

# Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

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CARreport

## Pontiac Sunfire burns up the road

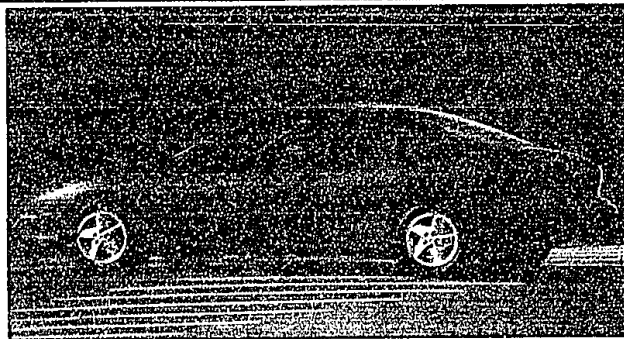
By Anne Fracassa  
Avanti NewsFeatures

CLARKSVILLE, Tenn. — The news came suddenly and there wasn't time to get another car. The prospect of traveling hundreds of miles from Detroit to northern Tennessee overnight in a small car like the 1995 Pontiac Sunfire didn't seem too inviting.

After all, the Sunfire is a subcompact. And I'm tall. I like to have room when I'm in a car for more than a couple of hours.

Gomer Pyle would have yelled "shazamm!" if he could have driven a Sunfire instead of an Army jeep. Believe it or not, the Sunfire was a pleasant surprise, surprise, surprise, surprise, Sgt. Carter, because it logged an incredible 54 miles per gallon on the freeway, significantly higher than the 32 mpg estimate reported by the Environmental Protection Agency for this car. More on that later.

The Sunfire surprised me so much I actually looked forward



ROAD TEST  
By  
Anne Fracassa

nameplate on the rear deck lid and gorgeous styling. It's not too aggressive, however, and can easily be a lady's car.

The Sunfire is powered by a standard 2.2-liter 4-cylinder overhead valve engine outfitted with a smooth shifting 5-speed manual transmission. Driven was the 2-door SE coupe, which is the base model priced at just over \$11,000.

It performed well on the trip — which was mostly straight interstate driving. Exiting and entering the highway didn't produce any white knuckles, so it accelerated well, but didn't leave anyone in the dust.

The interior instrumentation is wrapped around the driver — almost to the exclusion of the front passenger. It's got full instrumentation, including a tachometer — sometimes something you only got on those higher-priced sports jobs.

The center console is well planned and includes cupholders, armrest and a side-mounted parking brake. Take out the ashtray, and you've got yet another functional cupholder.

Built in Lordstown, Ohio, and Lansing, Mich. (along with the Chevrolet Cavalier), the Sunfire's rear seating area is nearly non-existent, mostly because taller people tend to flat-out maximize the leg room in front. We jammed a cooler, some snacks, the road atlas and a AAA Trip-Tik (with some bad info), a ton of magazines and the laptop back there and it all seemed comfortable. There are rear heating and air conditioning ducts — also usually found in more expensive cars — for rear passenger comfort.

In the trunk, the two suit bags, a duffel, some toys to bring back for the girls and a

few groceries fit nicely. The rear seat folds down, giving you a lot of room. Actually, that's probably the best use for the rear seat — as extra cargo room — and not to carry passengers. Your dog would fit back there, unless he's a German shepherd.

And the glove box: The thing can almost hold a 6-liter box of wine — without the box, though. Pontiac engineers say it's actually 4.9 liters. An average-size ladies purse (not mine, though) could actually fit in there.

Another good thing — the ashtray/lighter area has a little pocket for the lighter to be stored in. You know how annoying it is to hear that little lighter roll around somewhere when you've plugged in the cell phone? Well, this little pocket keeps it secure and out of your way. A nice touch.

Now ... Pontiac engineers say this is impossible. But we don't work for Pontiac so we'll tell you what we found: Our car totaled 54 miles per gallon on flat interstate driving in the neighborhood of 1,100 miles. The test Sunfire was especially fuelish going from Detroit to Dayton (\$4 in gas) and from Dayton to Louisville (another \$5 in gas).

From Detroit to Clarksville, we had put only \$17 in the tank. The ride home cost us \$22.75 in gas taking the exact same route.

In all, we paid \$39.75 in gas money going from Detroit to Tennessee and back to Detroit.

If we had flown, it would have cost more than \$1,000 per person.

Official EPA numbers are 24 city and 36 highway. All I know is the car got great mileage.

The Sunfire comes in four flavors: The base SE coupe, the 4-door SE sedan, the 160-horsepower 2.3-liter Quad-4 GT model and the SE convertible.

All come standard with dual air bags, full instrumentation, a rear folding seat, anti-lock brakes, a stainless steel muffler and tailpipe, 100,000-mile spark plugs, a 16.2-gallon fuel tank and power mirrors.

Smart styling and the decent price make this a great small car. And if the base model is this good, imagine what fun the GT or convertible must be.

Anno Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures.

1995 Pontiac Sunfire  
Vehicle class: ... SE coupe  
Engine: ... 2.2-liter 4-cylinder  
Base price: ... \$11,074  
Where built: Lordstown, Ohio, and Lansing, Mich.  
EPA mileage: 25 city / 32 highway  
Mileage (as tested): 30 city / 54 highway

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

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