



Oldsmobile RECON

■ With a boxy shape and sliding side doors that close into the trailing edge of the front doors, the RECON looks and feels more like a minivan than a sport-utility vehicle. Still, with all-wheel drive and a 200-hp 3.0-liter V-6, you can go just about anywhere. RECON stands for reconfigurable, which applies to the versatile seating, sliding 2-panel sunroof and onboard electronics. Information from a personal digital assistant can be loaded into the RECON's onboard computers, and data ranging from appointments to e-mail can be displayed on the instrument panel. The display will show traditional vehicle instrumentation and settings for the climate-control and entertainment systems. The screen can also be used for onboard navigation, real-time traffic information and uplinks to the Internet. The RECON is purely a concept, with no plans for production.—MDL

Chrysler PT Cruiser

■ DaimlerChrysler co-chairman Bob Eaton says the PT Cruiser is "too cool to categorize." Based largely on Neon mechanicals, it's certified as a truck, and has all the space of a European minivan such as the Renault Megane Scenic while retaining styling that is distinctly American Thirties' hot rod.

With round fenders, a tapered nose and profile that has the silhouette of an old sedan delivery, there's no mistaking the PT Cruiser's American roots. Starting at less than \$20,000, the PT Cruiser will go on sale by next January's Detroit show. Built in DaimlerChrysler's Toluca, Mexico, assembly plant, the PT Cruiser is powered by a transversely mounted 150-hp 2.4-liter dohc 4-cylinder engine, while a 2.0-liter dohc powerplant will be used for export. The PT Cruiser is about 4 in. shorter than the new Neon, although both vehicles share a 103-in. wheelbase.

DaimlerChrysler showed two PT Cruisers, a front-drive pre-production version (shown here) that will go on sale next year as 2001 model and the all-wheel-drive show car that featured a huge canvas sunroof. Eaton said an awd Cruiser will follow within a year after the original.—MDL



Volkswagen Beetle RSi

■ Herbie never looked like this. VW's RSi study demonstrates the flexibility of the New Beetle concept by wedging a twin-turbo V-6 under the hood, adding some aero bits and huge 18-in. wheels and tires. VW chairman Ferdinand Piëch called the power output of the pumped-up Beetle "sufficient" (borrowing language from VW's recently acquired Rolls-Royce and Bentley operation). Inside, the RSi has carbon-fiber racing seats and enough aluminum supports and grab handles to rival its Audi TT sibling.

The V-6 mates to a 6-speed manual transmission and VW's next-generation of Syncro all-wheel drive known as 4MOTION.

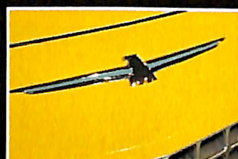
That system will probably be offered on standard-edition New Beetles before you can find an RSi at your local VW dealer.—MDL



Ampersand

(my) Mercury

■ Based on the platform of the Ford Contour, the (my) is a precursor to the crossover vehicles Ford is planning to launch next year. The Ford and Mazda models will be more trucklike in appearance, while Mercury vehicles will have more car cues. Though the (my) is tall and has a squared-off rear hatch, the main part of the passenger cabin has an arching roofline that belies its sedan roots. The doors open suicide-style and there's no B-pillar. Inside, the stark Bauhaus interior carries over that theme with aluminum supports for the seats and heavy use of brushed aluminum accents. The instruments are clustered in a central binnacle, which allows for right- and left-hand-drive versions of the vehicle. The amber-tinted windows and the two amber roof glass panels soften this technical, highly machined look. The (my) seats five comfortably and when the rear seats are folded down, offers a flat load space 6 feet in length. Sage-colored mats with a non-slip diamond pattern cover the floor. According to Ford's vice president of design, J. Mays, "It is a very modern, progressive design that incorporates simple shapes and unique materials to give it a precise yet adventurous look and feel."—MDL



Ford Thunderbird

■ We asked Jacques Nasser, president and CEO of Ford, what he thought of the Thunderbird's reception and the future of retro. Replied Jac: "Oh, I hate that word. It's *heritage design*. We're delighted about how it was received. We are proud of it. The reception is exactly the way we felt about the Thunderbird and what we are trying to communicate. We really tried to recapture the essence of America in the Fifties and Sixties: a simpler lifestyle, a measure of optimism and self-confidence in the future. And it's interesting that a lot of people will say it reminds them of past Thunderbirds. The reminders are things like the portholes, the turquoise in the badges, the eggcrate alloy grille, the pastel color. When you go back to the Thunderbirds of the Fifties and the Sixties, they were about colors and textures and individual features and some of the shapes. That's what we've tried to do with this vehicle. And yet the proportions and the stance and the language are very, very modern."—MDL



Monte Carlo bows

■ Chevrolet's redesigned Monte Carlo was unveiled at the Chicago Auto Show carrying some styling cues of last year's Intimidator concept car. The new Monte has a smaller greenhouse, a blunter nose and red taillamps covered by smoked lenses. Chevy also announced that the Monte Carlo will pace the Indy 500 and that the new shape may also be ready for NASCAR as early as August for the Brickyard 400.—MDL



LETTER FROM DETROIT

By Matt DeLorenzo

Cars, what a concept

I love auto shows. The cars are a given. For me, it's the blend of the hardware, the people who make the cars and the news being made. Few thrills are bigger than being given a walkaround for a concept car (and perhaps a sit-in) by its designer. There's far more to shows than just cars. They are an opportunity to chart the changes affecting the future. A few random thoughts from a week on the Motown show floor:

The 1999 show will be remembered for its many beginnings. It marked the first public show for the newly merged DaimlerChrysler. Co-chairmen Bob Eaton and Jürgen Schrempp were in the spotlight, but further down the food chain you could see Mercedes-Benz and Chrysler executives taking the baby steps that are drawing them ever closer together. On the show floor, it's still difficult for the general public to grasp the fact that the two are one. There are still separate stands for each brand, the one for Mercedes-Benz tucked in

the corner where it always has been, looking suitably European. And Chrysler brands are out in the middle of the floor, chock-ablock with concept cars just as they always have been. Still, there was something incongruous about looking at pictures of Chrysler concept cars while seated in the Mercedes-Benz hospitality area, and seeing a video of the Mercedes SLR projected on the Chrysler stand. But as DaimlerChrysler would say, that's your problem, get over it.

Ford decided it was the perfect opportunity to put on a unified front in a two-tier 84,000-sq.-ft. stand that brought all six of its nameplates together at an auto show for the first time. Newly minted president and CEO Jacques Nasser was all business that week. There wasn't any razzle-dazzle; just a steady drumbeat of new product and concept-car launches, environmental

and safety initiatives. Nasser even made news at the black-tie charity preview by announcing that Ford was sponsoring a Detroit stop by the Three Tenors. If the show is any indication, Nasser's run at the helm of Ford will be a whirlwind of activity.

The show also served notice that General Motors is not content to watch DaimlerChrysler and Ford capture all the headlines. GM sought to present an image that the colossus "gets it" by offering up a slew of concept cars that embrace "math-based" design—in other words, cars completely designed on computers by young hot designers. However, the most attractive of the lot was the Cadillac Evoq, a design penned (and not mapped out by geometric coordinates on a screen) by veteran designer Kip Wasenko and lovingly fabricated by the wizards at Metalcrafters. The Chevy Nomad was also a good effort, thanks partly to an interior by Jeff Gale, the son of Chrysler's Tom Gale. But the Oldsmobile RECON and the Pontiac GTO were almost cartoonish in appearance. Very edgy and unapproachable, they looked like they belong in a computer, not on the road. I met the GTO's young designer, Jay Bernard, who was wearing a leather jacket that bore the logo of Alias, the software he used to design the GTO. My not-so-random thought: It's about cars, not computers.



■ Pontiac GTO.

Ford buys Volvo

■ Ford, the second-largest carmaker in the world, has purchased Volvo's passenger-car operation for \$6.45 billion. In Volvo, Ford gains its seventh global nameplate, as well as the right to use the Swedish company's name on cars, minivans, sport-utility vehicles and even light trucks, although Volvo retains its heavy-truck business. "Volvo has a world-class reputation for safety, quality, durability and environmental responsibility," says Ford president and CEO Jacques Nasser, "all of which fit our 21st-century vision for Ford Motor Company."—AB

The Z8, worth the wait

■ Production versions of BMW's Z07 show car will go on sale as the Z8 early next year. Expect pricing to be in excess of \$100,000. The car, a rival to the Mercedes Vision SLR concept, will be powered by the M5's 400-bhp V-8. The Z8 is expected to make its official debut at the North American International Auto Show next January.—MDL

Aston doubles down

■ Bob Dover, chairman of Aston Martin, announced that the company is doubling the number of cylinders it offers in the DB7, replacing the current supercharged six with a new V-12 in some models.—MDL

The sales race

■ The Toyota Camry was the best-selling car in the U.S. last year, with a total of 429,575 sales. Honda's Accord was next, at 401,071, followed by the Ford Taurus at 371,074. And for the 17th-straight year, Ford's F-series has taken the truck crown, its 836,629 sales surpassing Chevy and GMC combined.—AB

PHOTO BY JOHN LAMM

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Ampersand



Jaguar S-Type Estate

■ The Jaguar S-Type luxury sedan has only just gone on sale in England, but already the next generation is being prepared, in the shape of this spacious station wagon. Some have said the new S-Type load-carrier could be unveiled as early as this fall, but it's unlikely to go on sale before 2000.

Jaguar has never made a wagon for production, but management has been tempted for years, possibly inspired by Lynx, the British coachbuilder whose elegant XJ-S conversions were well regarded in Coventry. Jaguar built a prototype XJ40 wagon a few years ago that never reached production. Things are different now, though, and Ford is keen to have Jag compete with Mercedes and BMW, both of which have similar wagons.

The S-Type wagon will have the same V-8 and V-6 engines as the sedans, as well as the supercharged V-8 looming large in the S-Type's future. A strong, self-leveling rear axle is part of the car's specification, as is a split rear seat to maximize load space.—*Ian Norris*

COMPUTER-ENHANCED PHOTO BY HANS G. LEHMANN/HIDDEN IMAGE

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Ferrari's new 360 Modena

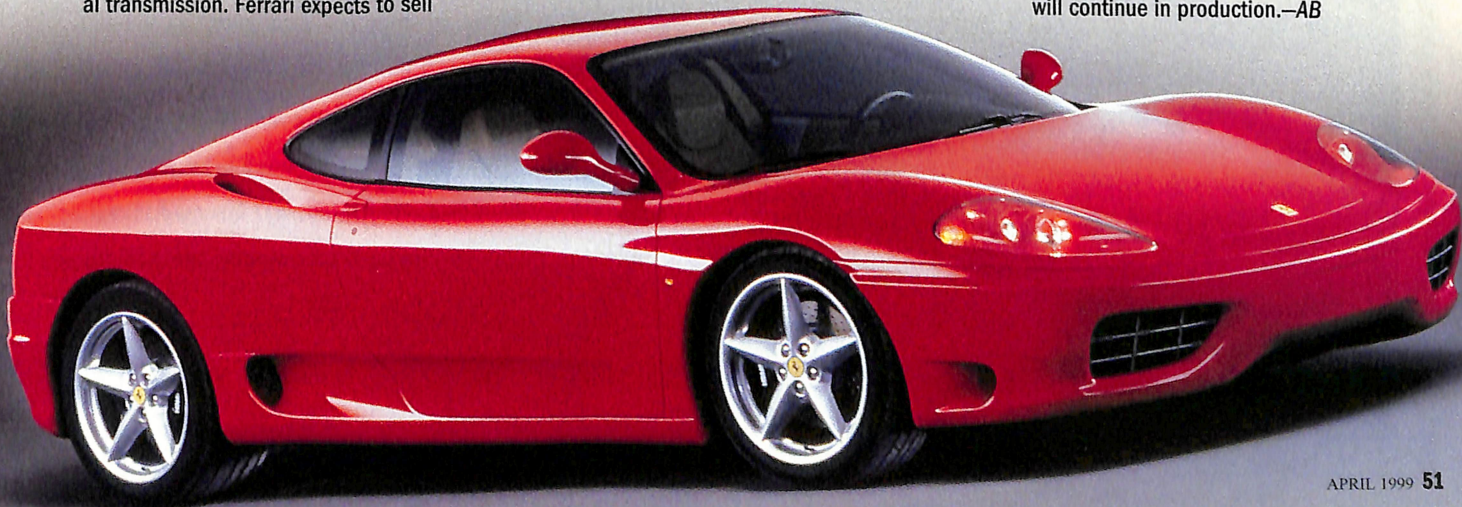
■ About the time this magazine hits the newsstand, Ferrari will be pulling the drapes off the new 360 Modena, an all-aluminum sports car that replaces the F355 and is making its world debut at the Geneva auto show in March. With styling by Pininfarina (and looking remarkably like the computer-enhanced photos in our September 1998 issue), the Modena goes on sale this spring.

According to Ferrari, the Modena promises to be one of the fastest and most powerful GT road cars ever to be produced at Maranello. Four years in the making, this mid-engine 2-seater is powered by a 3.6-liter 8-cylinder engine, presumably an enlarged version of the F355's 3.5-liter 40-valve V-8, producing 400 bhp or an outstanding 111 bhp per liter.

As you'd expect, the second generation of Ferrari's F1-style paddle shifters will be available on this car, as will a 6-speed manual transmission. Ferrari expects to sell



2275 Modenas a year, which represents 65 percent of the company's annual production of around 3500 cars. In addition to a revised suspension, the new Modena is said to have a more spacious cockpit that's more refined than ever. Though intended to be a replacement for the F355 over the next six months, the F355 Spider will continue in production.—*AB*



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WITH THE MONA LISA.
BEETHOVEN DIDN'T FUTZ
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Sure, da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" is one of the world's most beautiful paintings. And, yes, Beethoven's 5th is nothing short of a musical masterpiece. But just think how much better they could have been.

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the wind as well as the dark? Make its shape more aggressive. Fit it with low-profile, 225/50 V-rated tires that grip the road and 5-spoke 17" aluminum wheels, so they look good doing it.

But like most sticklers for excellence, we couldn't stop there. We wondered how its luxurious interior could be even more luxurious (if that was at all possible). The answer? Standard amenities like a power-operated rear-window sunshade to block



THE NEWLY REDESIGNED Q45t

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Chevrolet
Camaro SS vs. Ford SVT
Ford SVT
Mustang Cobra

Grudge Match

The rivalry goes on—and it's better than ever

BY MATT DeLORENZO

PHOTOS BY BARRY HATHAWAY

ONE IS PAINTED HUGGER ORANGE, THE OTHER TOUTS ITS “heritage” (read retro) styling cues. These touches underscore that both are children of the Sixties, even though the technology beneath their skins has changed dramatically. Yet there’s one thing that hasn’t varied over three decades: The Chevrolet Camaro and Ford Mustang are quintessential American pony cars and as such, continue to fight the good fight over which is best.

To the factories, the measure has been sales numbers (and right now, Ford owns that bragging right). But out on the street, sales figures don’t mean a whit. It’s the hardware that counts. And while both Chevy and Ford have V-6 entry-level models and mainstream V-8s like the Mustang GT and Camaro Z28, the bragging rights come from playing above the rim. Which is where the Camaro SS and SVT Mustang Cobra reside. Their production numbers are small, but the rewards from out-leaping the competition are psychologically considerable.



For a while, it's been no contest. Thanks to nearly 40 years of evolution of the small-block V-8, Chevrolet has held the upper hand when it comes to raw power. Indeed, the 5.7-liter LS1 V-8 has rewritten the book on the effectiveness of pushrod powerplants.

But while Chevrolet was working hard to extract the most from its existing technology, Ford chose to send the Mustang to finishing school, dropping its 5.0-liter pushrod V-8 for a more refined 4.6-liter overhead-cam unit (consequently improving fuel economy and emissions). And Dearborn has continued to tweak and tune the Mustang GT, the most polished of its ilk yet, thanks to its better body structure and steering feel. And now from their Specialty Vehicle Team graduates the SVT Mustang Cobra, a car that offers all the refinement of the GT with Camaro SS levels of power and an independent rear suspension.

The look of the new Cobra is more subdued than in the past. The nostril hood scoops have given way to a gentle power dome, which is much cleaner in appearance than the Mustang GT's

non-functional hood scoop. However, the Cobra's nose is notably more aggressive, what with its smaller but grilleless opening—through which you can actually see the radiator core behind the mascot pony insignia.

And while we're examining its snout, let's note that the Cobra retains its round driving lights, which are flanked by inlets that direct air toward 13-in. vented Brembo brake rotors. Though the press materials say the Cobra has its own side cladding, from the side and rear the car is virtually indistinguishable from stock, save for the SVT Cobra logos on the front fenders. Despite the Cobra's 17-in. alloy wheels shod with P245/45ZR-17 tires, the Mustang's New Edge design—with its sharply creased and flared wheel wells—actually makes the car look like it could wear even larger wheels and tires. And at the back, the previous model's bas-relief Cobra in the rear fascia is now gone, replaced by a stock Mustang bumper cover.

Unlike the Mustang Cobra, the SS is instantly distinguished from the Z28, thanks to the SLP-designed, -fabricated

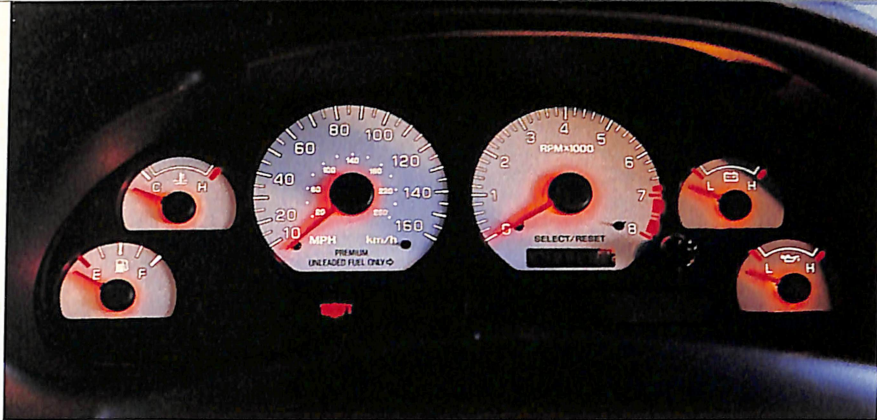
and -fitted composite hood with a large functional hood scoop. (SLP originally developed the SS concept, which Chevrolet took in-house last year.) The scoop balances last year's redesigned front clip, which, with its sculpted headlamps and large grille opening, recalls the handsome 1970–1973 Camaro. At the rear, the SS has a large rear spoiler that flares upward, higher even than the stock Z28 wing. It looks good in profile, but from the cockpit, the spoiler peaks in the middle of the rear window, further blocking rear vision from the already pillboxlike greenhouse. The \$3700 SS package (order code WU8) also includes 5-spoke 17-in. alloy wheels wearing P275/40ZR-17 Goodyear tires, stiffer front springs (by 24 percent), a 32-mm hollow front anti-roll bar and 30-percent-stiffer progressive-rate springs on the rear live axle. The solid rear anti-roll bar remains the same at 19 mm, but the Z-28's deCarbon shocks have been stiffened.

While looks are important, the real story is what's going on beneath the SS and Cobra hoods.

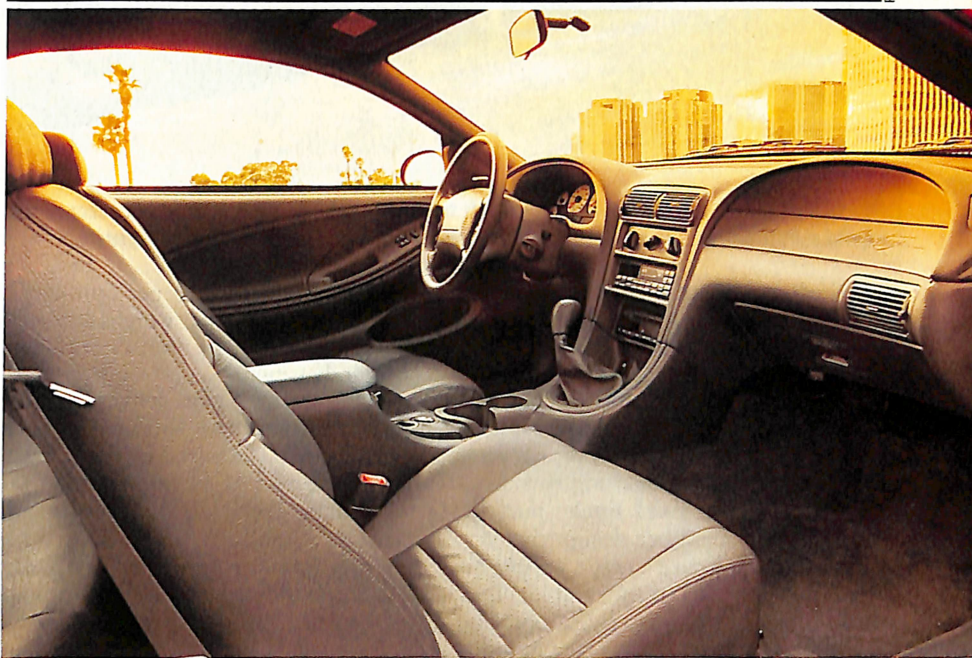


We'll admit up front to being big fans of the Z28's 305-bhp LS1, which provides astounding performance at a relatively affordable price of \$24,000. The more potent SS puts out 320 bhp at 5200 rpm and a monster 345 lb.-ft. of torque at 4400 rpm, an increase of 10 lb.-ft. over the Z28. That extra muscle comes from free-flowing stainless-steel exhaust tubing that is 3.5 in. in diameter and 40 percent less restrictive than the Z28's system. This splits off into two 2.75-in. exhaust pipes ending in chromed tips. Still, Chevy engineers were wary of encroaching on the Corvette's 345-bhp rating, so the SS has a less aggressive cam profile and a more restrictive exhaust.

Still, 320 bhp is 320 bhp. The greatest thrill the Camaro has to offer is its visceral punch when the accelerator is floored. The engine rumbles and roars like a V-8 should, and the 6-speed Borg-Warner transmission has solid throws that are made even more rewarding by the nearly baseball-sized shift knob that fits neatly into the center of your palm. And even the skip-shift system doesn't seem as intrusive if you have the patience to wait out the warning light before grabbing 2nd gear. This is a car that loves to run at high speeds even as the engine loafs; you'll find the speedometer's needle standing straight at attention at 80 mph while the lazy tach is barely ticking at about 2000 rpm.



PHOTOS BY BRIAN BLANDES



■ The Cobra at right seems to be smirking a bit. Wouldn't you with 320 bhp on tap from the SVT-tweaked dohc 4.6-liter V-8? Note its right cam cover bearing the signatures of its builders. Less specialized is the interior, standard Mustang fare save for the white instrument faces.

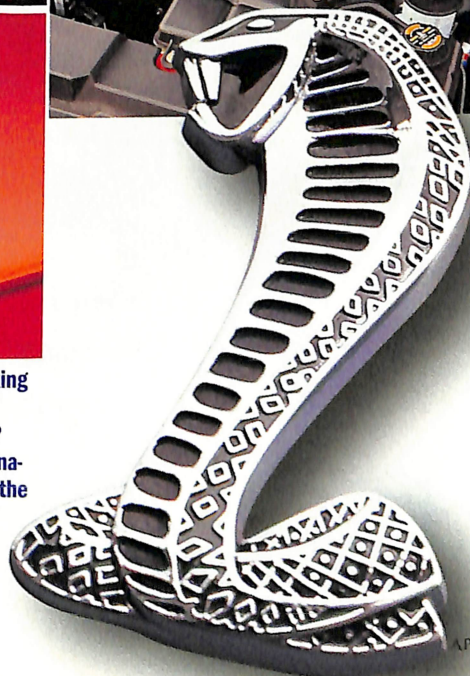




PHOTO BY BRIAN BLADES

And max horsepower isn't achieved until the engine is spinning at 6000 rpm. The 4.6-liter V-8 feels muscular through the middle range, but it's a little soft right at throttle tip-in, completely lacking the explosiveness of the LS1.

Still, the Mustang Cobra is able to match the Camaro SS in 0-60-mph acceleration at 5.5 seconds even though it weighs 50 lb. more at the curb. On closer inspection, the numbers actually show a quicker launch (credit the independent suspension, perhaps?), the Mustang beating the Chevy to 30, 40 and 50 mph. But after 60 mph, it's all SS, the Camaro holding a 0.2-sec. advantage over the quarter mile, hitting 105.5 mph in 13.9 sec. At that same distance, the Cobra musters but 101.5 mph in 14.1 sec. Still, SVT has knocked a healthy 0.2 sec. from the previous Cobra model's 0-60 time.

But the biggest shift in the pony-car wars may be less about what's going on at the drag strip than what happens when the road becomes curvy. Here the Mustang Cobra has an edge, with a modular independent rear suspension that bolts onto the same mounting points as the GT's live axle setup.

The independent rear is built around an aluminum differential case borrowed from the Lincoln Mark VIII. But its upper and lower control arms are unique to the Cobra and are attached to a welded tubular subframe. While the irs setup is more complex

■ Special wheels are the most obvious tip-off to the SVT Cobra's identity; bodywork changes are quite subtle. And is that a trace of negative camber from the independent rear suspension?

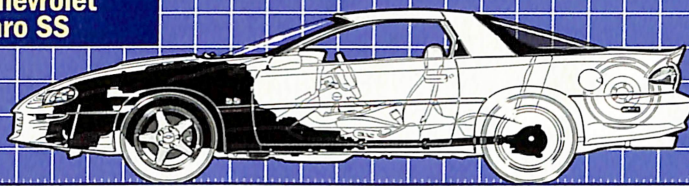
Early on, Ford promised to match Chevy's 320 bhp—and delivered, extracting those ponies from the smaller-displacement 32-valve dohc 4.6-liter V-8. That's an increase of 15 bhp over the previous Cobra. Likewise, torque is now 317 lb.-ft. at 4750 rpm, a gain of 17. Specifically, these improvements come from a revised intake port and combustion chamber design that promotes better intake charge tumble for improved mixing of fuel and air. Even though the engine is more complex than the Mustang GT's V-8, which still uses a cast-iron block, aluminum

heads and two valves per cylinder, a dressed Cobra engine weighs less than the GT's, improving the SVT model's weight distribution.

The Mustang Cobra delivers its power in a much more subdued manner than does the Camaro. The most apparent disadvantage is torque, with the Ford being nearly 30 lb.-ft. shy of the Camaro figure. While the SS pulls strongly from low rpm, the 4-valve Cobra powerplant doesn't start cooking until about 2000 rpm, finally taking a big step up between 3000 and 3500 rpm, and eventually peaking at 4750.



1999 Chevrolet Camaro SS

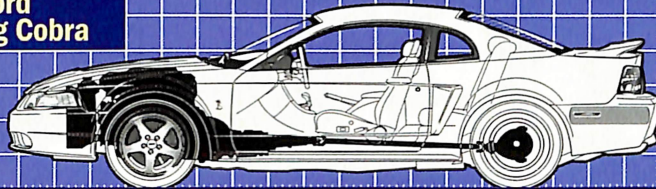


SCALE: 1/8 IN. (25.4mm) DIVISIONS
DRAWING BY TIM BARKER

List price/Price as tested: \$20,870/\$27,466

Price as tested includes std equip. (dual airbags, ABS, air cond, AM/FM stereo/cassette, limited-slip diff), SS performance and appearance pkg (\$3700), Z28 preferred equip. (cruise control, remote hatch release, foglamps, keyless entry, anti-theft alarm, rear floor mats; pwr windows, mirrors & door locks) \$1591, leather bucket seats (\$500), stereo upgrade w/CD (\$100), rear-window defogger (\$170), dest charge (\$535).

1999 Ford SVT Mustang Cobra



SCALE: 1/8 IN. (25.4mm) DIVISIONS
DRAWING BY TIM BARKER

List price/Price as tested: \$27,470/\$28,190

Price as tested includes std equip. (dual airbags, ABS, air cond, leather upholstery, traction control, anti-theft alarm; pwr mirrors, windows, driver seat and door locks; AM/FM stereo/cassette/CD), rear spoiler (\$195), dest charge (\$525).

General Data

Chevrolet Camaro SS Ford SVT Mustang Cobra

Curb weight	3360 lb	3410 lb
Test weight	3510 lb	3540 lb
Weight dist (with driver), f/r, %	58/42	55/45
Wheelbase	101.1 in.	101.3 in.
Track, f/r	60.7 in./60.6 in.	59.9 in./59.9 in.
Length	193.5 in.	183.5 in.
Width	74.1 in.	73.1 in.
Height	51.3 in.	53.5 in.

Engine

Type	ohv 2-valve/cyl	dohc 4-valve/cyl
	V-8	V-8
Displacement	5666 cc	4600 cc
Bore x stroke	99.0 x 92.0 mm	90.2 x 90.0 mm
Compression ratio	10.1:1	9.9:1
Horsepower (SAE)	320 bhp @ 5200 rpm	320 bhp @ 6000 rpm
Torque	345 lb-ft @ 4400 rpm	317 lb-ft @ 4750 rpm
Maximum engine speed	6000 rpm	6800 rpm
Fuel injection	elect. sequential port	elect. sequential port
Rec. fuel	prem unleaded, 91 pump oct	prem unleaded, 91 pump oct

Chassis & Body

Layout	front engine/rear drive	front engine/rear drive
Body/frame	composite, steel/unit steel	unit steel
Brakes, f/r	11.8-in. vented discs/11.9-in. vented discs; vacuum assist, ABS	13.0-in. vented discs/11.7-in. vented discs; vacuum assist, ABS
Wheels	cast alloy, 17 x 9	forged alloy, 17 x 8
Tires	Goodyear Eagle F1 GS, 275/40ZR-17 93W	BFGoodrich Comp T/A, P245/45ZR-17
Steering	rack & pinion , pwr asst	rack & pinion , pwr asst
Overall ratio	14.4:1	15.0:1
Turns lock to lock	2.3	2.6
Suspension, f/r	upper & lower A-arms , coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/ live axle on dual lower trailing links, Panhard rod, torque arm, coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar	MacPherson struts , coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar/ upper & lower control arms , coil springs, tube shocks, anti-roll bar

Accommodations

Seating capacity	2+2	2+2
Head room, f/r	36.0 in./33.5 in.	37.3 in./32.5 in.
Front-seat leg room	44.5 in.	44.3 in.
Rear-seat knee room	20.5 in.	19.0 in.
Trunk space	10.1 + 9.6 cu ft	10.3 + 8.5 cu ft

Acceleration

Chevrolet Camaro SS Ford SVT Mustang Cobra

Time to speed, sec		
0-40 mph	3.3	3.1
0-60 mph	5.5	5.5
0-80 mph	8.7	9.2
0-100 mph	13.2	13.6
Time to distance		
0-1320 ft (¼ mile)	13.9 @ 105.5 mph	14.1 @ 101.5 mph

Braking

Minimum stopping distance		
From 60 mph	129 ft	137 ft
From 80 mph	222 ft	234 ft
Control	excellent	excellent
Brake feel	excellent	very good
Overall brake rating	excellent	very good

Handling

Lateral accel (200-ft skidpad):	0.87g	0.85g
Balance	mild understeer	moderate understeer
Speed thru 700-ft slalom:	60.0 mph	64.5 mph
Balance	mild oversteer	moderate understeer

Interior Noise

Idle in neutral	53 dBA	52 dBA
Maximum, 1st gear	79 dBA	80 dBA
70 mph	76 dBA	78 dBA

Fuel Economy

Normal driving	est 19.0 mpg	19.0 mpg
EPA city/highway	18/27 mpg	est 17/26 mpg
Fuel capacity	15.5 gal.	15.7 gal.

Drivetrain

Transmission	6-speed manual	5-speed manual
Gear/Ratio/Overall/(Rpm) Mph		
1st, :1	2.66/9.10/(6000) 48	3.37/11.02/(6800) 45
2nd, :1	1.78/6.09(6000) 72	1.99/6.51/(6800) 79
3rd, :1	1.30/4.45/(6000) 98	1.33/4.35/(6800) 116
4th, :1	1.00/3.42/(6000) 128	1.00/3.27/est (6800) 154
5th, :1	0.74/2.53/est (5550) 160	0.67/2.19/est (4660) 160
6th, :1	0.50/1.71/est (3750) 160	
Final drive ratio	3.42:1	3.27:1
Engine rpm @ 60 mph		
in top gear	1500 rpm	1750 rpm

Subjective ratings consist of excellent, very good, good, average, poor; na means information is not available.

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and slightly heavier than the live axle unit it replaces, it reduces unsprung weight by a significant 125 lb. And (as mentioned earlier) the weight distribution is improved, according to Ford, moving from 57/43 to 55/45 front to rear. The rear suspension uses a slightly thicker tubular 26-mm anti-roll bar (up 1 mm from last year's) while the front bar loses 1 mm (now at 28 mm). High-rate linear springs are also used front and rear.

All told, the Cobra offers up a good combination of ride comfort and sure-footedness. Not only does the car feel more settled through tight turns, the across-the-board improvements in the Mustang's steering give the confidence you need to push the new suspension to its limits. It has the right amount of weight, linearity and feedback to allow you to precisely place the car where you want it. Naturally, there's a bit of understeer dialed into the chassis, but it's easily overcome with judicious application of power (and there's a standard traction-control system just in case you get overenthusiastic).

Like the pushrod LS1, Chevrolet has taken its live-axle setup about as far as existing technology can be pushed. In fact, improvements elsewhere actually do more to help the Camaro's ride and handling than does the suspension itself. For example, the car's rack-and-pinion steering (with its fluid cooler) returns a firm and direct feel. The great grip provided by the tires is aided by standard traction control that relaxes the throttle, retards engine timing and applies braking to a spinning wheel. And the Camaro stops as well as it goes—a short 129 ft. from 60 mph and 222 ft. from 80, compared to 137 and



■ Through a circuitous path, the Camaro SS's V-8 breathes through its NACA-ducted hood to make a thunderous 320 bhp. Decidedly non-sporty steering wheel mars the racy interior.

234 ft. for the Mustang. Credit here the nearly 12-in. vented discs supported by a new Bosch ABS system and electronic brake proportioning that replaces the hydraulic valve.

Even though the live-axle setup is not optimal, what it lacks in sophistication it makes up in predictability. Switch off the ASR, stomp on the gas and get ready to hang the tail out. The suspension's

tuning, through the stiffer springs and deCarbon shocks, makes the SS responsive, communicative and just plain fun. We were able to wring a respectable 0.87g out of the car on the skidpad with minimal body roll—not bad for a car with such basic suspension technology. In fact, the Camaro SS's lateral acceleration number is higher than the 0.85g we coaxed from the irs Mustang Cobra.





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But don't let numbers alone fool you. A live-axle setup will grip smooth, flat pavement just fine, thank you. (In fact, the '99 Cobra's lateral g's are identical to the previous live-axle model's). It is on irregular pavement out in the real world, or during quick right-to-left transitions, where it ultimately demonstrates its superiority in maintaining a consistent contact patch. And this was evident in the slalom, where the Mustang Cobra hit 64.5 mph (2 mph better than the previous Cobra), while the Camaro SS could only manage a tail-happy 60.0 mph.

Out on the open road this translates into much less drama in the turns. Under load, the rear end now squats and hangs onto the tarmac with a tenacious grip. Whereas with the old car, you would tend to roll out of the throttle as the tail started to go wide, it now takes a pronounced set and you can even consider dialing in throttle to nudge the stern sideways. That's our kind of difference.

But if the Mustang Cobra is breaking new ground for pony cars in handling, an area crying out for change in both cars is ergonomics. The Camaro's racy look, with its nearly horizontal windshield, has severely compromised the interior package. The lack of interior room for a car of its exterior size is truly remarkable. For instance, if an average-size person gets comfortable in its nicely bolstered front buckets, the rear seats become vestigial at best, and the large console and closeness of the windshield header are downright claustrophobic. While the speedometer and tach are easy to read, the smaller fuel, coolant-temperature, oil-pressure and electrical-system gauges can be obscured by the tilt steering wheel.

The Mustang Cobra is roomier, but for a premium pony car the materials fall short of expectations. The package is basically the stock GT interior with the addition of a white-face gauge pack-



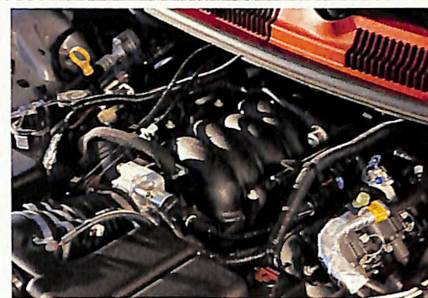
■ The Camaro wins the hunkered-down, broad-shouldered award easily, with its wide stance and meaty P275/40ZR-17 tires. Corvette-derived LS1 V-8 backs up the bravado.

age and a different stitch pattern on the seats. The bland interior cries out for dressing up—at least the SVT Contour uses some faux carbon fiber to break up the sea of plastic. The biggest improvement we'd recommend would be better-bolstered seats with firmer padding than the stock Mustang buckets. On the plus side, the rear seats are decidedly more adult-friendly for short hops.

Both cars offer the same level of equipment for about the same price, roughly \$28,000. For that money you can get traction control, ABS, air conditioning, a premium sound system, power windows, power door locks and the like. In fact, the only option on the Mustang is a \$195 rear spoiler. In an era where nearly anything on the plus side of 300 bhp costs \$40,000 or more, this is tremendous value.

So which one wins?

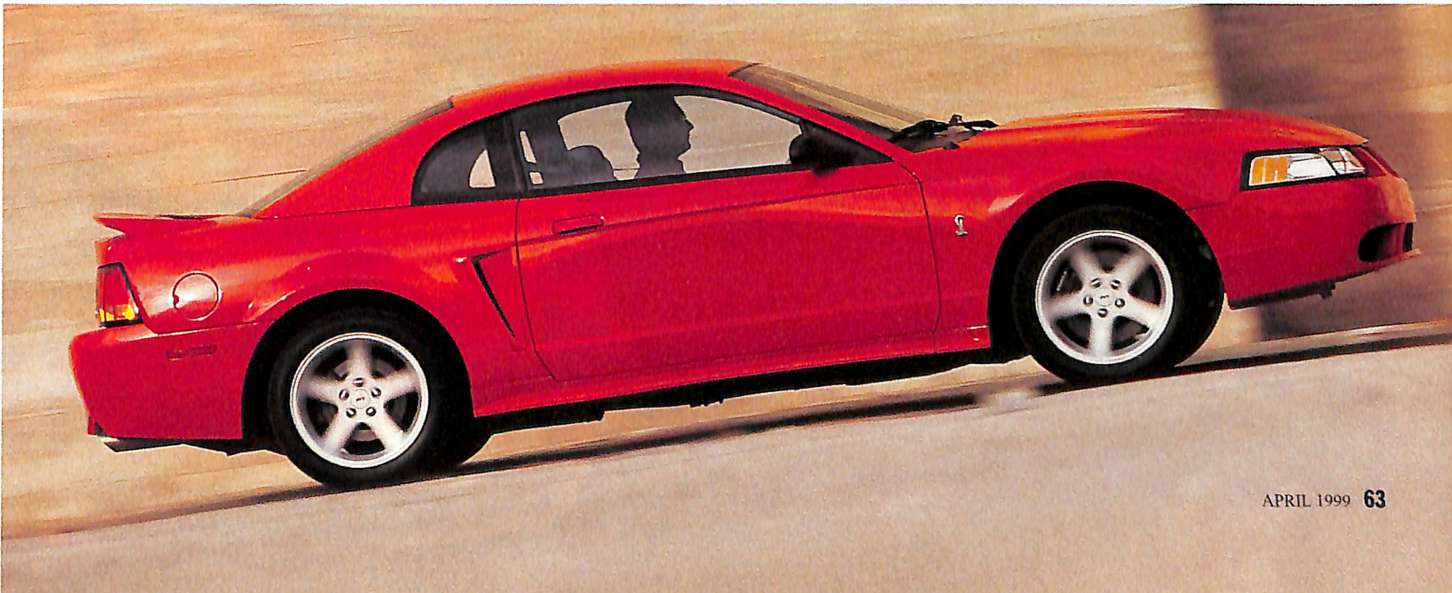
If you want old-time muscle-car performance (meaning that smoky burnouts are your forte), then by all means it has to be the Camaro SS. But for my money, I'd look to the future.



Sure, the Mustang Cobra's V-8 lacks the rumble of the small block, and its higher-revving nature is an acquired taste to those weaned on the low-end performance of pushrod engines. But as the numbers show, off-the-line performance doesn't seem to suffer, and from a handling perspective, the new Mustang Cobra is as much a revelation as it is a delight.

In fact, the Mustang Cobra just about puts to rest the notion that pony cars by sheer definition must be hairy, grunt-off-the-line non-handlers. Though the Camaro SS, with its pushrod engine and live axle, possesses a bit more edge, it's showing its age. No, the pony-car future lies with cars such as this Mustang—which (technically at least) has become a horse of quite a different color. ☐

PHOTO BY BRIAN BLADES





**Looks like two weeks vacation
isn't going to cut it anymore.**



CRUISING ALONG A TWO-LANE highway, winding among a few of the better-known wineries north of San Francisco; Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No.3 (*Allegro*) is playing in the background, resonating through a seven-speaker concert-hall-like Lexus/Nakamichi audio system. With the winter morning sun sitting lower than usual above the horizon, the light easily penetrates the

neighboring orchards and makes the dew left on the leaves sparkle. At a touch of a button, the window lowers gently into the door as it welcomes a gush of crisp late morning air—fresh from an overnight rainstorm—into the cabin. This is the perfect setting for a Grand Touring adventure.

I was bringing up the rear of a three sports-coupe caravan in the Lexus SC 400—first introduced in 1991. It has

since been updated with a new VVT-i (Variable Valve Timing with Intelligence) engine and minor styling changes. In front of me was race-car champion Steve Millen piloting the new-for-1999 Mercedes-Benz CLK430, a V-8 version of the successful 6-cylinder CLK320, blending handsome E-Class styling atop the C-Class chassis. And just ahead of Steve were Editor-in-Chief Thos L. Bryant and Art Direc-



Jaguar XK8 vs Lexus SC 400 vs Mercedes-Benz CLK430

Grand Touring, V-8 Style

Great food, great company, great cars

BY PATRICK HONG
PHOTOS BY RICHARD M. BARON

for Richard... ing their
way through the wine country in a
very elegant Jaguar XK8 coupe, the
first new sports car in 21 years from a
marque famous for building Grand
Touring automobiles.

On paper, the Lexus, the
Jaguar and the Mer-
cedes appeared
as equals;
each



has the sports-car performance and the luxury to qualify it as a Grand Tourer. But those are just numbers. And with all three in the \$50,000-to-\$75,000 range, it was an easy decision to invite them to take part in a head-to-head comparison.

So in the city of Healdsburg, about 60 miles north of San Francisco on Highway 101, we sat in Bistro Ralph and plotted our route for a two-day tour of Northern California over shoe-string fries, tempura calamari, chicken Caesar and warm-duck salads. Acting as the photographer and as the official tour guide for this road trip, Richard briefed us on the game plan: We would continue north on Highway 101 and turn toward the coast just before the city of Eureka, arriving in the historic Victorian village of Ferndale. From there, we'd head south along the curvy coastal route and drive through the beautiful redwoods as we approached Mendocino. The next day, it was back to San Francisco for our return flight to Newport Beach.

LEXUS SC 400 92.9 points

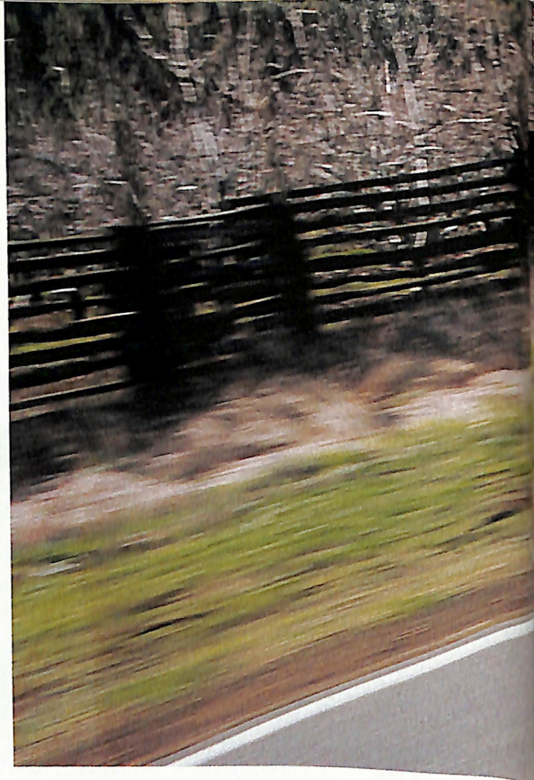
ALTHOUGH THE LEXUS SC 400 IS the oldest of the three GTs on this trip, it never failed to keep up as a competent Grand Tourer, thanks in part to the recently introduced VVT-i engine capable of producing 290 bhp at 6000 rpm and 300 lb.-ft. of torque

at 4000. Making all that power accessible to the driver is the velvety 5-speed electronically controlled automatic transmission that is always eager to meet your demands. Step on the throttle and the SC 400 downshifts promptly. The power builds up in a linear fashion as the tach sweeps past the 4400 mark, propelling the 3610-lb. car around any slow-going traffic. "The 4.0-liter V-8 is a lovely free-revving engine," Steve commented. It's no wonder that the Lexus 4.0-liter powerplant earned the highest average mark in the subjective ratings.

On long stretches of Highway 101, the Lexus' ride is supple, with minimal wind or tire noise. Everyone agreed with Tom when he noted that the SC 400 "does everything asked of it without much drama. It's smooth, fast and reliable."

Off the main road, the Lexus' progressive speed-sensitive power steering is a bit slow and numb for my taste, especially when it comes to challenging the twisties inside Humboldt Redwoods State Park and along the Avenue of Giants. And while its 4-wheel independent suspension—with the help of the optional TRAC electronic traction-control system—provided stability and grip through the turns, the car could have used more rubber to avoid spinning its inside rear tire too easily. At our usual Pomona test track, the SC 400 exhibited moderate understeer around the skidpad and through the slalom.

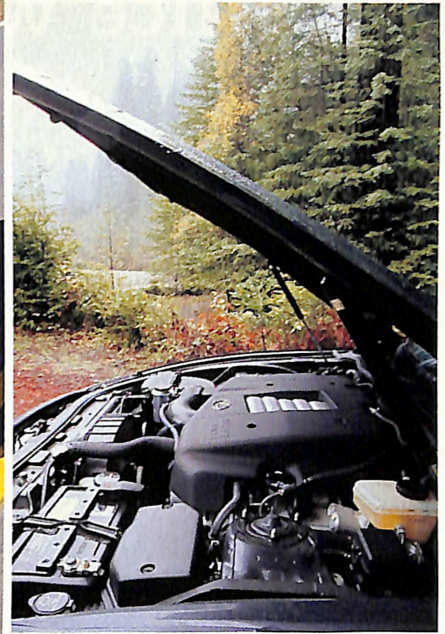
Sculpted by designers at Calty



Design in Newport Beach, the SC 400 retains much of the original's exterior styling. Updated with a revised grille and silver trim around the rear lights, the Lexus is still handsome. But when parked next to the Mercedes and the Jaguar, the SC 400's age is apparent. The sleek egg-shaped body appears heavy-set and unassuming by comparison.

Inside, not much has changed either. New touches such as perforated leather inserts on the seats and on the 3-spoke steering wheel (similar to the Lexus





GS's) give the interior a sportier feel. The 10-way power adjustable driver seat is very comfortable, providing excellent support for leisurely cruises or aggressive driving. Those who stand more than 6 feet tall may find the head room a little tight; however, they will appreciate the automatic tilt-away feature of the steering column as well as the out-and-forward actuation of the door, making ingress and egress a breeze.

On the dash, large climate-control and radio dials set in highly polished maple veneer are all within an arm's reach. And who can complain about the Lexus/Nakamichi sound system, pumping out 280 watts of music, making you feel like you're attending a live

performance at Carnegie Hall (even Bach would be impressed). All of us voted the Lexus as having the best sound system of the bunch. And new for 1999 in the SC 400 is a standard 6-CD auto-changer located in the trunk.

Perhaps the biggest roadblock for the SC 400 in this comparison is its entry fee of \$61,246 (as tested). It would be very hard to justify spending that on a slightly dated SC 400 when you can drive away a new CLK430 and save some \$7600. For patient sorts, the next-generation Lexus SC 400, which promises more refinements and dramatic styling, will make its debut in January 2001 (see the Ampersand column in our February 1999 issue).

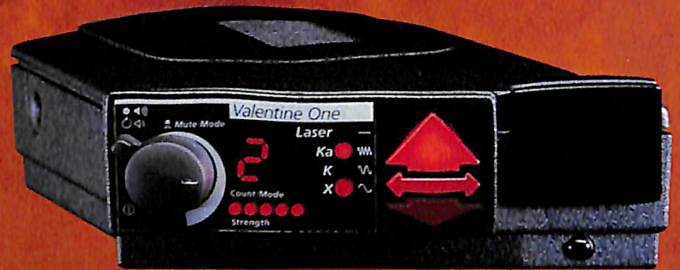
Underneath SC 400's slightly revised exterior styling is the smooth-rewiring 290-hp V8-i engine. Inside, perforated leather inserts on the seats and the 3-spoke steering wheel give the Lexus a sportier look. And we all agreed that the 280-watt sound system is the best of the bunch.



"Nice work, Car and Driver!"



Mike Valentine:
Electronics Engineer and
Radar-Warning Fanatic.



"In its latest tests, Car and Driver laid bare the dirty little secrets of the radar detector industry. Here are my five favorites:"

1 Backsliding on X and K bands.

New detectors should be better than old detectors, right? *C/D* compared all the new ones to two *C/D* test winners from the 80's. Guess what? On X and K bands, the two oldies "trounced" five of the six new detectors; only Valentine One beat the oldies.

All other brands lost range on X and K bands in the 90's when they added supervide Ka.

2 "Cordless" kills performance.

When operated on batteries, one cordless model lost 20 percent of its X- and K-band range—modest to begin with—and was "virtually oblivious" to instant-on Ka; the other lost about 30 percent range on all bands.

Valentine One has a power cord because I don't know how to protect you without one. Obviously, no one else does either.

3 False alarms from sloppy engineering.

Should detectors set off other detectors? Four of seven models tested are so leaky they caused false alarms in identical models from the same maker. Some famous brands have so little filtering they were set off by six of the seven detectors in the test.

*Valentine One resisted all false alarms from other detectors, *C/D* found.*

4 Who really has 360-degree protection?

Notice all the ads claiming 360-degree protection? All models were tested from behind with a K-band radar signal. The brand that claims "360° Total Perimeter Protection" warned at 80 feet; another that merely claims "360° detection" warned at 30 feet. Yet another with "360 degree detection" was "virtually blind" to lidar from behind.

Valentine One, in the same K-band test, warned at more than 4000 feet.

5 Bogus advertising claims.

"360° detection" isn't the only broken promise. Two of the models that claim VG-2 invisibility could be found at one-fifth and three-quarters miles away, respectively.

I'd be embarrassed if Valentine One didn't do everything I say it does. Of course, no one else puts his personal reputation behind a detector.

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