



TRUCK TEST

We all know that the fastest-growing segment in personal transportation is the truck, but it's safe to say that a full-time all-wheel-drive American street pickup with up to 14 pounds of turbocharging and a 4.9-second 0-60 time is unprecedented.

Those madcap MBAs at GMC have created just such an animal in the remarkable Syclone regular-cab pickup. This extremely high-performance variant is built from an S-model Sonoma core vehicle, but the panorama of genetic code tinkering mutates the two-seat baby pickup into a radically aggressive new shape. We recently drove and tested the Syclone prototype at a local Detroit dragstrip. The fact that GMC had chosen a dragstrip for our initial look-see is your first clue to the truck's outlaw view of life. Mamas, don't let your babies grow up to be drag racers.

By title, Kim T. Nielsen is GMC's manager of market research. A numbers guy, right? A well-spoken power tie. What he is by avocation is a power drag racer, but the most deadly strain—with an MBA and an attitude. His dream a few years ago was to drop a Buick turbocharged 3.8-liter V-6 into GMC's S-15 pickup truck to

G M C SYCLONE

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURBO

by Daniel Charles Ross

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM FRENK

create the Godzilla of street trucks, one as equally adept at kicking over Tokyo as its taller monstrous namesake. A concept vehicle was created for the '89 North American International Auto Show.

The basic six-cylinder motor, now a turbocharged 4.3-liter V-6, is a fairly conventional GM parts-bin item, but the Syclone version obviously has many important upgrades. New pistons were required, plus a new split-level intake manifold and new left and right exhaust manifolds. A unique exhaust system was created for the truck incorporating a three-

way catalyst, but it has no actual muffler in the usual sense. The system is judged quiet enough for street use and pass-by noise regulations, but is aggressive enough to get attention even before you slam-dance your competitor into the next zip code.

The congenital bits this engine uses include an overhead valve configuration with one intake and one exhaust valve per cylinder. A chain-driven camshaft drives the pushrods and rocker arms. The compression ratio is 8.35:1. A new electronic fuel delivery system was also designed, with pintel-style port fuel injectors and the throttle body from the Corvette's L98 5.7-liter V-8. The intercooled turbocharger huffs up to 14 pounds of boost at maximum thrust, good for 280 horsepower at 4400 rpm and molar-wrenching twist of 360 foot-pounds at 3600 rpm.

Molar-wrenching may not be just hyperbole. The horsepower is ducted to the pavement through a full-time all-wheel-drive system with a transfer case adapted from that used for the awd L-model Safari mini-van. Aluminum 16x8.0-inch wheels front and rear mount colossal 245/50VR16 tires from—surprise—Firestone. There's no practical wheelspin, and with a Hydra-Matic 700R4 four-speed

automatic transmission (the only gearbox offered here), no loss of boost pressure between shifts, either. With this unique footprint, those ponies, and the correct dragstrip launch etiquette, Syclone was good for an official quarter-mile time of 13.7 seconds at 98.5 mph. Hoo-whee, bubba.

Now a word about some of the test techniques. Our official times are derived from our own normal test regimen, but Nielsen's so unrelenting a dragmeister that he asked us to try following the dragstripper's credo of maximizing our minimum quarter-mile times. This required more cool-down between each run than most beer gets in our refrigerator.

While we waited patiently, the high priests in attendance covered

system, good under our feet for stopping distances of 144 feet from 60 mph and 41 feet from 30 mph. Syclone negotiated our 600-foot slalom at 64.5 mph, but unfortunately, no skidpad could be drawn at the dragstrip due to the lack of sufficient space.

Some reports have it that Syclone will have "unlimited production," but GMC folks say production probably won't go above 2000 units in the first year. Dealers started taking orders in September, with initial volume production to commence in January. At this writing, GMC plans to tag the vehicles as '91 models. Pricing wasn't firm at the time we drove the truck, but more than one person familiar with the program has mentioned a

sticker of \$26,000.

That's a bag of nearly Corvette-size money for "just a pickup truck," which is how some will refer to it. There are unquestionably 2000 well-off citizens who will queue up for one of these hot performers, and every one of them will owe a debt of thanks to Nielsen, drag-racer and sometime wearer of power ties. Somebody once said that success always produces a degree of corruption of the original intentions, but this tenet doesn't apply to Nielsen or his truck. He once threatened to quit GM instead of changing the project's course. In his quest, he was eminently successful.

Thanks to automotive gene splicing and first-class midwifery, Godzilla lives. **MT**



the intake manifold with fat bags of ceremonial ice and ran a garden hose of sacred water onto the surface of the radiator. More charge, more speed. Under these laboratory conditions, the Syclone was finally good in the quarter for 13.4 at 99.3 mph. About three tenths of a second are meaningless in the big picture, of course, unless your snapshot includes dragstrip timing lights. While we appreciate the pure science implicit in this procedure, we don't hold any belief that buyers of this exotic truck will duplicate the program in their driveways. If you want to put your lab coat on and run three trips a night for money out on Woodward Avenue, you won't get any argument from us.

After a day of flogging, the preproduction Syclone we drove really needed a fresh Wheaties injection to optimize its flagging spirit. It flat died before shifting out of second gear on one non-timed familiarization run, and in another, it refused to shift out of second into third. GMC says the problem has now been fixed.

Ride quality aboard stiffened suspension components was just fine, and well tuned to the task. Power front ventilated discs and rear drums feature an efficient anti-lock brake

TECH DATA

GMC Syclone

GENERAL/POWERTRAIN

Make and model	GMC Syclone
Manufacturer	GMC Truck div., General Motors Corp., Pontiac, Mich.
Body style	2-door, 2-passenger
Vehicle configuration	Front engine, all-wheel drive
Engine configuration	90° V-6, OHV, 2 valves/cylinder cast iron block and heads
Engine displacement, ci/cc	262/4300
Compression ratio	8.35:1
Fuel induction system	Multipoint EFI, turbocharged/intercooled
Horsepower, hp @ rpm, SAE net	280 @ 4400
Torque, lb-ft @ rpm, SAE net	360 @ 3600
Transmission	4-speed auto.
Axle ratio	1.10:1
Final drive ratio	2.39:1

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in./mm	108.3/2750
Track, f/r, in./mm	57.8/58.0/ 1468/1473
Length, in./mm	178.2/4526
Width, in./mm	64.8/1646
Height, in./mm	60.0/1524
Ground clearance, in./mm	6.3/159
Curb weight, lb	3526
Cargo capacity, cu ft	40.1
Weight distribution, f/r, %	64/36
Fuel capacity, gal.	20.0
Weight/power ratio, lb/hp	12.3

CHASSIS

Suspension, f/r	Independent/ live axle
Steering	Recirculating ball, power assist
Ratio	13.0:1
Turns, lock to lock	3.1
Turning circle, ft	37.9
Brakes, f/r	Vented discs/drums
Anti-lock	Standard
Wheels	16 x 8.0
Tires	245/50VR16 Firestone Firehawk

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration,	
0-30 mph, sec	1.7
0-40 mph, sec	2.5
0-50 mph, sec	3.6
0-60 mph, sec	4.9
0-70 mph, sec	6.5
0-80 mph, sec	8.5
Quarter mile, sec @ mph	13.7 @ 98.5
Braking,	
30-0 mph, ft	41
60-0 mph, ft	144
Speed through 600-ft slalom, mph	64.5

PRICE

Base price	\$26,000 (est.)
Price as tested	\$26,000 (est.)