





Road Test:

# Starfire V-6, Scirocco, Skyhawk V-6, Corolla SR-5 Monza V-8, and Celica GT

By Jim Brokaw and Herb Adams



What it is?

It's little, but doesn't feel little. It looks racy, but doesn't run racy. It handles like a sports car, but doesn't ride rough like a sports car. What we have here is a new class of automobile.

The low-slung, droop-snouted, hotch-tailed Monza family is the first small car built in the world that combines small size with sufficient power, smoothness, style, convenience and handling that can best be described as sports-comfortable.

Comfortable is the key word. From the first post-war immigration of the MG-TC, we have been liberally assaulted with a diverse assemblage of sports cars ranging from the baseline MG Midget to the Ferrari Dino, all of which share the same characteristic of a harsh ride. Some have referred to it as the spinejarring cranial compression of an anvil being dropped on a steel rail, occasionally muted in the more expensive models to a ride on a rubber-tipped jackhammer.

The visceral thrill of passing an LTD on the outside of a hairpin curve notwithstanding, the prime drawback to healthier sales of sports cars has been the universal lack of ride comfort.

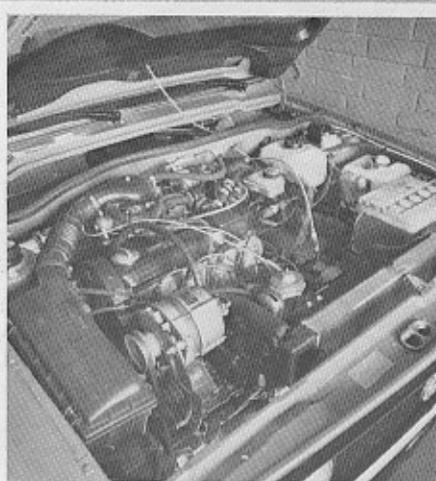
A relative measure of comfort with handling has been available in various imported sports sedans, now emulated by our own luxury compacts. But all of these, including the domestics, are singularly lacking in style. The lust for vehicular adventure that ticks within the rib cages of almost every male demands sleek sweeps of sheet metal that knife through the resisting air. Smoothly curled rocker panels and

gently drooping noses to stir the bile of envy in one's neighbors and friends. Seats that rake gently back giving the impression to the casual, but intent observer, that you prefer the reclining operator's position when in fact you are only a few degrees off your normal upright, comfortable driving stance. Crisp steady cornering with complete control as you smoothly feed exit power at the apex. All of these are mandatory for us to justify the slightly excessive expense of purchasing a car that is not quite "practical."

These are the very qualities that distinguish the Monza class. With the bonus of being very practical...for you.

The ideal size for commuting, these cars have about 97-inch wheelbases, good gas mileage, (21 to 23 miles per gallon on the Motor Trend 73-mile test loop) seat four adults—not four linebackers—but it's not too bad in back. And the light weight is going to be real easy on tire wear. Hell, they only weigh 3000 pounds. That's a half ton less than the car most of us drive now. The price is a bit stout, \$5000 with the really necessary options, but then everything is higher these days.

Monza, Skyhawk and Starfire are like a set of triplets. They all look alike until you start peering at details. The grilles are distinctive, but minutely so. The rear chrome decorative panel on the hatch door is individual. Striping is individual, but very little else is with the obvious exception of the engine. Monza has a 262-cubic-inch V-8, while Skyhawk and Starfire share a 231-cubic-inch—V-6, a cast-iron derivative of the old Buick aluminum block V-6. Comments made in regard to Monza apply to the two brethren.



Monza's hatchback speaks for the group with ample storage area. Spare tire is hidden beneath deck. Leather-like seats in Monza are very comfortable. Ours had rake adjustment and tilt steering wheel, both of which are highly recommended options. Chevrolet version elected rub strip and plastic wheel covers.

Scirocco sports bold new styling from Volkswagen. Pleasant blending of form and function. Scirocco's dash is a little short of instruments but very easy to read. Engine compartment has all of the hardware very neatly arranged. Box to left is air intake for carburetor. Very delicate aluminum radiator has side mounted tanks. Very little lean or wheel distortion in a hard corner.



Buick Skyhawk's profile is common to the Monza family. Distinction is achieved by name badge on front fender, turbine wheel covers. Suspension at work. Skyhawk favors pinstripes for hood decor. Buick's dash is common to the line. White vinyl upholstery gives Skyhawk interior a very open feeling.

#### Monza, Skyhawk & Starfire

The GM designers have accomplished a major feat: The interior design curls around you, giving you the sense of being protected and firmly retained in your seat, and yet the dash panel and the doors are far enough away to avoid an impression of being cramped. Seats are very close to being perfect, if you order the adjustment lever, optional. Skyhawk has a two position rake adjustment. A multi-position version would be more desirable, but the two-place item suffices. There is a little work needed in the lower back region: The support isn't quite right. Seat belts are as easy to use as any of the new breed integrated belt-harness systems. Shifters are properly located and easy to use. Controls are easy to reach with no confusion as to which knob is for which function.

A medium fat steering wheel operates a very good quick ratio (16.5-13.5:1) variable power steering with just enough road feel to keep it interesting.

Handling is excellent. The front sub-frame reinforcement reduces twisting, controlling changes in caster and camber, resulting in better directional stability. Placement of steering linkage in front of the front wheel hub axis re-



Starfire prefers the cord cloth insert on seats. Unique to the Starfire is a wide side stripe and cast wheels. Taillights are all the same. An alternate choice for Oldsmobile is the protective rub strip.

duces bump steer. A large stabilizer bar (0.875 inches) improves front end roll control.

The rear suspension is a work of art. Two trailing arms and a pair of coil springs provide bounce control, splayed shocks limit suspension travel, and a stabilizer bar takes care of roll control, all of which is relatively common. The improvement comes from a laterally-mounted track bar and a long torque arm anchored between the rear axle housing and the transmission which eliminate body sway and axle hop. In essence the suspension is firmly anchored in place to do only its assigned task, which it does with great efficiency. Power brakes, disc front/drum rear, are very good with excellent feel permitting application right to the point of skid. The torque arm helps out here.

Visibility is excellent except for very tall drivers who wind up with their heads beside the B pillar (centerpost). Normal folks have no trouble. Outside mirrors could be larger to provide a greater field of vision to the rear.

However, no one has built the perfect car yet and GM is no exception. The engines are not great powerhouses. Monza's V-8 is adequate for normal driving. It definitely lacks zip, but it gets the job done. The V-6 is another story. Power is sufficient to drive with safety and without frustration as long as your attention is focused elsewhere. With a 3.11 gear and non-smog tuning, both power plants would be quite interesting. But we have some smog tuning even with the catalyst, which hurts. The quest for fuel economy dictates a 2.56:1 rear axle ratio, which really hurts performance.

You have to run the engine above 3000 rpm to get any performance at all. Buick compounds the difficulty by setting their automatic transmission in the Skyhawk to shift at 2400 rpm, so under normal conditions you never even see 3000 rpm. This can be overcome by shifting manually at a sacrifice of fuel economy. You must take a choice, you can't have hustle and big fuel numbers at the same time. All of our GM cars had automatic transmissions, but a 4-speed stick shift is available with a 5-speed promised in the future.

The hidden spare tire leaves the hatch area uncluttered, but the plastic tool storage cover rattles at times.

The three dash panels are hard to read because the gauges are hidden behind steering wheel. The windshield pillar molding is poorly trimmed and mated.

The V-6 engine runs rough at idle when cold. Both engines have cold engine stumble. The V-6 has a high frequency whine at 3500 rpm when cold, but it goes away at operating temperatures.

The chrome external decor is foil decal and looks terrible if not properly applied.

Air conditioning works very well and is not too noisy, but fresh air ventilation only comes in under the dash. The cars should have high level outlets.

Brakes are excellent, but the heat build-up melts the plastic hub caps. There is a running change which will cure this problem and you are not likely to encounter it unless you do a lot of driving down steep mountains, but it does exist on the earlier models.

All in all, the good far outweighs the bad and you will have a sleek, sharp looking car with good handling, good brakes and good fuel economy if you so choose. Power is there but you have to work the transmission to find it. Best of all, it is, as Herb Adams described it, a happy feeling car. You really like to drive it.

## MUSTANG II

All during this discourse I have seen out of the corner of my eye, banners waving in the distance with Ford Mustang II emblazoned on them. I have heard faint cries of 'we are the class leader.' Without offense to the Ford fans, you may very well be the class leader, but you are in a different class. Although the fastback styling is quite like the Monza from the windshield aft, the long flat hood and high belt-line put you inside the car while Family Monza's sloping hood and low belt line puts the car around you, which is a very distinct and different set of surroundings.

Mustang's rich carpeting, finely appointed wood-grain dash, excellent radio, and very comfortable seats sunken below the long wide hood give a very distinct air of a small Lincoln Continental Mark IV. Low buck luxury, but luxury, not excitement.

The Mustang V-6, which we could not get in time for the test, has been seriously underpowered. The V-8 (302 cubic inches) which we received too late for a full test, has plenty of power, but comes up a tad short on fuel economy (16.9 mpg). The extra weight of the V-8 takes away the light, quick feel of the smaller-engined car. Mustang has excellent ride, excellent directional stability and very good handling, but it isn't in the sports class. It still leads its own class . . . luxury.

## VW SCIROCCO

When we put this test together, Volkswagen's new Scirocco looked like a prospective opponent for family Monza. It is an excellent car and a radical departure for Volkswagen, but it is not in the same game as Monza, or even Mustang for that matter. Styling is modern, well balanced, and pleasing to

most eyes, visibility is excellent, and the feeling of space and roominess in the front seat area is the complete opposite of the feeling in the Bug.

The response and power of the small 1500-cubic-centimeter engine are almost unbelievable. The 2000-pound weight is a factor, but the little mill really puts out the horses, with excellent mid-range response.

Front-wheel drive design doesn't have any of the torque-steer characteristics normally associated with other models. There is no indication from the cockpit that the car is front-wheel design.

VW has done an excellent job of reducing vibration in their four-cylinder engine.

Steering effort is fairly strong, but it gives good road feel and the quick ratio (17.37:1) permits precise control with little wheel deflection.

Seats are comfortable, giving good support with an extra fine touch of plaid cloth inserts for the seating area.

The trunk is of adequate size and right there when you open the back.

There are some problem areas though. The Scirocco's shift linkage is poor; sloppy feeling, too much travel and a nearly undetectable reverse position. Like pushing the shifter through foam covered notches in boards.

The engine oil pan sits extremely low. Our test car already shows evidence of being scraped. We think a protective shield or skid pan is necessary.

The seats are nice but the seating position isn't. The distance from seat to control pedals and seat to steering wheel is disproportionate. It appears to be designed for a man with long arms and short legs as per the Italian position.

In spite of an excellent job of isolating engine and transaxle noise and vibration, VW didn't really do their homework, or choose to go to the expense of providing good sound isolation for the interior. The selection of interior materials could be better. Although it seems durable enough, the amount of flat metal surface exposed and the use of large grain shiny vinyl trim gives it a bargain basement trim, which is in sharp contrast to the well done driving areas of the car.

In any event, if you liked the Beetle, you'll love the Scirocco. Tight fitting parts, no frill interior, with the added bonus of very modern styling and solid power. The price is well above Bug level, but in keeping with the competition. The Scirocco has a \$4450 base price.

A new deal for VW front engine, front wheel drive, water cooled, with a belt-driven overhead camshaft are very well executed. Power disc front brakes bring the whole package to a very quick stop on demand.



### CELICA GT

When we called Toyota to see what they felt was their market competition for the Monza, they offered the Celica GT and their revamped Corolla SR-5. Celica GT is really the car that fits the category, as it's priced about the same \$4749, and weighing within 500 pounds of the Monza.

Celica is the right size with adequate 2 + 2 seating, the ride is smooth and comfortable and the seats are very comfortable with adjustable rake. Visibility is very good and there is a full bag of instruments. The interior is quite attractive with good attention to detail, all of which make the Celica a pleasant and enjoyable car to drive.

Pleasant, but not exciting. Handling isn't really up to snuff with too much understeer. There is too long a throw on the shifter and third gear is hard to hit with any consistency. The engine lacks mid-range response and vibrates over 4000 rpm. The fifth gear on the 5-speed manual transmission functions as an overdrive for fuel economy.

Steering effort is a bit stiff which wouldn't be too bad except the ratio is too slow.

All in all, the Celica is an excellent package size with good basics that need some development to keep pace with the competition.



### COROLLA SR-5

The Corolla SR-5 is a slightly different story. Low price \$4055 (\$3640 base) and lightweight (2320 pounds) are the hooks, along with excellent fuel economy at 30.4 miles per gallon. The redesigned interior is very uptown. A full instrument panel with a space age set of radio controls, a slide knob for the volume control, push button on-off, and a very comfortable seat put the little one up in the Corona class for decoration.

The 5-speed shifter is more precise than that of the Celica, using its fifth gear for overdrive, which in the case of the Corolla is needed since the engine gets very noisy over 3500 rpm.

Styling is pleasant but not spectacular.

The previous Corolla was a nimble, noisy little beast with quick, strong mid-range power. The only concession to comfort was the seat. Well, the little scatback is long gone. The sharp



*The family resemblance is obvious between Toyota Celica above and Corolla SR-5 below. Celica has much more spacious front seat layout, but Corolla has better function and placement of shifter. Celica profile shows what a few subtle styling effect. Corolla, below, sheds box image for 1975. Both cars corner flat on moderate turns, but both tend to understeer when pushed. Celica retains the smoother ride of the two.*

range of power has disappeared, the nimble handling has softened, and the upgraded interior just isn't enough compensation. The ride is much smoother, but the handling is equally diminished. Worth the inflated price, if taken in context with all the other inflated prices, but the civilizing process has cost the Corolla its character. It's a nice little city car, but not on the same field as the Monza.

In summary, we do, in fact, have a new class of cars. They are overpriced, and along with most everything else, they suffer from a few cost-cutting gimmicks, but they are beautiful and and it is a sheer pleasure to drive them: An almost forgotten feeling. ■



SPECIFICATIONS	SKYHAWK	MONZA	STARFIRE	SCIROCCO	COROLLA SR-5	CELICA GT
Engine	OHV V-6	OHV V-8	OHV V-8	SOHC 4	OHV 4	OHV 4
Bore & Stroke — ins.	3.80 x 3.40	3.671 x 3.10	3.80 x 3.40	3.01 x 3.15	3.35 x 2.76	3.48 x 3.50
Displacement — cu. in./c.c.	231/3749	262/4300	231/3749	89.7/1471	96.9/1588	133.6/2189
HP @ RPM	110 @ 4000	110 @ 3600	110 @ 4000	70 @ 6000	75 @ 5800	96 @ 4800
Torque — (lbs.-ft. @ RPM)	175 @ 2000	200 @ 2000	175 @ 2000	81 @ 3500	83 @ 3800	120 @ 2800
Compression Ratio	8.0:1	8.5:1	8.0:1	8.2:1	9.0:1	8.4:1
Carburetion	2V	2V	2V	2V	2V	2V
Transmission	3-Speed Automatic	3-Speed Automatic	3-Speed Automatic	4-Speed Manual	5-Speed Manual	5-Speed Manual
Rear Axle Ratio	2.56:1	2.56:1	2.56:1	3.90:1	4.30:1	3.91:1
Steering Type	Recirculating Ball	Recirculating Ball	Recirculating Ball	Rack & Pinion	Recirculating Ball	Recirculating Ball
Steering Ratio	16.5:1-13.5:1	16.5:1-13.5:1	16.5:1-13.5:1	17.37:1	16.0:1	18.0:1-20.5:1
Turning Circle — ft.	35.81	35.81	35.81	32.2	30.8	32.8
Wheel Turns (lock-to-lock)	2.82	2.82	2.82	NA	3.0	NA
Tires	Firestone BR 78-13	Firestone BR 78-13	BF Goodrich BR 78-13	Continental SR 175.70-13	Bridgestone 185/70 HR-13	Bridgestone RD-105 Wide 70 185/70 HR-13
Brakes	Disc/Drum	Disc/Drum	Disc/Drum	Disc/Drum	Disc/Drum	Disc/Drum
Front Suspension	Coils/Shocks Stabilizer	Coils/Shocks Stabilizer	Coils/Shocks Stabilizer	Coils/Shocks	Coils/Shocks Stabilizer	Coils/Shocks Stabilizer
Rear Suspension	Trailing Arm, Coils/Shocks, Stabilizer, Torque-Arm, Track Bar	Trailing Arm, Coils/Shocks, Stabilizer, Torque-Arm, Track Bar	Trailing Arm, Coils/Shocks, Stabilizer, Torque-Arm, Track Bar	Coils/Shocks Stabilizer	Semi Elliptical Leaf Springs, Stabilizer	Coils/Shocks
Body/Frame Construction	Integral With Separate Partial Front Frame	Integral With Separate Partial Front Frame	Integral With Separate Partial Front Frame	Unitized	Unitized	Unitized
Wheelbase — in./mm	97.0/2463.8	97.0/2463.8	97.0/2463.8	94.5/2400.3	93.3/2369.8	95.5/2425.7
Overall Length — in./mm	179.3/4554.2	179.3/4554.2	179.3/4554.2	155.7/3954.7	165.2/4196.0	171.5/4356.1
Width — in./mm	65.4/1661.1	65.4/1661.1	65.4/1661.1	64.0/1625.6	65.0/1651.0	63.4/1610.3
Front Track in./mm	54.7/1389.3	54.8/1391.9	55.2/1402.0	54.7/1389.3	52.0/1320.8	51.4/1305.5
Rear Track — in./mm	53.6/1361.4	53.6/1361.4	54.1/1374.1	53.1/1348.7	52.6/1336.0	51.4/1305.5
Height — in./mm	50.2/1275.0	50.2/1275.0	49.5/1257.3	51.5/1308.1	53.5/1358.9	51.2/1300.4
Weight as Tested — lbs.	3020	3180	3050	1905	2320	2535
Storage Capacity cu. ft./cm <sup>3</sup>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Fuel Capacity gals./liters	18.5/70.0	18.5/70.0	18.5/70.0	11.9/45.0	13.2/49.9	13.2/49.9
Oil Capacity qts./liters	4/3.8	4/3.8	4/3.8	4.2/3.0	4.7/4.4	4.8/4.5
Base Price	\$4185	\$3965	\$4156	\$4450	\$3640	\$4249
Price as Tested	\$5025	\$4751	\$5362	\$4450	\$4055	\$4749
<b>PERFORMANCE</b>						
Acceleration						
0-30 mph	4.8	4.1	4.4	3.5	5.3	5.3
0-40 mph	6.7	6.4	6.7	5.8	7.7	8.0
0-50 mph	9.2	9.5	9.3	8.2	10.2	11.3
0-60 mph	12.4	13.2	12.9	12.0	15.2	14.6
Standing Start 1/4-Mile Elapsed Time (sec.)	19.01	18.00	18.69	17.85	20.05	19.32
Speed (mph)	73.11	77.58	73.38	76.33	67.92	70.86
Passing Speeds						
40-60 mph	7.4	7.8	7.1	6.8	7.4	6.9
50-70 mph	9.2	9.0	8.4	8.0	9.5	8.5
Stopping Distance (ft.)						
30-0 mph	21' 4"	28' 9"	25' 5"	24' 0"	21' 2"	24' 11"
60-0 mph	111' 0"	116' 4"	114' 4"	103' 2"	110' 0"	124' 5"
Fuel Mileage	22.12	21.47	23.54	34.7	30.4	23.9
Speedometer Error						
Indicated Speed	40 50 60	40 50 60	40 50 60	40 50 60	40 50 60	40 50 60
True Speed	38.2 48.6 58.6	40.1 50.5 61.9	38.8 49.3 60.4	37.8 47.4 57.2	38.7 48.0 57.1	39.9 49.1 58.7