

SCOOP: CARROLL SHELBY'S BRAND-NEW COBRA!

CAR DRIVER [®]

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ONE DOZEN NEW CARS FOR UNDER \$10,000!

We test twelve runabouts that won't drive you to debtor's prison. Page 32.



And then some: Mercury's new Villager minivan. Porsche America Roadster. Ford Club Wagon. Mercedes, Cadillac, Jaguar ragtops compared.



The Econ Majors

From twelve competitive classmates—all priced under \$10,000—we pick the dean's list.

BY ARTHUR ST. ANTOINE



The average college student owns the following: an anthology of English verse (unopened), pizza knives, seventeen never-washed sweatshirts, pizza trays, one clean sweatshirt for parental visits, pizza plates, four R.E.M. CDs, pizza napkins, a 120-ounce beer stein, pizza-stain remover, and an economy-size bottle of Extra-Strength Tylenol.

Likewise, the average college student *wants* to own the following: a sharp set

of wheels—brand-new, please.

So what does a college undergraduate look for in a new car, anyway?

First off, it has to be cheap to buy and economical to run—no car would be any good if it soaked up all the pizza money. But from there the priorities list gets a little fuzzy. Maybe one student wants to try out some of the physics he's been studying with a g-generating performance car. Maybe another delights in the ribald plea-

tures of road trips with friends—room is a priority there. A third might simply want lots of car for the money, a machine with amenities and comforts galore.

Hmmmm. Sounds like the same sort of priorities regular working stiffs go for, right? So, can any new car satisfy college kids and average Joes on the cheap—say, for under ten grand?

We arranged this comparison test to find out. The twelve cars pictured here

represent all the major players available in the U.S. for less than \$10,000—including, we decreed, air conditioning, a rear defroster, and an AM/FM radio. (Our Mazda 323 and Ford Escort test cars did not have radios, but both can be fitted with dealer-installed radios and remain under \$10,000.)

Our field comprised both hatchbacks and sedans. All twelve cars are front-drive, and all were equipped with manual transmissions to help them stay under our pricing limit.

Conducting this comparison turned out to be more difficult than we envisioned. Not only did the sheer number of cars strain our technical staff (requiring a full instrumented test on each car, a comprehensive vital-statistics chart, and careful measurements of features and cargo room), but it made voting a nightmare. Cars were driven and redriven. Compared with close competitors. Driven again. And driven some more for good measure. Then came the fun part of trying to mete out points to twelve different machines.

Adding to the voting difficulty was a most unexpected element: the overall goodness of the field. Prior to assembling our players, we fully expected to find a few clear front-runners and a slew of obvious also-rans. But after driving them, we came away astonished at how competent



these under-\$10,000 cars are. "I'm just amazed," said one editor. "I've been in comparo tests of \$30,000 luxury sedans where, say, one or two of the cockpits had real problems. But these little cars all provide a clear view of the instruments, good ergonomics, and decent seats. They're really impressive."

Because a car priced under \$10,000 doesn't have the resources to be all things to all people, we decided not to pick an overall winner but instead to choose victors in three distinct categories: *Most Fun to Drive*, *Best People Mover*, and *Best Value*. Our usual Editors' Ratings chart is also included for those who want to make direct comparisons from car to car.

In judging these econ majors, we made no compromises in our standards. Each car was evaluated against the same two criteria we apply to \$80,000 sedans: "Could I live with it every day?" and "Would I actually consider buying it?"

In alphabetical order, then, we present our nine runners-up, followed by our three winners.

Eagle Summit

The three-door Eagle Summit hatchback, near-twin to the Mitsubishi Mirage (and built by Mitsubishi on the same assembly line in Japan), combines an aero-slippery form with impressive sophistication for the class.

This is a quiet car, mechanically refined but also unobtrusive to a fault. "Draws no attention to itself," wrote one editor, adding, "The problem is, it's almost somnambulant." Several editors used the word "unexciting" to describe the Summit.

Power comes from a 92-horsepower 1.5-liter four that earned high marks for smoothness and response. "Engine is silky at idle," wrote one tester. "One of the best engines of the group," wrote another. The Summit is not a quick car, however: its 10.2-second 0-to-60-mph time was only slightly better than the group average. The standard manual transmission is a four-speed, and though there were complaints



Two slick shapes: Civic (left) achieved best fuel economy at expense of gearing. Summit was smooth and competent but unexciting.

THE ECON MAJORS

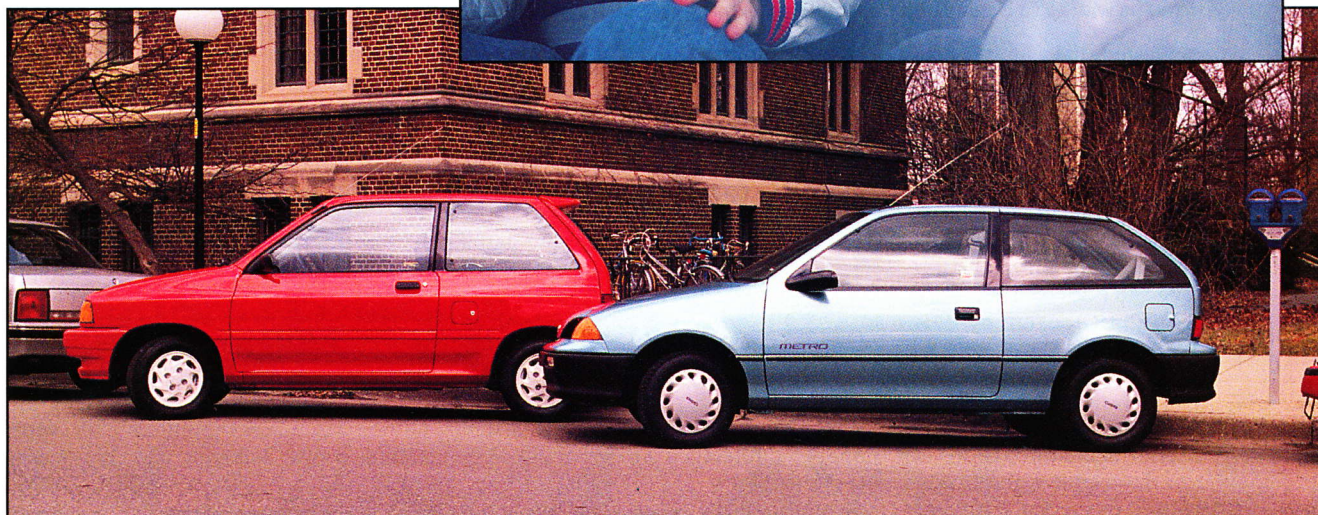
about the lack of a fifth gear, most drivers admitted that the four ratios worked out reasonably well.

The Summit earned praise for its cockpit design and interior room, and all testers commented favorably on its soft, forgiving ride. The pillowy suspension exacts a toll in poise and handling response, however.

We had no trouble filling each car with editors and an impressive quantity of bad breath. Simply eyeballing the exteriors reveals nothing about cabin spaciousness, as the Ford Festiva and Geo Metro (below) graphically demonstrate.



JEFFREY G. RUSSELL



Warranties and Annual Operating Costs

		WARRANTY COVERAGE years/miles x 1000			MAINTENANCE \$	FUEL \$	INSURANCE \$	DEPRECIATION \$	TOTAL \$
		basic	powertrain	rust-through					
	EAGLE SUMMIT	3/36	5/60	7/100	189	419	881	1201	2690
	FORD ESCORT	3/36	3/36	6/100	130	464	822	1305	2721
	FORD FESTIVA GL	3/36	3/36	6/100	184	393	853	1257	2687
	GEO METRO	3/36	3/36	6/100	133	333	847	1162	2475
	HONDA CIVIC CX	3/36	3/36	5/unlimited	222	317	822	916	2277
	HYUNDAI EXCEL GS	3/36	5/60	5/100	180	419	953	1259	2811
	MAZDA 323	3/50	3/50	5/unlimited	166	499	828	905	2398
	NISSAN SENTRA E	3/36	5/60	5/unlimited	145	499	890	1013	2547
	PLYMOUTH SUNDANCE AMERICA	3/36	3/36	7/100	98	590	799	1231	2718
	SATURN SL	3/36	3/36	6/100	116	519	831	957	2423
	SUBARU JUSTY GL	3/36	5/60	5/unlimited	249	406	767	1375	2797
	TOYOTA TERCEL	3/36	5/60	5/unlimited	155	406	708	946	2215

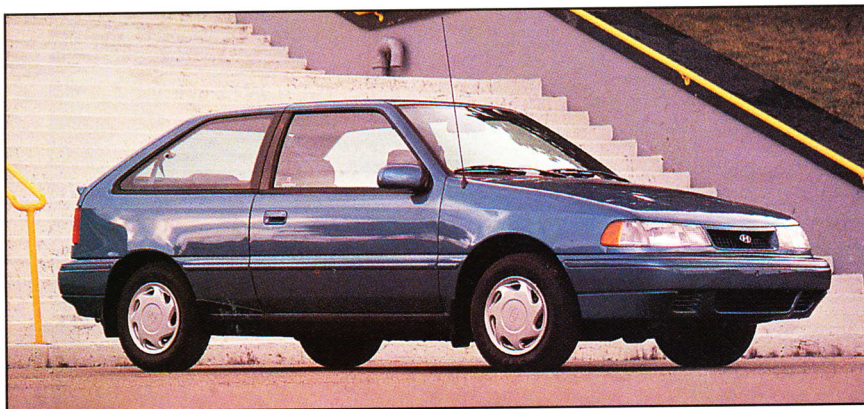
NOTE: Maintenance costs are averaged over five years of manufacturer's recommended dealer service.

Fuel costs are figured for 12,000 miles of driving at C/D-observed fuel economy assuming a \$1.08/gallon average fuel cost.

Insurance costs are based on an average of first year of ownership quotes for 20-year-old University of Michigan students with clean driving records.

Depreciation is an annual average over five years based on the NADA Official Used Car Guide. The Festiva estimate is extrapolated from four-year data.

Saturn information is based on GMAC residual figures used to calculate lease rates.



Hyundai surprised us with terrific seats and truly tasteful, expensive-looking upholstery.

At \$8965 as tested, the Summit provides undeniably capable transportation without a lot of flavor.

Ford Festiva GL

Built in South Korea by Kia, a Ford affiliate, the Festiva has been scooting around our shores since 1987. Based on a Mazda minicar design, the Festiva is just 140.5 inches long and rides on a 90.2-inch wheelbase—Lilliputian even by this class's standards.

Yet this is not a cramped package. With a tall roof and wheels pushed out to the corners of the body, the Festiva offers impressive interior accommodations—including one of the roomiest, most comfortable rear seats in this group. Everyone liked the natty interior decor, too.

Surprisingly, the GL's jaunty exterior—complete with cast-aluminum wheels and a rear roof spoiler—struck out big-time with our real-life college kids (see the "Unscientific Nerddiness Poll").

Displacing 1.3 liters, the Festiva's inline four produces just 63 horsepower. Accordingly, a run to 60 mph takes a mid-pack 10.5 seconds. Skinny tires contribute to mediocre braking from 70 mph: a long

216 feet. But the engine is feisty. "A little coarse but pulls decently," wrote one editor. "Engine likes to rev—car has a go-kart feel that makes it fun to drive," wrote another.

Where the Festiva suffers is in value. Although stickered at a whopping \$9674, it lacks power steering, a remote hatch release, and the solid, stable feel of the class leaders. Summed up one tester: "It's just not big, fast, or refined enough to command \$9700."

Geo Metro

Like the Festiva, the Metro is a tiny import—a rebadged Suzuki Swift. Yet the Metro goes one step closer toward doubling for the *Fantastic Voyage* shrinking machine: it's powered by a 1.0-liter three-cylinder engine.

Because all three-cylinders are inherently unbalanced and

typically lack power, they attract much criticism. And such was the Metro's fate in this comparison. "Terrible idle vibration, lawnmower sound," wrote one editor. "Engine is noisy and gutless," agreed another. Indeed, the Metro recorded the group's poorest acceleration time, requiring 13.1 seconds to hit 60 mph.

Also drawing hisses was the Metro's suspension. The logbook adjectives included: "non-sure-footed" and "sloppy" and "marginal." Not only is the Metro low on grip, but it also feints and hunts in turns—making it unpleasant to drive briskly.

Much better is the Metro's slick shifter, its trim and modern shape, and its nicely styled cabin. Just don't try to stuff any full-grown adults into the tight, low-cushioned back seat.

Configured for this review, the Metro costs \$8670—about \$1500 too much, according to our water-cooler discussions. With several bigger, sturdier, and more refined four-cylinder entries selling for about the same price, the Metro is simply outclassed here.

Honda Civic CX

"Real seatbelts and an air bag!" exclaimed one editor upon leaving the Civic. Many of the other cars were equipped with annoying and confidence-



Mazda 323 (left) won the "looks most like a shoe" award, but it felt vault-solid and offered an eager, fun-to-rev 82-hp engine.

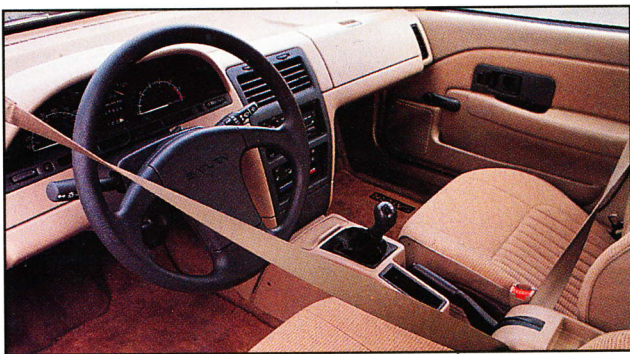
eroding motorized passive belts, so it was a real pleasure to strap into the Honda's well-protected driver's seat.

Honda produces a manifestly fine product: from the beautiful instrument panel to the fine shifter to the handsome materials to the superb fit and finish, the Civic feels and looks far more expensive than it is.



Yet the little Honda is not without shortcomings. The engine, a 70-horsepower 1.5-liter four, is astoundingly rough, loud, and feeble—"astoundingly," because we're not used to equating those adjectives with Hondas. "Downright noisy," wrote one editor. "Underpowered and generally unimpressive," wrote another. And the extremely tall gearing further saps the engine's performance. Our seat-of-the-pants impressions of bottom-drawer performance were confirmed at the test track: 11.2 seconds from 0 to 60 mph. The engine atoned for those sins by delivering 41 miles per gallon, the best observed fuel economy in our test.

No one was happy about the absence of power steering—particularly in the parking lot. Steering feel at speed, however, is light and communicative.



Saturn: great fit and finish, and brimming with amenities—including tilt steering. Winner of our Best Value category.

Despite the Civic's quality and its standard air bag, there was much grumbling about the \$9957 price. Which only proves how a weak, raucous engine can ruin your day.

Hyundai Excel GS

Econ has always been Hyundai's major, and the econo-famous Excel proved it—finishing fourth in the *Best People Mover* category and tying for third in *Best Value*.

For \$8991 as tested, this is an exceptionally well equipped car. In addition to the requisite A/C, rear defroster, and radio (a fine AM/FM/cassette system), the Excel included intermittent wipers, a rear-window wiper/washer, and a tachometer. Also appreciated were the interior's myriad pockets and the high quality of the upholstery and trim. The seats were praised as among the best in the group.

Mechanically, the Excel is a competent if bland performer. The 1.5-liter four produces 81 horsepower and delivers 0-to-60-mph times of 10.6 seconds. The five-speed



Sundance America: the heaviest car in the group and the most difficult to drive smoothly.

shifter is a bit notchy but light in effort. The suspension delivers a good ride, though it's loose and unsettled in tight handling maneuvers. The steering, which lacks power assist, is extremely heavy at low speeds.

Wrapped in this clean and tasteful

exterior shape and boasting an exceedingly roomy cabin, the South Korean Excel delivers a lot of car for the money. Wrote one tester: "Doesn't have the 'richness' of some of the others, but it's a darn good cheap ride."

Mazda 323

Finishing third in the *Most Fun to Drive* and *Best Value* categories and fifth

Features and Amenities		passive restraints ¹	tachometer	trip odometer	power steering	tilt steering	intermittent wiper	rear wiper/washer ²	sound system ³	remote trunk/hatch release	remote fuel-door release	fold-down rear seatback	passenger seat tilt/slide ⁴	left mirrors ⁵	right
	EAGLE SUMMIT	M		✓					R-2		✓			M	
	FORD ESCORT	M		✓	✓		✓				✓			R	
	FORD FESTIVA GL	M						✓	R-4		✓	✓		M	M
	GEO METRO	D-3					✓		C-2		✓	✓		R	M
	HONDA CIVIC CX	A		✓					C-2	✓	✓	✓		R	R
	HYUNDAI EXCEL GS	D-2	✓	✓			✓	✓	C-2	✓	✓	✓	✓	R	R
	MAZDA 323	M		✓	✓						✓			R	
	NISSAN SENTRA E	D-3		✓				—	C-4					M	
	PLYMOUTH SUNDANCE AMERICA	A		✓	✓		✓		R-2		✓			R	R
	SATURN SL	M	✓	✓		✓	✓	—	C-4	✓	✓	✓	—	R	M
	SUBARU JUSTY GL	D-3	✓	✓			✓	✓	C-2	✓		✓	✓	R	R
	TOYOTA TERCEL	D-2						—	R-2					M	

¹Passive restraints: A=Air bag; M=Motorized 2-point belts; D-2/3=Door-mounted 2- or 3-point belts.

²Rear wiper/washer: Hatches only.

³Sound system: R=AM/FM Radio; C=AM/FM/Cassette; -2/-4=2 or 4 speakers.

⁴Passenger seat tilt/slide: Two- and three-doors only. Passenger seat automatically slides forward when the seatback is tilted, for easy entry to the rear seat.

⁵Mirrors: R=Remote adjustment; M=Manual adjustment.



Quirky three-cylinder Subaru offered a three-quart back seat but with no break on price.

in *Best People Mover*, the 323 is a car that does everything well.

There was universal applause for the 323's engine, an 82-horsepower 1.6-liter four. "Engine makes nice noises, encourages flogging," wrote one editor. "Best point-and-squirt racer in traffic," wrote another. "Engine is my favorite," proclaimed a third.

There was also general praise for the 323's maneuverability and chassis

response, but several editors noted an unsettling tendency for the rear end to step out under hard cornering. The 323 never swapped ends on anyone, but that feeling of uneasiness near the limit was enough to drop the 323's handling rating a notch.

The Mazda earned a "9" in the quality scoring, as everything about the car—its tight body structure, freedom from squeaks and rattles, smooth controls—feels high-grade. Everything, that is, except the seats. "Will you take a look at the wacky vinyl texture of these things?" wrote one editor, agog. "What are these seats made of, nylon?" queried another. Whatever it is, we don't like it.

The 323 also received some demerits for its sparsely equipped, "hose-it-out" interior. Nobody complained too loudly, though: at just \$8504 as-tested, the 323 leaves a lot of change from a \$10,000 bill for add-ons (including a dealer-installed radio).

Plymouth Sundance America

It's fitting that this car has the word "America" in its moniker. The Sundance is the most "American" car in the group—it's big, isolated, and, at 2662 pounds, the heaviest entry by far.

The Sundance is a reassuring car to drive. It feels substantial, and it has an air bag and good seatbelts. Big bonus points there.

It also has the biggest, torquiest engine of the group, a 93-horsepower 2.2-liter four that churns out 122 pound-feet at 3200 rpm. Acceleration is mid-pack (0 to 60 mph in 10.5 seconds), but the Sundance displays notably strong off-the-line response. The pleasure of that torque, however, is dampened by annoying driveline snatch that makes it nearly impossible to pull away from a stop smoothly.

There was no faulting the Sundance for equipment offered: its \$9927 test price includes intermittent

wipers and power steering. And its notch-back sedan shape hides a handy liftgate. Clever.

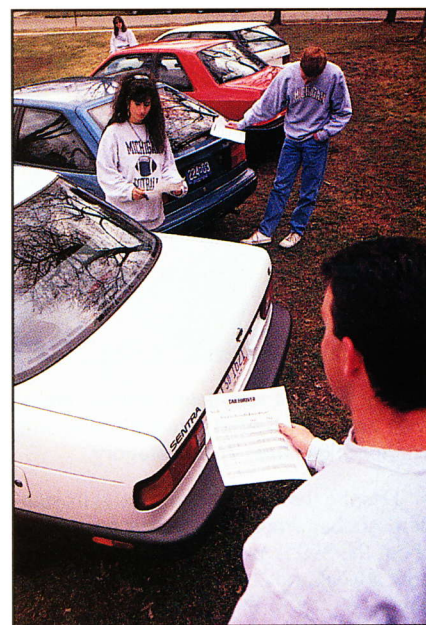
But there the praises end. From the logbook: "Poor pedal placement, unattractive interior," and "Engine sound by John Deere," and "A feeling of wasted motion that the quick steering can't hide."

The Sundance also returned the group's poorest fuel economy: 22 miles per gallon during our test.

Summed up one editor: "This whole package reeks of anti-sporty. But it's a car my mother probably wouldn't frown upon."

Subaru Justy GL

Like the Geo Metro, Subaru's Justy GL has a three-cylinder engine. So right away this bantamweight comes to the plate with



College students' analysis of styling surprised us. The Saturn was way cool, but the Festiva dug deeply into Yugo territory.

three strikes against it.

The Justy's three is a 1.2-liter unit that produces 73 horsepower—more than the Ford Festiva and Honda Civic fours. That's enough power to deliver a 0-to-60-mph run of 11.3 seconds. But there's no escaping the engine's roughness. "Grip the wheel at idle and no one needs to tell you this is a three-banger," wrote one editor.

There were complaints that the Justy felt as small as it is. "Back seat is terrible—worst legroom of the bunch," was one. "Controls work okay, but the interior looks cheap," was a frequently heard complaint. "Exterior styling courtesy of the set designers from 'The Lawrence Welk

Usable Trunk Volume

	maximum trunk capacity		usable cu ft
	large bags	small bags	
EAGLE SUMMIT	0	3	6
FORD ESCORT	2	0	10
FORD FESTIVA GL	0	3	6
GEO METRO	0	3	6
HONDA CIVIC CX	0	3	6
HYUNDAI EXCEL GS	0	3	6
MAZDA 323	0	4	8
NISSAN SENTRA E	1	4	13
PLYMOUTH SUNDANCE AMERICA	1	2	9
SATURN SL	2	1	12
SUBARU JUSTY GL	0	3	6
TOYOTA TERCEL	1	3	11

Measured using a combination of fully stuffed, large (5.0 cu ft) and small (1.9 cu ft) duffels, with very little squeezing.





An Unscientific Nerdiness Poll

●Are we hip here, or what?

Well, there are a few mature scribes at this magazine who are grappling with the concept of Grecian Formula, and a few others who wish that were still an option. There's a backseatful of college graduates from the go-go eighties in these cubicles off Hogback Road, though word has it they are no longer welcome on campus.

With that in mind, we randomly approached ten college kids at the University of Michigan to see how—or if—any of these modest cars would fit into their plans, cool-wise. In short, would they be seen dead in these cars? Remember, this is not a scientific poll.

Right off, we ventured an opinion that the Ford Festiva had cool alloys, excellent flared fenders and a rad red paint job. “Eeeewww,” said Martine, a

21-year-old student. “It’s not red, it’s orange! The Honda’s got nice red paint.”

Another young female said, “The Festiva looks like a Yugo.”

Honda? No surprise. Nissan? No surprise. Saturn? Say what? “I like the headlights,” explained Sandra. Did she think, as many do, that it looks highly related to a small Olds? She offered a puzzled glance and a charming “nnnooooo.”

What about the marvy teal Excel? “No,” said Leslie. “It’s just a Hyundai.” How about the Mazda? “It’s just another little car,” said a student.

We moved to the guys. What do they like? They didn’t have much to say, except for three words: “Mustang five-liters.”

Note: In youth-speak, the term “way” in the chart is the opposite of “no way,” and thus means “yes.” —*Phil Berg*

Would you be caught dead in this car?

	WAY	NOT
Honda Civic CX	10	0
Nissan Sentra E	10	0
Saturn SL	10	0
Toyota Tercel	8	2
Plymouth Sundance America	7	3
Ford Escort	7	3
Hyundai Excel GS	3	7
Geo Metro	2	8
Mazda 323	2	8
Eagle Summit	1	9
Subaru Justy GL	1	9
Ford Festiva GL	0	10

Show,” grumbled another editor. It’s not surprising, then, that the Justy’s \$9840 as-tested price stunned us all.

But for all of its shortcomings, the Justy can be endearing. Its very quirkiness is charming. Wrote one editor: “I think this car should qualify as having a remote fuel release, because I can roll down the window and reach my left hand out to the fuel door and open it.”

The Justy is that kind of car.

Toyota Tercel

An unremarkable performer, the Tercel nevertheless finished fourth in the *Fun to Drive* ratings and missed winning the *Best*



Tercel: light steering, nice organic shapes inside and out, missed Best Value by a hair.



Otherwise trustworthy coeds kept pocketing keys.

Value award by a mere two points. That says a lot about the overall goodness of this machine.

There was unanimous praise for the Tercel's 82-horsepower twelve-valve 1.5-liter four. "Engine isn't strong, but it pulls

smoothly all the way to its redline," and "Engine is the smoothest and quietest of the group at low speeds," and "Power ain't great, but engine response is."

Also getting applause was the Tercel's sculptured styling. Wrote one editor: "Lovely organic shape inside and out—stylists talked to each other and emerged with an integrated whole." Wrote another: "The insides are nothing you'd have to make excuses to your friends for—seats are grippy and comfortable."

Figure in lively handling, low-effort steering (asked one editor, "How does

Toyota make non-power steering feel so lively and light?"), an excellent shifter (a four-speed), and quality you can *feel*, and you can understand our admiration for this car.

For all of its attractions, the Tercel checks in at a mere \$8448 as tested. As one editor wrote: "This is a pretty hard car to fault at the price."

MOST FUN TO DRIVE

Nissan Sentra E

In gunning for this award, the Nissan arrived with real ammunition. Its double-

Vital Statistics

	price, base/ as tested	engine	SAE net power/torque	transmission/ gear ratios:1/ maximum test speed, mph/ axle ratio:1	curb weight, lb	weight distribution, % F/R
EAGLE SUMMIT	\$7742/ \$8965	SOHC 1468cc 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, port fuel injection	92 bhp @ 6000 rpm/ 93 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm	4-speed/ 3.36, 1.95, 1.29, 0.94/ 37, 63, 95, 102/ 3.45	2251	62.1/37.9
FORD ESCORT	\$8730/ \$9741	SOHC 1859cc 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, port fuel injection	88 bhp @ 4400 rpm/ 108 lb-ft @ 3800 rpm	5-speed/ 3.42, 1.70, 1.15, 0.87, 0.73/ 33, 66, 98, 100, 107/ 3.41	2363	62.1/37.9
FORD FESTIVA GL	\$8265/ \$9674	SOHC 1324cc 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, port fuel injection	63 bhp @ 5000 rpm/ 73 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm	5-speed/ 3.45, 1.94, 1.28, 0.86, 0.69/ 34, 57, 86, 96, 93/ 3.58	1868	63.1/36.9
GEO METRO	\$7284/ \$8670	SOHC 993cc 3-in-line, aluminum block and head, 1x1-bbl throttle-body fuel injection	52 bhp @ 5700 rpm/ 58 lb-ft @ 3300 rpm	5-speed/ 3.42, 1.89, 1.28, 0.91, 0.76/ 28, 51, 75, 95, 90/ 4.10	1689	59.8/40.2
HONDA CIVIC CX	\$8410/ \$9957	SOHC 1493cc 4-in-line, aluminum block and head, port fuel injection	70 bhp @ 5000 rpm/ 91 lb-ft @ 2000 rpm	5-speed/ 3.25, 1.76, 1.07, 0.85, 0.70/ 35, 60, 96, 99, 91/ 3.25	2137	62.5/37.5
HYUNDAI EXCEL GS	\$7979/ \$8991	SOHC 1468cc 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, port fuel injection	81 bhp @ 5500 rpm/ 91 lb-ft @ 3000 rpm	5-speed/ 3.36, 1.95, 1.29, 0.94, 0.78/ 29, 50, 76, 102, 102/ 4.02	2244	62.0/38.0
MAZDA 323	\$7549/ \$8504	SOHC 1598cc 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, port fuel injection	82 bhp @ 5000 rpm/ 92 lb-ft @ 2500 rpm	5-speed/ 3.42, 1.84, 1.29, 0.92, 0.73/ 25, 45, 67, 104, 104/ 4.11	1959	62.2/37.8
NISSAN SENTRA E	\$8795/ \$9931	DOHC 16-valve 1597cc 4-in-line, aluminum block and head, port fuel injection	110 bhp @ 6000 rpm/ 108 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm	4-speed/ 3.33, 1.96, 1.29, 0.90/ 38, 65, 98, 111/ 3.55	2334	62.5/37.5
PLYMOUTH SUNDANCE AMERICA	\$8262/ \$9927	SOHC 2205cc 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, 1x1-bbl throttle-body fuel injection	93 bhp @ 4800 rpm/ 122 lb-ft @ 3200 rpm	5-speed/ 3.29, 2.08, 1.45, 1.04, 0.72/ 33, 52, 75, 91, 104/ 2.76	2662	63.4/36.6
SATURN SL	\$8695/ \$9809	SOHC 1901cc 4-in-line, aluminum block and head, 1x1-bbl throttle-body fuel injection	85 bhp @ 5000 rpm/ 107 lb-ft @ 2400 rpm	5-speed/ 3.08, 1.81, 1.21, 0.86, 0.64/ 30, 51, 76, 105, 105/ 4.06	2332	60.1/39.9
SUBARU JUSTY GL	\$8623/ \$9840	SOHC 9-valve 1189cc 3-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, port fuel injection	73 bhp @ 5600 rpm/ 71 lb-ft @ 2800 rpm	5-speed/ 3.07, 1.70, 1.14, 0.79, 0.68/ 25, 45, 67, 95, 95/ 4.80	1726	63.3/36.7
TOYOTA TERCEL	\$7293/ \$8448	SOHC 12-valve 1457cc 4-in-line, iron block and aluminum head, port fuel injection	82 bhp @ 5200 rpm/ 89 lb-ft @ 4400 rpm	4-speed/ 3.55, 1.90, 1.23, 0.89/ 30, 57, 87, 99/ 3.53	2008	61.9/38.1

THE ECON MAJORS



dimensions, in				fuel tank, gal	interior volume, cu ft			suspension		brakes, F/R	tires
wheel-base	length	width	height		front	rear	trunk	front	rear		
93.9	158.7	65.7	51.9	13.2	50	35	12	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	rigid axle integral with two trailing arms and an anti-roll bar, Panhard rod, coil springs	disc/drum	Michelin All Seasons, P155/80R-13
98.4	170.0	66.7	52.5	11.9	49	39	17	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	ind, strut located by 1 trailing link and 2 lateral links, coil springs, anti-roll bar	vented disc/drum	Goodyear Invicta GL, P175/70R-13
90.2	140.5	63.2	55.3	10.0	47	39	12	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	ind, trailing arm, coil springs	disc/drum	Yokohama 372 All Seasons, 165/70R-12
89.2	147.4	62.0	52.4	10.6	48	31	10	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs	ind, strut located by a semi-trailing arm and a lateral link, coil springs	disc/drum	Goodyear Invicta GL, P145/80R-12
101.3	160.2	66.9	53.0	11.9	46	33	13	ind, unequal-length control arms, coil springs	ind, 1 trailing arm with 2 lateral links and a toe control link per side, coil springs	vented disc/drum	Goodyear Invicta GLR, P165/70R-13
93.8	161.4	63.3	54.5	11.9	48	38	15	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	ind, trailing arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	vented disc/drum	Goodyear Invicta GL, P175/70R-13
96.5	163.6	65.7	56.5	13.2	51	40	16	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs	ind, strut located by 1 trailing link and 2 lateral links, coil springs, anti-roll bar	vented disc/drum	Bridgestone SF-405 Steel, P155/80R-13
95.7	170.3	65.6	53.9	13.0	49	34	12	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs	ind, strut located by 1 trailing link and 2 lateral links, coil springs	vented disc/drum	General Radial ST, P155/80R-13
97.0	171.7	67.3	53.0	14.0	50	39	13	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	rigid axle integral with two trailing arms and an anti-roll bar, Panhard rod, coil springs	vented disc/drum	Goodyear Invicta GA, P185/70R-14
102.4	176.3	67.6	52.5	12.8	51	37	12	ind, strut located by a lateral link and an anti-roll bar, coil springs	ind, strut located by 1 trailing link and 2 lateral links, coil springs	vented disc/disc	Firestone FR480, P175/70R-14
90.0	145.5	60.4	53.7	9.2	46	33	10	ind, strut located by a lateral link and an anti-roll bar, coil springs	ind, trailing arm, coil springs	vented disc/drum	Bridgestone SF-405, P165/65R-13
93.7	161.8	64.8	53.2	11.9	49	34	11	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	rigid axle integral with two trailing arms and an anti-roll bar Panhard rod, coil springs	disc/drum	Dunlop SP RS All Season, P155/80R-13

overhead-cam 1.6-liter four, the only sixteen-valve engine in this test, produces a healthy 110 horsepower—17 horsepower more than the next most powerful player.

Not surprisingly, the Sentra ran away with the test-track honors. Check out the

results: 0 to 60 mph in 8.4 seconds, the quarter-mile in 16.7 seconds at 82 mph, a top speed of 111 mph. No other car even came close.

The 1.6-liter is a peaky engine, producing maximum power at a lofty 6000 rpm.

But that peakiness merely adds to the excitement of the car. And because the engine is as smooth as it is powerful, it's a pleasure to rev hard. No wonder the engine received a perfect "10" in the voting.

The standard transmission is a four-speed manual, which might at first seem a disappointment. But thanks in large part to the engine's smooth and quiet nature, none of our testers seemed to miss having a fifth cog. Indeed, we all liked the four-speed, filling the logbook with remarks like "great shifter" and "shifter could hardly be improved upon."

Complementing the Sentra's winning drivetrain is a taut, responsive suspension. "Best ride/handling compromise of the bunch," wrote one editor, adding, "damping is near-perfect." Wrote another: "Well-balanced chassis—makes good use of the engine's power."



Nissan Sentra E

Highs: Smooth and potent engine, responsive chassis, fine cabin.

Lows: Lacking in amenities.

The Verdict: The runaway choice for enthusiasts on a budget.



C/D Test Results		acceleration, sec						top speed, mph	braking, 70-0 mph, ft
		0-60 mph	0-90 mph	1/4-mile	street start, 5-60 mph	top gear, 30-50 mph	top gear, 50-70 mph		
	EAGLE SUMMIT	10.2	29.5	17.8 @ 76 mph	10.8	11.5	13.0	102	211
	FORD ESCORT	9.8	26.1	17.5 @ 77 mph	10.2	12.8	14.0	107	227
	FORD FESTIVA GL	10.5	42.7	18.0 @ 74 mph	11.0	14.5	18.8	96	216
	GEO METRO	13.1	56.9	19.1 @ 70 mph	13.6	15.2	19.1	95	220
	HONDA CIVIC CX	11.2	36.1	18.3 @ 73 mph	11.7	17.0	19.6	99	214
	HYUNDAI EXCEL GS	10.6	30.7	18.0 @ 76 mph	11.0	12.3	14.8	102	209
	MAZDA 323	9.9	28.0	17.5 @ 77 mph	10.5	12.8	14.1	104	202
	NISSAN SENTRA E	8.4	21.4	16.7 @ 82 mph	9.1	10.1	11.3	111	187
	PLYMOUTH SUNDANCE AMERICA	10.5	31.5	17.9 @ 75 mph	11.3	15.0	18.2	104	200
	SATURN SL	9.9	27.4	17.6 @ 77 mph	10.3	13.1	15.4	105	202
	SUBARU JUSTY GL	11.3	45.0	18.4 @ 72 mph	11.9	12.5	17.8	95	198
	TOYOTA TERCEL	11.1	36.3	18.2 @ 74 mph	11.8	13.0	14.7	99	206

Ford Escort

Highs: Spacious interior, torquey engine, expensive-car manners and feel.

Lows: Coarse-sounding engine, short on extras.

The Verdict: The versatility winner, an econocar that does everything well.



But several editors were less than enthralled with an annoying on-center dead-spot in the steering, which made it difficult to make fine directional adjustments. Others complained that the nonassisted steering is too heavy at low speeds.

Thanks to its clean shape and excellent

ergonomics, the Sentra is a car that even nonenthusiasts will appreciate. "Short on amenities but doesn't look cheap," wrote one editor. "The dash and interior look almost as pleasing as in the highest-line Sentra," wrote another. And the Sentra has a huge trunk—a big plus for

those long weekend road trips.

At \$9931 as tested, the Sentra E is the closest thing you can get to a BMW 325i with a four-figure sticker.

BEST PEOPLE MOVER

Ford Escort

If we were bestowing a Swiss Army Knife Versatility Award, Ford's popular Escort would be the recipient. It won the *Best People Mover* category, finished second in *Most Fun to Drive*, and fifth in *Best Value*.

This is a solid, substantial car. Compared with the others in this group, it feels wide and notably well planted on the road—even though its exterior dimensions are only slightly larger than the group average.

The interior is huge—our tallest editor proclaimed the Escort's back seat the most accommodating for his legs, though a few long-of-torso editors found that when sitting bolt upright in back their heads would just brush the roof. Excellent seats (the rear seat folds down for carrying large loads) complement the cabin's room, leading one editor to call the Escort "the limousine of the bunch."

The cockpit is cleanly designed, with rich-looking materials and no-nonsense gauges. The shifter and pedals are well placed. The steering wheel is a meaty, pleasing-to-grip design.

Yet for being such a commodious piece, the Escort is also strong on performance. The 1.9-liter four delivers 88 horsepower, enough to clock sprints to 60 mph in 9.8 seconds. More important, the engine pulls strongly from low revs, making for excellent response in traffic.

Not everyone liked the engine's song, however—the logbook contained several

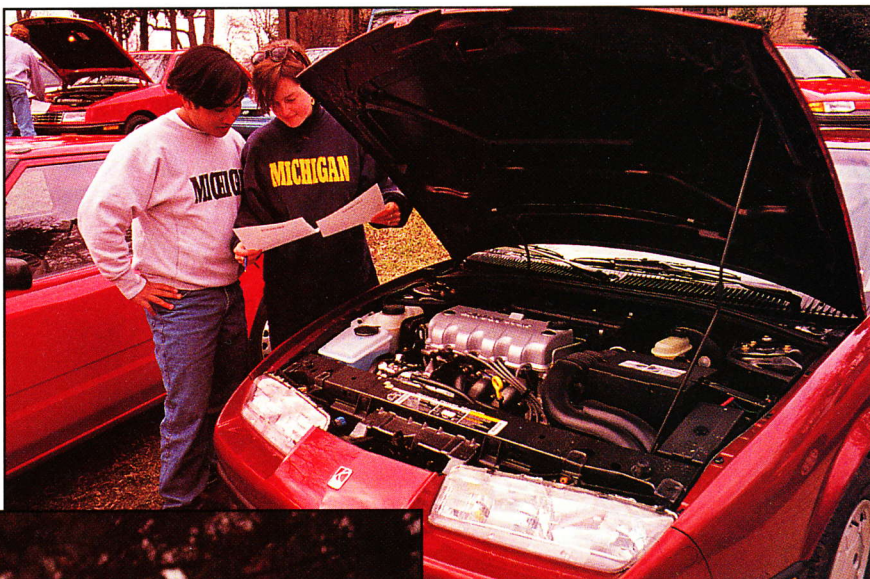
roadholding, 300-ft skidpad, g	interior sound level, dBA				fuel economy, mpg		
	idle	full throttle	70-mph cruising	70-mph coasting	EPA city	EPA highway	C/D observed
0.74	45	85	75	74	31	36	31
0.73	48	79	74	74	30	37	28
0.71	46	89	76	76	35	41	33
0.73	49	83	75	74	46	50	39
0.76	43	85	76	75	42	48	41
0.71	47	84	75	74	29	36	31
0.75	50	80	77	76	29	37	26
0.72	42	90	72	72	29	37	26
0.75	55	85	74	74	26	32	22
0.74	47	83	72	72	28	38	25
0.72	51	84	78	77	33	37	32
0.76	46	81	76	75	32	37	32

references to a “coarse” and “thrashy” sound that worsens as revs build. Still, the engine managed to earn a “9” in the editors’ voting.

The chassis combines a supple ride with secure, rewarding handling—under its unassuming clothes, this is a real driver’s car. Lock it onto the highway at 80 mph and it will happily arrow along all day.

Stickered at \$9741, the Escort is a tad short on amenities. But it has the important goods, including intermittent wipers and power steering (a dealer-installed radio is extra).

Concluded one of our hard-to-please editors: “I could live very contentedly with this one.”



Saturn SL

Highs: Bounteous features, poised chassis, substantial demeanor.

Lows: Thrashy engine, low back seat.

The Verdict: The luxury econocar, tightly built and brimming with niceties.

Editors' Ratings		engine	trans- mission	brakes	handling	ride	driver comfort/ ergonomics	back-seat room/ comfort	cargo utility	fit and finish/ quality	features/ amenities	styling
	EAGLE SUMMIT	8	8	6	7	8	8	8	7	8	5	7
	FORD ESCORT	9	9	5	8	9	9	8	8	8	6	7
	FORD FESTIVA GL	6	7	6	6	7	7	8	6	8	6	7
	GEO METRO	5	7	5	5	6	7	6	5	6	7	7
	HONDA CIVIC CX	7	9	6	8	8	8	7	7	9	9	9
	HYUNDAI EXCEL GS	7	8	7	6	8	8	8	7	8	10	7
	MAZDA 323	9	9	7	8	8	8	8	8	9	6	6
	NISSAN SENTRA E	10	9	9	8	9	9	7	9	9	5	8
	PLYMOUTH SUNDANCE AMERICA	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	7	8	7
	SATURN SL	8	8	7	8	8	8	7	10	8	10	7
	SUBARU JUSTY GL	6	7	8	6	7	8	6	7	7	9	6
	TOYOTA TERCEL	8	8	7	8	8	8	7	9	9	4	8
HOW IT WORKS: Editors rate vehicles from 1 to 10 (10 being best) in each category, then scores are collected and averaged, resulting in the numbers shown above.												



BEST VALUE

Saturn SL

To the question, "What's the most car I can get for \$10,000?" the indisputable answer is the made-in-America Saturn SL.

The Saturn's equipment list alone would thrill any budget shopper. The \$9809 as-tested price includes intermittent wipers, a tachometer, tilt steering (the only car in the group to have it), dual mirrors, a remote hatch release, and a four-speaker AM/FM/cassette sound system. All of which added up to a "10" in our features rating.

The Saturn offers the most of any car in this test. At 176.3 inches overall, the SL is the longest car in this review by almost

five inches. It is the widest and, at 102.4 inches, has the longest wheelbase. It's also the only four-door in the group, and it comes with a spacious trunk.

The Saturn's cabin is agreeably finished and shows obvious attention to detail. Fit and finish are impressive. Overall roominess is good too, though the front seats suffer from a too-narrow backrest and the rear-seat cushion is placed too low to the floor, resulting in a "knees-up" sitting position.

Motorized passive belts are standard. An air bag is optional for \$625, which would have put the Saturn over our price limit—without eliminating the irritating motorized belts.

The Saturn's 1.9-liter four makes 85 horsepower at 5000 rpm and delivers a 0-to-60-mph time of 9.9 seconds. It's not an

appealing engine to the ears, however. "Beyond 3000 rpm, aural assault begins," was one of several similar comments. The SL's standard five-speed shifter is fine and light, with a slightly notchy feel.

The suspension is well balanced between ride and handling. From the log-book: "Ride is pleasantly firm without being harsh. Chassis controls body motions well, and the car seems nicely tied down," and "Good chassis composure and lots of stick."

Also commended was Saturn's overall quality. "Seems to have been assembled with great care," wrote one editor. Said another: "The Saturn offers a look and feel of substance—as if it belonged in a higher class of cars."

It doesn't take a college education to appreciate value like that. ●



Road warriors who did not fit in back seat of Geo Metro take matters into their own hands, introducing new parking techniques.

The Winners		FUN TO DRIVE	BEST PEOPLE MOVER	BEST VALUE
	EAGLE SUMMIT	72	80	76
	FORD ESCORT	85	90	84
	FORD FESTIVA GL	66	76	66
	GEO METRO	58	68	63
	HONDA CIVIC CX	78	78	77
	HYUNDAI EXCEL GS	72	84	87
	MAZDA 323	84	83	87
	NISSAN SENTRA E	89	88	83
	PLYMOUTH SUNDANCE AMERICA	66	81	74
	SATURN SL	78	87	91
	SUBARU JUSTY GL	65	69	68
	TOYOTA TERCEL	80	83	89
	An average of editors' ratings on a scale of 1 to 100.			