	28.0%
Electrical	14.7
Transmission roughness	9.3
Noisy brakes	8.0

Repair it yourself?

No	98.7%
Yes	1.3

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	77.3%
No	22.7

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	47.0%
Good	38.8
Average	11.6
Poor	2.6

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	53.0%
Good	37.5
Average	7.0
Poor	2.5

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	21.6%
Two vehicles	48.1
Three vehicles	19.4
Four or more	11.0

Principal driver:

Female	53.9%
Male	45.7
Equal	0.3

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	6.7%
30-49	46.8
50-plus	46.4

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Chrysler Concorde if you had it to do over again?

Yes	70.8%
Maybe	27.0
No	2.2

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Chrysler Minivans Owners

Report

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Although owners like the looks of their second-generation Chrysler minivans, styling was fourth among best-liked features. Comfort, handling and roominess had the top spots.

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A small percentage of the owners suggested a redesign of the instrument panel.

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Interior comfort and the standard driver's airbag drew high praise.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the April 1993 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

In our first Owners Report (Aug. '84) of the then-new Dodge Caravan and Plymouth Voyager, survey respondents indicated that they found their new vehicles to be extremely well-engineered, well-built, roomy, comfortable, easy-to-drive, thoughtful alternatives to Detroit's traditional station wagons.

There were a couple of things our 1984 respondents didn't like about the early Caravans and Voyagers, however--tepid power and indifferent fuel economy. Original engine options were limited to a pair of 4-cylinders. Even with a 5-speed manual transmission,

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Summary 2 of 6

those 4-bangers didn't give the '84 models the grunt owners wanted. Nor did they measure up to their EPA fuel economy projections. Real-world fuel economy ranged from 19.0 to 25.5 mpg, according to our 1984 respondents.

Though their appearance is familiar, today's Caravans and Voyagers are considerably changed---bigger, heavier and better equipped. You can still get a Chrysler minivan with a Four, but only 17.3% of our 1992 owners did so. The rest went for one of the two V6 engines offered.

More power and more weight hasn't improved fuel economy---our owners reported anywhere from 18.2 to 24.1 mpg. But only

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Summary 3 of 6

4.5% of them said this was below their expectations, compared to 23.6% in 1984.

In 1987, Chrysler introduced the long-wheelbase Grand versions of the Caravan and Voyager. The luxurious Town & Country came along in 1990, using the same extended wheelbase.

Then in 1991, all three nameplates got a complete redesign, inside and out. Exteriors now appear less boxy. Interiors look even less spartan, more friendly. And all-wheel drive has joined the list of powertrain options. In 1992, Chrysler stole another march on its competitors by becoming the first minivan manufacturer to offer a driver's airbag, with a

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Summary 4 of 6

passenger's airbag as an option. Other safety options included 4-wheel antilock brakes and integrated fold-down safety seats for children.

The quality of Chrysler's new-generation minivans got respectable marks, with just more than half of our owners judging it as excellent and another 44% rating it as good. And most of the members of the survey group hadn't suffered through any mechanical problems.

No particular problem showed up enough for us to tabulate, and all complaints were relatively minor, like rattles in the sliding door, cold-engine hesitation and improper wheel alignment.

A number of details received praise from

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Summary 5 of 6

our owners. For example, turn signal repeater chimes remind drivers when a signal is operating when it shouldn't be, and another chime lets drivers know when the fuel level is getting low. The many storage compartments complement the fold-out cup holders, and there's a slide-out storage tray under the front passenger seat.

In the negative column, owners criticized the shoulder harnesses, especially those near the sliding door. They tended to entangle passengers getting in or out, and the straps chafed against some passengers' necks.

The small horn buttons on the airbag steering hub tend to be hard to find in an emergency.

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Summary 6 of 6

And a number of buyers felt that Chrysler charges too much for options, which are often wrapped in packages that include equipment they don't want.

Even so, owners of these minivans told us unequivocally that they couldn't have made a better choice. Nearly a third of our survey group had owned Caravans and Voyagers before. More significantly, almost 80% said they would buy a Chrysler minivan again.

As one owner put it, "It's a hard vehicle to outgrow."

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Creating a new market segment is what Chrysler did when it launched its minivans 10 years ago--- means that you'll eventually find yourself defending it. When it became clear that Chrysler had answered a need no one else had recognized, competing manufacturers mobilized to respond with minivans of their own.

But despite the offerings of GM, Ford, Toyota, Mazda, Nissan, Mitsubishi and, most recently, Volkswagen, Chrysler's minivans still dominate sales and give every indication of continuing to do so.

Based on our Chrysler minivan experience, including the Voyager pictured here, we see

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Editor's Report 2 of 4

two main reasons for this remarkable performance.

First, Chrysler's basic emphasis on carlike driving still sets the Mopar minivans apart from most of the crowd. Only the Mercury Villager/Nissan Quest are favorably comparable on this score.

Mitsubishi's Expo twins are smaller, aimed at a distinct sub-mainstream niche.

Second, Chrysler offers a much broader variety of models and equipment than its competitors. With apologies to Mr. Shakespeare, you could call it the As You Like It approach to minivan marketing.

Our sample Voyager reflected the other

traits that have helped to keep Chrysler's minivans on top--good fit and finish, quiet operation, smooth ride, good road manners, adequate power (from its Mitsubishi-supplied 142-hp 3.0-liter sohc V6) and styling.

In our travels around Los Angeles, our Voyager turned in overall fuel economy of just over 20 mpg, which is fairly typical for the class. We found no hint of squeaks or rattles, even though our tester had almost 10,000 miles on its odometer.

The Voyager's handling rates as thoroughly predictable. It resists haste in hard cornering, but so do most minivans.

Thanks to its recent redesign, the Voyager

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Editor's Report 4 of 4

and its stablemates are well provided with small-object storage. About the only item missing from the interior inventory is a readily accessible coin holder---not exactly what you'd call a weak point.

Every design has its limits, of course. If we wanted real towing capabilities---say 5000 pounds or so---we'd look at one of the rear-drive pickup-truck-based minivans like the Chevy Astro, GMC Safari or Ford Aerostar. The front-drive Chrysler minis don't do this.

What they do is provide pleasant, well-made, versatile family hauling. Some of the competing makes may do certain things better, but Chrysler's all-around minivan competence still sets the pace.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE CHRYSLER MINIVAN*

Total miles driven	1,287,284
Average miles driven	6101
Purchase price:	
Average	\$18,161
Range	\$12,600-\$24,000

Why did you choose a Chrysler minivan?

Past experience	31.2%
Roominess	27.4
Styling	17.7
Reputation	13.4
Price/value	9.7
Handling	9.1

Model choices:

Standard Plymouth	18.3%
Voyager	
Standard Dodge	16.4
Caravan	
Dodge Grand Caravan	11.9
LE	
Plymouth Grand	10.0
Voyager LE	
Dodge Caravan SE	9.1
Plymouth Voyager SE	6.8
Dodge Grand Caravan	5.9
SE	
Dodge Caravan LE	5.9
Plymouth Grand	4.6
Voyager SE	
Plymouth Voyager SE	3.7
Dodge Grand Caravan	3.2
ES	
Dodge Caravan ES	1.8
Plymouth Grand	1.4
Voyager	
Dodge Grand Caravan	0.9

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning	100.0%
7-passenger seating	99.5
Antilock brakes	39.0
Digital instruments	19.3
Handling package	18.7
Integrated child seats	14.3
Towing package	7.4
All-wheel drive	3.6
Cellular phone	2.4

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

2.5-liter Four	20.6/24.1
3.0-liter V6	19.5/23.9
3.3-liter V6	18.2/22.8
Engine choice:	
3.3-liter V6	44.4%
3.0-liter V6	38.3
2.5-liter Four	17.3
Transmission choice:	
3-speed automatic	55.0%
4-speed automatic	44.5
5-speed manual	0.5
Engine power:	
Excellent	53.2%
Good	40.4
Average	5.6
Poor	0.9
Handling:	
Excellent	57.8%
Good	38.1
Average	4.1
Poor	0.0
Braking:	
Excellent	51.2%
Good	42.4
Average	6.0
Poor	0.5
Overall performance:	
Excellent	53.0%
Good	43.8
Average	3.2
Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	44.2%
Good	49.3
Average	5.6
Poor	0.9
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	46.8%
Good	49.1
Average	3.2
Poor	0.9
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	53.3%
Good	41.2
Average	6.5
Poor	0.0
Specific likes:	
Comfort	42.4%
Handling	40.4
Roominess	40.4
Styling	22.7

Power	20.7
Ride quality	20.2
Vision	14.6

Specific dislikes:

No complaints	13.6%
Noises and rattles	12.4
Price	9.0
Passenger mobility/rear legroom	6.2
Fuel economy	4.5
Seatbelts	4.5

Suggested changes:

Better passenger mobility	12.9%
No changes	10.0
Redesign instrument panel	8.6
Make dual airbags standard	7.1
Make ABS standard	7.1
Eliminate rattles and noises	5.7
Improve outside mirror controls	5.7

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	51.8%
Good	44.0
Average	3.7
Poor	0.5

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	61.4%
Good	33.2
Average	4.5
Poor	0.9

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	41.3%
Good	49.3
Average	7.5
Poor	1.9

Mechanical trouble?

No	72.1%
Yes	27.9

What type of trouble? Complaints not statistically significant

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	82.1%
No	17.9

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	49.1%
Good	36.0

Average	12.4
Poor	2.5

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	14.5%
Two vehicles	66.5
Three vehicles	14.5
Four or more	4.6

Principal driver:

Female	56.4%
Male	36.8
Equal	6.8

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	6.9%
30-49	57.2
50-plus	36.0

Based on your experience, would you buy a Chrysler minivan if you had it to do over again?

Yes	78.9%
Maybe	18.8
No	2.3

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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[macro=`Jl(qchPath,"lhsedan_ownrep")']bitmaps.dib} **Dodge Dakota Owners**

Report

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Dakota's handling pleased most owners, scoring second on best-liked list.
Click on the photos above for more information.

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Dakota's dimensions, which are slightly larger than Ford Ranger and Chevy S-10/GMC s-15 competitors, was main factor in 36.8 percent of Dakota purchases. Styling ranked second.

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Interior drew complaints for marginal comfort and too much noise.

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Many owners felt the need for V8 power

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Summary

(This first appeared in the July 1990 issue of Popular Mechanics)

Chrysler has established itself as the niche-marketing champion among the domestic automakers, and the Dodge Dakota midsize pickup is one proof that the title is in the right hands.

Surveying the burgeoning pickup market in the early '80s, Chrysler product planners saw an opportunity for a truck scaled midway between minipickups like the Mitsubishi-built Power Ram 50 and full-sized models like the big Dodge D-W150 series.

Inching into the marketplace with a package slightly bigger than Ford's Ranger and the GM

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Summary 2 of 10

S-10/S-15 twins, the Dakota quickly established itself as an idea whose time had come, and Dodge marketers have been broadening the Dakota's appeal ever since.

Prices range from \$7995 for the 1990 S model to \$17,000 for the Sport convertible and there are now 12 models to choose from.

That's because in 1989 Dodge scooped the industry by adding a factory convertible to the Dakota line, creating a niche within a niche. And this year, there's also a Club Cab version on a 131-in. chassis.

According to Dodge, Dakota owners tend to be slightly younger than buyers of full-size pickups, and they also earn more, with a

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Summary 3 of 10

median income of \$35,000. We found that the Dakota appeals mostly to men ages 30 to 50 and that it doesn't attract many women drivers (only 9.4 percent).

The Dakota's market share has grown every year since its introduction, starting at 2.1 percent for 1987 and currently at 7.7 percent. For 1988, Dodge sold a total of 93,396 Dakotas, an impressive showing for a new truck. The only real competitor in the Dakota's size class remains the Jeep Comanche pickup, a sibling since Chrysler's acquisition of AMC.

However, the Dakota still has this niche pretty much to itself, and its success has been due partly to a long option list and also to a

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Summary 4 of 10

wide range of body styles, bed lengths and power-train choices. This is definitely not your average pickup.

Yet we found through our questionnaires that owners view the Dakota as no better than average in several important categories. Almost a quarter of our respondents, for example, reported mechanical problems of some nature, with a rough-shifting automatic transmission and a noisy 5-speed topping the list. We also recorded a number of electrical glitches, engine hesitation and so forth.

Dealer repairs ranked average, too, with just over half of the owners in our survey rating the backshop good and only a third deeming

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Summary 5 of 10

dealer service excellent. The Japanese would not be pleased with those marks. Fortunately, most repairs were made under Chrysler's 7/70warranty, but even so, a number of owners grumbled about downtime and mentioned that dealers put customer-paid repairs ahead of warranty work.

Workmanship turned out to be another area of definite averageness. Just over half the owners we queried rated workmanship good, while 46.2 percent gave it a mark of excellent. The Dodge Dynasty, built under the same corporate roof, managed an extra 10 percentage points in the excellent workmanship column, and even that's not prize-winning.

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Summary 6 of 10

No one mentioned pep, power and performance among the Dakota's best-liked features. However, 17.4 percent of our owners did have good words for fuel economy. On the other hand, a nearly identical number--15.7 percent--told us they'd expected more miles per gallon, and were disappointed by the 16/20 mpg they were getting from their 3.9-liter V6s, especially with the 4-speed overdrive automatic. (For the record, the EPA forecast was for 15/20 mpg.)

Owners of 4-cylinder Dakotas were considerably happier with their 22/26 mpg averages (the Four is available with 5-speed only).

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Summary 7 of 10

On that topic, for 1989 Carroll Shelby converted a limited number of Dakotas to V8 power by dropping 318s into 2wd versions. These weren't catalogued as production vehicles and were sold only by Shelby. In our survey, a few Dakota owners suggested that the 318 V8 be made available from the factory, and 8.7 percent suggested that some sort of larger engine, V8 or otherwise, should be made available. As it turns out, according to Dodge, that engine will become available as a 1991 option. One area of performance that did draw a noteworthy response was handling, cited by almost 34 percent as something they

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Summary 8 of 10

particularly liked about their Dakotas. This ranked second on the best-liked list behind styling, which won the hearts of almost 40 percent of our Dakota buyers.

However, Dakota's size scored ahead of styling as the primary reason for buying, vindicating the product planners.

Price was also an important consideration, and it was interesting to see that 14 percent of our owners had owned a Dakota prior to their current one. Of these, a hefty percentage opted for the extra space afforded by the new Club Cab edition.

In fact, almost 40 percent of the group owned Club Cab models.

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Summary 9 of 10

The Dakota's standard 2-wheel antilock braking system (ABS) came in for a fair amount of unsolicited praise. One gentleman in Louisiana told us that without ABS, he would have "bought the farm" after a freak cold snap left glare ice on local roads.

Ride comfort also met with hearty approval. The Club Cab option sold a lot of Dakotas, but most owners agreed that the Club Cab's rear seats were only good for children and pets. In summary, even though the Dakota's scoring was essentially so-so--fewer than 70 percent said they'd buy this truck if they had it to do over again--we did hear a lot of "I really love

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Summary 10 of 10

it" and "best truck I've ever owned" from many respondents. Admiration and enthusiasm for this mid-size pickup seemed to be much greater than the sum of its data.

The bottom line seems to be that the Dakota has a lot of personality, and, even though it's far from perfect, it endears itself to many of those who live with it.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Aside from the availability of a convertible top, size is the Dakota's chief claim to fame. It's the biggest small pickup truck you can buy.

But being biggest in a group of smalls can be a mixed blessing. People tend to expect the best of both worlds, and, as a consequence, may slide behind Dakota steering wheels with unreasonably high expectations.

Take fuel economy as an example. The Dakota gets better gas mileage than a full-sized V8 might-but not a lot, especially in the 4x4 version. If you expect super economy, you're going to be disappointed, just as some of our owners were.

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Editor's Report 2 of 4

Similarly, don't expect to sit three adults in the cab. Even with a bench seat, there won't be enough hip or shoulder room. Same for the cargo box--the traditional 4x8 plywood sheet won't make it.

The interior is fine for one or two, although we did whack heads against the roof hot-dogging for the pictures you see here. Steering was devoid of serious kickback jumping ruts in the sand pit, and at the same time not overly boosted on the freeway.

Engine power is adequate, but if you go for the 4x4, we strongly recommend staying away from the automatic transmission--there's not enough horsepower to comfortably coexist

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Editor's Report 3 of 4

with traffic. With the stick, shifting is precise, but won't be hurried.

Ride was trucklike, which means firm, well-damped and with too much spring rate in the rear. Like any pickup, Dakota rides best when it's carrying something in the box. But it's not as ponderous as a full-sized truck.

Fit and finish of the high-end truck shown here was excellent-for a truck. How well the tape graphics will last after a few seasons of brush-busting remains to be seen, but the body panels were straight, and the paint relatively shiny and deep.

Body panel fit was average, with large but consistent gaps. There's a good reason for this.

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Editor's Report 4 of 4

Like most pickups, the Dakota rides on a separate ladder-type chassis, which grades out low for torsional rigidity. Low torsional rigidity eliminates close tolerances between panels-the truck twists too much over rough surfaces.

We have several acquaintances who own Dakotas, including one contractor who has owned several. And with the abuse they see in that kind of service, we're happy to report that they seem to hold up extremely well.

The Dakota may not get rave reviews from all its owners, but it's not afraid of hard work.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE DODGE DAKOTA *

Total miles driven: 1,136,608

Average miles per gallon:

With 2.5-liter Four

In town 21.9

On the highway 26.3

With 3.9-liter V6

In town 16.2

On the highway 20.4

With 5-speed manual transmission

In town 19.6

On the highway 23.9

With 4-speed automatic

In town 16.1

On the highway 20.3

Why did you choose Dakota?

Liked the size 36.8%

Liked the styling 28.1

Price was right 17.8

Owned Dakotas before 14.0

Wanted the Club Cab 11.2

Liked the warranty 5.4

Roominess and carrying capacity 5.4

Series chosen:

Base Dakota 42.8%

Dakota S 38.6

Dakota Sport 11.0

Dakota LE 6.4

Body styles chosen:

Regular Cab 60.4%

Club Cab 39.6

Bed lengths chosen:

6-ft. bed 74.5%

8-ft. bed 25.5

Engine selection:

3.9-liter V6 82.3%

2.5-liter Four 17.7

Transmission selection:

4-speed automatic 70.6%

5-speed manual 29.4

2- an 4-wheel-drive selection:

2-wheel drive 87.4%

4-wheel drive 12.6

Major options chosen:

Air conditioning 71.0%

Optional sound system 66.5

22-gallon fuel tank	47.5
Alloy wheels	39.7
Limited-slip differential	37.9
Trail	29.9
Exterior styling	39.9%
Handling	33.8
Riding qualities	31.5
Comfort	30.0
Size	23.0
Economy	17.4

Specific dislikes:

No complaints	15.7%
Low fuel mileage	15.7
Rattles and noises	10.3
Comfort level	7.0
Engine not powerful	5.4

enough

Riding qualities	5.4
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What changes would you like?

Greater fuel mileage	13.8%
Make a larger engine available	8.7
Larger glovebox	7.2
Make seats softer	7.2
Higher horsepower	7.2
Reposition window-lift switch	7.2

How much did you pay?

Average	\$12,962
Range	\$7615-\$17,461

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	46.2%
Good	51.0
Average	2.4
Poor	0.4

Comfort opinion:

Front seats:	
Excellent	53.5%
Good	41.4
Average	3.9
Poor	1.2
Rear seats:	
Excellent	17.5%
Good	48.5
Average	26.2
Poor	7.8

Had any mechanical trouble?

No	76.2%
Yes	23.8

What type of trouble?

Rough automatic and noisy manual trans	18.0%
Electrical gremlins	8.2
Engine hesitation after deceleration	8.2
Speedometer registers high	8.2
Oil leaks	6.6
Hard to shift into reverse	6.6
Did you repair it yourself?	
No	87.9%
Yes	12.1
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	69.1%
No	30.9
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	32.6%
Good	50.3
Average	11.6
Poor	5.5
Number of vehicles owned:	
This pickup only	19.0%
Two vehicles	52.0
Three vehicles	20.6
Four or more vehicles	8.4
Would you buy a Dakota again?	
Yes	68.8%
Maybe	26.3
No	4.9
Would you buy Chrysler again?	
Maybe	50.2%
Yes	31.0
No	18.8
Age distribution of owners:	
Under 29 years	16.0%
30-49 years	48.6
50-plus	35.5

* Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or insufficient data.

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Dodge Intrepid Owners

Report

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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Intrepid's celebrated cab-forward design pleased most owners, who cited styling as their prime purchase motivation. Spacious interior and crisp handling also won praise.

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Owners liked dark-on-white markings.

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Overall roominess rated high marks.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the February 1994 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

At \$16,030, the Dodge Intrepid is the least-expensive member of Chrysler's new LH family. Next comes the Eagle Vision at \$17,487, then the Chrysler Concorde at \$18,441, the Chrysler New Yorker at \$24,294 and the top-of-the-line Chrysler LHS at \$29,046.

Excellent cars, according to virtually all of the many automotive writers and broadcast journalists who tested them. And the kudos were enthusiastically echoed by our Intrepid owners.

First, they found the Dodge Intrepid

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Summary 2 of 9

amazingly well equipped. Oft-mentioned--and apparently much appreciated--standard features ranged from the car's dual airbags to its V6 engine, its 4-speed automatic transaxle, its 3-abreast 50/50 front bench seat with folding armrests, tilt steering wheel, rack-and-pinion power steering, rear air-conditioning and heating ducts, speed-sensitive intermittent windshield wipers, headlight delay switch with warning chimes, AM/FM ETR sound system and full instrumentation.

To this, the up-market ES model adds 4-wheel disc brakes, touring suspension, polycast steel wheels, bucket seats with a center console, an electronic message

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Summary 3 of 9

center and a half-dozen additional comforts, all of which add \$1259 to the price of the base Intrepid.

With either model, buyers can order optional antilock brakes, low-speed traction control, two different air-conditioning systems, built-in child safety seats and a remote keyless-entry system.

The Intrepid comes in only one body style--an aerodynamic 4-door sedan. Besides winning a number of awards, it's a design that almost everyone seems to like. The cab-forward look drew terrific scores from nearly all of our respondents. Some three-quarters listed styling as their main

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Summary 4 of 9

reason for choosing this car over its main rivals--the Ford Taurus, Honda Accord, Toyota Camry and Nissan Maxima.

Another plus was roominess, which the Intrepid has in abundance. Chrysler simply produced a bigger basic package than the competition, which shows up the most in exceptional rear-seat roominess. The front bench seat makes this a true 6-passenger sedan. Both front and rear seating comfort received ratings of excellent from nearly 80% of the owners we surveyed.

The Intrepid's standard engine is a 3.3-liter pushrod V6, introduced in 1990. It delivers 153 hp, and while this doesn't seem like

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Summary 5 of 9

much for a 3200-pound car, most of our respondents judged its performance as excellent. Also, output of the 3.3-liter V6 has been increased by 8 hp--to 161 hp-- in 1994 models.

There's also an optional engine--a totally modern 3.5-liter 24-valve sohc V6. This powerplant produces 214 hp at 5800 rpm, with a redline of 5300. The 3.5-liter's 221 ft.-lb. of torque stretches from 2100 to 5600 rpm, so it gives a very broad powerband, important for use with automatic transmissions.

The larger V6 adds only \$625 to the Intrepid's overall price, and while the 3.5-liter makes a dramatic difference in launch and

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Summary 6 of 9

passing acceleration, it hardly cuts fuel consumption at all. We were surprised that only 11.7% of our owners chose the optional 3.5-liter version.

At the moment, all LH sedans are assembled in Canada. The Bramalea, Ontario, plant was patterned after Honda's U.S. facilities and borrows such traditional Japanese factory concepts as interactive assembly teams, just-in-time parts delivery and statistical-analysis quality control. Whatever its origins, the overall manufacturing philosophy works nearly 76% of our respondents gave workmanship a rating of excellent.

Handling was another feature Intrepid

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Summary 7 of 9

owners greatly admired--85% judged it excellent, an exceptionally high rating, particularly for a car in this size class.

The Intrepid's handling begins with a very rigid, solid body structure. Front MacPherson struts and multilink Chapman struts at the rear form the basic suspension system. The Intrepid's spring and shock rates come in three levels of tune: base, touring and performance.

At the head of a very short list of mechanical problems came a stubborn cruise control, which 20.7% had to take back to the dealer for repair. Nonmechanical complaints included several different types of door problems. The most common had to do with

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Summary 8 of 9

broken front-door limit straps. These tended to break most easily in subfreezing weather. Other door complaints included warped or twisted hinges, clicking noises and leaks. Chrysler put out a technical service bulletin on these problems, and owners reported that their doors were repaired under one of Chrysler's two available warranties.

Another frequent complaint--in fact, the most frequent complaint--touched on the Intrepid's headlamps, which some respondents found inadequate, even on high beam. Chrysler reports that a few units simply weren't adjusted properly at the factory, but a spokesman also added that they've recently

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Summary 9 of 9

re-engineered the reflectors and lenses to put more light on the road.

However, like most of the other Intrepid complaints, the headlight issue seems to be a minor flaw in an otherwise outstanding car. Almost 22% of our respondents had no complaints under the Specific Dislikes heading, and more than 9% were unable to suggest any changes.

There's no doubt that Chrysler scored an important coup with its LH sedans. The company needed a home run to stay in the ballgame. And according to the owners we surveyed, the Intrepid--the bread-and-butter LH--represents just that.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Somewhere, someplace there's an LH owner who's not happy. Maybe. Everybody likes these cars. The value is high for both stripped models and fully optioned models, although we'd probably skip checking off the box for the leather seating. It's too slippery to keep the editorial backside stationary on the seat when whipping around corners as fast as an Intrepid encourages one to go.

While the pushrod 3.3-liter V6 is fine, we strongly recommend the 4-cam 3.5-liter V6. There's little penalty in fuel mileage, and plenty of rewarding midrange torque to compensate. The traction control is one feature we really

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

haven't had much need for in the wilds of suburban New Jersey, but the few times we activated it, it worked fine. It manages to keep the front tires glued to the ground and reduce steering-wheel kickback at low speeds over loose gravel and puddles.

One of the few differences between the Dodge/Plymouth/Chrysler-flavored LH models are the headlights. The Intrepid headlamp is different from the others, and Chrysler is in the midst of re-engineering the headlamps on the Vision and Concorde. Most of the changes have to do with evening out the spread of light on the ground near the car.

Some owners in our survey complained

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

about headlights, but we really hadn't noticed any problem.

Similarly, we haven't noticed any problem with squeaks or rattles--every LH we've driven has been as tight as a bank vault and as quiet as a teenager sneaking back into the house at 3 am.

Yes, the performance suspension is firmer (and slightly noisier) than the standard. One thing that has been changed since our survey is to make the performance suspension truly optional, rather than bundling it with other options. This way a buyer who really wants a loaded car won't be forced to take the stiffer, noisier suspension.

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

Nor have we had any problem with the trunk release. Of course, we generally use the electronic trunk-release button on the key fob rather than reaching for the one on the floor.

As for the defroster, every LH in our experience has had the optional air conditioning with automatic temperature control. It's CFC-free, and it kept us cool in one of the nastiest, hottest and most humid New York City summers we can remember.

We use the cruise control a lot--it's just about the only way to keep from inadvertently achieving warp-drive speeds on the open roads when prudence would prefer maintaining a more politically correct velocity. And the

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

cruise control is as good as any we've seen, from the easy-to-find buttons on the steering wheel to its smooth acceleration when resuming speed after slowing for a tollbooth.

All-in-all, it's easy to see why our owners like these vehicles so much, and hard to understand when they've found even minor faults. Some people are never happy--but driving one of these cars is a good prescription for curing the blues.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE DODGE INTREPID*

Total miles driven 2,244,187

Average miles driven 5829

Purchase price:

Average \$19,019

Range \$14,866-

\$25,400

Why did you choose the Intrepid?

Styling 74.3%

Roominess 26.5

Handling 16.7

Price/value 11.9

Reputation 10.8

Ride quality 7.9

Model choices:

Standard Intrepid 54.6%

Intrepid ES 45.4

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 99.7%

Antilock brakes 41.0

Optional suspension 39.3

Leather interior 6.4

Integrated child seat 2.1

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

3.3-liter V6 21.3/26.9

3.5-liter V6 19.8/25.4

Engine choices:

3.3-liter V6 88.3%

3.5-liter V6 11.7

Specific likes:

Styling 64.5%

Handling 55.6

Roominess 38.5

Comfort 29.3

Ride quality 27.4

Engine power 17.6

Specific dislikes:

No complaints 21.7%

Headlight adjustment 12.5

Noise 11.8

Rear sightlines 7.3

Inadequate windshield

defroster 5.1

Vulnerable trunk release 5.1

Suggested changes:

Adjust headlamps properly 14.0%

No changes 9.2

Reduce noises and rattles 8.5

Improve defroster 7.4

Improve seat comfort	5.5
Relocate trunk release	5.2
Engine power:	
Excellent	61.8%
Good	36.9
Average	1.3
Poor	0.0
Handling:	
Excellent	85.0%
Good	14.5
Average	0.5
Poor	0.0
Braking:	
Excellent	72.0%
Good	27.0
Average	0.8
Poor	0.3
Overall performance:	
Excellent	73.3%
Good	26.4
Average	0.3
Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	71.5%
Good	26.0
Average	2.6
Poor	0.0
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	74.5%
Good	22.9
Average	2.3
Poor	0.3
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	62.1%
Good	29.2
Average	6.9
Poor	1.8
Overall convenience:	
Excellent	69.4%
Good	28.0
Average	2.6
Poor	0.0
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	75.5%
Good	22.8
Average	1.3
Poor	0.3
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	79.7%
Good	16.5
Average	2.8

Poor	1.0
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	
Excellent	80.2%
Good	18.5
Average	0.5
Poor	0.8
Any mechanical trouble?	
No	76.4%
Yes	23.6
What type of trouble?	
Cruise control	20.7%
Electrical system	12.0
Fuel gauge	10.9
Air conditioning	7.6
Engine noises	7.6
Transmission	6.5
Repair it yourself?	
No	97.8%
Yes	2.2
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	67.9%
No	32.1
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	54.4%
Good	36.8
Average	5.7
Poor	3.0
Dealer sales policy:	
Excellent	56.8%
Good	36.9
Average	5.0
Poor	1.3
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	22.2%
Two vehicles	42.9
Three vehicles	25.3
Four or more	9.7
Principal driver:	
Male	50.3%
Female	43.6
Equal	6.1
Age distribution of owners:	
Under 29	5.0%
30-49 years	44.7
50-plus	50.2
Based on your experiences, would you buy a Dodge Intrepid if you had it to do over again?	
Yes	79.0%
Maybe	16.2
No	4.9

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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[macro=`Jl(qchPath,"ram_ ownrep")']bitmaps.dib} **Dodge/Plymouth Neon**

Owners Report

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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Cut from a slightly different mold than most current small sedans, the Neon's styling remains one of its strongest appeals. The jury's still out on the headlights, though.

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Controls are clear and easy to use.

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Despite the car's size, there's lots of room.

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Summary

Say "Hi!" to the Neon, that cute, cuddly, little-but-big, all-new 1995 car that Chrysler Corp. rolled out--all bright and smiling--last January. Dodge and Plymouth dealers sell identical Neon twins, and the cars have been doing extremely well against such competitors as the Saturn, Corolla, Prizm, Civic and Escort.

And say "Hi!" to the Neon's \$9500 base price. This is up from the original \$8975 introductory price. Truth is, however, very few people buy strippers anymore--a mere 3.2% of our Owners Report respondents did--yet even the barest-bones Neon comes with dual airbags, side-door guard beams, power

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Summary 2 of 9

front disc brakes and a console between reclining bucket seats.

The majority of our surveyees (61.3%) opted for the slightly upmarket Neon Highline series, which costs \$1715 (at the time of our survey) more than the base car and whose standard equipment adds power steering, firmer touring suspension, a split folding rear seatback, dual remote side mirrors, AM/FM/cassette stereo, tinted glass, intermittent wipers, body side moldings and bright wheel covers. There's also a Sport series that comes with standard antilock brakes, front and rear stabilizer bars, 14-in. wheels with wider tires, tach, tilt steering

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Summary 3 of 9

wheel, power door locks, dual power mirrors, foglamps, remote trunklid release and more.

Remarkably, you can order some options separately on base and Highline Neons and not have to pay for packages that throw in a lot of stuff you might not want. Antilock brakes, for example, cost \$565 extra, period. Or you can get an integrated child seat for \$100. Intermittent wipers in the base Neon cost \$66. Air conditioning, though, is available only as part of broader option packages, but the costs of these packages seem quite reasonable for what you get. The least expensive a/c package adds only \$527 to the Neon Sport. In the base car, a/c ups the price by \$1861 but adds

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Summary 4 of 9

nearly everything that's standard in the Highline, so you're basically paying \$146 for the air. That's probably why 99.3% of our respondents ordered a/c.

Part of the a/c package, by the way, is the touring suspension upgrade, including the front stabilizer bar. This improves cornering, but the stiffer damper settings also firm up the ride. Handling turned out to be the Neon's second-best-liked attribute, right behind styling, yet 8.4% complained of a jouncy ride. "A little firm, but the Neon's handling makes it worth it," said a Tennessee pilot.

The fwd Neon comes with a state-of-the-art,

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Summary 5 of 9

sohc, 2.0-liter Four with four valves per cylinder. This engine delivers 132 horsepower and 129 ft.-lb. of torque which are best-in-class figures. Buyers who want even more power will be able to order a twin-cam version of a 2.2-liter 4-cylinder toward the end of 1994. That'll add 10-to-20 additional horsepower.

Performance with the sohc Four was judged outstanding by most Neon owners. "Runs strong and nimble," a Michigan diemaker told us, "especially from 50 to 100 mph." Zero to 60 mph comes up in approximately 8 to 8 1/2 seconds, depending on whether the car has a 5-speed manual or 3-speed automatic, and top speed is electronically limited to 116 mph.

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Summary 6 of 9

Along with those good numbers, our respondents reported fuel mileage of 27 city/33 hwy with the 3-speed automatic and 30 city/36 hwy for the 5-speed.

The Neon also excelled mightily in the areas of comfort and ergonomics. The Chrysler platform team stretched the Neon's wheelbase and set all four tires out toward the corners of the car. They also dropped what's essentially a big-car greenhouse onto a subcompact body, enhancing--as in Chrysler's cab-forward LH cars--the feeling of roominess. Actually the interior is roomy. There's about 3 in. more headroom here than in most of the Neon's rivals, and the windshield base extends out

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Summary 7 of 9

nearly to the front-axle centerline. All pillars are thin for good all-around vision, although short drivers did mention not being able to see out over the parcel shelf and trunk.

Short drivers also had a problem with the window cranks--when they moved the seat fully forward, it interfered with handle rotation.

Neons underwent a number of early factory recalls, but dealers took care of these promptly and professionally. "Properly, politely and efficiently handled," according to a Massachusetts administrator. Chrysler Corp. dealers, in fact, seem to be getting the Saturn message. Most gave customers loaners during

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Summary 8 of 9

downtime, and many washed cars after service.

But the biggest single complaint had to do with noise--a combination of engine, wind and tire roar--along with a lack of body insulation.

The Neon's styling attracted many customers, but it wasn't the magnet it's been with buyers of the Chrysler LH sedans and the new Dodge Ram pickup. In the Neon's case, several people mentioned that it doesn't look like every other car on the road, which is true, but the "bug-eyed" headlights bothered a number of respondents. Most conceded, though, that looks contributed to the Neon's personality and that the Neon had more charm

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Summary 9 of 9

than most cars. "People stop and ask me about my Neon," commented a Wisconsin nurse. "I guess they assume that if the car looks friendly, the owner must be, too." And a Maryland warehouse manager volunteered, "I like the way the Neon makes me feel: happy!" When a car can do that, it's got to be all right.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Give the car-buying public a fun-to-drive, comfortable, roomy, economical and well-built car, and the public will come to the showrooms to look at it and kick its tires. Pack that car with features that people want and charge a fair price for the whole thing and vast numbers of that same tire-kicking public will stick around, go for a test drive, come back smiling and sign along the dotted line.

Adhering to that relatively uncomplicated formula has Chrysler Corp. back at the top of its game, and riding atop the surging crest that is a robust domestic auto industry.

The Neon twins--and make no mistake about it, these cars are twins, differing only by the

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

badge on the hood and the dealership from which they're bought--have done more than capture the public's fancy. They have shown that a domestic carmaker can still engineer, build, sell and service a small car.

The Neon's initial appeal is based on some very clever marketing on the part of Chrysler. The car's natural cuteness has been elaborated upon through a heavy advertising blitz, and the car's ultralow base price has been touted and touted some more.

The truth is, as our survey shows, the number of folks who actually drove away in a base Neon is practically nil. In fact, the typical owner paid about \$4000 more than that for a

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

nicely equipped car. Nicely equipped boils down to air conditioning, an upgraded sound system, antilock brakes and an automatic transmission. As noted in the report, for those who were first on the block with a Neon, power windows were simply not available for any price. And that was enough to keep some people away. Nor could you equip your Neon with a 4-speed automatic, not for love nor money. Again, a reason to have some folks walk rather than drive out of the showroom.

When you shop around, you'll find that you can buy any one of a variety of good small sedans for about \$14,000. And several of them can be equipped with both power windows

and a 4-speed. Some can even be ordered with a factory-installed sunroof, something else that's MIA on the Neon's order form. Few, however, can offer everything that the Neon can. That means all the hardware--driver's- and passenger's-side airbags, scads of room inside, gobs of go under the hood and crisp, nimble, very forgiving, predictable handling--as well as all of the software.

You see, the Neon really is a fun car. After you've spent some time behind the wheel, you find yourself smiling. Oh sure, the noise from the drivetrain and the tires can be numbing, and the ride can be harshly choppy--especially with a full car and a bumpy road--and the fuel

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

economy can be somewhat disheartening for such a small car thanks to the gearing of the 3-speed automatic, but in the end, you come out smiling.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE DODGE/PLYMOUTH NEON*

Total miles driven 1,348,256

Average miles driven 4617

Purchase price:

Average \$12,817

Range \$10,000-

\$15,186

Why did you choose the Neon?

Styling 56.2%

Price/value 41.6

Economy of operation 21.3

Roominess 17.2

Reputation 15.0

Safety features 12.7

Handling 12.0

Nameplate choices:

Dodge Neon 52.6%

Plymouth Neon 47.4

Series choices:

Highline 61.3%

Sport 35.6

Base Neon 3.2

Transmission choices:

3-speed automatic 78.9%

5-speed manual 21.1

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 99.3%

Power steering 96.3

Premium sound system 53.4

Tilt steering wheel 49.0

Power door locks 48.3

Antilock brakes 46.9

Antitheft alarm 8.6

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

5-speed manual 29.5/35.8

3-speed automatic 27.0/33.2

Engine power:

Excellent 75.9%

Good 22.7

Average 1.4

Poor 0.0

Handling:

Excellent 80.4%

Good 18.6

Average 0.3

Poor 0.7

Braking:

Excellent 69.1%

Good	29.2
Average	1.4
Poor	0.3
Overall performance:	
Excellent	75.1%
Good	23.5
Average	1.0
Poor	0.3
Control layout:	
Excellent	67.5%
Good	30.1
Average	1.7
Poor	0.7
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	68.3%
Good	29.0
Average	2.7
Poor	0.0
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	62.3%
Good	31.2
Average	6.5
Poor	0.0
Overall convenience:	
Excellent	65.8%
Good	32.7
Average	1.4
Poor	0.0
Specific likes:	
Styling	56.3%
Handling	46.7
Power	38.2
Fuel mileage	32.7
Roominess	24.6
Comfort	21.0
Safety features	14.0
Specific dislikes:	
Wind/engine roar, road noise	16.4%
No complaints	12.4
Power windows not available**	8.9
Harsh ride	8.4
Trunk blocks vision	6.7
Seating comfort	4.9
Suggested changes:	
Make power windows available**	14.1%
Better sound insulation	7.6
Gentler ride	6.6
Make ABS standard	5.1

Relocate window cranks 5.1
Make sunroof available 4.5
Better rearward vision 4.5

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent 66.4%
Good 30.1
Average 2.4
Poor 1.0

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent 63.1%
Good 31.4
Average 4.4
Poor 1.0

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent 52.8%
Good 40.2
Average 5.9
Poor 1.0

Any mechanical trouble?

No 71.6%
Yes 28.4

What type of trouble?

Misc. electrical 24.1%
Manual shifter 10.8
Engine computer 9.6
Crossed brake/turn signal wires
A/C refrigerant leaks 8.4
Brakes 7.2

Repair it yourself?

No 95.1%
Yes 4.9

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes 74.3%
No 25.7

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent 54.4%
Good 36.8
Average 6.6
Poor 2.2

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent 54.8%
Good 36.2
Average 5.7
Poor 3.2

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only 26.2%
Two vehicles 42.9
Three vehicles 16.7
Four or more 14.2

Principal driver:

Female	66.1%
Male	32.1
Equal	1.8

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	23.9%
30-49	50.8
50-plus	25.3

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Neon if you had it to do over again?

Yes	66.9%
Maybe	27.9
No	5.2

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Dodge Ram Owners

Report

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Who would think that looks would be the reason someone would buy a truck? Most of our Ram owners, thats who. Best-liked feature is this trucks style.

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Every Ram has a drivers airbag.

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Interior boasts more space than most.

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Summary

Chrysler Corp. took another big chance when it designed the Dodge Ram pickup--and again it paid off. The 1994 Ram is Dodge's first all-new pickup in 22 years. And for a modern pickup, it's pretty far out. Chief stylist Trevor Creed drew inspiration from both today's aerodynamic big rigs and vintage pickups from all the makers back to 1939. Dodge found that potential buyers either loved or hated it. Obviously our people--the Ram owners we surveyed--liked the look. In fact, nearly 60% bought it on that basis, and 70.5% put styling at the top of their best-liked-features list.

Keep in mind, though, that a lot of Ram

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Summary 2 of 8

owners use their trucks to do truck things, not just to cruise. They're more likely than owners of Ford and Chevrolet pickups to be contractors, tree surgeons, mechanics, farmers, ranchers--blue-collars of all sorts. That image is generally borne out by this Owners Report. For instance, more respondents were male (93.5%) than in any other pickup survey we've ever done. Does that mean that the new Ram runs on testosterone? Sure looks that way.

The machismo might extend even to the popular Cummins turbodiesel, the "500,000-mile" inline-Six that makes this truck sound and feel as powerful as it looks. The big

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Summary 3 of 8

Cummins was our respondents' first engine choice, with more than 40% of them opting for the diesel. No wonder, the Cummins puts out 400-420 ft.-lb. of steamroller torque and 160 or 175 hp, depending on whether you order automatic or manual transmissions. Speaking of power, in mid-1994 the Viper's V10, detuned to 300 hp and 450 ft.-lb. of torque, became available in the Ram pickup. It arrived too late, though, for any but 0.4% of our owners to order it.

Much to choose from

Dodge Ram buyers have a litany of choices since the Ram is offered in 2- or 4-wheel drive, three series, four trim levels,

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Summary 4 of 8

with six engines, four transmissions, three transfer cases, two wheelbases and two box sizes. Then there are other options, such as seating configuration, 4-wheel ABS, the sound system, snowplow package, skidplate, trailer group, stuff like that.

The 1994 Dodge Ram comes in three payload ratings. The Ram 1500 is 1/2-ton, the 2500 is 3/4-ton and the 3500 is the hairy 1-ton job. Standard equipment in all includes a driver's airbag, rear ABS, power brakes and steering, tinted glass all around, vinyl bench seat, 5-speed, intermittent wipers and 26- or 35-gal. fuel tank, depending on whether you choose the 119- or 135-in. chassis. Most of

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Summary 5 of 8

our owners loaded their Rams and went for the Laramie SLT package. This starts with the LT trim level and, for about \$2300 more, tosses in a/c, power windows and door locks, cassette stereo, tach, deluxe cloth interior, bright bumpers, body side moldings, chrome wheels, tailgate top molding and items like that.

There's much room, too

The standard cab gives more interior space than the Ram's competitors, and 80.7% rated comfort as excellent. What drivers didn't like were the wide A-pillars. These tended to block the three-quarter side vision.

The Ram's leading mechanical problem

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Summary 6 of 8

had to do with warped brake rotors and out-of-round rear drums, all taken care of under warranty. We also heard complaints of oil leaks, sometimes from the optional oil cooler. But 60.8% of our respondents reported no mechanical flaws at all and went back to their dealers only for routine service. In that regard, owners of diesel-engined Rams wished the fuel filter were easier to get at.

Diesel clatter was another annoyance, but it bothered only 9% of our surveyees. Drivers of gasoline-engined versions praised the Ram's silence. Several owners pointed out that the pickup bed isn't square--it tapers--so conventional slide-in camper shells don't fit.

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Summary 7 of 8

You also need tools to remove the tailgate, but Dodge does provide indents and slots in the pickup box for 2-tier loading.

Overall quality also rated excellent with most of our respondents (62.4%). A Wisconsin pharmacist contended, "Overall fit and finish are superb. Workmanship is similar to the Toyota trucks I owned previously." In doing this Owners Report, we noticed a good feeling about this truck that goes beyond ordinary praise. As a Colorado manager told us, "Every time I pass another Dodge Ram, we automatically wave to each other. It's like a national fraternity or club."

But mostly it boiled down to looks. A Texas

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Summary 8 of 8

aircraft parts producer summed it up by saying, "I'm one of those stupid people who buys something because it looks good. But this time I got a lot more than I ever dreamed I would. I only wish I could buy another one and store it away until I drove the wheels off this one."

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EDITOR'S REPORT

With the Ram, Dodge simply went out and redefined the term "pickup truck." Sure the thing looks great--if you like it, ugly if you don't. But unlike many walks of life, it takes more than a pretty face and a terrific body to make it in this world as a pickup truck.

There's no denying that those who like the appearance of the Ram--our surveyees chose appearance as their single favorite feature of the Ram--find it exciting, appealing and undeniably macho. Count us among those who think the truck looks aces. And there's no denying that style alone is enough to get people to ante up the green in a fit of lust. But if there's nothing to back up the fresh

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Editor's Report 2 of 4

appearance, those looks can grow pretty stale after only a few thousand miserable miles behind the wheel. Not a problem for the Ram. The simple truth of it is that the Ram's standout sheetmetal is a harbinger for the superb engineering that bristles beneath it.

The cab is roomy, comfortable, quiet and well appointed. The space behind the seats can be configured for in-cab storage with various size and shape bins that hang from the cab's rear wall. And the center console in the 3-way split-back bench seat simply sets the standard for what a center console should be--wide, broad, deep and well partitioned. It's funny, that term "sets the standard" just keeps

coming up again and again when talking about the Ram pickup truck.

The truck's ride is well damped, comfortable and actually pleasant--even when the cargo bed is empty. The handling is--for a pickup--relatively crisp and predictable. And engine performance, especially with either the Viper-inspired V10 or the let's-get-serious Cummins 6-cylinder diesel, is unparalleled.

Even the business end of the truck--the cargo bed--has been carefully tuned to improve upon the species. While it may be true that owners of slide-in campers may not appreciate the cargo bed, the typical owner who needs to safely haul a variety of cargo

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Editor's Report 4 of 4

will. There are built-in, flush-mounted cargo tiedowns in the corners of the bed. The factory-installed plastic bed liner has pop-out plugs over the tiedowns so you can still protect the bed from scratches and tie down the cargo.

In fact, other than the radical styling, most of what's so right about the Ram pickup is in the attention paid to the small but critical details, details that affect your everyday use of the truck.

With the coming of a stretched cab in the future, there's precious little more to ask for in a pickup truck. Except perhaps greater availability at dealerships.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE DODGE RAM*

Total miles driven 1,974,217

Average miles driven 7652

Purchase price:

Average \$22,894

Range \$14,000-
\$32,000

Why did you choose this pickup?

Styling 59.9%

Cummins diesel power 21.1

Towing capacity 13.8

Engine power 11.7

Ride quality 10.1

Owned Dodges before 8.5

Chrysler Corp. reputation 8.5

Overall comfort 7.3

Model choices:

Ram 2500 3/4-ton 53.8%

Ram 1500 1/2-ton 38.5

Ram 3500 1-ton 7.6

Series choices:

Laramie SLT 77.3%

Ram ST 12.6

Ram WS (Work Special) 6.9

Engine choices:

5.9-liter 360 turbodiesel L6 42.4%

5.2-liter 318 V8 30.2

5.9-liter 360 V8 18.3

5.9-liter 360 HD V8 5.7

3.9-liter 239 V6 3.9

8.0-liter 488 V10 0.4

Transmission choices:

4-speed automatic 70.3%

5-speed manual 29.7

Drives:

4-wheel drive 59.8%

2-wheel drive 40.2

Bed sizes:

8-ft. long bed 86.3%

61/2-ft. standard bed 13.7

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 95.1%

Cruise control 90.2

Tilt steering wheel 88.2

Styled wheels 82.2

Power windows and door locks 79.5

Heavy-duty cooling system	77.0
Transmission oil cooler	66.4
Premium sound system	63.4
Sport appearance group	43.8
Message center	41.8
Ram-trac disconnect	34.1
Avg. mpg, city/hwy:	
5.9-liter turbodiesel L6	18.1/21.2
5.2-liter 318 V8	14.1/17.3
5.9-liter 360 HD V8	13.0/16.3
5.9-liter 360 V8	12.1/15.5
5-speed manual	17.5/20.5
4-speed automatic	14.5/18.0
Specific likes:	
Styling	70.5%
Power	41.5
Ride quality	38.4
Comfort	37.9
Handling	21.9
Economy	20.5
Roominess	12.9
Specific dislikes:	
No complaints	15.9%
Paint/finish	10.9
Engine roar, rattles	9.0
Low fuel mileage	6.0
High price	5.5
Brakes	5.5
Shifting	5.0
Suggested changes:	
No changes	10.2%
Tougher paint/finish	7.0
Better materials	6.4
Better noise control	5.7
More horsepower	5.7
Relocate cup holders	5.1
Engine power:	
Excellent	72.7%
Good	22.7
Average	3.8
Poor	0.8
Handling:	
Excellent	72.3%
Good	24.2
Average	2.7
Poor	0.8
Braking:	
Excellent	61.4%
Good	31.3
Average	5.8

Poor	1.5
Overall performance:	
Excellent	68.1%
Good	29.6
Average	2.3
Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	72.0%
Good	26.8
Average	1.2
Poor	0.0
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	72.1%
Good	26.4
Average	1.6
Poor	0.0
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	64.9%
Good	29.0
Average	5.4
Poor	0.8
Overall convenience:	
Excellent	70.0%
Good	28.5
Average	1.6
Poor	0.0
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	62.4%
Good	35.7
Average	1.9
Poor	0.0
Comfort opinion:	
Excellent	80.7%
Good	15.4
Average	3.9
Poor	0.0
Had any mechanical trouble?	
No	60.8%
Yes	39.2
What type of trouble?	
Brake rotors and drums	15.7%
Oil leaks	11.8
Transmission	10.8
Fuel pump	7.8
Steering system	6.9
Shifter	6.9
Misinstalled wiper blades	6.9
Repair it yourself?	
No	93.1%
Yes	6.9
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	

Yes	76.4%
No	23.6

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	49.1%
Good	38.3
Average	9.3
Poor	3.3

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	49.2%
Good	37.9
Average	8.6
Poor	4.3

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	11.2%
Two vehicles	42.7
Three vehicles	22.7
Four or more	23.5

Principal driver:

Male	93.5%
Female	4.9
Equal	1.6

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	10.5%
30-49	45.0
50-plus	44.6

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Dodge Ram pickup if you had it to do over again?

Yes	79.1%
Maybe	19.4
No	1.6

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Owners Report

Ford Crown Victoria

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Although many full-size car buyers rate safety as a high buying priority, the new Crown Vic's styling easily topped the list of reasons for purchase in the survey group. Owners perceived body-on-frame construction as a safety feature, as well as a durability factor.

Aerodynamic efficiency improved from the old car's 0.42 CD to a respectable 0.34.

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Owners liked control layout, but said that wheel hub blocked instrument panel.

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Interior space ranked as a plus, but cramped center front seat legroom drew criticism.

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Summary

Ford's Crown Victoria donned its new Taurus-style sheet-metal in March of 1992 and immediately became a much more modern-looking, aerodynamic automobile. The design team retained the basic rear-drive chassis, with substantial suspension revisions, and the coefficient of drag (Cd) promptly dropped from 0.42 to 0.34.

Ford also replaced the Crown Vic's old 5.0-liter pushrod V8 engine with its new sohc 4.6-liter V8. This added 40 peak hp (190) and bumped torque by 50 ft. -lb., to 260. With the dual-exhaust Touring Sedan version, peak hp jumps to 210, and peak torque to 270 ft.-lb.

So what emerges here is a full-size Ford

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Summary 2 of 9

with body-on-frame construction and excellent trailer-towing capabilities-a traditional American family car that no longer looks like a stack of boxes.

The person who buys a Crown Victoria-or its cousin the Mercury Grand Marquis-is usually mature and more safety conscious than most. The standard driver's airbag (a passenger airbag will soon be offered as an option), antilock brakes with traction control and even the body-on-frame construction swayed a goodly number of buyers.

Looks remain important, however, and in our March 1992 survey styling led as the Crown Vic's prime purchase motivator. Just

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Summary 3 of 9

under half of the survey group cited the modernized exterior and interior as the best-liked feature of the car. But size, handling, comfort, quiet operation, ride quality, improved power and respectable fuel economy were also important considerations.

Fully 60% of the Crown Vics in our survey were equipped with antilock brakes. The Crown Vic ABS system includes traction control, and is standard in the Touring Sedan. It's a \$695 option on the basic car or the midlevel LX model. Standard in all are Ford's 4-speed automatic transmission, speed-sensitive, variable-assist power steering, 4-wheel power disc brakes, front and

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Summary 4 of 9

rear antiroll bars, a reclining split-bench front seat, a driver's airbag and air conditioning.

The LX gets a 6-way power seat and a number of additional goodies, but it's the Touring Sedan that's accessorized to a fare-thee-well. The Touring Sedan stickers out at about \$4000 more than the \$20,108 base car, and its list of additional equipment includes more power, stiffer suspension, pneumatic load leveling at the rear, heavier antiroll bars, a 3.27:1 rear axle (versus 3.08 standard) and cast-alloy wheels with 225/70R-15 Goodyear Eagle tires.

The performance and handling package is also available as a \$1612 option on lesser

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Summary 5 of 9

series. A towing package is also available for all models.

When we asked owners to specify their complaints, 22.1% told us they didn't have any--a level of satisfaction that ranks with the Lexus LS 400 and Infiniti Q45. The gripes we did hear had mostly to do with safety. For example, 7.9% felt that the rearview mirror is mounted too low, restricting both forward and rear vision.

A few drivers also complained that the adjustable steering wheel blocks some of the instruments, and that the two small horn buttons are impossible to find at night and difficult to use when the wheel is turned.

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Summary 6 of 9

There were also scattered complaints that the Crown Vic's large transmission tunnel and instrument console conspired to virtually eliminate front center-seating.

No one had any argument with the way the new Crown Vic ran or performed, though. Many owners took the time to praise the new V8's quiet operation, its smoothness and the way it could hustle the 3770-pound sedan away from stoplights.

As we noted earlier, Ford made major revisions to the Crown Vic's suspension to go along with the new engine and body, and tweaked the standard car's coil and gas-shock setup again for '92 to improve ride quality and

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Summary 7 of 9

reduce body roll during cornering. And the overall result impressed most of our owners.

Fit and finish were judged excellent by 64.3% of our owners, good by an additional 33.3%. The Crown Victoria's only trouble spots seemed to be the air-conditioning compressor and a few electrical aberrations, like false readings from the fuel gauge.

And service proved to be a painless experience at most dealerships. The majority of our owners (53.7%) gave their dealer shops a score of excellent. Not that there was much reason for most buyers to return for service.

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Summary 8 of 9

Only 16.6% needed after-purchase adjustments, and in those cases nearly 80% reported that the work was done right the first time.

So judging by our survey, Ford's new Crown Victoria proves to be totally satisfying to the vast majority of its owners. Most experienced no problems at all, and those who did were happy with their dealers.

What seemed to impress our owners most of all, though, was the fact that they were getting a lot of car for the money. Several owners noted that they would have had to pay roughly

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Summary 9 of 9

the same for a Volvo 240 or a top-of-the-line Honda Accord, ending up with less power and less space.

And it seems to be the value factor that prompted 78.6% to say yes to our bottom-line question: Based on your experience, would you buy a Crown Victoria if you had it to do over again? Another 20.5% said maybe, which adds up to an outstanding score for any car, at any price.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

When it comes to cars, if you think American, chances are you're still inclined to think big. Full-size, as they're called--the kind of cars that American carmakers are known for building. Smooth riding, with plenty of engine power, they seem to offer an extra measure of safety in their weight and bulk.

Driving the new Ford Crown Victoria is a convincing demonstration of the viability of this peculiarly American style of automobile. The new sedans still ride big, but handle with a level of response that suggests something much smaller. The suspension is taut, letting the tires ripple over the pavement while keeping the body steady and level. The

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Editor's Report 2 of 4

variable-assist steering is light to the touch at parking-lot speeds and gets firmer at freeway paces.

As with previous generations of the Crown Victoria, personal safety is something many owners associate with sheer mass. You find belt-and-suspender safety here-the 3700-pound curb weight that will win any head-to-head confrontation with the popular compacts, the driver's air-bag, a truly user-friendly, manual 3-point belt system, and the option of antilock brakes and traction control.

Crown Vic buyers have every reason to be happy with the new 4.6-liter sohc V8 engine. It's smoother, more fuel efficient and makes

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Editor's Report 3 of 4

this big car much more peppy. Teamed with the 4-speed automatic overdrive, this powertrain approaches world class.

Big cars are all about interior space, and the Crown Vic is movearound spacious. While we agree with the owners concerning the 6-passenger rating-five is really closer to reality-those five will find plenty of extra inches for hips, hats and heavy winter clothing, front and back.

Consistent with this, the trunk is vast-wide, deep and capable of holding a family-size load of vacation luggage.

For all the driver seat space, Ford has managed to keep heater and radio controls

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Editor's Report 4 of 4

within easy reach. A bonus is Ford's wheel-mounted cruise-control system, arranged around the edges of the airbag. We'd like it even better if the radio controls could be mounted there, too, and the passenger airbag option can't come too soon for the buyers this car will attract.

But there are few nits to pick here. In the steadily shrinking world of true full-size affordable cars, the new Crown Vic stands out as a leader. If this car is an indication of where the class is headed, we think the traditional American full-size sedan will be around for a long time.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE FORD CROWN VICTORIA*

Total miles driven: 1,537,413

Average miles driven: 4549

Purchase price:

Average \$20,799

Range \$15,900-
\$26,800

Why did you choose the Crown Vic?

Styling 46.5%

Previous ownership 28.3

Size/interior space 18.5

Price/value 13.5

Comfort 11.4

Ride quality 9.8

Model choice:

Crown Victoria LX 91.1%

Standard Crown Victoria 8.9

Crown Victoria

Touring Sedan 0.0**

Avg. mpg, city/hwy.: 19.1/24.9

Engine power:

Excellent 78.5%

Good 19.8

Average 1.5

Poor 0.3

Handling:

Excellent 74.9%

Good 23.0

Average 1.5

Poor 0.6

Braking:

Excellent 74.9%

Good 24.0

Average 0.9

Poor 0.3

Overall performance:

Excellent 74.8%

Good 24.3

Average 0.6

Poor 0.3

Control layout:

Excellent 48.8%

Good 45.8

Average 3.6

Poor 1.8

Instrumentation:

Excellent 51.6%

Good 42.4

Average 4.2
Poor 1.8

Driver sightlines:

Excellent 44.3%
Good 42.2
Average 9.6
Poor 3.9

Specific likes:

Styling 47.8%
Handling 42.4
Ride quality 42.0
Comfort/interior space 35.2
Engine power 32.2
Quiet operation 28.0

Specific dislikes:

No complaints 22.1%
Rearview mirror too low 7.9
Instruments blocked
by wheel 5.9
Horn buttons 5.5
Cramped center front
seat 5.5
Air conditioner 4.7
Spacesaver spare tire 4.7

Suggested changes:

Passenger's airbag 9.2%
No changes 7.6
Reposition rearview
mirror 6.5
Better lumbar bladder 5.9
Improved horn buttons 5.4
Eliminate center console 5.4
Redesign instrument
panel 5.4

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent 64.3%
Good 33.3
Average 2.1
Poor 0.3

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent 70.6%
Good 26.7
Average 2.0
Poor 0.6

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent 61.4%
Good 37.4
Average 0.9
Poor 0.3

Mechanical trouble?

No 83.4%

Yes 16.6

What type of trouble?

Air conditioner 15.8%

Electrical system 15.8

Power seats 8.8

Brakes 7.0

Automatic transmission 7.0

Did you repair it yourself?

No 94.7%

Yes 5.3

**Dealer repairs
satisfactory?**

Yes 78.8%

No 21.2

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent 53.7%

Good 38.5

Average 5.3

Poor 2.5

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only 28.6%

Two vehicles 41.9

Three vehicles 17.3

Four or more 12.3

Principal driver:

Male 54.4%

Female 37.1

Equal 8.5

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29 2.1%

30-49 years 19.8

50-plus 78.2

**Based on your experience, would you buy
a Crown Victoria if you had it to do over
again?**

Yes 78.6%

Maybe 20.5

No 0.9

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

** Crown Victoria Touring Sedan production startup delayed.

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Ford Escort Owners

Report

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Styling strongly influenced Escort buyers. Car has a pleasing aero shape and is more angular than its Taurus rival. Fit and finish received high marks.

Click on the photos above for more information.

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Closely resembling Mazda Protege, formal sedan body style is new to Escort lineup for 1992. The family also includes 2- and 4-door hatchbacks, plus a 4-door wagon. While owners liked the new Escort styling, dollar value topped list of purchase priorities.

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Dash layout is clean, but gauges are small. The speedometer is especially difficult to read. Fuel-injected 3.1-liter V6 pulls strongly, but is noisy when pressed hard.

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Seating comfort and all-around roominess drew high praise from most owners.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the June 1992 issue of Popular Mechanics)

Ford used to bill the Escort as the world's most popular passenger car. This was based on collective sales totals of all cars bearing the Escort name and the domestic Escort's U.S. sales leadership in 1982, '87 and '88.

However, European Escorts were very different from their Dearborn cousins--different as in better. But the Escort introduced in 1991 eliminates this confusion.

The Escort uses the same basic platform as the Mazda Protege. Ford and Mazda engineers developed the new car jointly, and Mazda supplied the new Escort's performance

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Summary 2 of 8

powertrain. Styling came from Ford, and the interior design was developed in an international Ford studio located in Hiroshima.

The two liveliest members of the Escort family, the GT coupe and new-for-'92 LX-E sedan, use the same 1.8 liter dohc 16-valve 127-hp Four that powers the Mazda Protege. They're also equipped with 4-wheel disc brakes. All Escorts have a 5-speed transaxle, independent suspension and rack-and-pinion steering. The basic Escort and midrange LX model use Ford's 88-hp rear, smaller discs at the front and 13-in. wheels. Both the GT and LX-E have more aggressive suspension

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Summary 3 of 8

components, alloy wheels and a lot of other extras.

But that's not to say that the lesser Escorts are strippers. The basic care comes with reclining front and folding rear seat backs, front and rear antiroll bars, 2-speed wipers, side-window defoggers, a hatch cargo cover, trip odometer and central console. The LX adds a digital clock, better fabrics, wheel covers, a 60/40 folding split rear seat back and AM/FM/cassette stereo system.

Basic and LX Escorts are available in 2- and 4-door hatchback body styles, as well as a 4-door wagon. And for 1992, Ford has added 4-door sedans in the LX and LX-E series.

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Escorts have traditionally been favored by buyers who prioritize value. These down-to-earth cars have always meant economy for tight budgets, and the new Escort continues that tradition. So it came as no surprise that price topped the purchase motives among our owners.

Buyers who had owned Escorts before--over 25% in our survey group--noted that the new generation is roomier, more comfortable and requires fewer repairs than previous models. In short, the new Escort is on a more equal footing with competitors like the Toyota Corolla and Honda Civic.

Among the new Escort's more compelling

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virtues is its economy of operation. Besides fuel efficiency, this means troublefree driving. So few owners reported mechanical problems that there wasn't enough data to tabulate.

Fuel economy numbers pretty much matched up with EPA projections, which is to say good. Since only 19% of our respondents owned Escorts with the 1.8-liter Mazda engine, we didn't tabulate the fuel performance of the two engines separately. Overall, about the only negative comment we heard in any volume on the new Escort concerned brake squeal. We get this complaint with lots of new cars. Ford is handling individual Escort brake squeal complaints at the dealer level.

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Summary 6 of 8

A few Escort owners also complained about uncomfortable automatic shoulder belts. This too is a common complaint with many new cars. Some owners wished their cars were equipped with airbags, something Ford plans to make standard by the 1995 model year.

Handling turned out to be one of the Escort's strong points, something that couldn't be said for the previous car. Nearly 60% of our owners rated handling as excellent, and most of the rest judged it as good. Engine performance satisfied most, especially drivers who have the GT model.

Ergonomics pleased most owners, although 8% did complain about the dashboard layout.

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Summary 7 of 8

A few owners said the dashboard lighting rheostat was tricky to use, and others suggested swapping the radio and climate-control locations. A very few found the front seats either too soft, too hard or too confining. However, most respondents (95.5%) rated the front seats good or excellent, and 85.8% said the same for the rear seats. Driver sightlines and control locations also drew praise.

Basically, what owners are telling us is that the Escort has gone from being a good deal to being a good car. No one ever argued with the Escort's price/value ratio. But with the sophistication and reliability that the Mazda

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Summary 8 of 8

connection has produced, the new Escort matches its Japanese competitors in terms of road manners, comfort and quality.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Like everyone else who had an opportunity to drive both the U.S. and European versions of the old Ford Escort, we were startled by the differences between the two.

But like the owners, we think the new Escort puts the issue of those differences to rest. This is a better car than any of its predecessors.

To update our new Escort experience, we spent a couple of weeks tooling around the Los Angeles area in an LX-E sedan, a new addition to the Escort lineup. With its 127-hp dohc 16-valve Mazda engine, 4-wheel disc brakes and sporty suspension tuning, it's virtually identical to the popular Mazda Protege. Our tester included extras like

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Editor's Report 2 of 4

power mirrors, power locks, cruise control and a power sun/moonroof that helped raise the price to a hefty \$14,008.

The new Escort has a number of strong suits and not many weak ones. Foremost on the list of much-improved traits are excellent front-seat legroom, good front and rear headroom, excellent seats, generous trunk volume and good ride quality.

LX-E handling is very much like the GT. There's a fair amount of body roll in hard cornering, but the LX-E's progressive understeer isn't as pronounced as many front-drive cars with sporting aspirations, and there are no quirks. The LX-E rolls on

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Editor's Report 3 of 4

185/60R14 tires (the GT model uses 185/60R1 5s). This is enough contact patch for ordinary driving, but we think both cars could use a little more for hurrying on twisty roads.

The LX-E's braking stacks up very well against cars of this class-quiet, as well as efficient. We'll bet that owners with brake squeal didn't bed their new brake pads in properly.

Good as this new Escort is, we think there are a couple of areas for improvement. Rear-seat legroom, for example, is tight. The Mazda/Ford consortium could take some lessons from Honda's new Civic on this score. We agree with owner complaints concerning skimpy instrumentation, although

the Escort is far from unique in this shortfall. And though driver sightlines are much improved, forward vision could be better.

Finally, we think Ford's homegrown sohc 1.9-liter may be disappointing to buyers who've read glowing Escort roadtests. The engine rates a couple of mpg higher, but it's very ho-hum compared to Mazda's sparkling 1.8. Unfortunately, the 1.8 is only available in LX-E and GT trim levels, which start at \$11,871.

But even with the uninspired engine, the new Escort is an impressive compact sedan. It's yet another proof that the Ford/Mazda cross-pollinization is paying off for all concerned.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE FORD ESCORT*

Total miles driven:: 1,471,143

Average miles driven: 7583

Purchase price:

Average \$10,130

Range \$7600-
\$13,420

Why did you choose the Escort?

Price/value 44.6%

Styling 36.9

Low operating cost 28.7

Past experience 25.6

Reputation 10.3

Model choice:

Escort LX 68.5%

EscortGT 19.0

Standard Escort 12.5

Body style choice:

2-door hatchback 52.2%

4-door hatchback 25.4

4-door wagon 22.4

Avg. mpg, city/hwy.

5-speed manual 30.4/36.4

4-speed automatic 26.1/33.0

Transmission percentages:

Automatic 53.2%

Manual 46.8

Engine power:

Excellent 42.5%

Good 49.0

Average 8.0

Poor 0.5

Handling:

Excellent 59.4%

Good 38.6

Average 1.5

Poor 0.5

Braking:

Excellent 40.6%

Good 45.5

Average 10.9

Poor 3.0

Overall performance:

Excellent 42.3%

Good 55.2

Average 2.5

Poor 0.0

Control layout:

Excellent	41.9%
Good	54.0
Average	3.5
Poor	0.5

Instrumentation:

Excellent	42.2%
Good	51.8
Average	4.5
Poor	1.5

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	44.7%
Good	45.2
Average	9.0
Poor	0.5

Specific likes:

Low operating costs	51.1%
Styling	47.9
Handling	34.0
Comfort/roominess	22.9
Engine power	20.2
Overall performance	17.6

Specific dislikes:

Automatic shoulder belts	14.3%
No complaints	12.5
Brake squeal	11.9
Insufficient power	7.1

Suggested changes:

Reduced brake noise	10.4%
Improved instrumentation	8.0
Friendlier automatic belts	7.2
Make airbags available	6.4
Reposition ashtray	5.6
No changes	5.6

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	48.9%
Good	48.4
Average	2.1
Poor	0.5

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	52.2%
Good	44.3
Average	4.4
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	36.6%
Good	49.2
Average	13.1
Poor	1.1

Mechanical trouble?

No	78.2%
Yes	21.8

What type of trouble?

No statistically significant complaints

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	76.5%
No	23.5

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	34.4%
Good	48.0
Average	12.8
Poor	4.8

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	31.4%
Two vehicles	46.1
Three vehicles	15.2
Four or more	7.4

Principal driver:

Female	57.3%
Male	39.7
Equal	3.0

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	29.5%
30-49 years	40.5
50-plus	30.0

Based on your experience, would you buy an Escort if you had it to do over again?

Yes	68.3%
Maybe	27.7
No	4.0

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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[macro='JI(qchPath,"f150_ownrep")']bitmaps.dib} **Ford Explorer Owners**

Report

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Reflecting practical appeal of sport/utes, 4-door convenience outranked styling as primary reason for buying among Explorer owners. Styling still ranked tops as best-liked feature.

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Detailing and appointments of Explorer interior scored well with most owners, as did its roominess.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the January 1992 issue of Popular Mechanics)

Sport/utility vehicles have come a long way since the Jeep Wagoneer blazed a bumpy trail across the gullies and washes of North America on its way to the country club. But once accepted in suburbia, the Wagoneer and the smaller Jeep Cherokee legitimized the sport/utility vehicle as something suitable for all-around driving.

People buy these vehicles for any number of uses. Most manufacturers now offer 4-door versions, which rival minivans as station wagon substitutes and dominate the sport/utility total sales picture. Rear seats usually fold

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Summary 2 of 8

flat or can be removed entirely, providing the utility side of the equation. The sport side comes when owners drive these vehicles into the boonies and put on their hunting caps or fishing waders.

Beyond that, many owners value 4-wheel drive to help pull them through snow, mud and over the rough stuff in bad weather. Sport/utilities are crossbreeds: part truck, part sedan--engineered for all seasons and unmistakably styled for the great outdoors, with their own kind of macho panache that's easily adapted to a wide variety of tastes and purposes.

As one of the newest, and most popular,

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Summary 3 of 8

representatives of its breed, the Ford Explorer is a natural Owners Report subject. We mailed questionnaires to 1000 owners of 1991 Explorer and asked how they're getting along with their vehicles. And the overall reply seems to be: "Just great!" An impressive 57% rated the Explorer's fit, finish and overall quality excellent, while another 41% called it good. Both percentages are well above average.

Very few questionnaires reflected any type of mechanical trouble. The most common non-mechanical problem had to do with leaky windshield seals. Ford quickly came up with a fix and offered free repairs in the field.

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Summary 4 of 8

We noted a large number of positive comments about the Explorer's performance, both on and off the road. The 4.0-liter 155-hp V6 got lots of praise for its smooth, quiet operation and also for its wide torque band. Most of the buyers surveyed--86.9%--chose the optional 4-speed overdrive automatic transmission over the manual 5-speed.

It was also interesting to note that there was very little difference in overall fuel mileage between the automatic and the manual in 2wd or 4wd.

The Explorer's 4x4 drive has a pushbutton-operated shift-on-the-fly feature. Owners appreciated its ease of operation and

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Summary 5 of 8

instant response. A second soft-touch button is provided to engage or disengage low range, but the vehicle must be stopped to do so.

So far, Ford provides antilock brakes on the rear axle only, but Dearborn insiders say that 4-wheel ABS is on the near horizon.

Explorer buyers don't seem to hold back when they get to the option list. Among the owners we surveyed, most chose the upmarket XLT series, and then proceeded to add several thousand dollars worth of extras. They wound up paying \$20,248 on average.

The least expensive Explorer 2x2 lists for \$14,451, but our owners made it clear that even with the heavy option invoice they felt

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Summary 6 of 8

they'd gotten their money's worth. To emphasize the Explorer's value, one in 10 respondents listed price as an important sales incentive. The three prime reasons for purchase, though, were the availability of four doors, styling and 4wd, in that order. A lot of subtle touches were simultaneously pointed out by owners. Many appreciated the full-size spare tire that stows under the cargo floor. They also liked the opening window in the rear liftgate and the cargo net that keeps groceries from sliding around. The 40/60 split rear bench seat folds flat to give 81.6 cu. ft. of cargo space--a lot more than any sedan. And the Eddie Bauer edition comes with two fitted

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Summary 7 of 8

pieces of luggage, a thoughtful extra that wins friends for Ford.

Ford launched the Explorer as a successor to the 2-door-only Bronco II. Although a few mechanical parts were carried over, the Explorer is a lot more than just a mere replacement. Many of our respondents had owned Bronco IIs, and virtually all agreed that there's no comparison between that vehicle and this one.

If they had it to do all over again, would they still choose an Explorer? Based on their experiences, 84% of our Explorer owners said yes. Perhaps even more significant, only 2% said no. That's an extremely high approval

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Summary 8 of 8

rate, particularly for so specialized a vehicle.

It also says something for the appeal of sport/utility vehicles in general. This type of vehicle is winning converts daily. And the Ford Explorer seems to stand out as one of the most satisfying.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Like the majority of owners in this survey, our experiences with the Ford Explorer have been positive. Unlike the majority of the owners, these experiences span a broad range of environments, from urban stop-and-go to wide-open interstates to wide-open spaces.

It's this last part that sets our experiences apart. Most sport/utilities rarely leave the pavement, but we've done some pretty rough stuff with an Explorer ("Death Valley To Pikes Peak," page 38, Sept. '90), a job it handled in style.

That experience taught us a lot about the Explorer's off-road capabilities. Its 4-wheel-drive system is flexible, user-friendly

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Editor's Report 2 of 4

and tough. The 4.0-liter V6 has plenty of low-end grunt for bog-slogging, and there's enough leftover torque for towing.

Competent as it is off-road, though, the Explorer does have one weakness when it comes to the paths less traveled. Its minimum ground clearance is just 6.3 in., which isn't much when you're out there rock-hopping. In fact, it's the smallest ground clearance in the compact sport/utility field, a statistic to keep in mind if there are a lot of rocky roads on your horizon.

However, when it comes to the environment where most Explorers spend most of their time, it's hard to think of another sport/ute that

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Editor's Report 3 of 4

does a better job. The 4-door Explorer, which accounts for 86% of Explorer sales, serves mostly as an all-weather go-anywhere station wagon. Whether you're schlepping Superbowl eats for 24 or mushing through slush en route to the ski area, the Explorer gets it done with minimal fuss.

It has the roomiest interior in its class--a genuine 5-passenger vehicle. And even though it's essentially a truck, its longest-in-class wheelbase helps keep ride quality carlike.

Handling is more truckish, though favorably comparable to the other players in this class. Our only complaint is the power steering, which is typically Ford. overassisted

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Editor's Report 4 of 4

and numb on center. And like the owners, we wish the ABS function extended to all four wheels.

But there is nothing else that sticks out as a weak spot. Interior appointments range from tasteful in the basic XL to almost luxurious in the Eddie Bauer edition, instrumentation is clean, controls well located and small-object storage plentiful.

The Explorer is an enticing combination of thoughtful design, solid engineering and attractive pricing. Many of our owners think it's the best in its class. We're inclined to agree with them.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE FORD EXPLORER*

Total miles driven: 2,625,854

Average miles driven: 6436

Purchase price:

Average \$20,248

Range \$15,000-
\$25,500

Why did you choose the Explorer?

4-door convenience 33.8%

Styling 32.7

4-wheel drive 32.7

Roominess 20.2

Comfort 11.2

Price 10.1

Model choice:

XLT 66.2%

Eddie Bauer 23.3

XL 23.3

Sport (2-door) 1.3

Avg. mpg, city/hwy.:

5-speed manual 17.6/21.8

4-speed automatic 16.8/21.2

2wd 17.7/21.7

4-wd 16.9/21.2

Transmission choice:

4-speed automatic 86.9%

5-speed manual 13.1

4-wd/2-wd 87.4/13.1

Specific likes:

Styling 42.9%

Ride quality 34.8

Interior/roominess 34.0

Seating comfort 34.0

Handling 28.8

4wd 22.3

4-door convenience 21.5

Engine 21.2

power/performance

Specific dislikes:

No complaints 16.4%

Low mg 13.1

Stiff ride 9.8

Price 6.6

Seating comfort 5.9

Seatbelts chafe neck 4.6

Suggested changes:

No changes 26.8%

Improved mpg	8.0
More comfortable seats	5.9
Improve rear-seat airflow	5.0
More comfortable seatbelts	4.7
Better dash layout	4.4
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	57.0%
Good	41.0
Average	2.0
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	69.1%
Good	28.0
Average	1.7
Poor	1.2
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	
Excellent	46.3%
Good	44.6
Average	7.8
Poor	1.3
Mechanical trouble?	
No	82.1%
Yes	17.9
What type of trouble?	
Noisy brakes	13.9%
Wheel alignment	12.5
Fuel gauge	6.9
Transmission	6.9
Accelerator	5.6
Did you repair it yourself?	
No	95.8%
Yes	4.2
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	75.0%
No	25.0
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	46.6%
Good	42.3
Average	9.7
Poor	1.4
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	12.2%
Two vehicles	44.9
Three or more	42.8
Principal driver:	
Male	50.9%
Female	42.3
Equal	6.8
Age distribution of owners:	
Under 29	10.0%

30-49 years	58.7
50-plus	31.4

Based on your experience, would you buy an Explorer again?

Yes	84.0%
Maybe	14.0
No	2.0

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Ford F-150 Pickup Owners Report

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F-150's styling looks subdued compared to current GMC and Chevrolet pickups, but is clean and contemporary. Owners rated styling second behind ride quality among best-liked attributes. Workmanship was rated either Excellent or Good by 96.4% of survey group.

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Straightforward analog instrumentation is attractive, contemporary and easy to read.

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General comfort, rarely a pickup strong point, got positive reviews.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the April 1991 issue of Popular Mechanics)

As a single-line vehicle, Ford's F-150 not only outsells all other pickups on the road--it outsells absolutely *everything* on the road: cars, trucks, vans, you name it.

According to Ford, the F-150 has been America's best-selling single vehicle line for seven years, from 1983 through 1990.

People who drive pickups seem to be more brand-loyal than car buyers. That's why 39.1% of our April 1991 Owners Report respondents gave past experience as their primary reason for choosing the F-150. They'd owned at least one--some as many as five--Ford pickups

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Summary 2 of 9

previously, and saw no reason to change.

Ford's two main competitors among half-ton pickups are the Chevy-GM C C/K-1500 series and Dodge's W/D-150. As a class, the three look pretty similar in terms of specifications, engines, transmissions, drive systems and options. But careful shoppers find major differences between the Big Three.

The Dodge W/D-150 half-tonner is seen as the most traditional in style and purpose. It's the farm truck, in contrast to Chevy's more citified pickup. The Chevrolet-GMC family was restyled and reengineered for 1989. It's more carlike than the Ford and Dodge in its interior appointments and ride, and the GM

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Summary 3 of 9

trucks are perceived as more white collar than blue.

The F-150 holds a broad stretch of middle ground between these two. It's both white *and* blue collar. You use it for work, but still feel comfort-able driving it to the golf course on weekends. It's truly the archetypal American full-sized pickup.

Price and value ranked second in our survey group's reasons for choosing the F-150. Ford currently offers the least expensive base pickup in this very competitive field. The F-150's basic manufacturer's suggested retail price beats the Dodge by \$221 and the Chevy by a substantial \$1056.

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Of course, hardly anyone buys a base pickup these days, and similarly equipped versions and trim levels tend to cost about the same from all three manufacturers.

In our survey, the most popular F-150 combination was the 5.0-liter V8 with 4-speed electronic overdrive automatic (E4OD) and dashbutton lockout in 2-wheel drive with an 8-ft. bed, regular cab and the upmarket XLT Lariat trim package. This brought the average price paid by our respondents to \$14,793, or about \$4000 more than the base price.

Almost all buyers in our survey ordered comfort and convenience options like air conditioning, cruise control, power windows

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and power door locks. In addition, 16% specified the optional camper package, and 36.7% got the trailer-towing package. Both include suspension upgrades and special outside mirrors, to which the trailer package adds auxiliary cooling, heavy-duty battery and a specific wiring harness.

As always, we paid close attention to owners' opinions on workmanship and quality. How good a job does the factory do to make quality Job One? Are Ford vehicles as troublefree as those from Japan? Or do dealers have to make up for factory lapses. And if that necessity arises, how successful is the dealer at pleasing a customer who returns with a problem?

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Summary 6 of 9

A little over a quarter of our F-150 owners told us they had minor mechanical and paint complaints. The key word here is minor. No single complaint showed up often enough to be statistically significant, but some general concerns centered on easily scratched paint (especially with 2-tones), juddery shifts into and out of Fourth with the automatic transmission, false flasher signals from the rear antilock brake system, and cruise controls that didn't work.

Unfortunately, dealers succeeded with first-time repairs only 60.6% of the time--not a terrific record.

But the most significant complaint had

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nothing to do with quality or reliability. It was fuel economy-- 28.5% of our survey group wanted more miles per gallon. The volume of individual complaints depended to some extent on engine/transmission/drive selections. Our tabulations indicate that the 5.8-liter V8 gets about 2 mpg less than the 4.9-liter Six. The popular E40D automatic knocks off another mile per gallon, and so does 4wd. The qualities F-150 owners liked best about their pickups were ride, styling, comfort, handling, performance and power, in that order. The majority felt that Ford's Twin I-Beam front suspension (Twin Traction Beam with the 4x4) gives a ride much like a passenger car.

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Summary 8 of 9

Owners were nearly unanimous in their praise of cab comfort, both standard cab and SuperCab.

Performance from all three available engine--the 150-hp Six and 185- and 210-hp V8s--seemed to come up to owners' expectations. Only 4.7% of those surveyed said they'd like more power, and that tiny sample simply wished they'd chosen one of the V8s instead of the Six. It's the old story of economy versus power.

To sum up, the versatility offered by Ford's F-150 range of pickups, from their very complete option list to the way they handle both work and play, pleases the majority of

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owners. They're basically happy with their trucks' value, performance, quality, comfort and all-around usefulness.

The bottom line: 73.3% of our survey group said they'd buy the F-150 if they had it to do over again, and another 20% said maybe. Add this to the 39.1% who based their purchase on past experience, and it's easy to see why this truck remains a perennial best-seller.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Ford has been building pickup trucks since 1925, and F-Series pickups since 1953. That's plenty of time to figure out how to do it right, and in our judgment, Ford is doing just that.

Our experiences with Ford's full-size pickups have always been positive, and the current edition is no exception. To refresh our memories, we spent a few days with an F-150 in XLT Lariat trim. And like every F-Series pickup we've ever driven, this one creates an impression of all-around solidity. It may lack the flash of GM's current Chevy and GMC pickups, but it's well-made, well-finished and solidly in touch with its fundamental purpose. Ford hasn't lost sight of the fact that a truck

should be, first and foremost, a truck.

Considering this basic attribute, we rate the F-150's ride quality as very good. However, we wouldn't go as far as some of the owners who think their trucks ride like sedans. The F-150 is smooth on city streets, but doesn't damp out pavement irregularities as well as a passenger car. This is a function of spring and shock absorber damping rates chosen to accommodate heavy loads. When the truck is empty, irregular surfaces tend to show up as sharp jolts.

Similarly, we don't agree with owners who regard the handling as carlike. Like other full-size pickups, the F-150 tends to respond

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ponderously. This is not a vehicle designed for lightning lane changes or hard cornering. It's intended to haul loads competently, with minimum drama, and does this job well. But nimble just isn't part of the F-150 equation. Buyers thinking in terms of a sport truck would do well to look at the midsize pickups, or Chevy's 454 SS.

Power, delivered by one of Ford's excellent V8 truck engines, seems to be plentiful, and the automatic transmission in our tester performed smoothly, with none of the hiccups that bothered some of the owners. Fuel economy during several days in the L.A. area paralleled the owners at just over 15 mpg.

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Editor's Report 4 of 4

Inside, the F-150 is attractively finished. We like the straightforward analog instrumentation, in contrast to the glitzier layouts we've seen. We have to agree with owners who complain about seating comfort, though. Our F-150's bench seat isn't something we'd care to experience for more than an hour at a time, a classic failing of all pickup trucks.

Basically, we think Ford's heritage of truck leadership shows to good advantage in the F-150. Inside and out, it's solid goods-short on flash, long on value.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE FORD F-150 PICKUP*

Total miles driven: 1,094,360

Purchase price:

Average \$14,793

Range \$9999-
\$20,500

Avg. mpg by engine, city/hwy:

4.9-liter inline Six 14.6/18.0

5.0-liter V8 13.4/16.7

5.8-liter VS 12.9/15.7

Avg. mpg by trans, city/hwy:

5-speed manual 14.6/17.8

4-speed automatic 13.5/16.9

Avg. mpg, 2x4 and 4x4, city/hwy:

2x4 14.3/17.7

4x4 13.0/16.1

Engine choice:

5.0-liter VS 48.3%

4.9-liter inline Six 38.3

5.8-liter VS 13.4

Transmission choice:

4-speed E40D 65.3%
automatic

5-speed manual 27.9

4-speed manual 4.8

Drive system:

2wd 64.6%

4wd 35.4

Bed length:

8-ft. 65.8%

6 3/4-ft. 34.2

Trim level:

XLT Lariat 85.2%

Custom 11.4

XL 3.4

Body style:

Regular cab 75.3%

SuperCab 24.7

Maior options chosen:

Cruise control 95.9%

Air conditioning 95.3

Power windows/locks 80.6

Handling suspension 65.1

Limited-slip 48.8

Trailer-towing package 36.7

Camper package 16.0

Why did you choose the F-150?

Past experience 39.1%

Price/value	21.8
Styling	18.8
Ford reputation	11.3
Dealer service	6.0
Specific likes:	
Ride quality	42.3%
Styling	40.0
Interior/comfort	32.3
Handling	28.5
Performance	19.2
Power	14.6
Specific dislikes:	
Low mpg	28.5%
Paint quality	8.1
OEM tires	8.1
Uncomfortable seating	6.5
No complaints	6.5
Suggest changes:	
Better mpg	24.4%
No changes	21.3
Better seating	10.2
Better paint quality	8.7
More power	4.7
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	36.4%
Good	60.7
Average	1.4
Poor	1.4
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	57.7%
Good	34.2
Average	6.7
Poor	1.3
Rear seat comfort (SuperCab):	
Excellent	15.9%
Good	38.6
Average	29.5
Poor	15.9
Mechanical trouble?	
No	74.0%
Yes	26.0
What type of trouble?	
No consensus	
Did you repair it yourself?	
No	92.1%
Yes	7.9
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	60.6%
No	39.4
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	34.8%

Good	42.4
Average	13.0
Poor	9.8

Would you buy a different Ford product next time?

Maybe	44.5%
Yes	28.5
No	27.0

Would you buy an F-150 again?

Yes	73.3%
Maybe	20.0
No	6.7

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Modern styling picks up and makes the most of styling cues from the original, including the horse in the grille and cooling slots in the rear fenders.

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Cabin boasts modern gauges, dual airbags.

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Front comfort is good, rear is minimal.

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Summary

On April 17, 1964, the Ford Mustang appeared simultaneously on the covers of Time and Newsweek magazines and before the public at the New York World's Fair. That day many people fell in love with the car's sporty looks, affordable price and high fun quotient. Also that day, Ford sold 22,000 Mustangs. In the 30 years since then, Ford has put more than 6.1 million Mustangs on the American road.

Ford's 1994 ponycar picks up--and slicks up--a lot of the styling cues that came out on the original. And, not surprisingly, nearly 80% of our respondents told us that it was the Mustang's sporty, neoclassic body design that

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Summary 2 of 10

won their hearts and wallets.

Recalling those innocent days, of course, is also a large part of what the Mustang is all about. A Missouri nutritionist observed, "I had a 1968 Mustang as a teenager. This new one makes me feel young again." And several owners admitted that the car satisfied their "midlife crazies." In all, 18.4% of our respondents had owned Mustangs before, and many still own and regularly drive their older ones.

Besides mimicking the design of the original, the 1994 version also pays tribute to the 1964 engineering. As with the original, the

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Summary 3 of 10

1994 Mustang again offers 6- and 8-cylinder engines, coupe and convertible body styles and two basic series, the standard Mustang and the Mustang GT. The GT comes with Ford's 5.0-liter V8. The high-performance Mustang Cobra is an option package on the GT. It costs \$4560 additional but hadn't come out before we mailed our questionnaires. Nor had the 1000 Cobra convertible Indy Pace Car replicas.

Mechanically, this 1994 model goes back to 1979 when Ford began building the Mustang on the same platform as the Fairmont. The good news is that Ford engineers have done a lot of upgrading through the years, especially

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Summary 4 of 10

for 1994. The new coupe body is some 60% stiffer in bending and 45% stronger torsionally than last year's. The GT adds crossbracing from the cowl to the strut towers. Variable and more compliant spring rates, a 20% increase in roll stiffness plus a relocation of the front crossmember for more caster help rid the Mustang of some of its previous bad habits. Ride is more comfortable than in the past, and a number of owners remarked that the GT offered a noticeably softer ride than its arch rival, the Chevrolet Camaro Z28.

All Mustangs now come with 4-wheel disc brakes, dual airbags, full gauges, center

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console, 4-way power driver's seat, power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering with a tilt column and a 5-speed manual transmission. The base convertible adds standard power windows, power door locks and a power trunk release.

With the GT you get, in addition, a limited-slip rear axle, foglamps, decklid spoiler, 16-in. alloy wheels and trim differences. The Cobra is essentially a fully dressed GT with a 240-hp V8 (versus 215 in the GT), bigger 4-wheel discs, 17-in. alloy wheels with Goodyear Eagle GS-C tires, standard ABS, a/c, suspension tweaks, white dial faces and Cobra-specific trim.

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Summary 6 of 10

All coupes have split rear fold-down seats, but convertibles don't. Among the options available for non-Cobra Mustangs are antilock brakes, automatic transmission, air conditioning, 17-in. wheels, a hardtop for the convertible and upgraded sound systems, including a compact-disc player.

Though our surveyees were closely split, slightly more than half chose the base Mustang with the 3.8-liter V6. They were nearly evenly divided between the 5-speed manual and the 4-speed automatic transmission. The V6 engine is the same one used in the Taurus/Sable, Thunderbird/Cougar

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Summary 7 of 10

and Lincoln Continental, and it delivers 145 hp and 215 ft.-lb. of torque. In general, owners of the 3.8 V6 felt that acceleration and passing power were ample at highway speeds but a little sluggish off the line. A few V6 owners suggested making the supercharged 3.8-liter V6 from the Thunderbird Super Coupe available. Even some V8 owners wished aloud for more horsepower, now available in the Cobra.

The Mustang received excellent reviews in the area of handling. A Maryland service engineer noted, "Nice, small package that handles great. Gives plenty of warning when it's going to understeer and recovers by just

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Summary 8 of 10

letting off the gas for an instant." The 17-in. wheels and wide 245/45ZR tires, though, created lots of road noise.

Front-seating comfort was judged excellent by 71.3% of our respondents, but rear seats were deemed suitable for kids and pets only. A number of drivers suggested making the trunk larger and getting rid of the rear seats altogether. Not that many complained about the trunk. There's plenty of volume and more with the seatbacks folded. A few owners felt the trunk opening should be bigger, and a few more complained about poor rear vision because of decklid height, particularly with the spoiler.

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Summary 9 of 10

Workmanship was judged good to excellent by 98.2% of our surveyees, and most agreed that Ford had indeed ranked Quality Job 1. In fact, owners of the convertibles said their cars were remarkably silent, considering that ragtops are always noisier than hardtops.

We heard a few gripes about paint sags and a louder gripe about the black plastic wiper grille cracking and having to be replaced under warranty. But only 21% mentioned true mechanical problems. Of those who did mention them, 14.3% had to bring their cars back for rough-shifting automatic transmissions, 10.7% cited electrical maladies and 7.1% noted engine roughness at idle.

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All these complaints, however, were drowned out by the enthusiastic shouts that Mustang owners heaped on their cars. "Mustang is a best buy dollar for dollar," said a Kentucky teacher who paid \$13,300 for her standard coupe. And a Michigan driver summed it up by saying, "It's just a beautiful car!"

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EDITOR'S REPORT

It's kind of hard to believe, but like most of the people who own one, the Mustang is now more than 30 years old. The reason that it may be hard to appreciate that the Mustang is entering its fourth decade is because the car, like its owners, continues to exhibit the exuberance and panache of youth. And the current Mustang, introduced last year as a 1994 model, may be truer to the original Mustang's forever-young concept than any of the many iterations of ponycars since that original back in '64.

Like the original, the current Mustang is a well-balanced package of quick acceleration, nimble handling, head-turning good looks and

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

plenty of comfort for two--the third, and, omigod, the fourth, pay the price for creating the crowd. Despite its popularity, this car was never about crowds, though, either inside the passenger compartment or in being a part of one.

This car is for one person, with or without his or her favorite other, escaping from the crowd, even if only during a long, slow-moving traffic-choked commute. And the Mustang allows you to do that by injecting you with instant youth. You get behind the wheel of a Mustang, and you're transported to the fun, carefree and less-stressful days that for many of us and for many Mustang owners

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

(note that two-thirds of our respondents are more than 30 years old) are long gone.

And the current Mustang doesn't deliver this youth through blinding, teary-eyed power like some of those that went before it. Of course, that fact probably disappoints a number of Mustang fans, especially those folks who think that the Mustang should be Ford's Camaro-eating rocket-sled. Sorry, but it's just not.

Oh, there's more than ample go under the hood, with the 5.0-liter V8, that is. (We personally don't really consider a V6-powered Mustang more than a cute commuter.) Of course, we definitely prefer the Cobra version

that benefits from improved breathing among other engine tweaks for 25 more horsepower than standard. The Cobra also comes with a 5-speed manual, which is, in our opinion, the kind of transmission you need in a ponycar.

In addition to the power and the 5-speed, the Mustang's handling makes a monumental contribution to the Mustang's youth-producing elixir. The car is nimble without being darty, responsive and--unlike all of those front-drive sporty coupes--steerable with the throttle. Yes, you can still hang the tail out there and keep it there under power, balancing throttle and steering inputs, just like the old days. Just like the big boys.

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But the Mustang has not lost any of its responsibility in its drive for eternal youth. The car has 4-wheel discs, with antilock the smart option. On the Cobra, those brakes are massive, by the way, with 13-in.-dia. rotors in front and 11.65-in. rotors in the rear. Naturally there are dual airbags, just in case.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE FORD MUSTANG*

Total miles driven 1,110,275

Average miles driven 4143

Purchase price:

Average \$18,431

Range \$13,000-
\$27,600

Why did you choose the Mustang?

Styling 79.2%

Owned Mustangs before 18.4

Price/value 14.1

Handling 11.8

Power 8.2

Overall performance 7.5

Ride quality 6.3

Model choices:

Base Mustang 54.7%

Mustang GT 45.3

Body style choices:

Coupe 85.1%

Convertible 14.9

Engine choices:

3.8-liter V6 54.4%

5.0-liter V8 46.5

Transmission choices:

4-speed automatic 50.9%

5-speed manual 49.1

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 100.0%

Cruise control 89.0

Power windows and
locks 88.4

Premium sound system 73.5

Antilock brakes 71.2

Keyless entry 65.3

Alarm system 32.1

Leather seat trim 23.2

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

3.8-liter V6 21.2/26.6

5.0-liter V8 16.7/22.1

5-speed manual 19.2/24.9

4-speed automatic 19.2/24.4

Specific likes:

Styling 85.6%

Handling 43.2

Engine power 37.7

Comfort 24.5

Interior styling 16.7

Performance	16.3
Ride quality	16.0
Specific dislikes:	
Tight rear legroom	20.7%
No complaints	15.0
Not enough power	9.7
Trunk could be bigger	6.6
Shoulder harness fit	6.0
Noises and rattles	4.8
Fuel mileage could be better	4.8
Not enough front legroom	4.8
Suggested changes:	
More horsepower	18.5%
No changes	7.7
More interior space	6.5
Lower rear decklid	6.0
Improve harness comfort	5.4
Offer a more potent V8	4.8
Relocate cup holders	4.8
More front/rear legroom	4.8
More trunk space	4.8
Engine power:	
Excellent	61.7%
Good	35.4
Average	2.2
Poor	0.7
Handling:	
Excellent	78.3%
Good	19.2
Average	2.2
Poor	0.4
Braking:	
Excellent	67.8%
Good	29.7
Average	2.2
Poor	0.4
Overall performance:	
Excellent	70.9%
Good	27.6
Average	1.5
Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	74.9%
Good	24.0
Average	1.1
Poor	0.0
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	76.3%
Good	22.6

Average	1.1
Poor	0.0

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	56.2%
Good	35.4
Average	6.9
Poor	1.5

Overall convenience:

Excellent	69.7%
Good	28.8
Average	1.5
Poor	0.0

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	71.1%
Good	27.1
Average	1.5
Poor	0.4

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	71.3%
Good	26.9
Average	1.8
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	23.8%
Good	27.9
Average	34.0
Poor	14.3

Mechanical trouble?

No	79.0%
Yes	21.0

What type of trouble?

Transmission	14.3%
Electrical	10.7
Shifter	10.7
Engine vibrations	7.1

Repair it yourself?

No	98.2%
Yes	1.8

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	68.2%
No	31.8

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	47.7%
Good	34.5
Average	13.2
Poor	4.6

Dealer sales policy opinion:

Excellent	56.9%
Good	30.0
Average	10.1
Poor	3.0

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	23.0%
Two vehicles	39.1
Three vehicles	19.3
Four or more	18.7

Principal driver:

Female	52.6%
Male	43.5
Equal	4.0

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	36.8%
30-49	46.5
50-plus	16.6

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Ford Mustang if you had it to do over again?

Yes	73.4%
Maybe	21.9
No	4.7

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Report

Ford Probe Owners

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Whether it's coming, going or just standing still, the new Probe's sleek styling converted more shoppers into buyers than all other purchase motivators combined

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New instrument panel rated high marks.

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Owners liked front sears, criticized rears.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the February 1994 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

Ford launched the first-generation Probe on May 12, 1988. Enthusiastic buyers, smitten with the coupe's good looks, stormed dealerships in mobs. Initial demand was so great that the Mazda/Ford plant in Flat Rock, Michigan, went into overtime.

Initial sales of the second-generation Probe have been almost as hot, but in a much cooler economic climate and with many more rivals. The Probe 2+2 sport coupe currently stands out in a crowd that includes the Nissan 240 SX, Toyota Celica GT-S, Mazda MX-6, Honda Prelude, Volkswagen Corrado and the Diamond-Star triplets--the Mitsubishi Eclipse,

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Summary 2 of 9

Plymouth Laser and Eagle Talon. This remains an extremely competitive market segment that places tremendous emphasis on that most subjective of traits--styling.

Americans fell in love with the first Probe's swoopy lines, and the same happened again with this model. The original coupe's styling, however, drew more raves than the new one. In our 1989 Owners Report, 91.4% of those responding chose the Probe mainly on the basis of styling. This time around, styling accounted for only 78% of the purchase decisions.

Second-generation Probes again share the Mazda MX-6 platform and powertrain, just as they did in the original version. This time,

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Summary 3 of 9

though, Ford had a chance to help plan and engineer the package from the outset. The first time around, Ford barely had time to send in its design team to work out the sheetmetal and to add some suspension tweaks.

This time, Ford and Mazda worked together. The result: a Probe with a track that measures 2.0 in. wider, a body that hunkers down 2.7 in. lower at the cowl, a wheelbase that stretches 4.0 in. longer and a windshield that starts 3.0 in. farther forward. Also noteworthy is the 50 to 80 pounds that have been trimmed from the package.

There are two Probe models this year: base and GT. The sportier GT boasts

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Summary 4 of 9

a firmer all-independent suspension system, 4-wheel disc brakes and fat P225/50VR16 tires on alloy wheels. The GT's supportive bucket seats have electric lumbar supports and power-adjustable side bolsters. All Probes can be ordered with antilock brakes, 4-speed automatic transmission, keyless entry and a sliding electric sunroof. Both series come with a driver's airbag and 50/50 fold-down rear seats.

Probes also benefit from two new Mazda engines: a 2.0-liter dohc 16-valve alloy Four and a 2.5-liter V6 in the GT. The V6 is adapted from the narrow-V 1.8-liter dohc 16-valve V6 that powers the Mazda MX-3 coupe. It delivers 164 hp at 6000 rpm and

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hustles the GT from 0 to 60 mph in just over 7 seconds. The Four makes 115 hp at 5500 rpm and can't be accused of loitering either. The old Probe's turbocharged engine is gone, but the combination of reduced weight and a broader V6 powerband adds up to generally improved performance in the new GT.

In the minus column, more than half of our owners stated that early '93 Probes suffered from poor window sealing, citing gaps between the glass and the rubber molding. This caused wind noise and water leaks. According to Ford, the early Probe's soft rubber seals weren't installed correctly at the plant. Ford issued a technical service bulletin (93-3-2) that

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Summary 6 of 9

tells technicians how to reinstall the molding. The repair is covered by Ford's 3/36 warranty. Later Probes don't have this problem.

Of actual mechanical woes, nearly 82% of our owners reported none at all. Among the 18% who did report problems, one-fifth cited miscellaneous electrical maladies. Another 16% mentioned odd engine knocks and noises in the V6. Ford explains that some fuel additives cause a buildup of unburned residue inside the V6 combustion chambers. With the engine still cold, this residue can fill most of the clearance between the pistons and combustion chamber ceilings, thus causing the noise. When the engine warms up, the residue

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Summary 7 of 9

burns off and the noise goes away. In severe cases, Ford has exchanged the cylinder heads, again under warranty.

FoMoCo mechanics succeeded in diagnosing and repairing these and other problems only about half of the time--not a very good record, particularly when compared with the 81% first-time fixes reported by '93 Taurus owners. Ford service people seem to have a tougher time with Mazda engines than Ford engines.

A minority of respondents found the GT's bucket seats and suspension system a tad firm. Some 4-cylinder Probe owners found the oil filter expensive and difficult to replace. And while no reasonable owner expected to carry

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Summary 8 of 9

rear-seat passengers in limousine comfort, nearly 11% had rear-seat gripes.

But this seemed a small price to pay for the Probe's many outstanding qualities. Handling impressed 82.2% of our respondents as excellent--a particularly high mark. The legibility of instruments and handiness of controls also received high praise, as did engine response, fuel mileage and the Probe's price/value ratio. The average buyer paid \$16,800. By taking advantage of dealer discounts, some buyers drove out for as little as \$12,800. Ford offers four Preferred Equipment option packages, ranging in price from \$395 to \$2898.

A South Carolina physical therapist gave

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Summary 9 of 9

us a nice summation of the distinctions between the first- and second-generation Probes.

"The difference between my old Probe [a '90 GT] and this '93 GT is like night and day," he said. "The V6 is so much smoother all the way up to redline. There's no turbo-lag, no rush and no torque steer. The suspension handles great on curves, and Ford's attention to interior details is impressive. I can't imagine how Ford's going to improve future models."

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Every time we begin thinking that Ford's design minions might be slowing down, they turn out another winner--like the car shown here. For all its many sport-coupe virtues--a lengthy list indeed--sheetmetal is what seems to propel most owners into new Probes.

We're inclined to dismiss the even higher percentage of style-driven purchases in our 1990 Ford Probe Owners Report as a statistical aberration, mainly because we think this Probe--particularly the Probe GT--is far more seductive. If the original looked hot, then this edition was conceived to melt your sneakers. Low, squat, lean, mean, with lots of

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

rubber on the ground, just the thing to appeal to the boy racer in all of us.

And hot it is. Although the GT's 2.5-liter V6 doesn't deliver quite as much straightahead go-power as the previous GT's 2.2-liter turbo Four, it's far smoother and far easier to live with. We've seen no sign of the startup knock mentioned by owners.

Clutch engagement is as sweet as money from home, and the powerband is broader. More important, there's no turbo-lag and no hint of the pronounced torque steer that went with full boost in the old car.

Mazda has also improved the shift feel of the 5-speed manual transaxle that's standard in all Probes. All in all, there are few

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

powertrains more cooperative than this one.

The improvements in the chassis are at least as impressive as the powertrain, if not more so. In particular, the joint Mazda/Ford development task force zeroed in on chassis stiffening, which in turn pays benefits in the handling department. Although some owners found the new Probe GT to be a trifle firm in the shock/spring department, we think its suspension tuning is right on the money. We also think it's far more responsive and agile--far less inclined to wallow--than its predecessor.

The big caster revision that accompanied the rear-canted front struts (laid back to accommodate the sloping hoodline) lends a

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

particularly decisive feel to steering inputs. Braking is also much improved and measures up well versus the competition, something that couldn't be said for the original Probe GT.

Inside, the Probe's totally redesigned instrument panel and seating is almost as arresting as the all-new exterior. The sporty cockpit theme is particularly well executed here, clearly conceived to stimulate your Walter Mitty glands.

While we agree with our owner group concerning the limited dimensions of the rear-seat area--yes, it's cramped--it's hard to be sympathetic to these complaints. This is a sport coupe, a classic 2+2, a sports car with

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

emergency rear seats, and in this respect it's very much like its contemporaries. If you need real rear-seat legroom, buy a sedan. But if that's not a consideration, the Probe should be on your shopping list. It does everything well, and looks good doing it.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE FORD PROBE*

Total miles driven 1,592,951

Average miles driven 5835

Purchase price:

Average \$16,800

Range \$12,800-

\$21,000

Why did you choose the Ford Probe?

Styling 78.0%

Handling 19.2

Price/value 15.7

Previous ownership 12.9

Performance 11.4

Power 6.7

Reputation 6.3

Avg. mpg city/hwy:

4-cylinder 26.1/30.8

V6 21.4/26.4

5-speed manual 23.5/28.4

4-speed automatic 23.6/28.7

Model choices:

Probe GT 50.4%

Standard Probe 49.6

Engine choices:

2.5-liter V6 54.3%

2.0-liter Four 45.7

Transmission choices:

5-speed manual 53.6%

4-speed automatic 46.4

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 99.6%

Preferred Equipment

packages 87.9

Cruise control 86.4

Keyless entry 66.4

Antilock brakes 66.4

Sunroof 31.4

Engine power:

Excellent 56.9%

Good 36.8

Average 5.7

Poor 0.6

Handling:

Excellent 82.2%

Good 17.2

Average 0.6

Poor 0.0

Braking:

Excellent	66.7%
Good	32.2
Average	0.6
Poor	0.6

Overall performance:

Excellent	73.4%
Good	26.6
Average	0.0
Poor	0.0

Control layout:

Excellent	71.3%
Good	25.3
Average	2.3
Poor	1.1

Instrumentation:

Excellent	74.1%
Good	24.7
Average	0.6
Poor	0.6

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	62.6%
Good	34.5
Average	1.7
Poor	1.1

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	62.8%
Good	32.8
Average	4.0
Poor	0.4

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	65.1%
Good	29.8
Average	3.3
Poor	1.8

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	9.4%
Good	25.2
Average	35.0
Poor	30.5

Specific likes:

Styling	82.2%
Handling	54.7
Engine power	23.3
Performance	22.9
Comfort	19.0
Ride quality	15.0
Fuel economy	14.7

Specific dislikes:

No complaints	14.3%
Uncomfortable rear seats	10.8

Not enough legroom	10.4
Wind noise	9.5
Fit of window moldings	8.7
General comfort	7.4
Suggested changes:	
Improve front-seat comfort	10.3%
Larger rear-seat area	8.8
More rear legroom	8.8
Better window molding fit	7.2
Add coin and cup holders	6.7
More power	5.7
Mechanical trouble?	
No	81.7%
Yes	18.3
What type of trouble?	
Electrical system	20.4%
Engine noise (V6)	16.3
Cruise control	6.1
Power windows	6.1
Wipers and washer	6.1
Repair it yourself?	
No	94.0%
Yes	6.0
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	52.5%
No	47.5
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	39.3%
Good	41.8
Average	12.9
Poor	6.0
Dealer sales policy opinion:	
Excellent	54.1%
Good	35.3
Average	6.4
Poor	4.1
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	31.4%
Two vehicles	27.8
Three vehicles	23.5
Four or more	17.4
Principal driver:	
Female	57.3%
Male	40.5
Equal	2.2
Age distribution of owners:	
Under 29	35.4%
30-49	43.1

50-plus 21.5

**Based on your experiences, would you
buy a Ford Probe if you had it to do
over again?**

Yes 65.0%

Maybe 29.6

No 5.4B

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Report

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Although the exterior was redesigned for '92, styling slipped to third place among Taurus purchase motivators. Previous Ford ownership and high quality swayed most owners.

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Most called instruments and controls excellent.

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Comfort was second best-liked trait.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the August 1993 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

When Ford introduced the Taurus in 1986, the company recognized the huge gamble it was taking. Taurus styling was as radical as anything since the Chrysler Airflow, in 1934. But the public went well beyond merely accepting the Taurus. They absolutely fell in love with it. And dealers at last had a midsize major-league family sedan and wagon to sell--a welcome relief after years of Fairmonts and Fairmont derivatives.

Today's Taurus doesn't look all that different from the original. Ford is understandably reluctant to change so successful a design,

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Summary 2 of 7

especially since the Taurus outsold every other passenger car in America last year and seems to be on its way to doing so again in '93.

As a result, the Taurus doesn't stand out from the crowd the way it once did. But on the other hand, continuous improvement of a good design pays dividends in quality. Seven years ago, 41.2% of the owners we surveyed told us they had to take their cars back to the dealer for adjustments or repairs. In its first year, Taurus quality ranked as no better than average. So here we are seven years later, same basic Taurus, but with one big difference. This time only 10.9% of our owners said they had to take their new cars

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Summary 3 of 7

back for fixes. It seems the Quality/Job One message is more than mere hype.

Another big change in owner responses, now versus then: Styling ranks a distant third as a purchase motivator, compared to tops in 1986. The owners in this survey rated past experience (meaning previous ownership) and reputation ahead of looks. Interpretation: People have gotten used to the aero look. It doesn't stop traffic or turn heads anymore. But it's significant that many of the owners in this survey were satisfied enough the first time around to come back for more.

However, owner loyalty has led to a certain graying of the owner body. The mean age of

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Summary 4 of 7

Taurus owners in 1986 was 53. Today it's 62. When the same people keep buying newer models of the same car, owner age increases. Ford would prefer to see new buyers coming in, which is why Ford ads are targeting college students and 30-somethings. It's also why Ford introduced the Taurus SHO sport sedan, with its 220-hp Yamaha V6 engine, in 1989.

The years of relatively major changes for the Taurus came in 1990 and '92. In 1990, Ford made the driver's airbag standard equipment, with antilock brakes available as an option (standard on SHO). In '92, all sheetmetal--except the doors--was subtly restyled, and a passenger's airbag became

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Summary 5 of 7

available as an option. Aside from that, changes have been minor: addition of speed-sensitive power steering, electronic controls for the automatic transaxle, express-down power window on the driver's side--things like that. And the 1993 models are virtual carbons of the '92s.

What Taurus owners tell us they really like about their cars is handling, comfort and styling--in that order. Engine power was judged as excellent by nearly 60%, while handling and braking were deemed excellent by more than 70%. Workmanship got an excellent rating from 67% of our respondents, versus 54.5% in '86.

Owner opinion of dealer service is up, too:

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Summary 6 of 7

53.4% excellent, versus 31.6% in 1986. Dealers fixed things right the first time in 80.8% of all cases, instead of 66.9% in '86. So there's no doubt that Dearborn is aiming higher.

However--and it's a very small however--Taurus owners did mention a few tiny problems. Rattles and noises annoyed 11.2%, and 7.6% complained that fuel mileage didn't come up to expectations. A few second-time owners also pointed out that the shoulder harnesses on their cars dug into their necks, a problem they hadn't experienced on earlier models.

Ergonomics and driver sightlines didn't inspire quite the same scores as performance

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Summary 7 of 7

did, but all-around driveability seemed to please most owners.

What it mainly boiled down to, though, was value. As a Florida owner observed, "We also own a new Toyota Camry and consider the Taurus a much finer automobile for considerably less money."

All in all, more than 75% of our owners agreed with this enough to say they'd definitely buy a Taurus if they had it to do all over again. Another 22.3% gave it a definite maybe. Ford can live with percentages like that--for a long time.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

The old line about "you're not getting older, you're getting better" may work for people--after all, the older you get, the more you want to believe it. But it's a tough sell for cars. Regardless of the improvements a manufacturer may make to a particular model, it's hard to have it perceived as new unless it's wrapped in new sheetmetal.

All of which makes the continuing popularity of the Taurus--and the Mercury Sable--that much more impressive. Although these cars did get an extensive redesign for the 1992 model year, the sheetmetal emerged looking very much the same as before. Since the basic shape still looked fresh--particularly the wagon--the designers were able to focus

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Editor's Report 2 of 6

on subtleties like improved control location, better seating, improved instrumentation, switches more readily identifiable to the fingertips and so on. User-friendly is a term that gets far too much exercise these days, but it definitely applies to the changes wrought in the Taurus since its debut.

We've spent time in a number of different Taurus models lately, and all have performed up to expectation--no assembly glitches, no finish flaws and no performance hiccups. Our favorite edition continues to be the SHO, with its superb 220-horsepower 3.0-liter dohc 24-valve aluminum V6 and 5-speed manual transaxle, but we know that mainstream Taurus buyers prefer one of the other V6

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Editor's Report 3 of 6

engines, mated to an automatic transmission. This isn't surprising, since the SHO is the only Taurus model available with a 5-speed (an automatic SHO became available at midyear).

We think the optional 3.8-liter pushrod V6, with its 215 ft.-lb. of torque, provides better all-around driveability than the standard 3.0-liter. But we did find it to be thirstier, particularly in L.A. urban traffic, where we recorded 18.5 mpg, compared with 22.1 for the 3.0-liter. On open-freeway cruise-control runs, the 3.8 did much better at just over 27 mpg, only 0.5 mpg less than a 3.0-liter version. Our conclusion here is that the 3.8's stronger stoplight response tends to make some drivers

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Editor's Report 4 of 6

forget about mpg for a hundred yards or so.

In any case, it seems that most Taurus owners are pleased with their cars' power. But the trait that pleased them most of all, to our surprise, was this car's handling. This isn't to say we think the Taurus has handling deficiencies. Quite the contrary. As an all-around family sedan, this car's handling is as good as any in its class--reasonably responsive, not too roly-poly and predictable as a calendar. What surprises us is the emergence of handling as a best-liked quality in a car such as this. Comfort, which is second on the list, makes more sense, as does ride quality, which our owners ranked fourth. But

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Editor's Report 5 of 6

handling? It tells us Ford has been listening closely to its owners.

The few minor reservations we have about Taurus handling are limited to the SHOs. We think both SHO editions could use a little more roll stiffness, particularly the automatic. We also think the Taurus shows its age from within via its relatively high cowl height.

How long can the refinement go on without a new skin to signal change? It's clear that the continuous development game can be played too long. VW provided the textbook case in point by sticking with the Beetle to the edge of corporate disaster. But it's equally clear that the Taurus-Sable twins, due for redesign in

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Editor's Report 6 of 6

'95, aren't even close to the point of diminishing returns.

The Taurus may not be new anymore, but it's far from old.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE FORD TAURUS*

Total miles driven 1,299,682

Average miles driven 4206

Purchase price:

Average \$17,982

Range \$14,500-

\$23,659

Why did you choose the Ford Taurus?

Previous Ford ownership 37.6%

Ford quality reputation 22.9

Styling 20.3

Price/value 19.9

Size 8.3

Handling 6.4

Body style choices:

Sedan 75.4%

Station wagon 24.6

Model choices:

Taurus GL 72.4%

Taurus LX 27.3

Taurus SHO 0.3

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 99.7%

Preferred Equipment

package 80.9

Antilock brakes 59.2

Dual airbags 53.4

Rear-facing rear seat

(wagon) 52.0

Keyless entry system 29.5

Heavy-duty

suspension system 19.0

Moonroof 4.5

Cellular telephone 3.3

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

3.0-liter V6 21.3/27.3

3.8-liter V6 19.9/26.1

Engine choices:

3.0-liter V6 60.8%

3.8-liter V6 38.2

3.0-liter SHO 24-valve V6 0.7

3.2-liter SHO V6 (auto

trans.) 0.3

Transmission choices:

4-speed automatic 99.7%

5-speed manual 0.3

Specific likes:

Handling 41.1%

Comfort	38.7
Styling	34.3
Ride quality	29.4
Instrument panel layout	15.7
Performance	15.7
Engine power	14.9
Specific dislikes:	
No complaints	17.3%
Engine and wind noise	11.2
Fuel mileage below expectations	7.6
Auto door-locking function	6.1
Shoulder harness discomfort	5.1
Suggested changes:	
No changes	7.7%
Reduce noise and rattles	7.7
Make dual airbags standard	6.5
Make ABS standard	6.5
Improve fuel economy	6.5
Improve shoulder harness	
comfort	5.9
Remote tailgate release (wagon)	5.9
Engine power:	
Excellent	59.1%
Good	39.3
Average	1.6
Poor	0.0
Handling:	
Excellent	72.1%
Good	26.7
Average	1.2
Poor	0.0
Braking:	
Excellent	70.1%
Good	28.3
Average	1.6
Poor	0.0
Overall performance:	
Excellent	68.5%
Good	30.3
Average	1.2
Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	54.4%
Good	38.6
Average	5.6
Poor	0.4
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	54.8%

Good	40.1
Average	3.2
Poor	2.0
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	51.9%
Good	39.6
Average	8.0
Poor	0.8
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	67.0%
Good	31.7
Average	1.3
Poor	0.0
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	65.4%
Good	31.5
Average	2.0
Poor	1.0
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	
Excellent	49.8%
Good	45.0
Average	5.2
Poor	0.0
Mechanical trouble?	
No	89.1%
Yes	10.9
What type of trouble?	
Transmission	14.7%
Electrical	11.8
Cruise control	8.8
Antifreeze	8.8
Repair it yourself?	
No	100.0%
Yes	0.0
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	80.8%
No	19.2
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	53.4%
Good	41.5
Average	3.6
Poor	1.6
Dealer sales policy opinion:	
Excellent	64.0%
Good	33.3
Average	2.4
Poor	0.3
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	36.3%
Two vehicles	41.5
Three vehicles	14.7

Four or more 7.6

Principal driver:

Female 51.9%

Male 40.6

Equal 7.5

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29 2.9%

30-49 28.4

50-plus 38.5

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Ford Taurus if you had it to do over again?

Yes 75.1%

Maybe 22.3

No 2.6

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Honda Accord Owners Report

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Swoopier than before but still conservative, the Accords styling is appreciated by most and offends few. Appearance was not a major buying factor, however.

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Most everyone loves the dash and controls.

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Many felt the car needs a stronger engine.

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Summary

Honda has sold more than 7.5 million Accords since the nameplate first appeared in 1976. In 1990, the Accord sent the domestic industry reeling when it became the best-selling passenger car in the United States. Then, just to prove it was no fluke, the Honda maintained the No. 1 spot for three seasons, through 1992. Since then, the Accord has continued to outsell every car but its arch rival, the Ford Taurus. And each year that sales battle has been going down to the wire.

Since 1982, Accords have been built in the United States, in Marysville, Ohio. This current-generation Accord--the fifth--contains about 80% American-sourced parts, roughly

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Summary 2 of 10

the same as the Taurus. Based on its popularity as well as its content, the Accord is now about as American as apple pie.

The Accord spans a broad price spectrum. The base DX coupe stickers out at just over \$14,000 and the top-of-the-line EX 5-door wagon goes for about \$23,000. With a coupe, sedan and wagon in that price range, the Accord butts heads not only with the Taurus (and Sable) but now with the new Ford Contour/Mercury Mystique as well as a myriad of other domestic and imported models. Some of the Accord's competition include Chrysler Corp.'s LH sedans, the Toyota Camry, the Nissan Altima, the Mazda

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Summary 3 of 10

626, the Mitsubishi Galant and many General Motors models.

Short menu

For better or worse, Honda markets the Accord without any factory options. Accords come in three series: DX, LX and EX. The base DX gives you a goodly amount of standard equipment, including dual airbags--but not, for example, air conditioning. If you want air, you've got to order the LX or EX. For antilock brakes, you have to order the EX. And you can't get a DX with a/c nor an LX with ABS or a power moonroof. So you're buying packages, not individual options, and some of the owners we surveyed said they

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Summary 4 of 10

didn't like that. Other carmakers let you order ABS or power door locks or cruise control on any model, even the least expensive. And that might be one reason only 2.9% of our respondents bought the DX series. The majority (49.0%) went for the \$20,000-plus Accord EX.

At present, the Honda offers two versions of the 4-cylinder Accord engine, though a V6 is due any day now. Both Fours displace 2.2-liters, and have twin cams, 16 valves, dual balance shafts and aluminum blocks. The big difference is that the EX version comes with Honda's VTEC variable-cam technology, which controls valve lift and duration. In the

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Summary 5 of 10

Accord EX, VTEC plus better manifolding and air injection result in 5 more horses (130 hp versus 125 in the DX/LX). The VTEC Four also gives greater fuel economy and stronger low-rpm torque. Owners praised their cars' 25- to 30-mpg thriftiness, but 13.4% noted that they'd like more power for merging, passing and climbing hills. Of course, with almost half of our respondents ordering the punchier VTEC engine in the Accord EX, it's no surprise that relatively few owners felt they needed more power.

The new V6, which will be available in LX and EX models, should provide it. The new engine boosts power to 170 hp. Equally

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Summary 6 of 10

important, the 2.7-liter 24-valve sohc V6 develops 165 ft.-lb. of torque. Like the Fours, the V6 has electronic fuel injection, an aluminum block and aluminum cylinder heads.

Most Accord buyers had owned the marque before, and that's the main reason nearly half (47.7%) chose one again. A New York teacher confided that this was his 12th Honda. The Accord coupe had just become available when we sent out our questionnaires, and the wagon was still a gleam in the dealer's eye, so we can't report on those two body styles. The Accord sedan, though, pleased the vast majority in terms of comfort, ride, sightlines

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Summary 7 of 10

and silence. "Bigger than it looks," observed an Ohio market researcher. A few owners grumbled about seating, saying they'd like better or different lumbar support, both front and rear. The lack of lumbar support became especially noticeable on long trips.

Solid quality

Lest there be any question about the quality of a "Japanese" car made in Ohio, 98.2% of those surveyed rated workmanship good to excellent. Fact is, 74.1% gave it a flat-out excellent rating, not bad in anyone's book. And a number of owners cited Honda's reputation for durability. A retired military man from Colorado boasted that his 1982

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Summary 8 of 10

Accord has logged 180,000 miles without any major engine work. "Uses maybe 2 tablespoons of oil between 3000-mile changes," he noted.

Most owners like the Accord's styling but weren't overwhelmed by it. Some called it sporty, and others used the word "classy." Short drivers said they had a little trouble seeing over the upward-sloping rear parcel shelf and high decklid. Others mentioned that the trunk opening wasn't large enough.

The sun visors didn't impress anyone: cheap looking and feeling, and ineffectual, and the lighted vanity mirror was on the "wrong" side. A Kentucky mom hoped Honda might offer

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Summary 9 of 10

more dark-colored interiors, as in the past. "For soccer and baseball families like mine, this light interior demands constant nagging and cleaning."

Not many new Accords required dealer service during the 4938 miles our average owner had put on his or her car, and not enough consistent problems cropped up to be statistically significant. The little things that did go wrong were infrequent and minor, like automatic antennas icing up and not going down all the way. Dealer sales policies got good marks, as did dealer service. However, a few drivers complained about the high cost of parts and service. And then we got the old

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Summary 10 of 10

gripe about the high price of the car itself.

Our questionnaires went out during wintertime, and drivers in snowy areas praised the Accord's handling on slippery surfaces. The EX's antilock brakes helped a lot, according to those who needed them.

By and large, then, the Accord continues to please the faithful and new buyer alike. Many owners in our survey had young, growing families, so they couldn't be sure they'd opt for a 4-door sedan as their next purchase. Nearly 20% said they weren't sure they'd buy an Accord again, not because of any dissatisfaction with the car but simply because they'd probably be ready for something larger, like a minivan, next time.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

The Nikon camera. The Sony television set. The Seiko watch. The Honda Accord. As much-- perhaps more--than anything else, these four products totally reversed the connotation of that once laughable label, "Made In Japan."

With enviably high quality at affordable prices, these products helped stamp the Japanese as solid manufacturers. And cars wearing the Honda nameplate helped launch the assault on our auto industry (an assault from which Detroit is finally recovering).

But a funny thing happened along the way: The Accord lost its "Made In Japan" label, replacing it with a "Made In The USA" one. And hardly anyone who's owned an Accord

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

has complained. In fact, thanks to its solid sales success across the breadth and depth of the country and the fact that it is built in our heartland--southern Ohio--the Honda Accord has become a familiar and very American car. It's also an American car that boasts a reputation for the same high quality that its Japanese-manufactured siblings enjoy and its American-made brethren strive for.

The curious part of all of this is that despite the Accord's familiarity as an "American" car, it's really quite different from American sedans. For one thing, the Honda engines--the two Fours and the soon-to-be V6--deliver a very high-revving, narrow band of power. As

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

amazing little engineering gems as these powerplants are, they do not deliver gobs of grunting torque, and the torque that's there is farther along the rev range than it is in your standard-issue, relatively big-bore domestic sedan engine. Yet, fewer than 7% of our respondents complained about a lack of power. More than power, the Accord cries out for more tractability and a broader torque band, especially to help the automatic cope with around-town driving and freeway passing. Hopefully the new V6 will fix this.

The Accord is also distinctly different from most family sedans in the amount of room to be found inside the car, as well as in how

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

much room the car takes up on the road. The fact is, the Accord is smaller, inside and out, than most of the cars against which it competes. But only about 7% of our survey respondents felt that the car was too tight a fit. However, long-legged drivers and front-seat passengers find themselves wanting just another inch or so of rearward travel for those front seats.

Like the interior, the trunk--and its opening--is on the small side, making the loading and carrying of American-size cargo (like that large-screen Sony TV) difficult to impossible.

Yet, despite its obvious Japanese roots, the Accord does pay excellent homage to the

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

American-sedan ideal with its quiet, comfortable--almost cushy--and well-isolated ride. It's not that difficult to see how this well-made, carefully engineered sedan has assimilated itself into our culture.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE HONDA ACCORD*

Total miles driven 1,145,510

Average miles driven 4938

Purchase price:

Average \$18,632

Range \$14,900-
\$23,616

Why did you choose the Accord?

Previous ownership 47.7%

Styling 22.1

Reliability 19.4

Reputation 18.9

Good price/value ratio 13.1

Quality 10.8

Model choices:

Top-line Accord EX 49.0%

Midline Accord LX 48.1

Base Accord DX 2.9

Body style choices:

4-door sedan 93.4%

2-door coupe 6.6

5-door wagon** 0.0

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

5-speed manual 25.4/30.3

4-speed automatic 24.6/30.2

Transmission choices:

4-speed automatic 74.2%

5-speed manual 25.8

Engine power:

Excellent 53.8%

Good 40.3

Average 5.5

Poor 0.4

Handling:

Excellent 75.5%

Good 23.6

Average 0.8

Poor 0.0

Braking:

Excellent 70.0%

Good 29.1

Average 0.8

Poor 0.0

Overall performance:

Excellent 68.1%

Good 38.1

Average 0.8

Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	65.1%
Good	32.8
Average	1.3
Poor	0.9
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	65.4%
Good	32.9
Average	0.9
Poor	0.9
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	65.5%
Good	28.4
Average	5.2
Poor	0.9
Specific likes:	
Styling	46.6%
Handling	43.8
Comfort	26.0
Riding qualities	17.8
Performance	16.3
Specific dislikes:	
No complaints	10.6%
Uncomfortable seats	7.8
Noises and rattles	7.3
Lacks interior space	7.3
Engine not powerful enough	6.7
Poor vision to rear	6.1
Suggested changes:	
No changes	13.4%
More powerful engine	13.4
Bigger trunk opening	8.7
More comfortable seats	7.6
Less car noise	6.4
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	74.1%
Good	24.1
Average	1.7
Poor	0.0
Front seat comfort:	
Excellent	65.5%
Good	31.9
Average	1.7
Poor	0.8
Rear seat comfort:	
Excellent	36.8%
Good	52.7
Average	9.1
Poor	1.4

Overall comfort:

Excellent	59.9%
Good	36.6
Average	3.5
Poor	0.0

Any mechanical trouble?

No	87.1%
Yes	12.9

What type of trouble?

(Too few replies to tabulate)

Repair it yourself?

No	100.0%
Yes	0.0

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	69.0%
No	31.0

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	57.0%
Good	38.8
Average	2.4
Poor	1.8

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	47.2%
Good	45.0
Average	6.1
Poor	1.7

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	23.3%
Two vehicles	50.0
Three vehicles	18.3
Four or more	8.4

Principal driver:

Female	58.7%
Male	37.4
Equal	3.8

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	15.2%
30-49	42.2
50-plus	42.6

Based on your experiences, would You buy a Honda Accord if you had it to do over again?

Yes	77.1%
Maybe	19.9
No	3.0

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Honda Civic Owners Report

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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Stretched wheelbase improves ride quality and interior volume of both the Civic Hatchback (160.2 in. overall length) and the stylish new Civic Sedan (173 in. overall).

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Civic instrumentation and control layout continue to be among the best.

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A few owners complained about lack of lumbar support in front seats.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the September 1992 issue of Popular Mechanics)

The first Civic came to America in 1972. Remember that funny little roller skate of a car? Whatever people thought of its looks, though, the timing was inspired--just ahead of the 1973-'74 gas crunch. Suddenly Honda wasn't able to import Civics fast enough as fuel economy became America's No. 1 buying priority. Customers practically beat down the doors of Honda dealers trying to thrust wads of money at happy Civic salespeople.

People lucky enough to get a Civic soon found out that they had bought a package filled with surprises. Thrifty, of course. Cute,

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Summary 2 of 10

yes. Fun to drive, ditto. But Civic newcomers also found that their little cars were well engineered, surprisingly roomy, ergonomically on target, well made and anxious to please.

So here we are, 20 years later and into the Civic's fifth generation. For 1992, Honda offers two Civic body styles--a stylish 4-door sedan and a 2-door hatchback. A 2-door coupe version is due this fall.

In 1991, 68% of all Civics sold in this country were made in North America. Civic Sedans --are now being produced in East Liberty, Ohio, and contain 75% local content--enough to be counted as U.S. domestic autos.

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Summary 3 of 10

Hatchbacks come from Honda's assembly plant in Ontario, Canada. So while most of us still think of Civics as Japanese cars, most of them--like most Honda Accords--are actually hybrid transplants.

The top-of-the-line Civic EX and Si models come with 4-wheel disc brakes, and the EX also lists antilock braking as standard equipment. Adding to every Civic's safety quotient are a driver's airbag and 3-point shoulder harnesses.

The fifth generation seems to continue the Civic's "spirited economy car" tradition. As in our earlier surveys, Civic owners saw their cars as inexpensive to buy and operate, fun to

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Summary 4 of 10

drive and technologically advanced.

From the beginning, Honda has never skimmed on practical innovation and high technology. An example of this is the new Civic sheetmetal, which is now 80% galvanized--which means that the unitized body won't look like salted Swiss cheese after two or three years.

Another example: Two of the Civic's 4-cylinder engines--the 92-hp high-mpg lean-burn VTEC-E 1.5-liter (VX Hatchback) and the hot 125-hp VTEC 1.6-liter (Si Hatchback, EX Sedan)--borrow variable valve timing from the midengined Acura NS-X sports car. These two VTEC Civic Fours use

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Summary 5 of 10

single overhead cams and four valves per cylinder. At low rpm, the cam followers open only one of the two intake valves. But -above 2500 rpm, a freewheeling secondary part of the cam lobe locks against the main lobe and opens the second intake valve for added power. The net result is a high-economy 3-valve engine up to 2500 rpm and a 4-valve hot rod from 2500 on up to the 7000-rpm redline.

The other two engines available for the Civic family are a 70-hp 8-valve sohc 1.5-liter and a straightforward 16-valve 1.5-liter rated at 102 hp. Each engine mates to a specific 5-speed manual transaxle with gearing tailored to either economy or performance, depending on

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Summary 6 of 10

the model. And a 4-speed automatic is available as an option.

Most of the owners in our survey chose the 102-hp versions without variable valve timing. And a surprisingly small number of our respondents chose Civic Hatchbacks. The new Sedan is obviously a hit.

The biggest complaint by Civic Sedan owners had to do with the driver's view of the road behind. Shorter drivers said the car's high parcel shelf restricted their view out the rear window. They also told us that it's hard to tell where the car ends in backup maneuvers.

The Civic's headrests are equipped with fairly thick side-mounted stanchions, and

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Summary 7 of 10

these also interfere with side and rear vision for some drivers.

Finally, some of the less expensive Civic models have no righthand outside mirror. Owners who did have right side mirrors complained that the mirror design allowed dust and/or mud to build up on the window glass, obscuring the mirror.

There were also a few complaints about comfort--12.6% mentioned road and wind noise, observing that earlier Civics were quieter, and 8.7% cited lack of lumbar support in the front bucket seats as a problem.

However, Honda's usual attention to detail showed good results-97.3% of our owners

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Summary 8 of 10

were impressed with overall workmanship, and fewer than one in five reported mechanical difficulties that required dealer attention. Moreover, of the few problems reported, no single set of maladies stood out.

Unfortunately, the few owners who did experience problems weren't pleased with the service of their Honda dealer, and more than one-third had to go back a second time for the same repair.

Nevertheless, the owners found plenty of things to like about their new Civics. Styling led the list, followed closely by operating economy, and these two were also cited as the main reasons owners decided on Civics to

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Summary 9 of 10

begin with. Honda's reputation and past Honda ownership also scored high among determiners in Civic purchase decisions, proving once again that Honda is on the right track. As one Civic owner remarked, "Honda excels because Honda *wants* to excel. Everything about this car says quality. I'm not sure if this is an economy car with outstanding performance, or a performance car with outstanding economy. Whatever, it's without equal."

Looking at the bottom line- the number of owners who, based on their experiences, would buy this same car again- it seems that most members of our survey group agree.

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Summary 10 of 10

Almost 63% gave an unqualified yes-and only 11.1% said no. Maybe brand loyalty isn't dead after all.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

It's not easy being the standard by which all others are judged. Besides going 110% to keep your competitive advantage, your critics tend to survey your efforts with an exceptionally hard eye, simply because you've continually raised their expectations.

Honda has met this challenge through every renewal of its Civic series, and continues to be the benchmark of its class. And if the new Civic lineup isn't as startlingly innovative as some of the past iterations, it is certainly improved in every respect.

To refresh our Civic experiences, we spent a few days hustling around Los Angeles in an arrest-me-red Si Hatchback. Powered by

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

Honda's nifty 1.6-liter sohc 16-valve VTEC Four, this is the hot rod of the family, thanks to its weight advantage (about 150 pounds lighter) versus the similarly powered EX Sedan. Although this setup doesn't produce the dramatic mpg numbers as some of the other Civic powertrains, it's certainly the most fun to drive.

Excellent powertrains notwithstanding, the biggest improvement in the Civic lineup is that it's bigger. This is particularly welcome in the 4-door, which has been stretched 4.7 in. on the wheelbase (to 103.2 in.) and 4 in. overall (to 173 in.), which adds up to better ride and more rear seat legroom.

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

Hatchback dimensions have also increased. The wheelbase is 101.3 in. (from 98.4 in.) and overall length is up by 3.1 in. to a still-tidy 160.2 in. The Sedan is clearly better for anyone anticipating rear seat passengers, but the Si Hatchback is tough to beat as a 2-passenger runabout that can also deliver sports car fun. We also like the clever horizontal clamshell hatch opening--just the thing for stowing groceries.

Don't think we're making a sedan versus hatchback comparison here. Perhaps the most striking thing about these new Civics is their diversity. The Sedan is much roomier than its predecessor, and strikes us as the new style

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

leader in its class. The Hatchback continues to be distinctive, as well as a mini-masterpiece of interior design.

Both Civic series offer improved ride quality and their handling--always a Civic strength--is as good as anything in the small car spectrum. And we think Honda continues to be on the cutting edge when it comes to control layout and small-object storage.

Civics have long commanded premium prices, a trait exemplified in our Si test car--almost \$13,100 with options (a/c, \$720, and premium AM/FM/cassette sound system, \$420). We should point out that the basic Si price--\$11,900--includes power locks, power

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

windows, power mirrors, a driver's-side airbag (standard on all Civics) and a power sunroof. And anyway, who ever heard of best-in-class also being cheapest?

SURVEY RESULTS FOR HONDA CIVIC *

Total miles driven:	1,066,892
Average miles driven:	5230
Purchase price:	
Average	\$12,604
Range	\$9950-\$16,103

Why did you choose the Civic?

Styling	30.5%
Economy	27.6
Reputation	26.2
Past experience	24.3
Reliability	14.8
Performance	12.9
Quality	12.4

Model choice:

Civic LX Sedan	56.0%
Civic DX Sedan	37.5
Civic CXHatchback	0.5
Civic Si Hatchback	0.5

Avg. mpg, city/hwy., EPA est.:

70-hp 1.5-liter, 5-speed	42/48
92-h 1.5-liter, 5-speed	48/55
102- p 1.5-liter, 5-speed	35/40
102-hp 1.5-liter, 4-speed automatic	30/36
125-hp 1.6-liter, 5- speed	29/36
125-hp 1.6-liter, 4-speed automatic	27/34

Engine choices:

102-hp 1.5-liter	66.9%
70h 1.5-liter	13.7
125- p 1.6-liter	12.2
92-hp 1.5-liter	7.2

Transmission choices:

4-speed automatic	50.0%
5-speed manual	50.0

Engine power:

Excellent	38.9%
Good	48.6
Average	11.6
Poor	0.9

Handling:

Excellent	60.6%
Good	34.7
Average	3.7
Poor	0.9

Braking:

Excellent	52.8%
Good	40.7
Average	6.0
Poor	0.5
Overall performance:	
Excellent	55.6%
Good	40.7
Average	3.7
Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	60.7%
Good	36.9
Average	2.3
Poor	0.0
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	57.5%
Good	36.9
Average	5.1
Poor	0.5
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	48.4%
Good	37.1
Average	11.3
Poor	3.3
Specific likes:	
Styling	55.5%
Low operating costs	52.5
Handling	38.5
Comfort	26.0
Performance	19.5
Ride quality	18.0
Engine power	16.0
Roominess	13.0
Specific dislikes:	
Road and wind noise	12.6%
Restricted vision	10.9
Seats lack lumbar support	8.7
No complaints	8.7
Price too high	6.6
Insufficient power	6.0
No headlight-on reminder	5.5
Restrict headroom	5.5
Suggested changes:	
Improve rear vision	12.7%
Larger console	10.8
Improve seating comfort	7.6
No changes	7.6
Conventional headrests	7.0

Make ABS standard 7.0
More engine power 6.3

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent 68.1%
Good 29.2
Average 2.3
Poor 0.5

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent 55.6%
Good 37.5
Average 5.6
Poor 1.4

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent 37.5%
Good 53.0
Average 9.5
Poor 0.0

Mechanical trouble?

No 81.1%
Yes 18.9

What type of trouble?

No statistically significant
complaints

Repair it yourself?

No 92.5%
Yes 7.5

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent 48.4%
Good 37.4
Average 11.8
Poor 2.6

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only 33.0%
Two vehicles 45.0
Three vehicles 12.8
Four or more 9.3

Principal driver:

Female 60.6%
Male 38.0
Equal 1.4

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29 28.4%
30-49 years 47.4
50-plus 24.1

**Based on your experience, would you
buy a Honda Civic if you had it to do
over again?**

Yes 62.7%
Maybe 26.3
No 11.1

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Hyundai Elantra Owners

Report

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Restyled last year, both front and rear, the Hyundai Elantras good looks rank right after its low purchase price as the reason people ponied up the money.

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Drivers airbag was new for 94.

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Interior comfort drew high praise.

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Summary

Price has always loomed large in the Hyundai equation. So it won't surprise you that the window sticker, with its goodly list of standard equipment and friendly bottom line, puts most of our survey owners behind the 1994 Elantra's airbag-equipped steering wheel.

Hyundai's midrange Elantra offers pretty much the same standard equipment as its major competitors but with less strain on the family budget. Those competitors include the Ford Escort, Chevrolet Cavalier, the Neon twins, Saturn sedan, Geo Prizm, Honda Civic, Mazda Protegé and Toyota Corolla.

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Summary 2 of 8

The Elantra's styling, created by Hyundai's Korean designers, turned out to be the second most compelling reason for our owners' purchase decisions. Styling also became the car's overall best-liked feature.

This satisfaction with the car's design extends past simple aesthetics, as the interior design garnered just as much praise as the exterior. Most of our drivers were satisfied with comfort and ergonomic convenience.

The Elantra comes only as a 4-door sedan in two trim levels: base and GLS. Even the base

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Summary 3 of 8

model offers a generous range of standard equipment. Items like power steering, power disc brakes, dual remote-control outside mirrors, center console, rear defroster and a choice of automatic or 5-speed manual are part of the standard equipment package.

The GLS trim level adds power windows and door locks, a 6-way power driver's seat with lumbar adjustable support, a 4-speaker AM/FM/cassette stereo, a center console with an armrest, split/folding rear seatback, a tilt steering wheel and a tachometer. The GLS also uses gas-pressurized struts and shocks. Further, when you order the optional antilock brakes, you get discs at all four corners.

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Summary 4 of 8

There's Hyundai's marketing rub, however. To order ABS you have to also take one of Hyundai's option packages. And here's where some of Hyundai's price/value credibility makes you wonder. In order to equip your Elantra with an antilock brake system, you must also fit your car with a sunroof, alloy wheels, cruise control, upgraded stereo, and other items. One option package costs \$2078, the other \$3120.

The base Elantra comes with a 1.6-liter Four and a 5-speed manual transmission. You can opt for the 1.8-liter Four and an automatic. The larger engine is standard equipment in

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Summary 5 of 8

the GLS, with a choice of manual or automatic. The engines and transmissions were developed by Mitsubishi--but are built by Hyundai. Both 4-cylinders come with twin overhead cams, four valves per cylinder and--since they were developed by Mitsubishi--twin balance shafts. The 1.6-liter delivers 113 horsepower, and the 1.8-liter puts out 124 hp. According to our owners, performance with the smaller engine is adequate except with the air conditioner on, when the cycling of the a/c compressor takes its toll. The majority of owners who opted for the larger engine were more than satisfied with its power.

They were less satisfied with the noise--

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Summary 6 of 8

engine noise, road noise, wind roar, as well as too many squeaks and rattles. A few owners complained about clunky, rough shifting--especially in cold weather--with the automatic transmission.

The result is that Hyundai is still perceived as a get-what-you-pay-for car company. However, Hyundai is trying to change that image. According to our surveyees, dealers, by and large, went out of their way to make customers happy. The factory has apparently made some strides in improving such things as fit and finish, mechanical and body quality, overall durability and reliability.

To see whether the quality numbers have

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Summary 7 of 8

truly come up, we went back to our 1986 Hyundai Excel Owners Report and compared the data with what we've gathered for the '94 Elantra. And yes, there's been some improvement. The frequency of mechanical problems is down slightly, and owners now give dealer sales and service slightly higher marks. On the other hand, workmanship has slipped a tad and first-time dealer fixes were more consistent back in '86, though in fairness, the Elantra is a more complicated car to fix. So it's a mixed bag: up here, down there.

While our respondents certainly didn't blast Hyundai, people couldn't whip up a whole lot

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Summary 8 of 8

of passion one way or the other. And there was always that constant reminder of the Elantra being "good for the money." Isn't that what people want? But admitting that the Elantra is a good car for the money, how many owners would buy the same car again? Less than half, it turns out--45%. But a surprising number had moved up to the Elantra from the Hyundai Excel, and an equal number said they'd go to a Sonata next time.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

When Hyundai arrived on the North American continent, it did so with a very large bang in the form of the relatively inexpensive Excel front-wheel-drive subcompact. At the time, the Excel was quite a value. And compared with the other ultralow-price entry of the day, the Yugo--you remember the Yugo, don't you?--the Excel was so advanced engineeringwise, it was like comparing a Cray supercomputer with an abacus.

After setting sales records at its introduction, the Excel's mediocre performance and, worse, its shoddy quality seemed ready to scuttle the venture. Hyundai kept at it, though.

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

The Sonata was Hyundai's next introduction, followed by the Scoupe and finally the Elantra. Each was introduced with as much content as its competitors for less money. You simply had to accept the fact that these cars were not cutting edge. Essentially, each is a well-equipped car that is about a half-generation behind the competition. And they are all a great value in their own right. But as you signed on the dotted line, you had to accept their shortcomings as part of the deal.

The Elantra was given a serious redo last year, receiving new front and rear styling as well as some important technological upgrades. And they prove that Hyundai is

learning its lessons with the current car, which is head and shoulders above the original Hyundai, the Excel, in terms of its quality, as the owners survey shows. But there's still a way to go.

Upscale from the Excel, but down market of the luxuriously appointed Sonata, the Elantra suffers from neglect. Truth is, many folks don't even know that the Elantra exists. Perhaps worse, though, is that many who know about the Elantra couldn't care less about it. It's not that the car wants such treatment.

On the road, the Elantra comports itself well. The bigger 1.8-liter Four is clearly the

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

way to go and when mated to the 5-speed gives you a peppy, responsive feel. It's no sport sedan. Nor are you paying for one. The generally soft suspension benefits mightily from the gas shocks that are part of the GLS package. Again, you're not going to race your Elantra at Darlington. Nor are you paying for Corvettelike handling. Hitting rough pavement brings out the worst in the Elantra. It rattles and squeaks and feels somewhat tinnier than some of its more expensive competitors. Again, you didn't pay for Lexus quality, either.

The bottom line is that the Elantra is light-years ahead of those original Excels in

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

terms of quality. And Hyundai and its dealers have every intent on continuing the quest for the higher quality needed to compete. Given the car's still relatively low purchase price and the generally well-thought-out design and engineering, the Elantra is still quite a value in this market. Albeit a relatively unknown one.

Total miles driven	796,690
Average miles driven	5457
Purchase price:	
Average	\$12,465
Range	\$8900-\$16,000
Why did you choose theHyundai Elantra?	
Price/value	57.3%
Liked the styling	36.4
Owned Hyundais before	18.2
Generous standard equipment	16.1
Economy	9.8
Handling	9.1
Model choices:	
Elantra GLS	51.4%
Base Elantra	48.6
Engine choices:	
1.8-liter Four	59.3%
1.6-liter Four	40.7
Transmission choices:	
4-speed automatic	59.3%
5-speed manual	40.7
Options/Accessories:	
Air conditioning	90.1%
Premium sound system	79.3
Cruise control	57.6
Alloy wheels	44.1
Antilock brakes	43.7
Sunroof	25.3
Avg. mpg, city/hwy:	
1.6-liter Four	25.1/30.4
1.8-liter Four	23.2/28.3
5-speed manual	24.5/30.4
4-speed automatic	23.8/28.5
Specific likes:	
Styling	47.5%
Handling	33.1
Economy	23.7
Price	20.9
Comfort	19.4
Engine power	16.5
Color choices	16.5
Specific dislikes:	
Rattles and noises	16.4%
No complaints	10.7

Fuel mileage lower than expected	9.0
Not enough power	8.2
Shoulder harness	7.4
Paint chips easily	6.6
Seats uncomfortable	4.9
Rough-shifting automatic	4.9

Suggested changes:

More horsepower	12.8%
Better insulation	11.9
Handier shoulder harness	11.9
Better materials	8.3
Better fuel mileage	6.4
No changes	6.4

Engine power:

Excellent	32.5%
Good	51.7
Average	13.9
Poor	2.0

Handling:

Excellent	50.3%
Good	43.0
Average	6.0
Poor	0.7

Braking:

Excellent	47.0%
Good	45.0
Average	6.7
Poor	1.3

Overall performance:

Excellent	42.0%
Good	50.7
Average	6.0
Poor	1.3

Layout of controls:

Excellent	45.0%
Good	49.0
Average	4.7
Poor	1.3

Instrumentation:

Excellent	40.9%
Good	52.3
Average	6.0
Poor	0.7

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	45.0%
Good	45.6
Average	8.1
Poor	1.3

Overall convenience:

Excellent	42.8%
Good	49.0
Average	6.9
Poor	1.4

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	47.6%
Good	43.5
Average	7.5
Poor	1.4

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	44.0%
Good	49.3
Average	6.7
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	32.9%
Good	50.0
Average	16.4
Poor	0.7

Had any mechanical trouble?

No	68.7%
Yes	31.3

What type of trouble?

Manual gearshift	17.8%
Rough-shifting automatic	11.1
Air conditioner	6.7
Electrical	6.7
Turn signals	6.7
Vibrations	6.7

Repair it yourself?

No	95.7%
Yes	4.3

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	57.5%
No	42.5

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	43.3%
Good	34.6
Average	11.5
Poor	10.6

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	40.7%
Good	40.7
Average	11.0
Poor	7.6

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	28.5%
Two vehicles	45.0
Three vehicles	15.9

Four or more 10.6

Principal driver:

Female 59.4%

Male 39.9

Equal 0.7

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29 27.1%

30-49 53.5

50-plus 19.6

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Hyundai Elantra if you had it to do over again?

Yes 45.0%

Maybe 42.3

No 12.8

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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[macro=`Jl(qchPath,"cherokee_ownrep")']bitmaps.dib} **Infiniti Q45 Owners**

Report

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Q45s styling is conservative, and strongly reminiscent of a number of other cars, from Oldsmobile to BMW. Redesign brought the chrome grille in place of a large hood badge.

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Instruments have been revised.

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Interior comfort ranked high on the list.

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Summary

When Nissan launched its Infiniti division, it dropped its big gun, the Q45 sedan, right into the heart of the fray. In its baptism by fire, the Q45 had to instantly face off against such luxury stalwarts as the Cadillac STS, the BMW 5-series, the Mercedes-Benz 300-Class (now called E-Class) and the Jaguar XJ6. And let's not forget that the new Q was also immediately compared to its equally new competitor, the Lexus LS 400.

However, based on the comments of our respondents, the upstart from Infiniti has all the mettle it needs.

The typical owner in our survey (who was a male over the age of 50) paid \$46,819 for his

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Summary 2 of 9

Infiniti Q45. And the feature this established, mature citizen liked the best about his Q45 was its smooth but bodacious power.

Engine power was voted the Q45's best-liked feature by 52.6% of our respondents. "Performance is excellent," enthused a Maryland entrepreneur, "and the overall automobile makes a quiet statement of taste and achievement." Performance generated an additional 19% of the best-liked ballots. We interpret "power" as acceleration plus top speed, while we define "performance" as the uses of power in everyday driving.

Bearing that in mind, the Infiniti's best-liked

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Summary 3 of 9

feature--power from its 278-hp, dohc V8--also caused what drivers liked least, namely the Q45's skittish behavior on wet, snowy and icy roads. Almost 18% mentioned that problem. Even with the \$1600 optional traction control system, which 72.3% of our respondents did have, there seemed to be too much power for secure handling on slippery surfaces. "Great car as long as you stay off snow and ice," warned a New York dental hygienist.

But despite the Q's tendency to slip-slide through Snow Belt winters, most of our owners thoroughly enjoyed all that acceleration. Power was judged to be excellent by 90.6% of our owners, a record in recent memory.

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Summary 4 of 9

In 1991, the Infiniti Q45 became the first car in this country to offer an active suspension system. It's currently available in the Q45a, which amounts to a \$6600 package on the base car. The Q45a, ordered by 35% of our respondents, comes with a CD changer, rear antisway bar, traction control, all-season tires on special wheels, heated front seats and the active suspension system.

In very basic terms, the Q45a's active suspension senses a bump electronically with little accelerometers at each of the car's four corners. A computer processes this

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Summary 5 of 9

information and then opens or closes valves in hydraulic suspension actuators at those same four corners. The active suspension's sensors, computer and valve system can sense and counteract body roll, yaw and pitch during cornering, braking and hard acceleration.

Infiniti offers another interesting option group, dubbed the Q45t or Touring package, which includes a 4-wheel steering system. Only 12.1% of our surveyees had ordered the \$3100 Touring option, and there were no comments either way about the effect of 4ws on handling. Handling, however, did rank as the Q45's second-best-liked attribute, with ride quality coming in fifth, behind styling and

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Summary 6 of 9

comfort. A Vermont store manager observed, "Great road feel and response. You're really in total control." Again, owners gave the Q45 a handling rating of 81.1% excellent.

Just over a quarter of our Q45 owners told us they'd experienced some sort of mechanical problem, but they quickly added that dealers took marvelous care of them. The Q45's main mechanical problem had to do with the power windows. These were sometimes so tightly fitted that they moved very slowly and sometimes made squealing noises going up and down. A number of drivers commented on the Q45's extreme silence at speed, thanks partly to good body insulation and sealing.

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Summary 7 of 9

The silence prompted a North Carolina homemaker to observe, "We don't hear air rushing past the windows and doors--an annoyance that was so common in our former cars." Overall workmanship--including paint quality, how well the body and interior were finished and mechanical reliability--was judged excellent by 82.7% of our respondents.

When we asked for suggestions to improve the Q45, we really didn't get many. However, 10% of our surveyees said they'd appreciate brighter instrument-panel lighting. The analog gauges are too dimly lit at night for older drivers to see comfortably--a problem that was addressed with the car's recent facelift. A few

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Summary 8 of 9

also mentioned that this year's additional seat padding cuts into headroom. On previous models, flatter seats gave greater vertical clearance.

We also noticed a little grousing about the Q45's styling. "Design needs to be more distinctive for luxury identity, like the Mercedes or Rolls-Royce," commented a Florida doctor. And the Q45's trunk was judged to be too small by a few. At 14.8 cu. ft., its cargo capacity is smaller by just over 1 cu. ft. than the Chevy Lumina's.

But the majority opinion, by far, was one of satisfaction and driving pleasure. "Powerful, fun, handles great but also rides smooth.

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Summary 9 of 9

I don't know how they do it," exuded a South Carolina structural designer. A North Carolina retiree said, "I've previously owned six BMWs and three Mercedes, but the Q45 is the best car I've ever had." And a Florida attorney added, "You can pay more for a BMW 740i or a Mercedes S-Class, but I can't conceive of a better car. This one's just super-super!"

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EDITOR'S REPORT

The Infiniti Q45's greatest handicap is that it was born at the same time as the Lexus LS 400. While Toyota launched its Lexus division with deliberate efficiency, Nissan seemed to flounder. The Q45 was preceded by an esoteric advertising campaign showing rocks and flowers, whereas the LS 400 hit the public's consciousness with impressive hardware. The result has been that through no fault of the car, the Q45 has been lost in the LS 400's shadow. And that's really a shame.

As the overwhelming bulk of our survey respondents have discovered, the Infiniti Q45 is one nifty ride. Engineered in the traditional front-engine/rear-drive configuration of the

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

European sport/luxury sedans, the Q45 is a no-nonsense road car. The V8 is strong and sweet, with nearly 300 ft.-lb. of torque available to the driver's right foot. The tautly tuned suspension pays homage to the serious chassis tuners in Munich who have elevated the BMW's suspension to an art form. The Q45's drivetrain and chassis complement each other superbly--this car simply begs to be driven. The harder you drive it, the more it rewards you and then begs for more. Unless, of course, it's wet and sloppy outside, then the big Infiniti--in no uncertain terms--lets you know to back off. (A problem, interestingly, that used to plague the highly regarded sedans

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

from BMW.)

But more than the serious drivetrain and chassis, the Q45 offers an elegant and luxurious interior. The recent redesign even added a touch of wood to the otherwise Teutonic interior. The seats are firm, the driver's environment efficiently and thoughtfully designed and executed. For the rest of the car's occupants, there are all the necessary requisites--concert-hall stereo, leather upholstery, deep-freeze air conditioning--all wrapped in a solidly quiet body.

It's true that the rear seat is a bit crowded and the trunk fills pretty quickly once you

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

start loading the luggage, but these are minor warts on an otherwise impressive complexion. A complexion that comes complete with 4-wheel disc ABS, a sunroof, a Bose stereo, memory 10-way power leather seats and a remote keyless-entry system can accommodate a few warts. Throw in the optional active suspension, 4-wheel steering and traction control, just for kicks.

And, as our respondents noted, the dealership experience is as good as it should be. So what's wrong here?

Not much, really, except for the inevitable comparisons to the Lexus LS 400. And those comparisons are not really of equals. The Q45

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

was born of a different mindset than was the LS 400. And the big Infiniti accomplishes its designers' goals with the same success that the LS 400 accomplishes different ones.

Now that Nissan has settled down into quietly marketing the Q45 to an obviously receptive public, perhaps it can finally emerge from the Lexus's admittedly long shadow.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE INFINITI Q45*

Total miles driven 873,686

Average miles driven 7221

Purchase price:

Average \$46,819

Range \$38,500-

\$54,000

Why did you choose the Infiniti Q45?

Previous ownership 31.7%

Styling 28.5

Performance 19.5

Price/value 14.6

Quality 14.6

Options/Accessories:

Traction control 72.3%

Cellular telephone 53.3

Active suspension (Q45a) 35.0

Four-wheel steering 12.1

(Q45t)

Avg. mpg:

In town 20.9

On the highway 17.0

Specific likes:

Power 52.6%

Handling 42.2

Styling 38.8

Comfort 32.8

Ride quality 26.7

Quietness 19.0

Overall performance 19.0

Specific dislikes:

Handling on ice/snow 17.8%

No complaints 13.1

Trunk too small 7.5

Fuel mileage less

than expected 6.5

Power seat height range 5.6

Instrument lighting 5.6

Interior space 5.6

Suggested changes:

Brighter instrument lighting 10.0%

Greater range in power seat 8.9

Larger cup holders 8.9

Better winter handling 7.8

More interior room 7.8

More trunk space	6.7
Engine power:	
Excellent	90.6%
Good	8.7
Average	0.8
Poor	0.0
Handling:	
Excellent	81.1%
Good	15.0
Average	3.1
Poor	0.8
Braking:	
Excellent	82.7%
Good	13.4
Average	2.4
Poor	1.6
Overall performance:	
Excellent	86.4%
Good	12.8
Average	0.8
Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	64.3%
Good	28.6
Average	5.6
Poor	1.6
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	59.1%
Good	30.7
Average	7.1
Poor	3.1
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	69.8%
Good	24.6
Average	4.8
Poor	0.8
Overall convenience:	
Excellent	64.8%
Good	31.1
Average	3.3
Poor	0.8
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	82.7%
Good	15.7
Average	1.6
Poor	0.0
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	79.7%
Good	14.8
Average	5.5
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	62.1%
Good	29.0
Average	8.1
Poor	0.8

Mechanical trouble?

No	72.9%
Yes	27.1

What type of trouble?

Power windows	20.0%
Misc. electrical	17.1
Air conditioner	8.6
Battery	8.6
Brakes	8.6

Repair it yourself?

No	94.3%
Yes	5.7

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	79.3%
No	20.0

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	77.1%
Good	15.2
Average	7.6
Poor	0.0

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	72.2%
Good	23.0
Average	1.6
Poor	3.2

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	13.3%
Two vehicles	42.2
Three vehicles	23.4
Four or more	21.1

Principal driver:

Male	70.2%
Female	25.8
Equal	4.0

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	0.8%
30-49	41.6
50-plus	57.6

Based on your experiences, would you buy an Infiniti Q45 if you had it to do over again?

Yes	64.8%
Maybe	26.6
No	8.6

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Owners Report

Jeep Grand Cherokee

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Although owners praised the Grand Cherokee's ride quality, agile handling, antilock brakes and 4-wheel-drive systems, its styling tipped the balance on over 50% of purchase decisions.

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Grand Cherokee is first airbag-equipped SUV.

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Front-seat comfort got high ratings.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the July 1993 issue of Popular Mechanics)

It's no exaggeration to say that Jeep wrote the manual on sport/utility vehicles. The 1993 Grand Cherokee traces its roots all the way back to the Willys quarter-ton 4x4 that served America so well during World War II. Following up on its popular civilian version of the original Jeep, Kaiser-Willys introduced the 4-door Jeep Wagoneer in October of 1962, a date that marks the beginning of the modern sport/utility era. The Grand Cherokee, launched in 1992 as a '93 model, is the latest chapter in this remarkable success story.

According to the owners we polled, the new

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Summary 2 of 7

Grand Cherokee manages to provide a considerably smoother, more carlike feel and ride than any of its predecessors. It does this partly by using unitized body construction, instead of the traditional ladder frame.

This approach has obviously paid off, since ride and comfort were two of the things our owners liked best about their Grand Cherokees.

Structural rigidity also enhances handling during strenuous on- and off-road maneuvers. The Grand Cherokee unibody, although 8 in. longer than the standard Cherokee's, is 25% stiffer.

The Grand Cherokee is the first SUV among

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Summary 3 of 7

its 4-door competitors to offer a driver's airbag, three different types of 5-wheel drive and a V8 engine option. Compact SUV engine options from Ford, GM and other manufacturers top out with V6s.

Because the V8 came after the initial introduction of the new Grand Cherokee, 93.9% of our respondents own vehicles with the standard 4.0-liter inline Six. The Six delivers 190 hp, 225 ft.-lb. of torque and was broadly praised for its performance.

There can be no doubt why owners bought the Grand Cherokee. Our data shows that styling motivated nearly 52% of all purchase decisions. Like its competitors, the Grand

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Summary 4 of 7

Cherokee is a versatile 4x4 that offers the creature comforts of a sedan, plus a certain measure of suburban respectability.

These are not, however, inexpensive vehicles, and in theory there should be more room for customers to dicker. But demand has been so great that dealers don't seem to be making many price concessions. The average price paid by our owners--more than \$24,500--bears this out.

Most of our owners bought their vehicles loaded. All of them, in fact, ordered a/c and 4wd, even though a 2wd version is available. Only 0.4% chose a manual transmission.

Owners reported fuel mileage ranging from

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Summary 5 of 7

14.6 mpg in the city to 20.3 on the highway. Owners of V8-equipped Grand Cherokees reported 1.5 to 2.0 mpg less than the Six, and 18.3% of our respondents griped that their fuel economy was less than expected, regardless of which engine they ordered. However, EPA estimates put the Six at 16/20 mpg city/highway and the V8 at 14/18, so in the real world our sample showed mileage figures pretty close to the EPA projections.

Nearly a third of our owners--those with early-production Grand Cherokees--reported problems with the liftgate latch and seal, a problem Chrysler has addressed with a recall, and dealers are replacing the seals and latches.

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Summary 6 of 7

Jeep has since changed the durometer of the rubber seal, which solved the problem.

Nearly half of the owners in our survey reported mechanical troubles of one sort or another, including the hatchback latch. By way of contrast, only 18% of the Explorer owners we surveyed (January, 1992) cited mechanical problems.

Dealer service shops didn't measure up particularly well, either. More than 32% of our respondents expressed dissatisfaction with dealer repairs, meaning they didn't get it fixed right on the first try.

There weren't many complaints otherwise. The spare tire takes up too much space, said

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Summary 7 of 7

some, but an aftermarket mount can ease that pain. Other owners noted that the glovebox and binnacles ought to be bigger. And a few thought the 6-cylinder engine could be a little quieter.

The Grand Cherokee's safety features received a solid round of owner applause, and the vast majority seemed highly pleased. Many owners, in fact, called it the best vehicle they ever owned, and 81.1% told us they'd make the same purchase if they had it to do all over again.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Like everything else connected with Chrysler Corp. these days, Jeep is a revitalized, leading-edge concern that seems incapable of turning out anything but winners. And the Grand Cherokee is the latest proof. Conceived to counter the Ford Explorer challenge, the Grand Cherokee has been a winner from day one, in spite of some small startup glitches like the rear-hatch latch problem that showed up in early models.

While the Explorer phenomenon continues unabated, the Grand Cherokee has claimed its own following, and we're not surprised. Beyond its distinctive styling--a surprisingly big factor in purchase decisions for a vehicle

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

of this type--it's an exceptionally able all-around performer, on-road and off. Not all compact sport/utilities measure up to this standard.

We agree with owners who think the Grand Cherokee's basic 4.0-liter straight-Six is more than enough motor for most applications. It's got plenty of grunt and it's the smoothest sport/ute Six you can buy. But we also have to admit we've been seduced by the optional 5.2-liter V8, which gives the Grand Cherokee more versatility than its competitors, particularly in towing applications.

We also agree with owners who are delighted with this vehicle's excellent street

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

manners. Anticipating that the Grand Cherokee, like all compact sport/utes, would spend most of its time performing conventional family wagon chores--on pavement--the chassis design team prioritized ride quality in its suspension tuning. As a result, the Grand Cherokee is considerably more supple than many of its competitors. It's also quieter than most.

Consistent with other recent Chrysler products, the Grand Cherokee's handling development began with an exceptionally stiff chassis. A stiff chassis means that suspension components don't have to spend as much time compensating for chassis flex, making it easier

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

to strike the right balance between ride and handling. In terms of the latter, the Grand Cherokee manages to be more carlike than most. As with other sport/utes, the limiting factor is the extra ground clearance needed for off-road use, which makes hard cornering maneuvers a little more dramatic than in a contemporary family sedan.

Considering its civilized behavior around town, the Grand Cherokee's off-road capabilities are particularly impressive. Its compact shape and wide track help to make it a nimble rock-hopper, and the optional Quadra-Trac full-time 4-wheel-drive system is just about the best in the business, particularly in this price range.

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

There are really only two areas where the Grand Cherokee doesn't quite measure up to some of its competitors. The first is its spare tire location eats up a big percentage of its cargo bay. Jeep should at least offer the option of a rear-mounted spare.

The second criticism--relatively limited rear-seat legroom--isn't as easy to address without a complete redesign. Some of the Grand Cherokee's competitors are roomier, simply because they're bigger. But this is not to say that the Grand Cherokee's rear seats are cramped. And if the designers traded a little space to help achieve distinctive styling and all-around agility, it seems clear they made the right choice.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE JEEP GRAND CHEROKEE

Total miles driven	1,878,508
Average miles driven	6906
Purchase price:	
Average	\$24,544
Range	\$20,000- \$30,000

Why did you choose the Jeep Grand Cherokee?

Styling	51.9%
4-wheel drive	22.3
Previous Jeep ownership	21.2
Ride quality	17.3
Handling	12.3
Price/value	10.7
Comfort	11.9

Model choices:

Grand Cherokee Laredo	70.8%
Grand Cherokee Limited	26.4
Base Grand Cherokee	1.8
Grand Cherokee Wagoneer	1.1

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning	100%
Quadra-Trac 4wd	50.9
Trailer-towing package	39.8
Selec-Trac 4wd	28.9
Command-Trac 4wd	27.7
Up-country off-road suspension	29.4
Trac-Lok locking rear differential	29.4
2-wheel drive	4.3

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

4.0-liter Six	16.2/20.3
5.2-liter V8	14.6/17.9

Engine choices:

4.0-liter Six	93.9%
5.2-liter V8	6.1

Transmission choices:

4-speed automatic	99.6%
5-speed manual	0.4
Engine power:	
Excellent	54.7%
Good	41.7
Average	3.6
Poor	0.0

Handling:

Excellent	65.7%
-----------	-------

Good	32.5
Average	1.8
Poor	0.0
Braking:	
Excellent	71.8%
Good	24.5
Average	2.9
Poor	0.7
Overall performance:	
Excellent	62.7%
Good	36.2
Average	1.1
Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	57.0%
Good	38.7
Average	3.9
Poor	0.4
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	61.6%
Good	35.5
Average	2.5
Poor	0.4
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	59.5%
Good	35.5
Average	4.7
Poor	0.4
Specific likes:	
Styling	54.4%
Comfort	38.6
Ride quality	37.1
Handling	35.1
Engine power	19.7
Braking	15.8
Safety features	13.9
Specific dislikes:	
Mpg less than expected	18.3%
Engine and wind noise	17.4
Spare tire location	13.8
Not enough storage space	9.4
No complaints	8.9
Price too high	7.1
Engine power (4-cylinder)	4.4
Suggested changes:	
Relocate spare	14.2%
Eliminate engine and wind noise	12.3
Add passenger airbag	9.8
No changes	8.8
Better mpg	8.8

More and bigger storage spaces 5.9

Sunroof option** 5.4

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent 61.2%

Good 34.4

Average 3.6

Poor 0.7

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent 67.3%

Good 30.2

Average 2.5

Poor 0.0

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent 40.4%

Good 53.3

Average 5.6

Poor 0.7

Mechanical trouble?

No 52.0%

Yes 48.0

What type of trouble?

Liftgate latch 28.4%

Electrical 11.9

Cruise control 8.2

Speedometer 7.5

Repair it yourself?

No 96.9%

Yes 3.1

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes 67.9%

No 32.1

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent 43.7%

Good 35.6

Average 15.8

Poor 5.0

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only 16.8%

Two vehicles 42.7

Three vehicles 26.2

Four or more 13.4

Principal driver:

Male 56.1%

Female 39.5

Equal 4.4

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29 11.9%

30-49 57.9

50-plus 30.1

Based on your experiences, would you

**buy a Grand Cherokee if you had it to
do over again?**

Yes	81.1%
Maybe	16.4
No	2.5

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[macro=`Jl(qchPath,"mz626_ownrep")']bitmaps.dib} **Lexus LS 400 Owners**

Report

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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Although Toyota borrowed heavily from Mercedes in LS 400 design, 41.6 percent of owners cited styling as a best-liked feature.
Wind tunnel development yielded excellent 0.29 Cd rating, contributing to exceptional interior quiet.

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New 4.0-liter V8 offers excellent power, good mpg.

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Subdued interior is spacious and comfortable.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the August 1990 issue of Popular Mechanics)

Although Honda's Acura division is credited with the first Japanese challenge to the luxury car establishment, Toyota's Lexus LS 400 represents a far more serious threat to the old order of European grand touring cars.

Though successful, Acura's Legend has only nibbled at the fringes of Mercedes-BMW, Jaguar territory. But the LS 400, with its superb V8, sumptuous interior and Mercedes styling, is aimed squarely at the top of the luxury sedan market.

The LS 400 arrived in August 1989, totally new and engineered from the ground up.

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Summary 2 of 8

Lexus engineers and designers had painstakingly dissected and scrutinized the world's leading luxury cars and used the most prestigious as target vehicles, notably the Mercedes 420 SEL, BMW 735i and Jaguar XJ6 Vanden Plas, cars whose prices range from \$40,000 to \$62,500.

Building on Toyota's freshly developed 4.0-liter 32-valve quad-cam aluminum VS, the Japanese aimed to best their rivals by a comfortable margin, and at a considerably lower price. This they did, not only in terms of power (250 hp, 260 ft.-lb. of torque) and performance (0-60 mph in under 8 seconds, 150-mph top speed), but in refinements like

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Summary 3 of 8

aerodynamics (Cd 0.29), fuel mileage (18 mpg city, 23 highway, according to the EPA), interior quiet, smoothness and the thoughtful touches that the Japanese are so good at.

For example, dashboard warning symbols are projected onto the gauge glass from tiny projectors up in the panel cover. The ashtray glides out and back on hydraulic struts. Yamaha's piano division supplies the interior walnut paneling. The engine computer retards spark between shifts to remove driveline jolt from the 4-speed automatic transmission.

The driver can also choose from two different sets of shift points (Power and Economy). Suspension is all independent, of

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Summary 4 of 8

course, with load-leveling air springs optional.

In addition to an extensive list of standard equipment--which includes 4-wheel disc brakes with ABS, variable-assist power steering with automatic swingaway column and heated outside electric mirrors--buyers can choose optional traction control along with heated seats, moonroof and a Nakamichi/Lexus premium sound system with remote CD changer.

On paper, and in virtually every published evaluation, the LS 400 grades out very well indeed. But the real testing is performed daily, by the men and women who actually own and/or lease a new car. Which is why we

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Summary 5 of 8

asked a national sample of LS 400 owners to tell us what it's really like to live with this new luxmobile.

And even though we expected enthusiasm, the answers were eye-opening.

According to the owners we surveyed in 1990, there's no doubt that the LS 400 excels at transporting driver and passengers in style and comfort. Specific likes, in order of preference, included: interior quiet, riding qualities, power and performance, styling and handling. One owner called the LS 400 his "velvet rocket."

Lexus also seems to excel in building quality and finish into its cars, with a record-

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Summary 6 of 8

breaking 97.7 percent of our respondents rating workmanship as excellent. Never before in almost 40 years of PM's Owners Reports, have we seen such an unqualified endorsement of an automobile's quality and workmanship.

Reliability also rated high marks. Nearly 90 percent of our owners told us their cars had been entirely trouble-free. Complaints were so minor and scattered that we couldn't tabulate the data--things like wheel alignment, minor radiator leaks and sticky cruise controls. Toyota launched an early voluntary recall to correct the cruise-control defect. A few owners wanted sharper styling (9.6 percent),

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Summary 7 of 8

followed by a complaint that front shoulder harnesses irritated some people's necks.

Front- and rear-seat comfort received mostly marks of excellent again, with the minority opinion running mostly to good, and virtually no one criticized legroom, headroom or lumbar support. Cloth upholstery comes standard, with leather included in the \$4400 Luxury Group, or available separately for \$1400.

Dealer followup and service policies also drew high praise. Several owners mentioned that dealers had topped up their gas tanks after recalls. One woman said she was "flabbergasted" when two Lexus mechanics

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Summary 8 of 8

drove 250 miles round trip to pick up and deliver her car for the voluntary recall and routine service.

The Lexus LS 400 seemed, by all accounts, to sell itself, with no pressure or hardball from salespeople. A number of buyers wrote "best car for the money" on their questionnaires. It's a conviction that's echoed in our bottom-line statistic: If they had it to do over again, nearly 90 percent would still buy an LS 400.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Toyota's Credo for the new Lexus division is "the relentless pursuit of perfection," and as an initial proof of that ethic, the LS 400 sedan is probably the best first offering we've ever seen. It has two of the three requirements for cars in this class--refinement and power.

The third requirement, prestige, takes a little more time, but, judging by the responses of our owner group, this isn't far off. The car is already perceived as a bargain in its class, with most of the capabilities and amenities of the great European cruisers for less money. It's not much of a leap from there to equality in status. Lexus has already leapfrogged Cadillac and Lincoln in this regard.

Editor's Report 2 of 5

Our own experiences with the LS 400 largely parallel those of the owners. The Lexus V8 is an outstanding achievement, potent, quiet and economical enough to escape the gas guzzler tax--unlike its competitors.

Fit and finish are similarly remarkable. Inside, outside and even under the hood, this car is a symphony of precision and quality. In the course of several encounters, we have yet to find a mismatched panel or paint blemish, or misaligned seam, or anything that didn't work. Paint quality is of the highest order, and the thoughtful people touches that please the owners get high marks here as well. This is a car that begins providing owner pleasure the

moment he or she settles in behind the wheel.

Ride quality is precisely what we'd expect of a great luxury car, and more. The LS 400 irons out Manhattan's craggy thoroughfares better than any car in recent memory, and makes even the lumpiest stretch of interstate almost glass-smooth. With its exceptional noise isolation, excellent seating and world-class ride, it's hard to imagine a car better suited to long-distance travel.

But perfection is an absolute concept, and we have yet to see the perfect car. For example, we disagree with owners who see handling as this car's strongest suit. The LS 400's straightline stability is virtually flawless.

But on winding country lanes, the Lexus can be pushed into mulish understeer, and its responses to rapid changes in direction are only ordinary by European standards.

We find that the LS 400's coil spring setup performs better in this regard than the optional air spring suspension, but it still lacks the taut feel and response of, say, a BMW 735i.

But that criticism stems from Toyota's market positioning versus the Europeans. For all its imitation of Mercedes styling, this is not a European car. It's a new interpretation on the luxury sedan theme, one that can stand quite solidly on its own merits.

Perfection will always remain just over

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

the horizon. But for the Lexus LS 400, outstanding makes a pretty good starting point.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE LEXUS LS 400*

Total miles driven: 1,300,844

Average miles per gallon:

In town 18.2

On the highway 23.1

Major options chosen:

Remote entry system 96.8%

Power moonroof 91.3

Luxury group 54.8

Memory seat 43.8

CD player 37.5

Traction control 35.2

Cellular telephone 31.8

Air suspension system 22.4

Why did you choose the Lexus LS 400?

Like the styling 31.5%

Price is right 28.0

Quality 24.5

Performance 22.4

Handling 20.6

Reputation 18.9

Specific overall likes:

Silence 50.0%

Riding qualities 43.1

Power and performance 42.8

Styling 41.4

Handling 36.6

Comfort 36.2

Specific dislikes:

No complaints 33.3%

Styling too bland 9.6

Shoulder harness rubs

neck

Lacks sufficient comfort 5.3

Instrument lighting too

dim

Fuel mileage lower than

expected 3.1

What changes would you like to see?

No changes 25.3%

More distinctive styling 8.4

Add outside temp gauge 7.7

Reposition shoulder

harness

Greater comfort 4.4

Better lumbar support

(passengerseat) 4.4

How much did you pay?

Average	\$39,112
Range	\$33,000- \$46,000

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	97.7%
Good	2.3
Average	0.0
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion:

Front seats:	
Excellent	87.8%
Good	10.6
Average	1.3
Poor	0.3
Rear seats:	
Excellent	77.8%
Good	20.5
Average	1.7
Poor	0.0

Had any mechanical trouble?

No	89.8%
Yes	10.2

What type of trouble?

(Too few data for meaningful analysis.)

Did you repair it yourself?

No	100.0%
Yes	0.0

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	82.8%
No	17.2

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	84.7%
Good	14.1
Average	0.8
Poor	0.4

Number of vehicles owned:

This car only	7.6%
Two cars	42.7
Three cars	27.7
Four or more cars	22.0

Would you buy a Lexus again next time?

Yes	87.6%
Maybe	11.5
No	1.0

Would you buy a different luxury car next time?

No	59.8%
Maybe	38.4
Yes	1.8

Principal driver:

Male	67.6%
Female	26.4
Equal	6.1

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29 years	1.9%
30-49	48.6
50-plus	49.3

* Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Mazda 626 Owners

Report

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Sleek, curvaceous lines were a prime motivator for nearly half of our respondents. The car has a strong resemblance to more expensive models, notably the top-of-the-line 929.

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V6 engine was preferred over the Four.

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The interior received general kudos.

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Summary

In the field of family sedans, the Mazda 626 runs with the big dogs. In our survey, the typical 626 buyer (who was female, by the way) paid \$18,145 for her car. For just about the same money, she could have bought a Honda Accord or a Toyota Camry, a Ford Taurus or one of the Chrysler LH cars, a Chevy Corsica, Nissan Altima or VW Jetta III. That's a range of \$14,500 to \$23,500. No wonder she had a hard time deciding!

What separated the Mazda from the rest of this competent pack for nearly half of our Owners Report respondents was its styling. "It's the best-looking car on the market," opined an Ohio investment officer, echoing

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Summary 2 of 8

the sentiments of 48.1% of our 626 owners.

But the price/value ratio also had a lot to do with the purchase decision. Many owners used the Honda Accord as their benchmark, and the two cars do make an interesting comparison. Model for model, both offer virtually identical equipment. The Mazda 626 DX and LX cost a few hundred dollars less than the Accord DX and LX. But the Mazda 626 ES costs \$1795 more than the Accord EX, the big difference being that while the 626 ES has a V6--at the time of our survey--the Accord EX offered only a 4-cylinder engine.

Mazda's 2.5-liter V6 answers the one nagging weakness of previous 626s: lack of

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Summary 3 of 8

horsepower and torque. The V6 delivers a robust 164 horsepower and 160 ft.-lb. of torque. In our survey, 44.1% of our 626 owners decided to go for the V6.

More than 10% of those respondents who'd ordered Mazda's 4-cylinder wished they hadn't. "The Four just doesn't seem adequate with the automatic transmission," commented a North Carolina design engineer.

A comparison of recent Owners Reports shows that Mazda 626 drivers also opted for the manual 5-speed transaxle more often than Accord drivers: 38.3% to 25.8%. Does that mean that the 626 appeals more to an

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Summary 4 of 8

auto-enthusiast audience? Hard to say, but the word "fun" came up more often with the 626 than it did in our Accord survey. "The 626 is fun to drive," said a Delaware computer operator. "[It's] quiet and responsive; steers and corners more like a sports car than a sedan." Truth to tell, the 626 shares platforms and suspension systems with the Mazda MX-6 and Ford Probe sport coupes. Overall handling ranked as another of the 626's best-liked attributes. A Colorado physician added, "Handles very well in snow and ice and going up steep inclines. Also, the ABS is great!" Antilock brakes come standard in the ES or cost \$800 to \$950 additional in the LX, depending on engine.

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Summary 5 of 8

Adjusted for mileage, frequency of repairs was identical for the 626 and the Accord. With the Accord, though, individual problems were too scattered to form a pattern, whereas Mazda owners reported trouble spots in two main areas: The power windows had a tendency to stick open and the automatic transmission shifted roughly or erratically.

A few 626 drivers with the 5-speed reported gear grinding and stiff shifting, especially just after a cold startup. An oft-mentioned nonmechanical glitch had to do with rubber door seals that were poorly installed and caused wind noises and leaks. Mazda's 36-month/50,000-mile warranty covered all these problems.

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Summary 6 of 8

Other gripes were more minor. One complaint cited by 18.2% of our owners had to do with the way the 626's power door locks work. Only the driver's door controls all locks, and all doors unlock at the same time. As for the rest of the interior, seating and overall comfort came in for generous applause. And the 60/40-split fold-down rear seat was praised as a welcome addition to the already ample trunk.

One clever item everyone admired was the "swing" feature of the dashboard's center vents. These look like normal central vent

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Summary 7 of 8

louvers, but they oscillate from side to side when engaged and the fan is on to distribute air uniformly through the cabin.

However, while the car itself received the general plaudits, the Mazda dealers fell short of similar kudos. In fact, our owners didn't have many good things to say for dealers' sales policies or their service. As point of reference, Honda dealers racked up better scores in both areas. Fully 57% of all Honda owners rated dealer service excellent while with Mazda it was only 37.3%. As for sales policies--freedom from pushiness, product knowledge, no runaround--Honda dealers got a 47.2% excellent rating versus 30.4% for Mazda dealers.

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Summary 8 of 8

And despite the general overall satisfaction with the car, surprisingly few 626 owners would commit to buying the same car again next time: only 57.7%. Another 35.5% said maybe. Some of the maybes expressed a desire to move up into the Mazda Millenia or 929, and others mentioned that they'd shop the competition again, same as this time. As we mentioned at the beginning, the Mazda 626 runs with some very big dogs.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Lacking the massively cash-fueled marketing muscle of some other well-known Japanese carmakers, Mazda has opted instead to heavily inject its products with individuality to help them stand out from the pack. And the 626 runs with perhaps the most crowded, fiercely competitive pack of them all.

Hence, the 626 has a strongly stylish appearance--albeit one that is becoming familiar as more carmakers appreciate it--that sets it apart from other makers' family sedans. It's no fluke that such a large number of our respondents were attracted to this sedan by the sloping curves of its sheetmetal.

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

Equally important is that the car beneath the look kept many of those people from shopping elsewhere after they test drove the Mazda.

The current 626 has all of the engineering requisites to be on most folks' shopping lists: front-wheel drive, dual airbags and fully independent suspension. It also has all of the packaging requisites--seating for five adults and a commodious trunk. But the engineering and the packaging have that certain Mazda execution that helps give the car much of its character.

This means that the suspension is tuned for more than mere family comfort--it's set up to deliver precise, nimble and predictable

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

handling. You can mix and match the 4-cylinder or V6 with either a 5-speed manual or a self-shifter 4-speed, allowing you to create as sporty or mundane a ride as you might like.

The 626's packaging flexibility extends beyond drivetrain choices. Again, above the base model, you can add various equipment to the midlevel car--like power windows, door locks and sunroof--creating your own level of luxuriousness. This kind of mix-and-match flexibility is not something that the Japanese carmakers are noted for in general.

Beyond the marketing of the car, the specifics of the plan also have that Mazda individuality about them. The interior, for

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

instance, besides offering comfortable seating at all four corners of the passenger cabin and acceptable seating in the middle of the rear seat, boasts several thoughtful touches, including various well-placed closable small-item storage bins, including one for toll change--and those wonderful oscillating "swing" vents in the center of the dashboard.

Unfortunately, all the virtues of the 626 can be unappreciated, and even unnoticed, by someone who's turned off by poor treatment at the dealership. And an unsettlingly high number of our respondents found that treatment--both pre- and post-sale--to be less than what they had hoped. Just think how

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

many more people might be appreciating the car's qualities if they had been treated well enough to stay and buy in the first place.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE MAZDA 626*

Total miles driven 1,252,989

Average miles driven 5855

Purchase price:

Average \$18,145

Range \$13,700-

\$25,000

Why did you choose the Mazda?

Styling 48.1%

Price/value 32.1

Previous Mazda 24.5

ownership

Reputation 16.5

Handling 12.7

Standard features 11.8

Model choices:

Mazda 626 LX 72.7%

Mazda 626 ES 20.9

Base Mazda 626 DX 6.4

Engine choices:

2.0-liter Four 55.9%

2.5-liter V6 44.1

Transmission choices:

4-speed automatic 61.7%

5-speed manual 38.3

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 99.5%

Cruise control 97.3

Power windows and 96.8

locks

Alloy wheels 61.9

Premium sound system 58.3

Antilock brakes 54.8

Antitheft alarm system 53.6

Moonroof 43.7

Power drivers seat 35.7

Leather seats 20.8

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

2.0-liter Four 25.0/30.8

2.5-liter V6 21.2/25.9

Specific likes:

Styling 60.5%

Handling 39.5

Comfort 37.4

Ride quality 23.1

Engine power 18.5

Fuel economy 12.3

Specific dislikes:

Power door-lock operation	18.2%
Noises and rattles	10.2
Four not powerful enough	10.2
No complaints	6.8
Balky shifting	6.3
No rear cup holders	5.7

Suggested changes:

2-stage power door locks	20.6%
More powerful Four	9.7
Add rear cup holders	8.4
No change, leave as is	8.4
More comfortable seats	7.1
Fuller center armrest	5.8
Quieter ride	5.8

Performance opinion:

Engine power:

Excellent	44.7%
Good	43.4
Average	10.5
Poor	1.4

Handling:

Excellent	64.1%
Good	33.2
Average	2.3
Poor	0.5

Braking:

Excellent	53.6%
Good	43.6
Average	2.7
Poor	0.0

Overall performance:

Excellent	54.4%
Good	43.8
Average	1.4
Poor	0.5

Control layout:

Excellent	46.1%
Good	49.8
Average	3.7
Poor	0.5

Instrumentation:

Excellent	52.7%
Good	42.3
Average	4.5
Poor	0.5

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	48.0%
Good	44.3

Average	6.8
Poor	0.9

Overall convenience:

Excellent	47.4%
Good	50.7
Average	1.4
Poor	0.5

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	55.8%
Good	41.9
Average	2.3
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	62.9%
Good	32.6
Average	3.6
Poor	0.9

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	39.7%
Good	51.9
Average	7.9
Poor	0.5

Mechanical trouble?

No	73.5%
Yes	26.5

What type of trouble?

Power windows	22.8%
Automatic transmission	21.1
Electrical system	10.5
Air conditioner	7.0
Stiff manual shift	7.0
Engine roughness when cold	7.0

Repair it yourself?

No	98.2%
Yes	1.8

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	63.0%
No	37.0

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	37.3%
Good	43.7
Average	14.6
Poor	4.4

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	30.4%
Good	52.3
Average	11.2
Poor	6.1

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	23.2%
Two vehicles	46.8
Three vehicles	22.3
Four or more	7.7

Principal driver:

Female	67.3%
Male	30.7
Equal	2.0

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	21.1%
30-49	53.5
50-plus	25.3

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Mazda 626 if you had it to do over again?

Yes	57.7%
Maybe	35.5
No	6.8

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Mazda Miata Owners

Report

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Styling strongly influenced Miata buyers. Car has a pleasing aero shape and is more angular than its Taurus rival. Fit and finish received high marks.

Click on the photos above for more information.

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Miata's jaunty looks and tidy packaging pleased virtually all owners surveyed--almost 80 percent of our survey group rated styling as their principal reason for choosing this car.

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Owners praised layout and quality of interior, but tall drivers found it cramped.

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Miata's 116-hp dohc 4-valve Four was fine for most, but some drivers wanted more power.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the March 1991 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

From the moment it appeared, Mazda's Miata has been a major hit. No car in recent memory has captured so many hearts in so little time.

The Miata is the result of a handful of Mazda designers, engineers and product planners who thought the time was right to revive an old British concept: the affordable 2-seat sports roadster. Mazda's corporate decisionmakers had enough faith in their sports car enthusiasts to endorse the job, and with a \$13,800 base, the price seemed to be about right, too.

As it turned out, though, price became the

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Summary 2 of 9

Miata's one and only major area of complaint. Initial demand was so strong that even before the car hit dealer showrooms some entrepreneurs were offering Miatas for as much as \$10,000 over sticker price. Some Mazda dealers joined in the supply/demand frenzy, and a howl went up about dealers gouging their Miata customers.

Accordingly, we expected that when our Owners Report tabulations came in there would be lurid tales of \$30,000 Miatas. However, our survey indicates that the average price paid by Miata buyers was \$17,501. Since all of our respondents took delivery of cars with one of two option

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Summary 3 of 9

packages (A or B) and 91.3 percent also ordered--or, to be more accurate, accepted--air conditioning, \$17,501 doesn't seem that much out of line.

For the record, option package A consists of aluminum-alloy wheels, power steering, leather-wrapped steering wheel, digital clock and AM/FM/cassette sound system. Package B: all the foregoing, plus power windows, headrest speakers and cruise control.

Package A adds \$1145 to the base price, B an additional \$585 and a/c another \$795. With tax, license, prep and freight charges, it's hard to see much gouging in our survey results.

It's true that not everyone actually wanted

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Summary 4 of 9

either of the option packages or air conditioning, and that dealers and/or the factory simply wouldn't or couldn't supply the cars any other way. There's also no doubt that some dealers did add things like paint sealants, interior prep and body decals that buyers didn't want but had to swallow if they wanted a Miata.

Nevertheless, low price ranked second-behind styling-in factors influencing its purchase. We conclude from this that most of our Miata owners felt they got a good deal.

Still, some buyers did feel they'd been taken advantage of, and singled out Mazda salesmen as the prime offenders. Our survey reveals

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Summary 5 of 9

that dealer sales tactics were rated fair by 23.4 percent of our respondents and poor by nearly 10 percent, far worse than the industry average.

Dealer honesty fared little better: 17.9 percent judged their dealers fair in this category, 13.2 percent poor.

However, dealer complaints didn't seem to affect the high enthusiasm of the owners for their cars. None of our respondents confessed to choosing the Miata simply because they needed a car. People don't buy sports cars for practical reasons. Nevertheless, the Miata turns out to be a good car, about as troublefree as any car we've ever surveyed: 88.5 percent

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Summary 6 of 9

of our owners reported zero defects. The other 11.5 percent reported problems so trifling and scattered as to form no discernible pattern, which is a far cry from the old British sports cars.

In fact, only the new Lexus has scored better marks in recent times. The one under-hood complaint concerned the oil filter, which is difficult to get at for replacement.

The Miata also scored high marks for workmanship and overall quality: 74.2 percent excellent. There were a few complaints about paint quality, and a number of owners thought their floormats were too thin. A number of others said the plexiglass rear window

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Summary 7 of 9

becomes creased once the convertible top has been used a few times, and that it also scuffs easily, making rear vision murky, particularly at night. This is a classic failing of plastic rear windows in convertibles.

Handling proved to be one of the most compelling dynamic traits of this rear-wheel-drive sports car. Several owners even compared it to the kind of involvement that goes with riding a motorcycle. This was mitigated by Snow Belt drivers, however, who reported skittishness on slippery winter roads.

Most owners considered the Miata's power output (116 hp) to be adequate. A significant

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Summary 8 of 9

minority--26 percent--suggested adding more oomph.

In its first six months, the Miata was equipped with a 5-speed manual transmission. An automatic transmission option became available later, but since our respondents were drawn from early purchasers, the survey doesn't reflect any experience with the automatic.

Judging by our owners, the Mazda is particularly comfortable for a sports car--provided you're not too tall. Drivers over 6 ft. reported feeling a bit cramped. Cramped also applies to the Miata's trunk, something owners liked least about their cars.

All in all, though, the Miata seems to need

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Summary 9 of 9

very little improvement. Controls and gauges are ideal, according to the owners. The top operates with a flick of the wrist. The shifter snicks easily from gear to gear and feels just right.

The bottom line: Nearly 90 percent said they'd buy the Miata if they had it to do over again. This is an unusually high figure for a small 2-seater, suggesting that the Miata is already generating its own cult following, a phenomenon that comes along maybe once in a generation.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

For anyone whose youth involved cold winter driving in old British roadsters, the Miata MX-5 looks like some sort of miracle. This car embodies all the qualities that made MGs, Triumphs and Austin Healeys magic--wind-in-the-hair, responsive handling, seductive exhaust noises, the intimacy of a snug 2-seater--with none of their vices.

Miatas start instantly when it's cold and/or damp. They keep out the weather. Their folding tops are easily operated with one hand. They have heaters worthy of the name, and they're wonderfully simple.

It's hard to imagine a better update on the classic roadster concept.

On the other hand, there's always room for criticism. As our Owners Report indicates, for example, there are a few who wouldn't mind more horsepower. Reaction to this minority complaint is mirrored on our own staff. Editor-in-Chief Joe Oldham, an unabashed torque junky who regards the Chevy big-block as one of the highest achievements of Western civilization, dismisses the Miata's performance as wimpy.

However, the majority opinion seems to be that the output of the Miata's 16-valve twin-cam Four is just about right. True, its modest torque does keep the driver rowing around in the 5-speed gearbox, but this is part of the fun of sports car driving, and

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Editor's Report 3 of 4

the precision of the gearbox makes it pure joy. No one here would go so far as to call the Miata truly fast--after all, 150-mph street cars are becoming almost commonplace today--but its performance measures up quite favorably compared to oldtime MG standards. And based-on our own Miata experiences, which include a 1-year long-term test, prospective owners can expect bulletproof reliability to be part of the fun. Not to mention excellent fit and finish, inside and out.

Like some of the owners, we have observed a few small flaws. For anyone over 6 ft. tall, the Miata's cockpit slips from the realm of intimate into the narrow confines of cramped.

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Editor's Report 4 of 4

Cramped also applies to the trunk, which must have been laid out by the same guy who designed the overhead storage bins for the Lockheed L-1011 jetliner.

We've also noticed that comfort begins to fall off sharply in trips of 100 miles or more, and that the noise level inside the car runs a little high for some tastes.

The owners' observation about creases in the plastic rear window is accurate, but this can be prevented by the simple expedient of unzipping the window before operating the top.

But assessed for what it is--an agile 2-seat roadster designed to deliver lots of sports car fun for not much money--we don't think the Miata has an equal on the road today.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE MAZDA MIATA *

Total miles driven: 1,274,189

Purchase price:

Average \$17,501
Range \$14,500-
\$21,500

Average miles per gallon:

In town 26.3
On the highway 30.4

Major options:

Air conditioning 91.3%
Option package A 54.3
Option ackage B 45.7
Limited slip 37.2
Detachable hardtop 15.0
Compact-disc player 7.3
Automatic 0.9

transmission

Why did you choose the Miata?

Styling 77.9%
Price 24.8
Convertibleness 24.8
Performance 14.2
Reputation 13.3
Handling 12.4

Specific likes:

Styling 82.1%
Handling 69.2
Convertibleness 28.3
Performance 18.3
Power 13.3

Specific dislikes:

Insufficient trunk 25.6%
space
No complaints 14.2
Insufficient power 9.5
Plastic rear window 7.1
Cramped interior 5.7
Noises and rattles 3.8

Suggested changes:

More power 26.0%
No changes 7.1
More trunk space 7.1
More durable paint 5.9
Better rear window 4.7
Improved courtesy 4.7
lamps
Remote trunk release 4.7

Workmanship rating:

Excellent	74.2%
Good	25.3
Average	0.4
Poor	0.0
Comfort rating:	
Excellent	48.2%
Good	44.9
Average	5.7
Poor	1.2
Any mechanical problems?	
No	88.5%
Yes	11.5
Types of problems:	
No consistent mentions	
Did you handle repairs?	
No	88.9%
Yes	11.1
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	87.0%
No	13.0
Dealer service rating:	
Excellent	41.9%
Good	42.6
Average	11.8
Poor	3.7
Number of vehicles owned:	
This car only	17.6%
Two cars	33.2
Three cars	30.7
Four or more	18.4
Principal driver:	
Male	55.2%
Female	32.6
Equal	12.1
Owners age distribution:	
Under 29	17.4%
30-49 years	66.4
50-plus	16.2
Would you buy another Mazda?	
Maybe	52.9%
No	24.2
Yes	22.9
Based on experience, would Miata be your choice again?	
Yes	89.3%
Maybe	7.4
No	3.3

* Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Mazda RX-7 Owners

Report

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Although the RX-7's bold styling helped get signatures onto dotted lines, owners also praised its sizzling acceleration an outstanding all-around performance.

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Cockpit was a bit snug for some owners.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the February 1994 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

Mazda's RX-7 has always marched to a different drummer. Throughout its three generations, the RX-7 has stubbornly championed the Wankel, or rotary, engine. Mazda is, in fact, the world's last automaker to offer a rotary. The current RX-7 has a 1.3-liter 2-rotor model, with two sequential turbochargers.

The rotary's 80 cu. in. deliver 255 hp at 6500 rpm. How does so small an engine achieve such unbelievable power? The twin turbos account for a lot of the punch, and in a clever way. At low engine rpm, the first turbocharger

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Summary 2 of 8

receives the total exhaust stream that, at higher rpm, feeds both turbos. Thus, there's faster throttle response at all speeds, without turbolag.

Performance is stunning, thanks to a better power-to-weight ratio than even the alloy-body Acura NSX. The new RX-7 has recorded 0-to-60-mph acceleration times in the 5.3-second range, 14 seconds at nearly 100 mph in the quarter-mile and a top speed of 160-plus mph. These are hardly usable figures, but they do say something about the RX-7's purity of purpose.

According to the owners we surveyed for this report, the RX-7's outstanding features

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Summary 3 of 8

include sheer performance, handling and braking. These categories received higher ratings than for any car we've ever surveyed. Never have we heard raves like these. Engine power and braking both received a rating of excellent from 93.3% of our respondents. The score for handling was an even higher 96.2% excellent.

Engine response, handling and braking are all tied into one engineering nuance that Mazda calls its "powerplant frame." It's a laminated steel girder that runs the length of the car and bolts at both ends. This beam-like subframe, pioneered in the Miata roadster, connects the engine, transmission and differential and

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Summary 4 of 8

makes them one rigid unit. By doing so, it minimizes axle windup and increases both traction and braking adhesion. Traction is also aided by the RX-7's standard Torsen limited slip differential, and braking is helped by the standard antilock system working through huge disc brakes with vented rotors at all four corners.

The RX-7's front suspension consists of aluminum upper and lower A-arms up front, with lower lateral links, trailing links and toelinks plus upper A-arms in back. The R-1 option package, ordered by 27.5% of our respondents, includes firmer shock settings, additional chassis bracing, Z-rated 16-in. tires,

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Summary 5 of 8

a front airdam, a rear spoiler and dual engine oil coolers. The R-1 package is probably more at home on the raceway than on the freeway, and the 10.2% who grumbled about the RX-7's harsh ride were mostly R-1 owners. Those who'd ordered the Touring package--with its softer shock settings, V-rated tires, more sound insulation and leather seats--were not bothered by the RX-7's ride. Not surprisingly, owners expressed their greatest delight with the RX-7's body design. The taut surfaces, marvelous C-shaped door cuts, cozy interior and purposeful controls became the main selling points for 71.3% of our respondents.

Driving the RX-7, however, was not a trouble-free experience for 41.3% of our

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Summary 6 of 8

owners. Of those, a weak a/c system and stall problems afflicted 32.6%. Poor wheel alignment plagued another 10.9%. The engine stalls were caused by a computer malfunction, and dealers replaced the ECU under warranty.

However, many owners were far from pleased with the service their dealers provided. More than 25% rated dealer service in the average to poor range. A mere 56.1% reported successful first-time fixes not a good showing for a \$30,000 car.

A number of quality-control complaints surfaced under the Specific Dislikes heading of our survey: "easily chipped paint," "scratch-prone console" and "hard-to-close doors." Doors were hard to shut with the

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Summary 7 of 8

windows up because of the tight cockpit seals (like the old VW Beetle). A few owners also commented on the fragile sheetmetal. Mazda lightened this car partly by using comparatively thin body panels and an aluminum hood.

General workmanship rated quite high, with 95.2% scoring the RX-7 good to excellent in this category. The materials used inside the car, however, weren't up to everyone's standards. And the car's limited storage space drew fire as well, particularly when it was equipped with the super-duper Bose sound system.

The minority gripes and grumbles, though, didn't come close to overshadowing overall

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Summary 8 of 8

owner enthusiasm. A Texas engineer summed it all up: "I bought this car in a fit of temporary insanity," he said. "It was the prettiest thing I'd ever seen. Whether I could afford it or not never crossed my mind. And it's unbelievably fast."

Amen.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

To me, the curious thing about the ratings in the performance section of the RX-7 data panel is not that the owners gave their cars such a resounding endorsement. No. The oddity is that anyone could find the RX-7's power, handling, braking and overall performance anything but outstanding. It's also pretty interesting that 11.5% of our respondents thought they'd like a little more horsepower.

Well, there are those who will always say there's no such thing as too much horsepower. We've even said it ourselves. But as far as the RX-7 is concerned, it does seem that there's plenty--at least for any public road driving application we can imagine. Any way you

measure it--all by itself, against its contemporaries or against the entire history of its breed--this is an exceptional sports car.

That term--sports car--is important. Historically, it describes a race-capable car that can also be driven on the street. And in the not-so-distant past, it included a pretty primitive level of comfort.

The RX-7 is far from primitive, of course. And changes for 1994 have softened its hard edges. But this is still a real sports car--with far fewer compromises than most passenger cars, even those with sporty aspirations. Anyone who signs up expecting the kind of leather-lined hedonism they'd encounter in, say, a Lincoln Mark VIII is in for a disappointment.

To their credit, most of the owners in our survey seem to have accepted this covenant. And most of their complaints--paint quality, tacky interior plastics, insufficient small-object storage, difficult door closure--are valid within the terms of this compact. Mazda, as you'd expect, is busily working to improve the perceived shortfalls.

Complaints about dealer service departments, of course, are another matter entirely. While we can't comment on this from personal experience, we can say that when 43.9% of the respondents say no to the question about satisfactory dealer repairs--and 25% rate dealer service as average to poor--

the manufacturer has a problem.

However, as far as the car is concerned, we have few criticisms. Yes, we agree that the premium sound system is too bulky. Yes, driver sightlines in the rear quarters--where highway patrolmen are going to be sneaking up--are a little restricted. Yes, it has a thirst--a thirst that becomes prodigious when both turbos are pumping full-tilt boogie. But if you love performance, these are compromises you're willing to make.

This car belongs to a breed that is becoming increasingly difficult for manufacturers to justify. Thanks to our statistical-probability friends out there in insurance land, the RX-7

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

and its contemporaries are endangered species. So if you've always yearned for a true sizzler of a sports car, well, here it is. Get it while you can.

This is one of the great ones.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE MAZDA RX-7*

Total miles driven	1,491,264
Average miles driven	6687
Purchase price:	
Average	\$30,358
Range	\$25,000-
	\$37,000
Why did you choose the RX-7?	
Styling	71.3%
Performance	45.5
Handling	24.4
Power	18.7
Price/value	18.2
Previous Mazda/RX-7 ownership	11.5
Avg. mpg, city/hwy:	
5-speed manual	16.3/21.2
4-speed automatic	16.8/20.8
Transmission choices:	
5-speed manual	89.8%
4-speed automatic	10.2
Options/Accessories:	
Leather seats	69.0%
Touring package	60.6
R-1 package	27.5
Cellular telephone	10.4
Engine power:	
Excellent	93.3%
Good	5.8
Average	1.0
Poor	0.0
Handling:	
Excellent	96.2%
Good	2.9
Average	0.5
Poor	0.5
Braking:	
Excellent	93.3%
Good	6.2
Average	0.0
Poor	0.5
Overall performance:	
Excellent	92.8%
Good	6.2
Average	0.0
Poor	1.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	79.4%

Good	18.2
Average	1.9
Poor	0.5
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	79.9%
Good	19.6
Average	0.5
Poor	0.0
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	45.5%
Good	42.1
Average	11.0
Poor	1.4
Specific likes:	
Styling	79.2%
Handling	51.9
Power	49.5
Performance	45.8
Braking	11.3
Specific dislikes:	
Paint chips too easily	18.8%
Interior plastic looks cheap	12.9
Limited storage	10.2
Harsh ride	10.2
Tire, suspension noise, rattles	10.2
Poor stereo sound quality	9.1
Doors hard to shut	7.5
Fuel economy lower than expected	7.0
Suggested changes:	
Chip-resistant paint	13.8%
More powerful engine	11.5
Smaller speaker system	9.2
Reduce noises and rattles	8.6
Improve interior plastic	7.5
Improve seat comfort	6.9
Softer ride	5.7
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	54.6%
Good	40.6
Average	3.9
Poor	1.0
Comfort opinion:	
Excellent	48.8%
Good	44.2
Average	5.6
Poor	1.4
Any mechanical trouble?	
No	58.7%
Yes	41.3

What type of trouble?

Weak air conditioning	16.3%
Engine stalling	16.3
Wheel alignment	10.9
Engine-management computer	7.6
Miscellaneous electrical	7.6
Engine hesitation	6.5
Transmission	6.5

Repair it yourself?

No	96.8%
Yes	3.2

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	56.1%
No	43.9

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	35.5%
Good	38.3
Average	17.5
Poor	8.7

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	36.6%
Good	43.5
Average	13.9
Poor	6.0

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	20.5%
Two vehicles	25.6
Three vehicles	27.0
Four or more	26.9

Principal driver:

Male	84.4%
Female	14.6
Equal	0.9

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	19.1%
30-49 years	64.2
50-plus	16.8

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Mazda RX-7 if you had it to do over again?

Yes	62.5%
Maybe	31.5
No	6.0

* Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Villager/Quest Owners

Report

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Slick styling seduced more Villager and Quest buyers than any other trait. However, owners listed carlike handling as the best-like feature. Ride quality also ranked high.

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Some owners wanted stronger panel lighting.

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Seating got high marks, controls drew pans.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the November 1993 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

The greatest compliment you can pay a minivan is to say it drives like a car. And carlike is what a lot of the owners we surveyed said about their Mercury Villagers and Nissan Quests.

There aren't many differences between the two. The Quest sports a version of the Maxima grille, while the Villager has Mercury's familiar lightbar. Both vans have their own unique tail lamps, body moldings, wheel covers and optional alloy wheels. Other than that, they're the same.

While both vans come in two trim levels, Villager GS and LS, Quest XE and GXE,

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Summary 2 of 8

there are some distinctions in equipment. All Villagers come standard with 4-wheel antilock brakes, but ABS is a \$700 option in the Quest. All Quests have air conditioning, but it's an option in the basic Villager GS. The Quest GXE comes with an auxiliary rear air-conditioning system, but in the Villager it's built into several different option packages. All Quests come with tilt steering wheels and AM/FM/cassette stereo systems, but in the Villager they're standard only in the LS. A rear-window defogger is standard in all Quests, but it costs extra in all Villagers. The base Quest XE lists for \$17,395, the Villager GS for \$16,790.

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Summary 3 of 8

Nissan handled most of the design and engineering work in the development of the Villager/Quest, while Ford took on manufacturing issues and final assembly. Assembly takes place in Ford's former van plant near Avon Lake, Ohio.

Nissan supplies the V6 engine, the automatic transaxle and most of the major body stampings from its plant in Smyrna, Tennessee. The 151-hp V6 and electronically controlled 4-speed transmission--the only powerteam available--derive from the Nissan Maxima, as do most of the steering and front-suspension components. However, enough parts come from Nissan's U.S. plant and from

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Summary 4 of 8

Ford and other domestic suppliers that the Villager/Quest qualifies as a domestic vehicle.

It's clear that the Villager/Quest's marketing target is Chrysler's gold-standard minivans--the Plymouth Voyager, Dodge Caravan and Chrysler Town & Country. Dimensionally, the Villager/Quest stretches nearly a foot longer than the standard MoPar minivan (Grand versions of the Caravan and Voyager stretch to 190.5 in.), and the rear seat is 4 in. wider. But other interior dimensions are almost identical. Total cargo volumes, with the second-row seats removed, are also virtually identical for all the standard vans.

Our survey showed that owners

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Summary 5 of 8

particularly like the way the Villager/Quest handles. Fully 77% judged handling excellent, and another 22% scored it good. Owners also like the V/Q's style and ride quality, along with overall comfort.

There was a lot of praise for the V/Q's versatility in seating and cargo arrangements. Nissan claims up to 24 different seat configurations. The second-row seats, available as a single bench seat or separate captain-style buckets, have quick-release mounts and lift out easily. The third-row bench can then slide forward on tracks, and can be folded and refolded right up against the front seat backs. You can also remove the

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Summary 6 of 8

third bench with hand tools. This leaves an uncluttered interior of 126.4 cu. ft. Additionally, all second- and third-row seat backs fold flat so they can serve as tables.

What V/Q owners didn't like were the mouse-motor shoulder harnesses and manual lap belts. This is a common complaint that's disappearing as airbags replace automatic belts in passive systems. However, the V/Q vans in our survey weren't equipped with airbags--a driver's airbag will be standard with '94 models--and 26.2% of our owners expressed unhappiness with this omission. A number of them also criticized the lack of a child safety seat option.

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Summary 7 of 8

Another peeve had to do with parking. The V/Q's sloping hood provides no reference points, and some owners confessed to parking by ear.

The ergonomic gripes we tallied mostly had to do with stereo and ventilation controls. These are clustered on a console pod between the driver and passenger, and the buttons are so small and so numerous that they provoked a number of complaints.

Back on the plus side of the ledger, more than two-thirds of our respondents reported no mechanical difficulties of any kind. Of the 33.7% who did have problems, dealers made first-time repairs in roughly 80% of all cases.

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Summary 8 of 8

Since service constituted one of the main reasons for choosing between Mercury and Nissan, it's interesting to note that Villager owners were more pleased with dealer sales and service policies than were Quest owners.

Minivans tend to be transitional vehicles--people move into and out of them as their needs change. They're handiest, obviously, for growing families. So it's quite a compliment that 71.6% of our respondents said they'd buy a Villager or Quest next time around. Only 4.2% gave a definite thumbs down. This means that the majority of these minivan owners think that the Mercury Villager and/or Nissan Quest is their kind of car.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

It's amazing that something as successful as the Chrysler minivan has taken so long to provoke a direct challenge. Although there are some 18 minivan nameplates on the market, these two--the Villager and the Quest--are the first that square up head to head with the original Chrysler concept: sedan driveability, small-van volume.

A week of touring the Los Angeles area in the Villager shown here--plus a year of living with a Villager long-term test vehicle in Detroit--leaves us with no doubt concerning the driveability issue. These minivans are mannerly and predictable, with very good steering feel and excellent ride quality.

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

They're also exceptionally quiet. It's hard to remember that you're hauling around all that cargo volume. But the most telling testimonial concerning the Villager/Quest driveability quotient comes from the people doing the day-to-day driving. Based on our survey, almost two-thirds of these people are women. And in our experience, women have a much more demanding definition of "carlike" than men. Minivans riding on compact pickup chassis need not apply.

Recognizing that blazing 0-to-60 performance isn't an important consideration in minivan purchase decisions, we'd call this van's powertrain good. Nissan's V6 is

wonderfully smooth, and the 4-speed transaxle is almost transparent in its operation--upshifts in particular are difficult to discern in ordinary driving. And even though some of our owners weren't pleased with their fuel economy, we regard this van's mpg as competitive. Our own travels around L.A. netted just over 18 mpg.

About the only time we wished for more muscle was in passing situations on 2-lane highways. With almost 2 tons of minivan to tow, passing exposure times feel a little lengthy. We also think the tow rating--3500 pounds--is optimistic. If towing in that weight range is likely to be a regular part of your van's workload, we recommend one of the

rear-drive minivans and more power.

There are a couple of areas where the Villager/Quest gives something away to the Chrysler minivans. It has only one powertrain offering--albeit a good one--versus a varied Chrysler lineup that includes the option of all-wheel drive. The V/Q comes in just one size, in contrast to the stretched Grand versions of the Dodge Caravan and Plymouth Voyager. And Chrysler's airbags and optional integrated child seats have been strong selling points.

However, Villager/Quest gets a big edge in seating/cargo flexibility, and its styling is competitive. Stir a standard driver's airbag into the mix ('94 model year), and you've got a

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

strong alternative to the industry's perennial minivan sales leaders. It's always nice to have choices.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE VILLAGER/QUEST*

Total miles driven	2,362,572
Average miles driven	7225
Purchase price:	
Average	\$20,406
Range	\$16,000-
	\$28,000

Why did you choose the Villager/

Quest?

Styling	46.0%
Handling	20.9
Roominess	16.6
Versatile seating/cargo	14.7
Price/value	10.1
Standard equipment	8.9
Ride quality	8.9
Avg. mpg, city/hwy:	18.6/23.5

Model choices (Mercury):

Villager GS	62.3%
Villager LS	37.7

Model choices (Nissan):

Quest XE	63.2%
Quest GXE	36.8

Seating choices:

7-passenger	98.5%
5-passenger	1.5

Options/Accessories:

Antilock brakes	79.2%
Handling package	47.5
Center-row captain's chairs	32.6
Keyless entry	29.2
Digital instruments	21.6

Towing/performance

package	20.1
Sunroof	15.5
Leather upholstery	13.4

Engine power:

Excellent	51.5%
Good	43.3
Average	4.8
Poor	0.3

Handling:

Excellent	77.0%
Good	22.0
Average	1.0
Poor	0.0

Braking:

Excellent	62.2%
Good	34.0
Average	3.8
Poor	0.0

Overall performance:

Excellent	68.7%
Good	30.2
Average	0.7
Poor	0.3

Control layout:

Excellent	44.5%
Good	43.8
Average	11.0
Poor	0.7

Instrumentation:

Excellent	51.4%
Good	42.8
Average	4.1
Poor	1.7

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	50.9%
Good	37.8
Average	8.6
Poor	2.7

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	65.3%
Good	33.1
Average	1.2
Poor	0.3

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	73.5%
Good	24.4
Average	2.1
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	41.0%
Good	52.0
Average	6.4
Poor	0.6

Specific likes:

Handling	53.1%
Styling	41.5
Ride quality	38.9
Comfort	35.7
Versatile seating	22.5
Engine power	18.6

Specific dislikes:

No complaints	12.6%
Vague parking dimensions	11.5
Fuel economy lower	

than expected	8.6
Noises and rattles	7.8
No airbags	7.8
Suggested changes:	
Airbags	26.2%
Improve shoulder-harness comfort	10.7
Center-seat cup holders	8.7
Improve center console	6.7
More cargo space with seats in place	6.3
Improve instrument illumination	5.6
Mechanical trouble?	
No	66.3%
Yes	33.7
What type of trouble?	
Rear wiper won't shut off	22.1%
Electrical problems	15.0
Brakes	11.5
Heater fan	8.0
Air conditioner	7.1
Fuel system	6.2
Heater	6.2
Repair it yourself?	
No	98.2%
Yes	1.8
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	79.4%
No	20.6
Mercury dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	56.1%
Good	35.0
Average	7.2
Poor	1.7
Nissan dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	48.5%
Good	36.6
Average	12.7
Poor	2.2
Mercury dealer sales policy:	
Excellent	57.0%
Good	35.2
Average	7.3
Poor	0.5
Nissan dealer sales policy:	
Excellent	45.7%
Good	37.9
Average	15.1
Poor	1.4
Number of vehicles owned:	

This vehicle only	16.3%
Two vehicles	50.9
Three vehicles	20.2
Four or more	10.2

Principal driver:

Female	66.0%
Male	28.3
Equal	5.7

Age distribution of owners:

29 and under	5.9%
30-49	66.0
50-plus	28.1

Based on your experience, would the Villager or Quest be your choice if you had it to do over again?

Yes	71.6%
Maybe	24.2
No	4.2

* Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Mitsubishi Galant Owners Report

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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The strong resemblance between the Galant and more expensive Diamante is not a coincidence. Most of our owners appreciated the car's distinctive Mitsubishi appearance.

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The view forward and controls are good.

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All Galants have very smooth Fours.

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Summary

Bell for bell and whistle for whistle, the 1994 Mitsubishi Galant impressed most owners in our survey as a good-looking value. Many had test-driven comparably equipped Camrys, Accords, Altimas and 626s and found the Galant to be the most desirable combination, dollar for all-important dollar.

Totally redesigned for 1994, the Galant now looks like a cross between the sporty Eclipse and more elegant Diamante. So, not surprisingly, styling topped our owners' list of reasons for choosing the Galant, with price/value ranking second. Interestingly, nearly 20% had owned Mitsubishi's before.

Several respondents told us they'd stepped

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Summary 2 of 10

out of an Eclipse coupe and had chosen the Galant for greater space and comfort. The Galant's trunk volume measures 18 cu. ft., nearly 1 cu. ft. more than the Buick LeSabre's, and the Mitsubishi's rear seatback folds down for added capacity. Compared with last year's Galant, this 1994 model stands 3 in. longer, slightly wider and taller, yet weighs only 43 pounds more. And with its 1994 redesign, the Galant's coefficient of drag improved from 0.35 in 1993 to one of the best in the business, 0.29, for better fuel economy and less noise.

The Galant has been Mitsubishi's top-selling nameplate for several years now. It comes in four series but only one body style: a 4-door

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Summary 3 of 10

sedan. The series start with the base Galant S, which a mere 6.9% of our sample chose. Above the S, there's the ES and LS. Both come with 4-speed automatic, air conditioning, power windows and door locks, cruise control and AM/FM/cassette stereo. The LS adds a sunroof, alloy wheels and more. At the top of the list sits the Galant GS. The GS brings a twin-cam version of the 2.4-liter Four that produces 160 horsepower instead of the 141 hp of the others. The GS also comes with 4-wheel disc brakes, firmer suspension, front and rear stabilizer bars and a CD player.

The 141-hp engine uses a single overhead

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Summary 4 of 10

cam but has four valves per cylinder (the same number as the GS dohc engine). The Galant S and GS come standard with a manual 5-speed, but both are available with the fuzzy-logic automatic as well (at no cost in the GS). And therein lies a tale. Not everyone liked the fuzziness of the logic. A few owners questioned its habit of downshifting when coasting downhill and at other unexpected times. The algorithms programmed into this transmission's electronic brain are intended to deal with such things as mountain driving and stop-and-go traffic. Most automatics simply stay in whatever range they happen to be in or, at borderline speeds, "hunt" up and down

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Summary 5 of 10

between gears. downshifting when coasting downhill and at other unexpected times. The algorithms programmed into this transmission's electronic brain are intended to deal with such things as mountain driving and stop-and-go traffic. Most automatics simply stay in whatever range they happen to be in or, at borderline speeds, "hunt" up and down between gears. Fuzzy logic, though, tries to make sense out of random data and then maximize the outcome. The microprocessor is programmed, for instance, to downshift on long descents and to choose the ideal range for performance and economy in traffic. Some owners understood what the fuzzy logic was

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Summary 6 of 10

trying to do but others didn't. "Transmission sometimes shifts for no apparent reason," sniffed a miffed Minnesota retiree.

Another complaint with the automatic cited jerky First-Second and Second-First shifts. This was mechanical and had nothing to do with fuzzy logic. Also, going from Reverse to Drive or vice versa without coming to a full stop--as in backing out of a parking space--produced a jarring clunk. Most of our survey Galants were equipped with the automatic versus only 8.5% that came with the 5-speed.

Our owners voiced their loudest complaint against the Galant's overall noisiness. According to 27.2% of our surveyees, the car

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Summary 7 of 10

puts out high levels of engine roar and tire noise. "It's not as refined as the competition," they told us loudly.

Galants are built in Normal, Illinois, in the Diamond-Star assembly plant joint-ventured with Chrysler Corp. Mitsubishi points out that 65% of Galant's material content comes from U.S. suppliers, and the labor force is apple-pie American. And the car's workmanship was rated excellent by 62.6% of our Galant owners. "Not a loose screw or a stitch out of place in the whole automobile," beamed a Texas counselor. "This is an excellent, well-built car, especially for the money," agreed a New Yorker.

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Summary 8 of 10

A fairly high 38% of our respondents, however, had experienced mechanical trouble in some form. Of those surveyees, the most common problems had to do with the electrical system: headlights dimming on deceleration, power windows sticking, power mirrors not working and the ABS light coming on for no apparent reason. According to a Mitsubishi spokesperson, these malfunctions have been acknowledged and were corrected in later production. Afflicting another 13.7% were warped brake rotors, a problem covered for only one year or 12,000 miles of Mitsubishi's 3-year/36,000-mile warranty. After that it's a dealer call.

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Summary 9 of 10

In terms of performance, handling and braking, most people seemed more than happy. "Good power to flatten out the hills," said an Arizona materials coordinator. A New York office manager: "Handles very well on all surfaces, hugs the road, has plenty of power for trips as well as city driving."

Of overall comfort and interior appointments, the vast majority praised the seats, although a few owners would have liked more lumbar support. The Galant's nonpower 5-way adjustable driver's seat comes standard in the S and ES, with the LS and GS adding a bottom-cushion tilt adjustment. The Galant cabin has loads of pockets and storage nooks.

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Summary 10 of 10

Except for the cruise-control switch hidden behind the steering wheel and too many tiny buttons on the radio, the controls, instruments and sightlines received high marks.

Most of our respondents were female, and many told us that the Galant's safety features helped them make their purchase decisions. A Wisconsin pharmacist summed it up this way: "The price! For a car of this caliber, there's no better deal around. It's like getting a luxury car for a compact-car price."

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Through no fault of their own, the cars that carry the 3-diamond logo of Mitsubishi just have not gained the broad popular success of some of their Japanese cousins. Given its relatively limited resources--as compared to juggernauts Toyota and Nissan--Mitsubishi has had to take to some fairly aggressive, yet carefully aimed, marketing techniques to help push its vehicles to the forefront of potential buyers' consciousness. And in the auto business, you spell aggressive marketing "incentives."

Mitsubishi's cars tend to be at least as technologically packed as the competition, yet priced a few bucks less.

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

As our respondents noted, when you're shopping for a well-engineered, well-equipped front-drive family sedan, you discover that the Galant is an excellent value. That is, if you even discover the Galant at all.

But even if you haven't been blitzed by Mitsubishi hype and may have to drive to the next county to find a Mitsubishi dealership, it's worth your effort. The Galant was redesigned just last year and is a worthy competitor to the horde of already superlative compact-size family sedans. Like most others in the field, the Galant is powered by an overhead camshaft 4-cylinder engine. Unlike most of the others, the Galant's Four benefits from

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

Mitsubishi's patented, dual counterrotating balance shaft technology, which results in an exquisitely smooth 2.4-liter powerplant. The engine--in sohc or preferably in dohc form--works best, in our opinion, with the 5-speed manual. We seem to be at odds with our respondents, who overwhelmingly opted for the 4-speed automatic. Of course, many of them seemed to be at odds with the transmission's fuzzy logic, however.

Few are at odds with the Galant's distinctive styling. Mitsubishi has done a fine job of creating a family resemblance throughout its model line, and though the individual cars share cues with each other, they look like

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

few others on the road. The Galant's shape is more than simply distinctive, it's super aerodynamic, with a 0.29 Cd, which helps high-speed stability, fuel economy and passenger-cabin noise levels. Unfortunately, the Galant needs as much help as it can get in keeping the noise down--between road noise and engine noise, the Galant just seems noisier and maybe a tad buzzier than many of its competitors.

Now that brings us back to the Galant being priced somewhat less while offering as much or more than the pack. You have to wonder how they do that. And maybe some of it comes out of that hard-to-quantify entity

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

"refinement." The Galant definitely represents a trade-off. You get more tangible neat stuff for your money, but a bit less of the intangible. It's your money--take the test drive and make up your own mind. We think you may be happily surprised.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE MITSUBISHI GALANT*

Total miles driven 1,265,150

Average miles driven 6990

Purchase price:

Average \$17,529

Range \$13,000-

\$24,060

Why did you choose the Mitsubishi Galant?

Styling 53.5%

Price/value 40.6

Mitsubishi reputation 18.7

Previous ownership 18.2

Generous standard 12.3

equipment

Handling 11.8

Model choices:

Galant ES 48.1%

Galant LS 39.2

Galant S 6.9

Galant GS 5.8

Engine choices:

141-hp 2.4-liter Four 94.2%

160-hp 2.4-liter Four 5.8

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 95.5%

Premium sound system 64.6

Antilock brakes 53.7

Keyless entry 29.0

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

141-hp Four 23.4/28.8

160-hp Four 21.0/28.5

5-speed manual 22.9/29.1

4-speed automatic 18.8/23.4

Engine power:

Excellent 52.6%

Good 38.4

Average 7.4

Poor 1.6

Handling:

Excellent 71.1%

Good 26.3

Average 2.1

Poor 0.5

Braking:

Excellent 68.4%

Good 27.4

Average 3.7

Poor	0.5
Overall performance:	
Excellent	60.2%
Good	36.1
Average	3.1
Poor	0.5
Control layout:	
Excellent	54.0%
Good	41.3
Average	4.2
Poor	0.5
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	54.3%
Good	40.4
Average	4.8
Poor	0.5
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	57.9%
Good	36.3
Average	4.7
Poor	1.1
Specific likes:	
Styling	65.7%
Handling	34.9
Comfort	27.8
Ride quality	18.3
Performance	17.8
Specific dislikes:	
Excessive noise	27.2%
Lack of comfort	11.4
No complaints	8.9
Needs more power	7.6
Ride too firm	7.0
Rough/odd shifting	6.3
Suggested changes:	
Make car quieter	22.9%
Better lumbar support	11.1
More engine power	7.6
Make seats more adjustable	6.9
Smoother ride	6.3
Better defroster system	5.6
Simpler radio controls	5.6
Overall convenience:	
Excellent	55.4%
Good	43.5
Average	1.1
Poor	0.0
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	62.6%
Good	31.3

Average	6.0
Poor	0.0
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	53.7%
Good	37.2
Average	8.0
Poor	1.1
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	
Excellent	36.9%
Good	51.4
Average	11.7
Poor	0.0
Any mechanical trouble?	
No	62.0%
Yes	38.0
What type of trouble?	
Electrical system	26.0%
Power windows	20.5
Warped brake rotors	13.7
Outside mirrors	12.3
Power door locks	8.2
Automatic transmission	8.2
Repair it yourself?	
No	97.3%
Yes	2.7
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	69.2%
No	30.8
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	45.3%
Good	37.1
Average	12.6
Poor	5.0
Dealer sales policy:	
Excellent	40.1%
Good	44.0
Average	12.1
Poor	3.8
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	31.9%
Two vehicles	45.0
Three vehicles	17.3
Four or more	5.7
Principal driver:	
Female	58.4%
Male	39.9
Equal	1.7
Age distribution of owners:	
Under 29	18.6%
30-49	53.7
50-plus	27.6

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Mitsubishi Galant if you had it to do over again?

Yes	53.2%
Maybe	39.2
No	7.5

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Nissan Altima Owners Report

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Altima's Infiniti-inspired styling and high quality helped pack prospective buyers into Nissan showrooms, and aggressive pricing helped convert them into owners.

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Elegant dash enhances quality look.

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Seat comfort drew some criticism.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the February 1994 issue of Popular Mechanics)

In 1993, Nissan replaced its ho-hum Stanza with the stylish Altima and introduced its capabilities in a clever way. Rather than playing the Altima against direct competitors like the Toyota Camry, Ford Taurus, Honda Accord and Mazda 626, Nissan TV commercials, implied that here was a handsome, beautifully made car that would out-slalom the BMW 325, outbrake a Lexus ES 300 and out-accelerate the Mercedes-Benz 190E 2.3. In the same breath, Nissan stressed

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the Altima's \$12,999 base price. Results were immediate and dramatic, well beyond the fondest expectations of Nissan marketers. Buyers flocked to Nissan showrooms and Altima sales took off.

But TV commercials can only whet the viewer's appetite. Question is, does the Altima live up to its advertised image? And what prompted so many American buyers to spend money on the Altima, a relative unknown, rather than one of its solidly established rivals?

To answer the second question first: Styling played an important role in helping to sell the Altima, but so did price. The words sporty, sleek, elegant, luxurious and value cropped up

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Summary 3 of 10

any number of times on our questionnaires. Not too surprisingly, several owners made a styling comparison with the Infiniti J30. "My Altima looks expensive," said an Illinois attorney. But it's not. At the end of the '93 model year, the basic Altima XE sedan cost \$901 less than the least-expensive Honda Accord, \$1256 less than the Mazda 626, \$2309 less than the Toyota Camry, and it beat the Ford Taurus by \$2601. As many of our owners observed, it's "a lot of car for the money."

The basic appeal here seems to be one of the oldest--and most productive--on record. A good-looking car with lots of features for a

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Summary 4 of 10

major marketing theme for the rest of the decade.

Offered only as a 4-door sedan, the Altima comes in four trim levels: XE, GXE, SE and GLE. The three upper levels are essentially option packages. But even the base XE, which only 6.8% of our respondents ordered, includes a long list of standard goodies: a driver's airbag plus motorized front shoulder harnesses, power rack-and-pinion steering, power brakes, dual power mirrors, a tilt steering wheel, a tachometer, front and rear antiroll bars and plenty of thoughtful touches like a digital clock, reclining bucket seats, a center console, cup holders, remote releases for the fuel-filler door

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Summary 5 of 10

and the trunklid, intermittent wipers and a rear-window defroster.

The GXE adds power windows, and door locks and a viscous limited-slip differential. In the sporty SE, you get standard air conditioning, rear disc brakes, fog and cornering lights, a cassette stereo, cruise control, sport suspension, a rear spoiler and alloy wheels. The GLE tops off the line with an alarm system, a power sunroof and other amenities. Prices range up to the mid-\$18,000 range for the GLE, which is roughly \$3000 less than similarly equipped competing models from other Japanese manufacturers.

The Altima offers relatively few free-

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Summary 6 of 10

standing options. You can order a 4-speed automatic transmission and antilock brakes for all models, leather upholstery in the GXE only, a power sunroof and a CD player for the SE and cruise control in the XE.

There's just one source of power for the Altima family--a 150-hp 2.4-liter dohc 16-valve 4-cylinder. It's the same engine that powers the 240 SX coupe, and it gives the Altima enough go-power to keep up with the best in its class. The Altima also offers commendable braking performance, according to our owners. And the fuel economy reported by our respondents was even better than the EPA

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estimates: 22/29 city/highway versus the EPA's 21/29 forecast.

As for the Altima's all-around performance, a Texas homemaker delivered the majority opinion when she said, "The Altima handles so well that I always feel in complete control. Ride is unbelievable for a small car, with no engine vibration and very little wind noise. Power feels stronger than the Camrys and Accords I test drove."

As she points out, the Altima is one of the smaller cars in the midsize class, both outside and in. It's 7.3 in. shorter than the Camry, although both cars ride a 103.1-in. wheelbase. Shoulder and hip space is tighter in the Altima. Trunk volume--at 16 cu. ft.--is 6 cu. ft.

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less than Camry's, although it's slightly larger than the '93 Accord.

Just over 80% of the Altimas in our survey gave their owners no trouble at all--a percentage that's identical to our most recent Toyota Camry survey. Of the 19.5% who did report problems, the most common was engine stalling. This, we're told by Nissan, was caused by a faulty computer ground, which has since been fixed.

And while most owners praised the automatic transmission's smooth shifts, some complained that part-throttle downshifts felt sluggish--not positive enough. The solution, according to Nissan, is for the driver to be

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Summary 9 of 10

more decisive with the throttle. The Altima shares this electronically controlled 4-speed automatic with the upscale Maxima SE and the Quest minivan, and it's set up for soft shifts.

A few owners also complained that their motorized shoulder harnesses weren't always releasing properly. One woman, in fact, said she'd been trapped in her car by a belt that gripped her like a python. Fortunately, that was as far as the python parallel went.

Among smaller annoyances, the Altima's glovebox took most of the hits. Too small, said 13.9%, and opening the bottom-hinged door allows contents to escape. Another peeve involved the cup holder. Owners

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Summary 10 of 10

complained that it interfered with the ashtray and some of the radio controls.

Unlike their predecessors, the Japanese-made Stanzas, Altimas are built in Smyrna, Tennessee, in the same huge complex that assembles Nissan pickups. The Tennesseans are apparently doing a good job, because Altima workmanship was rated excellent by 76.3% of our owners and good by another 22.1%. These ratings are virtually identical to the owner responses we recorded for the Camry.

It seems fair to say, then, that the Altima has lived up to its early promise. A Michigan legal secretary provided the ultimate endorsement: "When driving this car, I feel it's just built around me."

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EDITOR'S REPORT

The very first thing we did when we saw the results of this owners survey was rush to the nearest Altima test car and pop open the glovebox. And sure enough, it was a little on the small side, just as 13.9% of the owners told us under the Specific Dislikes heading of their questionnaires. Our reaction: If that's the worst thing someone can say about a car, the manufacturers have done a very good job indeed.

Beyond the glovebox issue, our overall reaction to the Altima continues to be enthusiastic. Most of the owners in our survey were seduced by the Altima's styling and converted by its pricing. While we too like the

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

Altima's Infiniti-inspired good looks, we think the quality that sets the Altima apart from many of its competitors is its fun-to-drive index.

Nissan's passenger-car chassis program has been among the best for a number of years now, and the Altima is yet another proof. Thanks to its stiff chassis, the Altima provides exceptionally precise and responsive handling. Nissan used to market its premium Maxima sedan as the "4-door sports car." The Altima, in our opinion, comes even closer to this standard. It also measures up well against a number of other contemporary midsize automotive standards. Fit-and-finish quality

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

compares with the best, inside and out. It's impressively quiet, thanks in part to its wind-cheating ovoid shape and also to very good isolation from road noise. Very little of what's going on under the car transmits itself into the passenger compartment.

The Altima's 4-cylinder engine also gives a good account of itself. It's reasonably potent, reasonably quiet and reasonably smooth--for a Four. However, 4-cylinder engines are no longer the last word in the midsize class. We agree with those owners who wished a V6 engine was among the Altima's options. So far, this restriction hasn't hurt sales. But with excellent V6 engines available for the Toyota

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

Camry and Mazda 626--plus another due sometime in 1994 for the new Honda Accord--the Altima's appeal could slip just a bit.

One area where the Altima does not measure up is inside, specifically in the rear seats. The car's compact dimensions make it pretty crowded back there for adults, although it's certainly roomy enough for families with young kids. Two welcome changes for 1994 are the addition of a front-passenger's airbag and the substitution of active front seatbelts--with adjustable shoulder anchors--for the previous motorized passive front belts.

Beyond that, though, there doesn't really seem to be much that needs changing.

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

If Nissan can maintain the Altima's high quality and aggressive pricing, it should continue to help repair the company's U.S. fortunes--and to make owners happy--for some time to come.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE NISSAN ALTIMA*

Total miles driven 1,556,342

Average miles driven 6225

Purchase price:

Average \$16,692

Range \$13,100-
\$21,000

Why did you choose the Nissan Altima?

Styling 58.4%

Price/value 42.4

Handling 21.0

Previous Nissan 13.3

ownership

Standard equipment and 10.5

features

Performance 10.10

Engine power 10.1

Model choices:

Altima GXE 64.1%

Altima GLE 18.7

Altima SE 10.4

Altima XE 6.8

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 98.9%

Cruise control 96.9

Antilock brakes 39.9

Sunroof 31.1

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

5-speed manual

4-speed automatic 25.3/30.6

Transmission choices: 22.0/27.9

4-speed automatic

5-speed manual 79.8%

Specific likes: 20.2

Styling

Handling 59.4%

Ride quality 43.2

Engine power 33.3

Comfort 31.2

Performance 29.5

Specific dislikes: 17.9

Glovebox too small

Motorized shoulder 13.9%

harness

No complaints 13.9

Seating comfort 9.9

Noises and rattles 8.4

Fuel economy 7.9

Suggested changes: 6.9

Larger glovebox	
Add courtesy lights	20.0%
Nonmotorized:	13.0
shoulder harness	
Improve seating comfort	11.4
Make V6 engine	8.1
available	
Power seats:	7.0
up/down feature	
Engine power:	6.5
Excellent	
Good	66.8%
Average	29.1
Poor	4.1
Handling:	0.0
Excellent	
Good	85.6%
Average	12.3
Poor	2.1
Braking:	0.0
Excellent	
Good	71.2%
Average	26.7
Poor	2.1
Overall performance:	0.0
Excellent	
Good	79.7%
Average	18.7
Poor	1.7
Control layout:	0.0
Excellent	
Good	61.9%
Average	34.4
Poor	2.9
Instrumentation:	0.9
Excellent	
Good	68.0%
Average	28.3
Poor	3.7
Driver sightlines:	0.0
Excellent	
Good	70.4%
Average	25.1
Poor	3.7
Overall convenience:	0.8
Excellent	
Good	66.2%
Average	31.2
Poor	2.1
Workmanship opinion:	0.4
Excellent	

Good	76.3%
Average	22.1
Poor	1.2
Comfort opinion, front seats:	0.4
Excellent	
Good	66.0%
Average	28.1
Poor	4.7
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	1.2
Excellent	
Good	52.5%
Average	42.4
Poor	4.5
Any mechanical trouble?	0.8
No	
Yes	80.5%
What type of trouble?	19.5
Engine stalls	
Transmission	16.0%
Shoulder-harness release	14.0
Air conditioner	10.0
Electrical	6.0
Exhaust system	6.0
Fuel-injection system	6.0
Repair it yourself?	6.0
No	
Yes	94.0%
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	6.0
Yes	
No	60.0%
Dealer service opinion:	40.0
Excellent	
Good	55.0%
Average	31.6
Poor	10.5
Dealer sales policy:	2.9
Excellent	
Good	50.0%
Average	33.2
Poor	12.9
Number of vehicles owned:	3.9
This vehicle only	
Two vehicles	30.2%
Three vehicles	40.0
Four or more	22.7
Principal driver:	7.1

Female	
Male	61.5%
Equal	37.3
Age distribution of owners:	1.2
Under 29	
30-49	16.4%
50-plus	58.0
Based on your experiences, would you buy a Nissan Altima if you had it to do over again?	25.6
Yes	
Maybe	65.1%
No	30.2
	4.7

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Nissan 300 ZX Owners

Report

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New 300ZX takes a step back from its former Disco Dan cruiser image to return to its roots as a hard-charging, all-around performing sports car. Turbo version is a match for standard Corvette and Porsche 944 S2

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Gear shifter and control ergonomics are rated tops.

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A better sports car value would be hard to find. Normally aspirated V6 is good for 222 hp.

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Summary

(This summary first appeared in the June 1990 issue of Popular Mechanics)

Nissan hit a grand slam home run with its original Datsun 240Z in 1970. And did it again with the current 300ZX. The company went back to the car's roots in creating the new Z-car as a true sports machine. The original 240Z was a lithe, refined sports car that quickly made its mark as one of the best all-around 2-seater packages of its day-and for just \$3596. Nissan freely admits that subsequent incarnations of its Z-car drifted away from the focused intent of the 240Z, holding more appeal for Disco Dans than real sports-car enthusiasts. The newest 300ZX, in both 2-seater and 2+2 versions,

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Summary 2 of 9

definitely gets the car back with the program.

For 1990, the 300ZX delivers even more. The promised twin-turbo, intercooled version has come on stream and fulfilled early expectations of 300 horsepower from a beefed version of the normally aspirated, 222-horse, 3-liter, 4-valve V6.

If all this sounds inviting, it's no surprise that the 300ZX has been a runaway seller since it first hit the showrooms. And, according to our Owners Report survey, most owners went wild when they first laid eyes on this latest rendition. Three-quarters told us they bought the car for its looks ahead of everything else, and 82.6 percent said styling is what

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Summary 3 of 9

they still like best about the 300ZX. Next comes handling at 52.1 percent and then performance at 36.9 percent. Roughly a quarter had owned Zcars before, and all previous owners agreed that this is far and away the best Z ever.

Rated just about as high was the Z's dependability and workmanship. Of our survey group, 82.5 percent reported no mechanical problems of any sort. People mentioned owning earlier Z-cars for nine, 10, 12 years with nary a problem. That, plus conscientious, caring dealers, kept them coming back.

Even price received a share of praise--a rare event in these days of sticker doubletake.

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Many owners felt their average out-the-door cost, \$29,011, made the 300ZX a great value for the price. Several pointed out savings of \$3000 over the standard Corvette coupe and \$4000 to \$13,000 over the Porsche 944 S2. One attorney described the 300ZX as a "poor man's 928." (Only 0.8 percent of our respondents had purchased 300ZX Turbos, mostly because we surveyed early buyers, before Turbos became widely available.)

On standards of performance, handling, braking and sheer driving fun and excitement, owners enthusiastically put the 300ZX in a league with the world's best, regardless of

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price. Many spontaneously mentioned that the new 300ZX is a head turner and ego booster. A physician mentioned that he felt like a celebrity every time he got behind the wheel.

Most owners, too, were up on the high-tech details of their new Z-cars. Several commented on the antilock brakes, even noting the aluminum calipers with opposed pistons. Others touched on the steering-control benefits of Nissan's multiple orifices in the hydraulic boost circuitry that make response quick and accurate at the same time. Most conventional power steering systems suffer from deadness in quick maneuvers and others feel over-

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Summary 6 of 9

boosted--twin problems that Nissan has apparently solved.

A number of owners wished out loud that they'd waited for the twin turbocharged 300ZX Turbo, not that the normally aspirated, 24-valve, 222-hp V6 lacks punch. Another group complained mildly that the 16-in. Michelin XGT-V tires are expensive to replace. Wheel alignment seems slightly more delicate and harder to maintain with the new Z's complicated front- and rear-suspension systems. In fact, 11.6 percent of our respondents reported needing realignments soon after delivery.

Cars in our survey were just about equally

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divided between the manual 5-speed transmissions and the 4-speed automatic. Fuel mileage was almost identical for both: 18 mpg in town and 23 on the highway.

Most buyers (85.8 percent) ordered the optional Bose stereo, and while most liked it, a minority felt that sound quality wasn't up to the \$700 price tag. If they had it to do again, they'd go for a less-expensive system.

Another area of complaint centered on rear vision. Blind spots caused by the bulky headrests and C-pillars were mentioned by 13.4 percent of our respondents. Likewise, a few grumbled about noises and rattles inside the cockpit, and 8.1 percent cited a noticeable

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Summary 8 of 9

drop in acceleration when the air-conditioner compressor kicked in. Others suggested adding body side moldings to the clean body flanks to prevent parking dings.

In both the sport coupe and 2+2, the two front bucket seats took top marks, with 97.2 percent of our owners rating front comfort good to excellent. Ergonomics--the placement of gauges, pedals and controls--needed no improvement in anyone's book. Several drivers commented on the cozy feeling that comes from being close to the faired dash with its up-front controls. Rear seats in the 2+2, however, might be a tad too cozy. Here, 79.8 percent rated comfort average to poor.

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Overall, though, the comfort pleased a resounding 99.6 percent, which means the rear seats weren't that important anyway.

According to the vast majority of those surveyed, the significant attributes of any successful sports car--fun, fleetness of foot, sleekness of styling and an all-around even temper-abound in the 300ZX. Nearly 80 percent said they'd grab this car again next time around. That's an unusually high figure for a car of this type and configuration. It means that the 300ZX does everything it's supposed to, plus a little more.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

It's been awhile since we've felt the need to slip on the old driving gloves before folding ourselves into a Nissan ZX. There simply was no reason to. Late-model ZXs, big in size, with curb weight bordering on the ponderous, were devoid of the visceral inputs that quickened our pulse and tempted us to push our demands of the car to hero levels. And, to be bluntly honest, ZX styling of the past three or four years was more to the liking of the gold-chain cruiser set than ours.

The 1990 300ZX changes all that. No question the car's a looker. A point soundly brought home in normally jaded midtown Manhattan when a couple of pedestrians

crossing the street stared and walked into the side of a cab.

In the cockpit, the ergonomics rate very high. The dash layout is very clean with simple analog gauges--white numerals on a black background--just the way we like them. Nissan managed to put just about every control function short of the sound system at the driver's fingertips, and they did it without nine stalks growing out of the steering column.

Clutch pedal pressure is very light. We didn't find this a drawback, but one staffer complained that the pedal was *too* easy and he had trouble modulating a precise release.

Gear shifting is an exercise in pure enjoyment with very short, precise throws. In fact, the shift mechanism is one of the best-feeling transmission controls in any car, anywhere.

The 300ZX begs to be driven very fast, thanks to its stiff chassis and excellent suspension. Our biggest complaint concerns a degree of numbness in dead-ahead steering. It lacks real high-speed, center-of-the-lane accuracy. We've found this to be a characteristic of many Japanese cars in their effort to insulate the driver from road-harshness feedback. Overall, it's a minor flaw in an otherwise precise and very forgiving machine. Forgiving, that is, unless you get

a little heavy-footed on wet pavement. A slick city street is not the Z's favorite element. We found out as even moderate amounts of throttle on wet streets fishtailed the rear end.

In the dry, the 300ZX's road manners are near impossible to fault. Our test car was a normally aspirated 5-speed model, and truthfully, we would have liked more power. The chassis and suspension work so well that the car doesn't feel its speed. This is one machine you can drive really fast while keeping all the blood flowing through your knuckles. The standard Z is no slug by any means, but it takes boost to make Nissan's V6

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

competitive with the standard Corvette's VS and the 944 S2.

The real beauty of the 300ZX, though, is its balanced temperament. It does so many things so well. And with a \$27,300 price tag, it's a performance bargain, too.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE NISSAN 300ZX*

Total miles driven: 1,324,902

Average miles per gallon:

With 5-speed manual trans

In town 18.1

On the highway 22.9

With automatic 4-speed trans

In town 18.0

On the highway 22.9

Transmission chosen:

Automatic 4-speed 50.6%

Manual 5-speed 49.4

Series chosen:

Standard 300ZX GS 99.2%

300ZX Turbo 0.8

Body styles chosen:

2-place coupe 66.8%

2+2 coupe 33.2

Major options chosen:

Bose sound system 85.8%

Pearlglow paint 54.1

Leather upholstery 41.4

Why did you choose the 300ZX?

Loved the styling 75.8%

Performance 30.0

Past experience with 27.1

Z-cars

Handling 15.0

Price 8.3

Specific overall likes:

Exterior styling 82.6%

Handling 52.1

Performance 36.9

Power 25.4

Comfort 20.3

Riding qualities 20.3

Specific dislikes:

Poor rear vision 13.4%

Noises and rattles 12.9

No complaints 12.4

Air conditioner saps 8.1

power

Air conditioner 7.2

What changes would you like to see done?

No changes 20.8%

Better rear vision	9.1
Better stereo value	6.9
Fewer noises and rattles	6.5
Add tilt-wheel option	5.6

How much did you pay?

Average	\$29,011
Range	\$24,700-\$33,500

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	81.7%
Good	17.9
Average	0.4
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion:

Front Seats:

Excellent	71.9%
Good	25.3
Average	2.4
Poor	0.4

Rear seats (2+2 only):

Excellent	7.6%
Good	12.7
Average	49.4
Poor	30.4

Had any mechanical trouble?

No	82.5%
Yes	17.5

What type of trouble?

Electrical	18.6%
Wheel alignment	14.0
Power windows	9.3

Did you repair it yourself?

No	100.0%
Yes	0.0

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	74.3%
No	25.7

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	46.1%
Good	43.3
Average	7.9
Poor	2.8

Number of vehicles owned:

This car only	15.5%
Two cars	39.7
Three cars	21.0
Four or more cars	10.4

Would you buy a 300ZX again next time?

Yes	79.9%
-----	-------

Maybe	18.1
No	2.0

Would you buy a different Nissan product next time?

Maybe	41.6%
No	33.7
Yes	24.7

Principal driver:

Male	73.0%
Female	24.6
Equal	2.4

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29 years	12.0%
30-49 years	63.1
50-plus	24.8

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Oldsmobile Achieva Owners

Report

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Its somewhat sassy appearance, coupled with the car's inherent value, proved to be a prime purchase motivator for many of our survey respondents.

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Most of our owners chose the V6.

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Interior is comfortable, but too noisy.

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Summary

There was recently an ad for the Achieva in which the car was called "a compact car with an attitude." That about hits it on the head if you go by the respondents to our Owners Report.

"I wanted a medium-sized, 6-cylinder, American 4-door that didn't look boxy or stodgy," commented a Texas electronics technician. A New York secretary said, "For the money, the Achieva was the nicest, sportiest car I could find. Also good workmanship, not cheaply made, very sturdy."

Several owners who filled out our questionnaires mentioned that they were pleasantly surprised by the Achieva's long list

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Summary 2 of 11

of standard equipment. The humblest Achieva--the base S model--includes 14 items that most automakers charge extra for. Among them: antilock brakes, automatic power door locks, tilt steering wheel, power steering and a center console--all that and more for \$13,510.

The Achieva is built upon General Motors' front-wheel-drive N-platform, which it shares with the Pontiac Grand Am and Buick Skylark. Like the other two versions, the Achieva S comes in coupe and sedan form in various trim levels. Above the Achieva S is the SC sport coupe and the SL sport sedan, each with higher levels of trim and standard equipment. You also get a choice of engines

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and transaxles.

For 1994, which is the model year our survey is based on, the base engine in the Achieva S was GM's Quad-OHC sohc Four. This single-cam version of the Quad 4 delivered 115 hp. Then there was a 155-hp Quad 4 with twin cams and another Quad 4 rated at 170 horses. The High Output 170-hp Quad 4 came only with a 5-speed manual transmission, and a mere 4.3% of our respondents ordered their cars that way. For '95, the engine lineup is simplified with just a 2.3-liter Four rated 150 hp and a 3.1-liter V6 rated 155 hp. That's it.

In '94, most chose the 3.1-liter, 155-hp V6,

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which delivers more torque than any of the Fours: 185 ft.-lb.

Interestingly, Oldsmobile offered two automatic transaxles for the Achieva in '94. There's a 3-speed automatic with a super-tall 2.53:1 final drive. This mated only with the 115-horse Quad 4 OHC, the idea being to maximize fuel economy. An electronically controlled 4-speed automatic was available with all engines except the 170-bhp Quad 4. The 4-speed automatic with the V6 also called for some high gears: 2.97:1.

In other applications, the 4-speed automatic came with 3.43 or 3.73:1 final-drive ratios, but even then fuel economy was surprisingly

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Summary 5 of 11

good. Our surveyees told us they got a minimum of 22.6 mpg around town and as high as 32.6 on trips. Unfortunately, the most popular combination--V6 with 4-speed automatic--turned out to be the thirstiest (see data panel). And very few respondents opted for the 5-speed stick: only 6.6 percent.

Oldsmobile looks to Saturn as a role model and is trying to match Saturn quality and customer satisfaction. John Rock, Oldsmobile's general manager, told his dealers he wouldn't tolerate unhappy customers. So if someone buys an Achieva--or any Oldsmobile--and decides within 30 days or 1500 miles that he/she doesn't like the car, it

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can be returned for the customer's money back or it can be traded for some other Oldsmobile model. In our survey, only one owner had taken advantage of this offer. She traded her new Achieva for a Cutlass Supreme.

Oldsmobile, like other GM divisions, set up several programs recently to keep customers loyal. The Oldsmobile Edge offers free transportation anytime you leave your car for service. You also get a loaner or rental if your car needs to stay overnight. Olds speeds to your rescue if you get locked out or stranded on some lonely road. And the company will help you plan vacation routes and reimburses you if your Achieva conks out away from home.

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Is the Oldsmobile Edge working? Apparently so, because most Achieva owners gave their dealers high marks for the way they handled both sales and service. Many Olds dealers now use Saturn's "no-dicker sticker" policy, and our buyers liked that. A Michigan entrepreneur noted that, "My salesman gave me his best price, with no dickering, and so far I haven't heard of a better deal." A New York teacher added, "I hate the humiliation of dealing with insulting salesmen who waste my time. The Olds dealer sold me my Achieva with no need to bargain." In fact, for 1995, every Olds model is "value priced," meaning the sticker price is the price.

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As for service, just over 3/4 of our surveyees required none at all. Of the rest, the most common complaint had to do with the Achieva's automatic power door locks. Doors now lock, unlock and relock themselves under certain driving conditions. They lock when you shift out of PARK, for example, and then unlock when you shut off the ignition. You can defeat the "unlock" by removing a fuse. You can also lock and unlock all doors with a key or remote entry fob. Some owners didn't understand all these intricacies, and sometimes the locks really didn't work right. But lock problems as well as others were repaired quickly, with an 82 percent success rate.

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Better yet, repaired cars were often returned to their owners with thoughtful surprises. A New York secretary reported, "My Achieva came back with a full tank of gas, the first time that's ever happened to me." And a Michigan state employee: "They lent me a loaner when they kept my car overnight. I think the Olds Edge program is wonderful!"

Slightly less wonderful was a common complaint about noisiness. Seems the Quad 4 still isn't the quietest of engines, despite GM's 1994 and earlier changes aimed at noise reduction. Another complaint had to do with the Achieva's thick windshield pillars causing blind spots. And many owners wanted dual

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airbags instead of the single bag in 1994-95 models. A few wished, too, that they'd been told about the \$150 split fold-down rear seat. Only 18.6 percent bought this option, but more said they would have if they'd known about it.

In the judgment of most, the Achieva scored well on the basics. The car provided adequate power, an acceptable ride, good maneuverability and handling, roominess, comfort and overall economy. Yet it knocked no one's socks off. If anything, owners tended to take these things for granted. The Achieva came up to expectations. It delivered on its promises but didn't go beyond them.

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In all, a less-than-impressive 56.8 percent of our surveyees said they'd buy an Achieva again next time. Another 35.5 percent answered "maybe." Many of the maybes explained that they hoped to move up into larger, more luxurious Oldsmobiles with their next purchase. The rest wanted to see what else comes along by that time.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

These days, Oldsmobile likes to go around calling itself GM's "Saturnized" import-fighting division. Indeed, take a look at the new Aurora and to a lesser extent, the Oldsmobile Eighty Eight and you begin believing it.

But then take a look at Achieva. This is arguably the best looking of the GM N-platform cars (Buick Skylark and Pontiac Grand Am) but what is Olds doing with it?

Nothing.

You wouldn't know it if you've seen any TV commercials recently for the Achieva. It's OK for your ad agency to say your car has an attitude. And the film clips of the car skidding

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around in the dust out on a California dry lake makes for some dramatic footage. But what happens when you fire one up at your local Olds dealer and take it for a test drive? Unfortunately, not much.

It was worse a few years ago. Then, if anything, there's was too happening, too much under the hood for the chassis to cope with . Violent torque steer threatened to rip the steering wheel out of your hand if you dumped in too much throttle off the line. And the car was downright treacherous on a wet roadway.

Nowadays, things have calmed down a bit. Perhaps too much. The wild turbocharged

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engines are gone. The trouble is, what's in their place? The Four is OK. It'll get you around and that's what people buy cars for. Right? But if you see one of those Leo Burnett commercials on TV, you want attitude. Unfortunately, even the V6 doesn't deliver on the promise. The TV commercials set up an expectation that's way too high for any current Achieva to achieve. You approach the car expecting something you don't get. Yes, you get a solid ride, a nice interior, even luxurious in the upscale trim levels. But the car feels heavy and underpowered, even with the V6. You don't get that nimble, throw-it-around, "import" feel.

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

This is not to say that the Oldsmobile Achieva isn't a good car. As we said, the car rides comfortably and it's stable and smooth. It's just not fun to drive. In fact, the fun quotient is about zero. A car's fun-to-drive quotient is mostly a matter of power-to-weight ratio. Imports usually do a much better job of it than American cars of the same class. So while the Achieva is a good, solid car, it's not a fun car to drive, nor does it have the attitude alluded to in the TV commercials.

This is all too bad because the Achieva has the looks to be a really terrific small car. If it had the powertrain to deliver on the attitude promise, Oldsmobile would really have

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

something here. As it is, unfortunately, the Achieva is somewhat of an underachiever.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE OLDSMOBILE ACHIEVA*

Total miles driven 1,319,560

Average miles driven 5615

Purchase price:

Average \$14,916

Range \$12,000-

\$19,200

Why did you choose the Achieva?

Styling 60.8%

Price/value 41.0

Standard equipment 12.2

Previous ownership 11.3

Size 9.9

Handling 9.0

Model choices:

Base Achieva S 74.9%

Achieva SC coupe 12.8

Achieva SL sedan 12.3

Body style choices:

4-door sedan 55.1%

2-door coupe 44.9

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 100.0%

Power door locks 97.5

Cruise control 77.0

Power windows 71.2

Premium sound system 55.4

Alloy wheels 48.6

Split folding rear seat 18.6

Alarm system 14.3

Power driver's seat 9.4

Leather seat trim 5.1

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

115-hp Quad-OHC 4 23.5/29.5

155-hp Quad 4 23.7/29.1

170-hp Quad 4 23.6/29.0

155-hp V6 22.6/28.8

5-speed manual 24.4/32.6

4-speed automatic 23.1/29.0

Engine choices:

155-hp V6 40.1%

115-hp Quad-OHC 4 36.9

155-hp Quad 4 18.7

170-hp Quad 4 4.3

Transmission choices:

4-speed automatic 93.4%

5-speed manual 6.6

Specific likes:

Styling	53.5%
Handling	40.1
Comfort	29.2
Economy	20.8
Power	19.3
Ride quality	18.8

Specific dislikes:

No complaints	15.6%
Excessive noise	15.1
Needs more power	8.4
Needs more space inside	7.8
Blind spots	6.7
Dashboard layout	6.7

Suggested changes:

Make car quieter	16.1%
More comfortable seats	8.7
No changes	8.1
Improve dashboard layout	6.7
Increase engine power	6.7
Change styling	6.7
Eliminate blind spots	6.7

Engine power:

Excellent	48.1%
Good	43.6
Average	7.4
Poor	0.8

Handling:

Excellent	61.2%
Good	34.3
Average	3.7
Poor	0.8

Braking:

Excellent	60.3%
Good	36.4
Average	3.3
Poor	0.0

Overall performance:

Excellent	52.7%
Good	45.1
Average	1.7
Poor	0.4

Control layout:

Excellent	55.8%
Good	39.2
Average	5.0
Poor	0.0

Instrumentation:

Excellent	50.4%
Good	43.3
Average	4.6

Poor	1.7
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	36.0%
Good	48.5
Average	13.8
Poor	1.7
Overall convenience:	
Excellent	46.1%
Good	48.3
Average	5.6
Poor	0.0
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	53.4%
Good	43.6
Average	2.6
Poor	0.4
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	49.8%
Good	44.9
Average	5.3
Poor	0.0
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	
Excellent	32.6%
Good	55.1
Average	11.5
Poor	0.9
Mechanical trouble?	
No	76.5%
Yes	23.5
What type of trouble?	
Power door locks	25.0%
Brakes	10.7
Electrical system	10.7
Windshield wipers	8.9
Air conditioner	7.1
Shifting	7.1
Transmission	7.1
Repair it yourself?	
No	98.2%
Yes	1.8
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	82.0%
No	18.0
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	42.9%
Good	46.3
Average	9.1
Poor	1.7
Dealer sales policy opinion:	
Excellent	44.6%
Good	44.6

Average	7.3
Poor	3.4

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	36.6%
Two vehicles	38.7
Three vehicles	14.0
Four or more	10.7

Principal driver:

Female	62.8%
Male	36.7
Equal	0.4

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	19.1%
30-49	46.4
50-plus	34.6

Based on your experiences, would you buy an Oldsmobile Achieva if you had it to do over again?

Yes	56.8%
Maybe	35.5
No	7.7

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Owners Report

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Subdued but contemporary styling ranked second behind handling--among best-liked features of Olds Eighty Eight owners. Styling also ranked second in Eighty Eight purchase motivations. Previous Oldsmobile ownership experience was tops in this category.

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Eighty Eight's instrument panel layout and lighting drew complaints from owners.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the February 1994 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

Oldsmobile recently renewed (for '92) Eighty Eight Royale has been a pleasant surprise for GM's rocket division. It still shares GM's H platform with the Pontiac Bonneville and Buick LeSabre. But the latest Eighty Eight looks totally Oldsmobile, thanks to a successful reshaping of all sheetmetal and a redesigned interior.

Besides its appealing exterior, what this means is real 5- to 6-passenger seating, an increase of 1.2 cu. ft. in the trunk and a glovebox that's twice the size of the old one.

The Olds Eighty Eight is no longer available

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Summary 2 of 9

as a coupe. It's offered only as a 4-door sedan in two series Royale and Royale LS, with a special luxury trim package available to elevate an LS into an LSS. (The LSS will be a separate model for '93.) Standard equipment includes a driver's airbag, which a number of owners in our survey mentioned as important to their purchase decision. Antilock brakes are standard on the LS and optional (\$450) on the base Eighty Eight. Additional LS equipment: rear-seat outlets for heating and a/c, power doorlocks, cruise control, automatic radio antenna and cornering lamps.

Also standard in both series: a 55/45 split front bench seat, kid-proof rear door locks,

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Summary 3 of 9

GM's Pass-Key antitheft system and the usual power goodies you'd expect on a car that stickers right at 20 grand. Traction control, available on the LS only, adds \$175. You can also order a towing package (\$325) and the FE3 touring suspension (\$718) for either series. FE3 includes 16-in. alloy wheels, all-season tires, added cooling capacity, quicker steering, automatic load leveling and recalibrated struts.

The Eighty Eight offers only one powertrain GM's port-injected 170hp 3800 V6 with an electronically controlled 4-speed automatic.

When the first Olds Eighty Eight (it was the 88 back then) appeared in 1949, it was a hot

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Summary 4 of 9

number aimed at the young family man on his way up. In tabulating our survey, it quickly became apparent that the current Eighty Eight appeals to those same buyers--literally. A number of our respondents had owned a 1949 original, and prior Olds ownership ranked as the No. 1 reason for choosing a new Eighty Eight. Nearly 60% of our respondents had owned Oldsmobiles before, and many had owned several--15 wasn't uncommon, and some had owned as many as 30. The survey champ had owned 34.

Drivers in so mature an age group--all but a handful in our survey were over 50--definitely know what they want. And they tend to be

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Summary 5 of 9

fussy about details. Our survey didn't uncover any big problems, but nearly everyone had some sort of nitpick.

For example, while handling got top marks generally, a few drivers complained about torque steer, even under normal acceleration.

The Eighty Eight's front quarter windows also caused a few grumbles, partly because their framing interferes with the driver's view to the side (including the driver's view of the outside mirrors), partly because some owners thought they contributed to wind noise. Rattles and road noise also annoyed 9.1% of our owners.

As mentioned, antilock brakes are part of

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Summary 6 of 9

the LS package, but an additional 27.3% of our respondents ordered ABS on their standard Eighty Eight Royale. ABS was roundly praised, and several drivers told us how they'd avoided or steered around potential accidents. However, a few also mentioned that the system's noise and pedal feel takes some getting used to.

Another area of nitpicking was the trunk. Though there's more capacity, the cargo floor is irregular, so grocery bags tend to fall over, and some owners complained that they couldn't fit their golfbags inside. The trunk also has a higher--by 2.8 in.--liftover sill than the previous Eighty Eight.

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Summary 7 of 9

The big airbag container in the steering-wheel hub makes it hard for short drivers to see the ignition switch and control stalks, especially with the tilt column in the down position. And there were a few complaints about the front seat--some found it too low, some too firm, and taller drivers wanted more rearward travel.

If this sounds like a lengthy list of complaints, it's important to keep in mind that our survey group represented an unusually experienced body of owners.

And the same owners who had specific nitpicks reported overall satisfaction with their Eighty Eights. "Best car I've ever owned," was a frequently repeated comment. A few had

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Summary 8 of 9

taken advantage of Oldsmobile's bring-back offer, explaining that they hadn't cared for some aspect of the '91 model they'd bought, so they'd traded it for the new car at full market value.

Fuel mileage in our survey came close to the EPA estimates of 18/28 mpg (city/highway). Our owners beat the city projection by 2.2 mpg.

Operation was mostly troublefree, with roughly 75% reporting no mechanical problems of any kind. Of the 25% who did have difficulties, 81.2% were satisfied with their first visit to the dealer service department. The most common problems had to do with the ventilation blower fan not working

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Summary 9 of 9

properly and batteries that wouldn't hold a charge.

The Olds customers in our survey seem to get along very well with their dealers. Most of these relationships are longstanding, which probably has a lot to do with the exceptional level of satisfaction: Nearly 97% of our respondents rated their dealers' sales policies as good to excellent.

Whatever the business, there's no doubt that happy customers keep coming back. The Olds Eighty Eight Royale makes an excellent case in point.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Like most of the people in our survey group, I have an Olds Rocket in my past--a '54 hardtop coupe. Unlike our owners, I didn't get mine new. It came along when I was still in my era of disposable cars--a series of near-junkers that went to the boneyard when I'd extracted their last gasps.

Although it didn't look too bad, my '54 was near the end. Standing on the throttle--something I did almost every chance I got--produced big blue clouds, and small puddles of fluids marked any place it sat for more than a half-hour or so. It finally sucked a valve during a full-throttle stoplight departure, substituting a dense white smoke screen for

the customary blue cloud.

But I loved it anyway, partly for its looks, more for its muscle. In a time when manhood was measured out in long black streaks of burned rubber, that battle-weary Olds lowered my adolescent squeaks to a solid baritone.

Today's Eighty Eight won't peel rubber like those big-inch V8s of yesteryear--in fact, it won't peel rubber at all--but it's still an easy car to like a lot. This doesn't mean we've entirely lost our taste for wheelspin. It means that we think the new Eighty Eight is solidly in step with the times.

Besides our long-term association with the '92 LSS pictured here, we've had several other

Editor's Report 3 of 5

new Eighty Eights in our care during the past year or so, and all have registered the same box score: no runs, no squeaks, no rattles. We disagree with those owners who registered complaints about wind and road noise--the Eighty Eight is certainly contemporary in this respect--and we haven't seen any complaints from staff members concerning torque steer or driver sightlines, either. In terms of operating efficiency, every new Eighty Eight we've encountered has been the same: seamless.

In fact, about the only owner complaint we endorse concerns the Eighty Eight's instrumentation, which isn't as contemporary as the rest of the car. But we know that

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

Oldsmobile is working on this.

The quality we like best about this car is its behavior on the road. While the 3800 V6 won't conjure up memories of the old Rocket Eights, it's got enough low-end grunt to keep up in the cut-and-thrust of commute traffic, and it's an effortless performer on the interstates. Handling, something that our owners endorsed, is an even stronger suit. With the FE3 suspension, the Eighty Eight is agile without excessive stiffness, yielding a ride-handling balance we wish we could see in more GM sedans.

Response to styling, of course, is always subjective. We see the Eighty Eight as

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

conservatively contemporary, as well as good looking. And like the Olds marketing people, that leaves us scratching our heads. Why doesn't this excellent car appeal to younger buyers? It's great to keep owners coming back decade after decade, but this is also a car for today.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE EIGHTY EIGHT ROYALE*

Total miles driven:	1,451,034
Average miles driven:	5602
Purchase price:	
Average-	\$20,775
Range-	\$15,800-
	\$26,000

Why did you choose the Oldsmobile

Eighty Eight Royale?

Owned Oldsmobiles before	58.5%
Styling	33.3
Price/value-	9.7
Handling-	7.8
Size, roominess	7.4
Performance-	6.6

Model choice:

Eighty Eight Royale-	58.0%
Eighty Eight Royale LS-	
42.0	

Major options chosen:

Antilock brakes-	69.3%
Digital instruments-	40.8
Traction controls-	27.4
Towing package	25.6
FE3 touring suspension	22.4
Bucket front seats	21.4
Avg. mpg, city/hwy	20.2/27.2

Engine power:

Excellent	61.6%
Good	34.6
Average	3.4
Poor	0.4

Handling:

Excellent	70.2%
Good	27.2
Average	3.4
Poor	0.4

Braking:

Excellent	68.3%
Good	29.4
Average	1.9
Poor	0.4

Overall performance:

Excellent	66.9%
Good	30.5
Average	2.3
Poor	0.4

Control layout:

Excellent	42.6%
Good	45.3
Average	8.2
Poor	3.9

Instrumentation:

Excellent	43.6%
Good	41.6
Average	12.8
Poor	1.9

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	42.4%
Good	37.4
Average	15.2
Poor	5.1

Specific likes:

Handling	46.5%
Styling	38.3
Ride quality	33.0
Comfort, roominess	30.9
Economy of operation	23.0
Engine power	22.2

Specific dislikes:

No complaints	15.9%
Seating comfort	14.9
Instrument panel layout/lighting	10.6
Trunk (shape, liftover height)	9.1
Side vision/quarter windows	9.1
Noises and rattles	9.1

Suggested changes:

Improved side vision	18.0%
Redesigned instrument panel	14.1
Improved seating comfort	13.5
Improved trunk access	9.4
No changes	8.8
Eliminate rattles, noises	5.9

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	58.9%
Good	37.3
Average	3.0
Poor	0.8

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	56.3%
Good	34.0
Average	7.1
Poor	2.6

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	48.4%
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Good	45.1
Average	6.1
Poor	0.4
Mechanical trouble?	
No	74.8%
Yes	25.2
What type of trouble?	
Air conditioner	13.2%
Heater fan	10.3
Battery	10.3
Power windows	7.4
Speedometer	7.4
Windshield wipers	7.4
Did you repair it yourself?	
No	100%
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	81.2%
No	18.7
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	55.0%
Good	38.4
Average	4.7
Poor	1.9
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	41.3%
Two vehicles	45.8
Three vehicles	9.2
Four or more	3.7
Principal driver:	
Male	59.8%
Female	32.4
Equal	7.8
Age distribution of owners:	
Under 29	0.8%
30-49 years	10.5
50-plus	88.6
Based on your experience, would you buy an Oldsmobile Eighty Eight Royale if you had it to do over again?	
Yes	66.9%
Maybe	32.4
No	8.9

*Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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[macro=`Jl(qchPath,"royale_ownrep")']bitmaps.dib}{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2,
[macro=`Jl(qchPath,"bonne_ownrep")']bitmaps.dib} **Oldsmobile Silhouette**
Owners Report

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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Although some owners complained that the Silhouette's long nose and fallaway hoodline made parking a chancy business, styling was this vehicle's best-liked feature. Over 65% of the owners in the survey listed styling as their prime reason for choosing the Silhouette.

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Owners gave Silhouette good marks for comfort, but some disliked dash layout.

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Thanks to easy removability of seats, Silhouette's cargo versatility got high praise.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the August 1991 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

It's no secret that General Motors wants very much to sell more mini-vans. It's a corporate embarrassment to trail both Chrysler and Ford in such an important market segment.

Chrysler routinely leads the field in minivan sales. No one else even comes close. This is one area where the Japanese don't compete seriously with U.S. carmakers.

In 1984, Chrysler upstaged VW's Vanagon and started the big American switch from the station wagon into the garageable van.

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Summary 2 of 9

GM's early entries in the minivan competition were the rear-drive Chevy Astro and GMC Safari. In the first six months of 1990, these twins accounted for just 17% of the market, versus 43% for the Dodge Caravan/ Plymouth Voyager clones and 20% for the Ford Aerostar.

It was clear that GM needed something completely different, and one look tells you that the General's GM200 minivans--Oldsmobile Silhouette, Pontiac Trans Sport and Chevrolet Silette APV--are just that. They definitely stand out in an increasingly crowded field.

But there's more to GM's newest minivan than just 21st-century styling. Its chassis and

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Summary 3 of 9

body construction are as radical as its exterior. Welded to a ladder-type frame is an internal skeleton made of thin, lightweight high-strength galvanized steel.

Glued directly to the inner space-frame are reinforced plastic body panels. These outer panels bear some of the body load and add rigidity to the structure. The idea originated with the Pontiac Fiero, although the Fiero panels were bolted on. The Corvette and Saturn also use similar construction and materials.

The critical question, of course, is how does this distinctive new vehicle score with its owners. From a market point of view, it seems clear that it's taking people awhile to get used

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Summary 4 of 9

to the zoomy styling. During the first six months of 1990, the GM-200s captured a mere 12% of minivan sales, still in third place behind the Caravan/Voyager and the Aerostar.

The Silhouette has been selling more slowly than the Silette APV and the Trans Sport, partly because Olds has fewer dealers, partly because it starts further upmarket-about \$3000 more than Chevy's base minivan.

As compensation, the Silhouette offers more standard equipment: 7-passenger seating, styled alloy wheels, electric outside mirrors, intermittent wipers, side-window defoggers and so on. The average price paid by the

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Summary 5 of 9

Silhouette owners we surveyed fell just short of \$18,000.

Standard equipment in all GM200s, by the way, includes air conditioning, solar-reflective glass, power steering, AM/FM sound systems and quick-release flat-folding seats.

The standard engine is GM's 3.1-liter V6, offering 120 hp, mated to a 3-speed automatic transaxle. So far, that's the only engine and gearbox available, and it produced some complaints about sluggish performance from our survey group.

Obviously, the Silhouette's strongest suit has been its styling: 65.2% of our owners narrowed their choice down to the Silhouette

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Summary 6 of 9

because of its looks. Styling also scored as the best-liked feature, followed in order by comfort, ride and handling.

The drivers in our survey, 49.1% of them women, did find some minor distractions in the Silhouette's aerodynamic shape. The distance from the inner windshield base to the instrument panel is about 3 ft., and since drivers can't see where the nose ends, a lot of parking gets done by ear.

According to most owners, three of the Silhouette's biggest pluses are ride comfort, interior spaciousness and the versatility of its seating arrangement. The van's standard seats, 34-pound lightweight buckets are normally set

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in a 2+3+2 configuration. Buyers can delete the second-row center seat for a \$110 credit.

All five rear buckets have quick-release floor anchors and lift out easily. Removing the two rearmost seats provides 75 cu. ft. of cargo space, and taking out all but the front seats results in a generous 112.6 cu. ft. Although the rear seats don't recline, they do fold flat and have hard plastic backs so that plywood and such--pieces up to 7 ft. long--can be carried without removing the seats.

The seatbacks also double as table-tops, complete with recessed cup holders, and

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Summary 8 of 9

there are numerous storage compartments throughout the Silhouette. About the only persistent complaints we registered had to do with the lack of a security screen over the rear cargo area and owners who had difficulty seeing and/or using controls and instruments.

Only about 26% of our respondents listed mechanical problems, mostly minor ones like a stuck-on-hot temp gauge. Most Silhouettes in our survey were early-production models, so a few came through with rattles in doors and windows, and even body panel misalignments. By and large, though, Silhouette owners gave quality high marks, more than half rating

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Summary 9 of 9

workmanship as excellent. Dealer service also got solid praise.

Asked whether they'd buy the same vehicle if they had it to do over again, 66.2% of our Silhouette owners answered yes. That's higher than the response we recorded in our Ford Aerostar Owners Report back in 1986 (63.3% yes). But the Silhouette still can't touch the Caravan/Voyager 79.6% would-buy-again response, recorded back in 1984.

And judging by recent sales figures, Chrysler continues to set the pace. The Silhouette and its cousins might be awhile in catching up.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

In the past 18 months, we've spent quite a bit of time driving various GM200 vans, in particular a Pontiac Trans Sport that was a member of our long-term test fleet for a year. And while we share the enthusiasm of our owner group for the radical styling of these vans (we do think a little more budget could have been devoted to making more distinction between the various divisional offerings), styling wouldn't be our primary reason for buying one of them.

The factor that separates these vans from their competitors--seating and cargo versatility--is something only 14.2% of our respondents cited as a buying priority. GM has

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Editor's Report 2 of 4

done an exceptional job in this area of design, and no other minivan comes close. Snap out the seats, and the GM-200 becomes a mini-cavern, capable of swallowing all kinds of stuff.

Click the seats back in, and you've got a roomy, comfortable station wagon that's also long on style.

We certainly endorse the owners' remarks concerning sluggish performance. The Silhouette and its brethren are adequate around town, but they dawdle in passing maneuvers, and towing just isn't part of the equation.

Although our most recent experiences with a

Silhouette were rattle-free, our Trans Sport did have a few squeaks at the end of its term of service. We've also noticed a fair level of wind noise in GM-200 vans at highway speeds, and cleaning the inside of that big windshield is a real project.

On the other hand, after a half-hour of orientation we never had any problems concerning the whereabouts of the nose of a GM-200 van relative to vehicles in front. While it's true that you can't see the end of the hood, we find that you quickly develop a sense of where it is, and we've never had a "parking by ear" experience.

Speaking of parking lots, we've also been

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Editor's Report 4 of 4

impressed with the durability of the plastic body panels, which take all sorts of minor abuse without a trace. And, of course, they're never going to rust.

As for the Silhouette itself, we think Olds has done a good job of poshing up the interior, although without the leather upholstery option the interior distinctions between Silhouette and Trans Sport SE are subtle.

With or without leather upholstery, though, the great appeal of the Silhouette, Trans Sport and Silhouette APV is their versatility. Since that's the essence of the family wagon, we think they're tops.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE OLDSMOBILE SILHOUETTE*

Total miles driven: 2,634,032

Average miles driven: 7569

Purchase price:

Average \$17,928

Range \$13,500-

\$24,000

Average miles per gallon:

In town 18.8

On the highway 23.4

Major options:

Cruise control/power 97.8%

locks

Power windows 93.6

Captain's seat package 74.4

Suspension/towing 66.1

package

Leather upholstery 40.2

Why did you choose the Silhouette?

Styling 65.2%

Spacious interior 18.8

Comfort 16.0

Seating/cargo versatility 14.2

Size 9.7

Ease of handling 9.1

Specific likes:

Styling 59.3%

Interior/seating comfort 45.3

Good ride 36.9

Handling 35.2

Seating versatility 29.7

Roominess 25.6

Specific dislikes:

Noises and rattles 12.6%

No complaints 9.3

Poor forward visibility 7.9

Not enough power 7.9

Fuel economy 7.9

No storage -security - 6.6

screen

Hood air inlet traps debris 6.6

Suggested changes:

No changes 10.8%

More power 8.9

More comfortable seats 6.8

Better dash layout 5.5

Fewer noises and rattles 5.2

Workmanship rating:

Excellent	52.6%
Good	42.9
Average	4.2
Poor	0.3

Front seat comfort:

Excellent	70.2%
Good	25.3
Average	3.6
Poor	0.8

Rear seat comfort:

Excellent	45.3%
Good	46.6
Average	7.3
Poor	0.8

Any mechanical problems?

No	74.2%
Yes	25.9

Types of problems:

Temperature gauge	21.3%
Noisy, soft brakes	14.6
Air conditioning	11.2
Electrical	11.2
Oil leaks	9.0

Did you handle repairs?

No	98.9%
Yes	1.1

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	85.0%
No	15.0

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	44.4%
Good	43.0
Average	9.2
Poor	3.4

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	15.7%
Two vehicles	47.5
Three vehicles	22.8
Four or more	14.0

Principal driver:

Female	49.1%
Male	44.3
Equal	6.6

Owners' age distribution:

29 and under	4.5%
30-49	50.1
50-plus	45.4

Based on experience, would the Silhouette be your choice again?

Yes	66.2%
Maybe	29.1

No

4.7

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Report**

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Pontiac adds pizzazz to the style of all its cars for good reason--people love it. Nearly three-fourths chose style as their favorite feature of the Bonneville.

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Both V6 engines put out lots of power.

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Interior comfort got good marks.

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Summary

The current-generation Bonneville came on the scene for 1992 as Pontiac's sharp-looking, great-handling driver's car--a 5-passenger sedan that any young exec can park in front of his world headquarters with pride and confidence. In short, the Bonneville is a car that Pontiac positions as having everything a BMW buyer would want, for thousands less. Even back in 1992, the Bonneville SSE and SSEi offered dual airbags, ABS and optional traction control--all very important to buyers then and now.

Pontiac's success has traditionally been molded by body designers. That's because underneath any Pontiac you'll find some other

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Summary 2 of 9

GM car. Except for the Fiero, there hasn't been a full-blooded Pontiac in years. So whether it's a Camaro derivative like the Firebird or an H-car like the Bonneville--with basics shared by the Buick LeSabre and Oldsmobile Eighty Eight--there's always one department in which every Pontiac shines, and that's styling.

In the opinion of our Owners Report respondents, the Bonneville does that in spades. Styling hit the mark so dead-on that 62.9% listed it as their main reason for buying. "Looks like an Infiniti on steroids," quipped a Tennessee photoengraver.

As we said, the Bonneville shares GM's H-

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Summary 3 of 9

platform with the Buick LeSabre and Olds Eighty Eight. It also shares engines and transaxles with the Buick Park Avenue, including the supercharged version of Buick's 3.8-liter V6. Standard engine in the Bonneville's 1994 series, the SE and SSE, is the 170-horse, 3.8-liter V6. But for \$1167 more, you can order the SSEi option package, which includes the Eaton supercharger, Z-rated 16-inch tires, 2.97:1 final drive ratio and blower boost gauge. The supercharged V6 thinks it's a V8 and delivers 225 hp at 5000 rpm. "Performance with the supercharger," commented a Wisconsin manager, "is equal to a BMW 535i."

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Summary 4 of 9

The SSEi's 275 ft.-lb. of torque comes on without lag and covers the middle of the rpm band, right where most drivers need it. All Bonneville's come with an electronically controlled 4-speed automatic, but the SSEi's has two push buttons on the console, perform and normal, which change the shift points. With the 2.97 axle, the pushrod V6 loafs along at 60 mph in overdrive Fourth gear, the engine ticking over at 1650 rpm. This helps explain the 17.4 city and 23.6 highway mpg our owners reported for the supercharged Bonneville.

How Pontiac Cares

Pontiac vowed several years ago to give its

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Summary 5 of 9

customers the sort of dealer service Lexus and Saturn made famous. The Pontiac Cares program was set up to educate dealers that the customer was indeed king.

So how does the Pontiac Cares program rate with our surveyees? Not bad, actually. Dealer sales policies rated excellent in 60.1% of all cases and included lots of comments on follow-up phone calls from sales personnel. The service department garnered a rating of 56.1% excellent. Those are fine marks. "The dealer treats us like family," volunteered a Delaware civil servant. "He gives the impression that he's genuinely concerned with our wants and needs."

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Summary 6 of 9

Pontiac offers a 3-year/36,000-mile, no-deductible warranty. Only 20.1% of our owners reported any mechanical problems, and those were fixed properly in 81.6 % of all cases. Electrical gremlins topped the list, with faulty batteries the most common major complaint. Among non-mechanical problems, the inch-long plastic hasp on the console lid tended to break off easily, but this was a 5-minute fix in most cases.

We unearthed a few complaints about wind roar, tire noise and too loud an exhaust note. Seems the Bonneville's throaty tailpipe burble isn't universally appreciated. The traction control system also gives something akin to braying.

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Summary 7 of 9

In keeping with the Bonneville's image and purpose, handling was given a mark of excellent by nearly 75% of our owners. A Michigan engineer wrote, "Moderate understeer at the limit but very predictable and fun to drive." All 1994 Bonneville's come with all-independent suspension: MacPherson struts fore, Chapman struts aft. The SSE offers Computer Command Ride (CCR) when you order traction control. CCR uses another console button to select Touring or Performance damper settings. Performance firms up the suspension, while Touring automatically selects firm or soft damping, depending on road and driving conditions.

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Summary 8 of 9

The Bonneville's cabin design was judged as good as the exterior's. Instruments appear to be straightforward and easy to read. Shorter drivers had trouble seeing out the back window because of the center high-mounted brake light and raised speaker pods on the parcel shelf.

Some drivers felt that their seats should have adjustable lumbar support and a memory feature. The optional leather 12-way buckets do, but they're available only in the SSE and cost about \$1200. Those who ordered the heads-up display liked it, but here again it's expensive. You order it as part of a \$1440 option group that includes keyless entry, automatic, air conditioning and several other items.

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Summary 9 of 9

Owners gave the Bonneville high marks for quality and workmanship. A New York program manager said, "Forget the imports! The Bonneville's fit and finish are perfect!" And an Ohio retiree observed, "Quality is built into this car. I believe GM got the message and hope they continue to build such excellent automobiles." What it all boiled down to was value. With SE prices starting at \$20,424, or \$1000 more than a Taurus LX, most of the owners we surveyed felt they'd gotten a good deal. And nearly 71% told us they'd have no qualms about buying the same car for the same money again next time.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Does Pontiac have a great idea or what? Imagine: Give buyers equal or better performance, luxury and handling than that of a BMW but at thousands less in price. It's a great marketing strategy--more for less--and the result is that the Bonneville is one of the best car values you can buy these days. What's more, Pontiac backs up the strategy with hardware that puts its money where its mouth is, and a dealer body that's really trying to satisfy customers. Like we said, is this a great idea or what?

It's great to hear about a dealer body getting rave reviews from customers. And that's the kind of feedback we're getting these days

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

about Pontiac dealers. They really care. It was there in our survey results, too, with many respondents telling us about their dealers going overboard in trying to resolve problems. Cheers to Pontiac and its dealers for recognizing that customers are going to keep you in business or watch you go down for the third time.

Talk to Pontiac executives and they'll tell you that their customers are more "expressive" than other GM division customers and that they like more expressive cars. That's why the Bonneville has a lot more style and flair than its corporate cousins.

That's why Pontiac can hang plastic side

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

cladding on its car, tune the suspension way stiffer, put gold badges all over it, bedeck the rear with a big spoiler and have the loudest exhaust of any of the three cars that share the same platform. Most of its customers wanted it that way.

Most of the stuff we're talking about here is reserved for the SSEi option cars. In all fairness, the standard SE has one of the cleanest, best-looking profiles out of Detroit these days. And if only they'd let you get the supercharged engine without all the gold badges and spoilers, they'd have a helluva package.

As it is, the standard Bonneville engine has

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

been fair to adequate but no match for the stylish looks of the car. A ditto for the handling with the standard base suspension. For '95, the power problem is ended with the new Generation II 3800 V6 rated at 205 horsepower. And there's still the supercharged 3800 available as part of the SSEi package.

Many of our survey respondents thought the Bonneville's suspension was too stiff. We agree. Today, there's no excuse for a stiff ride in the quest for better handling. Auto engineers long ago found out how to have both and the Bonneville should have both.

The interior design is busy but effective. The seats, especially with the leather option,

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

are fantastic with excellent support and lots of comfort built in. The optional adjustable seats still require 12 buttons to make all the possible adjustments and that's ridiculous. But you do have a pretty good driving position after you've invested an hour adjusting your seat.

We guess that's part of that "expressiveness" expressing itself.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE PONTIAC BONNEVILLE*

Total miles driven 1,571,854
Average miles driven 5477

Purchase price:

Average \$23,440
 Range \$17,892-
 \$32,000

Why did you choose the Bonneville?

Liked the styling 62.9%
 Owned Pontiacs before 23.7
 Good price/value 15.9
 Performance 14.8
 Good handling 13.4
 Overall comfort 12.7

Model choices:

Bonneville SE 63.0%
 Bonneville SSE 25.7

SSEi supercharger

package 11.3

Engine choices:

170-hp 3.8-liter V6 87.1%

225-hp supercharged

package 12.9

Options/Accessories:

Cruise control 100.0%
 Power driver's seat 97.0
 Alloy wheels 93.0
 Keyless entry 88.7
 Premium sound system 77.1

Performance/handling

suspension 65.6
 Leather seat trim 66.3
 Traction control 59.5
 Theft-deterrent alarm 35.4
 Sunroof 26.9
 Computer Command
 Ride 21.5

Average mpg, city/hwy:

170-hp 3.8-liter V6 19.7/26.4
 225-hp supercharged V6 17.4/23.6

Specific likes:

Styling 69.7%
 Handling 41.0
 Comfort 34.1
 Performance 27.2
 Ride quality 20.7
 Engine power 17.6

Interior styling	10.7
Specific dislikes:	
No complaints	15.9%
Wind, road, exhaust noise	13.2
No lumbar or memory seats	10.0
Fuel mileage could be better	5.9
Rear, side vision	5.9
Ride too firm	5.0
Needs more power	4.5
Suggested changes:	
No changes, leave as is	12.0%
Greater silence	12.0
More engine power	8.3
Lumbar, memory seats	6.3
Smoother ride	5.2
Relocate cup holders	5.2
Improve vision	4.7
Engine power:	
Excellent	65.5%
Good	32.8
Average	1.4
Poor	0.3
Handling:	
Excellent	74.8%
Good	23.8
Average	1.4
Poor	0.0
Braking:	
Excellent	70.5%
Good	27.1
Average	1.7
Poor	0.7
Overall performance:	
Excellent	69.5%
Good	29.8
Average	0.7
Poor	0.0
Control layout:	
Excellent	57.7%
Good	38.9
Average	2.0
Poor	1.4
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	61.1%
Good	37.5
Average	1.0
Poor	0.3
Driver sightlines:	

Excellent	52.9%
Good	39.6
Average	6.5
Poor	1.0

Overall convenience:

Excellent	55.6%
Good	43.0
Average	1.4
Poor	0.0

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	64.2%
Good	33.7
Average	1.7
Poor	0.3

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	72.0%
Good	24.6
Average	2.7
Poor	0.7

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	56.3%
Good	39.1
Average	4.6
Poor	0.0

Mechanical trouble?

No	79.9%
Yes	20.1

What type of trouble?

Electrical	16.7%
Transmission	8.3
Windshield wipers	8.3
Oil leaks	6.7

Repair it yourself?

No	94.9%
Yes	5.1

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	81.6%
No	18.4

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	56.1%
Good	34.2
Average	5.7
Poor	3.9

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	60.1%
Good	33.3
Average	5.8
Poor	0.7

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	16.2%
Two vehicles	51.7

Three vehicles	24.0
Four or more	8.0

Principal driver:

Male	49.6%
Female	46.7
Both equally	3.7

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	5.6%
30-49	50.0
50-plus	44.3

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Pontiac Bonneville if you had it to do over again?

Yes	70.7%
Maybe	26.6
No	2.8

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Pontiac Grand Am Owners Report

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Although Pontiac brand royalty was an impressive sub-theme in survey group's Grand Am purchase decisions, sexy styling won more hearts than any other two factors combined.

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Spiffy dash reinforces sporty theme.

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Firm seats bothered some owners.

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SUMMARY

(This first appeared in the February 1994 issue of Popular Mechanics)

During the glory days of the classic GTO, Pontiac's product strategy was to deliver the top image car in every market segment it entered. Pontiac's planners developed this approach because their division was always forced to share body shells and major components with other GM divisions, especially Chevrolet. It's been a long time since the GTO, but those requirements really haven't changed much. And the Grand Am is the proof.

Although the Grand Am name dates to 1973, Pontiac introduced the current series in 1985,

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Summary 2 of 10

and it's been Pontiac's best seller for four of the past five years. The present body bowed as a 1992 model. What sets it apart from GM's other N-body cars (Chevy Corsica/Beretta, Oldsmobile Achieva, Buick Skylark) is styling. So it came as no surprise that styling convinced 70.4% of the Grand Am owners in our survey to sign up.

But most buyers also agreed that the Grand Am's beauty extended beneath the surface. They shopped the competition and concluded that price and value won out as their next strongest reasons for purchase.

Pontiac's simplified Grand Am lineup consists of only two trim levels, SE and GT,

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Summary 3 of 10

for both its coupes and sedans. The SE's standard engine is the Quad OHC, a 115-horsepower sohc 2-valve version of the 2.3-liter Quad 4. The GT powerplant, called the Quad 4 H.O. (for high output) puts out 175 horsepower.

Both the SE and GT offer an optional 155-hp version of the Quad 4 or a 3.1-liter 160-hp pushrod V6. Both these optional engines are available only with the 3-speed automatic. Most of the Grand Am owners we surveyed chose the V6. The V6 added \$460 to the price of an SE, but gave the GT purchaser a \$90 credit.

GM decided to upgrade all versions of the

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Summary 4 of 10

Quad engine for 1993, mostly by borrowing structural refinements from the H.O. version. Extra ribbing on the block and bulkheads now add stiffness and cut noise. The cylinder-bore bottom deck extends lower, and gussets strengthen the rear wall of the block. There's a stronger head gasket, of course, with greater torque capacity in the head bolts. Parts of the induction system have been made huskier to mute intake roar during hard acceleration. The timing-chain cover is thicker, there's an oscillating vibration damper on the right-side engine mount and the exhaust system has been redesigned. Most of these engine refinements came in response to owner comments about the earlier Quad engines.

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Summary 5 of 10

Our survey shows that all three iterations of the Quad powerplant delivered better fuel mileage than the V6. And the 5-speed beat the automatic by a significant 3 to 4 mpg. So it's apparent that economy wasn't uppermost in the minds of most Grand Am buyers, even though 18.8% listed fuel economy as a virtue. Gas mileage ranged from 21.1 in town to 32.5 on long trips and varied widely by engine and transmission choice.

Power was judged excellent by 54.2% of our respondents and good by 37.3% more. What this means is that acceleration and passing speeds were deemed ample, though perhaps not quite blinding. Owners thought more

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Summary 6 of 10

highly of handling and braking than of the acceleration delivered by any of the four engine options.

The SE's extensive standard equipment list includes antilock disc/drum power brakes, automatic electric door locks, an AM/FM ETR sound system, power steering, a remote decklid release and a 5-speed manual transmission. The Grand Am GT package adds a dual exhaust, Level II suspension with front and rear stabilizer bars, rally gauges, a tachometer and color-keyed alloy wheels. Only 7.9% of our owners opted for the 5-speed manual transmission, mostly because it's not available with the popular V6 option.

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Summary 7 of 10

And nearly 25% had owned Pontiacs before, which made brand loyalty the third key factor in Grand Am purchases. Roughly one-third of the owners we surveyed reported mechanical troubles of some sort. That's a relatively high figure. However, generally speaking, most of these problems weren't serious. The most common concerned a split hose in the wet-arm windshield-washer system. Noisy heater blowers were also cited, as were too-quick upshifts of the automatic transmissions. Dealers correctly repaired these and other problems in 80% of all cases, and they did so under the Grand Am's 3-year/36,000-mile bumper-to-bumper warranty.

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Summary 8 of 10

Workmanship was considered good to excellent by 99.2% of our respondents, so there's no quibble in that department. And while owners recognized and appreciated the Grand Am's standard antilock brakes, their most frequent request was for airbags. Pontiac says that a driver's airbag is on its way for 1994.

Opinions were divided about the Grand Am's standard automatic door locks (ADL). These secure all doors when the driver shifts the automatic transmission out of Park. (On manual-transmission cars, the doors lock when the speedometer hits 8 mph.) There's no override, so the ADL always locks all the

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Summary 9 of 10

doors. Trouble is, anytime anyone wants out, the doors have to be unlocked manually. Pontiac again assured us that 1994 models will address this complaint.

Sightlines came in for a little grumbling, thanks to the bulky headrests and wide C-pillars. Controls and instrumentation fared a little better but didn't exactly inspire ecstasy. In fact, beyond its styling, the Grand Am produced very ordinary owner responses. The consensus seems to be that it's a great-looking car, but it's not a world beater.

Even so, more than 60% of our survey respondents were still so seduced by the Grand Am's looks that they'd readily step up

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Summary 10 of 10

and do it all over again. And another 34.7% said they might do the same. Image may not be everything, but it still counts for a lot.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Pontiac characterizes itself as GM's Excitement Division, with considerable justification. The division's design teams regularly make sales winners out of cars that seem to produce yawns and cobwebs for other GM divisions--even though all the cars are virtually identical in their mechanical particulars.

As noted in the main body of this Owners Report, the Grand Am is an excellent example of this phenomenon. Introduced at the same time as its stablemates from Oldsmobile (the Achieva) and Buick (the Skylark), it succeeds while the others languish. Although Pontiac's chassis engineers can single out some minute

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Editor's Report 2 of 6

differences in suspension tuning--as well as the broadest array of powertrain choices among the N-bodies--the truth is that Grand Am, Achieva and Skylark are clones. While there are distinctions in appearance, obviously, and interiors, dynamic observations that apply to one apply to all.

For example, consider the Quad 4 engine family, which was a key part in the N-Car product planning. The Quad OHC--GM's 2-valve version of the Quad 4--was specified as the base engine for the various N-Cars. As our survey shows, Grand Am buyers rejected the Quad OHC--as well as the two Quad 4 variants--in favor of the V6.

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Editor's Report 3 of 6

There's a good reason for this. The Quad OHC is not only anemic, it's noisy--although '94 editions will be quieter. Mated to an automatic transmission, which is the overwhelming transmission choice among Grand Am buyers, the Quad OHC engine still gives a thoroughly indifferent account of itself.

Although the standard (155 hp) and H.O. (175 hp) versions of the Quad 4 still draw criticism for noisy operation, they're both spirited performers. The H.O. version in particular hustles the Grand Am to true sport coupe (or sedan) status. The V6 engine option for 1994 is GM's 3.1-liter 3100, which

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Editor's Report 4 of 6

replaces the previous 3.3-liter and is definitely an improvement on its predecessor. The same can be said for the 4-speed automatic that goes with the new V6. In our view, GM made a mistake by providing 3-speed automatics--rather than 4-speeds--for its N-car fleet. The 3-speed is still in the lineup--it's the automatic option with the Quad OHC--but the more desirable 4-speed is now available with the V6 and with the standard Quad 4.

One other initial N-car mistake that's corrected for 1994 is the addition of a driver's airbag. GM consumer clinics indicated that buyers considered antilock brakes to be more important than airbags, so the N-cars were

launched with ABS as standard equipment and automatic seatbelts instead of airbags.

Well, whatever deficiencies there may have been, it seems clear that the Pontiac Grand Am is making most of its owners happy. It does this with performance that's fairly ordinary throughout most of the model range. Handling is competent, but a good way from cutting edge for front-drive cars. Front-seat headroom and legroom is competitive, but rear-seat space is a bit cramped. Ride quality is adequate, tending toward taut, which--in our opinion--plays well with Pontiac's youthful image.

And that, of course, is what the Grand Am is

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all about. It's bold and sassy, inside and out, a rolling style statement on behalf of its owner. It's one of those rare cars that seem to make owners happy just by looking good in the driveway.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE PONTIAC GRAND AM*

Total miles driven 1,173,861

Average miles driven 4974

Purchase price:

Average \$15,072

Range \$12,000-\$18,800

Why did you choose the Grand Am?

Styling 70.4%

Price/value 29.2

Previous Pontiac 23.5

ownership

Pontiac reputation 10.2

Performance 7.5

Handling 7.5

Body style choices:

2-door 53.1%

4-door 46.9

Model choices:

Grand Am SE 81.2%

Grand Am GT 18.8

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 99.2%

Var. ratio power 91.7

steering

Rally gauge cluster 78.1

Power windows 61.1

Split/folding rear seat 48.5

Power driver's seat 14.8

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

115-hp Quad OHC 24.8/31.7

155-hp Quad 4 25.5/31.3

175-hp Quad 4 H.O. 21.4/27.6

160-hp V6 21.1/27.0

5-speed manual 25.6/32.5

3-speed automatic 22.2/27.9

Engine choices:

160-hp V6 71.7%

115-hp Quad OHC 14.1

155-hp Quad 4 10.7

175-hp Quad 4 H.O. 3.4

Transmission choices:

3-speed automatic 92.1%

5-speed manual 7.9

Specific likes:

Styling 75.2%

Handling 29.8

Comfort 25.7

Ride quality 19.3

Performance 19.3

Engine power	18.8
Operating economy	18.8
Specific dislikes:	
No complaints	19.1%
Automatic door locks	8.1
Seats too firm	6.9
Ride too firm	6.4
Shoulder harness chafes	5.8
No standard airbag	4.6
Not enough space in rear	4.6
Suggested changes:	
Standard airbags	14.7%
Softer seats	8.8
Improve shoulder harnesses	7.4
No changes	6.6
Reduce noises, rattles	5.9
Revise instrument layout	5.9
Softer suspension	5.9
Engine power:	
Excellent	54.2%
Good	37.3
Average	6.5
Poor	2.0
Handling:	
Excellent	62.6%
Good	35.5
Average	1.9
Poor	0.0
Braking:	
Excellent	67.7%
Good	29.7
Average	2.6
Poor	0.0
Overall performance:	
Excellent	59.5%
Good	37.3
Average	2.6
Poor	0.7
Control layout:	
Excellent	54.2%
Good	39.4
Average	5.8
Poor	0.6
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	52.6%
Good	40.9
Average	5.8

Poor 0.6

Driver sightlines:

Excellent 43.4%
Good 44.1
Average 10.5
Poor 2.0

Overall convenience:

Excellent 48.0%
Good 48.0
Average 3.9
Poor 0.0

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent 64.7%
Good 34.5
Average 0.4
Poor 0.4

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent 64.8%
Good 30.5
Average 3.8
Poor 0.8

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent 45.9%
Good 45.5
Average 8.6
Poor 0.0

Mechanical trouble?

No 66.9%
Yes 33.1

What type of trouble?

Leaky windshield washer 19.0%
Electrical system 12.7
Noisy heater blower 7.6
Front-end alignment 6.3
Automatic door locks 6.3
Gearshift mechanism 6.3

Repair it yourself?

No 97.5%
Yes 2.5

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes 79.1%
No 20.9

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent 57.3%
Good 33.1
Average 6.2
Poor 3.4

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent 53.4%
Good 38.1

Average	6.8
Poor	1.7

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	28.2%
Two vehicles	32.9
Three vehicles	21.4
Four or more	17.4

Principal driver:

Female	73.0%
Male	24.3
Equal	2.7

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	29.8%
30-49	46.7
50-plus	23.5

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Pontiac Grand Am if you had it to do over again?

Yes	60.6%
Maybe	34.7
No	4.7

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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Styling was what most owners liked best about their Saturns. Rust- and dent-resistance and easy-replacement of the car's plastic panels also drew praise

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Owners praised Saturn's classic white-on-black analog instruments.

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Saturn's seats and roomy interiors were high on the list of best-liked features.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the February 1992 issue of Popular Mechanics)

The Saturn wasn't really planned to be a rival for the Honda Accord, America's best selling passenger car. The original targets were two smaller imports--the Honda Civic and Toyota Corolla.

But by making their car slightly larger than the Civic and Corolla, the Saturn product planners wound up squarely in the Accord camp, with a car that costs, on average, \$3500 less.

This goes well beyond mere dimension. When we compared this our February 1992 survey with our most recent Accord Owners

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Summary 2 of 8

Report (see page 43, Sept. '91), we found that series for series the two cars produced very similar owner responses in almost every scoring category.

Accord owners reported fewer mechanical problems, but Saturn dealers corrected problems more quickly and with less hassle. In fact, Saturn dealers seem to be taking better care of their customers than Honda dealers, an opinion that's reflected in the latest J.D. Power Sales Satisfaction survey.

Without belaboring the Accord/Saturn comparison, it's obvious that GM has done an excellent job in a very competitive market segment. For a new American car to come

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Summary 3 of 8

along and match the best-selling car in the country--for 23% less in average price--says a lot.

To review: All Saturns are front-wheel drive. They're available in two body styles--coupe and 4-door sedan--with two variations of the same engine: an aluminum block, iron-sleeved 1.9-liter (116-cu.-in.) 4-cylinder head. The performance version has dual overhead camshafts, 16 valves, a 9.5:1 compression ratio, port injection and a free-flowing exhaust, good for 124 hp at 5600 rpm and a very flat torque curve.

The garden-variety version has a single overhead cam, eight valves, a 9.3:1 c.r. and

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Summary 4 of 8

throttle-body injection. It develops 85 hp at 5000 rpm and 107 ft. -lb. of torque at 2400 rpm.

There are two transmission choices--an electronically controlled 4-speed automatic or a 5-speed manual. Final drive ratios--4.06:1 for the manual, 4.133:1 for the automatic--are the same for both engines.

In our survey, 60% of the owners chose the more potent dohc Four. Of the owners who comes loaded with standard equipment. Saturn offers A and B option packages, but relatively few other extras. Antilock brakes with rear discs complained about acceleration--about 7%--most had chosen the sohc with an automatic transmission. Surprisingly, both

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Summary 5 of 8

engines delivered virtually identical mpg.

All vertical body panels are plastic, with a sturdy steel space-frame underneath. The hood, roof and decklid are sheet steel. The big advantage of plastic bodywork is its resistance to rust and small dents. It's also easier to replace and lends itself to less-expensive styling changes.

Like its imported competitors, the Saturn cost \$895 and were ordered by 18.3% of our respondents. Those who have ABS reported good performance, with no pedal feedback.

The Saturn's electric sunroof, a \$530 option, gave the most trouble of any component. Some 17% of our owner group cited snags

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Summary 6 of 8

with sunroof cables or bad switches. These and other problems were repaired under warranty.

When it came to warranty or other work, our owners returned exceptionally high praise for their dealer service departments. Dealer repairs were satisfactory in 86.5% of all cases, compared to 75% for the Accord.

The Saturn's price/value ratio was the main reason for buying. Styling ranked a strong second, with "Made in America" not far behind.

Performance also got generally good marks. The Saturn SL2 sedan and SC coupe are equipped with a sporting suspension that

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Summary 7 of 8

includes front and rear antiroll bars and more aggressive spring and damping rates. All models have variable-assist power steering. Thanks to these features and good chassis design, the Saturn scored well in ride, handling, steering and braking with most owners.

On the downside, 20.1% mentioned rattles and noises. A number of owners wished for airbags, which won't be available until 1994. There were also complaints about the automatic shoulder belt.

The all-important survey question--based on your experience, would you buy a Saturn again?--generated a rousing 83.4% yes. That's

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Summary 8 of 8

only four percentage points behind our all-time best, the Lexus LS 400, and less than one point behind the Acura Legend.

Given the fierce competition at the smaller end of the automotive marketplace, it was clear going in that Saturn was going to have to try harder than most to succeed. And it seems that's just what Saturn is doing.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

It's not always easy to get excited about American small cars, but the Saturn has been a happy exception. In testing (see Saturn Showdown, page 21, May '91), on the street and even on the racetrack (see Motor-sports, page 110, Dec. '91), it's been consistently impressive, and we're not surprised the owners like their cars.

We *are* surprised--pleasantly--at the early performance of the Saturn dealer body. Fast, reasonably priced, low-hassle service is rapidly becoming the key to getting ahead in today's car business. Thanks largely to Acura and Lexus, good dealer service has become a buying priority, and customers simply won't

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

put up with the old "you-can-maybe-have-it-back-next-week" approach. Saturn has obviously done its homework on this score, and judging by our survey it's paying dividends.

The car itself is exceptional in two respects--performance and interior volume. The dohc 16-valve version of Saturn's new 1.9-liter aluminum engine provides snappy acceleration, even when it's mated with the 4-speed automatic transaxle, and our fuel-economy experiences with the car largely parallel the numbers turned in by our survey group.

We also agree with those owners who

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

disliked the 85-hp 2-valve version of the engine: sluggish describes it best, and, we strongly recommend the 16-valve edition.

The new car's handling is, to us, its most impressive trait. Saturn did its homework here, too, carefully dissecting and analyzing nimble little hot rods like the Acura Integra before developing the chassis. The result is exceptionally crisp turn-in and transient response.

The ultimate proof of Saturn's chassis development program came last fall, when Peter Farrell won the IMSA Firehawk Touring Class driver's championship for Dave Rosenblum's Valvoline/ICY team. This series

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

is for street stock cars, and for an all-new car from an all-new manufacturer to win the first time out is rare.

Not everyone wants to go racing, of course, and for most drivers comfort and convenience are more important than agility. The Saturn gets some mixed marks on this score. It's roomy--the design team's use of interior space rivals something from Honda--and the seating is excellent. Controls are well marked and located, and driver sightlines are good.

On the other hand, the trade for crisp handling is more ride harshness than you'd find in a competing Japanese car. There's also substantially more engine noise, something

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

Saturn is working to fix in '92 models.

These are not insignificant criticisms in a car that's going to see a lot of family duty. Nevertheless, we think the Saturn's virtues--excellent handling, lively engine performance, superb brakes, resilient plastic body panels, roomy interior, thoughtful design for routine serviceability--far outweigh its faults.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE SATURN*

Total miles driven:: 2,349,536

Average miles driven: 6299

Purchase price:

Average \$11,744

Range \$7995-
\$15,100

Why did you choose the Saturn?

Price/value 51.9%

Styling 50.0

Made in U.S. 32.1

Operating economy 14.8

Quality/workmanship 11.0

Standard features 10.2

Avg. mpg, city/hwy.:

5-speed manual 28.9/35.5

4-speed automatic 26.5/32.7

Body style choice:

4-door sedan 88.6%

Coupe 11.4

Model choice:

Saturn SL (base) 11.1%

Saturn SL1 28.9

Saturn SL2 48.6

Saturn SC (coupe) 11.4

Engine choice:

Dohc 16-valve Four 60.0%

Sohc 8valve Four 40.0

Transmission choice:

4-speed automatic 52.9%

5-speed manual 47.1

Engine power:

Excellent 52.9%

Good 39.3

Average 6.8

Poor 1.0

Handling:

Excellent 77.5%

Good 20.9

Average 1.6

Poor 0.0

Braking:

Excellent 66.1%

Good 30.2

Average 2.9

Poor 0.9

Overall performance:

Excellent	67.9%
Good	30.7
Average	0.8
Poor	0.5
Control layout:	
Excellent	73.0%
Good	25.4
Average	1.6
Poor	0.0
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	72.6%
Good	26.1
Average	1.3
Poor	0.0
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	66.5%
Good	31.7
Average	0.8
Poor	0.3
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	63.5%
Good	33.7
Average	1.8
Poor	1.0
Comfort opinion, rear seats:	
Excellent	31.7%
Good	50.3
Average	15.1
Poor	3.0
Specific likes:	
Styling	62.7%
Handling	45.2
Economy	41.2
Comfort/roominess	24.3
Price	23.7
Power/performance	19.2
Specific dislikes:	
Rattles, noises	20.1%
No complaints	13.2
Automatic shoulder belts	12.3
Upholstery material	9.9
Insufficient power	7.2
Drips from rain gutters	5.7
Rear headroom	5.4
Suggested changes:	
Reduce rattles, noises	18.1%
No changes	10.6
More powerful base engine	10.6
Different upholstery fabric	9.6

Airbags	8.5
Improve automatic belts	8.2
Mechanical trouble?	
No	73.6%
Yes	26.4
What type of trouble?	
Sunroof sticks, balky motor	16.8%
Electrical problems	8.9
Brakes	8.9
Shift linkage	7.9
Air conditioning	5.9
Transaxle	5.9
Did you repair it yourself?	
No	95.0%
Yes	5.0
Dealer repairs satisfactory?	
Yes	86.5%
No	13.5
Dealer service opinion:	
Excellent	70.6%
Good	23.9
Average	4.4
Poor	1.1
Number of vehicles owned:	
This vehicle only	24.5%
Two vehicles	47.3
Three vehicles	17.2
Four or more	11.0
Principal driver:	
Female	51.9%
Male	44.3
Equal	3.8
Age distribution of owners:	
Under 29	26.6%
30-49	45.9
50-plus	27.3
Based on your experience, would you buy a Saturn again?	
Yes	83.4%
Maybe	13.7
No	2.9

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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Subaru Legacy Owners

Report

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Styling was not high on the list of likes. Handling, 4-wheel drive, interior comfort and engine performance were attributes more important to our sampled owners.

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There's also a righthand-drive version.

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Flat-4 engine has optional turbo.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the February 1994 issue of Popular Mechanics)

We noticed something unusual when we began crunching numbers for the Legacy data panel. A lot of owners had ordered this car with righthand steering. Whoa! The Subaru option book doesn't even list righthand steering. Who needs it?

Turns out rural letter carriers do. Letter carriers aren't uncommon among our Owners Report respondents, but this was the first time some 25% had marked "righthand steering" as one of the main reasons they bought a particular car.

Why so many mail carriers? The answer

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Summary 2 of 8

turned out to be simple. Subaru offered a special 1993 deal to postal employees: new Legacy wagons with a combination of righthand steering, full-time 4-wheel drive and an automatic transmission. Righthand steering puts a driver on the correct side of the vehicle to stuff mailboxes. Subaru and Jeep seem to be the only two automakers catering to RFD drivers.

These sloggers through sleet, snow, rain and dark of night agreed that the Legacy provides them with thrifty, comfortable, versatile, go-anywhere transportation. They praised the Legacy's interior room, its traction and its mechanical reliability.

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Summary 3 of 8

The Subaru Legacy comes in five trim levels: L, LS, LSi, Sport and Touring. Each amounts to a major option package. The LSi, for instance, is the Legacy's luxury series, with leather interior and an AM/FM/cassette/CD sound system. For the performance-minded, there's the Legacy Touring wagon or Sport sedan, with a 160-hp turbocharged version of the 2.2-liter flat-Four, plus firmer suspension and specific trim.

But even the lowest-price Legacy L offers a large number of standard items and an extremely short option list. Standard L equipment includes air conditioning, power steering, power 4-wheel disc brakes, all-

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Summary 4 of 8

independent suspension, cruise control, electric locks, power windows with one-touch down, an AM/FM/cassette stereo, a tilt steering wheel with memory, an adjustable lumbar bolster for the driver's seat, dual electric outside mirrors and a 5-speed manual transmission with hill-holder.

Next up, the Legacy LS adds Subaru's electronically controlled 4-speed automatic, 4-channel antilock brakes, power moonroof, alloy wheels, height-adjustable driver's seat, plus a raft of minor accessories. Above that, there's the leather interior LSi series and the turbocharged Touring wagon and Sport sedan.

ABS comes standard in all other Legacys

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Summary 5 of 8

except the base L. Even so, you can order ABS in the L wagon (but not in the L sedan).

On the safety front, every Legacy has a driver's airbag and motorized front shoulder harnesses. The hillholder in the 5-speed Legacy keeps the vehicle from rolling backward on an incline.

The standard Legacy engine is a twin-cam 2.2-liter horizontally opposed Four with multipoint fuel injection and distributorless ignition. It delivers 130 hp and drives the front wheels through a 5-speed manual transmission. There's also a 4-speed automatic available.

The Legacy also offers two versions of full-

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Summary 6 of 8

time all-wheel drive: Continuous and Active. Subaru's Continuous 4wd comes with the manual 5-speed only, and Active is for Legacys with the electronically controlled 4-speed automatic transmission. Continuous 4wd (5-speed) uses a viscous center differential to distribute and equalize power fore and aft. Active 4wd (automatic trans) substitutes an electronically engaged hydraulic multiplate clutch for the viscous center diff. Rear-wheel sensors in the Active system are shared with the ABS and register differences in wheel speed. Nearly 40% of our respondents bought the Legacy specifically for its 4wd. This feature, in fact, turned out to

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Summary 7 of 8

be Legacy's single strongest selling point.

The biggest complaint we heard about the Legacy concerned fuel economy. Just over 12% of our owners said they had expected better. Keep in mind, though, that 73.5% owned automatics. And 25% were letter carriers who did a lot of stop-and-go driving. Only 17.3% reported any sort of mechanical problem. Of those, 77.1% got their cars repaired correctly the first time.

What owners liked best about their Legacys were the benefits of all-wheel drive. Engine power, acceleration, handling and braking also scored well. The Legacy was judged to be comfortable in the front seats, but less so in

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Summary 8 of 8

the rear. Taller people complained that there wasn't enough headroom or rear legroom.

Nearly 30% of our respondents had owned Subarus before, and 66.5% said they'd buy a Legacy if they had it to do over again.

The final word came from a Wisconsin county clerk. "When we went shopping for a new car," he wrote, "we'd intended to also try the Taurus, Accord and Camry, but we got no farther than the Subaru dealer. This car is fun to drive! With the turbocharged engine, this 4-cylinder car has more zip than our Olds Regency Ninety Eight. "

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EDITOR'S REPORT

Fuji Heavy Industries, the parent corporation of Subaru, doesn't count on selling cars to have any significant effect on its bottom line. It's into aircraft, manufacturing and, well, heavy industry. Maybe that's why Subarus have always been a little offbeat.

But the Legacy is less unconventional than its predecessors. While it retains the flat-motor configuration, it somehow manages to be a lot like any number of other small economy sedans. We drove a 4-wheel-drive turbo Legacy with an automatic. During several days of good weather, we never managed to trigger the active 4wd system, but the turbo motor makes more than enough

power to deal with traffic.

Die-hard Subaru aficionados won't be turned off, however. We've used the hill-holder found on manual trans Subarus--and it's neat, but the handbrake is almost as convenient if you know how to do it. One thing they used to do right was the express-down and express-up power windows--but apparently someone in product planning decided this wasn't a valuable feature.

We can understand complaints about poor rear-seat headroom--it's cramped back there. But our size-12s found it plenty cramped up in the driver's footwell, too. Admittedly, the Legacy falls in the smaller end of the

spectrum for this class of cars.

We found the ride and handling to be excellent, although understeer is the limiting factor when pushing the limit in cornering. That's consistent with the Legacy's mission of dependable family transportation.

We'll be glad to see the Legacy--as well as every other car in production--transition to airbags. We find the motorized belts just as annoying as our readers do.

As far as complaints about ground clearance, those have got to be from those RFD letter carriers driving over heavily rutted country roads. I'd stack Manhattan's pothole-infested 11th Avenue up against any

properly maintained road in the country. The Legacy manages to ride reasonably well there, and never did bottom out over some of the lumps and dips that strike sparks from taxi frames.

We've always enjoyed Subaru cars (and trucks--remember the Brat?). Well, enjoyed might be the wrong term--appreciated perhaps. It's obvious they were designed by the engineering staff and not the product planners. That's in some ways good, and in some ways bad. The buzzphrase in the industry nowadays is "serving the needs of the customer," which is not the same as building the best car the engineering staff knows how. The Legacy retains its strong engineer's appeal with

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

features like the flat-4 engine, hill-holder and automatic 4wd. But it does so while still appealing to Just Plain Folks, whether they were Subaru converts before or not.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE SUBARU LEGACY*

Total miles driven 1,547,709

Average miles driven 6190

Purchase price:

Average \$17,654

Range \$13,500-

\$24,000

Why did you choose the Subaru Legacy?

For its 4-wheel drive 39.0%

Owned Subarus before 28.7

For righthand drive** 24.7

Subaru reputation 11.6

Price/value 9.2

Antilock brakes 8.8

Body style choices:

4-door station wagon 70.9%

4-door sedan 29.1

Model choices:

L 38.5%

LSi 4wd 33.9

LS 13.1

Touring turbo wagon 4wd 8.6

Sport turbo sedan 4wd 5.9

Average mpg, city/hwy:

With 5-speed manual 23.6/27.6

With 4-speed automatic 20.0/25.0

Transmission choices:

4-speed automatic 73.5%

5-speed manual 26.5

Engine power:

Excellent 50.5%

Good 43.1

Average 5.6

Poor 0.9

Handling:

Excellent 61.1%

Good 36.6

Average 2.3

Poor 0.0

Braking:

Excellent 57.4%

Good 39.4

Average 3.2

Poor 0.0

Overall performance:

Excellent 54.9%

Good 43.3

Average 1.9

Poor	0.0
Layout of controls:	
Excellent	47.4%
Good	44.2
Average	7.4
Poor	0.9
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	49.1%
Good	43.0
Average	7.0
Poor	0.9
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	51.4%
Good	41.2
Average	6.5
Poor	0.9
Specific likes:	
4-wheel drive	44.9%
Handling	33.0
Comfort	23.8
Engine power	22.5
Styling	22.5
Righthand drive**	13.2
Riding qualities	12.8
Specific dislikes:	
No complaints	13.7%
Mpg lower than expected	12.1
Motorized shoulder harness and lapbelt	7.9
Noises and rattles	6.3
Uncomfortable seats	6.3
Not enough ground clearance	5.8
Paint seems to chip easily	4.7
Suggested changes:	
Better fuel mileage	9.7%
Friendlier shoulder harness and lapbelt	7.9
Fewer noises and rattles	7.3
More comfortable seats	7.3
No changes, leave as is	6.1
Greater ground clearance	6.1
More headroom	4.8
More legroom	4.8
Workmanship opinion:	
Excellent	54.0%
Good	43.1
Average	2.0
Poor	0.0
Comfort opinion, front seats:	
Excellent	50.6%

Good	39.4
Average	8.0
Poor	2.0

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	28.5%
Good	56.2
Average	13.6
Poor	1.7

Any mechanical trouble?

No	82.7%
Yes	17.3

What type of trouble?

Brakes	20.9%
Air conditioning	11.6
Electrical system	11.6
Front-end alignment	9.3

Repair it yourself?

No	97.7%
Yes	2.3

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	77.1%
No	22.9

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	48.4%
Good	42.3
Average	7.1
Poor	2.2

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	48.3%
Good	42.1
Average	6.6
Poor	2.9

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	20.6%
Two vehicles	42.1
Three vehicles	23.0
Four or more	14.3

Principal driver:

Female	58.2%
Male	36.9
Equal	4.8

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	5.8%
30-49	48.5
50-plus	45.6

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Subaru Legacy if you had it to do over again?

Yes	66.5%
Maybe	29.9

No

3.6

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Toyota Camry Owners Report

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Though conservative, Camry's rounded, contemporary good looks scored high with owners. Previous ownership and Toyota's reputation were also prime persuaders.

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Controls, instruments pleased most owners.

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Front-seat comfort drew high praise.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the June 1993 issue of Popular Mechanics.)

The 1992 model year was a big one for the Camry--literally. Toyota's mainstream sedan grew in every dimension in its latest makeover, and in the process became a frontline player in the tough midsize sedan market. As such, it squares up against some of the best-selling cars in the country--Ford Taurus, Honda Accord, Chevy Lumina--and, to date, has measured up very well.

Like the Accord, the Camry is an import nameplate that's assembled in the United States--Kentucky, in this case--with sufficient

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Summary 2 of 7

local content to meet the requirement for a domestic automobile.

Sharing a number of structural and mechanical elements with the Lexus ES 300, the Camry comes in 4-door sedan and station wagon body styles. The wagon was added after this survey was completed. Most of the owners in our survey chose the Camry's basic 130-hp 2.2-liter dohc 16-valve 4-cylinder engine. Fewer than a third ordered the optional 185-hp 3.0-liter dohc 24-valve V6. Almost all of our Camry owners wanted the 4-speed automatic transmission--only 5.4% opted for the 5-speed manual.

A few--a very few--owners of 5-cylinder

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Summary 3 of 7

Camrys told us they wish they'd sprung for the V6. The Four feels weak on the bottom end, said 4.4% of our respondents. The V6 adds approximately \$1650 to the net cost of the Camry DX, LE and XLE series. It's standard only in the sporty SE, which comes with the 5-speed transaxle, a lower axle ratio, slightly stiffer suspension, V-rated P205/65VR15 tires, 4-wheel disc brakes (standard on all V6 Camrys) and slightly quicker 15.9:1 steering.

Camry offers few free-standing options. Standard equipment choices move up through the four series. About the only items you can order specifically are the V6 engine, antilock brakes (\$1130 to \$1245), leather seats for the

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Summary 4 of 7

XLE, a moonroof, alloy wheels (both standard on XLE) and premium sound systems. A driver's airbag is standard on all models, as are 60/40 split folding rear seats, front recliners, a tilt steering wheel and an AM/FM ETR audio system.

Those are the basics, but what's it like to own a new Camry? Does it measure up to Toyota's high standards for trouble-free automobiles?

Judging by our survey, not quite. About one in five of our respondents experienced problems of some type. Most were minor irritations--orange-peel in the paint, wind leaks around windows, bad remote decklid

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Summary 5 of 7

release adjustment, vibrations, poorly installed upholstery, wheel misalignment on delivery and a gas-cap holder that snapped off for some owners the first time they tried to use it.

While we did register a few more serious complaints--suspension strut leaks and air-conditioner malfunctions-- they were so rare as to be of almost no statistical significance.

Judging by our survey group, dealer prep seems to be as much of a culprit here as build quality. And more than a third of our owners with mechanical problems said their dealers didn't fix their cars properly on the first visit.

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Summary 6 of 7

Toyota dealers took some heat for arrogant sales policies, too.

"They think it's still a seller's market," grumbled one respondent.

The new Camry's styling got a lot of praise, and 41.2% of our respondents listed styling as one of the big reasons they were attracted to the car. Most owners felt the Camry's ride was quiet, but some considered it perhaps a bit too firm. In part, complaints about ride quality could be attributed to the seats, which some owners thought were a bit too thin in the cushioning department.

On the other hand, 76% gave the Camry's handling top marks.

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Summary 7 of 7

At the bottom line, the large majority of our Camry owners were pleased with their cars, saying they'd make the same choice if they had it to do over again. Indeed, many of our respondents have owned a series of Camrys over the years.

But our survey also revealed a significant minority that expressed some doubt about its choice. While it's clear that Camry is a winner, this isn't the ringing endorsement we've seen for some other Toyota products. Perhaps the inherent problems associated with big volume in the midsize segment are catching up with Toyota--or at least with some of its dealers.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

As a result of its most recent redesign, the Camry has gone from merely very good to outstanding. Toyota now has one of the best entries in the midsize field, a car that's put its share of pressure on the Honda Accord and the Ford Taurus.

Smooth styling and improved roominess are certainly key elements in the Camry's increased appeal as a family sedan. But the quality that sets it apart in our view is how little fuss it generates in going about its business. This is the basic currency of the all-around family sedan, and the Camry pays a high return on investment.

Most of the pleasant hours we've spent in new Camrys were V6-powered. This is

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

a superb engine--smooth, quiet and powerful--that helps to make the Camry one of the best traveling companions in its class.

The 4-cylinder version isn't quite so compelling. Although it stirs the car along well enough at freeway speeds, acceleration is so-so and the engine sounds busy when the driver demands peak power. We recommend the V6, which is one of the best in the business.

Measured against its competition, we think the Camry's handling is very good. It's devoid of vices and totally predictable. Toyota has done a particularly good job with the Camry's power steering, which provides much better

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

on-center feel than many competing makes. And the ride quality is of the all-day variety.

An important element of all-day comfort, of course, is all-day seating. The Camry's seats are kind to the gluteal portions of the anatomy. In a car with a fuel range of 500-plus miles, this is important.

Our only quibble with the Camry's interior appointments is the general mousiness of the fabrics--with the exception of the XLE's optional leather, of course. However, Toyota is already addressing this issue, and we'll see better-looking interiors in upcoming Camrys.

We don't know what to think about the survey owners who reported unhappiness with

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

their dealers. In the course of our just-completed long-term evaluation of a '92 Camry LE V6, we didn't have any occasion to test the one-time-fix index of the dealer service department, simply because nothing ever needed fixing. Nothing. All our Camry ever required was routine service, and we're inclined to regard this car as bulletproof.

We also regard the Camry's fuel economy as competitive for this class. Our '92 LE V6 long-termer, equipped with a 4-speed automatic, delivered 22.6 mpg during its year of PM service. The 4-cylinder LE automatic pictured here turned in 25.4 mpg during a

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week of driving in and around Los Angeles.

On balance, we're inclined to give the Toyota Camry even higher marks than its owners do. To say it another way, what's wrong with this picture? Nothing.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE TOYOTA CAMRY*

Total miles driven 1,988,357
Average miles driven 6118
Purchase price:
 Average \$17,995
 Range \$13,900-
 \$24,600

Why did you choose the Camry?

Styling 41.2%
 Previous ownership 37.7
 Reputation 25.0
 Performance 16.2
 Price/value 10.7
 Quality 9.1
 Handling 8.4

Model choices:

LE 68.3%
 XLE 17.5
 Basic Camry (Deluxe) 13.9
 SE 0.3

Options/Accessories:

Moonroof 31.4%
 Antilock brakes 29.4

Avg. mpg, city/hwy., EPA:

2.2-liter 4/5-speed 22/29
 2.2-liter 4/automatic 21/27
 3.0-liter V6/automatic 18/25

Engine choices:

2.2-liter Four 71.3%
 3.0-liter V6 28.7

Transmission choice:

4-speed automatic 94.6%
 5-speed manual 5.4

Engine power:

Excellent 76.0%
 Good 22.5
 Average 1.5
 Poor 0.0

Braking:

Excellent 68.2%
 Good 28.8
 Average 2.7
 Poor 0.3

Overall performance:

Excellent 71.0%
 Good 27.2
 Average 1.5
 Poor 0.3

Control layout:

Excellent	68.9%
Good	27.2
Average	1.5
Poor	0.3

Instrumentation:

Excellent	66.8%
Good	29.6
Average	3.4
Poor	0.3

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	62.1%
Good	32.1
Average	4.9
Poor	0.9

Specific likes:

Styling	54.5%
Handling	39.8
Comfort	27.8
Performance	25.8
Ride quality	24.7
Quiet operation	22.4

Specific dislikes:

No complaints	17.2%
Mpg lower than expected	10.1
Noises and rattles	8.9
Price	6.9
Ride quality	6.0
Compromised comfort	5.2
Engine power (4-cylinder)	4.4

Suggested changes:

No changes	10.0%
Make ABS standard	6.9
More power (4-cylinder)	6.5
Change seat angle	6.0
Dual airbags	6.0
Better mpg	6.0

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	76.2%
Good	21.0
Average	2.5
Poor	0.3

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	71.9%
Good	24.2
Average	6.4
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	52.4%
Good	41.2
Average	6.4
Poor	0.0

Mechanical trouble?

No	81.0%
Yes	19.0

What type of trouble?

Suspension system	12.6%
Odd vibrations	7.9
Windshield wipers	7.9
Air conditioner	6.3

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	66.0%
No	34.0

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	53.0%
Good	40.0
Average	4.8
Poor	2.2

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	30.3%
Two vehicles	46.2
Three vehicles	15.6
Four or more	7.8

Principal driver:

Female	53.7%
Male	40.8
Equal	5.5

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	7.6%
30-49	42.4
50-plus	50.0

Based on your experience, would you buy a Camry if you had it to do over again?

Yes	70.0%
Maybe	23.3
No	6.7

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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Toyota Celica Owners

Report

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Click on the photos above for more information.

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More than two-thirds of our respondents bought the Celica because of how it looks--like the son of Supra. That's sleek and fast. However, driver sightlines suffer for the aesthetics.

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Front comfort is good, rear nil.

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Many felt the engine is too tepid.

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Summary

Nothing ever goes wrong! That's what Celica owners kept telling us: nearly 90% of them. An outstanding figure? You bet, because practically every new car needs to come back for some little adjustment--a loose belt, a bumpy tire, a ragged transmission. But not the Celica. Nothing. No mechanical problems at all--this in an average of the first 5322 miles of driving.

Celica owners also told us they really liked their cars' styling. Looks helped 67.2% of our respondents decide to buy the car, and 81.5% listed styling as the feature they liked best after the newness wore off.

Next-best-liked feature was handling.

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Summary 2 of 10

Handling played a minor role in the purchase decision, but once drivers had a chance to live with their cars, handling impressed 51.3%. An auto mechanic and weekend racer from New York commented, "Handles like a race car and stops on a dime!"

What people liked least was the cramped rear seat. No legroom and very little headroom, said 13.2%, but hey, no surprise. "The car was not designed for carpooling," noted a Wisconsin systems manager.

The Celica comes in two flavors--ST and GT--and two distinctive body styles--coupe and liftback. The ST uses the same twin-cam 16-valve 110-horsepower 1.8-liter Four as the

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Summary 3 of 10

Corolla. The GT carries over the previous generation's 2.2-liter twin-cam 135-hp Four. The Celica All-Trac 4wd with the 200-hp turbo motor has been discontinued.

While this sixth-generation Celica weighs 300 pounds less than its predecessor, a few owners still felt the Celica was underpowered versus its competition. For roughly \$1400 less than the \$18,428 Celica GT, they could have bought a 5.7-liter 275-hp V8-powered Chevrolet Camaro Z28. Or a Ford Probe GT with its 164-horse 4-cam V6. Or the 170-hp Acura Integra GS-R. Or any number of other sport coupes in that general price range.

Nearly 20% of our owners would have liked

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Summary 4 of 10

more horsepower, and the Celica ST brought out most of those wishes. "Toyota ought to offer a power package for the ST," suggested a Massachusetts paralegal. An Ohio consultant opined, "No guts--runs like a neutered turtle."

Not everyone agreed, though, that the Celica's performance lacked sparkle. "Has enough power for my needs, and it's fun to drive," beamed an Oregon retailer.

Front-seat comfort got high marks, along with the expected gripes and groans about the rear seats. In all Celicas, the rear seatback folds forward for extra cargo space. According to some owners, the front buckets

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Summary 5 of 10

tended to be a little narrow for stout people, and tall occupants asked for more headroom, especially beneath the optional sunroof. An Illinois professor pointed out, "I could use a little more ceiling space, and I'm only 5 ft. 3."

Drivers agreed on the Celica's friendly dashboard and overall ergonomics, a Florida student saying, "Everything's right up front, so the driver can concentrate on driving instead of searching for buttons." A Louisiana ad rep echoed, "I love the way everything is angled toward the driver and well within reach."

But several surveyees found the shoulder harness hard to buckle because of the receptacle hiding between the seat and

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Summary 6 of 10

console. "Discourages use," noted a Wisconsin administrator. And once buckled, the harness tended to grip too tightly, in the opinion of some. "Doesn't allow for changing positions," grunted a Tennessee nurse. It's true that passenger harnesses have a firm-grip function to keep child seats secured. That function switches from locked to normal tensioning by pulling the shoulder strap all the way to the end of its travel. It's possible that some owners didn't know how to switch functions.

Sightlines were judged less excellent than controls and instrumentation, with the GT's decklid spoiler causing an annoying blind spot

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Summary 7 of 10

for some. In humid or cold weather, the Celica's windows seemed to fog easily, leading an Idaho landscape contractor to proclaim, "This is the worst car I've ever owned to keep the windshield defrosted."

The Celica was judged a fairly noisy car, especially the GT. "Noisy engine during acceleration," remarked a South Carolina airman. We heard a few hisses, too, about wind noise at the sunroof and windshield, and people generally agreed that the car needed better sound insulation.

Workmanship came in for a rating of 75.2% excellent. "Quality of fit and finish," attested an Ohio scientist, "is first-rate. Joint lines are

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Summary 8 of 10

even, paint is outstanding, no rattles or squeaks." A Florida housewife: "Fabulous workmanship; precisely what I expected."

No one quibbled with initial paint quality, but a few surveyees complained that it tended to chip easily and that the darker colors showed swirl marks from carwash brushes. On the interior, lint and hair were sometimes hard to vacuum out of the Celica's clingy upholstery fabric.

Our respondents rated dealer sales and service about average. We heard mentions of hard sell, overpricing and the rigors of haggling. Very few owners needed repairs, but a lot weren't thrilled with the way they were

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Summary 9 of 10

treated when returning for routine service. A number of longtime Toyota buyers claimed they avoided their dealers after the warranty period. However, a few did tune in a brighter picture. "My dealer provides customers with a shuttle. This is the third Toyota I've bought here, and the service department is my No. 1 reason for sticking with them."

When it came to the big picture, the vast majority of owners revered their Celicas. "Couldn't be much better except if it had the Lexus logo on it," wrote a New York broker. And finally, a Wisconsin information manager summed it up this way: "A lot of the Celica's appeal has to do with quality and

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Summary 10 of 10

dependability. I traded in my 1984 Celica at 212,600 miles. It still had most of its original parts, including the clutch. When the new body style came out for 1994, there was no question. Why fight fate?"

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EDITOR'S REPORT

It's amazing how closely our Owners Report survey follows our own experiences with a 1994 long-term Celica GT test car. We're just completing the 12th month of the test and just passed 20,000 miles on the clock. So, if anything, our experiences are even more telling than our survey respondents, who averaged just over 5000 miles each driving around in their new Celicas.

We agree wholeheartedly with their initial assessment--nothing ever goes wrong. We know Toyotas have an incredible record in build quality and are perennially at the top of the list in initial quality surveys. But this is ridiculous. We just about had nothing to write

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

about in four reports.

The Toyota Celica is based in large part on its bigger, more expensive and more potent brother, the Supra, which regular readers of Popular Mechanics will know was a 1994 Design & Engineering Award winner, which is another reason we wanted to run one long-term. We feel vindicated in picking the Celica. The build quality of this car is so high that it's off the scale.

The spirited performance of our GT test car makes it lots of fun to drive. We noted in one of our quarterly updates that the Celica GT's 135 horsepower feels like 190 and the slick-shifting automatic transmission can bang

off manual shifts if you want. If you don't want, just stick the stick in Drive and putter around as leisurely as you'd want. But, still, if you do want to make those crisp shifts, it's nice to know that the car is willing to do it, too.

The handling prowess is akin to a slot car on rails. This is a car you want to drive the wheels off of and constantly push to its--and your--limits. The Celica GT is amazingly surefooted, though, and it's pretty hard to get into trouble with it unless you're totally out of your mind.

During our long-term test, we had the opportunity to suffer through 17 Northeast snowstorms with the Celica and, even under

the most adverse conditions, it did yeoman service.

Until you come to the back seat.

In 1994, you would think that Toyota's designers had come to grips with the problem of fitting a decent back seat in a sport coupe. The Celica's back seat is so small as to be virtually unusable except as a package tray. Even small children have nowhere to put their feet and pets can't curl up and get comfortable. This is pathetic.

The other major problem with the Celica, especially the GT model, is the price. We know Toyota can't do anything about the yen-dollar relationship. But when a Celica GT's

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

price climbs to almost \$20,000, you have to start talking about value. Granted, you're paying for all that quality. But with the competition in this segment as hot as ever and Camaros and Firebirds selling as quickly as they roll off the assembly line, you have to wonder how much--in terms of real dollars--the extra quality is really worth.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE TOYOTA CELICA *

Total miles driven	1,107,051
Average miles driven	5322
Purchase price:	
Average	\$20,500
Range	\$16,500-
	\$26,000

Why did you choose the Celica?

Liked the styling	67.2%
Owned Toyotas before	31.3
Dependability/reliability	19.4
Overall quality	12.9
Toyota reputation	12.9
Performance	9.5

Model choices:

Celica ST	50.9%
Celica GT	49.1

Body style choices:

3-door liftback	67.9%
2-door coupe	32.1

Engine choices:

1.8-liter Four	50.5%
2.2-liter Four	49.5

Transmission choices:

5-speed manual	53.3%
4-speed automatic	46.7

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning	99.1%
Power steering	98.1
Power windows and locks	86.7
Premium sound system	70.0
Sunroof	68.6
Alloy wheels	51.5
Sport package	46.8
Antilock brakes	36.2
Leather seats	8.0

Average mpg, city/hwy:

1.8-liter Four	27.4/32.6
2.2-liter Four	24.5/29.7
5-speed manual	26.6/31.8
4-speed automatic	25.1/30.6

Specific likes:

Styling	81.5%
Handling	51.3
Power	19.0
Comfort	18.0
Economy	18.0

Performance	13.8
Reliability	13.8
Specific dislikes:	
Cramped rear seat	13.2%
Needs more power	11.5
Needs better seats	10.3
Too noisy	9.8
Not enough headroom	9.2
Tight shoulder harness	9.2
Suggested changes:	
More horsepower	19.8%
Less noise	9.2
Handier shoulder harness	8.4
More headroom	7.6
Bigger engine	7.6
Automatic antenna (ST)	6.9
Engine power:	
Excellent	48.6%
Good	42.9
Average	8.0
Poor	0.5
Handling:	
Excellent	80.7%
Good	17.0
Average	1.9
Poor	0.5
Braking:	
Excellent	74.5%
Good	24.1
Average	1.4
Poor	0.0
Overall performance:	
Excellent	70.1%
Good	27.5
Average	1.4
Poor	0.9
Control layout:	
Excellent	73.8%
Good	25.7
Average	0.5
Poor	0.0
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	74.1%
Good	24.9
Average	1.0
Poor	0.0
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	51.5%
Good	39.7
Average	7.8
Poor	1.0

Overall convenience:

Excellent	66.7%
Good	32.3
Average	1.0
Poor	0.0

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	75.2%
Good	21.4
Average	2.9
Poor	0.5

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	56.9%
Good	35.1
Average	6.6
Poor	1.4

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	11.7%
Good	31.6
Average	41.3
Poor	15.3

Mechanical trouble?

No	89.9%
Yes	10.1

What type of trouble?

Too few to tabulate

Repair it yourself?

No	100.0%
Yes	0.0

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	61.1%
No	38.9

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	46.0%
Good	39.6
Average	11.5
Poor	2.9

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	42.6%
Good	45.5
Average	6.9
Poor	5.0

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	39.8%
Two vehicles	34.1
Three vehicles	16.1
Four or more	10.0

Principal driver:

Female	68.1%
Male	31.9
Both equally	0.0

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	28.3%
30-49	54.1
50-plus	17.5

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Toyota Celica if you had it to do over again?

Yes	67.1%
Maybe	23.3
No	9.5

* Percentages might not equal 100% due to rounding up or insufficient data.

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[macro=`Jl(qchPath,"jetta_ownrep")']bitmaps.dib} **Toyota Corolla Owners**

Report

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Clearly drawing on styling cues established by big brother Camry, Corolla's clean, smooth look was the best-liked feature of surveyed owners. Handling was a close second.

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Instruments won praise for legibility.

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Firm front seats drew some criticism.

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Summary

(This first appeared in the February 1994 issue of Popular Mechanics)

We'll soon have another all-time world's best seller here. As the Corolla celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1993, its sales were quickly closing in on the all-time record-holding Volkswagen Beetle. At 16 million, the Corolla had already left the Model T Ford 1 million units behind, and it's only a matter of time before it overtakes the Beetle, even though Beetles are still in production in some parts of the world.

Toyota currently assembles Corollas in 13 countries--including the United States and Canada--and markets them in no fewer than

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Summary 2 of 10

130. The '93 model marked the nameplate's seventh generation, and numerous changes make this new Corolla--as well as its Chevrolet/Geo clone, the Prizm--very different from earlier models. While the drivetrain remains pretty much as before, the '93 body has grown in every direction. Wheelbase, track and height are all greater by an inch-plus, and overall length stretches 2 in. more. Interior dimensions reflect these changes, and the EPA no longer classifies the Corolla as a subcompact. It's grown up into a compact.

Corolla styling borrows unashamedly from the Toyota Camry and Lexus ES 300. The car

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Summary 3 of 10

is rounder and cuddlier than in the past. Available only as a 4-door sedan and wagon, it comes in three trim levels--Standard, DX and LE.

Standard equipment includes a driver's airbag, power front disc brakes, front bucket seats with a center console, a rear antiroll bar, an automatic-off headlight switch and remote releases for the trunk and fuel-filler door. In the Standard car, you also get your choice of a 5-speed manual transaxle or a 3-speed automatic with no price difference.

The Corolla DX adds a front stabilizer bar, a right-side manually operated outside mirror, a 60/40 split/ fold-down rear seat, power

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Summary 4 of 10

steering, a clock and the choice of a 4-speed automatic in lieu of the 5-speed.

Finally, the LE's standard equipment includes (in addition to or in place of the above) air conditioning, power windows, power locks, a tilt steering wheel, cruise control, a 4-way adjustable driver's seat, power outside mirrors, a tachometer and an AM/FM/ETR sound system.

Although many people still think of the Corolla as an entry-level automobile, it really isn't. Toyota reserves that distinction for the subcompact Tercel, whose price starts at around \$8000. The Corolla's lowest advertised price is \$11,198 and ranges up to \$15,218 for

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Summary 5 of 10

the fully equipped LE. Owners in our survey paid an average of \$14,161.

Many of our buyers had owned Corollas before. Fact is, 38.1% listed previous ownership as their main reason for choosing the '93 model. So brand loyalty ranked as the primary purchase motivator, followed closely by styling. Behind these came price/value, Toyota's reputation for reliability, reliability itself and economy of operation.

The Corolla shines, as always, in reliability and mechanical durability. Fully 91.1% of our '93 respondents experienced no mechanical problems whatsoever. That's an extremely impressive tally-- one of the highest

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Summary 6 of 10

percentages we've ever recorded. Ironically, it's also a full 10 points higher than the Toyota Camry.

The Corolla's overall workmanship was rated good or excellent by no fewer than 97% of all owners reporting, another very high score.

What did bother a few of our respondents was seating comfort. Just over 16% felt that the seats were a little too firm. "Could use more padding," suggested a Maryland executive, and we heard plenty of amens. Several owners mentioned that their previous Corollas were blessed with better seats, and they couldn't understand why Toyota would change them.

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Summary 7 of 10

Other gripes: The power door locks showed no on/off markings, so people couldn't tell whether they were locked or not. Antilock brakes, which 36.3% of our owners purchased for an extra \$825, should be made standard equipment, according to 7% of our respondents. Another 6.2% would like a passenger's airbag, which will be standard equipment in 1994 models.

A number of respondents also reported that the inside of the windshield fogs up easily in moist weather, and the defroster doesn't do much good in clearing it. Also, there's no timed shutoff for the electric backlite defroster.

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Summary 8 of 10

On the topics of performance and handling, most owners agreed that the Corolla does a fine job in both departments.

As for driving controls, a number of owners wanted the horn buttons to be more accessible and more sensitive to the touch. This has become a common complaint about cars with airbags.

Dealers received so-so scores on both service and sales practices. While many buyers sounded happy enough with the deals they made, we heard more than a few complaints about pushy salespeople. Strong demand for the Corolla meant that dealers weren't anxious to bend on price, nor were

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Summary 9 of 10

they--according to some of our respondents--terribly generous on trade-in concessions.

We heard a fair amount of comment on price, as in excessive price. Most owners, however, didn't seem to share that opinion. The majority felt they'd gotten good value for their dollar. Nearly 30% listed economy of operation as one of the Corolla's best-liked features. By that they meant, first, the money saved by not having to take the car back for repairs and, second, fuel economy, which worked out to an aggregate of about 27/33 mpg city/highway.

Despite the Corolla's proven reliability and the fact that most owners were generally

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Summary 10 of 10

pleased with performance, handling, comfort and economy, only 62% said they'd definitely buy a Corolla if they had it to do over again. On the other hand, only 7.6% said they definitely would not. And judging by the overall satisfaction with this car, we think the fence-sitters--the 30% who said maybe--would only make a switch if they could step up to a Camry next time around.

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EDITOR'S REPORT

In spirit as well as appearance, Toyota's latest Corolla is a Camry in miniature. It goes about its business with quiet efficiency, it rarely requires professional attention and its understated good looks should stay reasonably fresh for years to come.

Like the Camry, it's not the kind of car that raises pulse rates. However, it does raise expectations--not only for itself, but for its entire segment. Over the course of its past few renewals, the Corolla has become one of those benchmark automobiles that set the standard for their class.

This time around, of course, the Corolla finds itself in a new class. It's a compact now, with

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Editor's Report 2 of 5

room enough inside for most small-family applications. Nominally a 5-passenger car, it's more realistic to call it a 2-adult/3-child car. Rear-seat legroom is a trifle snug for adults, although it's certainly competitive by current compact standards.

The same goes for the car's engine performance. No, it won't raise pulse rates. But there's enough snort under the hood to keep pace with traffic, and neither of the engines calls attention to itself in any negative way---noise, vibration or excess thirst. The 1.8-liter is a particularly noteworthy achievement, offering an excellent blend of fuel economy and power that's well matched

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Editor's Report 3 of 5

to its task. Peak torque--115 ft.-lb.--comes up at 2800 rpm. Not only is this impressively low on the rpm band for a multivalve engine, it's also the range where most family drivers are likely to be operating. Moreover, it's the kind of powerband that lends itself to use with an automatic transmission.

Like its powertrains, the Corolla's suspension strikes just the right balance for its intended users. Ride quality is smooth, without being flabby, and all-around handling is both predictable and competent. It's not the kind of car that inspires drivers to attack a set of S-bends, but it can give a decent account of itself if a driver is so moved.

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Editor's Report 4 of 5

Where the Corolla shines, though, is in conventional, all-around transportation use. That's what it was designed for, and that's what it delivers--quietly, comfortably, economically and unbreakably. Thanks to the recent appreciation of the yen versus the dollar, it's not quite the bargain it's been in years past. Even though eight out of 10 Corollas sold in the United States are assembled (along with their Geo Prizm cousins) in California, Toyota, like other Japanese manufacturers, has had to respond with price hikes. This, in turn, has given some of Corolla's domestic competitors--Ford Escort, Saturn and Chrysler's new Neon, to

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Editor's Report 5 of 5

name three--a distinct window-sticker advantage.

However, though it's important, low purchase price is just one component of automotive value. Stir in the others--quality, long-term operating cost, comfort, all-around performance--and the Corolla still grades out as a leader.

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SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE TOYOTA COROLLA*

Total miles driven 942,080

Average miles driven 5148

Purchase price:

Average \$14,161

Range \$11,000-\$18,000

Why did you choose the Toyota Corolla?

Previous ownership 38.1%

Styling 36.4

Price/value 17.6

Reputation 16.5

Reliability 12.5

Economy of operation 11.9

Avg. mpg, city/hwy:

1.6-liter Four 27.6/33.1

1.8-liter Four 26.6/32.4

5-speed manual 28.5/33.9

4-speed automatic 26.7/32.3

Model choices:

Corolla DX 40.3%

Standard Corolla 33.5

Corolla LE 26.2

Body style choices:

4-door sedan 91.7%

4-door wagon 8.3

Engine choices:

1.6-liter Four 50.3%

1.8-liter Four 49.7

Transaxle choices:

4-speed automatic 79.7%

5-speed manual 20.3

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 97.9%

Power steering 95.3

Power windows and
locks 44.6

Antilock brakes 36.3

Sunroof 13.7

Engine power:

Excellent 53.3%

Good 40.0

Average 6.7

Poor 0.0

Handling:

Excellent 69.6%

Good 27.4

Average 2.2

Poor 0.7

Braking:

Excellent	64.9%
Good	32.1
Average	3.0
Poor	0.0

Overall performance:

Excellent	65.1%
Good	33.6
Average	0.7
Poor	0.0

Control layout:

Excellent	58.5%
Good	35.6
Average	5.2
Poor	0.7

Instrumentation:

Excellent	56.3%
Good	37.0
Average	5.2
Poor	1.5

Driver sightlines:

Excellent	50.4%
Good	43.0
Average	5.2
Poor	1.5

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	56.1%
Good	40.9
Average	2.3
Poor	0.8

Comfort opinion, front seats:

Excellent	54.3%
Good	40.9
Average	3.7
Poor	1.6

Comfort opinion, rear seats:

Excellent	37.6%
Good	51.1
Average	9.0
Poor	2.2

Specific likes:

Styling	46.5%
Handling	43.0
Economy of operation	29.1
Comfort	24.4
Ride quality	23.8
Engine power	16.9

Specific dislikes:

Front seats too hard	16.2%
No complaints	14.0
Price too high	7.4

Defroster system	5.9
Unmarked power door locks	5.9
Noises and rattles	5.1

Suggested changes:

Improve front-seat comfort	9.3%
No changes	7.8
Marked power door locks	7.0
Standard ABS	7.0
Smoother ride	7.0
Passenger airbag	6.2

Mechanical problems?

No	91.1%
Yes	8.9

What type of problems?

(Percentages too small to tabulate)

Repair it yourself?

No	88.2%
Yes	11.8

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	73.3%
No	26.7

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	58.0%
Good	32.1
Average	8.0
Poor	1.8

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	45.6%
Good	39.6
Average	12.1
Poor	2.7

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	39.6%
Two vehicles	36.4
Three vehicles	15.5
Four or more	8.6

Principal driver:

Female	74.2%
Male	23.1
Equal	2.7

Age distribution of owners:

29 and under	17.7%
30-49	47.3
50-plus	34.9

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Toyota Corolla if you had it to do over again?

Yes	62.0%
Maybe	30.4
No	7.6

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

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[macro=`Jl(qchPath,"corolla_ownrep")"]bitmaps.dib}{ewc MVBMP2, ViewerBmp2,
bitmaps.dib} **Volkswagen Jetta Owners Report**

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The lines are clean, conservative and very European. Almost half of our respondents liked the Jetta's styling, and it factored into nearly one in three buying decisions.

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All of our respondents chose the Four.

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Interior is spartan but comfortable.

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Summary

Volkswagen still ranks No. 1 in Europe and has outsold all continental rivals for several years. In this country, though, VW has a fortress to rebuild.

The once-impregnable Beetlemaker absolutely owned the American small-car market for years. By the late 1970s, though, the Bug was suddenly obsolete and the Japanese started sending over Civics and Corollas and boatloads of other newer, more appealing, more fuel-efficient cars. VW countered with the Rabbit, again hung on to it too long, and then had to abandon a problem-plagued plant in Pennsylvania.

VW isn't out of the woods yet, but lately it

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seems to be headed along the comeback trail. One shining example is the third-generation Jetta, the Jetta III, which quietly slipped into U.S. dealerships in July 1993. It's designed and engineered in Germany but assembled in Mexico for the U.S. market.

The early U.S. version of the Jetta III is not what's being sold today. Until September 1993, the Jetta III had no available airbags and came only in base GL form. That's also when VW added the mid-market GLS and the upmarket/performance GLX. The GL and GLS come with a 2.0-liter Four. The top-of-the-line GLX uses Volkswagen's narrow-V-angle VR6, a Popular Mechanics

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Design & Engineering Award winner in 1993.

That's not to say the GL wasn't or isn't well equipped. Standard items have always included such amenities as power door locks, an alarm system, tilt steering wheel, 4-wheel disc brakes and quite a lot more.

All the Jetta III buyers we surveyed owned the GL only. Some had bought the earlier non-airbag versions, which dealers continued to sell and lease through February 1994. Many wished they'd known and waited. A few hadn't been told that airbags were or would soon be out.

And yet all Jetta III owners voiced great enthusiasm for their cars. Many had been VW

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buyers since college. Past experience, in fact, prompted 46.1% of our respondents to choose the Jetta III over rival makes.

VW's styling has not been something people have talked much about since the Beetle, but the Jetta has changed all that. In fact, its appearance entered strongly into 29.3% of our owners' purchase decisions.

Another purchase incentive was VW's impressive warranty: 10 years or 100,000 miles on the powertrain, two years or 24,000 miles comprehensive, free fixes on rust-throughs for six years, free oil changes and regular servicing for 2/24 and a 2/24 roadside emergency assistance program.

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The interior got mostly high marks as well. Owners agreed that it's roomy inside the Jetta. The driver's seat can be adjusted for height as well as rake. Trunk capacity is an impressive 15 cu. ft.-- bigger than in the Acura Legend or Lexus LS 400. The rear seatback folds forward for additional cargo room, and the cabin is loaded with compartments, binnacles and cup holders.

Some 70% of Jetta IIIs came down with mechanical ills, the most common being that the central locking system failed. This was traced to a too-short vacuum hose to one of the doors, a 15-minute fix. Bad batteries and electrical glitches ranked second in frequency,

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and blown wiper-motor fuses (because of blades frozen to the glass) came in third.

While workmanship was rated excellent by 67%, a few Jetta III owners felt that Volkswagen should use better materials. Taillamp and headlight lenses occasionally cracked and leaked water. Paint chipped easily and peeled off of wheel covers. Side trim came loose and plastic chin spoilers shattered in freezing weather. A significant number of owners also mentioned squeaks in the dashboard. These were all minor things, but they were annoying enough for owners to tell us about.

Most of our surveyees (72.9%) combined

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the 115-hp sohc 4-cylinder engine with the 5-speed manual transaxle and praised their cars' acceleration and overall performance, although a few who'd ordered the automatic voted for a little more power.

Drivers were particularly pleased with the Jetta III's handling. An Army officer from Georgia asserted, "I've owned two German-spec BMWs, and the Jetta III drives better than either one."

Three-quarters of our respondents vowed they'd buy the Jetta III again if they had it to do over. That's a good rate of satisfaction. And many purchasers agreed with the Utah sales technician who wrote on his questionnaire, "I wouldn't trade my Jetta

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III GL for any other car except another Volkswagen."

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EDITOR'S REPORT

It may not look like a Beetle. It may not have a tiny air-cooled 4-cylinder engine mounted way out back. And it may not cost even close to \$1699 or however little many of us remember paying for our first Volkswagen. But make no mistake about it, the Jetta really is today's people's car from this stalwart German automaker. And as such, the Jetta is a refreshing change from the legions of quality--but ultimately similar--Japanese and domestic front-wheel-drive subcompact sedans. Climb out of a Honda, Toyota, Saturn, Ford or Mazda and slip behind the wheel of a Jetta, and you know that you have just taken an intercontinental-size step to a very different

automotive mindset.

For one thing, sitting behind the wheel of the Jetta, you can't help but notice that the view immediately ahead of you, as well as your surroundings, are really rather spartan by the competitor's standards. The dashboard is devoid of gadgets and gimmicks. There are the necessary controls and gauges and switches--placed logically and ergonomically. But none of it very fancy. Yet it all does just what it's supposed to do. No fuss, no frills. The same goes for the rest of the interior. The upholstery and trim are fine, if dull and plain.

The seats seem firm compared to many, but the necessary adjustments are there, and after

a couple of hours of driving, you find that you are ultimately quite comfortable.

The ride, like the seats, is firm, crisp and intent on getting you to your destination in a no-nonsense fashion. Steering is accurate if perhaps a trifle heavier than some of the others. Handling is crisp and perhaps a trifle more rewarding when you explore the car's limits.

Those limits are fun to approach when the Jetta is being pulled around by VW's masterfully potent little VR6. The truly skinny V engine develops the kind of instant throttle response and steadily building acceleration that typifies German cars.

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So why is Volkswagen stumbling around in the U.S. market looking for people with ready cash when the company has such a people's car?

First of all, it's not like all the people enjoy the spartan surroundings or the firm ride. In fact, many prefer the somewhat cushier surroundings and ride characteristics of the competition. Second of all, despite all of its admirable traits, the Jetta--and other cars from Wolfsburg--suffer from quality lapses that its Japanese and domestic competitors have pretty well put way behind them. The fact that 70% of our respondents were faced with some sort of problem with the new Jetta is

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indicative of the problem.

Three decades ago, owners of uniquely engineered imported cars were willing to live with things like squeaky dashboards. Not anymore.

The heartening news is that VW has retrenched and is improving both the engineering and the quality of the Jetta.

SURVEY RESULTS FOR THE VOLKSWAGEN JETTA*

Total miles driven 1,304,173

Average miles driven 6488

Purchase price:

Average \$14,906

Range \$12,000-

\$18,270

Why did you choose the Volkswagen Jetta III GL?

Owned Volkswagens 46.1%

before

Styling 29.3

Price/value 26.2

Handling 14.1

Warranty 12.0

Workmanship 10.5

Reliability 9.9

Options/Accessories:

Air conditioning 99.0%

Premium sound 81.6

system

Clearcoat metallic 65.3

paint

Moonroof 60.1

Cruise control 10.3

Average miles per gallon:

5-speed manual:

In town 26.1

On the highway 31.5

4-speed automatic:

In town 22.4

On the highway 27.4

Specific likes:

Handling 52.8%

Styling 44.4

Comfort 31.3

Engine power 22.8

Overall economy 22.2

Trunk and storage 16.1

capacity

Performance 14.4

Ride quality 13.3

Specific dislikes:

No complaints 12.6%

Noises and rattles 11.3

Door lock problems 10.1

Shoulder and lap belts 9.4

Missed out on airbags 8.2

Fuel mileage could be better	8.2
Suggested changes:	
Revise harness and lap belts	11.1%
Add airbags	11.1
Revise door locks	8.9
No changes	8.1
Make brakes quieter	6.7
Make cruise control standard	5.9
Improve fuel economy	5.9
Improve quality of materials	5.9
Performance opinion:	
Engine power:	
Excellent	56.9%
Good	38.7
Average	3.9
Poor	0.5
Handling:	
Excellent	76.1%
Good	21.5
Average	2.4
Poor	0.0
Braking:	
Excellent	63.2%
Good	32.8
Average	2.9
Poor	1.0
Overall performance:	
Excellent	68.0%
Good	30.0
Average	2.0
Poor	0.0
Ergonomics & driving convenience:	
Layout of controls:	
Excellent	73.3%
Good	25.2
Average	1.5
Poor	0.0
Instrumentation:	
Excellent	69.0%
Good	27.1
Average	3.4
Poor	0.5
Driver sightlines:	
Excellent	62.9%
Good	33.2
Average	3.5
Poor	0.5

Overall convenience:

Excellent	70.3%
Good	28.2
Average	1.5
Poor	0.0

Workmanship opinion:

Excellent	67.0%
Good	31.0
Average	2.0
Poor	0.0

Comfort opinion:**Front seats:**

Excellent	66.7%
Good	28.9
Average	4.4
Poor	0.0

Rear seats:

Excellent	45.6%
Good	46.1
Average	7.8
Poor	0.5

Mechanical trouble?

No	70.1%
Yes	29.9

What type of trouble?

Automatic door locks	41.0%
Electrical system	18.0
Windshield wiper fuse	11.5
Wheel alignment	4.9
Bad battery	4.9
Transmission	4.9
Window mechanism	4.9

Repair it yourself?

No	93.4%
Yes	6.6

Dealer repairs satisfactory?

Yes	84.7%
No	15.3

Dealer service opinion:

Excellent	50.5%
Good	37.4
Average	10.4
Poor	1.6

Dealer sales policy:

Excellent	47.5%
Good	41.0
Average	10.5
Poor	1.0

Number of vehicles owned:

This vehicle only	31.1%
Two vehicles	44.7

Three vehicles	13.1
Four or more	11.2

Principal driver:

Female	55.5%
Male	42.5
Equal	2.0

Age distribution of owners:

Under 29	31.0%
30-49	44.5
50-plus	24.5

Based on your experiences, would you buy a Volkswagen Jetta III GL if you had it to do over again?

Yes	75.0%
Maybe	20.6
No	4.4

*Percentages might not equal 100 percent due to rounding or an insufficient amount of data.

