



POWERHOUSE PICKUPS

Having a ball in the hallowed halls of horsepower with a Chevrolet 454 SS and a GMC Syclone.

Milan, Michigan—

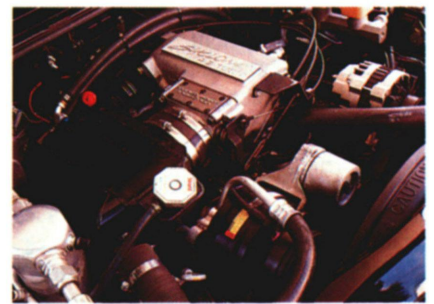
Honestly, does the world need a pair of pickup trucks, each producing well over 250 bhp? The calmer ninds among us would think not.

The Chevrolet 454 SS and the GMC Syclone (yes, with an "S"; Mercury owns "Cyclone") are pickup trucks on steroids with bodies lowered over their street tires. Both are capable of mind-boggling straight-line

performance. Both are dressed in evil black. And both are as different as they are alike.

Now in its third year of production, the Chevrolet 454 SS goes about its business the Theodore Roosevelt way: speaking softly and carrying a big stick. Power comes via a 7.4-liter Gargantua, painted black and stuffed under the hood of a C/K pickup. Actually, *stuffed* may not be the appropriate word—oddly enough, the engine appears nonchalant-

The 7.4-liter V-8 in the 454 SS (near right) is massive and mean. The Syclone's turbocharged V-6 (far right) is smaller but more powerful.



BY MARK H. SCHIRMER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARK PRESTON

POWERHOUSE PICKUPS

ly placed. One imagines 7.4 liters taking up an awful lot of space, but the full-size pickup wears the new engine well. Behind the huge V-8 is a cabin big enough for five with sport seats for two. The suspension is upgraded with Chevrolet's optional performance handling package, with special dampers, faster-ratio steering, and a heavier front anti-roll bar. Still, the truck rides like a truck, swallowing bumps and transforming them into soft, rolling motions. It sits up big and tall, beckoning riders to pull on a pair of Tony Lama ostrich skins and a size big Stetson.

Chevrolet's 454 SS develops its brute strength at the cost of fuel economy. The 25-gallon fuel tank is a necessity, considering 15 mpg is rarely achieved. The reward, however, is plenty of low-rumble fun. Driving is a tire-squealing, gun-glide-and-giggle scenario. The 454 SS is a great toy. We drove a 230-bhp 1990 model, but for 1991, 25 bhp more makes it even better. Fuel injection and dual exhaust push the output to 255 bhp with 400 pounds-feet of torque.

The GMC project, on the other hand, is far from a childish toy. The Syclone is a transformed Sonoma pickup (formerly called the S15) packed full of automotive goodies. PAS, a specialty-vehicle manufacturer, lends a hand in production. Under the hood, truly stuffed this time, is a turbocharged 4.3-liter V-6, modified by parts snatched right out of the Corvette bin. The transmission is an electronic four-speed, again pilfered from the Corvette, center shift console and all. Power is sent through a full-time all-wheel-drive system.

Syclone program manager Kim Nielsen, with a frightened me riding passenger, showed off his truck's muscle at Milan Dragway, south of Ann Arbor. In typical race fashion, Nielsen danced his feet on both pedals, pitting 280 horses against four straining brakes. The truck, poised to run, moaned as the drag strip's Christmas tree counted down to green. I think I muttered, "Jeez-zus," as we violently yanked away from the start line. Tire spin was minimal. My jowls and stomach resisted the fierce acceleration. By the time we passed 60 mph,



somewhere shy of five seconds, I had swallowed my gum and given serious thought to the fact that this could be dangerous. A quarter-mile was sucked up in just over thirteen seconds, with us traveling at 100 plus. Yep, they claim it's faster than the ZR-1. True or not, it's the fastest darn pickup I've ever seen.

The entire truck is lowered by about two inches, and the suspension is beefed up. Cornering is more like a Porsche's than a pickup's, although the ride is a bit jittery. Body roll is slight, and the steering is quite quick. The instrument panel, borrowed from the Pontiac Sunbird GT, is a vast improvement over original equipment. Upgraded bolsters improve the seats, and the steering wheel is wrapped in leather. The Syclone comes fully loaded, bed cover and all—no surprise, considering its \$25,500 base price. Production is limited to a maximum of sixty a day, and, according to Nielsen, "As long as people are buying, we will be building."

Last September, a specially prepared Syclone reached 210.069 mph on the Bonneville Salt Flats, breaking two speed records set by the Buick Skyhawk in September 1989. The record-breaking Syclone LSR blew past the old mark of just over 199 mph in both the flying kilometer and the flying mile. It seems GM is serious about speed.

One thing is clear: Even though these two trucks appear to be bridges strung across rivers not yet run, there may be a tiny light of enthusiasm coming from the dark halls of General Motors. Enthusiasts are getting their way, and there is fun to be had.



CHEVROLET 454 SS

Base price/price as tested \$19,610/\$20,185

GENERAL:

Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive truck
2-passenger, 2-door steel body

POWERTRAIN:

OHV V-8, 454 cu in (7440 cc)
Power SAE net 255 bhp @ 4000 rpm
Torque SAE net 400 lb-ft @ 2400 rpm
4-speed automatic transmission

CHASSIS:

Independent front, solid-axle rear suspension
Power-assisted recirculating-ball steering
Front disc, rear drum brakes
275/60R-15 BFGoodrich Comp T/A tires

MEASUREMENTS:

Wheelbase 117.5 in
Curb weight 4720 lb
Fuel capacity 25.0 gal



GMC SYCLONE

Base price \$25,500

GENERAL:

Front-engine, 4-wheel-drive truck
2-passenger, 2-door steel body

POWERTRAIN:

Turbocharged and intercooled OHV V-6, 262 cu in (4293 cc)
Power SAE net 280 bhp @ 4400 rpm
Torque SAE net 360 lb-ft @ 3600 rpm
4-speed automatic transmission

CHASSIS:

Independent front, solid-axle rear suspension
Power-assisted recirculating-ball steering
Vented front disc, rear drum brakes
245/50VR-16 Firestone Firehawk tires

MEASUREMENTS:

Wheelbase 108.3 in
Curb weight 3526 lb
Fuel capacity 20.0 gal

