

COMPARISON TEST: FOUR SPORTS COUPES
Road Test: Lotus Elite with Buick V-8

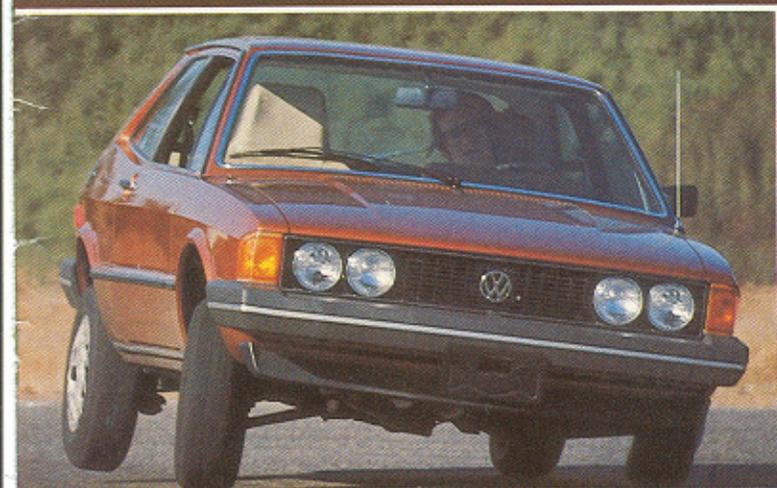
ROAD & TRACK

FEBRUARY 1978

UK 65P

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Renault's Le Car after 48,000 miles: *C'est si bon?*
5000 FACTS ON THE 1978 ENTHUSIAST CARS



VW SCIROCCO



TOYOTA CELICA GT LIFTBACK



HONDA ACCORD

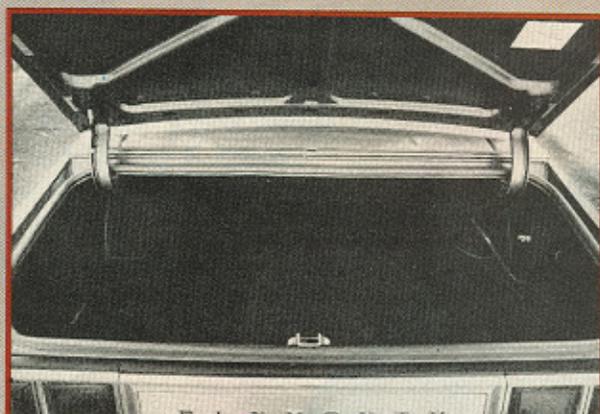


PLYMOUTH SAPPORO

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DYNAMIC DIFFERENCES

Front-wheel Drive vs Rear-wheel Drive



FOUR SPORTS COUPES

Combining the joy of sports car driving with the practicality of a sedan

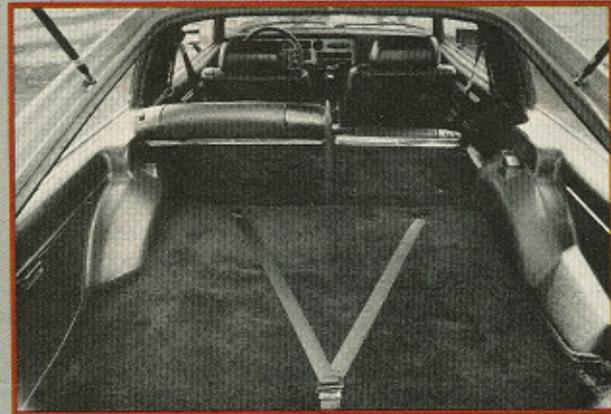
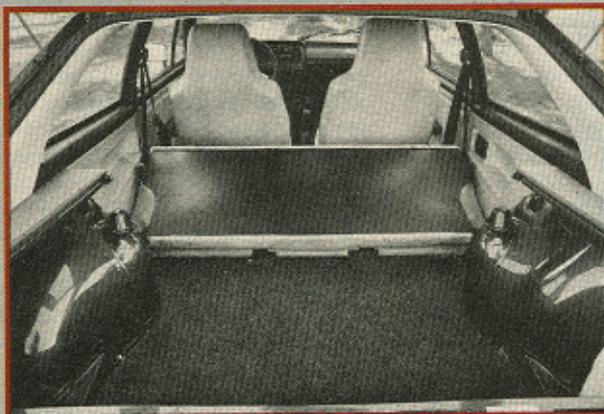
DURING THE PAST five years one of the fastest growing and most popular automobiles in America has been the sports coupe. As the car world has undergone extensive changes because of safety regulations, more and more enthusiasts have turned from 2-seaters in the classic sports car tradition to enclosed coupes that offer a reasonable compromise between the joy of

sports car driving and the practicality of a sedan.

Of the four sports coupes selected for this comparison, the Toyota Celica is the oldest, having been introduced to the U.S. market in 1971. For 1978, however, a complete restyling has given the Celica a thoroughly modern, crisp appearance. As we said in our road test of the new Celica in the January issue, the bold

restyling is combined with significant refinements underneath the sheet metal. Having praised the new Celica last month while evaluating it alone, we wondered how it would stack up against the competition.

The Honda Accord was introduced in 1976 and we labeled it the best automotive value in America at that time. We have conducted a 48,000-mile extended-use test on a 1976 model (R&T, December 1977) and concluded that it is still an excellent value. This comparison would give us the opportunity to measure the Accord head-to-head against some of its rivals and at the same time enable us to check out the differences (if any) between our 1976 model and a late 1977 car. We had requested a 1978 Accord LX, the new luxury version that includes among its standard features such items as



PHOTOS BY JOHN LAMM, JOE RUSZ, DEAN KOGA & KIRK WILLIS

power-assisted steering, air conditioning, luggage-area tonneau cover, digital clock, cassette tape player and steel-belted radial tires, but Honda had only two LXs in the U.S. at the time of the test and could not provide one. The power-assisted steering is a Honda variable-ratio design with maximum assist at low speeds and less at highway speeds when road feedback is more important.

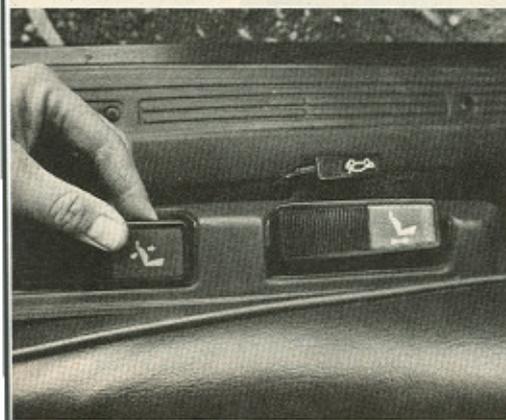
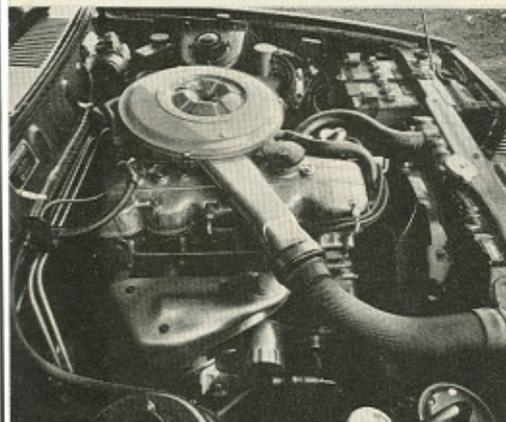
Volkswagen debuted the Scirocco in 1975 and in our initial test of the car we said, "it's exciting to look at, delightful to drive and technically fascinating." (R&T, February 1975). We revisited the Scirocco in January 1977 and found that significant improvements had been made to the car and we liked it even more. For 1978, Volkswagen shortened the engine's stroke from 80.0 mm to 73.4, thereby reducing displacement from 1588 cc to

1457 and dropping the bhp from 76 at 5500 rpm to 71 at 5800. The torque is even further reduced from 83 lb-ft at 3000 rpm to 73 at 3500. Volkswagen says the engine shrinkage was necessary for improved emission control and has the side benefit of slightly upping the miles-per-gallon figure. We were anxious to see if the Scirocco had lost any of its snappy performance as a result.

The fourth car in our test is the just introduced 1978 Plymouth Sapporo, built by Mitsubishi of Japan and marketed by Chrysler in the U.S. In the November 1977 R&T we described the Dodge Colt Challenger and Plymouth Sapporo (same cars, different names) and this would be our first opportunity to drive the new Mitsubishi product extensively. The Sapporo is the newest entry in the sports coupe class and we wanted to

know how it would fare over the course of track testing and a 2-day journey of several hundred miles.

While there are obvious important differences, there are also a number of similarities among the four cars. All are powered by single-overhead-cam inline 4-cylinder engines. The displacements range from a low of 1457 cc for the Scirocco to a high of 2555 cc for the Sapporo (this is the new 2.6-liter Silent Shaft engine with balancing shafts on opposite sides of the engine block, spinning in opposite directions, at twice engine speed to dampen vibration and reduce noise), with the Honda (1597 cc) and Toyota Celica (2189 cc) falling in between. There is also a considerable spread in horsepower ratings: the Accord being lowest at 68 bhp SAE net, the Scirocco next at 71, the Celica with 95 →



Plymouth Sapporo has many unusual features such as console-mounted electric controls for the outside mirrors and windows (top). The 2.6-liter engine was not as smooth as expected. Driver seat controls and trunk lever are convenient; rear seat is roomiest of the four sports coupes.

and the Sapporo 105. The three Japanese cars' engines are each equipped with one carburetor while the German-built Scirocco uses Bosch CIS fuel injection.

In the transmission department, it's interesting to note that all three Japanese cars are equipped with 5-speed manual gearboxes while the VW has a 4-speed. Top gear is an overdrive ratio of 0.85:1 (0.84:1 in the 1977 Accord we used for this test, but changed to 0.85 for 1978 models) in each of the 5-speed gearboxes and is designed to promote greater fuel economy as well as quieter highway cruising. The Interior Noise chart included with this report demonstrates that the 4-speed equipped Scirocco did have the highest dBA noise readings at every constant speed from 50 to 90 mph, but the difference was only one decibel over the Sapporo and Accord; the Celica was consistently the least noisy of the four except for the reading taken at maximum rpm in 1st gear.

The Sapporo is the largest (overall length 183.1 in.) and heaviest (2740 lb curb weight) while the Scirocco is the shortest at 155.7 in. and the lightest (1950 lb). In between, the Accord measures 162.8 in. overall and tips the scales at 2090 lb while the Celica is nearly 11 in. longer and 415 lb heavier than the Honda. Despite its greater weight, the Sapporo's braking performance was competitive with all of the other cars and this may be attributable to its being the only car in this test equipped with 4-wheel-disc brakes which come with the optional 2.6-liter Silent Shaft engine. While none of the four earned an excellent overall brake rating and there were some significant differences in stopping distances, we rated each of them very good. Fade was nil for all but the Scirocco which showed a 40-percent increase in pedal pressure in the 6-stop test. As would be expected of cars with sporting pretensions, the brakes are capable of reasonably controllable panic stops, although all of them exhibited brake lock-up and required pedal modulation to avert slewing, the Scirocco less than the others.

In our two objective measurements of handling characteristics, the 700-ft slalom and the 100-ft radius skidpad, there were some interesting results. The Scirocco and the Celica accomplished the slalom run at a very good 59.3 mph while the Accord and Sapporo were nearly 3 mph slower and closely matched at 56.8 and 56.5 mph respectively. On the skidpad, the Scirocco was the clear-cut winner with a lateral acceleration figure of 0.766g, the same number we achieved with a Porsche 924 and the mid-engine Lancia Beta Scorpion. The Accord recorded a 0.720g skidpad figure and showed a considerable improvement once its tires were warmed up. The Celica, which tied with the Scirocco through the slalom, fell back sharply on the skid-

pad (0.688g) as its understeering characteristics in steady-state cornering and a carburetor that starves for fuel when the car is turning left robbed it of a better performance. The Sapporo achieved 0.704g which puts it in the same area as the Dodge Colt (another Mitsubishi car).

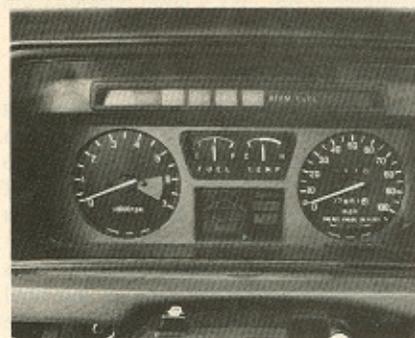
We should take this opportunity to note that the slalom number for the Celica is considerably improved over the one recorded in our test of the car in the January issue. This is apparently a result of a change in the spring rates from the very first few new Celicas to the present production models. Toyota says the new spring rates also reflected better handling characteristics in their tests conducted independently from ours.

On the Road

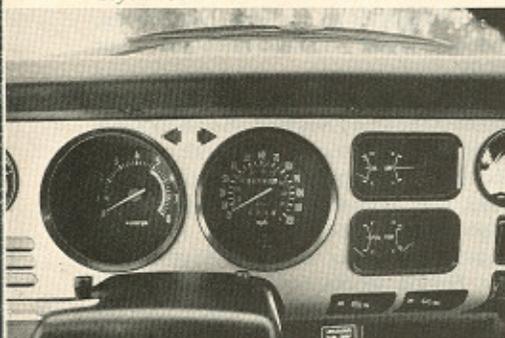
As is our tradition with this type of comparison test, we organized a journey in the cars which would enable us to drive each one under various conditions and rate them on a variety of factors: everything from handling, ride and steering to ventilation, interior and exterior styling and finish as well as a number of other categories (see cumulative rating sheet). And each participant would then give an overall ranking of preference independent of points totals. In addition to the four cars being evaluated, we took along a Saab EMS Turbo as a photography equipment carrier and to avoid anyone having to be a passenger—we all prefer to drive rather than ride. Our test crew consisted of the Editor, Engineering Editor, Associate Editor and Feature Editor, along with Editor-at-Large Henry N. Manney III, whose vivid impressions accompany this report. Henry was kind enough to pre-run most of the route to espy photographic locations, check refueling stops and note road conditions.

With Henry's assistance, the Associate Editor devised a route that emphasized handling, ride and performance characteristics—a goodly amount of what Mr Manney refers to as Targa Florio stuff. Altitude variations ranged from sea level to 9000 ft and roads included multi-lane interstates and narrow, bumpy, barely-paved tracks over mountains as well as everything in between. As we discovered with our Eight Sports Sedans comparison trip (R&T, March 1977), CB radios make it easier to keep everyone together and informed, so we called upon Clarion Corp of America (5500 Rosecrans Blvd, Lawndale, Calif. 90260; 213 973-1100) and they fitted their 40-channel CB radios (Model RCJ-003) to all the cars. These CB units feature a small hand control unit incorporating a digital LED channel readout, channel selector, squelch control, power/volume control, stand-by switch, transmitting indicator and press-talk switch—all very handy for the person alone in the car who may not have time to reach to the dash to change channels, adjust volume, etc. Clarion was

Honda Accord



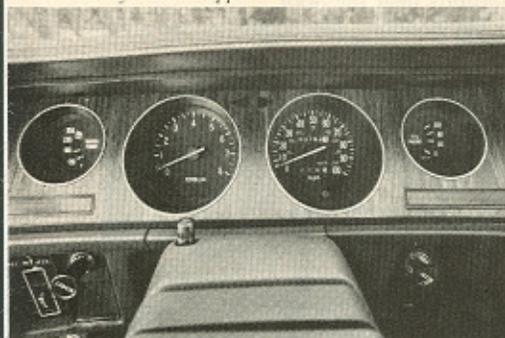
Toyota Celica



Volkswagen Scirocco



Plymouth Sapporo



exceptionally cooperative, even to sending a crew to our offices the evening before our departure to install the last CB units.

The rating sheets given to each participant called for 22 evaluations with a maximum of 10 points for excellent and 1 for poor. Out of a numerically possible 1100 points, this is the result: Celica 766, Accord 760, Scirocco 756 and Sapporo 703. In terms of driver preference (not necessarily related to point totals) the Scirocco was chosen by three people and the Celica by the other two. In addition to its three 1st-place votes, the VW received one 2nd and one 3rd. The Toyota →

GENERAL DATA

	Honda Accord	Plymouth Sapporo	Toyota Celica	Volkswagen Scirocco
Basic price	\$4465 ²	est \$5500	\$5339	\$5695
Price as tested ¹	\$4965	est \$6050	\$6049	\$6140
Layout	front engine/ front drive	front engine/ rear drive	front engine/ rear drive	front engine/ front drive
Curb weight, lb	2090	2740	2505	1950
Test weight	2225	2855	2595	2055
Weight distribution (with driver), f/r, %	60/40	53/47	54/46	62/38
Wheelbase, in.	93.7	99.0	98.4	94.5
Track, f/r	55.1/54.7	53.9/53.3	53.7/53.8	54.7/53.1
Length	162.8	183.1	173.6	155.7
Width	63.8	65.9	64.4	64.0
Height	52.4	51.8	51.6	51.5
Usable trunk space, cu ft	11.3+15.9	14.1	11.2+16.8	8.2+7.2
Fuel capacity, U.S. gal.	13.0	15.9	16.1	11.1
Brake system, f/r	disc/drum	disc/disc	disc/drum	disc/drum
Wheel size	13 x 4½	14 x 5½	14 x 5½	13 x 5
Tires	Bridgestone 155SR-13	Goodrich 195/70HR-14	Toyo 185/70SR-14	Michelin ZX 175/70SR-13
Suspension, f/r	ind coil/ ind coil	ind coil/ live coil	ind coil/ live coil	ind coil/ ind coil

¹ As-tested price includes: for the Accord, air conditioning (\$500 dealer installed); for the Sapporo, 2.6-liter Silent Shaft engine/5-speed transmission/4-wheel-disc brakes package (est \$550); for the Celica, air conditioning (\$490), rear-window wiper/washer (\$70), aluminum wheels (\$150); for the Scirocco, alloy wheels (\$155), AM/FM radio (\$125), rear-window wiper/washer (\$80), California emissions (\$85).

² Honda Accord price is for 1977 model used in test; 1978 prices not established at press time.

INTERIOR NOISE

	Honda Accord	Plymouth Sapporo	Toyota Celica	Volkswagen Scirocco
All noise readings in dBA:				
Idle in neutral	49	49	48	59
Maximum, 1st gear	80	81	87	85
Constant 30 mph	66	64	62	66
50 mph	69	69	67	70
70 mph	75	73	72	76
90 mph	na	79	76	80

ENGINE & DRIVETRAIN

	Honda Accord	Plymouth Sapporo	Toyota Celica	Volkswagen Scirocco
Engine type	sohc inline 4	sohc inline 4	sohc inline 4	sohc inline 4
Bore x stroke, mm	74.0 x 93.0	91.1 x 98.0	88.4 x 88.9	79.5 x 73.4
Displacement, cc	1597	2555	2189	1457
Compression ratio	8.0:1	8.2:1	8.4:1	8.0:1
Bhp @ rpm, SAE net	68 @ 5000	105 @ 5000	95 @ 4800	71 @ 5800
Torque @ rpm, lb-ft	85 @ 3500	139 @ 2500	122 @ 2400	73 @ 3500
Carburetion/Fuel injection	one Keihin (3V)	one Mikuni (2V)	one Aisan (2V)	Bosch CIS injection
Fuel requirement	regular, 91-oct	unleaded, 91-oct	unleaded, 91-oct	unleaded, 91-oct
Transmission	5-sp manual	5-sp manual	5-sp manual	4-sp manual
Final drive ratio	4.21:1	3.30:1	3.73:1	3.90:1
Engine speed @ 60 mph, rpm	2700	2270	2400	3230

PERFORMANCE

	Honda Accord	Plymouth Sapporo	Toyota Celica	Volkswagen Scirocco
Acceleration, time to speed, sec:				
0-30 mph	3.8	3.3	3.3	3.2
0-60 mph	13.8	12.1	10.4	10.4
0-80 mph	31.0	25.8	19.5	19.9
Standing ¼ mi, sec	19.7	18.7	18.1	18.0
Speed at ¼ mi, mph	69.5	74.0	77.5	77.0
Top speed, mph	90.0	108.0	113.0	104.0
Trip fuel economy, mpg	27.5	23.5	22.5	29.0
Braking: stopping distance, ft, from:				
60 mph	142	146	151	143
80 mph	256	261	270	240
Control in panic stop	good	good	good	very good
Pedal effort for 0.5g stop, lb	20	20	20	25
Fade, % increase in pedal effort in six 0.5g stops from 60 mph	nil	nil	nil	40
Overall brake rating	very good	very good	very good	very good
Cornering capability, g	0.720	0.704	0.688	0.766
Speed through 700-ft slalom	56.8	56.5	59.3	59.3

was rated 2nd by one driver and 3rd by the remaining two. The Honda received three 2nd-place rankings and two 3rds. And the Sapporo was ranked 4th unanimously—but that needs qualification and explanation, which we'll get to in the discussion of each car.

Toyota Celica

THE CELICA was the winner but the points spread between the top three cars is not significant. What it boils down to is that a basic choice is necessary before deciding which of these three cars is best: pure sportiness (Scirocco) a pleasant blend of GT performance and comfort (Celica), or something between those two (Accord). Four of the five drivers rated the Celica's gearbox the best of the group and four out of five gave the Toyota top marks in instrumentation and quality of exterior finish. And four out of five rated the Toyota 2.2-liter engine as good as or better than those of the other cars although the Scirocco scored more cumulative points in that category. The only complaint about the engine was that it does not rev freely above 4000 rpm and feels as though it runs out of breath because of emission controls as the engine approaches the upper rev limit.

Regarding the Celica 5-speed gearbox, one person wrote, "5-speed works well; pattern is correct and gear selection is easy." Another added, "This is the best gearbox for shifting quality; gearing is well matched to engine's characteristics."

All five of the evaluators agreed that the Celica feels the most solid and durable of the four cars. It has a solidity about it that suggests a larger, heavier car, but conversely, that heaviness, all agreed, detracts from its steering feel and puts it a

notch below the light and agile Scirocco. For 1978, the Celica can be equipped with power-assisted steering but we tried a car with that option last month and found it not to our liking because of its lightness and lack of feedback. The Celica understeers moderately but the road feel is second only to the Scirocco although the steering is a bit slow in really tight corners. The ride is relatively soft but well controlled and much improved over early Celicas. There is some freeway hop and an occasional feeling that the engine is moving up and down on its mounts—a sensation much like many front-wheel-drive cars. On really rough stretches of pavement, the solid rear axle of the Celica exhibits some hopping but it only suffered by comparison with the Scirocco which soaked up the roughest bumps and ruts without much trouble.

One of Toyota's strong suits over the years has been the quality of the fit and finish and the new Celica is no exception. The Celica's interior is a very comfortable environment for long stretches of driving. Two of our testers rated it best in seating/driving position while two others rated it lowest (reflecting the subjective nature of driver comfort and physical differences), while the fifth driver had it in the middle. The point differential placed it lowest in the cumulative total. All but one agreed that the interior finish was as good as or better than the three other cars and the Celica had the highest cumulative points total in this category.

All in all, the Celica was the most flexible performer of the bunch, had the best gearbox, no driveability problems although it does not like to rev much above 5500 rpm, nice pedal placement and a quiet environment. As one driver

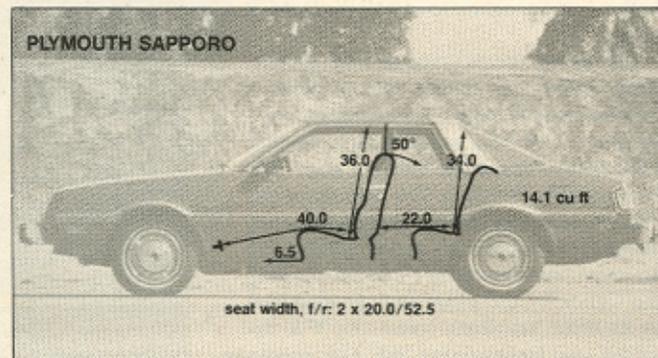
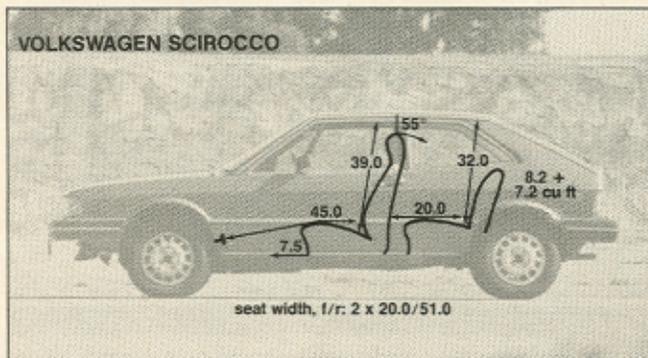
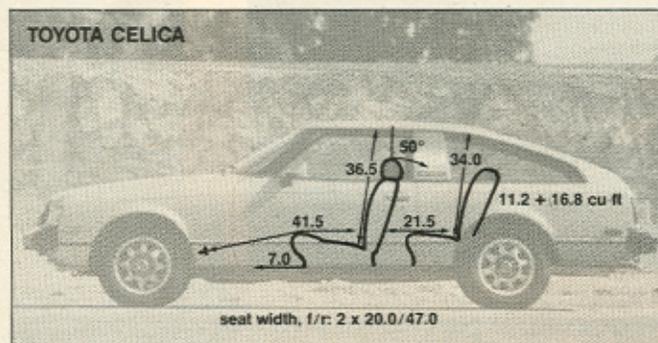
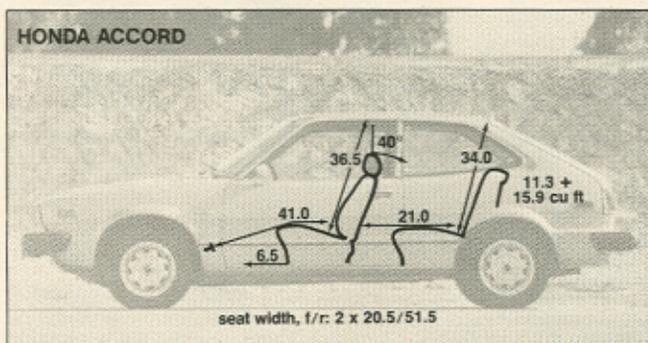
summed it up, "It's a good combination of GT features."

Honda Accord

ALL FIVE participants have spent a great deal of time driving our long-term Honda Accord and all were anxious to drive a late 1977 model (in the absence of the 1978 LX) to see how (if at all) it differed from the 1976 version. The Accord finished 2nd in total points but was given three 2nd-place votes in the final ranking by preference and two 3rds. The Accord's greatest attributes are compromise and comfort: It scored very high in such categories as controls, ventilation, outward vision, styling and finish. Four of the group rated the seating and driving position very good but the fifth complained the seat gives him an aching back after about an hour. In rating the engine/drivetrain, suspension, handling and ride, the Accord received reasonably high marks from everyone (see the cumulative rating sheet). Everything in the Honda works well together but it lacks the snappy driving characteristics of the Scirocco. The engine has adequate but not remarkable power and was marked by a touch of lean surge and a tendency to falter in really hard corners, a result of the engine twisting on its mounts rather than fuel starvation.

The Accord's 5-speed gearbox is a good but not a great one. Admittedly, our car had been abused by previous testing but we took that into account in making our judgments. We also found this Honda, as with our 48,000-mile car, had clutch chatter when moving off from a stop and the clutch engages rather abruptly near the floor.

The handling characteristics are quite



good and the Accord is a fairly precise car during hard cornering. As with most fwd cars, the Honda understeers but this can be balanced by modulating the power input. The steering is quick and responsive but there is more torque steer from the application of power than we like—this is detectable in straight-line acceleration and while rounding curves. The ride is also good although fast motoring over very rough pavement produces suspension crashing as everything underneath goes to the limit and hits the stops.

VW Scirocco

THE PRIMARY reason why we write this magazine and you read it is because we're car enthusiasts—cars are more than transportation for us, they're also a form of recreation, which translates to fun, which translates to Scirocco. We operate on a basic assumption that most car enthusiasts like to take a car out, find a good twisty road and enjoy driving. And that's why the Scirocco received three of the five 1st-place votes although it was 3rd in the points total.

For 1978, the Scirocco has been fitted with a functional aerodynamic spoiler below the front bumper, an increased capacity radiator, larger booster for the power-assisted brakes and additional sound insulation. Inside there is a wood-grain instrument panel, remote-control outside mirror and optional rear-window wiper.

The Scirocco we used was a California model with 70 bhp rather than 71 for the 49-state car and 72 lb-ft torque rather than 73. Also, the California model requires unleaded fuel but the 49-state car operates on regular-grade gasoline.

The VW was the unanimous choice in two rating categories: handling and steering. With a route purposely biased to place demands on each car's handling capabilities (which we think is of prime importance in selecting a sports coupe), the Scirocco was a cut above all the rest. One tester noted that the steering and roadholding ability are both excellent although the front end does get a little bouncy on undulating pavement at high speeds, that there is a good compromise in the suspension design giving an excellent ride on poor surfaces and that it's "a car that inspires you to drive hard." Another driver, pointing out the noticeable improvements VW has made in compliance and reduction of harshness compared to the first Sciroccos, concluded, "This is a nifty road racer—it sticks really well, has a wide stance, light weight and excellent balance, all adding up to exceptional handling."

The Scirocco's engine/drivetrain combination also got high marks and no one felt the smaller displacement detracted from performance. In fact, this Scirocco accelerates quicker—0-60 mph in 10.4 sec—than any previous one we've tested

(even discounting the difference in test weight with our new lightweight test equipment) and the engine is considerably smoother and quieter. The engine is also remarkable for its free-revving characteristics and doesn't feel choked at all by emission controls. "It makes me optimistic for the future of the internal combustion engine," noted one staffer. The gearbox and linkage are much better than on earlier Sciroccos and the shifting is measurably improved, with a positive feel that's aided by the smooth and light clutch action. One driver wrote, "I think the torque curve, transmission ratios and final drive ratio provide an excellent combination for hard driving." One of the characteristics of the Scirocco's smaller displacement engine is that the power curve is at the upper end of the rpm scale, so for spirited driving it's best to keep the revs above 4500.

In other areas of the rating system, the Scirocco was not particularly distinguished except for the exterior styling of the Giorgetto Giugiaro design which garnered the most points in that category. Everyone felt the interior styling was average or below average for the four cars in the test and while the seating and driving position was scored high, the seats themselves were not favorites of most of the rating crew. The one consistency was that each driver felt the Scirocco had the poorest ventilation system and it was often necessary to use the fan to boost the flow of fresh air into the car unless a window was opened.

Plymouth Sapporo

ALL RIGHT, it did finish last in the points total and it was ranked 4th in choice by each driver, but we're not going to condemn the new Mitsubishi product. That Japanese manufacturer has given us the Plymouth Arrow and Dodge Colt, both of which have been very durable and enjoyable cars to drive and there's no reason the Sapporo (and Dodge Colt Challenger) won't be the same. The Sapporo is biased toward comfort and received high marks in that area of the comparison. Four out of five drivers rated the Sapporo the quietest of the group (tied with the Celica in cumulative points) and three drivers gave it high marks for ride characteristics. All agreed that if we were setting out for New York from California in one of the four, the Sapporo probably would be the first choice. It's actually a very good blend of Japanese/American coupe design theory—it has what we think of as a soft Detroit-type ride but it's brought under better control.

All evaluators were disappointed with the 2.6-liter Silent Shaft engine and it may be that even the Silent Shaft design can't overcome the inherent noise and vibration of a 4-cylinder engine with that much displacement. However, the Sapporo's weight (2740 lb) requires a large

engine. This powerplant has good low-end torque, but it's slow to rev and if you find yourself in the wrong gear coming out of a corner, it seems to take an eternity to get the engine back up to speed. Befitting its blend of American and Japanese characteristics, the engine does not like to go much above 5000 rpm, although the redline is 6000.

The Sapporo's 5-speed gearbox drew mixed reviews from our traveling group, some finding it shifted easily and without problem while others noted a vagueness in the 2nd-3rd upshift and the need for more effort in making shifts than with comparable cars. The power-assisted steering is quick and takes some getting used to; there is a tendency to crank in too much steering lock because of the relative insensitivity of the steering and we'd prefer less assist. Also, the Sapporo is sensitive to cross winds and there's a tendency toward steering wander on straight roads.

In cornering, the Plymouth normally exhibits moderate to strong understeer but it is very predictable and, as one driver noted, "will never do you harm." However, it's also a car you can throw around with abandon and the staff wag labeled the Sapporo the "High Plains Drifter" because that seems to be its favorite cornering technique. The driver who enjoys pitching a car through corners will have a ball in the Sapporo. It's very controllable and lots of fun, but it had a tough time keeping up with other cars down a twisty mountain road. There is more than the usual amount of wheel travel for a Japanese car but the soft ride also results in more body roll than with the other cars and every driver commented on the improvement possible with stiffer shock absorbers. On bumpy pavement during cornering, there is a considerable amount of rear axle hop to be dealt with too.

The interior appointments of the Sapporo were not to some tastes but many others found them quite pleasant: crushed velour-like upholstery and door panels and lots of gimmicks (some quite useful) such as chimes rather than a buzzer for seatbelt and door warnings, electrically controlled windows and outside mirrors and a ceiling console with LCD clock, swiveling map light, door-ajar warning light and low washer fluid light. The interior dome light has a delay feature so there is light for 15 seconds after the doors close and the light comes on when the outside door handle is pulled even when the car is locked. This gives the owner the opportunity to see if anyone is inside before entering. Also, the keyholes light up to prevent fumbling in the dark to unlock the doors. The Sapporo seats can be adjusted for rake and lumbar support, the head restraints are nicely integrated into the seats and it's the only car in the group with an adjustment feature for raising and lower- ➤

ing the steering column. Also, the instrumentation is quite complete and easy to read at a glance.

One staff member summed up the Sapporo package as one which "should appeal to someone used to Detroit luxury but in a smaller package; overall, a nice blend of east and west; you can tell this car didn't happen by accident!"

Front-wheel Drive vs Rear-wheel Drive

ONE OF the most interesting facets of this comparison test was evaluating the relative merits of these two types of layout with two cars using each system. The two fwd cars proved to be the quickest traversing rough and twisty mountain roads as the pulling effect of the front wheels, the lighter weight, more nimble handling and the fully independent suspension of the Accord and Scirocco enabled them to go faster than the Celica or Sapporo. The Editor wrote in his log, "I think this test proves Erik Carlsson is right when he says that fwd is much better and much more forgiving when it comes to driving like hell over poor roads."

It is also noteworthy that the two fwd cars with their lighter weights were considerably more fuel thrifty and space efficient than the rwd Celica and Sapporo.

The two people who ranked the rear-wheel-drive Celica as their first choice, however, concede the point of the superi-

ority of fwd over rough roads, but in terms of driving a car over a variety of pavement surfaces and conditions feel that rwd is just as good and perhaps better. One expressed the feeling that he is simply much more comfortable cornering at high speeds (admittedly on smooth surfaces) in a rwd car such as the Celica.

This division of opinion showed up on the rating sheets as the test drive went along too, as there was only one unanimous selection for top marks in handling—the Scirocco. The Celica was rated 2nd by two drivers, two others had it tied for 2nd with the Accord and it was rated 3rd by the remaining evaluator. The obvious conclusion is that no clear-cut superiority exists based solely on layout. Suspension design, engine/gearbox harmony, power-to-weight ratio and many other factors go into making a car that has superior handling characteristics. Front-wheel drive does provide a head start in accomplishing that task, though, in cars of this size.

Conclusion

OUR PRIMARY goal in comparing these four sports coupes was to discover the various attributes of each car and how they match up against each other. The 10-point difference separating the first three cars is relatively insignificant in dealing with total numbers of 750-plus, so the result is essentially a 3-way tie among the Celica, Accord and Scirocco.

The 53-point spread between the Sapporo and the Scirocco is a significant difference, however, and some might say the Sapporo is the new kid on the block who was put into the wrong neighborhood. But we don't think so. It's a car that has much to recommend it and the traditional American car buyer looking for a smaller alternative without sacrificing the attributes to which he or she is accustomed will find the Plymouth (or the Dodge Challenger) a fine choice. Also, the traditional import buyer who is used to relatively austere small cars may find the Sapporo a pleasant step up. The nature of the route we drove also worked against the Mitsubishi product and if we had designed a course based on long stretches of highway travel the Sapporo would have excelled.

In choosing among the Celica, Accord and Scirocco it comes down to the expected factors: personal desires, needs and styles. The Scirocco received three 1st-place votes because it is far and away the most sporting of all four cars. It is a kick to drive through the mountains and on back country roads. It is light, nimble, predictable and has a free-revving engine that says "Let's Go!" Those of us involved in evaluating these cars are enthusiasts and never miss an opportunity to take a car of this sort out and have fun with it—and that's what the Scirocco provides.

The Celica has an outstanding living environment with instrumentation, con-

Back on the Road Again

BY HENRY N. MANNEY III

GOODY GOODY GOODY another multi-car shootout! I always like these things as they offer a chance to compare different makes while hurling them consecutively around on back roads, away from the teeming megalopolis. The Editor keeps talking about doing the next test with Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati and a trick BMW but see what we get. Just as well; the four we tested (plus the Saab Turbo camera car) are capable of going enough over the filthy Fifties to get us busted anyway.

Be that as it may, running an event like this is always a bit dodgy as somehow there never seems to be enough driving time. Hours seem to evaporate because of food stops, fuel stops, taking notes and switching cars stops, just standing around talking, call-of-nature stops, or running back and forth on the same bit of road endlessly for photos. To this end Mr Bryant cut us down to one photographer (two photographers take four x time as one) and sent me out to pre-run the route in the lendo Chevette. I didn't hurry too much, stopped to take notes, navigated, took a picnic lunch and running time was

9 hours Capistrano-Sta. Barbara via the back doubles. Starting 1½ hrs earlier, Mr Bryant reckoned, would get us to Sta. Barbara just after dusk. The route ran from Capistrano (in waffle ballast) up over the Ortega Highway, over to Perris, freeways to Riverside, Redlands etc, up the mountain to Big Bear, along there to Lake Arrowhead and Crestline (slow resort traffic), down the back road to Cajon Jct., up another county route to Wrightwood and Big Pine, then down another semi-desert Targa Florio road past Valermo to Pearblossom and Palmdale. From there it was along the San Andreas Fault road to Lake Hughes, left down a canyon past the reservoir to Castaic Jct. on I-5, then down 126 to Sta. Paula, Ventura and then Sta. Barbara. Mostly that first day's run, about 400 miles, is on the Los Angeles and Vicinity map. Piece of cake. What you need is four rally drivers like Erik Carlsson, Rauno Aaltonen, Fat Andrew McCracken and Sylvia Osterberg. With Timo Makinen to drive the photog.

Well actually, I think we might have done it, even with getting away late be-

cause one member forgot his brigade tie. The run up to Big Bear, aside from a delay while we changed cars and "took just one photo" was straightforward: I had the Scirocco for that and was much impressed by the roadholding, light steering, ease of driving, quietness (since the destroke) and general feeling of confidence even though there wasn't that much power available at higher altitudes. The clean shape, as on that 1100-cc Citroën, has its advantages and disadvantages, the latter being that it failed the Beechnut Blowby test (the wind blows in) and if the window is open at all, a piercing draft hits the back of the neck. Anyway, I got the Saab next which felt pretty high and antique but being an old Saab owner, I really like the turbo setup even though the Invisible Motorcycle Cop's siren is a bit distracting. The Saab had a sophisticated radar detector so it led along the slow road to Crestline, a nice folklorique little town with pines, needles thereof, chalets and the worst Italian sandwich stand in southern California. After another delay while a search for ice cream was mounted, we then charged off down a short version of an Alpine pass where I had the privilege of seeing both sides of the Honda at once in my mirrors. A nice flat run, then more wiggles (Carrera Panamericana style) be-

CUMULATIVE RATING SHEET

	Honda Accord	Plymouth Sapporo	Toyota Celica	Volkswagen Scirocco
Handling	34	28	36	45
Ride	36	35	37	39
Quietness	33	37	37	34
Braking	36	35	36	38
Steering	34	27	31	44
Gearbox	31	34	41	37
Engine	37	30	38	40
Controls	39	32	40	40
Instrumentation	36	39	40	30
Seating/Driving position	36	36	34	38
Ventilation	38	36	34	29
Heating	39	38	38	34
Outward vision	39	34	35	39
Exterior styling	39	33	35	41
Exterior finish	38	33	40	39
Interior styling	41	30	39	29
Interior finish	36	34	39	32
Ingress & egress	34	36	35	36
Luggage space & loading	37	29	38	36
Body structure	39	37	39	38
Rear seating	28	30	24	18
TOTALS	760	703	766	756



Clarion Corp of America's model RCJ-003 citizens-band radio proved a worthwhile addition to each car. Having all controls in a single unit is handy and the CBs not only prevented anyone from getting lost but expedited positioning of the cars during our photo sessions.

trols and a gearbox that are excellent. It's a comfortable car to drive in almost any situation and blends that attribute with sufficiently sporting performance and handling to make it entertaining. Toyota has a reputation for building solid, durable cars and the new Celica feels both solid and durable. It's a car in which most drivers will feel immediately at home, and for a cruising GT car it has to rank at

the head of this group of four.

Somewhere between the Scirocco and the Celica lies the Accord. It scores consistently well in nearly every category on the rating sheet and although it may not win any category hands down, it doesn't muffle any of them either. As we said, the Accord is an excellent compromise car that does all that's asked of it and does it well. And if price is a factor, the Accord

takes a quantum leap to the head of the class.

Any time a group of car enthusiasts gets together, there is a wide variety of opinion. Every driver looks for different characteristics and finds various faults based on his or her style of driving, physical size, geographic location and so on. You now have our opinions of these sports coupes—the rest is up to you. ☐

fore Cajon Junction for gas and a car change for me only as Lamm wanted to go ahead for photos.

Turn L after the rr tracks by Mormon Rocks up the Lone Pine Canyon Rd. all v deserty and bleak. Up to Wrightwood there is a long uphill drag that had us checking handbrakes etc and after a bit of to-ing and fro-ing because of a wash-out, down to Big Pine. Change cars there and this time I got the Honda, from which I expected much. Downhill again through Targa Florio country with lots of quick switches and hairpins . . . we passed a couple of cops shepherding a TV crew on one corner; you should have seen their eyes . . . resulting in stinking brakes and some peculiar maneuvers. The Honda is a cozy little devil with 5 speeds etc but I was wildly disappointed; the suspension is a bit floaty within its limited movement rather like a Hydrolastic Mini, it plows like anything, the engine is weak plus a bit rough and the gearbox notchy. On the freeway later it wasn't very comfortable either with a constant tiny vibration. As far as the suspension goes, any bike boy will tell you that Japanese shocks are pretty poor stuff. However it is a nice package and we had time to muse about that when the Saab *fait caca* near Valyermo. Saabs have one of those Big Brother devices where

you can't get the key out unless the box is in reverse. Well, when stopping to take photos, Lamm got the key out with the box in neutral which meant that the key wouldn't turn, viz no electrics. Saabs are hard cars to steal; it took the best minds of R and T over an hour to jury-rig the electrics (with an accompaniment of blowing fuses and starter bendixes refusing to retract etc) as there are a lot of things interlocking. The sun went down behind the hill, there were mutterings about telephones (Dinkel is always telephoning) and the upshot was that the Lake Hughes leg was cut out and we slid over to I-5 and the 126 2+3 lane rd to Ventura, which has the dubious distinction of having the highest accident rate in Calif I think. Tony and I, the Old Folks, arrived in the dark.

The Sta. Barbara Biltmore was v nice (where are you Delphine Seyrig?) and we shoved off early next morning, after more telephoning, to the 2-bit car wash and then up San Marcos Pass, there having been a change of route. The Saab stayed in bed, so I got the Plymouth which is 1/2 reconstituted Hillman Minx and 1/2 proper little American car. The interior was something else with red velour and temple chimes in place of a buzzer. Where are you Anna May Wong? Actually the Plymouth wasn't nearly as bad as

one might think as it had enough steam, light accurate steering and all the things you need except decent suspension for rough mountain roads which it has little business on anyway. But no way is it a sports coupe. So we continued up Happy Canyon (!) to Cachuma Saddle, making a car change there. I got the Toyota finally and although a comfortable machine with nice gearbox etc, wasn't any more suited to colonial going than the Plymouth much to my surprise. Steering was diabolically heavy, lock poor and what travel there was in the suspension was too well damped if anything. Later on the way to kitschy Solvang (open-face sandwiches!) the road opened up and the Toyota came into its own as a very comfortable touring coupe. Another one for nice roads.

So it was to home, as all sorts of excuses suddenly cropped up for a 6:00 p.m. arrival in NB even though Dinkel wanted to have a conference. We got the Saab going again (no reverse either) and I drove it down the Coast Highway after Oxnard and through the poisonous Friday eve freeway traffic. Monkey business with keys or not, I prefer the Saab (not eligible . . . Ed.) but after that the Scirocco as even with little performance, the manners are so nice. Wonder what the others think? ☐