

"Owner's Report" On Best, Worst Passenger Cars

Are you satisfied with your car? How could the manufacturer improve performance, comfort, fuel economy, construction and maintenance? What accessories have you bought for your car?

These are some of the questions we asked randomly selected pickup owners in an effort to highlight those pickups that perform with flying colors and to pinpoint the lemons that fail because of poor performance, or failure of the dealer or company to provide service.

Here's how the survey shaped up:

"We've had nothing but problems from day one," says Dennis Johnson, Shabbona, Ill., about his 1985 Pontiac STE 6000. "The fuel pump's been replaced twice, the computer brain replaced once, the stereo failed, and we installed new wiper and fog light switches. It gets poor gas mileage and backfires. If the engine were replaced these problems might be solved and it might have more 'get up and go'. It also needs more leg room for the driver. The dash is too low and gets in the way of our knees. We won't buy another GM car but we will buy American."

Jim Clemens, Corcoran, Minn., is happy with his 1986 Ford Escort. "It gets 36 mpg average, has sufficient room inside, is smooth-shifting, starts dependably, and gives a quiet ride. Maintenance is easy except for the oil filter, which is in a fairly hard to reach position."

"Everything is just right. They should make them all like this," says Albert Baerg, Abbotsford, British Columbia, about his "best buy" 1985 Volkswagen Jetta which he says gets as high as 70 mpg and averages 45 to 50 mpg.

George F. Flewelling, Woodstock, New Brunswick, has had good luck with his 1985 Dodge 4-door Aries. "We bought it with about 15,000 miles on it and it now has over 30,000 miles and has never caused a minute of trouble. We averaged over 37.5 mpg on a trip last year. Wouldn't know what improvements to make on this car."

"It's the top car in its class," says A.T. Haines, Vermilion, Alberta, about his 1986 Oldsmobile Delta 88 Brougham, noting that the only improvement it needs is in the area of fuel economy. He says he'd buy another one rather than a foreign model. "I prefer to buy Canadian or American-made cars since I live and work in North America but I think we should thank foreign car makers for putting some sense back into our manufacturers."

"We're extremely satisfied with our 1982 Chevrolet Chevette 4-door diesel. The first 17,000 miles we kept an accurate record and it averaged 42 1/2 mpg on both short and long runs. We wish it shifted easier, though," says Edward Reiter, Boscobel, Wis., who says that since GM recently stopped making the Chevette they'll buy an Olds Cutlass or Buick Century for their next car.

"This 5.7 liter diesel engine has 160,000 miles on it and the only major repair has been rebuilding the injection pump," says Greg Zellmer, Atlantic, Iowa, about his "best buy" 1981 Oldsmobile Cutlass.

Steve Coens, Reedsburg, Wis., is well-pleased with his 1987 Plymouth Voyager mini-van. "We've only had it for 6,000 miles but we've had no trouble. It has enough passing power and excellent

visibility. Mileage is 19 to 22 mpg, which I think could be improved. I fitted it with running boards which helps get in, keeps mud off and keeps rocks from chipping paint."

"Our 1983 AMC Eagle wagon rides well and plows through a lot of snow even when it's out of 4-WD. It's also fantastically well-built. A friend slammed his full-size Ford pickup into the back of the car. There was almost no damage to the car but the pickup looked like he'd wrapped it around a tree," says Angela Fischer, Marlette, Mich., who notes that the car has a problem carburetor. "It's been adjusted twice and now the choke keeps sticking. Gas mileage isn't very good at 17 to 20. No one seems to know how to work on the carburetor. If they improved the carburetor, we'd buy another Eagle."

Roger Jones, Frankfort, Kan., owns a 1983 Buick Lesabre Ltd. "It has 75,000 miles on it with just minor repairs. It burns no oil, gets around 20 mpg and gives a good ride. However, it had a poor paint job on the trunk lid and, after a few washings, the primer showed through so I had to repaint it. Also, the catalytic converter plugged after the first 20,000 miles."

John Lubben, Baldwin, Iowa, likes his 1986 Chevrolet Caprice Classic. "Excellent performance, good mileage, and plenty of head room for driver. Very comfortable for up to six people. One thing I don't like is the fact that I can't choose more practical upholstery in more expensive models. We live in a dusty area and don't like dark interiors."

"I had a small problem with the heating system but the dealer promptly fixed it. Really like the front-wheel drive, especially on icy roads. Fuel economy could be improved, even though it does reach 28 to 30 mpg on the highway," says Laverne Bohnhoff, New England, N. Dak. about his 1986 Buick Park Avenue.

"Our 1984 Chevrolet Chevette 4-door is built tight, handles well, and is very good on gas at 30 to 35 mpg. The automatic transmission is very good and my wife likes it but it has no passing power on the highway. We had a 1981 Chevette with a 4-speed and it had more zip and got 35 to 40 mpg. Maintenance is simple. Our 1981 model had 97,000 miles and still ran 2,500 miles before it needed oil," says Donald L. Tank, Blencoe, Iowa.

"This 1987 Dodge Omni is fun to drive and gets fair gas mileage but 1st and 5th gear are geared too high, as is reverse. Fifth is geared so high it's useless under legal speed limits. They could also make the engine a bit easier to work on," says Keith Massart, Algoma, Wis.

August Tammen, Pawnee Rock, Kan., owns a 1986 Chrysler Fifth Avenue.

"It's the nicest car we ever owned. Handles well, is well-balanced, and it's a pleasure to drive. My only complaint is that it's hard to see the speedometer when the sun shines in at a certain angle."

"With the price of cars approaching 1/2 the price of a modest home, you should have a right to expect near-perfect construction. Every car sold in the Midwest should have rust-proofing and undercoating standard from the factory, and a better paint job," says Dan Hanson, Nauvoo, Ill., who's satisfied overall with his 1984 Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera with a V-6 diesel. "It has ample room for 4 or 5 people, handling is good, and it gets between 30 and 40 mph."

"We like our 1984 Lincoln Town Car. It's smooth-riding and economical. The 302 cu. in. fuel injected engine, with overdrive, gets 28 to 32 mpg. Our only problems were that the door strips didn't last long and we had dust leaks," says Greg Skoropadyk, Two Mills, Alberta.

J.G. Hinde, Calgary, Alberta, owns a 1985 Toyota Celica GTS. "We've been sold on Toyota since we bought our first one in 1972. They make a superior car in every way that also has great resale value. The Celica has the zip to move in and out of traffic, an excellent engine, stability with no rattles, handles well, looks good, and is an all-around excellent value. Could use a little more headroom, however."

"Our 1983 Ford Ltd with a 3.8 liter V-6 engine runs great if you use super unleaded fuel but anything less will result in engine run-on when you shut off. Also, the OEM shocks that came on the car only last about 15,000 miles and then the car turned into a rubber ball. Overall, though, we're satisfied because the car gets 25 mpg or more on the highway and 22 in town. Comfortably holds five adults," says Christopher Tull, Lafayette, Ind.

Ron Briggs, Porter, Minn., doesn't like his 1984 Ford Escort wagon. "Lots of road noise, especially on gravel roads. Could also use more leg and head room. Should have full undercoating. I put a rear wind deflector on to keep the rear window clean and it does a real good job."

"I put an air pump on my 1984 Ford Ltd so I can inflate the tires at any time," says Carl Wegmeyer, Lachine, Mich., who's happy with the car.

"Our 1981 Cadillac Sedan DeVille

"There's a leak of diesel smoke into the inside of the car"

diesel has been a real pain. It was undrivable until we took it to a diesel injection shop and had it fixed. No Cadillac dealer was able to do anything with it. There's still a leak of diesel smoke into the inside of the car that's so bad the upholstery is yellow with smoke. The dealer can't find the problem and we

gave up trying to get satisfaction from the company. Since it hit 50,000 miles, it's been running well," says John May, Inverness, Mont.

William L. Tull, Shelbyville, Illinois owns a 1982 Mercedes Benz 240D. "It gets 40 mpg. in summer and has been no trouble at all. Very dependable and still looks like a new car. Handles nicely and has a good paint job."

"This is our fifth Honda Accord since 1978," says H.G. Westney, Pickering, Ont., who now owns a 1986 model. "We're satisfied. Our only complaint is that although everything else is standard, air conditioning costs an extra \$1,200. Seems too expensive."

"The 1983 Mercury Grand Marquis has all the options you could want and works great. A real good ride. On long trips it gets up to 22 mpg but short mileage could be improved. Also, the car has some wind noise under the doors that the dealer hasn't been able to solve," says David Heng, Gilman, Iowa.

"I think Oldsmobile has a good diesel engine," says Harley Schut, Hopkins, Mich., pleased with his 1982 Oldsmobile Delta 88 diesel. "A few years ago people were critical of diesel cars but I think that if you take care of them they'll give good performance and last a long time. We love both our car and diesel-powered pickup."

Wayne Jenkins, Springville, Iowa, owns a 1985 Dodge Diplomat. "I like the ease of handling, ride, and general good construction. On the negative side, I'm having a problem with the ignition. The computer is somehow receiving a false signal at times which causes it to miss. In 15,000 miles, they haven't found the cause. Wish the engine and components weren't so complicated so you could work on them yourself."

"I've very happy with our 1983 Chevrolet Suburban with a 6.2 diesel. Gets good fuel mileage, is comfortable and roomy, and inexpensive to operate. They could improve it by keeping dirt off rear window and tailgate," says Jim Deibert, Colby, Kan.

Jim Runneberg, Laurens, Iowa, is pleased with his 1984 Chevrolet Cavalier Wagon. "Has required only routine maintenance and service in the 2 1/2 years we have owned it. Offers reasonable comfort for a subcompact car and gets 27 to 30 mpg in normal highway driving. One negative is that the car has a sport suspension which results in a rather firm ride."

"We're generally well-satisfied with our 1983 Ford Fairmont but the seats are uncomfortable and there's not much leg room for front passengers," says Clifford Nerem, Deering, N. Dak.

"It has 99,000 miles and, outside of a battery and two sets of tires, I've only put on shocks and spark plugs. The brakes and muffler are still good and it uses no oil at all. Always starts right off," says Harry J. Anderson, Hawkeye, Iowa, about his "best buy" 1979 Ford LTD.

Robert Gotzman, Ellsworth, Wis., has had bad luck with his 1986 Ford Escort. "The transmission is very difficult to get into reverse and it won't stay in gear. The front-end shimmies, the windshield