

SORT OF A SYCLONE IN A TEAPOT



Sonoma GT shares black paint, styling cues with Syclone but doesn't have turbo truck's power—or price

This is not the Mother of All Trucks. That sobriquet rightly belongs to another pickup of similar size, shape and sourcing, the 285 hp Syclone ("AutoFile," AW, Sept. 16, '91). But the hand we're dealing with here also rocks the cradle. GMC has put real GT go in this small pickup.

Thanks to its size and its sizzle this trucklet is the sportiest of the trio of pickups we perused for SpringFile. If trucks are encroaching on the passenger-car market to serve as status symbols, surrogate family haulers and any and every thing else, then the standard-cab compact pickup is best suited to fill the role of sporting machine. And the Sonoma GT really gets that job done.

A bonanza of low-end torque makes the balance-shafted performance version (200 hp vs. 160, 260 lb ft of torque vs. 230) of the 4.3-liter V6 very useable. This pickup has pick up—though 0-60 times would be better yet if traction could have been maximized. As with the Magnum V8-equipped Dodge Dakota, we found that unless the launching surface was flat, clean and dry, axle tramp could be violent. Even under ideal circumstances the back end could bounce if we didn't precisely modulate the left-side pedal during brake-torque starts.

Although the tach's redlined at 6000 rpm, we found little purpose in running it to that point. Leaving the four-speed automatic in

bad old days when applying GM brakes felt like stepping in a bucket of oatmeal and stopped the proceedings about as well. Beneath a somewhat squishy pedal were extremely touchy brakes, locking up at anything even beginning to exceed moderate pressure. Modulation was impossible and flat-spotted tires inevitable. Four-wheel ABS would have prevented this, and we strongly recommend that General Motors—and other truckmakers who rely on rear-wheel-only ABS—make the full-blown system standard.

Ride and handling, however, swing the Sonoma GT equation back to the positive side. True, ride is firm but it's not harsh unless there are more potholes than pavement

OD brought upshifts at 4800 rpm and the best acceleration times. The 4.3 HP, as it's known, is smoother than the less-powerful non-balance-shaft version, but is still no paragon of deportment. While it's not rough, it does sound gravelly—even boomy, about what you'd expect from an oversized inline four. Shift quality, on the other hand, is superbly high, something we've come to expect of GM automatic transmissions of late.

Unfortunately, the feel and the operation of the brakes recalled—but, happily, not *too* strongly—the

JUST THE FACTS

GMC SONOMA GT MANUFACTURER'S DATA

GMC Truck Division
General Motors Corp.
31 Judson St.
Pontiac, MI 48342-2230
Customer Assistance telephone number:
1-(313)-446-4547
Country of Origin: United States
Number of dealers: 2455

PRICING

Base: \$16,700
As tested: \$17,170
Rebates: \$750 or low-interest financing
Destination charge: \$470
What owners paid: \$7,980-\$16,822 (all models), \$12,161 avg.

VOICES

OWNERS

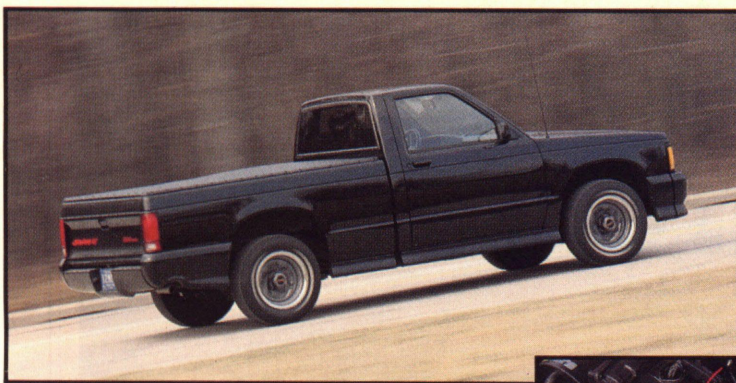
The 4.3-liter V6 accompanied by the four-speed automatic is a great combination for the driver who wants a vehicle to drive every day yet also be able to tow a trailer on the weekend. The gas mileage is also respectable, even with the 3:42 gear—I get 18 mpg for everyday driving and 23.5 on the freeway. The interior is well worth noting, especially with the extended cab. There is plenty of room for three people, four if they know each other well enough.

Steve Poor
Grove City, Ohio

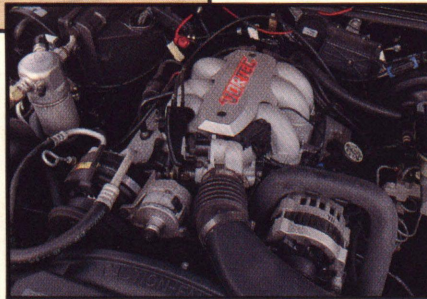
My Sonoma 4x4 was purchased for very specific needs. I go skiing in the Sierras as well as exploring in the Mojave Desert and needed four-wheel-drive; I'm building a new house and need to haul materials; and I need a vehicle for general transportation. My Sonoma is able to satisfy all these conditions. The truck has not had to return to the dealer, except for routine preventative maintenance, after 22,187 miles.

J.F. Allison
Lancaster, Calif.

Being 18 years old and this being my first truck, I think I got a good deal. I am very satisfied with it. The only thing I've had to buy for it is oil for the oil changes and



GT shows its heels to most pickups, thanks to 200-hp 4.3-liter V6 (below). Inside it shares dash, trim with 285 hp Syclone



GVWR of 4200 pounds; our subject vehicle weighed in at 3200 on the nose. Two average-sized guys, then, can ride in the non-blown GMC while it's hauling about 650 pounds of whatever. Not a strikingly significant advantage over the Syclone.

A truly significant contrast between the two trucks lies in their base prices. The GT undercuts the Syclone by about \$10,000. Thing is, desperate dealers are discounting the Syclone by about that amount. If a 2.9-second 0-60 advantage is worth more to you than 150 pounds of cargo capacity, shop for a Syclone. But look fast. That low price is for leftover '91 models. When they're gone, they're gone. After that you'll have to gamble the '92s—which haven't been released yet—will also carry fire-sale prices. On the other hand, if you'd be satisfied with a babysitter rather than the Mother of All Trucks, the Sonoma GT will fill the bill.

At least for awhile. Toyota will unveil a mid-size pickup in the 1993 model year and there are rumors that by 1994 it'll be powered by the same 250-hp V8 that moves the Lexus LS400. Then, baby, look out.

James D. Sawyer, Jeremy Sinek, Mark Vaughn and Curt Catallo compiled SpringFile.

beneath the wheels. The firm suspension also helps the GT keep its feet under it in turns, but, again, rough surfaces do it no favors. The action/reaction cycle is much like the hop, skip and thump Z24s or F-bodies exhibit when they're asked to cavort on roads that are less than silken.

Inside the GT shares most of its appointments with the Syclone including the instrument panel, which is a big improvement over the base dashboard. Instrumentation is complete but doesn't communicate as well as it might because too many gauges are crammed into too small a space. The bucket seats are nicely shaped and would be very comfortable if the backs reclined. But even if they could, there's not much to be gained because (as with most standard-cab pickups) the rear wall of the cab limits seatback travel.

But with pickups it's what's behind the cab that counts, and here the Sonoma GT dusts the Syclone. But not by a lot. The owner's manual says the Syclone can carry a maximum of 500 pounds of cargo. The GT has a

gas. There aren't any annoying squeaks and rattles and it always does what I ask of it. About the only thing I can nit-pick at is the dash. It seems a little gaudy.

*Keith Cooney
Millville, N.J.*

About the time I took it in for its 3000-mile service it developed a loud knock. It sounded like a hammer pounding on a piece of steel. At first they changed the crank. That didn't solve the problem. Then they installed a new motor and that seemed to cure the problem, although I've just recently started getting a similar sound.

*Brian Duff
Fort Wayne, Ind.*

OTHERS

With the V6 engine, this becomes a rather good-performing compact with enough extra punch to carry those heavy loads. About the biggest flaw is the instrument panel, a rather unattractive and annoying setup. That's cured in the GT, which shares its instrument panel with the Syclone. This one looks like something from a sports car with better visibility and a more attractive appearance. Add to that the GT's extra helping of horsepower and this becomes a sport truck that's fun and affordable.

Consumer Review

If you like the looks of the Syclone but can't cough up the cash for one, take a

THE NUMBERS

STANDING-START ACCELERATION

0-60 mph 8.1 sec
0-quarter mile 84 mph, 16.6 sec

BRAKING

60-0 145 ft

FUEL ECONOMY

EPA city 16 mpg
EPA hwy 21 mpg
EPA combined 18 mpg
AW overall 17.3 mpg
Corrected for odometer error of +1.0%

PUBLISHED BENCHMARKS

0-60 mph 8.5 sec (Sport Truck)
SS 1/4-mile 16.1 sec (Sport Truck)
60-0 n/a

ENGINE

Front-longitudinal, 4.3-liter/262 cid V6, cast-iron block, aluminum heads
Horsepower 200 @ 4500 rpm
Torque (lb ft) 260 @ 3600 rpm
Compression ratio 9.3:1
Valve train Pushrod, two overhead valves per cylinder
Fuel delivery Central port fuel injection

DRIVETRAIN

Rear-wheel-drive
Transmission Four-speed automatic
Final drive ratio 3.42:1

BRAKES

F/R Power disc/drum, rear ABS

WHEELS AND TIRES

Steel, P215/65R-15 BFGoodrich Comp T/A's

SUSPENSION

Front: Ind., coil springs, gas shocks, antiroll bar
Rear: Live axle, shocks, semi-elliptical two-stage multileaf springs

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase (in) 100.5
Length/width (in) 181.7/68.2
Test weight (lb) 3200

CAPACITIES

Fuel (gal) 20
Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (lb) 4200

look at the Sonoma GT. What you give up in performance, techno and hardware, you make up for in utility. With a base price in the \$16,000 range, it's still not cheap, but if you're looking for a truck with a lot of potential, this is the ideal place to start.

Sport Truck

While there's little passenger room and even less ground clearance for off-road romps, this capable cargo hauler can perform like a true sports car. It also shares much of the racy look and fiery performance of its turbocharged cousins, the GMC Syclone and Typhoon—yet costs about \$10,000 less.

Home Mechanix