

# VW SCIROCCO VS.



One is pungent; the other comfortable

By Michael Jordan

**T**here's a reason that the Scirocco and Accord look so much alike. Trapped inside their sleek fastback bodies is your basic transportation module. The combination of front-engine, front-wheel drive and hatchback is derived from the everyman's car invented by assorted wizards of European automotive design in the early '70s. These little cars with their people-pleasing shapes and utilitarian layout were supposed to be part of a glossy future in which everyone would shop at clever little boutiques, get 70 mpg and wear have-a-nice-day smiles.

It's a wonder then that the Scirocco and Accord, two transportation modules with funny names, turned out so differently from the rational car they were patterned after. In many ways virtually identical in specification, especially since the Scirocco's acquisition of a five-speed gearbox, the executions are as divergent as the names suggested. One is pungent, the other comfortable.

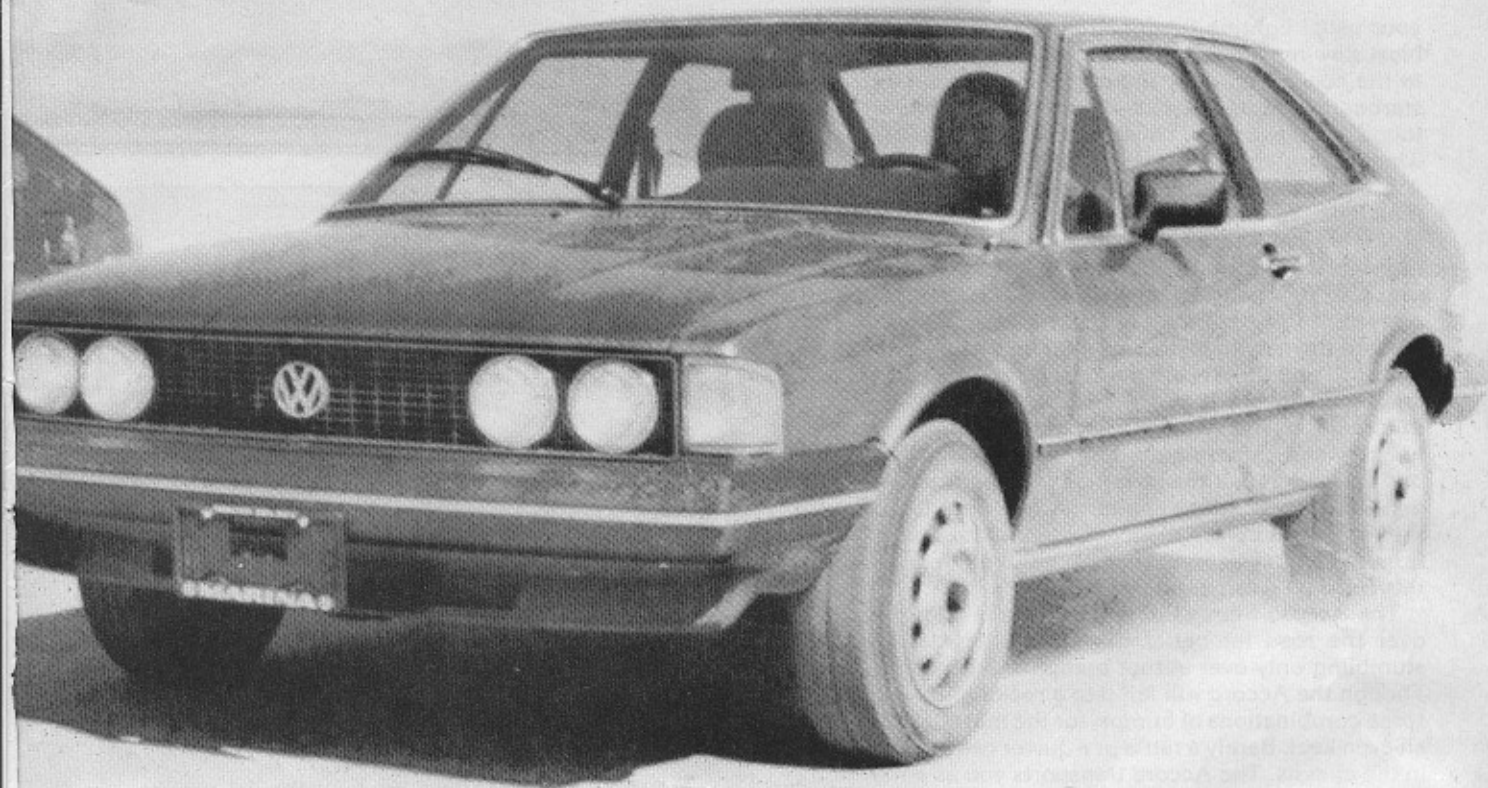
The Scirocco represents nothing less than a modern redefinition of that beleaguered device, the sports car. Every crisp line of the Scirocco's Giugiaro-drawn sheetmetal shouts style and performance. A lusty free-revving engine backs up the styling's high-speed aspirations. The car's tendency to hike its inside rear tire under fierce cornering

like an arrogant, street-wise mutt confirms the Scirocco's sporting identity. The sensible aspects of a transportation module—light weight, a hatchback, efficient passenger ergonomics and a good fuel mileage rating—have been simply incorporated in a high-spirited road demon. Like the MG TC, the Scirocco is a rational transportation that still manages to keep its fun-car quotient high.

The Accord is an American car. The lessons of Detroit cars—luxury, comfort and convenience—have been re-packaged in a small car that still manages to seem sufficiently European to keep it from classification in the econobox class. The Honda might be the best American car you can buy, just because it combines big-car virtues with what feels like a fairly aggressive fun car. In this way, Honda has managed to make the Accord appeal to a wide variety of people, from small-car enthusiasts to big-car mossbacks. It's the vision of Detroit's future, unaccountably built in Japan. Compared to the Scirocco, the Accord probably fulfills the role of transportation module better, just because it offers both mainstream American standards of comfort with a brilliantly executed transportation.

A brief gander at the interior controls and furnishings of the Scirocco and Accord reveals immediately the diver-

# HONDA ACCORD



gent intentions of Volkswagen and Honda. When evaluated according to comfort and convenience standards, the Accord makes the Scirocco seem like a screaming cheap shoebox, as if the spartan 1975 Scirocco with its garish plaid seatcovers had never left us. Every possible option is included with the LX Accord package. Because it's an Accord, you already get an AM/FM radio, a tachometer, a maintenance reminder, a fuel-reserve warning light, a warning system that glowers at you if a door should be ajar or if a brake light isn't working, a remote hatchback release, not to mention a full complement of ashtrays and shelves and compartments. There's all the seat adjustment you can stand and a two-speed windshield wiper. A daytime high-beam flasher. And just because your Accord is the luxury LX model, you rate a cassette player, oceans of velour, an air-conditioner and a variable-assist power steering which fades away as your speed increases, delivering an impression of road feel.

These features are tastefully executed and properly fitted throughout the Honda's interior, but in a lot of ways, the car's sensible controls seem like gadgets. The Accord's multitude of warning lights and convenience features diminish the contribution the driver makes to

operate his car. It's a bit like sitting down in front of one of those curious computers with semi-human intelligence that occasionally appear in Japanese science fiction movies, like a sophisticated toy for Rocket Boy. These characteristics appeal to the mainstream American driver, but to the enthusiast, the multitude of lights and flashes are no more than gimmicks.

The Scirocco's full-service dashboard duplicates in many cases the functions found in the Honda, but the execution leaves you with a different feeling. Volkswagen learned the hard way that Americans will resist high sticker prices unaccompanied by a great deal of apparent value, so since 1975 the Scirocco has grown softer around the edges, as indicated by the soft leatherette that now clings to the doors and the Scirocco logo emblazoned on the dash. Yet, even so, this car lacks that homey feel of the Accord's creature comforts. A hard edge of efficiency can be felt in every control.

As soon as you climb behind the wheel, it's clear that this car is meant to be operated just like some new battery-powered toy. The Scirocco has controls, not just electronic read-outs. You've got a mixed bag of levers, stalks, knobs and rocker switches. One stalk provides

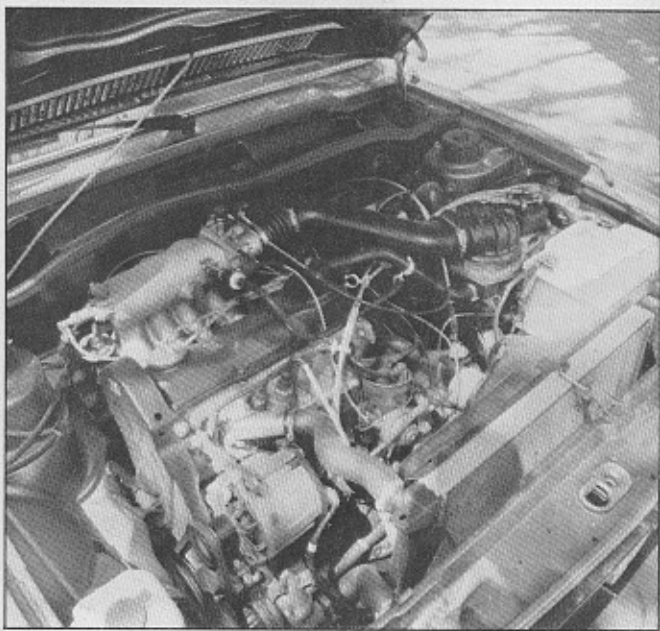
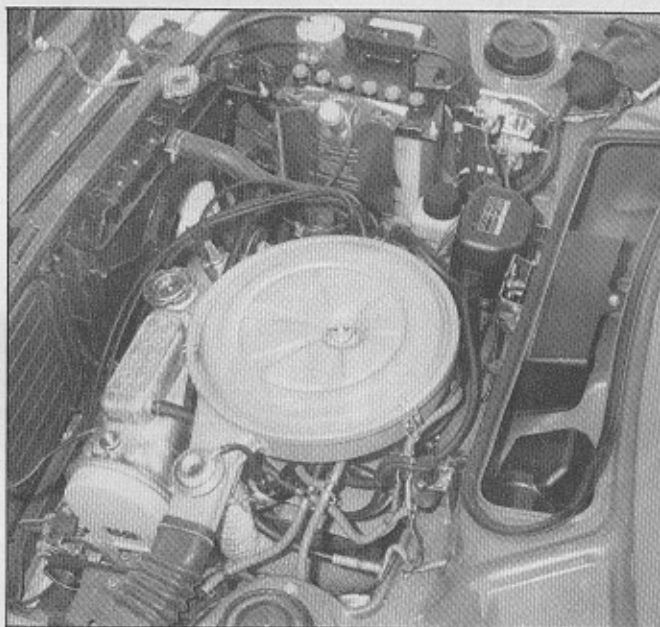


# VW SCIROCCO VS. HONDA ACCORD

your usual lighting functions plus a headlight flasher to blast slow-moving small-fry out of your way. The read-outs in the cockpit monitor the engine—not the status of the starboard side door locks—as the oil temperature gauge found in the center console confirms. The windshield wiper control moves in every possible direction, providing you with an intermittent wiper speed as well as the usual functions. Vents and side-window defrosters allow you to funnel air anywhere in the cockpit. In sum, the Scirocco urges you to operate your car despite the fact that the available functions are really no more elaborate than the Accord. It's just a matter of presentation, that's all.

More than styling and presentation distinguish how the Scirocco and the Accord perform. The Accord's luxurious overtones ensure it proceeds down the highway with a minimum of mechanical fuss and bother. The seat upholstery and carpeting do their part in sound absorption, but the isolation of the passenger compartment from suspension pieces and the engine bay also contribute most to the Accord's interior silence. Only tire noise and yowling from the engine as it reaches its 5500 rpm redline hints at this Honda's small-car heritage.

The Accord rides well, too. For the most part it glides over the road far better than any other Japanese car, stumbling only over abrupt bumps and expansion joints. Though the Accord will fall into a rocking-horse mode on some combinations of bumps, for the most part it stays on an even keel. Barely a rattle or a quiver can be heard or felt in the chassis. The Accord transports you as a transportation module should, without hesitation and with a feeling of



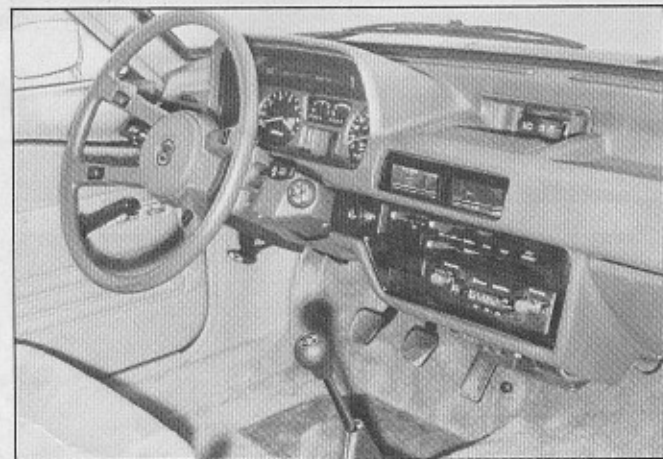
## COUNTERPOINT

Scirocco. A small taste of this one for a car nut is like a spoonful of triple-dip banana split for an ice cream freak. And I take back everything I said about my girlfriend's '76 Scirocco, now that I've had an afternoon of crooked road and sunshine with the '79. In 1976, there were warranty problems, and things kept falling off the doors and dash to litter the floor. For '79, there is an adequate power band in all gears (2000 to 6000 rpm will pull across the board), a crisper shift mechanism, a degree of steering precision that wasn't there before, positive braking, taut ride, sticky cornering capability and magnificent road visibility. It has chopped nuts, fudge syrup, whipped cream and a cherry on top. Yum! I like Accords, too. I've just spent a year with an Accord as a "second" car—though the "first" car remained in the garage for many trips of up to 1000 miles or more, just because the Accord is enthusiastic, fun to drive. Even for me, standing in at six-foot and three. And, 36 mpg wasn't inconsiderable on those 1000-milers. With its hatchback, the Honda was an admirable container for two large and two small folks bent on a seashore weekend—with luggage. As a do-it-myselfer, I found the plugs and points were a snap to replace, but pulling the oil drain plug was a posterior pain. In a year and 15,000 miles, the heater/air fan quit, an easy fix; but the tach became erratic to the point of unreliability, an expensive dealer repair. If I needed a second car today, I'd probably buy another Accord and push that gas-hog "first" car over a cliff.

—Dave Epperson

It was a real pain to drive our test Scirocco—back to VW's western offices—I liked that car so much. I considered handoffing myself to the steering wheel. I even wanted to wax it, a chore my own cars have yet to witness. I felt like Han Solo in *Star Wars*, sweeping in and out of the Imperial cruisers that blast down Los Angeles freeways. I was safe and secure, able to dodge the legions of miscreants who passed driving tests 20 years ago but have since forgotten where their turn signals are located. The scant few feet separating close call from police report was utilized to the max by the Scirocco's precise steering, self-correcting suspension and solid braking. Initial mumbblings of excessive front seat firmness turn to grins of respect for their tenacious grip and comfort during the first four-wheel drift. The tach is rightfully afforded equal space with the speedometer. You can playfully row the very accessible stick through a series of mountain switchbacks, or you can pretend Mobil Economy Run to coax record mileage from the trip meter. This is a car for all—but especially for me. It is unfortunate that duty calls for me to comment on the Honda Accord while still basking in the memory of the Scirocco. I like the Accord very much. It hints at a roominess and middle-class solidness that is perhaps lacking in the Scirocco. Its engineering is practically faultless and the ride is unarguably proper and decent. But, I would hate to have to choose between the two, for the Accord would be the loser. And it isn't really that at all. It's just that the Scirocco is the winner.

—Greg N. Brown



precision. The crisp action of the gearshift and the engine's substantial torque rating enable you to build speed easily and without a very demanding foot on the accelerator. The wide-open cockpit affords a clear view in every direction which helps ease tension while you're surrounded by lumbering Fords and Chevys. In sum, the Accord executes its everyday transportation tasks with precision, an impression which leads to the feeling of value per dollar that has made the Accord such an extraordinary sales success.

The Scirocco's specifications should make it an equally satisfying piece of transportation-think. Its taller final drive, higher horsepower rating and new fifth gear should ensure that it can be kept rolling with less effort and less noise than the Accord. But it doesn't work out that way, perhaps because the Scirocco lacks the sound-deadening frills of the Accord. Also, even the new fifth gear can't disguise the fact that the VW drivetrain is noisy. A tinny whine characterizes its operation no matter what rpm level the engine is turning.

Even so, the Scirocco does live up to the necessities of transportation. A substantial fuel mileage margin over the Accord is part of it, but the Scirocco is also a sedan with wide doors for easy access and a fold-down rear seat for a large cargo area. Both the Accord and the Scirocco share the unfortunate characteristic of a high hatchback liftover height, but neither will strain very many backs because of it. Also, like a sedan, the Scirocco has yards of suspension travel, or so it seems while the car bounds across the roughest of pavement, swallowing pavement imperfections whole. The only thing that compromises its identity as a painless transportation module is that urgent mechanical pulsebeat which pounds through the car even while you're coasting through a school zone.

Once you bury your right foot in the floor, the Scirocco proves it's capable of feats the Accord can only aspire to, for the Honda's comfort quotient undercuts the car's fun-factor. The Accord's power-assisted steering is quicker than the Volkswagen's, except you feel as if you're driving the power-assist instead of the car. You can fling the Honda through the corners, but the skinny tires aren't up to such antics and squeal in protest while the chassis rolls alarmingly on an under-damped and under-sprung suspension. You soon discover that this car is far happier prowling the turnpike than racer road.

The Honda's drivetrain also proves faint-hearted when the going gets twisty. When you search for power at high rpm, the engine can't deliver. You can stir the gearbox as quickly as you can, but the tachometer functions only as a volume indicator. This motor is rated for torque and undemanding low-rpm shifts, for getting away from stoplights quickly.

After some time spent tacking through corners heeled over on the Honda's soft suspension, you don't expect street racing performance from cars in the sub-100-horsepower class. The combination of agile suspension, adequate horsepower and 1850-pound weight on the other hand, transforms the Scirocco into a parking lot Formula racer. Responsiveness is this car's prime directive. Every bit of throttle travel is greeted by willing horsepower. The gap between gear ratios still seems somewhat large, but even in the ultra-long tall fifth gear there's good response from the engine. Your throttle foot can order up engine rpm at any time from the light-flywheel engine.

Even better, you get a chassis calibrated to get the most from the engine. Despite a slightly slower steering than the Accord, you can whipsaw the Scirocco through the turns effectively because the rack-and-pinion maintains your relationship with the responsive Conti radials. Why, you can hammer through corners fast enough to make your neck hurt. And if the Contis suddenly let go—as they will when pressed hard—Scirocco agility will save you from disaster.




# VW SCIROCCO VS. HONDA ACCORD

When you look at the Scirocco with a resolutely virtuous eye and a dedication to pure transportation, the Accord seems pretty persuasive. Where everyday comfort and convenience are concerned, the Accord's plush interior, numerous gadgets, friendly disposition in traffic and lower sticker price combine to make it very attractive. In addition, its alert and willing personality at moderate speed promises a sufficiently spirited personality to keep most car freaks entertained.

But you can't resist the appeal of a sports car, especially when it comes wrapped in a practical package. The Scirocco comes out a winner in any confrontation with a mere transportation module. Being able to control your line with the throttle while smoking through a freeway on-ramp brightens up your whole day. Lurching around in antiquated British two-seaters seems a vain and stupid thing to do in contrast. Bumbling back and forth in a dull econobox feels silly and dull. Only the Scirocco provides the excitement a driver of real cars thirsts after.

The Scirocco's status as a real sports car covers up any handicaps it might have as a transportation module. And it qualifies as a sports car because of the way it's been hammered into functional form in the way it drives, as well as the way it hauls people and cargo around. These days true function describes a stylish skin drawn tight over a sedan's configuration. And the Scirocco proves that a sports car doesn't have to be frivolous to be fun—you really can apply sporting characteristics to the kind of car that modern people use every day.

It's easy to become confused by the substantial bottom line of a Scirocco's price tag and believe that this car is simply the world's most expensive econobox. You're probably better off to think of it as a competitor for the Porsche 924. It just happens to be a sports car that makes sense. 





## VOLKSWAGEN SCIROCCO

Base price	\$7500
Options on test vehicle	N/A
Price as tested	\$7500*

### ENGINE

Type	Water-cooled, overhead cam, inline four, cast-iron block, aluminum head	
Displacement	97 cu in (1588cc)	
Bore x stroke	3.13 in x 3.15 in	
Compression ratio	8.0:1	
Max. horsepower @ rpm	78 @ 5500	
Max. torque @ rpm	84 lbs-ft @ 3200 rpm	
Fuel injection	Bosch K-Jetronic	
Fuel requirement	91 RON, unleaded	
Max. recommended engine speed	6300 rpm	

### DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	Five-speed manual	
Final drive ratio	3.90:1	
Gear	Ratio	Max. test speed
1st	3.45:1	35 mph (6300 rpm)
2nd	1.94:1	60 mph (6300 rpm)
3rd	1.37:1	87 mph (6300 rpm)
4th	0.97:1	106 mph (6100 rpm)
5th	0.76:1	102 mph (5700 rpm)

### SUSPENSION

Front	Independent, MacPherson struts, coil springs, telescopic shocks
Rear	Independent, stabilizer axle w/trailing arms, springs, telescopic shocks

### STEERING

Type	Rack and pinion
Turns lock to lock	3.85
Turning circle	31.5 ft (curb to curb)

### BRAKES

Front	Power assisted 9.4-in solid discs
Rear	Power assisted 7.1 x 1.2-in cast-iron drums

### GENERAL

Curb weight	1948 lbs (1/8 tank of fuel)
Weight distribution, F/R	65/35%
Wheelbase	94.5 in
Track, F/R	54.7/53.5 in
Overall length	155.7 in
Overall width	63.9 in
Overall height	51.5 in
Ground clearance	4.6 in
Fuel tank capacity	10.6 gal
Cooling system capacity	5.1 qts
Oil capacity	3.7 qts
Battery rating	12V, 45 amp hrs
Wheel type and size	cast aluminum, 5.0 x 13 in
Tire make and size	Michelin ZX, 175/70SR-13
Tire type	Steel-belted, radial-ply, tubeless

### PERFORMANCE

Top speed	106 mph
Zero to 60 mph	10.67 sec
Standing 1/4-mile	18.6 sec @ 72.9 mph
Test fuel consumption	25-32 mpg
EPA-estimated fuel consumption	24-38 mpg

\* does not include dealer prep, state and local taxes

## HONDA ACCORD LX

Base price	\$6799
Options on test vehicle	None
Price as tested	\$6799*

### ENGINE

Type	Water-cooled, overhead cam, inline four, aluminum head	
Displacement	107 cu in (1754cc)	
Bore x stroke	3.03 in x 3.70 in (77.0mm x 94.0mm)	
Compression ratio	8.0:1	
Max. horsepower @ rpm	72 @ 4500	
Max. torque @ rpm	94 lbs-ft @ 3000 rpm	
Carburetion	1x3-bbl Keihin	
Fuel requirement	91 RON, any gas	
Max. recommended engine speed	5800 rpm	

### DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	Five-speed manual	
Final drive ratio	4.38:1	
Gear	Ratio	Max. test speed
1st	3.18:1	28 mph (6000 rpm)
2nd	1.84:1	49 mph (6000 rpm)
3rd	1.20:1	75 mph (6000 rpm)
4th	0.90:1	89 mph (5100 rpm)
5th	0.72:1	98 mph (4500 rpm)

### SUSPENSION

Front	Independent, MacPherson struts, coil springs, stabilizer bar, shocks
Rear	Independent, MacPherson struts, coil springs, shocks

### STEERING

Type	Rack and pinion, power assisted
Turns lock to lock	3.0
Turning circle	36.1 ft (curb to curb)

### BRAKES

Front	Power assisted 9.0 solid discs
Rear	Power assisted 7.1 x 1.4-in cast-iron drums

### GENERAL

Curb weight	2655 lbs (1/2 tank of fuel)
Weight distribution, F/R	60/40%
Wheelbase	93.7 in
Track, F/R	55.5/55.5 in
Overall length	163.2 in
Overall width	63.8 in
Overall height	52.6 in
Ground clearance	6.5 in
Fuel tank capacity	13.2 gal
Cooling system capacity	1.6 gal
Oil capacity	4.2 qts
Battery rating	12V, 47 amp hrs
Wheel type and size	stamped steel, 4.5 x 13 in
Tire make and size	Michelin XZX, 165SR-13
Tire type	Steel-belted, radial-ply, tubeless

### PERFORMANCE

Top speed	98 mph
Zero to 60 mph	13.67 sec
Standing 1/4-mile	19.36 sec @ 68.7 mph
Test fuel consumption	23-28 mpg
EPA-estimated fuel consumption	26 mpg

\* does not include dealer prep, state and local taxes