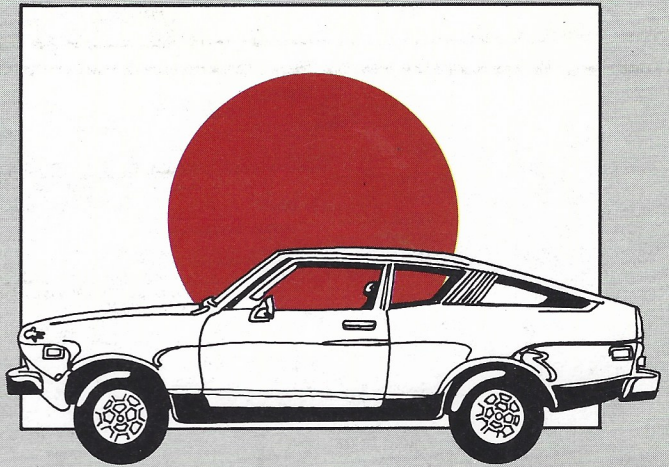
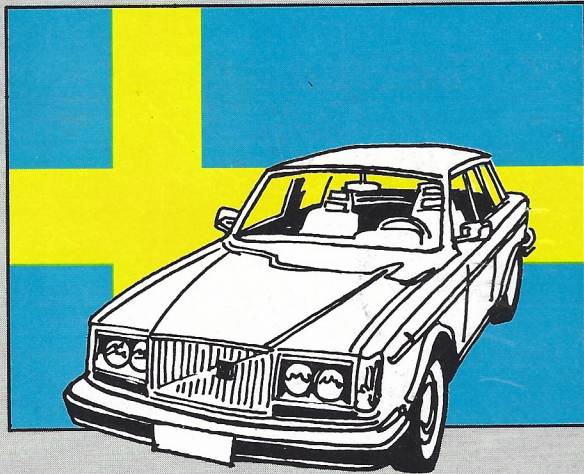


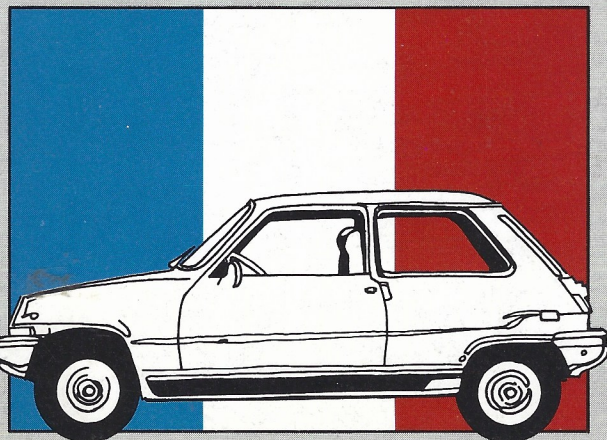
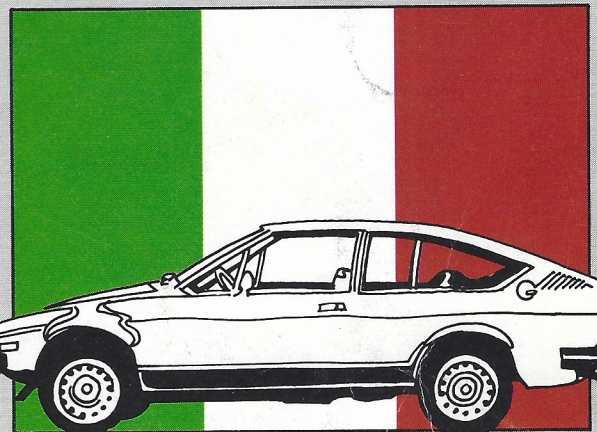
WARD'S

AUTO WORLD

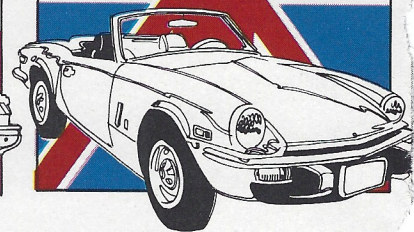
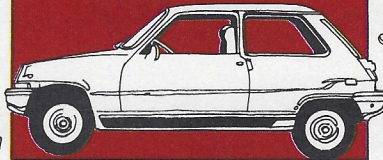
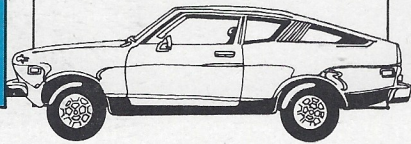
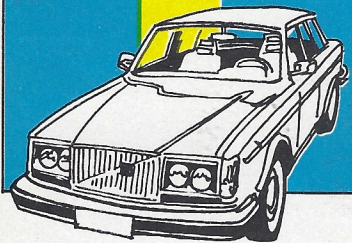
NOVEMBER 1976



WAW'S SECOND ANNUAL **IMPORT** EVALUATIONS



**Reuther's Legacy:
UAW's Black Lake**



Because of the enthusiastic response to our foreign car test report last year (see *WAW Sept. 1976 p. 40*)—and because we enjoy doing it—WAW herewith presents results of its Second Annual Import Evaluations.

In this year's tests we drove 22 cars and scored them on a 1-to-5 scale, with "poor" at the bottom and "excellent" at the top. A perfect score would be 80, but the highest any entry attained was 74 while 50 was the lowest (see chart p. 22) in the 16 test categories.

First off, we can report that despite some lower rankings there wasn't a dog among them. Expensive cars generally scored better than cheaper models as might be expected, but there were some exceptions.

The tests were conducted on city streets and open highways by various WAW staff members, and their scoring and remarks are totally subjective—which is as we intended. There is no pretense at objective, instrumented track testing, since we felt that the honest reactions of a number of drivers of differing sizes, shapes, ages, backgrounds and experience were more indicative of how these cars will be received in the real world. Individual scores are identified as such in the text, while "composite" scores represent an average of all the appraisals combined. Two-seater sports cars were arbitrarily given a grade of "average" on rear seat room to better equalize their composite totals with the others.

Luxury Sedan Class

In the luxury sedan class, WAW tested four cars: a \$10,000 Swedish Volvo 264 GL, a British Jaguar XJ6-C and a German Mercedes 300D, both at around \$14,000, plus a Mercedes 280 costing about \$16,500.

The numerical ratings are high, and they are also surprisingly close to each

WAW'S SECOND ANNUAL IMPORT EVALUATIONS

by Gary L. Witzenburg and Alan K. Binder

other. The lowest-cost test entry (Volvo) came in at a total score of 69 while the most expensive entry (280) topped the field at 74 points. The Jag scored 70 on the WAW scale and the diesel Mercedes landed a runner-up 72. Oddly enough, three of these luxury imports are motivated by six-cylinder power and the fourth by a 5-cylinder diesel. There's not a V-8 in the bunch.



Mercedes 280 4-Door Sedan

The 280 sedan combines the aging but well-packaged 280-series body with Mercedes' relatively economical 6-cyl. engine which provided adequate performance along with reliable starting and very smooth operation. Only one WAW judge rated the engine "below average" for lack of power and the only other "below average" mark was a complaint about the automatic transmission: "Jerky, balky and hard to kick-down," says the complainer. Four of the seven "average" marks went to the instruments and controls ("Con-

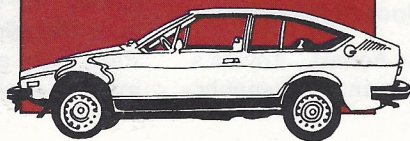
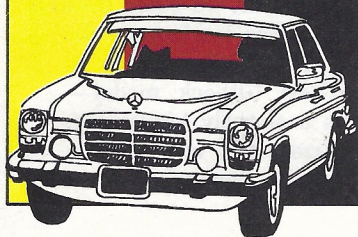
fusing identification and operation") while other "average" scores (one each) were assigned to the transmission, the front seat room and the low-speed handling and steering.

On the other hand, the Mercedes 280 rated consistently "above average" or "excellent" in interior and exterior appearance and quality, seat comfort and support, front and rear roominess and trunk capacity, brakes, handling and interior quietness. There was an occasional gripe about the rather jerky cruise control, squeaky brakes, a sunroof that drummed badly (when open) above 45 mph and a noisy air conditioner blower; but all the nitpicking aside, the 280 came across as a solid, fine-driving piece of machinery with which every critic felt obligated to find fault in some small way, but which nevertheless emerged at the top of our import evaluation heap.

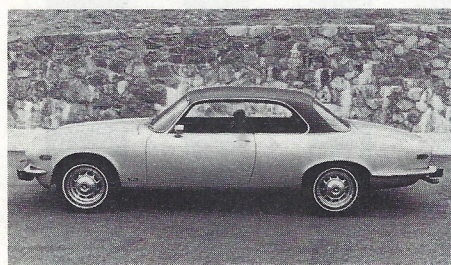


Mercedes 300D 4-Door Sedan

Costing some \$3,000 less than the



6-cyl. 280, the 300D features a 5-cyl. diesel mated to the same efficiently-packaged compact-size body. This test is a repeat from last year, and results were similar. Complaints centered around the engine's lack of power and other negative diesel characteristics, but all drivers agreed that it was far superior to any other diesel car they'd driven. The usual Mercedes quirks—poorly marked controls and noisy brakes—were mentioned, and the transmission, interior and low-speed handling were graded only average by some. But when the scores are tallied the 300D rates second only to its more expensive twin on the WAW scale.



Jaguar XJ6-C 2-Door Coupe

The lithe and plush Jaguar 6-cyl. coupe also drew rave reviews from most judges, but it fell down badly in quality control and for its poorly designed front seat occupant restraints. The restraint system harness mounting points are too low for proper comfort and protection, and the belts tended to twist and hang up in their guides. Quality control complaints were numerous: a broken remote mirror control, a sticky driver window mechanism, paint and chrome flaws, loose weather-stripping, even a rattle or two. "Bad enough in a \$3,000 car," says one critic, but "inexcusable on one costing \$14,000-plus!"

Still, the Jag scored "above average" or "excellent" in almost every category. Only rear seat room was scored as "average" on a composite basis, and only the transmission (Borg-

Warner automatic), the interior and the interior noise level received even one individual vote as low as "average."

The car's most outstanding attributes were its smooth and quiet engine, exterior appearance, wonderfully comfortable seats, beautifully laid-out instruments and controls, front roominess, excellent brakes (although braking effort was high), smooth ride, and fantastic high-speed and low-speed handling. One judge summed it up: "It's the way a \$14,000 car should look—elegant, beautifully appointed, non-synthetic and gorgeous."



Volvo 264 GL 4-Door Sedan

While not scoring quite as many "excellent" ratings as its more expensive mates in the luxury category, the solid and comfortable Volvo emerged with no composite mark less than "above average." Singular complaints were directed at its brakes ("Spongy pedal"), high-speed handling, transmission, interior ("Monochromatic") and its instrument layout.

Near unanimous raves, however, were accorded the Volvo's excellent seats, restraints, ride, front roominess and luggage capacity. "A thoroughly well-executed car . . . very comfortable and sure-footed," exclaims one judge. "As solid as the Mercedes 280 and definitely more luxurious inside," enthuses another.

Economy Sedans

Competition was close in the economy sedan category, with the inno-

vative new Honda Accord (\$4,000) heading the list at 67 points, the stylish Plymouth Arrow (\$3,400) just nudging out Buick's Opel Isuzu (\$3,300) and Toyota's nifty liftback (\$3,600) 60 points to the latter pair's 59-point tie. Renault's diminutive R5 (\$3,300) and Mazda's stingy Mizer (\$2,900) came in with 57 and 56 WAW points, respectively, and Datsun's popular B-210 (\$3,300) squeaked by with a still-respectable 50.

Significantly, all of these cars are powered by 4-cylinder engines, all but one are built in Japan and all but two have conventional drivetrains. The French R5 sports a longitudinally-mounted four-banger, has its transaxle ahead of the engine, while the Japanese Accord has its CVCC (stratified charge) 4-cylinder arranged transversely. Both are front drive, like the VW Rabbit tested last year and the upcoming Ford Fiesta, which allows for better interior packaging in cars of this size. All seven test models were either 2-door hatchbacks or 2-door coupes, so rear seat room was their most common sore point.



Honda Accord 2-door Hatchback

The one editor who was able to drive Honda's Accord on the West Coast rated the car "above average" or "excellent" in every category except rear room and ride, which are traditional shortcomings in this size and price class. Still, it was considered better than most minis in back seat roominess and better than many in ride comfort.

Exterior appearance, seat comfort, front room, brakes and fast handling drew "excellent" marks, while the new Honda scored "above average" for its smooth CVCC engine, transmission, interior appearance, instrumentation, restraints, luggage capacity, slow handling and noise. Most intriguing was the Accord's far-ranging selection of gimmicks: lights that tell you a door or tailgate is open or that maintenance is due, blower opening for defogging the side windows, an inside release for the rear hatch, a coin holder for tolls and parking change and more.

We may be taking one man's word,
continued next page

Import continued

but the only complaints we've heard yet from the field are the Accord's lack of availability (the waiting list is already months long), some dealers' avarice in loading them all up and then taking a "take it or leave it" attitude toward prospective buyers, and the car's styling similarity to VW's Scirocco. Greedy dealers and waiting lists aside, Honda seems to have set the new minicar industry target with this one.



Toyota Corolla 2-door "Liftback"

Like the Honda Accord, Toyota's new Corolla liftback is in short supply,

but two WAW evaluators were able to take a demonstration ride at a local dealership and spent enough time in the car to form a pair of valid opinions

The Corolla's worst points were front and rear roominess. In last year's Corolla 2-door coupe test we noted that front seat legroom was inadequate for six-foot drivers, a condition which is shared by the new liftback model—even though it's a slightly bigger car. Rear seats are essentially unusable by average-sized adults due to lack of

Charting WAW's Import Evaluations

Car Model/Price		ENGINE	TRANSMISSION	BRAKES	HANDLING FAST	HANDLING SLOW	EXTERIOR APPEARANCE	INTERIOR APPEARANCE	SEATS	INSTRUMENTS	RESTRAINTS	FRONT ROOM	REAR ROOM	LUGGAGE ROOM	INTERIOR NOISE	RIDE	OVERALL RATING	TOTAL POINTS
LUXURY SEDAN CLASS																		
MERCEDES 280	\$16,545	4	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	74
MERCEDES 300D	\$13,582	3	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	72
JAGUAR XJ6C	\$14,250	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	2	5	3	4	4	5	4	70
VOLVO 264GL	\$9,895	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	69
MEDIUM PRICE SEDANS																		
VW DASHER	\$5,195	5	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	71
VOLVO 245	\$7,495	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	3	4	4	68
AUDI 100LS	\$6,950	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	5	5	4	4	5	4	64
PEUGEOT DIESEL 504	\$8,260	2	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	2	3	4	5	5	4	5	3	59
ECONOMY SEDANS																		
HONDA ACCORD	\$3,995	4	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	5	3	4	4	3	4	67
TOYOTA COROLLA	\$3,598	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	3	5	4	2	2	4	3	3	4	60
PLYMOUTH ARROW	\$3,383	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	3	2	3	4	3	4	60
OPEL ISUZU	\$3,282	4	5	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	3	4	2	4	4	4	4	59
RENAULT R-5	\$3,295	4	3	4	5	4	4	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	57
MAZDA MIZER	\$2,899	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	56
DATSUN B-210	\$3,359	4	4	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	50
SPORTS COUPES/SEDANS																		
PORSCHE 924	\$9,395	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	1	3	4	4	5	70
ALFA ROMEO ALFETTA	\$8,515	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	4	3	2	4	4	4	5	67
DATSUN 280Z	\$6,594	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	2	4	3	3	4	3	5	66
MAZDA COSMO	\$5,800	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	5	4	4	66
LANCIA BETA	\$7,510	4	4	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	3	4	4	63
TRIUMPH SPITFIRE	\$4,295	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	2	3	4	58
TRIUMPH TR-7	\$5,649	4	3	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	4	4	3	57

Ward's Auto World Chart

room in every dimension, but a small child or the family dog might find the rear perch area comfortable.

On the other hand, we praised the car's very smooth-shifting transmission (with no awkward up or down motion required to catch reverse), its sleek styling ("Looks like a Jensen sport wagon. Best-looking car from Japan since the 240-Z," enthuses one of our observers) and its handsome and very complete set of instruments and controls. The strong Corolla 1600-cc engine, the interior appearance, restraint system, luggage room, brakes and handling were judged "above average," while the Liftback's seats, interior noise level and ride characteristics were graded "average."



Plymouth Arrow 2-Door Hatchback

Bad pun or not, the Arrow hits its mark in the low-dollar subcompact class. Composite "excellent" ratings were hard to come by in this group, but the Arrow scored one for its good-looking and sexy exterior appearance. And it was rated "above average" in engine, transmission (automatic), interior, seats, instruments, restraints, brakes, handling and quietness. Its only composite "below average" mark was for rear seat room.

Aside from that, the 2-liter "Silent Shaft" engine gets raves as the smoothest 4-cyl. powerplant in the known world. "Drives like a Mazda rotary," says one judge. "It's the smoothest subcompact I've driven." Other comments involve the Arrow's sportiness: "Has a very sports-car-like feel." "Very responsive and fun to drive." Looks like Plymouth dealers finally have a winning captive import.



Opel Isuzu 2-Door Sedan

A very close second to the Arrow on the WAW points scale was the other

new captive import from Japan, Buick's "Opel" by Isuzu. This very pleasant little car beats the mini-Plymouth in both ride and roominess, having been designed originally (by elves in the Black Forest of Germany) as the Opel Kadette version of the worldwide GM "T-car." The smooth-shifting 4-speed won "excellent" marks from our judges, although a 5-speed would have been welcome; and the Opel was graded "above average" in engine, instrumentation, front room, luggage room, brakes, handling, quietness and ride.

Rear room was "below average," however, and there were other complaints: "Cheap-looking, poorly-designed interior," grouses one evaluator, "the steering wheel placement was the worst I have seen, and so was the radio . . . bring back the *real* Opel!"

Yet another gives the car five "excellent" ratings and calls it "A damned honest product . . . one hell of a car at that price." Hopefully, at least some Buick dealers will not ignore it to death like they did the "real" Opel.



Renault R5 2-Door Hatchback

"It looks like a brioche (a type of French bread) on wheels—very cute," exclaims one female evaluator. "Strange-looking," says another observer, "but cute in an ugly sort of way." Chief GM Stylist William L. Mitchell called it a "hop toad" in a recent magazine interview. But any way you see it, the R5 is an intriguing little car with both endearing and aggravating traits.

The diminutive Frenchie garnered an "excellent" mark in high-speed handling and "above average" in engine, exterior, seats, brakes, low-speed handling and ride. There were no composite marks below "average." It leans dramatically when cornering, yet hangs on with a tenaciousness more common to sports cars than economy sedans, and its ride quality is probably the best in the world in its size and price class.

On the negative side were a driver's restraint system buckle mounted backwards so the webbing was always twisted when in use, high braking effort and a somewhat vague shift linkage. Instrumentation was almost non-existent,

and controls—in typical French fashion—were confusing, a short turn signal stalk mounted right next to the longer light switch stalk being the worst feature. Also the inside door lock levers were nearly inaccessible in a position far back on the doors.

Complaints aside, the little Renault is "A lot of fun to drive," according to more than one judge, and two say they'd consider buying one if the price were lower.



Mazda Mizer 2-Door Sedan

The Mizer was the least expensive of our test cars, but certainly an acceptable economy package in every way. There were no composite "excellent" or "below averages," and grades were about equally divided between the "average" and "above average" columns. The car's stronger points were transmission, exterior appearance, restraints, front room, brakes and handling.

Gripes were directed at the poorly designed manual choke linkage, which was mounted below the dash in a flimsy plastic bracket and was extremely hard to pull; difficult rear seat access and poor rear room; cheap interior; engine roughness (particularly when cold) and noise at high speed; non-reclining seats; and shaky rear view mirrors. "A plain Jane car," one evaluator concludes, "but it was tight and things seemed to fit well. A solid little piece of machinery that will get you where you're going . . . and back."



Datsun B-210 2-Door Hatchback

This little car has been such a hot seller for so long that we felt it appropriate to test it again, particularly because only one staff member got to drive one during a West Coast trip last year. Although it emerged low on the WAW econobox totem, it does

continued next page

Import continued

have some strong points and is still a pretty decent car for the money.

There were no categories in which the B-210 scored "excellent," but it did get "above average" marks for its smooth and lively engine and transmission, sporty exterior appearance and spirited handling. But hurting the Datsun's point total were a trio of "below average" scores: an atrocious restraint system that continually locked up and then was difficult to release; stiff ride; poor front seat room and non-existent rear seat room. Because of the choppy ride, poor restraints and low head room, front seat occupants often lumped their heads on the ceiling over bumps. Other individual criticisms were directed toward engine noise, poor rear visibility, a cheap-looking interior, and seats with no lateral support.

Sports Coupes/Sedans

Most fun of all is testing cars in the sports car/sports coupe/GT category, so we tried seven of them this year. Hands down winner was the lovely new Porsche 924, but for \$9,400 it should be. Second was the \$8,500 Alfa Romeo Alfetta GT and tied for a close third were the \$6,600 Datsun 280-Z and the surprising \$5,800 Mazda Cosmo. The Lancia Beta Coupe scored 63 points on our scale, while Triumph's Spitfire roadster and TR-7 landed 58 and 57, respectively.

Three of these sportsters (Alfetta, Cosmo, Beta) are sedan-based, while four are pure sports models, and drivetrains vary widely. The British Spitfire and TR-7 have conventional-drive 4-cyl. power, while the Japanese 280-Z is a conventional drive "six." The Italian Lancia Beta has a transverse 4-cyl. engine and front-drive, the equally Italian Alfetta and the German Porsche 924 have 4-cyl. engines with rear transaxle, and the unique Japanese Cosmo is rotary-powered and conventionally driven.



Porsche 924

While Porsche purists may grumble about front-mounted engines and water cooling, those who objectively appreci-

Who Gets What Among Importers

	1976		1975	
	September	9 Months	September	9 Months
Toyota	35,405	258,865	27,513	223,303
Datsun	28,704	206,826	26,887	206,013
Volkswagen	18,258	154,191	17,120	225,841
Honda	15,805	105,319	12,149	80,184
British Leyland	5,324	52,211	5,784	58,753
Fiat	5,418	46,087	9,180	76,306
Colt	5,124	36,407	4,371	49,380
Subaru	4,742	35,569	3,634	32,982
Volvo	4,195	32,335	5,046	49,154
Mercedes-Benz	3,150	29,727	3,694	31,822
Mazda	2,595	28,195	2,812	58,344
Audi	2,997	26,341	3,664	41,058
Capri	2,604	24,328	3,268	47,276
Arrow	4,889	20,769	—	—
BMW	2,020	20,600	2,625	15,209
Porsche	1,024	10,276	1,132	13,724
Saab	917	7,599	837	10,565
Peugeot	660	7,383	1,145	8,719
Opel	1,220	7,158	2,934	34,380
Renault	687	5,057	465	4,797
Alfa Romeo	400	4,268	500	3,748
Lancia*	100	1,300	157	290
Pantera	—	—	—	490
Total	146,238	1,120,811	134,917	1,272,338

* Estimated for 1976.

Ward's Auto World Chart

ate quiet, fast, sure-footed, pleasurable and economical motoring, not to mention head-swiveling good looks, will fall in *love* with the 924.

As a very satisfying replacement for the mid-ship, VW-engined 914 (which the purists would never admit was even a Porsche), the 924 gets outstanding marks for its engine, exterior and interior appearance, seats, restraints, front room, brakes and both low- and high-speed handling. Only luggage room and rear seat capacity were rated "average" or below, but people don't buy Porsches for passengers and suitcases anyway. The few minor complaints involved some harshness over small bumps and tar strips, too much brake pedal travel and the fact that it wasn't a roadster.

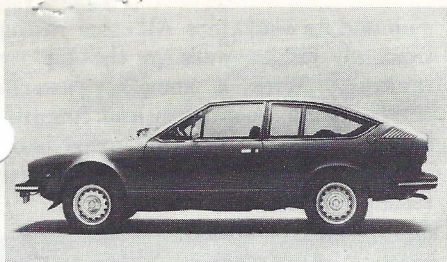


Datsun 280-Z

This is another repeat test, but last

year's car was a 2+2 and was available only to one evaluator during the aforementioned West Coast visit. Going into its seventh year of U.S. sales, the highly touted Datsun Z-car continues to live up to its reputation for smooth, fast and comfortable sports car motoring—helped by the addition of fuel injection a year ago and despite a considerable (\$2,500) increase in price over the original version.

Engine, transmission, exterior, interior, brakes, and fast handling were rated "excellent," while seats, instruments, front room, low-speed handling and quietness got "above average" marks. The "Z's" total composite score was hurt by a balky and stubborn restraint system (apparently common to Datsun), only "average" luggage room and a ride that was adequate for a sports car but produced audible, annoying "thumps" over tar strips and other small irregularities. The instruments drew one complaint (hard-to-see heater controls) but otherwise were excellent in both content and layout. All told, the "Z" is still hard to beat even at today's inflated price: "Illegal, immoral and fattening!" crows one enthusiastic driver.



Alfa Romeo Alfetta GT

Only slightly less desirable than the Porsche 924 is the lovely and sleek Alfetta GT. Successor to the spirited GTV, this aerodynamic coupe is flawed only by its strange, long-armed, short-legged driving position and its lack of real adult passenger room in back.

The Alfa's exterior appearance, instrumentation, brakes and handling drew "excellent" ratings, while only front and rear room fell below the "above average" mark. Additional individual criticism was limited to a slightly "notchy" shift linkage that slapped against the console in reverse, the rather odd mounting of the speedometer in the central dash area, and the fact that the pedals were offset to the right of the driver's seating position.



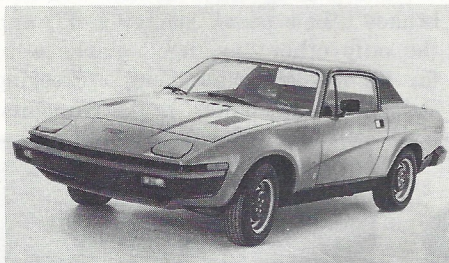
Lancia Beta Coupe

The stylish and exotic Lancia Beta Coupe was a study in contrasts and mixed reactions. To quote its severest WAW critic: "The steering wheel has an uncomfortable finish and sits over your left knee. The seat adjusts from too close to way too close for a 6-ft. driver. Even though there's sufficient room for the seat to move further back, there's no 'catch' positions in the desirable area. The \$600 A/C unit is useless—doesn't work at all—and the heater/vent system is confusing and slow in responding to input. Gages are unnumbered and marked only with stupid graphics, and the controls are a mish-mash of twist actions, push/pulls and rockers with unidentified buttons, knobs and switches scattered all over the dash and console area. And the windows stick up an inch over the door sills in their furthest-down position. The person in charge of comfort and convenience at Lancia ought to be deported!"

And there were other complaints,

mostly accompanied by a "but" phrase: seats were uncomfortable but beautiful to look at; engine had poor low-end torque but good high-rpm performance. Low-speed handling was characterized by heavy steering and torque steer from the front drive, but high-speed handling was faultless; there was a super-annoying whine from the engine, but the interior was otherwise very quiet.

However, another worthy appraiser disagreed: "A neat machine—well worth \$7,500 compared to similar-type sporting cars. There's a solid road feel and the handling is excellent." When all this is averaged out, the Beta still scored "excellent" ratings in exterior, brakes and handling and "above average" for its engine, transmission, interior, seats, instruments, front, rear and luggage room and even ride. The one thing everyone agreed upon was that the restraints were the worst design ever seen—the harness was mounted too low and close to stay on your shoulder, and the webbing tended to twist, bind and hang up.



Triumph TR-7

Another car most people either like or don't; B-L's Triumph TR-7 was surprising in that it didn't score better. As with the Lancia Beta, good is mixed with bad in the eye of each beholder to produce a curious blend of contrasting criticism and remarks.

There were no "excellent" ratings on a composite basis, but "above average" was recorded for engine, interior, seats, instruments, front room, brakes, handling, noise level and ride. The only "below average" came for exterior appearance, as several judges objected to the "wedgy" styling. "Looks funny," says one. "Ugly," comments another.

Other criticisms were directed at the transmission (very awkward reverse selection), visibility (restricted both left and right by thick pillars), seats ("lateral support excellent, but lower back support terrible.") and the lack of an oil pressure gage in what is supposed to be a sports car. "Some thought should be given to convenience items," says one critic, "the worst feature being ash trays in the doors—very unhandy!" Yet the newest Triumph

was generally a pleasure to drive: "All the handling and overall fun of the Spitfire without the interior noise or harsh ride," to quote one judge's summation.



Triumph Spitfire

One of the few real convertibles left and one of three remaining ragtops from British Leyland (with the demise of the TR-6 and E-type Jag), the little Spitfire was a pleasant surprise for most of us. Although it garnered no "excellent" composite votes, it nailed down "above average" scores in engine, transmission, exterior, interior, seats, instruments, front room, brakes and handling; and its only "below average" mark was for interior noise.

Specific complaints were numerous but not serious: "Fun to drive, except for poor restraints and no power," says one driver, "and the choke would not stay 'off,' causing a near-constant high idle condition." Others mention the lack of oil pressure or electrical system instruments, high braking effort, weak first gear synchronizers and side windows that leaked in bad weather. The speedometer cable broke during our test period, and the tachometer cable seemed sticky at times. Still, a pleasant small sports car at a fairly reasonable price.



Mazda Cosmo

A real surprise performer was the Mazda Cosmo sport coupe. Twin-rotor Mazdas have always been fast and smooth, but this car also scored well in brakes and interior quietness, and rated "above average" in every other category except rear seat room. The four-wheel discs provided sure, fast stops and the motor was a regular turbine, particularly at higher rpms. "I'll take a rotary over pistons any day if I have the choice," says one female

continued next page

Import continued

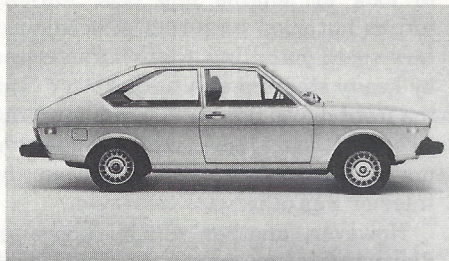
tester. Some cold driveability difficulty was the only power train flaw.

Exterior styling and interior appearance drew mixed reviews ("A bit gaudy," says one judge. "Early bordello," quips another). There was one complaint about uncomfortable seat-backs and another judge griped that the restraint system buckle was hard to find. Otherwise, a very pleasant car in nearly all respects.

Medium Price Sedans

We tried four cars in what might be termed the "medium price sedan" class: the \$5,200 VW Dasher 2-door hatchback and the \$7,000 Audi 100LS 4-door (both front-wheel drive) representing Germany, the \$7,500 Volvo 245 5-door wagon holding up the Swedish side and the \$8,200 Peugeot 504 diesel 4-door flying the French colors. Oddly enough, the least expensive entry grabbed most of the glory, and vice-versa, the Dasher rolling up an impressive 71-point total, the Volvo emerging second with 68, the big Audi scoring 64 and the Peugeot netting 59 points on the composite scale. Three are powered by 4-cyl. gasoline en-

gines, while the Peugeot has a 4-cyl. diesel.



VW Dasher 2-Door Hatchback

The stylish Dasher, cousin to the Audi Fox we tested last year, was a favorite among our judges. Small but not too small, the Dasher has a perky personality that ingratiates it to all who press its pedals.

"A really good sports sedan," says one driver, whose only complaint was the rather confusing instrumentation. This same judge rates the interior and restraints "average," the exterior appearance and the seats "above average" and everything else "excellent."

The only other "below average" individual rating came for the Dasher's brakes ("Low pedal, spongy feel") and the only other "average" marks were for its low-speed handling ("Steering stiffens under power"), its transmis-

sion and its restraints. All other ratings from all judges were in the top two rankings. With a smooth, powerful 4-cyl. engine, roominess and handling as its strongest suits, the Dasher is a very satisfying little car at a fairly reasonable price.



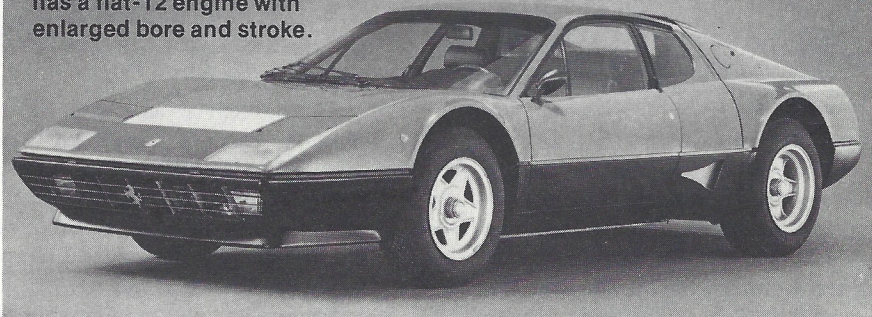
Volvo 245 5-Door Wagon

"Probably the most pleasant-driving station wagon in captivity," observes one judge. But another wonders: "What does the Volvo have that, say, a correctly optioned Aspen or Volare wagon doesn't have at about \$2,000 less?"

The Volvo collected composite "excellent" ratings for its transmission (a 4-speed with electric overdrive), roominess in all dimensions and low-speed handling ease. All other categories were "above average" except interior noise, which was hurt by some disturbing vibrations from the undercarriage—

Meanwhile, In Paris...

Ferrari's Berlinetta Boxer has a flat-12 engine with enlarged bore and stroke.



by Gordon Wilkins

(As WAW summarizes its evaluation of the current crop of imports, the foreign automakers unveil their 1977 models at the first of the international auto shows. Here is the report from our man in Europe.)

PARIS—The Paris Salon opened the fall series of European motor shows with a colorful display of new and improved cars which reflect the growing interest in new automobiles in Europe now that the fuel crisis is receding.

Citroen surprised show viewers by introducing the new LN small car, a three-door hatchback similar in size to the Ford Fiesta, using the body and

suspension of the Peugeot ZS coupe with Citroen's flat twin air-cooled engine and front drive transmission. But the firm emphasized that this does not signify a wholesale switch to hybrid Citroen-Peugeot models. Citroen also unveiled the CX 2400 sedan which replaces the 2200, with an engine enlarged to 2347 cc at 115 bhp and the CX 2200 diesel with 2175-cc, 66 bhp engine.

Chrysler Corp. added detail improvements to its Simca line and to its largest car, the 180/2-liter, which now is produced in Spain.

With a face lift the British Avenger bore a close resemblance to the Simcas with the new instrument panel, Simca-style steering wheel and engine im-

provements for greater economy. The little front-wheel drive Matra-Simca Bagheera sports coupe, with three separate seats abreast, has improved body styling trim and equipment.

The main attraction from Germany included the 123 series "small" Mercedes-Benz range and the impressive new Audi from the VW group. Audi is offering three engines including a 5-cyl. With production plans of 250,000 units a year, Audi is a tough competitor in a market where the buyer already is flush with choices from Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Jaguar, Peugeot 604, Renault 30, Volvo, and Rover 3500 (which also will offer a 6-cyl. engine next year.)

BMW has taken the trouble to retool

probably a faulty exhaust system bracket and hopefully a quirk of our test car only.

The only other minor complaint involved the overdrive, which did not engage as smoothly as the one in last year's Volvo test car; and the only individual ratings lower than "above average" came for the engine, exterior and interior appearance, instrumentation and brakes. "A fine family car," says one of our judges, which very nearly says it all.



Audi 100LS 4-Door Sedan

The "big" Audi, a styling soul brother to the Mercedes 280 sedan since its introduction some seven years ago, is still a fine automobile but seems a bit long in the tooth—a fact that is not lost on the people at Audi who are about to crank up production on the car's replacement.

Audi scored only three "excellent" composite ratings—for front and rear roominess and ride—but also only three "average" marks (instruments, restraints and brakes) and nothing below that level. Two individual "below average" marks came from judges who found the brakes soft and unpredictable in their response to pedal travel, one complaining that his foot wound up overlapping onto the gas pedal under hard braking.

The numerical ratings come out to a straight "above average," and that's what the 100 is—an above average automobile straight down the line. In the words of one evaluator, "A nice car, but a bit overpriced."



Peugeot 504 Diesel 4-Door Sedan

Last year we drove a gasoline-powered Peugeot 504 and found it a solid, quiet, sure-footed, well-built family

sedan with funny controls and rather lazy performance. This year, we tried the diesel version and found it a solid, sometimes quiet, sure-footed, well-built family sedan with controls and performance that makes Heinz Ketchup look speedy.

The Peugeot was not a low-scoring car, but it did not measure up to its price-group competition in most categories. Rear seat room, trunk capacity and ride garnered "excellent" composite ratings, but the engine and instrumentation controls got "below average" marks.

The engine started easily enough and was fairly smooth (for a diesel) but had some serious noise and vibration problems at idle and a "boom" that was almost intolerable at speeds over 65 mph.

The standard-equipment manual sunroof was a nice touch and caused no turbulence even at high speeds (it even tended to cancel the engine boom), but it was hard to open and even harder to close. One female judge, however, loved the car and rated it excellent in almost every category, so it will certainly appeal to some buyers even at the stiff \$8,000 price tag. And it'll probably run forever. □



Maserati's Kyalami
4.1-liter V-8 delivers
265 bhp.



Citroen's LN
mini uses
ZS body.

the hood of the 5-series to make room for a deeper double-oval center motif in the grille, bringing frontal appearance into line with that of the 3-series, the new 6-series coupes and the 6-series sedans due out next year.

But the most interesting technical innovation from Germany is the new VW diesel engine in the Golf (Rabbit) sedan. It's a big step forward in lightness, performance and quietness for diesels. Based on a strengthened version of the 1471 cc block (which, unlike the current 1588 cc unit, has room for water passages between the bores), it can be machined on the same lines as the gasoline engines. Injector pump and overhead camshaft are driven by a cogged belt. At 2,575 lbs., the diesel

unit is only 34 lbs. heavier than the 1100 engine and 11 lbs. heavier than the 1471 gasoline unit.

It revs extraordinarily fast for a diesel, producing 50 bhp at 5,000 rpm.

Ford Motor Co. exhibited the Fiesta and the Taunus, which has had an extensive face-lift. Ford's new Cortina, launched in the UK just before the Paris Salon, is similar to the Taunus except for its locally produced range of 4-cyl. engines. Cortina sizes include 1300, 1600 and 2000 cc with a choice of two 1600 units—one an economy version with smaller carburetor and inlet manifolds and 3.78:1 axle ratio instead of 3.89. Maximum power is reduced from 72 to 59 bhp and top speed comes down from 94 to 87 mph,

but touring fuel consumption is reduced by about 10%.

Also in the Salon spotlight were Ferrari Sp.A's 365 GT4 sedan, offered for the first time with an automatic transmission, and the mid-engined Berlinetta Boxer. The slightly longer and wider Boxer has a flat 12 engine with larger bore and stroke that takes it up to 4942 cc. The announced power of 360 bhp is lower than for the 4.3 liter engine.

The new Maserati Kyalami with 2+2 coupe body by Frua was another attraction. It has a 4.1 liter dry sump V-8 engine with four overhead camshafts delivering 265 bhp and a 5-speed gearbox. Production of an initial batch of 300 begins in January. □