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2002 Saturn Wagon An Impressive Specimen

CARport



By Anne Fracassa
Avanti News/Features



ANNE
FRACASSA

Over the past several years, I have been impressed with the quality I've seen in Saturn vehicles. The new 2002 LW300 wagon is no exception.

This mid-sized wagon has a lot of heart and is as quiet as a mouse. The doors sound solid when you slam them. And there's comfort in there, too.

The only thing that freaked me out was the price: \$26,200. For a Saturn. Granted, the standard equipment list is huge, but still, you could pick up a Mercedes for that price.

Yet the price is the only complaint I had about this vehicle. I traveled to the upper part of Michigan in this Saturn and never felt fatigued. The seats are comfy and the ride is very, very nice.

Power is provided by a 3.0-liter 24-valve dual overhead cam V6 mated to a 4-speed automatic transmission that has the get up and go to get you there quickly. Like I said before, the engine is quiet. With the windows rolled up, you've got to strain to hear if it's turned over and running.

The LW300 rests on 16-inch performance tires mounted on chrome clad wheels and an enhanced sport tuned suspension. The ride is definitely smooth.

Make your kids happy and quiet on even the shortest of trips with the optional DVD entertainment package. This integrated video DVD system that can play video or audio compact discs.

The system, however, cannot be accessed by the back seat passengers. I don't know if that's a good thing or not. It was annoying to pass discs back and forth. And the placement of the buttons to operate it are right where you can knock into them if you place a drink in the cup holder.

What happens if you knock into the button is that it ejects the disc-which means the video has to start from the beginning. That really annoyed my kids, especially when the movie was more than halfway through.

But the system is really great because the screen is located in the headliner directly in back of the front seat. The 7-inch screen folds down and wireless headphones allow passengers to listen to CDs or



A Quality Mid-Sized Wagon 2002 Saturn LW300; Vehicle class: Mid-sized station wagon. Power: 3.0-liter DOHC 24-valve V6 engine. Mileage: 21 city/29 highway. Where built: Wilmington, Del. Price as tested: \$26,200

watch a movie and the folks don't have to hear it.

It also allows the front seat passenger and driver to listen to the car's stereo at the same time. And if you really want to, you can also listen to the video or audio through the car's speakers strategically mounted throughout the cabin.

This DVD entertainment package can only be ordered on black special-edition LW300 and Saturn will only build 1,000 of them. The special edition also has fog lamps, gray leather interior, power driver's seat and premium audio systems. Saturn also is planning to offer the same system on L200 and L300 sedans and on LW200 and LW300 wagons.

Gotta tell you this system is really cool for the kids and the parents, but it's quite pricey at \$3,350. The sheer convenience of the unit may be worth the cost. It sure can make a back seat with kids quiet—that's for sure. I had to turn around a couple of times to make sure they were awake.

Safety and security are all built in nicely in the LW300 and all of it comes as standard equipment. It's got head curtain air bags, which are designed to reduce the severity of head and neck injuries in side-impact crashes.

With electronic sensors, the car can sense when a collision has occurred and inflates the air bag, providing a cushion to protect the head and neck. Couple that with dual front air bags and you're even safer.

Other safety features include antilock brakes, traction control, automatic headlamps, side impact

door beams and pats, 3-point outboard front and rear safety belts, child-proof rear door locks, child seat anchors and tethers in all three back seat positions, immobilizer theft deterrent system, 4-way adjustable front head restraints, dual heated power mirrors, 5 mph impact bumpers and rear wiper and washer.

Here I go again. It's also got that annoying safety feature that locks your door as soon as you get in. Problem with that is when you're dropping off or picking up kids and you're still in gear, it's locked. Then fiddling around trying to unlock the door and it's monsooning out there. Annoying to me, but more safety for your family.

Worried about nicks and dents at the local mall or shopping center? Don't have to with the LW300. All of the doors and fenders are dent resistant. Another nice touch usually reserved for the luxury cars-but it's on this Saturn-is a stainless steel exhaust.

Other standard equipment includes air conditioning, power locks and windows, cruise control. Leather wrapped tilt steering wheel, driver's seat height adjuster, cargo cover and convenience net, front and rear floor mats and 60/40 fold-down rear seats.

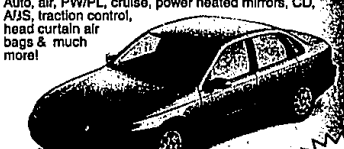
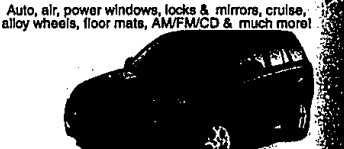
Did I mention the exterior? Nice lines and curves all over, making it a pleasure to gaze at. It's unmistakably Saturn.

This mid-sized wagon was fun to drive and would be fun to own. Not to mention the kids will love it. Write Anne Fracassa at avanti1054@aol.com.

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