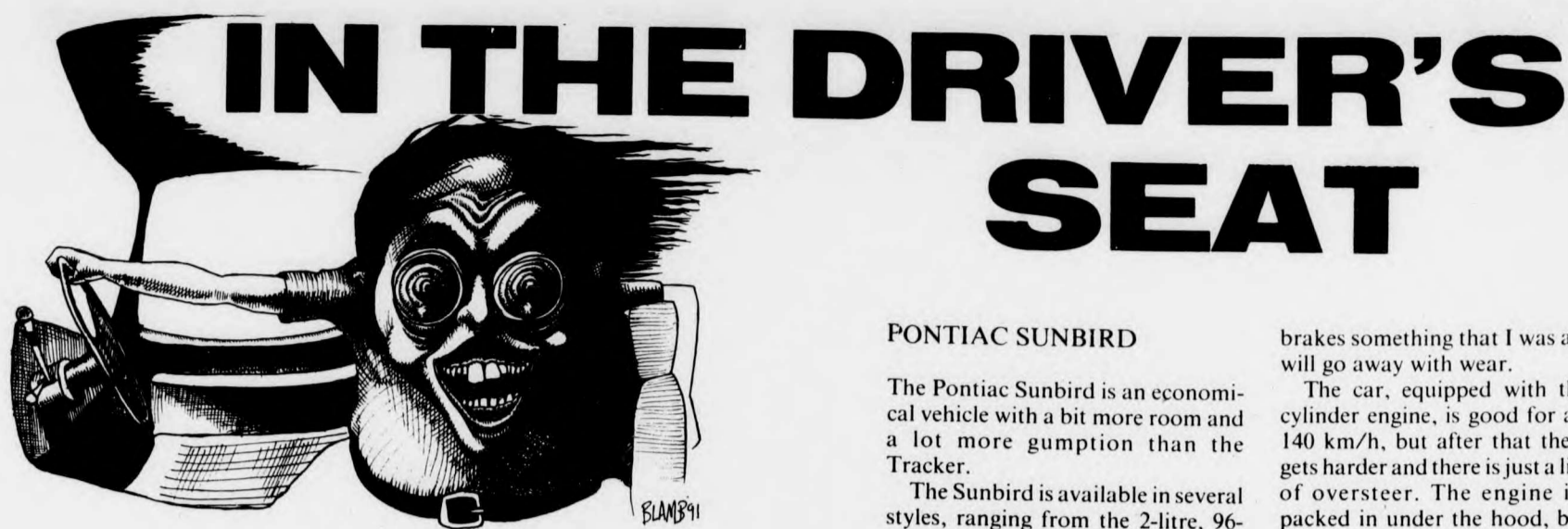


FEATURE



IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

by James Silver

Welcome to the first edition of *Excalibur's* newest section devoted solely to automobiles. In it I'll bring you reports of what's going on in the automotive industry, reviews of the cars that are already on the market, discussions of the car dealerships in the York vicinity, and tips on how to keep your present car, if you have one, running in top condition.

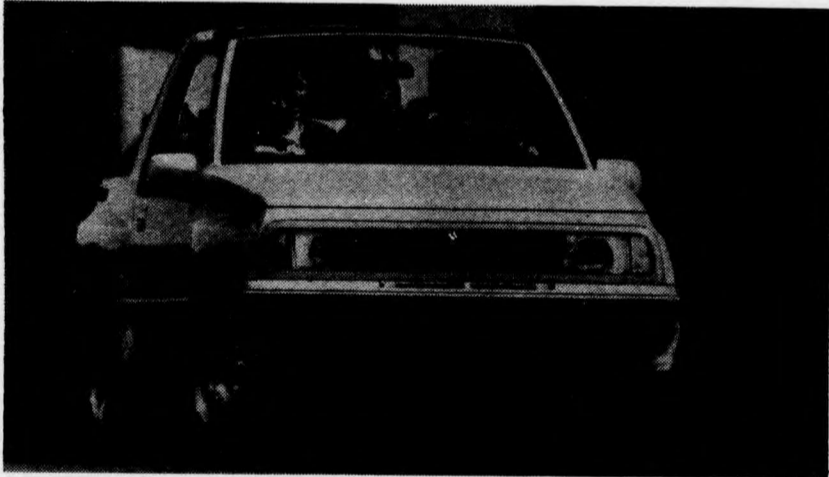
If you have any questions or concerns, drop them off at the *Excalibur* office at 111 Central Square. I'll be more than happy to answer them.

This month, I turned my eye to General Motors, specifically Pontiac, as the victim of my road tests. I drove one of each of the classes of vehicle that they offer for sale, and, in general, the cars made out pretty well.

Special thanks must be extended to Mike Venneri, the general sales manager at Plaza Pontiac Buick (3400 Dufferin St. at highway 401, 781-5271) for graciously allowing me to try and wreck his cars.

GMC TRACKER

When General Motors decided to create a sporty utility vehicle they went to Suzuki and got them to create the Tracker — a less expensive version of the bad little toy.



GMC Tracker: Not a Lamborghini, but fun, economical and terrific on gas

The base Tracker, a two door convertible price, the Tracker is with manual transmission and no radio comes in at around \$14,000. A factory AM/FM cassette with a clock runs at around \$300. There aren't many options available, and the fully not aloaded vehicle (no power door locks or windows available) runs for around 18 grand.

With variable four/two wheel drive and optional free-wheeling hubs, this machine has good road-holding ability. Also, considering the fact that it is a convertible, the insulation provided against wind noise is excellent. The four wheel independent suspension provides adequate cornering, but I wouldn't suggest cornering much faster than 30 km/h.

The drive is a bit bumpy, despite the suspension, but no worse than the other sport-jeep options. Although this is a sturdy vehicle as far as utility vehicles go, the car is built too high for sports car driving.

The pickup on the Tracker is, at best, sluggish. The 1.6-litre fuel-injected four cylinder engine produces 80 horsepower at 5400 rpm. On the highway, with a tailwind, the truck might be good for 130 km/h, but this speed is attainable only at the possible risk of the having to replace the engine. A Lamborghini Jeep it isn't, but it's also about a thousand mortgages less expensive.

The steering is power assisted, but is as sluggish as the pickup. At higher speeds it is tight and responsive, but at low speed it takes some getting used to.

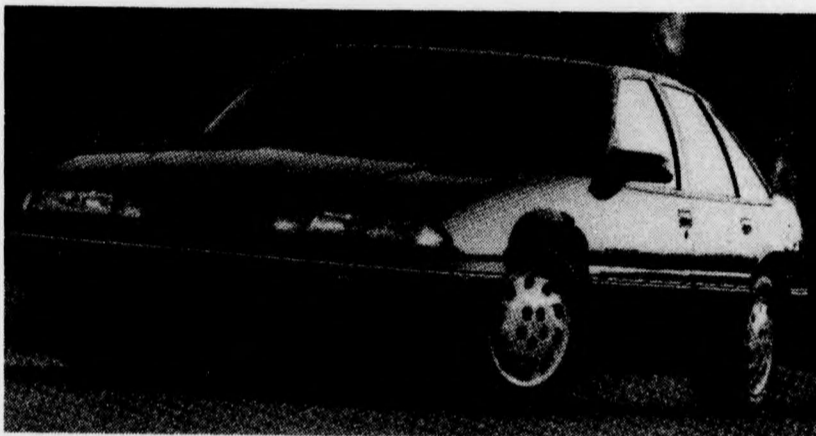
Thankfully, the vents and fans are very heavy duty. This is a necessity in a convertible during the winter. The storage space isn't too bad, with a glove box and folding rear seats. Unfortunately, to get into the trunk you have to unzip the rear window.

The seats are comfortable, although even the upgraded interior is not terribly aesthetically pleasing. All the controls (sorry, not much gadgetry) are well placed and easy to use. There are standard daytime running lights, and a warning beep to tell you that your night lights have been left on.

Overall, the Tracker is a fun, economical little convertible that is ter-

several engine choices, including a 2.3-litre engine producing 160-hp. Also available in the GT and STE models a 3.4-litre six cylinder engine capable of 200-hp.

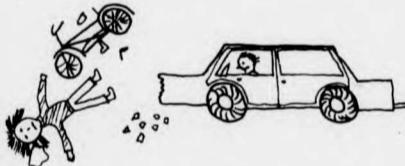
The cornering and lane-changing abilities were superb on the test car,



Pontiac Grand Prix: Suspension and brakes are mushy, but it's a good family sports car

but the suspension and brakes were mushy (see road test on the Pontiac Sunbird). The steering was excellent at both low and high speeds, as was the traction.

The seat's controls were basic, but six-way electronic controls are optional in the "Easy option packages".



There is a lot of neat gadgetry available including an anti-lock braking system. The temperature controls are pushbutton, and somewhat difficult to work if you have stubby fingers or are wearing gloves. Even the glove box is interesting — instead of a keylock, it uses a combination lock.

The stereo is base GM-Delco, but it's not as bad as it seems. The sound is good, and the speakers O.K. quality.

The sound of the car is music to itself. The engine rumbles away happily, even when approaching the \$600 speeding ticket mark.

Aside from the mushy brakes, the only other complaint about the car is the placement of the warning lights. They are tossed in all over the dash, around the speedometer, and the tachometer, almost haphazardly wherever there was space for them. They are understandable, but strangely placed.

If you want a sportscar, but are in the market for a family car, take out the Grand Prix.

The prices range from \$ 18,000 to around \$30,000 for the GTP with leather interior, premium sound system, and all the gadgetry imaginable.

This one is quick. Even the fuel efficient four-cylinder model moves. Check it out. It not only looks good, but it's fun to drive.



PONTIAC SUNBIRD

The Pontiac Sunbird is an economical vehicle with a bit more room and a lot more gumption than the Tracker.

The Sunbird is available in several styles, ranging from the 2-litre, 96-hp. four-cylinder, fuel injected base (around \$13,500) to the 3.1-litre, 140-hp. six cylinder, multi-port GT (around \$20,000 loaded). There is even a convertible available.

The test car was the two-door LE, with the ISC package (two tone paint, V6, air, stereo, auto. transmission, tilt steering, and more). This model costs around \$15,800. It is sporty looking, available in 3-speed auto. or five-speed manual, and is very quick. Also, it is whisper-quiet on the interior, letting in very little

brakes something that I was assured will go away with wear.

The car, equipped with the six-cylinder engine, is good for at least 140 km/h, but after that the going gets harder and there is just a little bit of oversteer. The engine is well packed in under the hood, but this one would be difficult to do a valve job on. Better pay out and leave it to the pros.

The air controls and vents are good and they include front-side window defoggers, but are a bit difficult to adjust at speed.

There is a lot of storage space, and the interior is nicely laid out. The back is roomy, the front comfy, but I'm only around 5'10". If I were 6'3", I would probably have to look into the convertible and a really warm coat.

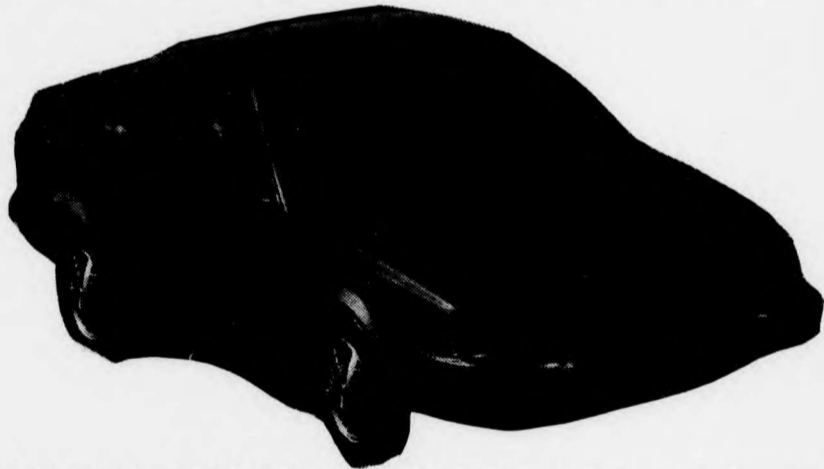
The instrumentation includes a speedometer, tachometer, temperature, fuel, and coolant warning lights. A digital option is also available. Personally, I prefer the rally cluster option on the LE over the digital — I find it easier to read.

The Sunbird, in its various guises is a sporty yet economical machine, and with the four-cylinder engine, would probably be good on gas. The six-cylinder engines trades good gas mileage for better performance, and the GT throws in twin-exhaust pipes which provide a pleasant-sounding throaty growl on acceleration.

There is a wide range of options available (no surprise, considering the range of models available). To make things easier for the buyer, though, there are neat "option packages" that make you pay for things you might want to buy (like the rally cluster with tachometer) as well as things that you might not want (like a tilt steering wheel). Go figure.

wind noise, tire noise, or engine noise.

The power steering is tight and is good, but the suspension is a bit mushy. And so were the power responsive at both low and high offer good road hold. The cornering



Pontiac Sunbird: Another mushy car but rally cluster is easier to read than digital readout.

WINTER DRIVING TIPS

Just a few tips to help get your car through the winter:

- Change your oil at least every five or six thousand kilometers, or once per season.
- Use a rust remover or a buffing compound to remove any obvious rust spots from your car, then touch up the bad spots with touch-up paint. When the paint is dry, use a damp, soft cloth to apply wax. Wax one small area of your car at a time allowing it to dry to a haze before wiping it off. Be careful not to use an abrasive wax. Don't forget: wax helps keep your car from rusting.
- Make sure your tire pressure is correct. The proper pressure is written on your tires. If the actual pressure is incorrect, it can result in tire explosion at the worst, or a wicked skid at the least. So keep it right and avoid problems.
- If you happen to get into a skid, KEEP YOUR FEET OFF THE ACCELERATOR AND THE BRAKE! Steer INTO the skid. If you have a manual transmission car, try to gear down. But remember not to accelerate or brake until the skid is under control.
- In adverse weather conditions don't go so fast that your car can't handle it. If you feel that you have to speed, do so carefully. Keep it down to regular speeds when cornering or changing lanes, and avoid following too closely. Although you may be Mario Andretti in your turbocharged Ferrari, its the guy in the rusted out '74 Monte Carlo with the bald tires who is in front of you that you have to worry about.
- Keep your windshield washer reservoir full, your antifreeze engine coolant at the right level, and check your oil every time you fill up with gas. Have a safe and happy winter.