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**MOTOR
TREND**

'77 VW PREVIEW

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MOTOR TREND'S

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Much of this little beauty you've seen before. The cleanly sculpted nose has graced other GM creations, past and present. The fine, fixed rear spoiler is reminiscent of the late GTO "Judge." The greenhouse is basic Monza 2+2, the louvered taillights once lived on the '66 GTO, and the boxy exhaust extension... well, we've seen 'em before but usually in pairs.

But familiarity of the parts aside, the whole represents a good deal more than just another sexy GM show car. The corporation doesn't spend the time and money it once did on such projects just for fun, so when it builds one, you can bet there's a reason behind it. This one made the rounds of the large Eastern and Midwestern car shows—Detroit, New York, Chicago—as part of the Chevrolet display and was "a hit," according to GM Design Vice President Bill Mitchell.

The production 1977 Monza "Spyder" model was little influenced by this Super Spyder show car; the '77 Spyder has added on spoilers front and rear but otherwise looks like a stripped 2+2 and nothing more. But this little golden gem just could be a sneak preview of the long-awaited next-generation Corvette, which will be about the same size when it finally appears.

The original Monza Super Spyder was a lovely, shark-nosed example of what could be done with the rear-engine, air-cooled Corvair as the basis for a 2-seat roadster; but the spunky 'Vair was shot out of the water by Righteous Ralph and the Zealots,

and the 2-seater proposal sank with it into the murky depths of the bureaucratic Bermuda Triangle.

Its successor is based on the current pretty but conventional Monza hatchback, with drivetrain borrowed from the short-lived Cosworth Vega (which should have been the Cosworth Monza in the first place) to light the fire. The revvy 2-liter, twin-cam, 16-valve engine is coupled to the Borg-Warner 5-speed and the special 4.10:1 rear axle, just like in the CosVeg, except that it's twin (45mm) Weber-carbureted instead of Bendix fuel-injected. The chromed and gold-flaked motor was created as a showpiece in itself and is the same one that once graced the cover of *Hot Rod*.

Styled by Jerry Palmer's studio at the GM Design Center, under the direction of executive-in-charge Chuck Jordan and chief stylist Mitchell, the Super Spyder actually began life mostly as a lighting concept. "We led 20 years ago with quad headlights," Mitchell explains, "then again two years ago with rectangular lamps; so we thought it was a good way to let the industry know we still had some fresh ideas kicking around."

Working with Cibie, GM lighting engineers came up with a long fluorescent tube buried in the car's nose behind a plexiglas shield. Flanked by yellow-tinted parking lights, the tube (theoretically) provides low-beam illumination for urban night driving, while twin high-powered Cibie driving lights are faired into the underside of the nose for high-speed travel.

And around this innovative concept was built probably the slickest GM show/go machine since the happy, halcyon, pre-Nader, pre-Muskie days of yore. "The idea," says Mitchell, "was to get a super sports car with emphasis on the outside aerodynamic profile. The color we chose for it is a palomino, platinum gold, rather than a brassy gold; and we did some visual tricks with it, like the clearance blisters in the hood, which are intentionally asymmetrical as on an aircraft fuselage. The engine air intake on the right side is functional, and there's a digital speedometer under the taller bump on the left."

This hood-mounted speedo recalls the outside tachometer seen first on Mitchell's needle-nosed Astro III idea car in the mid-'60s and shortly thereafter on some production Pontiacs, except that it has the added novelty of being digital. "Digital instruments are coming all over in cars," Mitchell tells us, "and the idea of putting it out on the hood is to have the smallest change in sight angle from the road—so the driver isn't always looking down low to check his speed."

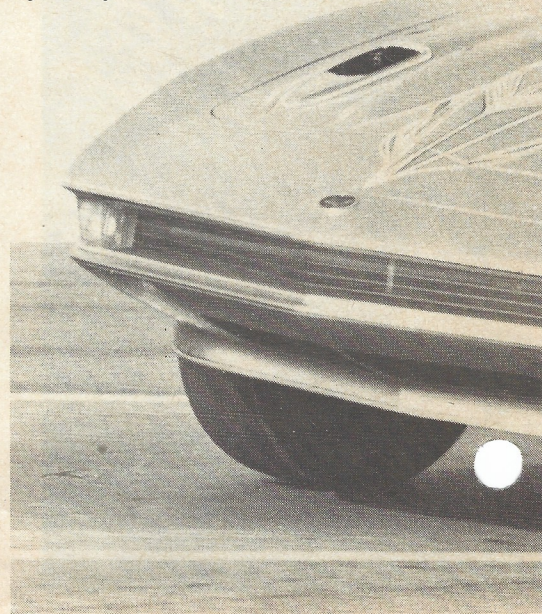
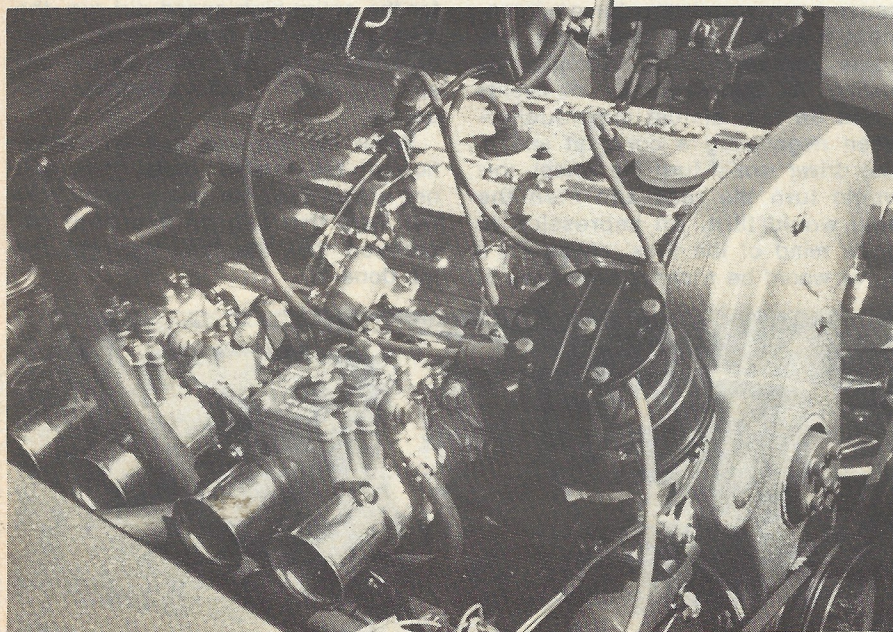
Inspecting the car front to rear, the first thing you notice is the lack of pile-driver bumpers—beautiful but not legal in the Great Protective Society. But maybe those questionable requirements could be met with cellular plastic and/or one-shot energy absorbers a la Corvette.

Then you have a large, curved front spoiler—not a road grader air dam as on a modern closed-wheel race car, but a neat, built-in bib tucked around and under the

Super Spyder II

Is this a preview of things to come?

by Gary Witzenburg



chin as if the car were about to gobble a lobster dinner. Fenders are tastefully flared front and rear to accommodate the FR60-14 Goodrich Radial T/A's on German BBS lightweight racing wheels. As a final visual (and aerodynamic) touch, the graceful, molded-in rear "wing" sets off the fastback body just right in profile and neatly frames the stylish taillights in the rear view. Front to back, it's a lovely piece of work.

"We were inspired by the current car," says studio head Palmer, "and did things with it we couldn't do to the original. The theme is an aerodynamic 2+2. It's the slickest car in the world to drive, and we think it's right for the times..." Mitchell adds, "This car represents the way the trend is going—cars that are still exciting but smaller and with smaller engines. This

combination of the Cosworth with the 5-speed is a natural."

Mitchell generously agreed to let us drive the car (carefully!) for a couple of days, and to say we enjoyed it would be an understatement. Working within the confines of the tight-travel Vega/Monza geometry, the suspension wizards have created a genuine joy on wheels—but they had to spend some bucks to do it. In addition to the extra-wide, extra-expensive trick wheels (14 x 7 in. front, 14 x 8 rear), the Super Spyder benefits greatly from Koni shocks and high-rate springs at all four corners, special front and rear anti-roll bars and a ride height noticeably lower than stock. Ride suffers to some degree, but it is little worse than the production Monza and comparable to most machinery of similar capabilities. The only other neg-

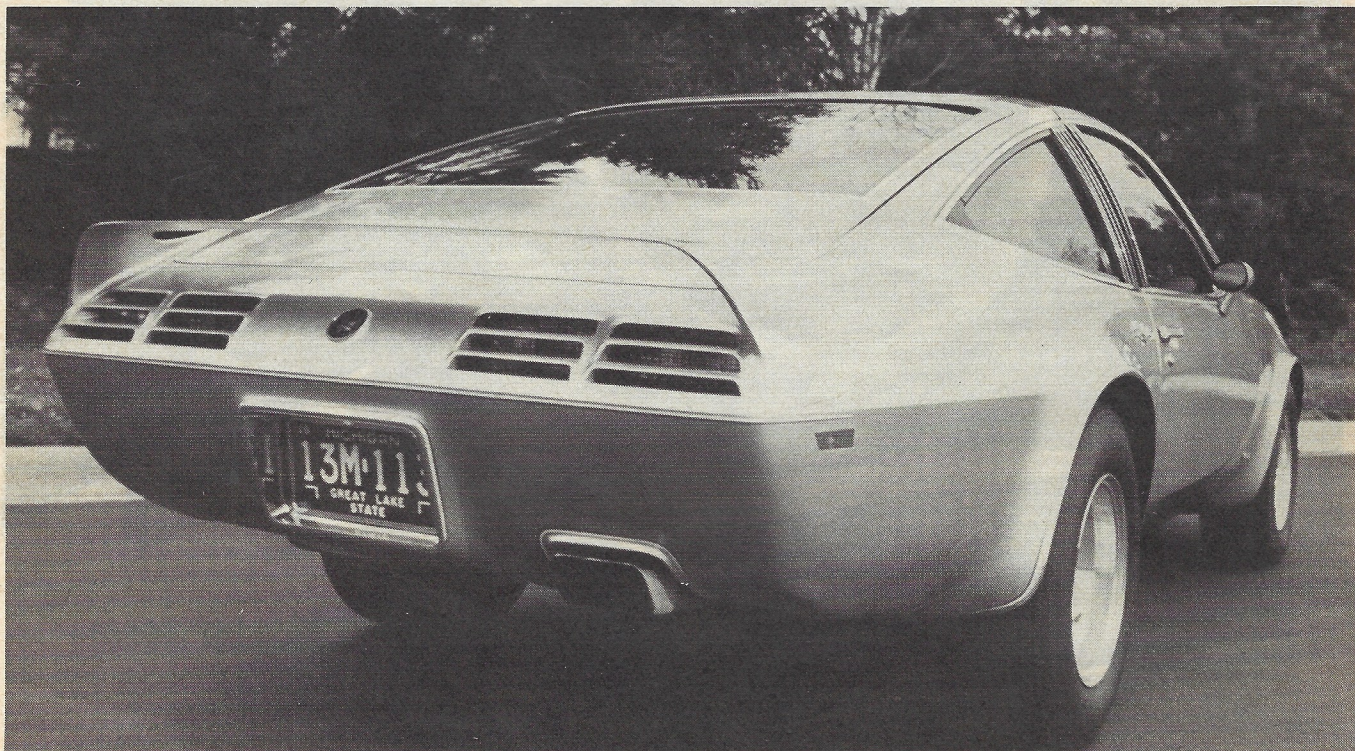
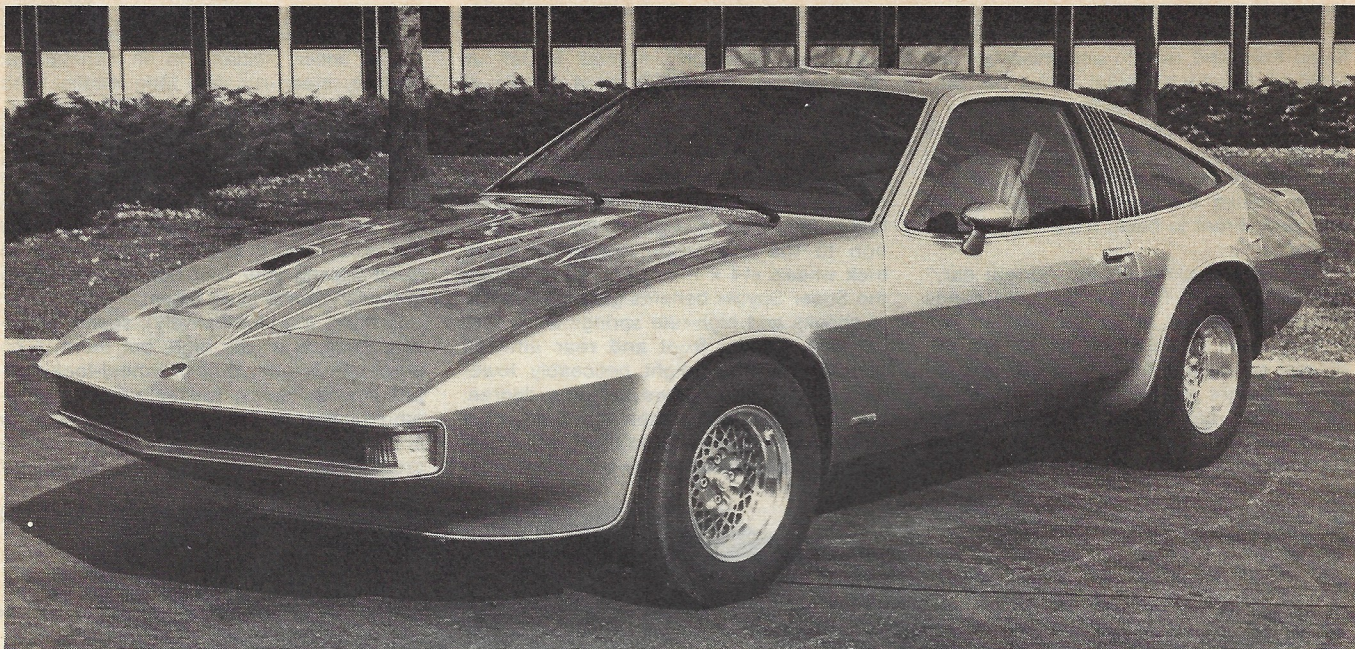
ative is some mild rear axle hop under hard cornering on rough surfaces.

It is sheer pleasure to sit behind that smooth, clean-running little engine and row joyfully through the B-W gearbox. Adding to the fun is a shamelessly erotic exhaust note that follows close behind, making you keep wanting to check your mirrors to see if Jody and the 6-wheel Tyrrell are trying to put a pass on you into the next turn. It takes a will of iron to resist leaving your foot buried ankle-deep in those Webers at all times.

Braking, too (subjectively), seems excellent. Effort is a little high, but there is no perceptible fade, pull or wheel-locking—just smooth, quick, readily available stopping power. No doubt the wide wheels and Goodrich treads get much of the credit here.

continued





Instrumentation and controls are standard (early style) Monza/Vega GT, which is to say pretty but not very practical. The tach and conventional speedo are large enough and easily read, but the auxiliary gauges are all but hidden behind the fat steering wheel. As in the CosVeg, these dials are housed in a gold-tinted, brushed aluminum panel, and the smaller rectangles containing the standard wiper and lighting controls on the left and the heater and radio on the right of the steering column carry on this motif. The handmade seats are very supportive, comfortable and Ferrari-like in vented palomino leather.

In a straight line, the Super Spyder's perceived performance is somewhat greater than the real thing. Probably because of the raucous exhaust note and the Cosworth's wonderfully willing high-rpm feel, we thought we were really scorching the

asphalt when we actually could do no better than about 12 seconds 0-60 mph and 18 for the quarter-mile. Even with two aboard and with easy-on-the-driveline starts, that was mildly disappointing for a car that sounds and feels (and looks) so strong; but we acknowledge that the Cosworth was never intended as a stump-puller. On the top end, we saw the far side of 110 mph before having to back off, and there was still a little left at that point.

At night, the full-width fluorescent road lamp is lovely to behold and draws more double-takes than Lady Godiva ever did, but its illuminating power is less than adequate for driving even on well-lighted city streets. On the other hand, the high-powered running lights will melt the brass buttons off a traffic cop's jacket at a hundred yards, so you really can't use them unless there's *nobody* else on the road. The sys-

tem seems like a neat idea but obviously needs development if ever it's to see production.

As for the digital speedometer out there on the hood, it takes some getting used to; but it's fun as hell to watch the crazy thing changing numbers... 5... 10... 20... 35... 55... 80... One other nice feature worth mentioning is the dark-tinted LOF glass all around, which looks good on the outside and helps keep things cool on the inside.

Eventually, sadly, we had to give it back, and they didn't even let us run it on a road course, a test track, a skid pad or even a respectable dragstrip (for obvious reasons—these show cars are not cheap to build). But it was certainly fun to drive on the street, it attracted a lot of attention and it is a definite shame Chevy doesn't build one like this... yet. ■