

Factory custom packages that don't come in plain brown wrappers

by Chuck Nerpel and John Ethridge

A TRIO OF SUPER COUPES



The market for performance cars, those with either mechanical options, cosmetic add-ons or a combination of both, is very healthy. Even with scaled-down overall and engine sizes, the "specials" continue to attract enough customers to encourage car makers to build special editions. Two-door coupes are the favorite body styles for the factory customizers, probably because of their "sporty" configurations, and, of course, the spoilers and air dams look

a lot better on these than on a big 4-door.

While the American auto makers dressed up their cars with all of the cosmetic goodies customizers had been installing for years, the European marques continued to produce very acceptable styling without the extras our domestic manufacturers recognized as sales boosters. Imported car

dealers got on the bandwagon, however, by "loading" their more popular models with everything in the book—with an attitude toward customers of "take it or leave it." Custom striping, name ap-

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pliques, "mag" wheels, spoilers, air dams and fender flares were among the extra-cost items that boosted the \$4000 sticker price of a subcompact to nearly \$6000 by the time the buyer got it out the door. Some of these extras were not very well tuned to the overall engineering of the vehicle, and many a customer wondered why his car handled poorly or the tires wore rapidly, while the blame could be laid to the wrong rear wheel offset being used in the independent suspension. What the owner does to his car after purchase is his problem, but the dealer modifications reflected on the

manufacturer if the car did not perform well because of the bolt-on engineering done at the dealer level. Product reliability is the responsibility of the manufacturer, and he is concerned and bound by law to stand behind the product.

So, now we have the important factory "specials," engineered and tested for reliability, yet "loaded" with those often-attractive styling touches and tuned for better handling and performance.

The Super Coupes are in. As an example of what is available from the U.S., Germany and Japan, *Motor Trend* selected Ford's Fairmont ESO, Honda's Ac-

cord LX and VW's Scirocco Sidewinder, all special editions of compact or subcompact coupes that can be ordered as complete packages right from the dealer. Affordable, reliable and carrying the full manufacturer's warranty, factory modifications are aimed at owners who want something different in a production car without the extra cost of having it done by an outside shop or the problems of getting it repaired either in or out of warranty. These three examples are exciting cars, a fair cut above those sold *en masse* as pure stockers and packaged as complete with no extras.

FORD FAIRMONT ESO

The Fairmont is very Continental in concept to begin with, more so than anything else produced by Ford or anyone else on this side of the water. It is lightweight, compact in overall dimensions but with generous interior accommodations for passengers and luggage, and produces acceptable performance and economy with smaller (by domestic standards) engines. But it doesn't look very Continental, bearing instead a strong resemblance to the Ford family of cars.

Recognizing this from the beginning, Ford product planners came up with a fix in the form of the ESO (for European Sport Option) for those Fairmont buyers who want their cars to appear, as well as act and feel, Continental. When this package is ordered you get a blacked-out grille, deluxe bumpers, black cowl grille, bright belt moldings, black window frames, black quarter window ventilation louvers, vinyl insert body moldings, black lower body panels, black outside mirrors and special wheel covers. Inside, you get grey engine-turned appearance instrument panel and cluster appliques, a black sport steering wheel insert and steering column. All other interior components are either black or chamois color. And to top it all off you get a special suspension that includes a rear stabilizer bar.

The external appearance stuff really produces the desired effect, particularly the black lower body panels. The car looks even lower and smaller than it is, and there is now a purposeful, made-for-the-road aura about the whole car. The wheels shown on our test car in the photos, by the way, are the handsome extra-cost light alloy items offered by the factory, not the wheel covers referred to in the ESO package.

A perfectly standard Fairmont isn't a bit shabby when it comes to handling and does a highly creditable job of negotiating any kind of road whether the surface is good or atrocious. But the ESO suspension is even better and gives the



car a taut, responsive feel without marring the ride. With the additional rear stabilizer bar, roll stiffness is increased, resulting in less body lean when cornering and lightning-quick steering response. Steering is more nearly neutral, whereas the standard car is a strong understeerer.

Fingertip controls for the horn, wiper/washer, light beams, etc., are fairly new here but have been commonplace for years on European cars. They take some getting used to for anyone accustomed solely to a diet of domestic cars, but most people prefer them after using

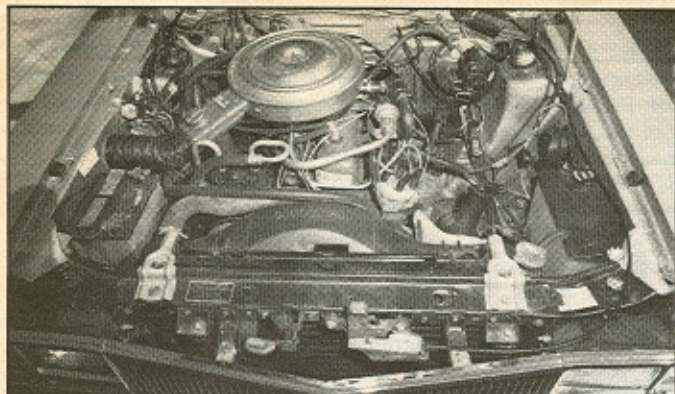
them for awhile. It beats fumbling all over the instrument panel for the wipers when rain is suddenly encountered. The rear window defogger is quite logically grouped with the heater, blower and defroster controls, a trick that even some of the foreign cars could use.

The legibility of the Fairmont's instruments, day and night, is vastly superior to what is found on the typical domestic, with one minor exception: The odometer window could use better lighting.

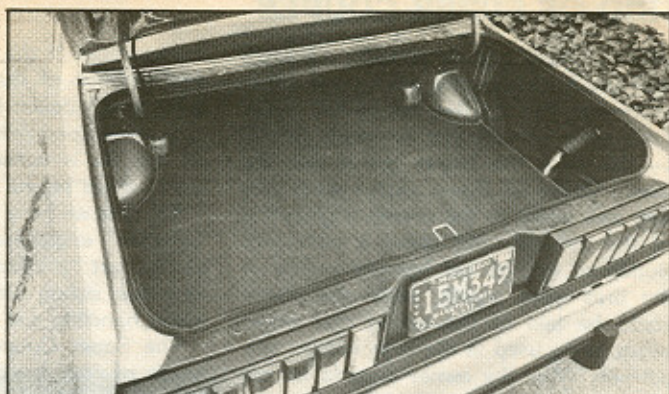
The bucket seats in our test Fairmont were both liked and disliked by members of our staff, with opinions being divided according to individual physiques. Our medium-to-small staffers either had no comments or liked the seats, where those who come in large to extra-large sizes tended to grumble. The seats have no adjustment whatsoever except fore and aft, and they could use a little more aft for taller people. A reclining feature or a seatback rake adjustment would be a most welcome addition and would no doubt eliminate most of the gripes.

The 200cid six that our test car had isn't exactly the powerhouse of the Ford engine lineup and, as a matter of fact, produces a few less horsepower than does the 2.3-liter (140cid) four that is the standard engine for the car. Its torque, however, comes lower in its speed range, making it more desirable for all-around service. Thanks to the Fairmont's weight-saving design, however, the six does a better than satisfactory job of propelling the car, even through an automatic transmission. The next step up is the 5-liter V-8 which adds 255 pounds of total weight to the car, with 231 pounds of this falling on the front wheels. When this and the six's economy are considered, it is believed the six is a better choice for most people, unless a lot of heavy hauling is expected, in which case the V-8 would be better.

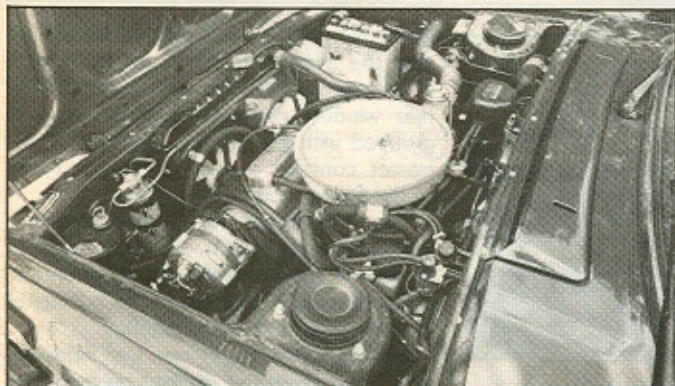
So, that's how the Fairmont ESO stacks up in the Super Coupe race. It, too, comes off quite well when compared with more expensive offerings, both from without and within this country. Compared to the other two Super Coupes presented here, it's roomier, has a cav-



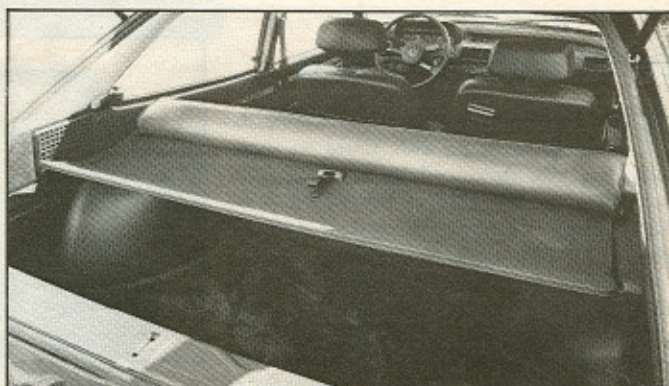
Engine compartment of Fairmont has conventional layout for in-line six, and access to points and plugs is convenient.



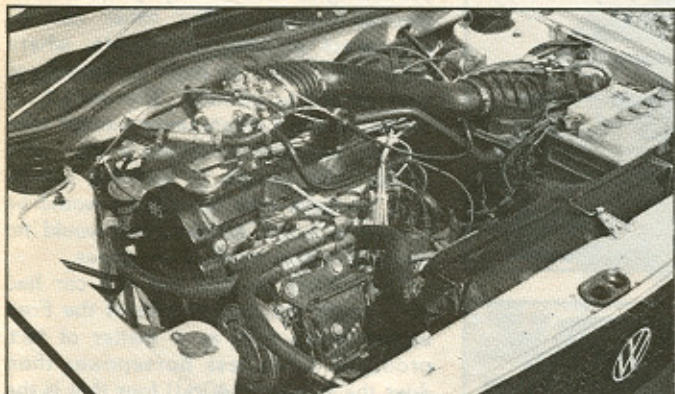
Fairmont trunk is large and smoothly finished, has spare tire in well under upholstered mat.



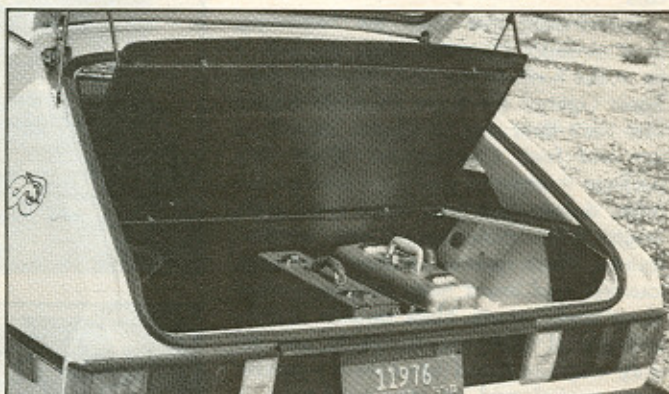
Accord with transverse CVCC engine has large air cleaner with outside intake and twin electric cooling fans.



Rear shelf above lower cargo area provides security for luggage in that area. Rear seatback folds to increase capacity.



Fuel-injected transverse Scirocco engine provides uncluttered ease of access to plugs and distributor.



Rear luggage area has security shelf that raises with hatch or can be removed for carrying bulky cargo.

ernous trunk and would be a leading candidate where a family figure into the equation. It's the only one with any kind of engine choice, and there are three to pick from. Its automatic transmission is truly automatic, and there's also a choice of a 4-speed. And it's not lacking in the fun-to-drive department. Perhaps of importance, depending on where you live, is the comforting fact that dealers and service outlets are everywhere.

If you're the type who requires excitement along with utility, the Fairmont ESO gives a good measure of both.

HONDA ACCORD LX

Ever since its introduction the Honda Accord has enjoyed acceptance by car buyers that has been the envy of the industry. In most areas of the country demand has so far outstripped supply

that dealers have been asking and getting prices far in excess of list for this Japanese import. Typically, the practice has been to add every conceivable accessory and gewgaw in order to build prices and profits to premium levels. In some instances dealers haven't bothered to add anything, except a fat margin to the factory-recommended retail price. Chevrolet, earlier this year, purchased a number of imports in the Los Angeles area as part of a program to acquaint its dealers and salesmen with the competition. They were more than a little taken aback to find that, when it came to the Accord, they were forced to shell out \$500 in excess of the window sticker price in order to persuade a Honda dealer to part with one.

Much of the appeal that the Accord has stems from the fact that it comes

standard with a long list of luxury and convenience features and equipment befitting an expensive limousine. It's also chock-full of instruments and replete with reclining bucket seats and a sporty steering wheel with fingertip control stalks, putting it on equal footing in this regard with the best European sports sedans. And underneath all of this are advanced technical features such as a stratified charge engine that runs happily on any kind of gas and doesn't require a catalytic converter, 4-wheel independent suspension with negative steering roll radius, and dual diagonal brake circuits.

To the above add quietness of operation, top fuel economy and lively performance, and it becomes more understandable why so many have found the Accord nigh irresistible. And happily for those who have bought them, these cars

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enjoy an excellent reputation for reliable, trouble-free service.

In short, the Accord has almost everything, but not quite, and that's where the LX model that is the subject of this test comes in. No doubt taking note of what the dealers have been doing, the factory decided to add some equipment of its own. Added as standard on the Accord LX are air conditioning, a rigid tonneau cover (to hide the contents of the luggage compartment), a digital clock with nice large numerals, AM/FM/stereo cassette sound, steel-belted radials, special tricote fabric interior in burgundy color, a choice of either silver or maroon metallic paint, and power steering.

When we first learned of the power steering it seemed to us that Honda was

gilding the lily, because the Accord gets by nicely without it. But upon driving the LX we changed our opinion and decided that it's desirable, after all. It has a wonderful feel and overcomes every trace of heaviness that the standard steering has when executing parking maneuvers. The LX steering has a variable assist feature (as opposed to variable ratio) that provides full power at low speeds, yet retains road feel at highway speeds.

When the LX is specified, the list of available options becomes very short, with mag wheels, stripes and the Hondamatic 2-speed semi-automatic transmission being pretty much the sum of it. If the latter is installed, by the way, both fuel economy and performance will be significantly lower. It should also be noted that economy and performance for

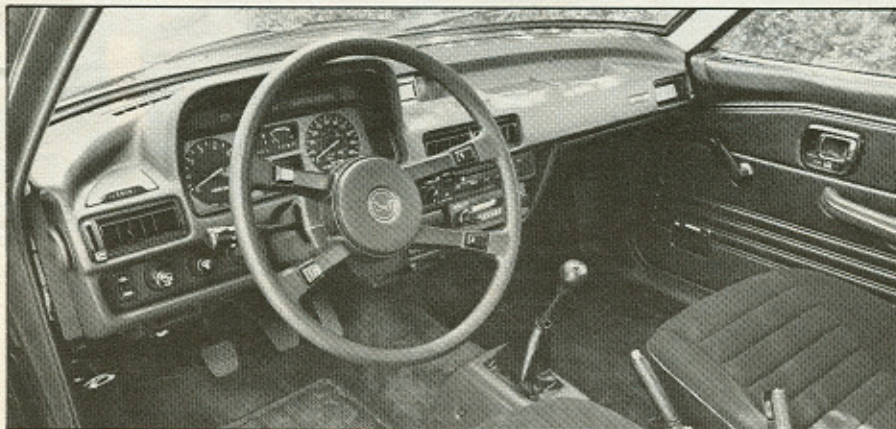
49-state 5-speeds will be even better than that recorded in the specification tables for our test car, which was a California car.

Our test car, or any Accord, is a joy to drive under any conditions and particularly so in the rain. It rained lots during the time we tested it, and it became our favorite conveyance for inclement weather. The rear wiper/washer and defogger permitted an unobstructed view of the scene behind us, making lane changes and whatnot in heavy traffic safe and efficient maneuvers. The front-drive stability and being able to get all of the engine's power to rain-slick streets was continually appreciated, too. We have never driven one of these in snow or freezing rain, but we imagine it would do well under such conditions also.

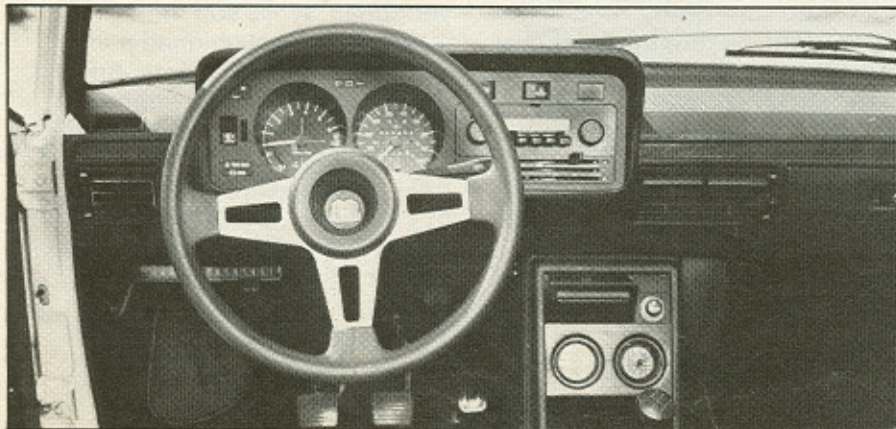
If one were to sum up the Accord LX by saying that it has everything, that would scarcely be an exaggeration. Comparing it with cars costing two, three or four times as much will bring this point into focus. If your taste in super coupes leans toward civilized, genteel luxury blended with uncommon fuel economy, this is a car you must consider. You'd be prepared for just about anything, come gasoline shortages or high water.



Ford Fairmont ESO



Honda Accord LX



VW Scirocco Sidewinder II

VW SCIROCCO SIDEWINDER II

Looking for an affordable compact economy vehicle that handles like a sports car with the utility of a 4-passenger coupe and the cargo capacity of a small station wagon? VW's Sidewinder package built around the Scirocco offers 2 plus 2 passenger space that converts to 2 plus lots of luggage space with a flick of the rear seat, powered by a lively SOHC fuel injected engine, front-wheel drive, rack and pinion steering and set off by distinctive Italian styling—all for \$6000 and change.

The exterior features wrap-around bumpers coated with scratch-resistant polyurethane and a front spoiler that has been aerodynamically tested to reduce drag under the car and around the front wheels. One thing that takes a bit of getting used to is the single center-mounted windshield wiper, but it lends a touch of LeMans racing to the overall feeling of the car.

The interior provides a secure kind of feeling as one slides into the front bucket seats of the Sidewinder. Its wing-like side bolsters really snug one down and give excellent support when rounding curves at the speed this little goer is capable of.

The SOHC 88.9cid 4-cylinder engine for the 1978 model Scirocco is slightly smaller than the '77, but performance has been improved to where it is at least equal to the larger powerplant and gets 1 mpg better gas mileage. Compared to the other super coupes tested, the Side-

ROAD TEST DATA

FORD FAIRMONT ESO

GENERAL

Vehicle type	FAIRMONT ESO Front-engine, rear-drive, 5-pass. coupe
Base price	\$3589
Options on test car	Straight-6 engine, air cond., ES option, pwr str., AM/FM cassette, misc.
Price as tested	\$6334

ENGINE

Type	OHV in-line six
Bore & stroke	3.68 x 3.13 in.
Displacement	200 cu. in.
Compression ratio	8.5:1
Fuel system	1-bbl
Recommended octane number	87 (index) min.
Emission control	Fed
Valve gear	OHV pushrod
Horsepower (SAE net)	85 at 2400 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	154 lb.-ft. at 1600 rpm
Power to weight ratio	32.7 lb./hp

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	3-speed auto.
Final drive ratio	3.08:1

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	105.5 in.
Track, F/R	56.6/57.0 in.
Length	195.8 in.
Width	71.0 in.
Height	53.5 in.
Ground clearance	4.61 in.
Max. load length w/rear seat(s) folded down	N.A.
Curb weight	2785 lb.
Weight distribution, F/R	1513/1270 lb.

CAPACITIES

Fuel capacity	16.0 gals.
Crankcase	4.5 qts.
Cooling system	9.7 qts.
Trunk capacity	16.1 cu. ft.

HONDA ACCORD LX

GENERAL

Vehicle type	Accord LX Front-engine, front-drive, 4-pass. 2-door hatchback
Base price	\$5645
Options on test car	none
Price as tested	\$5645

ENGINE

Type	In-line four, water-cooled, alum. head, cast iron block, 3-valve
Bore & stroke	2.91 x 3.66 in.
Displacement	97.6 cu. in.
Compression ratio	8.0:1
Fuel system	3-bbl carb
Recommended octane number	91 regular, low-lead or no-lead
Emission control	Cal. CVCC
Valve gear	OHC
Horsepower (SAE net)	68 at 5000 rpm

Torque (SAE net)	85 lb.-ft. at 3000 rpm
Power to weight ratio	30.54 lb./hp

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	5-speed
Final drive ratio	4.428:1

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	93.7 in.
Track, F/R	55.1/54.7 in.
Length	162.8 in.
Width	63.8 in.
Height	52.4 in.
Ground clearance	6.5 in.
Max. load length w/rear seat(s) folded down	52.0 in.
Curb weight	2077 lb.
Weight distribution, F/R	1259/818 lb.

CAPACITIES

Fuel capacity	13.2 gals.
Crankcase	3.8 qts.
Cooling system	6.1 qts.
Trunk capacity	21.6 cu. ft.

VW SCIROCCO SIDEWINDER II

GENERAL

Vehicle type	VW SIDEWINDER Front-engine, front-drive, 4-pass. coupe
Base price	\$6135
Options on test car	Special Sidewinder package
Price as tested	\$6135

ENGINE

Type	In-line transverse four, SOHC, aluminum head, cast iron block, 5 main bearings.
Bore & stroke	3.13 x 2.89 in.
Displacement	88.9 cu. in.
Compression ratio	8:1
Fuel system	Fuel injection
Recommended octane number	84-91 low lead (Calif. unleaded)
Emission control	Air injection (Calif. catalyst)
Valve gear	Cog-belt driven SOHC, cross-flow head

Horsepower (SAE net)	71 at 5800 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	73 lb.-ft. at 3500 rpm
Power to weight ratio	27.43 lb./hp

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	4-speed
Final drive ratio	3.90:1

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	94.5 in.
Track, F/R	54.7/53.5 in.
Length	155.7 in.
Width	63.9 in.
Height	51.5 in.
Ground clearance	4.6 in.
Max. load length w/rear seat(s) folded down	N.A.
Curb weight	1948 lb.
Weight distribution, F/R	1000/948 lb.

CAPACITIES

Fuel capacity	10.9 gals.
Crankcase	6.3 pints
Cooling system	4.9 qts.
Trunk capacity	12 cu. ft.

Ford Fairmont ESO

SUSPENSION

Front	Independent, McPherson Strut, anti-sway bar
Rear	Four-bar link coil spring, upper and lower control arms.

STEERING

Type	Rack and pinion, power-assisted
Turns lock-to-lock	3.1
Turning circle, curb-to-curb	39 ft.

BRAKES

Front	10.1 in. ventilated disc
Rear	9.0 in. drum

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size	14 x 5.0
Wheel type	Aluminum
Tire make and size	Firestone DR78-14
Tire type	Steel radial
Recommended pressure, F/R	26/26 psi

TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph	5.7 secs.
0-40 mph	8.4 secs.
0-50 mph	11.7 secs.
0-60 mph	16.6 secs.
0-70 mph	24.6 secs.
0-80 mph	N.A.
Top speed	N.A.
Standing quarter mile	20.4 secs./66.6 mph

BRAKING

30-0 mph	39.0 ft.
60-0 mph	186.0 ft.

FUEL CONSUMPTION

EPA city	19 mpg
EPA highway	26 mpg
EPA weighted average	22 mpg
MT 73-mile test loop	26.07mpg

SPEEDOMETER

Speedometer	30	40	50	60
Actual mph	29	38	48	57

Honda Accord LX

SUSPENSION

Front	Independent, McPherson struts, coil springs
Rear	Independent, McPherson struts, coil springs

STEERING

Type	Rack and pinion, power assisted
Turns lock-to-lock	3.1
Turning circle, curb-to-curb	32.9 ft.

BRAKES

Front	8.98-in. disc
Rear	7.09-in. drum

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size	13 x 4.5J
Wheel type	Pressed steel
Tire make and size	Goodrich 155SR13
Tire type	Steel radial
Recommended pressure, F/R	24/24 psi

TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph	4.9 secs.
0-40 mph	7.4 secs.
0-50 mph	10.5 secs.
0-60 mph	15.2 secs.
0-70 mph	21.7 secs.
0-80 mph	21.9 secs.
Top speed	98 mph (est.)
Standing quarter mile	19.3 secs./67.7 mph

BRAKING

30-0 mph	48.0 ft.
60-0 mph	177.0 ft.

FUEL CONSUMPTION

EPA city	30.6 mpg
EPA highway	41.8 mpg
EPA weighted average	34.8 mpg
MT 73-mile test loop	34.76 mpg

SPEEDOMETER

Speedometer	30	40	50	60
Actual mph	29	39	49	59

VW Sidewinder II

SUSPENSION

Front	Independent, McPherson struts
Rear	Independent, coil springs.

STEERING

Type	Rack and pinion
Turns lock-to-lock	3.85
Turning circle, curb-to-curb	31.2 ft.

BRAKES

Front	Discs, power assist
Rear	Drums, power assist

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size	13 in.
Wheel type	Alloy
Tire make and size	Continental 175/70 SR x 13
Tire type	Radial
Recommended pressure, F/R	27/27 psi

TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph	4.3 secs.
0-40 mph	6.9 secs.
0-50 mph	9.9 secs.
0-60 mph	14.6 secs.
0-70 mph	19.0 secs.
0-80 mph	26.1 secs.
Top speed	100 mph
Standing quarter mile	19.5 secs./72 mph

BRAKING

30-0 mph	23 ft.
60-0 mph	126 ft.

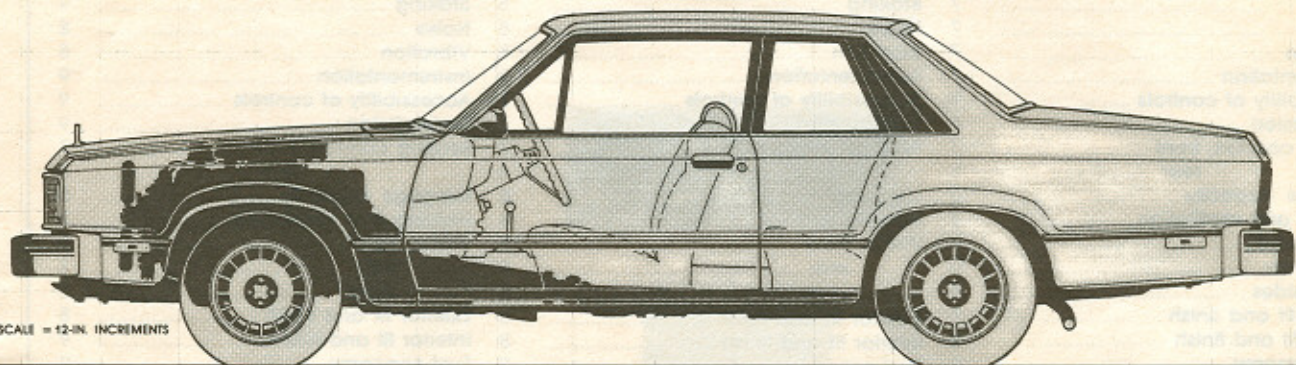
FUEL CONSUMPTION

EPA city	25 mpg
EPA highway	38 mpg
EPA weighted average	32.15 mpg
MT 73-mile test loop	28.38 mpg

SPEEDOMETER

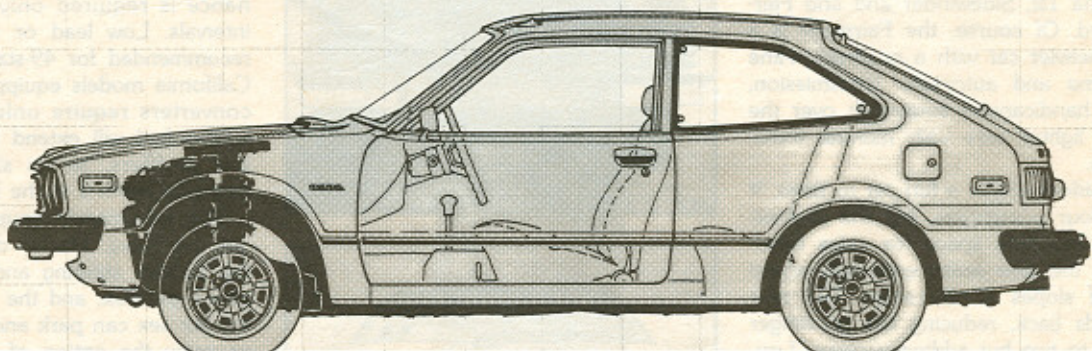
Speedometer	30	40	50	60
Actual mph	27	37	47	57

FORD FAIRMONT ESO

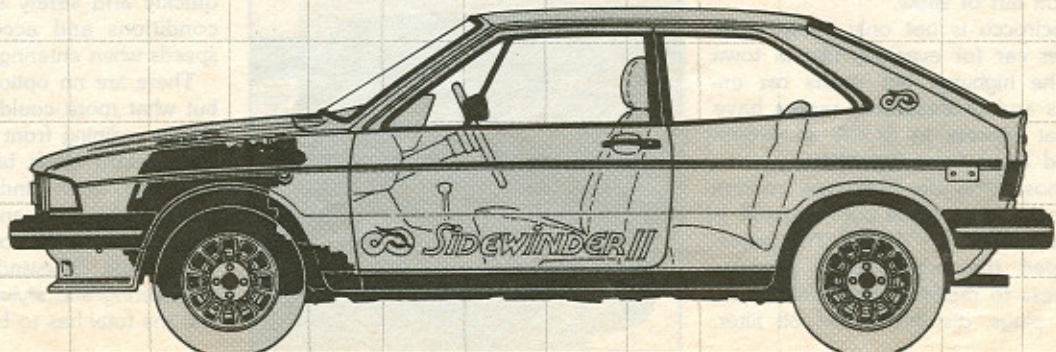


SCALE = 12-IN. INCREMENTS

HONDA ACCORD LX



VW SCIROCCO SIDEWINDER II



MT STAFF RATINGS

(On a scale of 1-10;
10=excellent, 1=poor)

Fairmont ESO

Performance	7
Ride	8
Handling	8
Steering	6
Braking	7
Noise	7
Vibration	7
Instrumentation	7
Accessibility of controls	9
Transmission	8
Seating comfort, front	3
rear	5
Luggage capacity	10
Heating and ventilation	8
Vision, front	8
rear	8
sides	8
Exterior fit and finish	7
Interior fit and finish	5
Fuel economy	9
Ease of entry and exit, front	9
rear	5
Average overall rating	7.2

Accord LX

Performance	7
Ride	7
Handling	7
Steering	8
Braking	5
Noise	8
Vibration	8
Instrumentation	9
Accessibility of controls	7
Transmission	7
Seating comfort, front	7
rear	6
Luggage capacity	8
Heating and ventilation	8
Vision, front	8
rear	8
sides	8
Exterior fit and finish	8
Interior fit and finish	8
Fuel economy	9
Ease of entry and exit, front	7
rear	5
Average overall rating	7.76

Sidewinder II

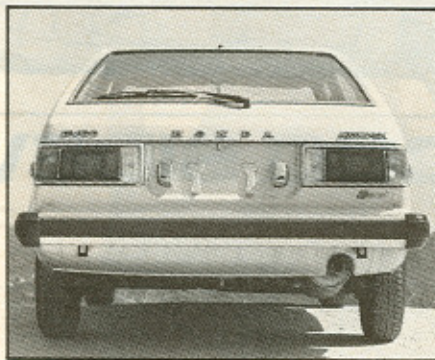
Performance	7
Ride	6
Handling	8
Steering	9
Braking	9
Noise	8
Vibration	8
Instrumentation	9
Accessibility of controls	9
Transmission	9
Seating comfort, front	7
rear	3
Luggage capacity	5
Heating and ventilation	7
Vision, front	8
rear	8
sides	8
Exterior fit and finish	8
Interior fit and finish	9
Fuel economy	9
Ease of entry and exit, front	6
rear	5
Average overall rating	7.5

winder has faster 0-70 times than the Fairmont ESO and the Honda LX. Quarter-mile speed also ranks above the others, but the elapsed time is a bit slower, and in a match race the finish would be Honda 1st, Sidewinder 2nd and Fairmont 3rd. Of course, the Fairmont is a larger, heavier car with a pushrod in-line six engine and automatic transmission, so it is handicapped somewhat over the smaller, lighter cars with manual transmissions.

The Sidewinder is a fun car to drive. It carries four passengers, but the six-footers will find little space for extra headroom in the rear seats, especially where the roof slopes at the sides. The rear seat folds back, reducing the passenger capacity to two but adding another 7 cubic feet to the luggage area. Handling is light and positive, and there is no torque steer effect (the tendency of some front-wheel-drives to pull the wheel right out of the driver's hands when the throttle is applied with the wheels turned sharply). However, there is plenty of torque, even in the higher gears, to literally pull the car through fast sweeping curves and, should the occasion arise, out of soft dirt or snow.

The Scirocco is not only a very agile passenger car for everyday use in town or on the highway, but sports car enthusiasts and professional racers have had great success in SCCA showroom stock and Trans-Am competition.

For those who do their own routine maintenance, the engine compartment is the home mechanic's dream. Transversely mounted, the engine layout provides easy access to radiator, windshield washer tank, plugs, distributor and oil filter.



As a carry over from the old reliable air-cooled flat four that powered the popular Beetle, VW has engineered the same kind of stability into this water cooled engine to the extent that routine maintenance is required only at 15,000-mile intervals. Low lead or unleaded fuel is recommended for 49-state cars, and the California models equipped with catalytic converters require unleaded only. Unleaded fuel will extend the life of plugs and mufflers, so its slight extra cost might be worth it in the long run.

This mini-muscle coupe has it all under the hood. Macho drivers will enjoy the positive steering and slick-shifting 4-speed gearbox, and the most delicate of the fair sex can park and drive with ease or enjoy the option of a 3-speed automatic transmission. The Scirocco is a very functional blend of performance, economy and comfort, as much at home in traffic as on a long highway trip. There are not too many cars in this size and price class that will do over 100 miles per hour and go nearly 400 on a tank of fuel (not, however, at 100 miles per hour). It is nice to have the capability right under the throttle pedal to pass quickly and safely under heavy traffic conditions and accelerate to freeway speeds when entering from an on-ramp.

There are no options for this package, but what more could one ask for? It includes reclining front bucket seats, tinted glass, quartz clock, tachometer, resettable odometer, rear window defogger, steel-belted radial tires and the Sidewinder II applique along the rocker panel.

Just add Sidewinder's very adequate engineering and styling qualities together and the total has to be a Super Coupe.