

pit
stop

The Monte Carlo-competent but thirsty

By Jim Williams

I practically had the Monte Carlo road test written before I ever saw the subject. After all, this is your basic Middle American Status Car, replete with fake wood, coats-of-arms, opera windows and curvaceous sheet metal. It's an "image car" created for white-collar Impala stiff who don't know anything about things that really count.

With an objective, open-minded viewpoint like this, a good column was a cinch. All I needed were a few acerbic comments about limp handling and flaccid-armadillo acceleration, plus some snotty comparisons to "real" cars like BMW or Mercedes (neither of which I've ever even sat in.) It might not be true, but it would show how clever I was.

Biases confirmed

Things went according to plan on the first item, the typically American interior. The front bench seat is okay, although lacking in lower-back support. Things are tighter in the rear and 6-ft. backseaters will rub knees with the front seat and heads with the roof. At the rated capacity of six, passengers' bodies are squeezed closely together. Whether this is pleasant or not depends largely on your companions.

The driving position is excellent, and the dash layout is very good except the perfectly-located instrument holes are filled with warning lights. Real gauges are optional. The view through the mirror is slightly distorted and the tail is invisible—parking a Monte Carlo will take practice.

The engine started immediately and when I pulled the trigger, it hit 60 in 12.5 seconds. That dusts off a Mercedes 280S by about four seconds.

Better than expected

This fit my prejudices. American cars often are quick but handle poor because of Detroit's concern for a smooth ride. Sure enough, the Monte Carlo's shocks were too soft—it pitched on rippling pavement. But the road feel was surprisingly good.

So was cornering. The power steering is light, quick and positive. Understeer is well controlled by huge anti-sway bars. The brakes also were easy to control, although the rears tried to lock too soon. It's no sports sedan, I thought, but it's better than I had expected.

On a straight, flat, deserted highway at 55 though, it was a boring car. The tires clippety-clopped and the pitching grew tiresome. I decided to let it out just a little.

Suddenly, the car seemed alert. The pitch was gone. The steering felt great. It really improves, I was thinking, at a couple m.p.h. over the limit. . .

Then I looked down. I was 35 m.p.h. over the limit and pulling away. If I hadn't looked at the speed, I might have topped 100 without noticing.

I discovered it works just as well on gravel and it handled my favorite twisty roads with perfect composure. When I returned it, my bias against domestic cars was wadded up in the ashtray. The Monte Carlo is low on

pulse-pounding excitement, but it's an extremely competent car.

Read this notice

Ten years ago we could have stopped here. But today, this must be the conclusion: this is a good car, but don't buy one.

The Monte Carlo is a nice individual, but in society-as-a-whole it's a menace—bigger, heavier and thirstier than need be. I only got 12.5 miles a gallon during the test.

The Monte Carlo neither practices nor preaches restraint, and we must do both. I say this because I love cars and driving, and I want it all to last as long as I can make it. Please help.

Students honor Chan

A memorial fund honoring Chi Cheung Chan, a victim of the Jan. 10 explosion at Fremont's Pathfinder Hotel, has been started by five classmates.

Chan was graduated from the College of Dentistry in 1974 and would have received his M.S. degree in Orthodontistry in May. The NU Foundation is handling the memorial fund.

Donations checks should be made payable to the University of Nebraska (Account CD 593) and should specify the Chi Cheung Chan Memorial in the lower left-hand corner. Donations should be mailed to the Foundation, 3835 Holdrege St. Lincoln, Ne., 68503.

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