

Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

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CAREport

Tahoe changes for the better

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

It looks best in black. It's most comfortable in leather seating.

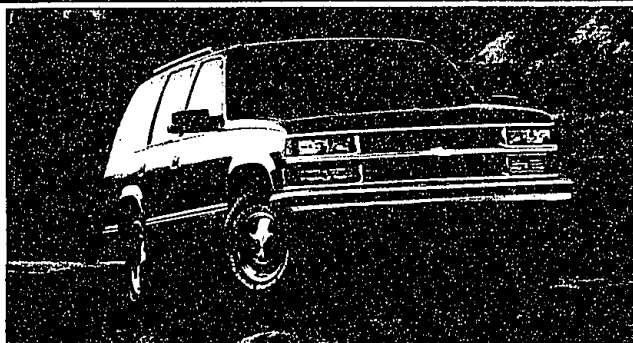
Best of all, it's big. And if you think the 1997 Chevrolet Tahoe hasn't changed since last year's model, you're dead wrong.

For example, the 11-blade engine cooling fan now is made of composite, rather than steel. Little thing, but it reduces noise.

There's also a refined 4-speed automatic transmission that gives you smoother shifts and is more efficient. And a revised clutch plate design reduces slippage and is more efficient. Even the power steering system has been improved to reduce driver effort.

It still looks great on the outside as well. Two new paint colors have been added (a metallic blue and metallic beige). Styling is rugged and tough-looking all around. Don't be surprised if you see your local trooper driving one this summer — the Tahoe will soon be available in a police package.

Actually, it's a perfect vehicle for that application. It's high,



ROAD TEST
By
Anne
Fracassa

it's fast, it's big, it's capable of off-road action and it's easy to maneuver. And for a vehicle of this size, you really wouldn't expect that to be true.

There are even some changes on the inside. There's now a standard outboard front-passenger air bag, the center console has a pivoting writing surface on top. And there's cassette storage, a removable coin holder and two cupholders for rear-seat passengers, and a cargo-area power door lock/unlock

switch right on the instrument panel.

Sure, the Tahoe is big. And it's hard to get into without running boards. But it has a surprisingly tight turning ratio. On a normal subdivision street you can nearly turn around curb to curb. It only used about a foot into the neighbor's driveway when I tried it. I know some large sedans that can't do that.

The Tahoe is available in a number of configurations, which means you can buy high- and low-priced model. Tested was the 4-door 4-wheel-drive leather-seated lots-of-options model. That's why it cost so much (more than \$34,000).

If you like choices, this wonderful truck is for you. You can choose from 2-door, 4-door, 2-wheel-drive or 4x4 models.

The standard engine is a Vortec 5700 SFI V8 engine that provides 265 horsepower mated to a 4-speed automatic trans-

mission. More than adequate for a truck — excuse me, sport ute — of this size. Optional is a 180-horse 6.5-liter turbo diesel V8 engine.

The 2-door Tahoe is available in standard, LS and LT models, while the 4-door Tahoe comes in LS and LT models. The 4-door 4x4 LT, of course, costs the most.

The standard equipment list is longer than Santa Claus' shopping list: Illuminated entry, rear heat ducts, two 12-volt outlets (for the car phone and radar detector or laptop or whatever), dual air bags, dual cupholders up front, map pockets, rear 60/40 split-folding seats, intermittent variable wipers, dual mirrors and AM/FM stereo with seek-scan and digital clock.

Instrumentation is cool, easy to use and has backlit switches. All the information you'll ever need is there: coolant temperature, oil pressure, fuel gauge,

voltmeter, speedometer, trip odometer, odometer and tachometer.

The Tahoe 4x4 LT I drove has more stuff on it, but it's well worth it. Like leather seating, leather-wrapped steering wheel, high back bucket seats, power door locks and windows, keyless entry, power driver's seat, AM/FM cassette/CD stereo, tow hooks, air conditioning, rear window defogger, rear window wiper/washer and car mats.

Safety is no stranger, either. Count on anti-lock brakes, dual air bags, side impact beams and daytime running lamps to keep you safe and cozy. And you can tow between 5,000 and 7,000 lbs., depending on the model you choose.

I loved the ride, the comfort, the ease of handling, and how safe I felt in the Tahoe. I didn't like the mileage — 14 mpg in the city, 17 on the highway.

My neighbor, Joe (a General Motors employee), just ordered his Tahoe and expects delivery in February. He trotted over to take another look and drive it a bit. I asked him what he liked about the Tahoe.

"When you hold the steering wheel, you feel like there's something substantial there. I'm really impressed with the new steering system," Joe said. "The comfort and room up front was great and I think the high-back bucket seats are wonderful. I don't like the mileage, though. But it's just great."

You know what? Joe's right. The Tahoe's just great.

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures. This is the last week to cast your online vote for car and truck of

the year and to identify your favorite car in our reader poll. Make your voice heard by writing AVANTI1054@aol.com.

1997 Chevrolet Tahoe
Vehicle class: Full-size sport utility.
Engine: Vortec 5700 SFI V8.
Mileage: 14 city / 17 highway.
Where built: Janesville, Wis.
Price as tested: \$34,495.

Clarification

Last week's review of the 1997 Suzuki Sidekick Sport should have said Geo offers the Tracker sport utility vehicle as a four-door hard-top. The Tracker is the sister vehicle to the Sidekick.

(Naps) — Your new car or truck may soon be sporting a new exotic metal alloy called AlCuZinc.

The new patented, high-strength, recyclable material is finding its way into a number of popular (GM) cars.

This aluminum-copper-zinc alloy can be used on gears, levers, steering column parts and door hardware, according to its developers, M. David Hanna and M.S. Rashid, metallurgists at General Motors Corp's NAO Research and Development Center in Warren, Michigan.

The material offers a number of advantages including recyclability, quicker production times and manufacturability, which result in a lower production cost. Up to 40 net-shape parts a minute can be created by taking advantage of the material's relatively low melting temperature and fluidity, according to its inventors. Its melting temperature is 800 degrees F. compared to aluminum which melts at about 1,250°. The material also requires less energy to produce, is stronger, and has better wear resistance than existing zinc alloys.

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SALE PRICE \$18,995* GM OPT II
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1997 JIMMY 4x4 FOUR DOOR



Vortec 4300 V-6 engine, automatic trans., air bag, ABS brakes, air conditioning, power windows/locks & mirrors, tilt, cruise, AM/FM cassette stereo & much more! Stock #979009.

SALE PRICE \$24,395* GM OPT II
Deduct \$1314.25

36 month Smart Lease \$275* per mo.

1997 SIERRA PICKUP



VORTEC 4300 V-6 engine, automatic transmission, dual air bags, ABS brakes, air conditioning, tilt, & cruise, AM/FM stereo cassette & much more! Stock #979052.

SALE PRICE \$16,399* GM OPT II
Deduct \$816.65

36 month Smart Lease \$224* per mo.

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2.2 liter, four cylinder engine, five speed manual transmission, air bags, ABS brakes, air conditioning, tilt, cruise, AM/FM stereo cassette, and much more! Stock #968448.

SALE PRICE \$11,995* GM OPT II
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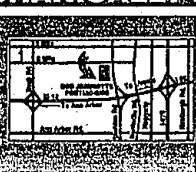
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