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Keeping



It



Beautiful



Rag Top Reminiscence

It was a Saturday, and like all good Saturdays I slept until noon. The sun was out, and when I looked outside to check the weather the brightness left burn-ins when I closed my eyes.

God, I love days like this.

Days like this mean one thing. Out to the garage, pull off the dusty cover, check the oil, clean the windshield. In a brown paper bag I put a loaf of bread, some lunchmeat, favorite tapes, a tube of suntan lotion and a change of clothes, in case the weather turned cold.

Slowly I descended into the driver's seat. Carefully I turned the ignition switch. Like clockwork the engine fired, and I eased out of the garage.

Then I put the top down.

The car wasn't anything dramatic; a 1973 MGB roadster, blue with a tan interior torn in several spots. But it had a ragtop and I was driving it, and that was more than enough. Stopped at a traffic light, I felt funny knowing that I could look up and see birds fly overhead across the clear blue Central Valley sky.

I pulled up to Brian's house and knocked on the door. Best friends through high school, he was going to Berkeley and I to Santa Barbara, but we both had a penchant for long-distance road trips. One night, we told my father we were going to get Chinese food. Three hours later, we called from San Francisco to tell him the food was great. Growing up in Stockton tends to make you do funny things like that.

"So where we going today?" he asked.

"Uh, I was kind of thinking about going to Napa," I said.

"Sure," he said with a wide grin.

The May sun beat down hard on the flat farmlands outside Lodi, and we watched families drive along in large American cars, putting on our Arrogant Young Buck grins. We passed car after car, making it a point to wave to old couples in motorhomes. In the back of my mind, there was a nagging suspicion that we were acting Pretentious, like the rich kids who went to school across town from us. But when the motorhomes waved back, you could see that they wanted to be in the back seat, if MGs had back seats.

After about an hour of staring out over

farmlands, the hills at the backside of the Coast Range were a welcome sight. The sweet smell of dry grasses all around us, we talked endlessly about college and who was going to be more successful, him as a chemical engineer or me as a writer.

"Who'll make more money?" he taunted.

"Who'll work for a multi-death conglomerate?" I responded.

The debate would have worn on, but the road started to curve and turn, dry yellow grasses giving way to dense green foliage. "Here he comes, here comes Speed Racer, he's a demon on wheels," we sang. The car handled beautifully. Slow down going into the curve, give it gas as you hit the midpoint. The engine sounded like a 1940s British fighter plane, purring and roaring through the hills.

I suggested we take a short cut through Sonoma County, taking a small one-lane road that appeared to go straight up a mountain. On the map it looked straight, but in reality it was more like a hairpin gone bad. "I wonder if these seatbelts work," he said with more fear than curiosity.

The road was like the ones in Audi commercials; barely two lanes, constant sharp curves and abrupt dips. It was the kind of road MG owners like to tell stories about, between complaints about the bad valve seals and piston rings. We went up one hill and down another, and found ourselves near Geyserville, a town of about 2,000 near the Russian River.

We stopped to eat next to the river, trading school gossip and planning the next video we would make. There was a funny feeling I had, like I wouldn't get to do this anymore.

"What kind of father do you think you'll be?" I asked, bare feet resting in the cold water.

"I dunno. I don't want to be like my dad, that's all I can say. He ... he pushes me too hard sometimes. And I work really hard to make him happy and all he says is 'Is that all?'" he said, staring up into the speckled-white sky. Two weeks earlier, he had stood on a podium giving the valedictorian's address.

"I know what you mean," I said. "Sometimes Dad is really strict with me, and other times he just says 'Do your own

thing.' I'm just glad to be going to school to get out of there."

"Will you ever go back to Stockton?" he asked.

"No. Why should I? What's there to interest me? There's a whole world out there."

"I was just wondering, because I'm probably gonna stay there."

"You mean Berkeley isn't going to corrupt you?" I asked, throwing a handful of water at him.

"No way, man. I'll probably corrupt them," he said.

And the sky started to turn grey-white, high clouds above the tallest mountains. We changed into warmer clothes, but still kept the top down. I put the new U2 tape in the stereo.

So let it go, and so to fade away...

How do you say goodbye to good friends? You tell them you'll stay in touch, keep writing. And the spaces between grow, and people find new friends, I thought as turn after turn came and passed. "You ever wonder what you'll look like when you're 50?" I asked with the distant, quirky tone I use when kidding around.

"I'm going to be bald. I know that for a fact. Every time I take a shower I pull out gobs of hair," he said.

"Don't worry. You're not going bald. And if you do, so what. Big deal."

"I worry about it. I can already see it happening."

"Hey. What about that winning personality? That boyish charm. Those impeccable credentials. Besides, you've got a friend like me. What else could you want?"

A pause. Then Brian said, "I'm going to be sick."

Thinking he was disgusted with my rampant egotism, I laughed and continued to attack the curves. San Francisco was a half hour away, and the road cut through lush redwood groves. At several points, signs of the last winter's storms could still be seen as landslide-prone earth continued to slip.

Brian sat in the passenger seat, moaning and doubled over. "There's some Dexedrine in the glove compartment," I said. He swallowed eight. "I didn't know you got carsick. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why didn't you tell me we were going to go on the Hairpin Highway?"

"I thought you liked going on those

roads."

"Well, I don't, but I didn't say anything because I knew you liked them."

"Oh, man. I'm sorry. Really sorry."

It was dark when we made it to San Francisco, and the buildings lit up like large glowing Lego blocks. We stopped in front of the World Famous Clown Alley restaurant on Van Ness to use a bathroom, and Brian was about to get out. "I'll be just a min..."

He hung his head over the door, slumped. People stopped eating inside. One man I watched dropped his chili dog. "Oh, man. I'm sorry," he said. I told him there was no need to apologize, smiling sheepishly at the people in the restaurant. "Let's get the hell out of here and find a McDonalds," I said.

It was cold and foggy and we put the top up in haste, hurrying to get to a McDonalds or somewhere with a bathroom. Brian was feeling better, and we took the freeway back to Stockton.

We got home at about 3 a.m., and my dad asked where I was. "Oh, just out with Brian."

"Chinese food?" he asked.

About a month ago, I called Brian to see what was going on in his life. "Oh, nothing much," he said, adding that he had just won a big scholarship from Procter and Gamble and was setting the curve in his chem classes. And we talked about the trip, which we both apologized for.

"So when are you coming up?" he asked.

"I don't know. Mom has the MG," I said. "She won't loan it to me. She says I beat it up too much."

"Oh, well. Try to get up here sometime, OK?"

"I'll do what I can." And I tried to work up a voice of male camaraderie. "Hey. I miss you," I said.

"Me too," he said.

I drove downtown this weekend with a couple of friends looking for something to do. On 101 I passed a couple of guys in a primer-spotted MG convertible. They had the top down, sunglasses on, smiling in the Santa Barbara sunlight.


I looked at the driver, who couldn't have been older than 19, grinned, and nodded in approval. He looked back at me, waved with two fingers, and sped off.

And I wished MGs had back seats.

— Doug Arellanes

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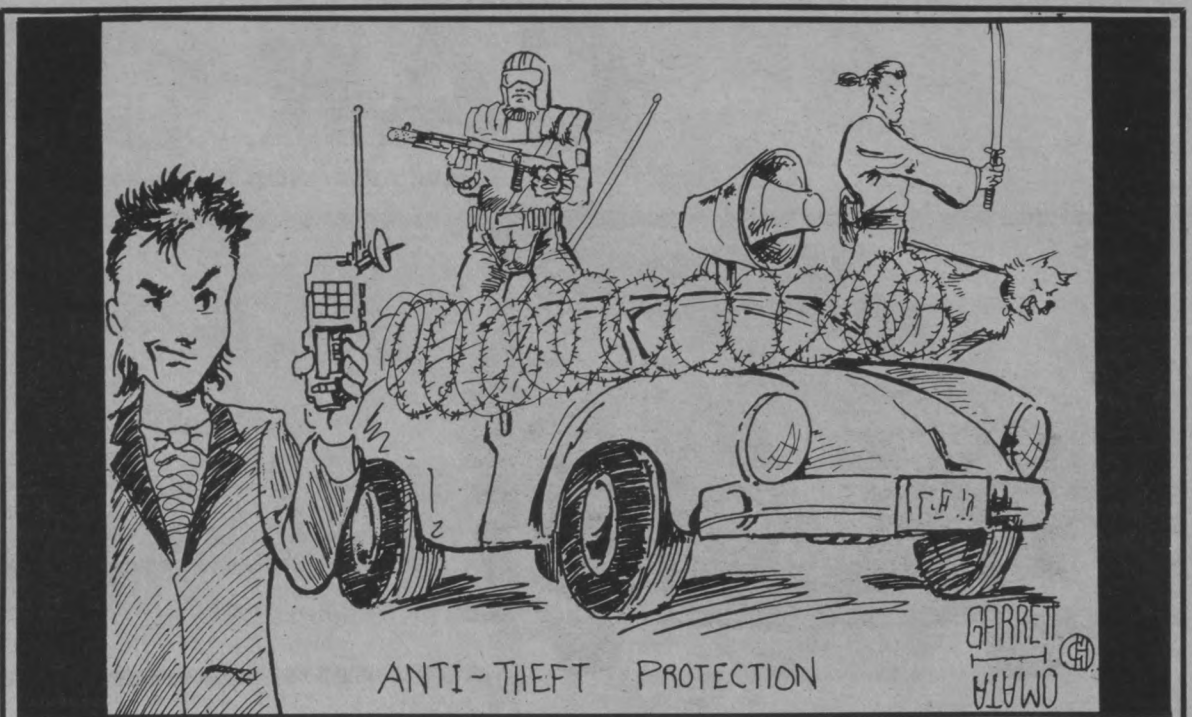
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Alarming Your Car

Security has become an important factor in car ownership in America. In 1985 there were over three and a half million crimes reported against automobiles and \$915 million taken off in bounty. So it comes as no surprise that over \$400 million was also spent on car alarm systems. But the question is, what is it being spent on?

There are four basic forms of defenses in most car alarms. Usually, a system is a combination of a few or all of them. The first is the foundation of alarm systems, the electronic control module. The power for the module comes from the car battery, unless the module is designed to accompany a backup battery. The module taps into the electrical system and monitors opened car doors or trunks with lights. The next defenses are switches located in the hood and trunk that are primed to react when open.

Motion or vibration detectors are popular in a several new systems. These activate when there is extreme agitation in the car, such as when the car is driven. The sensors are adjustable so that they become more or less sensitive. Another defense disables the electrical current from the ignition to the engine so the car won't move. The other defenses are characterized by the activation of a siren or the car horn and sometimes the parking lights. Sirens are usually in the range of 92 to 96 decibels, and draw their power from the car battery.

There are two types of alarm systems that utilize these defenses: professionally installed and do-it-yourself. The professionally installed systems run anywhere from \$300 to \$600 and have the advantage of a being more reliable, since the installers are experts, and have a more complex and complete set of safety functions. Do-it-yourself kits cost about \$75 to \$300. They are cheaper, but require that the buyer have a good knowledge of his car and electrical systems. Also they are known to lack necessary hardware at times, and their reliability depends depends a lot on how good an electrician the do-it-yourself installer is.

An important consideration to many people is the arming and disarming of the alarm. Car alarms may have a switch that is connected to the ignition switch, so that it turns on automatically after all the doors are shut. Others require an external switch, such as a toggle switch, a keypad or an additional key. Currently popular are the remote control

switches that can activate the system from outside the car and also act as a beeper to notify the car owner when security is breached.

Those are the basics. But what happens when you're picking out a system? *Consumer Reports* has several suggestions concerning particular models. The magazine preferred the professionally installed alarms for several reasons. As stated before, experienced people install them, ensuring their reliability. They include more all around features, some of them including the activation of parking lights and panic buttons that can activate the alarms from inside the car. The do-it-yourself models tended to occupy the CR staff for a while and they predicted that the buyer should plan on spending the better part of the day putting it in.

Another factor to be aware of is the quality of the installation by car dealers. *Consumer Reports* found a great inconsistency in the price of installation by different dealers, ranging anywhere from \$110 to \$250. So it is obviously a good idea to get a large range of estimates. But an important thing to note is that Texas is the only state that requires installers to have a license to operate. Incompetent installation is not a rare occurrence.

A few noted companies of quality systems include Crimestopper Products Inc., Clifford Electronics Inc., and Alpine Electronics of America Inc. Crimestopper is the only one of these companies that is distinguished for the do-it-yourself models.

Alternatives to these crime deterrents involve extensive achievements in microprocessors. More discriminating computers are being developed that will aid the motion detectors to distinguish between actual theft and the force of the wind or people accidentally brushing up against it. Other microchips will be able to inform the owner of the car of its security status via the remote control. This will tell the owner all perturbations the car encounters, but will indicate whether it is an theft attempt or something else. And not only that, but the Lo-Jack Corp. has developed a microchip transceiver that will broadcast a signal to the authorities so they can pinpoint its location.

And of course, there is one deterrent to crime that doesn't strain your wallet or your brain extensively: lock your door!

—Garrett H. Omata

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Service Contracts

Aah, you're finally buying that brand-new car you've wanted ever since you had to settle for that '65 VW bug your father gave you for your sixteenth birthday. They didn't pay much attention to comfort that year, did they... But you've scraped and scrounged, and now you've just barely got enough money for a down payment and that sheepskin seat cover. And as if the quarter-ton of papers you need to sign isn't enough, they also push an auto service contract on you. It's a good thing to have, they say. You'll get an extension of your warranty service, right? A little more insurance never hurt. Except when it costs \$200 to \$1000 extra.

Are service contracts REALLY necessary? And are they serving the purpose they set out to do? Let's face facts. Dealers really aren't there for the public good, to fill the world with happy customer with nice running cars. They want profits! They wouldn't be offering the contracts if they were losing money on it.

The American Warranty Corp., for example, said that over 10 years, service contracts provided \$300 million to dealers and cost only \$60 million in claims. Not bad. The contracts are usually sold by either the original automobile maker, such as Chrysler or General Motors, or through third party contractors, like Lincoln National Bank or Mitsubishi Motor Sales. They cover an automobile over a present period of time after the warranty expiration by the date, or by mileage. Contracts are also available on used cars and almost always has a deductible tied on.

The benefits of the contract include things like unexpected problems inherent in the construction. Of course these can be circumvented simply by buying a sturdy, reliable car. But there are cars that are known as high risks and need repair more often. But statistics show more in favor of nothing happening to your new car in the related time than otherwise. Obviously if you purchase a used car there is a better chance that something will malfunction, in which case a contract may be worth something. But still, used car dealers are known for their slippery tactics and tongue-twisting use of language in contracts.

There are basic areas that most contracts will not cover. They may include a "weasel" clause that will not cover malfunctions caused by parts of the car not covered in the policy. And some contracts have a loophole that doesn't include labor in the deal. Items like brakepads and shocks that normally wear out are not usually covered. Also things like failure due to misuse, fluid replacement, or lack of proper maintenance will not be covered in the contract. It doesn't really leave a whole lot left.

So, do you think you really need it? The dealers will always push you to take it as part of the package, since a good part of it goes to their commission. But really, there's no rush. A good thing to do is to make sure that a contract can be cancelled in the first 30 or 60 days, with full money back. Also you should be able to buy the contract up to a year after you buy your new car. However, postponing it won't give you an extra year of coverage; it will be retroactive to the date that you bought the car. And though any sound consumer already knows this, make sure you get an actual copy of the contract and are able to read the fine print. There's always some of that around to decorate the borders.

—Garrett H. Omata

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The Eight Best Small Cars for

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Owning a new car has become an integral part of the American Dream. We have come to appreciate cars that not only get us from point A to point B but that also do it in comfort, style and with performance. Unfortunately, it seems almost impossible in the vast automotive landscape to find a car which satisfies our need for desirable transportation while not creating a monthly payment the size of the national debt, and with the average price of a new car standing at about \$12,000, this can seem like an almost hopeless task.

That is what this article is about — trying to get a reasonable car for a reasonable price. True, you can't get a new Porsche or Mercedes on a limited budget — for that matter, even a Toyota Celica or Honda Accord can seriously affect a paycheck — but for a relatively minimal amount of money, it is possible to get a good, reliable automobile which not only fulfills your basic needs but will also make you happy doing it. All of these cars are available in the \$6,000-\$10,000 range before tax and license fees, thus minimizing the damage inflicted to that starting salary.

Keep in mind that whatever car you choose, it should be one that fits you both literally and figuratively. Not only should you feel comfortable and have easy access to the controls, the car should also perform to your unique expectations. Is it attractive enough that, day after day, you won't feel disappointed every time you look at it and realize it's yours? Does it carry the people and cargo you need without too much fuss? These and other considerations can only be evaluated by you, and they should be carefully addressed before you make such a significant financial commitment to any car.

The cars:

The eight models chosen are good representatives of the most desirable compacts and subcompacts available for under \$10,000. None are perfect, and some are more desirable than others, but all are solid, well-built performers that with at least minimal maintenance should run well for several years to come.

An obvious question to arise is why the omission of several other automobiles from the list? The answer depends on the cars in question. In the case of several of the new

C H A R T

Model	Base Price	Body Styles
Chevrolet Nova	\$6,548-8,800	4-door sedan 5-door hatchback
Honda Civic	\$6,078-9,178	4-door sedan 4-door hatchback
Honda CRX 2.0 3	\$7,918-9,674	3-door hatchback
Mazda 323	\$6,304-9,104	3-door hatchback 4-door sedan 5-door wagon
Nissan Sentra (sedan, hatch, wagon)	\$6,424-11,084	2-door sedan 3-door hatchback 3-door coupe 4-door sedan 5-door wagon
Toyota Corolla FX	\$8,403-10,103 \$8,103-8,543	3-door hatchback 4-door sedan 5-door hatchback
Toyota Tercel	\$6,073-8,213	2-door sedan 3-door hatchback 5-door hatchback
VW Golf GL	\$8,005-9,275	3-door hatchback 5-door hatchback

All cars have front-wheel drive, 4-cylinder, inline, single overhead cam engines, front/drums rear, four-wheel independent suspension and bucket seats as standard. All cars have a 5-year/50,000-mile warranty on emissions control equipment.

“bargain models” which promote themselves with sub-\$6,000 base prices (Ford Festiva, Hyundai Excel and Volkswagen Fox), it is not a significant lack of quality which kept them off the list, but the fact that the price of a reasonably equipped model will often be equal to those already on

competition was biting into GM's profits.

Thus the Nova has been reborn, the result of a joint venture of Chevrolet and Toyota. If the car strikes you with how much it resembles a Toyota Corolla, then you have proven your acute powers of observation — the



this list. On the other hand, the Dodge Omni/Plymouth Horizon, Renault Alliance and Encore, and especially the Yugo GV were all excluded clearly because of their inferior reliability and build quality. Ford's Escort, Chevrolet's Sprint, and the twin Isuzu I-Mark /Chevrolet Spectrum were excluded as well, not because they are particularly bad choices but because they are not quite up to the standards of the best.

Among the eight that are on the list, there is a choice that will satisfy almost anyone. Test the models that interest you carefully, and the search for that perfect economy car will be made much easier.

Chevrolet Nova

Once upon a time, a Chevy Nova was a big engine mounted on the front of a mid-size chassis. It was a car perfect to fulfill the needs of Middle America — it was simple, reliable, roomy, fairly comfortable and good for Interstate cruising. It was not exactly the marquee of sophistication, but it did everything it was supposed to reasonably well, and any backyard mechanic with a few tools and odd bits could keep it running forever.


But during the late '70s as American workmanship declined in quality and big engines proved too eager to consume fuel, cars like the Nova faded away. Middle America was turning more to the Japanese to find the car that would dependably haul the kids and the groceries, and the

engineering is straight out of a Corolla. But it is assembled here in California, and because of this, an obvious question arises: Is it as good a car as the comparable Toyota? Can America build a small car which is as reliable and durable as a Japanese car?

The answer is definitely yes. The Nova has proven itself to be virtually indistinguishable from the Corolla in both quality and driveability. Its exterior design is clean and simple, the Nova's body being slightly more rounded at the edges but still sharing the Toyota's basic shape. The dash layout of the two cars is identical, and its clear, logical displays with well-arranged controls which fall easily to hand make for a good if not overly informative driving environment.

Driving the Nova is not exactly a memorable experience, but it performs its job well and efficiently. The engine does not surge with power or sing with excitement when floored, but it performs with perfect adequacy. Its five-speed manual transmission is a bit notchy in an annoying way, but it never balks going into gear. Its seats and driving position are above average for a small car, and it is even fairly comfortable for the rear seat passengers. Its ride and handling are also very good when you consider that this is an economy car designed with neither as a particular emphasis.

In other words, the Nova is just like its Toyota counterpart: reliable as



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

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		TYPE	INDUCTION		Horsepower (Torque lb. ft.)	City	Highway	Basic					Powertrain	Rust	
4-door sedan	5	1.6 liter	carburetor	74	86	27	27 (manual)	28	32 (automatic)	13.2	5-speed M 155 SR 13 3-speed A 175/70 SR 13	tinted glass, rear window defroster, cloth interior, AM radio	1/12000	6/60000	5/10000
5-door hatchback	5	1.8 liter	carburetor	60	73	37	43 (4-speed)	30	35 (5-speed)	11.9	4-speed M 185/70 R 13 5-speed M 175/70 R 13 4-speed A	rear window defroster	1/12000	2/24000	3/unlim
4-door sedan	5	1.8 liter	carburetor	76	84	30	33 (3-1/2)	27	37 (automatic)	11.9	5-speed M 155 SR 13 3-speed A	tinted glass, rear window defroster, halogen headlights, tachometer, front spoiler	1/12000	2/24000	3/unlim
4-door sedan	5	1.8 liter	electronic fuel injection (DI)	91	93	27	37 (automatic)	30	33 (3-1/2)	11.9	5-speed M 155 SR 13 3-speed A	rear window defroster, halogen headlights	1/12000	2/24000	3/unlim
3-door hatchback	2	1.5 liter, 8-valve (HF)	carburetor	58	79 (HF)	45	50 (HF)	30	33 (3-1/2)	11.9	5-speed M 185/70 R 13 4-speed A 175/70 R 13 (s-i) 185/90 HR 14*	tinted glass, rear window defroster, halogen headlights, tachometer, front spoiler	1/12000	2/24000	3/unlim
3-door hatchback	4	1.8 liter, 8-valve	electronic fuel injection	86	92	26	30 (4-speed)	28	34 (5-speed)	11.9	4-speed M 155 SR 13 5-speed 3-speed A 175/70 SR 13	tinted glass, rear window defroster, halogen headlights	1/12000	2/24000	2/24000
4-door sedan	5	1.8 liter, 8-valve	carburetor	70	92	28	35 (5-speed)	26	30 (automatic)	13.2	5-speed M 155 R 13 3-speed A 175/70 R 13	rear window defroster, halogen headlights	1/12500	3/36000	3/36000
3-door coupe	5	1.8 liter, 8-valve	carburetor	74	86	30	37 (5-speed)	28	32 (3 spd auto)	13.2	5-speed M 155 R 13 3-speed A	rear window defroster, halogen headlights	1/12500	3/36000	5/50000
4-door sedan	5	1.8 liter, 8-valve	carburetor	74	86	30	37 (5-speed)	28	32 (3 spd auto)	13.2	5-speed M 155 R 13 3-speed A	rear window defroster, halogen headlights	1/12500	3/36000	5/50000
5-door hatchback	5	1.8 liter, 8-valve	carburetor	74	86	30	37 (5-speed)	28	32 (3 spd auto)	13.2	5-speed M 155 R 13 3-speed A	rear window defroster, halogen headlights	1/12500	3/36000	5/50000
2-door sedan	5	1.5 liter, 12-valve	carburetor	78	87	36	41 (4-speed)	31	38 (5-speed)	11.9	4-speed M 145/80 SR 13 5-speed manual 155 SR 13 3-speed A	halogen headlights	1/12500	3/36000	5/50000
3-door hatchback	5	1.8 liter, 8-valve	fuel injection	85	96	26	34 (manual)	23	34 (automatic)	14.5	5-speed M 175/70 SR 13 3-speed A	tinted glass, rear window defroster, rear window wiper, halogen headlights, tachometer	2/unlim	2/unlim	3/unlim

*rear cam engines, rack and pinion steering, steel-belted radial tires, manual transmission, power brakes (discs), bucket seats as standard equipment.



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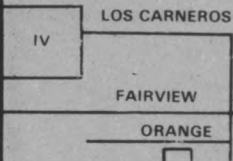
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cast iron, durable, reasonably good at everything but not at all exciting. If you believe cars were designed simply to run with as little attention paid to them as possible, then the Nova is probably one of your best investments, and with Chevy's extensive dealer network, a mechanic will surely be around if you need him (quite an unlikely possibility). Fortunately for the budget-oriented consumer, Novas have not been selling all that well — apparently, people are buying Corollas instead — so it should be easy to score a great deal on this car.

Honda Civic Hatchback, Sedan

If anyone has figured out how to combine the utilitarian function of an economy car with the feel and fun of a sports car, then Honda has cornered the market. To maximize space efficiency, its shape is somewhat unconventional — its hatchback seems more like a small wagon, yet its lines look clean and sporting. As with almost all Japanese cars, the fit and finish are outstanding, but the Civic is especially flawless. Quality is a word difficult to overuse when describing this car — it is most certainly the flagship in its class.

Driving the Si model, with its 1.5 liter 91-horsepower fuel-injected engine, is a satisfying experience. The car handles with agility and precision, exhibiting none of the torque steer common in front-wheel drive automobiles, yet the ride is compliant and comfortable. Coupled to a slick-shifting five-speed, its engine loves to rev easily up to its 6500 rpm redline. At high speeds, it is as stable and tight as many larger cars — a brief 95 mile per hour run down San Marcos Pass was both confidence inspiring and quiet.

Complaints about this car are few. The gauges are clear and easily read at a glance, but like most sporty cars, an oil pressure gauge is absent from the instrument cluster. While the seating position is good, the seats are merely adequate, and only the uppermost setting of the tilt steering serves any useful purpose, thus rendering it a useless feature. However, in light of all its other qualities, these criticisms seem almost frivolous. Just be forewarned — unlike most of the cars featured here, the sportier Civic models are almost impossible to buy for below its list price, making it a less desirable package for the especially cost-conscious. But when calculating the fun-per-dollar ratio, the Civic definitely delivers more bang for the buck than any of its competition.

Honda CRX

Honda has a way of creating its own unique marketing niches and succeeding with them in a big way. In the mid seventies, Honda introduced the Accord hatchback which elevated the idea of an econo-box into a more luxurious package, and in the late seventies, the Accord sedan fostered the notion of a Japanese sedan which could actually be competitive with the formidable, semi-mythical BMW. For the 1980s, Honda has done it again with the CRX, a two-seater which can actually hold more than just two pieces of soft luggage, and it has been quite a success for the now number-one Japanese automaker.

Actually, the CRX is not a radical machine within the Honda lineup — its components are shared with the normal Civics. Like the Civic hatchback, it comes in three variants which each differ in engine power and trim level. However, its somewhat unusual highback hatchback design draws more attention than does the normal Civic, and its marketing image is more towards the sporty. Nonetheless, with all it has in common with the Civic, some comparisons are justified.

Certainly the most pronounced difference is in the ride. The CRX's wheelbase is shorter than that of the Civic, and it shows — the ride is too bouncy and sensitive to bumps in the roadway. Perhaps as a result of this constant shaking, this car seems especially prone to interior and dashboard rattles. Wind noise also seems greater — at 70 to 75 mph, the noise picks up considerably. Another consideration is that due to its unusual hatchback design, rearward vision is not ideal.

However, the CRX is certainly not short on virtues. Its seats are an improvement over the standard Civic, the cargo area is cavernous and versatile, and the usual Honda quality and reliability are as prominent here as in the Civic. In its Si form, the CRX also sports low-profile tires and a power sunroof, thus improving the handling and luxury of the car. Both the normal carbureted 12-valve engine and the fuel-injected Si engine are easily wound out to redline, and the car provides at least the feel of a good performer.

The CRX HF, with an 8-valve, 58-horsepower engine and high gearing for maximum fuel economy, is Honda's highest

mileage car. Unlike the other CRXs, performance is dull and uninspiring. For freeway driving, *third* gear is necessary to attain just moderate passing speed, and in cornering, its small tires quickly reach their limit. Working this car to perform is a task — it simply does not want to cooperate in the pursuit of happiness. One must be very frugal about burning gas (although its 50 mile per gallon highway mileage rating is quite impressive) to want to drive an HF. The normal model or especially the Si are by far the more desirable.

Is the CRX the way to go? If two (See THRILLS, p.6A)

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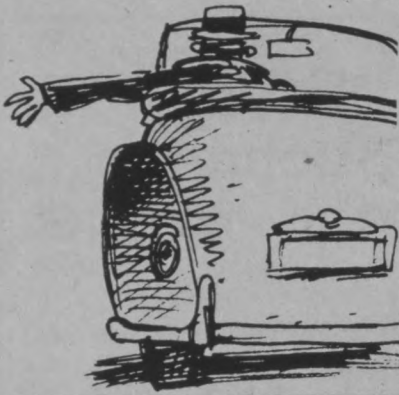
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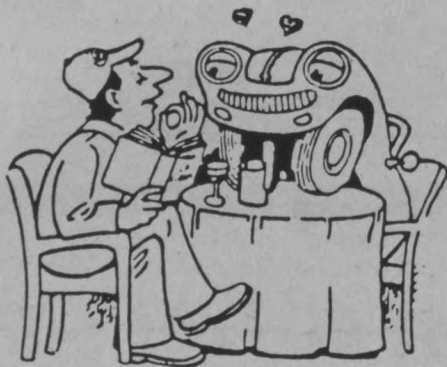
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THRILLS

(Continued from p.5A)
seats are enough for you and performance is of a high priority, the CRX Si is certainly worth it; for those with more moderate ambitions, the normal CRX can be a satisfying compromise. For the very fuel-conscious who believe "high-speed" driving is better left to the senior citizens of the highway, an HF will do. But just as with the Civic Si, the CRX Si and perhaps even the normal CRX will be hard to purchase for a song, which makes the competition look more attractive. As for the Toyota MR2 and Fiero drivers of America, don't be too surprised when one of these little Hondas presents a little more competition than you ex-

difference is marginal enough not to matter to most people.

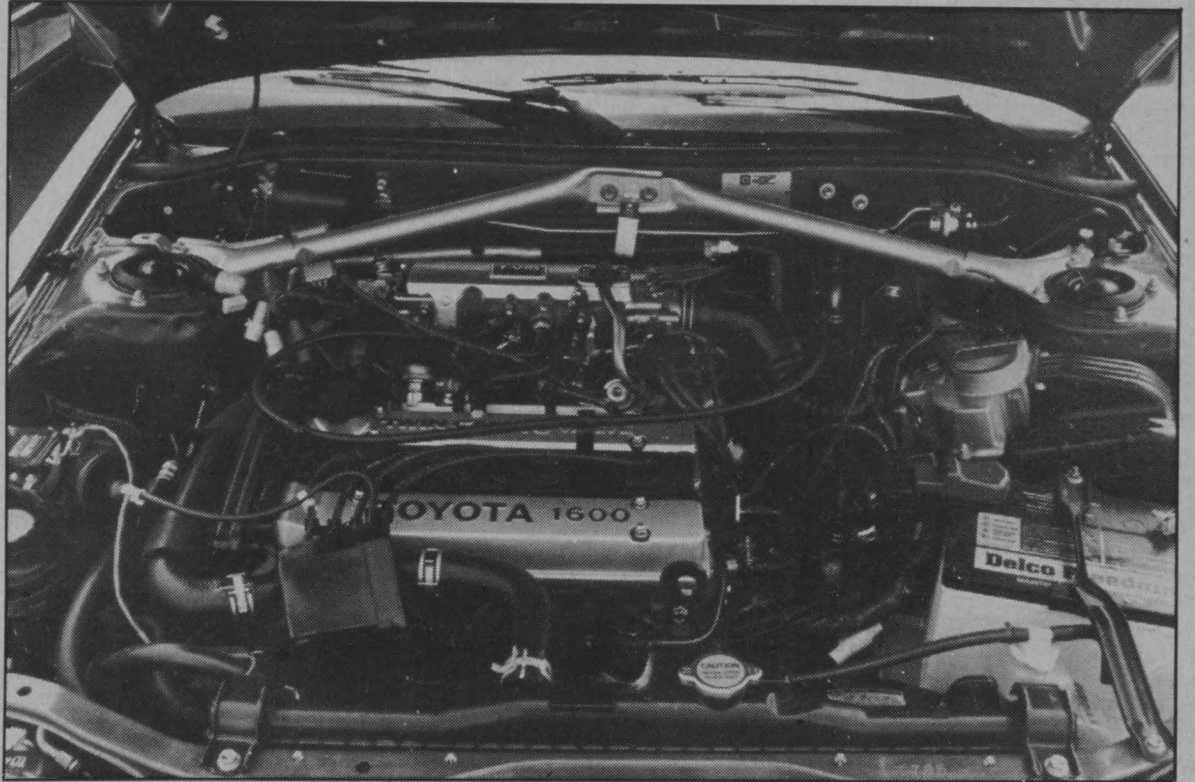
Among the sportier cars tested here, the 323 is probably the best for those who cannot afford the more expensive Golf or the higher-level performers of the Civic line. These cars are quite plentiful, and striking a good deal should be easy. Mazda does well in providing a generous value for the money, and those who choose to buy it either in its budget DX version or its lavishly equipped LX version will not be disappointed.

Nissan Sentra

Nissan touts this car as one that "goes way beyond the basics." Frankly, I am not exactly convinced that this car is some revolutionary leap forward in the economy car market, but the

Toyota Corolla Sedan, Liftback/Toyota FX

Toyota has earned itself a well-deserved reputation for building rock-solid small cars which can endure neglect and abuse like no other car. Reliability is a word synonymous with their name, and the Corolla has come to be regarded as the quintessential indestructible econobox. This latest Corolla, the first of its breed to have front-wheel drive, is a continuation of their long tradition of quality, and it provides great transportation for the economy minded. A description of the Corolla is essentially a redescription of the previously mentioned Chevy Nova — both the sedan/liftback and the FX, which is made at the same California factory as the Nova, duplicate the



pected on your next run down the Interstate.

Mazda 323

Evidently, judging from the cars they build, Mazda has some regrets about being a Japanese car company. First, they pioneered the use of the rotary engine in production cars, having taken the idea from a German company; now, they have designed the latest RX-7 to the almost exact dimensions of the Porsche 944 while referring to their two other passenger cars as "road cars," a term implying European sophistication in design. The 323, the most inexpensive of the three, indeed does have a Germanic feel, and it is quite a good choice for those who have a feel for performance but a modest budget.

The first thing you notice about the 323 is its good immediate acceleration from a stop. Its surge of power from the first gear is quite a pleasant surprise in an economy car, and this is with little loss in fuel economy. This car feels more sporting than the Corolla and almost as much as the Volkswagen Golf, although higher engine noise is evident during highway cruising. The steering is a bit vague on center, but handling is more than competent. Shifting can be unpleasantly notchy, but it is precise and sharp much of the time. Headroom, while not great, is better than in the Golf and many other cars in this class, albeit the

Sentra does serve well as a competitively priced, reliable car that excels in providing a diverse selection of trim levels and body styles extensive enough to satisfy the needs of almost anyone interested in such a car.

In a sense, the Sentra is a variation of the Corolla/Nova theme of a reliable, durable appliance like transportation; however, it differs in some ways which may appeal to slightly different car buyers. The linkage of its five-speed stick is smoother than most other cars of this class, and its seats feel surprisingly good, providing good firm lower back support and side support reminiscent of the BMW 2002. The ride is rather good, absorbing bumps and potholes with aplomb and the car generally feels quite solid; unlike some of the cars tested for this report, no annoying rattles were evident. Fit and finish is, of course, outstanding as it is with all of the cars tested here, and although the styling wins no awards, its boxy shape is pleasant and inoffensive.

Yet the car suffers from some minor flaws. While the car's handling is reasonable enough, the steering transmits little road feel back to the driver. The standard model with its skinny tires exhibits some body lean in only moderate cornering, its 70-horsepower engine feels rough and noisy when pushed, and the dashboard treatment is marred by ugly ventilation openings.

What makes the Sentra an appealing package is its ability to perform as a solid transportation car. While it has few special virtues, it has no vices either, and its prices for minimally equipped models are competitive even with Chevy's smaller Sprint. A word of warning: Avoid the SE Sports Coupe. It is greatly overpriced and an anemic performer when compared with other sporty economy models such as VW's Golf GT, Honda's Civic Si/CRX Si, Mitsubishi's Mirage Turbo or Toyota's Corolla GT-S. Stick with the lower-equipment versions, and for a reasonable price, you can get quite an investment in a solid, practical vehicle.

Chevrolet's driving manners and excellence of construction. Again, it is not an exciting automobile, but it does everything well enough and pleasantly enough to please just about anyone.

So why buy this instead of a Nova? Perhaps its styling is more to your liking, or maybe you still feel hesitant about buying an American-made car. The primary difference between the two cars is not qualitative but quantitative — the Corolla offers a greater number of options such as a 4-speed automatic transmission (as opposed to the 3-speed option in the Nova), power mirrors and a power sunroof. It is important to remember, however, that with such optional equipment, a Corolla's sticker price can easily elevate to well above the \$10,000 level, a price which can induce acute sticker shock in event the strongest of us. If you have decided to buy the Nova or Corolla and you cannot decide which one to choose, simply buy the one you can get at the best price. Regardless of the one you choose, either should satisfy a desire for high-quality, comfortable economical transportation.

Toyota Tercel

The previous Tercel was an extremely reliable but otherwise undesirable car. It had seats that were at best mediocre, a less than spartan dashboard, an engine low on horsepower but high on harshness and a manual transmission plagued by vague, rubbery linkage. Styling for the car was virtually non-existent — straight lines and awkward angles were its most prominent features. All in all, it was a product whose primary purpose was to serve as a loss leader in the otherwise marvelous Toyota lineup.

However, the Tercel has finally become a car on a par with others in the economy field. The engine now has twelve valves for freer breathing, its interior has become attractive and comfortable, and the styling reflects an appreciation for aerodynamics. The sporty three-spoke steering wheel even feels more accommodating than the plastic ring which served as one on the previous model.

(See THRILLS, p.7A)

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Protecting Against Body Rot

Let's face it; most of us are semi-impooverished students who drive old heaps Uncle Chester pawned off on us for beer money when we turned 17. We also live amidst the salty mist of the Pacific. We're prime candidates for body rot.

It usually takes about five or six years for corrosion to set in, according to Dave Boytis of McLean's Auto Body and Paint in Goleta. One of the most common factors that contributes to body rot is design flaws which allow water to accumulate and eat at the paint and then the metal.

Windshield moldings and fenders are the easiest targets for this. Water often accumulates in the bottom of car doors which become clogged.

Although some body shops boast that they guarantee their work, repairs done on these areas cannot truthfully be guaranteed since the problem is design-oriented, Boytis explained. These sorts of problems have for the most part been eliminated in newer model cars.

Salt in the Isla Vista air is a more indirect culprit. It attacks the paint, thus making the body itself more vulnerable to the elements. For this reason it has been widely recommended that one should avoid buying automobiles from areas where salt is poured on roads for traction in icy conditions.

Perhaps the best advice for keeping your paint intact is to keep it washed and waxed. This may seem a little far-fetched but hey, it's only advice.

Beer cans, careless drunks, meteorites: All are common problems in I.V. and all scratch and dent our fair autos laying naked their flesh of ore to the monsters of the sky. But we ourselves can at least slow down the progress of decay until we graduate and can either trash the hunk or get it fixed by someone who knows what they're doing.

For scratches and nicks you can buy some very

fine-grained sandpaper and painstakingly remove all the rust. You'll probably take out some of the surrounding paint but that's all right.

Then, take a spray can of silicon coating or paint primer (both available for a few bucks at car part stores) and layer on a couple of coats. You can also purchase aluminum tape which helps, but it tends to fall off and looks really tacky.

Both of these methods leave your car in less than showroom condition but slowing down the decaying may save you a good deal of cabbage in the long run.

When body rot is initiated internally, the exterior will have a sort of bubbled appearance without affecting the paint much at first, but you can bet there's water in there working away. If you can, feel the other side and see how far it has progressed. If not, start sanding. If the metal is "bubbly," you may end up making a hole all the way through.

There is a good demonstration of do-it-yourself hole filling in the May 1984 issue of *Popular Mechanics*. For starters, you have to tear or snip off every bit of rust or it will start spreading again immediately. It's kind of like operating on a cancer patient.

Now comes the infamous Bondo. It either takes a lot of luck or an artistic hand to make this look good. You have to gob it in there, smooth it as best you can and wait for it to dry. Then start sanding and do your best to make it match the rest of the car. This is where the luck or skill come in handy.

Some people do body work with a blow torch and a sheet of fiberglass but Boytis said this does not work especially well on metal cars.

If your car decay is at a very advanced stage, you will either have to spend a lot of money to get it fixed or just live with it (Maybe plant some flowers in there.).

—Wade Daniels

THRILLS

(Continued from p.6A)

Unfortunately, I had only a very brief chance to drive the car, but some observations are warranted. Acceleration with the optional three-speed automatic felt good for a car with its engine displacement, and the optional power steering felt somewhat overboosted but still adequate in offering moderate road feel. (Without power steering, the car reportedly suffers sluggish handling.) As intended, it is easy to park and maneuver in low-speed situations, and at higher speeds, ride is dramatically improved over the old model. It is also quieter, evidently a benefit of its smooth new power plant which produces over 25 percent more horsepower than the engine of the previous model while delivering improved fuel economy.

The Tercel in its base model is probably not as good a choice as are lower-level Sentras, 323's or Civics (air conditioning and power steering are not even available options on the base-level Tercel), but as a somewhat pricey automobile of impeccable reliability, outstanding assembly quality, and extremely high resale value, it is a fine package. Although its handling is hampered by narrow tires, the Tercel should prove to be quite effective and economical in the daily urban commute.

Volkswagen Golf GL

German engineering is something the world has come to regard with great respect for its

enduring quality and conservative understatement, and it is a heritage Volkswagen will not let us easily forget that it shares with the folks at BMW and Mercedes Benz; their marketing and advertising constantly refer to unlimited-speed *Autobahnen* and German design to emphasize that point. It must then come to a surprise to many that the Golf, introduced in 1985 as a replacement for the Rabbit, is actually manufactured not in Germany but in Pennsylvania. Too bad VW doesn't tell us this in their promotional, for they have nothing to be ashamed of — like the Nova, the Golf proves that Americans are quite capable of building a quality automobile as well as even the Europeans.

The Golf's strengths are in its well-balanced combination of performance, utility and subtlety. This car is geared to perform — its fuel-injected 1.8 liter engine revs easily and nicely, its transmission is notchy but precise, and it handles nimbly both in the parking lot and on windy roads — the optional power steering facilitates low-speed maneuvering while remaining unobtrusive at high speeds. It holds the driver comfortably with an excellent seating position and a tasteful, simple interior which lacks the gaudy flash of some of the comparable Japanese cars on the market. It is also one of the few cars of its type which can also hold its passengers just as comfortably; it has a back seat that can actually hold real adults without forcing them to crouch into variations of the fetal position, and it can carry a good amount of their luggage as well.

With its high level of assembly quality, it is evident that VW took a few tips from their cousins at Porsche, and the results have given us a marvelous economy car with a lot of performance.

For those who have longings for a German car but who have only a moderate income, the Golf is probably a great choice. Of all the cars here, it does the best job of accommodating all its passengers (even the air conditioning is quieter than most.), and its only real flaw is that its reliability is slightly below that of the other cars on this list. If you can accept this and its plain-Jane looks, then the Golf should prove to be a great example of a European-style car for an affordable price.

—Adrian Imonti

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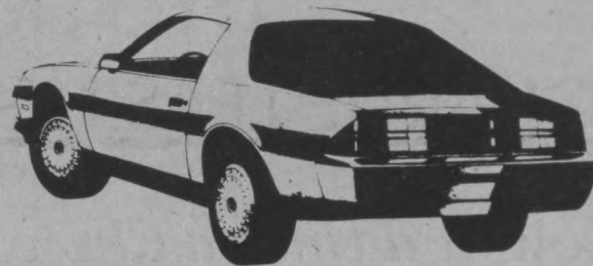


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