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New 3rd door makes Sierra pickup a keeper

Ry Anne Fracassa Avanti NewsFeatures

Used to be buying a club cab pickup truck was great if you had a family. With its full-size truck capabilities and versatility, adding a bench seat in the back for the kids was, well, just perfect, if dad or mom wanted a pickup.

Now enter the GMC Sierra Club Coupe outfitted with a third door.

This is heaven on 16-inch all-terrain steel-belted radials.

Having the third door makes all the difference in the world for your rearseat passengers. It means you don't have to fiddle with the front seats you know, moving them up and over and then back — to let your passengers in. Just open the passenger door, reach in and open the second door.

Both doors open up wide, too, so there's no struggling.

And what those doors open wide for is comfortable, plush seating and car-peting, as well as more-than-adequate bench seats that can accommodate three large adults in front - and in back. Leg room in the rear seats could



ROAD TEST Anne

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better.

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though. With tall people in front, you'll find it less than an average person might want.

Test-driven this week was the 4x4 Sierra Club Coupe outlitted with the famed GM Insta-trac and the Vortec 5000 V8 sequential fuel injected engine with 55 more horses than last year's model. Reigning in those 230 horses is easy, as acceleration and merging onto freeway ramps is done without effort.

The standard engine for the Sierra

is a new base Vortec 4300 V6 that provides 200 horsepower. This engine is outfitted with platinum-tipped spark plugs and coolant fluid that have a life expectancy of 100,000 miles. Also available as options are a 5.7-liter V8, 7.4liter V8 and a 6.5-liter turbo-diese! V8.

The interior of the Sierra has been completely changed over last year's model. And change is good.

Instrumentation is smartly laid out, with simplicity the norm. There are gauges galore — tach, speedometer, oil, water temp, battery and fuel. Plain and easy to read, too.

There are very few switches to fool

There's a switch for the cargo light and one for the headlamps. Cruise con-trol and windshield wipers are on the turning stalk. The AMFM stereo/cassette/CD is up high on the dash so you're taking your eyes off the road for only a second. There are two auxiliary power plugs located in the middle.

between front seat passengers, to accommodate the cell phone and radar detector. And both of those plugs are covered with spring-hinged doors. In the middle of those is a cigarette/cigar lighter in case you need another plug

Between the front passengers is a neat, pull-out dual cup holder. Also between the front passengers is a cen-ter armrest that folds up and away if you need to carry that third passenger.

In the fabric-covered console is a storage compartment that can hold a good number of cassettes or CDs. Close it and on top there's a flat surface that can be used to write on. A band across the top can hold a number of papers and there's even a place to snap in your favorite pen and hold some change.

Of course, there are plenty of safety features on the Sierra, including day time running lamps, illuminated entry, dual air bogs, B-pillar-mounted heightadjustable shoulder belts, shoulder belts for the rear passengers and an

electrochromic inside rearview mirror with an 8-point compass built in.

The base price of the Sierra is just a hair over \$20,000. The model tested, however, loaded with all the special stuff, came in at around \$27,500.

At \$20,000, it's got a lot of standard equipment, such as an Insta-trac 4x4 transfer case, power steering, power brakes, a front stabilizer bar and independent front suspension, an all-welded cargo box, 100-amp alternator, steel-belted radials, driver air bag, 4-wheel anti-lock brokes, side door guard beams, intermittent wipers, tinted solar glass, gravel anti-chip protection, a 25gallon fuel tank, removable tail gate, side window defoggers, front tow hooks and rear heat ducts for the passengers.

With all that, it's obvious the Sierra is a solid full-size pickup truck that's solid on features and bullish on price. It's a good buy for anybody who needs to haul people or cargo comfortably.

1996 GMC Sierra

Vehicle class: Pickup truck. Power: Vortec 4300 V6 engine. Mileage: 14 city / 22 highway. Where built: Flint and Pontiac, Mich.; Oshawa, Ontario, Canada; and Fort Wayne, Ind.

Base price: \$20,290.

Keep Car Cool To **Save Interior**

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Summer heat is hard on a

Summer heat is hard on a car's interior. It can cause the headliner (ceiling fabric) to droop, the padded dash to crack and upholstery to fade. Many summer related problems can be addressed with a little common sense. Try to park in the shade. Avoid those wide open spaces that allow relentless full time exposure to the sun.

Try to park near a building to assure your car of some shade at least part of the

time.
Finally, purchase a sun shade. These inexpensive cardboard blockers placed in the windshield and rear windows help lower the interior temperature.

temperature.

More tips on protecting your car's interior are in a free pamphlet, 'HOW TO KEEP', YOUR CAR LOOKING YOUNG', published by the Car Care Council. Send stamped, self addressed envelope to the Car Care Council, Dept. N, One Grade Lake Drive, Port Clinton, OH 43452.

If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI 1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox...Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com Anne Fraçassa is senior editor of Avanti News Features.

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