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CAR Report



Sonoma stands out in a crowd

By Anne Fracassa
Avanti NewsFeatures

"That's a pretty purple truck," my 4-year-old squealed when I brought home the 1996 GMC Sonoma. She sounded like her See-and-Say toy that introduces the color purple by yelling, "Mrs. Fox loves her purple truck."

You've got to have a pre-schooler to understand.

Anyway, the "radar purple" is really pretty. It certainly stands out in a crowd.

And as crowded as the small pickup vehicle class is, GMC wants the Sonoma to stand out from the competition. GMC promotes the Sonoma as a "no-apologies-necessary-get-out-of-my-way-I'm-coming-through" truck.

And get out of its way, you should. This is a no-nonsense truck that's built for serious work — and quite a bit of fun.

There are a lot of options to choose from, depending on how you plan to use this truck. It comes as a 2-door regular cab, 2-door club cab or in 2- or 4-wheel-drive. You also have a choice of two box lengths and three trim levels.

The Sonoma was first intro-



ROAD TEST
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duced in 1982 as a 2-wheel-drive model. The Insta-trac 4-wheel-drive was added a year later.

It was last redesigned and re-engineered during the 1994 model year, but this year, the Sonoma has a bunch of new features and refinements.

Most importantly, the club cab Sonoma has that nifty third door this year. It's an option, but certainly worth every penny. This one is a little different and I like it better: The third door is located

at the rear of the driver's door, making it much more convenient than it had been.

The handle to the third door is recessed within the door and you've got to open the driver's door to access it. It opens up wide — actually 100 degrees — to give you plenty of access to the rear space in the truck. What a great option.

Also new this year on the Sonoma is a sportside box. Its 6-foot design can be chosen with regular and extended cab and with either the 2- or 4-wheel-drive models.

The Sport Suspension system is also new for 1996 and GMC hopes it gives Sonoma a competitive advantage to people who want comfort. Sonoma is already the smoothest riding and most comfortable truck on the market.

The Sport Suspension system may make it the best handling as well. This system has a stiff

structure, soft spring rates and high damping control to give it the handling feel of a sporty passenger vehicle. It's rounded out with frame reinforcements, gas-charged shock absorbers, fat tires, wide wheels and anti-roll bars in both the front and rear. There's even a rear-axle vibration damper to keep the Sonoma quiet on the road.

The base engine on the Sonoma is a 2.2-liter 4 cylinder that has cast aluminum cylinder heads. It's rated at 118 horsepower. Optional engines include a 175-horsepower V6 and a 180-horse V6. The 175 is standard on the 4-wheel-drive models.

I liked the 175-horse V6. It performed well during inclement weather and was outstanding on dry pavement. It accelerated and responded when you wanted it to and without so much as a whimper.

Another new feature on the

Sonoma — and it's a first for any GM-built truck — is a lightweight two-part intake manifold design. As usual, the bottom half is cast aluminum, but the upper half of the manifold is made of molded composite material. The new composite material provides weight savings, thermal insulation, noise reduction and improved air flow. The distributor housing is also made of composite material.

Another plus: The Sonoma is perfect for anyone who hates car maintenance. It's got platinum-tipped spark plugs that can go 100,000 miles without changing, standardized hose sizes, a quieter cooling fan, long-life water pump bearing and coolant that doesn't have to be changed for five years or 100,000 miles.

The Sonoma is also outfitted with OBD II — second-generation on-board diagnostics. That means it's easier to repair if service is ever needed.

Standard on the Sonoma is a brand new 5-speed manual transmission. Backlash has been reduced, as have shift effort and throw. The shift knob has also been moved downward an inch and a half and it's also been moved 5.4 inches to the rear, providing a lot more comfort.

Even on the base model — SL — the standard equipment list is long. Take a look: Brake/transmission interlock, daytime running lamps, driver's side air bag, dual mirrors, AM/FM stereo with digital clock, five 15-inch steel wheels (no temporary spare in this one), 4-wheel anti-lock brakes, intermittent wipers, tinted glass, side door beams and 7-wire trailing harness.

The Sonoma is a comfortable commute truck, can work hard when you want it to and can take you to the theater in style at the end of the day.

It's worth a look.

1996 GMC Sonoma

Vehicle class: Small pickup.

Power: 2.2-liter 4-cylinder engine.

Mileage range: 16 city / 27 highway.

Where built: Shreveport, La., and Linden, N.J.

Base price: \$11,290.

Tips On How To Be

A Better Driver

(NAPS) — A recent survey of the National Sheriff's Association, commissioned by Alamo Rent A Car as part of its nationwide Be A Better Driver campaign, revealed that greater driver safety awareness could have prevented 74 percent of the more than 469,000 auto accidents investigated by these law enforcement officers during their careers.

Top Five Driving Don'ts:

- driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs
- speeding
- running red traffic lights
- not concentrating on driving
- aggressive driving

Top Five Driving Dos:

- attention and concentration while driving
- caution behind the wheel
- good judgment
- courtesy toward other drivers
- reflex action

Free Guide

For a free copy of the *How To Be A Better Driver* consumer guide, write to Alamo Rent A Car, "Be A Better Driver," P.O. Box 291260, Davis, FL 33329-9915.

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1996 Ford F-350 Stake
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