

Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

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CA Report

Fun-to-drive Geo Tracker a good choice for college kids

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

Finally, someone was using their head over at Warren's General Motors Tech Center.

Ever since its introduction as a "special purpose vehicle" in 1989, the Geo Tracker has only been available as a 2-door model. Its sister-car, the Suzuki Sidekick, was available in both 2- and 4-door models.

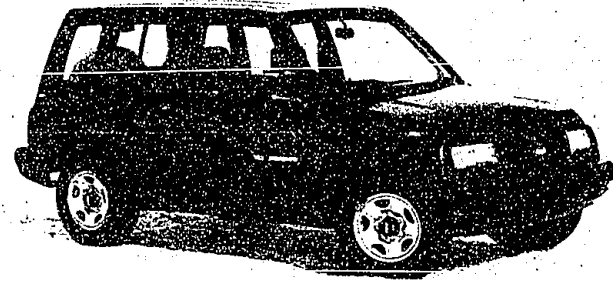
Both the Sidekick and Tracker are built by CAMI Automotive Inc. in Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada, through a joint venture between GM and Suzuki Motor Co. Ltd. Suzuki has long enjoyed exclusive sales of the 4-door model and I figured it would never give that up.

That's all changed. For 1996, the Geo Tracker hard-top enjoys two more doors, a lot more headroom and hiproom (3 inches) and more than 12 more cubic feet of cargo room.

All that translates into a lot more comfort in the new Geo Tracker.

The 2-door model is still available, but with the 4-door Tracker, it's a larger compact sport utility (does that make sense?) than ever before. Anyone planning to utilize that back seat is much better off with the 4-door model.

And you know what? Even with four doors, the Tracker doesn't lose any of its cute look. Or its sportiness. Or its 4x4 capabilities.



ROAD
TEST
By
Anne
Fracassa

And it's even a little bit fun to drive ... if you can get past the clunky, uncomfortable, nearly impossible to shift 5-speed manual transmission. I've known how to shift for about 20 years now — most of the cars I evaluate are 5-speeds — and this transmission seemed to get hung up in third for some reason.

As the week progressed, I learned to slam it into the third gear to get it in, but that's no way to drive a vehicle. And it wasn't just me — a few other evaluators noticed its hard-to-shift trans.

Me? Even though you'll experience a loss of real control with an automatic, I'd opt for it — just for aggressive driver's sake.

One more observation for the wish list: It needs a much better suspension package.

You could argue that because it's got nearly 8 inches ground clearance and is, essentially, marketed toward people who want 4x4 capabilities, it's really a rougher-than-normal ride.

But those were the only disappointments in the Tracker.

Because it's high off the ground, you've got great visibility. Oh — visibility is better in the '96 because there's a lot more glass. It's almost like a greenhouse. It's got a wider stance, too, for better stability.

And when was the last time you got into any vehicle that you could realistically wear a cowboy hat in? The Tracker actually has that much headroom. Honest — I put on my own cowboy hat and it fit with not so much as a rub.

Evaluated was the Lsi Hardtop model, which has a 97.6-inch wheelbase, nearly a foot longer than the 2-door model. And the Tracker has a

much wider stance that translates into a more solid, stable vehicle.

Although there isn't a drastic change in the new Tracker, it does have a revised fascia, grille and hood design. Instrumentation design has also been changed to accommodate standard dual airbags.

Also new is the addition of an optional convenience package that includes power windows, door locks and mirrors. Also available as options are electronic speed control and stereo speakers mounted on top of the instrument panel.

The standard 1.6-liter 16-valve SOHC 4-cylinder aluminum-block engine provides 95 horsepower. It's adequate for a small vehicle, but don't expect to win any drag races down Woodward.

The engine can also tow up to 1,600 pounds when equipped with the optional tow package and can be mated to three configurations: A 5-speed manual, 3-speed automatic or a brand new 4-speed automatic transmission.

Other standard features include daytime running lamps, child security rear-door locks, center console

with dual cupholders and storage space for CDs and other personal stuff, reclining front bucket seats, rear folding bench seat and cloth seats.

Consider the Tracker perfect for a college kid or as a second "fun" vehicle for the family.

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti NewsFeatures.

1996 Geo Tracker	
Where built:	Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada
Vehicle class:	Sport utility
Engine:	1.6-liter SOHC, 16 valve 4-cylinder
Mileage:	23 city / 28 highway
Price as tested:	\$19,551

Car's Quirks Can Be Tip-Off To Winter Driving Problems

(NAPS) — If you're watching your budget like most people these days, you've probably had your car for at least several years. That may have given you a chance to learn its little quirks — and to save money in the process.

If you've discovered a tendency for your car to overheat, then you should waste no time in taking the proper maintenance steps to avoid potential winter problems. This is especially true for car owners in areas which are subjected to severe cold weather.

Your first step should be to flush the cooling system and replace the old antifreeze. Your mechanic can do this, or you can save money by doing it yourself with the aid of an easy-to-use flush kit available in most stores selling car-care products.

If you do the job yourself, remember to check local regulations regarding the proper disposal of old antifreeze/coolant.

For do-it-yourselfers looking for superior performance and hassle-free maintenance alternatives, a new product, Zerex® Extreme 4/50 antifreeze/coolant, can provide a solution. The product's container carries a hang-tag detailing the protection provided against damage from freeze-ups, boil-overs or corrosion... a guarantee that extends for four years or 50,000 miles. That may be longer than you're planning to keep your car!

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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 Fracassa is senior editor of Avanti News-Features.

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