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Spinout: Who'll Survive the 1980s?

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WAW's Sixth Annual Import Evaluations

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Aggressive Competition In a Depressed Economy

by Gary L. Witzenburg and Alan K. Binder

Penetration by import makes in the U.S. new-car market may be down from last year — closer to 25% than 30%. But the thought of one in every four sales going to a foreign brand keeps Detroit reaching for the Excedrin, for a number of reasons.

As WAW's Sixth Annual Import Evaluations show, the foreign phenomenon still relies heavily on price, quality and fuel economy. The Japanese still account for the bulk of import sales with fuel-efficient economy cars. They continue mounting efforts to penetrate more traditional American market segments, however, with a proliferation of higher-price midrange sedans, luxury cars, sport and sporty models and small trucks. They are particularly adept at plugging holes in the domestic-model spectrum, often creating new products where there is little or no competition.

But price in the past has been a limiting factor for the Japanese, who heretofore have had little success in penetrating upper levels of the mid-range-sedan market.

The cars were tested by the authors and four WAW editors who drove them over a six-month period in cities, on highways, around test tracks and in various climates and locations from coast to coast.

This year's WAW sampling includes 19 1981-model foreign cars and two trucks. Under "Economy Sedan" are three significant new Japanese imports: an all-new front-wheel-drive (fwd) Mazda GLC; Honda Civic 4-door sedan (also fwd and different enough from other Civic models to be considered a separate entry); and a rear-wheel-drive (rwd) Toyota Starlet. All are 4-cyl.-powered, and the two fwd's have transversely mounted engines for optimum space efficiency.

Four new cars are examined in the "Medium Sedan" category, breaking down into two 4-cyl. fwd Europeans and a matched set of 6-cyl. rwd Japanese. Like the Civic 4-door, the Rabbit-based Volkswagen Jetta, made in West Germany, is substantially different from its



domestically built hutchmates, yet springs from the same transverse fwd platform and powertrain. The French Renault 18i brings its own unique (longitudinally mounted) fwd personality into American Motors Corp. and Renault showrooms. Toyota Cressida and Datsun 810 (sort of the Ford LTD and Chevrolet Caprice of Japan), near-identical in concept yet individual in execution, both are reskinned and reengineered for 1981.

All six "High/Luxury Sedans" evaluated are European. Significantly, five are turbocharged (three of them diesel-powered), one has a 6-cyl. engine, three are 5-cyl., two are 4-cyl., but only two are fwd — an indication of where this class is heading in the fuel-conscious future. The German Mercedes 300SD is Daimler-Benz AG's latest top-level, (5-cyl.) turbodiesel luxury liner. Also new this year, the 300TDT is a mating of the smaller Mercedes station wagon with 300SD's turbodiesel engine. The Audi 5000 Turbo, also a 5-cyl. but gas-powered and fwd (longitudinal), is the latest, fastest, most luxurious and expensive edition of Porsche-Audi's flagship sedan. Ditto the French Peugeot 505 (4-cyl.) turbodiesel and the 4-cyl. fwd (longitudinal) Swedish Saab 4-door notchback sedan.

Most diverse are five unique machines under the "Sport/Sporty Car" heading, boasting five different engine/driveline configurations, five different countries of origin and five very different looks and personalities. The gullwing, stainless-steel-body De Lor-

ean, built in Northern Ireland, is the long-awaited creation of John Z. De Lorean; it is propelled by a rear-mounted PRV (Peugeot/Renault/Volvo) V-6. The Italian Alfa Romeo GTV 6/2.5 is a combination of the company's best-looking sport-coupe body and its most sophisticated engine, a V-6 mounted in front but driving the rear wheels through a rear-mounted transaxle. The Swedish Volvo GLT Turbo is really a 4-cyl. midrange car bumped into the sporting category with a shot of turbocharged adrenalin, curve-straightening handling and boy-racer visuals. The Japanese 280ZX is the latest-generation Datsun Z-car, half luxury GT and half street rod through the magic of turbocharging grafted to its already strong inline-six. Audi 5+5 is a pleasant mixture of sport coupe and sport sedan with a unique 5-cyl. gas engine.

Finally, the "Light Trucks" category this year takes on Chevrolet's latest version of the 4wd LUV truck from Isuzu Motors Ltd. of Japan and Nissan Motor Co. Ltd.'s new diesel-powered pickup in King Cab configuration.



Toyota Starlet.

TOYOTA: If simplicity is a virtue, Toyota Motor Co. Ltd.'s Starlet is a saint. Bucking the transverse fwd trend in economy cars, its 58-hp 1.3-liter push-rod 4-cyl. engine sits up front and drives the rear wheels through a 5-speed manual transmission. Only 152.2 ins. (386.6 cm) long on a 90.6-in. (230.1-cm) wheelbase and weighing a featherweight 1,730 lbs. (778.5 kg), it delivers an outstanding 39 mpg (6 L/100 km) city/54 mpg (4.3 L/100 km) highway Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) rating. It comes in only 3-door hatchback body-style and features rack-and-pinion steering, power-assisted disc/drum brakes. MacPh-

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son-strut front, coil-spring rear suspension and little else.

Not surprising, there's not much room inside (especially in the rear) and little sound insulation, but front-seat accommodations are reasonably comfortable, if spartan. The engine is a noisy devil, but gives good subjective performance when pressed hard, while the simple suspension returns spirited handling with a definite sacrifice in ride. The car is an ugly little duck, but then ugliness, like beauty, is subjective. We rate Starlet average overall, with fuel economy its shining attribute. It is solidly built and a good value with its \$4,800 base price.

Comments a *WAW* editor who drove a Starlet extensively on the West Coast: "Achieved a high of 47 mpg (5 L/100 km) on steady-speed freeway jaunt (average 54.3 mph/86.9 kmh) in fifth gear. What you get in fuel economy you lose in performance, and you really have to use the gears to keep up your speed on grades. The 5-speed is not as smooth as other Toyota 5-speeds. Ride is choppy, not something to tolerate for long distances. It's a bare-bones car, but nothing else is available at the price that gives such good economy. That has to be the bottom line for Starlet."

Toyota's luxury Cressida (base price: \$11,600) is nicely redesigned and upgraded for 1981. Available in 4-door sedan and 5-door wagon, it's motivated by a new 116-hp 2.8-liter fuel-injected straight-six through a 4-speed overdrive automatic transmission that delivers respectable 22-mpg (10.7-L/100 km) city/29-mpg (8.1-L/100 km) highway EPA ratings. The lengthy equipment list includes cruise control, power antenna, automatic air conditioning, power windows, door locks — and the industry's first motorized automatic front-seat shoulder harnesses. While we're not crazy about Cressida's new look, especially the herringbone grille and down-sweeping side character line, it's a huge improvement over the old one. Beyond its sophisticated engine and transmission, we rate Cressida average or above in every category.

DATSUN: Fighting hard to close the sales gap between itself and archrival Toyota, Nissan has introduced three new Datsun models in the U.S. so far this year and a fourth is on the way.

First off the mark is the sleek new 810 series with a newly christened flagship, Maxima. Although the thought of paying \$10,000-plus for a Datsun elicits

negative comments from one editor, the *WAW* staff of judges for the most part is impressed by Datsun's new top-of-the-line model. Velour upholstery, sexy European styling and smooth yet robust 6-cyl. 2.4-liter engine earn praise from most judges, one of whom even takes a liking to the soft, suggestive female voice that gently implores a forgetful driver to "please turn out the lights" when leaving the car.



Datsun 810 Maxima.

On the other hand, Maxima draws flak for its stiff suspension, relatively low fuel economy and lack of road-noise isolation. With 65 total points, it ranks third in the medium-sedan class. One judge sums the car up this way: "About 90% of what a great little car should be. But stiff suspension and a lingering tinniness keep it from being truly competitive with the best from Europe." An 810 diesel bows next month.

WAW editors are divided over performance of the new turbocharged 2-passenger Datsun 280ZX. Addition of the turbo turns an already hot performer into a junior muscle car with super acceleration, which pleases the lead foots on our staff, but boosts the sticker to \$17,000.

However, Nissan engineers haven't done all their homework in the suspension department, which detracts sharply from the car's overall performance, according to our sport-car enthusiasts. One editor says it: "Suspension makes it feel more like a small sedan with a big engine than a sport car."

The diesel-powered King Cab mini-pickup gets generally favorable reviews, particularly for its zest. "Best performance ever for a small nonturbodiesel, except for Rabbit," says an editor. "And its spacious interior — the only small truck with enough room to be comfortable."

Engine noise, or rather lack of effective sound-deadening material, brings sharp criticism from judges, though, and our West Coast editor complains of poor high-altitude driveability. Especially bothersome is the din that erupts on a cold winter-morning startup, accompanied by a huge cloud of black smoke. Still, King Cab's pluses overcome those problems, and the truck scores highest of those tested this year.



Honda Civic 4-door.

HONDA: Addition of a trunk and second set of side doors transforms the best-selling hatchback coupe into a notchback 4-door sedan, and a few other deft touches make it seem like a whole new car. Honda Motor Co. Ltd. stuck with its well-known Civic name, but that, the 1.5-liter CVCC engine and drivetrain are about all the sedan has in common with other Civics. The look is new throughout, much like a mini-Accord 4-door, with its own semilux interior and instrument panel complete with digital clock, tachometer, trip odometer and coin box. Other equipment includes remote decklid release, locking fuel-filler cap, electric rear-window defogger, rear headrests, rack-and-pinion steering, coil-spring independent rear suspension and power disc/drum brakes.



Subaru GL hatchback.

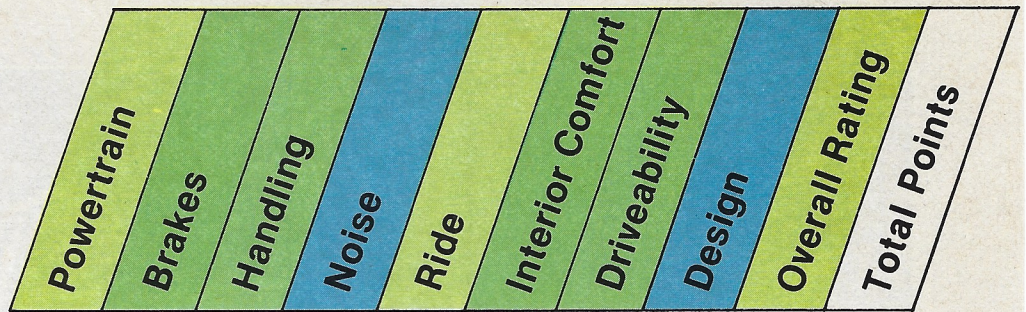
SUBARU: Although essentially a carryover, Fuji Heavy Industries Ltd.'s Subaru line benefits from one new model variation (a luxury-level GL hatchback, fwd or 4wd) and substantial engineering improvements for 1981. These include a dual-range transfer case for 4wd models; a unique "Hill-Holder" (in fwd GL models) that maintains brake pressure while stopped on hills with the clutch disengaged; electronic carburetion control across the board; and a new 1.8-liter engine for 4wd's, wagons and other models.



Mazda GLC 4-door.

MAZDA: Toyo Kogyo Co. Ltd. jumps to the head of the economy-import class in one fell swoop with its excellently conceived, designed, engineered and constructed fwd GLC series. Available in 3- and 5-door hatch and 4-door sedan variations (there's still a wagon, but it's the

WAW Import Evaluation Scoreboard



Economy Sedans

Model	Powertrain	Brakes	Handling	Noise	Ride	Interior Comfort	Driveability	Design	Overall Rating	Total Points
Mazda GLC 4-Dr. \$5,900 39 mpg 93.1-in. wb 1,915 lbs.	7	6	7	6	6	7	7	8	7	61
Honda Civic 4-Dr. \$6,500 35 mpg 88.6-in. wb 1,813 lbs.	8	7	7	5	6	6	7	7	7	60
Toyota Starlet 2-Dr. \$4,800 36 mpg 90.6-in. wb 1,750 lbs.	6	5	6	4	5	5	5	4	5	45

Medium Sedans

Volkswagen Jetta 4-Dr. \$8,000 26 mpg 94.5-in. wb 1,982 lbs.	9	8	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	69
Renault 18i 4-Dr. \$7,400 26 mpg 96.1-in. wb 2,261 lbs.	7	7	8	7	9	7	8	7	8	68
Datsun 810 Maxima 4-Dr. \$8,000 23 mpg 104.3-in. wb 2,740 lbs.	7	8	7	7	7	7	7	8	7	65
Toyota Cressida 4-Dr. \$11,600 22 mpg 104.1-in. wb 2,921 lbs.	8	6	5	6	6	7	7	5	6	56

High/Luxury

Mercedes 300SD 4-Dr. \$34,200 26 mpg 115.6-in. wb 3,750 lbs.	9	10	9	9	9	10	9	9	9	83
Mercedes 300 TDT Wagon \$31,400 26 mpg 110-in. wb 3,740 lbs.	9	10	9	8	8	8	9	8	9	78
Audi 5000 Turbo 4-Dr. \$17,700 18 mpg 105.5-in. wb 3,042 lbs.	9	8	8	9	7	8	9	8	8	74
Jaguar XJ6 4-Dr. \$27,000 15 mpg 112.8-in. wb 4,050 lbs.	9	8	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	72
Peugeot 505 Turbodiesel 4-Dr. \$13,000 32 mpg 107.9-in. wb 3,250 lbs.	7	7	8	6	8	9	8	8	8	69
Saab Turbo 4-Dr. \$15,000 19 mpg 99.4-in. wb 2,840 lbs.	8	7	8	8	8	8	7	7	7	68

Sport/Sporty

De Lorean \$25,000 19 mpg 94.8-in. wb 2,712 lbs.	9	8	8	7	8	9	8	9	8	74
Audi 4000 5 + 5 \$11,100 21 mpg 100.1-in. wb 2,537 lbs.	9	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	73
Alfa Romeo GTV 6/2.5 \$16,000-\$17,000 NA mpg 94.5-in. wb 2,800 lbs.	10	9	9	7	6	7	8	8	8	72
Volvo GLT/Turbo \$13,600 18 mpg 104.3-in. wb 2,891 lbs.	8	8	8	8	7	8	8	8	8	71
Datsun 280ZX Turbo \$17,000 19 mpg 91.3-in. wb 2,891 lbs.	9	8	7	8	7	7	7	6	7	66

Light Trucks

Datsun King Cab Diesel \$7,700 33 mpg 110.8-in. wb 2,570 lbs.	7	7	7	4	7	8	8	8	8	64
Chevrolet LUV 4 x 4 \$8,500 22 mpg 102.4-in. wb 2,595 lbs.	7	7	7	5	4	6	6	7	6	55

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old rwd variety), GLC is powered by a zippy, transverse-mounted 1.5-liter four coupled to a standard 4-speed (optional 5-speed manual or 3-speed automatic) transmission that gets a 35-mpg (6.7-L/100 km) city/45-mpg (5.2-L/100 km) highway EPA rating in its most fuel-efficient form. Suspension is fully independent with front MacPherson struts and a unique stabilizing linkage design in the rear that rates high marks in ride and handling.



Dodge Challenger.

MITSUBISHI: You wouldn't know to look at it, but Mitsubishi Motors Corp. Ltd.'s rwd sport coupes (sold here through Chrysler Corp. as Plymouth Sapporo and Dodge Challenger) feature all-new sheet metal and redesigned, roomier interiors for 1981. They are powered by a 2.6-liter 4-cyl. engine with the company's unique MCA-Jet 3-valve combustion system and twin balancing shafts; offer 5-speed manual or 3-speed automatic transmissions and a long list of comfort and convenience equipment; and represent excellent alternatives to the better-known Toyota Celica and Datsun 200SX.



VW Jetta.

VOLKSWAGEN: Jetta, Volkswagenwerk AG's standard-bearer in this year's WAW evaluations, arrived less than a year ago as an upscale sedan variant of the popular, more utilitarian Rabbit. Like Rabbit, on which much of Jetta is based and with which it shares a powertrain, performance is its most endearing feature — along with ability to wring an incredibly high number of miles from a gallon of gasoline (a diesel option is due shortly). But the car's rather stiff, typically made-in-West-Germany ride found some disfavor among WAW evaluators, as did intrusion of engine noise at highway speeds.

Those gripes aside, Jetta still was rated highest in its class with 69 total points and captured a best-in-class

award for overall performance of its engine and 5-speed transmission, beating some stiff 6-cyl. competition from other cars in the medium-sedan class.

Unfortunately, Jetta's super acceleration, handling and fuel economy come at a high price of \$8,000 — \$1,000 or so more than a comparable Rabbit. That is the main reason judges unanimously turn thumbs down when asked the question, "Would you buy one?" A typical comment: "Too expensive, but nice."



Volvo GLT sport sedan.

VOLVO: New GLT and GLT Turbo sporty cars will go a long way toward erasing AB Volvo's image of a producer of safe, solid, but stodgy transport. GLT proves to be a super combination of utility sedan and grand tourer, while the Turbo peeps up performance of Volvo's standard 2.1-liter 4-cyl. to the level of its 2.7-liter V-6, while retaining the L-4's frugality. A GLT Turbo 2-door sedan ranked a strong fourth among cars in WAW's sport/sporty class, well ahead of a popular sport car and only slightly behind another sport coupe and two state-of-the-art sport machines.

Control layout gets high marks in both the GLT and Turbo, with several editors citing convenient placement of power-window controls and the new pushbutton overdrive control in the center of the shift knob, which replaces a slide switch used previously. Performance, especially in the Turbo, also is highly rated by the judges, including one who comments: "The first Volvo I've really liked. Not superior in any way, but good to excellent throughout." "Par excellence," commented another. Lowest score for Volvo is in the ride category, where several editors criticize its stiffness.



Audi 4000 5 + 5.

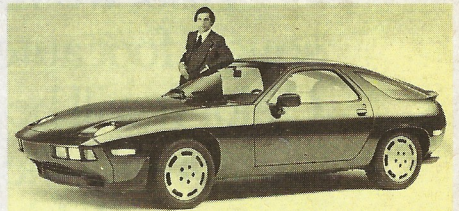
PORSCHE-AUDI: This year Audi 4000 is transformed from a stylish, comfortable but noisy medium sedan into a true junior edition of the VWA division's flagship, the 5000. The transfor-

mation consists of dropping the 2.1-liter 5-cyl. gasoline engine from the senior Audi into the smaller version, and adding an optional 5-speed overdrive transmission, alloy wheels and upgraded interior trim. The 4000 with aforementioned options becomes Audi 5+5, a sporty junior luxury car that not only is a quiet high-speed cruiser, but recaptures much of the quick, agile nature of Audi Fox.

Virtually every staff member who drove the 5+5 loved its new-found character, frequently comparing it favorably with BMW.

Still a favorite with WAW editors, Audi 5000 takes on new character this year with addition of a turbocharger to the 5-cyl. gasoline engine.

The turbo turns the compact-size "Mercedes-killer" into a real neck-snapping performer that puts most luxury-sedan competitors to shame. "All the power a sane person could want, and in a luxury sedan, too," is used to describe opinions of the car. The 5000 turbo is rated just short of excellent in all categories, and its total point score of 74 is third-highest in the luxury-sedan class, overshadowed only by Mercedes, which costs twice the 5000's \$17,700 price tag.



Porsche 928.

Porsche's evolutionary changes for 1981 include an 11-hp boost, interior upgrade, additional equipment for the 4-cyl. 924 Turbo and new "competition package" option (spoilers, special seats, wheels, shocks) for the 928 V-8. All Porsches now carry an industry-leading seven-year anticorrosion warranty.



Mercedes 300SD.

MERCEDES-BENZ: "Every time you think Daimler-Benz (D-B) engineers have developed the ultimate car, they go a step further," one obviously enthusiastic editor says of the new Mercedes S-class sedans. It seems the German engineers once again have worked the "Mercedes Magic" in developing the

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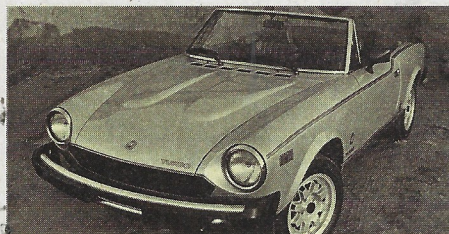
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new 380/300SD sedan series, which not only is lighter and more frugal than its predecessor, but also more fun to drive. "Best-looking Mercedes sedan yet," notes an admirer in summing up the new body style.

Even though the new S-class sedans have a smaller, more fuel-efficient 3.8-liter V-8 replacing the thirsty 4.5-liter V-8 of previous models, the 300SD turbodiesel is expected to remain the top-seller in 1981. In that form *WAW* editors find little to quarrel with as its 83-point score indicates. Not only does it surpass competition in the high/luxury class, but it drives away with top honors in *WAW* evaluations this year.

D-B also improves performance of its station wagon for '81 by sticking in the same 5-cyl. turbocharged diesel as used in the 300SD. The wagon's name also is changed to 300TDT to distinguish it from its predecessor, 300TD, with a naturally aspirated 5-cyl. diesel.

The turbodiesel turns a "stone" into a fairly strong performer in *WAW*'s opinion, although desirability of the wagon body style is a point of debate. The main beef is that a 300TDT station wagon is not very useful because cargo space is not large enough to haul things normally expected of wagons. Other complaints range from the usual "it's too expensive" to "I still find Mercedes seats far too rigid and butt-crunching."



Fiat Spider 2000 turbo.

FIAT: The timeless Spider 2000 gets a boost via a limited-production U.S.-only Spider turbo version, which debuts this month. Developed by Legend Industries Inc. for Fiat Motors of North America Inc., the 2-liter 4-cyl. turbo comes with Pirelli P6 low-profile, high-performance radials, alloy wheels and spiffed-up interior for \$13,000 to \$13,500. If the 1,200 to 1,500 Spider turbos prove successful, a Brava Sport turbo is waiting in the wings for the U.S. market this year.

Fiat's Strada econobox was updated last year with addition of fuel injection to its 1.5-liter 4-cyl. engine, but there are only a few cosmetic changes for '81. The X1/9, Fiat's junior Ferrari, also got fuel injection and a 5-speed gearbox in '80, and continues unchanged for '81.



BMW 733i 5-speed.

BMW: Ask any automaker today where it would like to be tomorrow, and the answer is likely to include some reference to Bayerische Motoren Werke AG, the German company occupying the envious position of supplying expensive, sporting coupes and sedans to the elite who appreciate and can afford them. Somewhere between Mercedes and Jaguar in concept, and generally brilliant in execution, BMW has built and nurtured a reputation to which most others can only aspire. That said, we must add that BMW's only major change this year is replacement of the standard 4-speed manual with an excellent 5-speed in its two top-line cars — 633CSi coupe and 733i sedan — making them even more desirable to some, but unattainable to most enthusiasts.



Jaguar XJ6 Series III.

JAGUAR/ROVER/TRIUMPH: You have \$30,000 to spend for a new luxury sedan. You aren't pleased with anything Detroit offers. You have a thing against German cars, and the Japanese don't have anything in that bracket. What do you do? If you're like an increasing, although admittedly small, number of middle-class Americans, you opt for a Jaguar XJ6, with its suggested \$27,500 retail price. What you get, unfortunately, is less than what you should get — unless you can settle for the mystique of the Jaguar name, a classic design that's actually a bit outdated and a car that deserves recognition as a relaxed touring car.

The new Jaguar XJ6 Series III (new last year, updated with a few options this year) is easy and comfortable to drive fast over winding roads. It's responsive without being overpowering. And it doesn't require every moment of your attention for fear it will wander off the road.

But as it has through the years, Jaguar seems to have the niggling things no expensive luxury car should

have, such as: a dashboard that's an elegant blend of simulated veneer walnut and gaudy aluminum fascias around some instruments; built-in speed governor (for those who wear 9½-plus Tony Lama boots) because of limited toe space above the throttle; an almost dainty gearshift lever and plastic shift gate that moves sideways with any hard motion; and occasional lapses in electrical operation.



Renault 18i sedan.

RENAULT: The latest entry served up by AMC/Regie Nationale des Usines Renault turns in the second-best performance in the medium-sedan class. In total points Renault 18i falls just one short of matching the winning Jetta's score and is rated well above Japanese competition in most categories. The 18i's strongest attribute is a super-smooth ride, not surprising in light of its French origin. In that category the 18i scores a "9," higher than any other car in the series except Mercedes 300SD and another French product, Peugeot 505.

Other pluses for 18i include a solid feel, high-quality workmanship and a peppy but thrifty 4-cyl. engine. "Maybe the best all-around handling and driving car we've tested in this series," enthuses a test driver. Another admirer calls it "a tidy job that feels good to drive."

The 18i is not without fault, however. One judge grouses about the "poor control layout" with a short turn signal lever placed next to a longer light control.

SAAB: Sweden's No. 2 carmaker, Saab-Scania AB, received high marks in past *WAW* evaluations for performance of its sporty Turbo coupe. This year Saab hopes to turn its 4-door sedan, equipped with turbocharged 2-liter engine and automatic transmission, into a luxury supercar. The transition of the Turbo from 5-speed sporty coupe to automatic luxury sedan does not, in *WAW*'s opinion, come off as well as Saab had hoped.

The Turbo still makes Saab a mighty performer at higher speeds when the automatic transmission downshifts to allow the turboboost to kick in. The problem seems to be that, for city-suburban use, the automatic upshifts before the

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Saab Turbo.

turbo comes on, even with the accelerator floored. One must manually control the transmission to use the turbo's power for merging with high-speed highway traffic.

But Saab scored well for its usual strong points — “the most comfortable seats ever” and an automatic seat-warmer that is appreciated on frosty mornings.



Peugeot 505 turbodiesel.

PEUGEOT: French automaker PSA Peugeot-Citroen continues to improve its excellent 505 series, introduced a year ago to replace the aging 504 sedan. Available only as a 4-door notchback, the 505 is conventional in layout yet surprisingly contemporary in design and technical sophistication. Under a handsome, rock-solid and space-efficient new body are fully independent suspension, power 4-wheel disc brakes, power rack-and-pinion steering and choice of gasoline or diesel 4-cyl. engines with manual (4-speed with the diesel, 5-speed with the gas engine) or automatic transmission.

Latest addition to the 505 series, and a subject of our 1981 evaluation, boasts the country's second available turbo-charged diesel engine (after Mercedes) and first turbodiesel 4-cyl. Equipped with standard 5-speed manual transmission (3-speed automatic is optional), it is 18% more powerful and produces 40% more torque than the nonturbo Peugeot diesel while delivering EPA ratings of 28 mpg (8.4 L/100 km) city/36 mpg (6.5 L/100 km) highway. In 5-speed form, we judge it the first diesel-powered passenger car ever to be fun to drive.

ALFA ROMEO: Having abandoned the U.S. sedan market, Alfa Romeo S.p.A. has decided to concentrate on sport and sporty cars, and for 1981 has created the most exciting Italian sport car (short of an exotic) in memory. The trick is clever mating of the swoopy Alfa



Alfa Romeo GT V-6.

GT body with the gutsy 160-hp fuel-injected 2.5-liter V-6 engine from Alfa's top-line European-market sedan. Complete with upgraded chassis and driveline, slightly swelled hood, front chin-spoiler, Pirelli P6 tires on alloy wheels, upgraded and redesigned interior and blacked-out exterior trim to distinguish it from the 4-cyl. GT, the new GTV 6/2.5 is a contemporary street rod with superb handling and braking to match its straight-line performance. Chassis features include power rack-and-pinion steering; 5-speed, rear-mounted transmission; 4-wheel disc brakes; and 4-link torsion-bar front and de Dion coil-spring rear suspension.



Isuzu I-Mark diesel.

ISUZU: The latest importer hoping to cash in on the fertile U.S. market is American Isuzu Motors Inc., which began marketing Japanese Isuzu I-Mark cars and P'UP (get it?) trucks in 22 western and southern states and the District of Columbia early this year (see story p.76.). While I-Marks (coupes and sedans) are updated versions of Isuzu Opels sold here by Buick dealers a few years back, and P'UP is little different from the Isuzu-built Chevrolet LUV minipickup, the latest vehicle's chief claim to fame is Isuzu's thrifty 2.2-liter diesel engine. Prices (with a 1.8-liter gas 4-cyl.) start at just under \$6,000, but the diesel brings about an \$800 premium. EPA estimates for the diesel coupe with 4-speed manual transmission are 41 mpg (5.7 L/100 km) city/51 mpg (4.6 L/100 km) highway.

DE LOREAN: Another exciting new sport car to reach the U.S. this year is from a brand-new automaker, De Lorean Motor Co. of New York City, and is built in an equally new facility near Belfast, Northern Ireland. It's the brainchild of John Z. De Lorean, former General Motors Corp. vice president, whose dream car seems a remarkable piece of engineering under a unique stainless-steel-

over-plastic body (and “backbone frame”) that looks contemporary, although its Giugiaro design goes back several years. Also unusual are gullwing doors and rear-mounted Renault-built engine and transaxle. In essentially the same U.S. certified form as found in American-market Volvos, the fuel-injected 2.8-liter 130-hp PRV V-6 gets EPA ratings of 19 mpg (12.4 L/100 km) city/29 mpg (8.1 L/100 km) highway.



De Lorean DMC.

Performance, if not great, is certainly good by modern standards (about eight seconds 0-60 mph/96 kmh) with standard 5-speed, slightly slower with automatic transmission. Fully independent suspension, rack-and-pinion steering and 4-wheel discs give excellent accounts of themselves in handling and braking. Ride is somewhat stiff but not harsh, and is surprisingly supple on rough roads.



Chevrolet LUV.

CHEVROLET LUV: Chevrolet's imported minipickup, in its 11th and last full year in the U.S., received its first major body change in '81. The new LUV's family resemblance to its larger stablemates lives on, however, through the Isuzu P'UP now being sold through American Isuzu's new dealer network. WAW staffers evaluated a LUV 4x4 in the new configuration but, unfortunately, found little improvement over the old body style. While the new cab has several inches more room, it still suffers in comparison to Datsun King Cab, although it's probably on par with standard-cab models from other mini-truck manufacturers.

Poor road-noise isolation and a stiff ride are other gripes voiced by the WAW editors, especially one long-distance driver.

On the plus side, LUV's peppy 1.8-liter gasoline engine, good fuel economy and modern, up-to-date interior design are greeted favorably. A 2.2-liter 4-cyl. diesel engine, which becomes available later this month, should make LUV even more lovable to the mpg-conscious. □