

# Automotive

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## CLASSIFICATION

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## 1997 GMC Sonoma: Even a 4-year-old can shift it

By Anne Fracassa  
Avant NewsFeatures

My 4-year-old daughter, Becca, learned to shift a 5-speed manual transmission this week.

Not from the driver's side, of course, but from the passenger seat of the 1997 GMC Sonoma extended cab pick-up truck. No passenger driving, so that meant the kids could be in the front seat.

Of course, my 5-year-old, Francesca, already learned how to shift about a year ago, so it was only natural that Becca wanted to learn. She's so good at it now that she anticipates and watches me step on the clutch and shifts on her own — without me saying "shift up, shift down."

Guess that tells you how easy it is to shift the 5-speed Sonoma. Gotta tell you, though, it kinda grinds on your nerves when you're in a traffic jam.

In bright apple red metallic, the Sonoma is a beautiful truck. Styling is really smart — not overwhelming, yet up to date. The black stripe added a bit of sportiness to the truck. What I liked best was the aggressive front. It looks imposing and truly GMC, yet it's really a gentle truck to drive.

Guess that's why a lot of ladies choose the Sonoma. It's got the sportiness and aggressiveness, yet the interior is plush and inviting.

Speaking of the interior, front instrumentation is eye-pleasing and easy to understand. The stereo and controls (which are quite large) are up high, so you don't have to take your eyes off the road for too long.

If you choose an automatic transmission over the manual, you'll be pleased to find the shifter on the floor this year, instead of the steering column.

You want a strong truck, you've got it with the Sonoma. It isn't bogged down by a 4-cylinder engine. The Sonoma's got the tried and true Vortec 4300 (4.3-liter) V6 engine with 190 horsepower.

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Guess how many Sonomas were sold last year: Just a hair shy of 54,000.

An option on the extended cab was a



The standard engine is a 2.2-liter 4-cylinder, but take my advice and get the Vortec. It's stronger and will meet your needs better, even if you don't plan on hauling your worldly belongings on a weekly basis.

There are a lot of choices — which makes the Sonoma quite versatile and almost customized for anyone — including a 2-door regular and extended cab, a 2-door extended cab with a third rear access door, a 6-foot or 7.3-foot bed and sideside or sportside design. The Sonoma is also available as a 2-wheel- or 4-wheel-drive vehicle.

Guess how many Sonomas were sold last year: Just a hair shy of 54,000.

That's a lot of trucks being driven out of New Jersey and Louisiana, where the Sonoma is built.

There's a lot of new stuff this year, including a sport suspension option on the extended cab, a better frame design on the 2-wheel-drive models, a redesigned automatic transmission that gives better fuel economy, fuel system improvements that lead to lower evaporative emissions and a redesigned keyless entry control fob.

Oh, and there are two new colors: A fairway green and smoky caramel that replaces radar purple and bright teal. I really liked that purple, actually.

An option on the extended cab was a

third rear access door, which swings out more than 100 degrees. It's really convenient to load stuff into the rear cab, but I'm not sure I can live without the left-side extra seat. If you've got more than two passengers, you're sunk. Inside the door is a storage pocket.

The GMC Sonoma has an attractive MSRP: Just \$14,714. But once you start adding a few options — ones that I think everyone wants — you're adding about 6 grand in no time.

Still, the standard list is decent: Underbody spare tire carrier, double wall pickup box, power steering, power

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