

## Performance Trucks...Exit Stage Left?

Anyone with a hankerin' for a serious performance truck had better act fast because their days seem numbered. The reasons for their downfall can be traced back to the truck that started it all, the GMC Syclone. The S-series compact truck packed a big-league wallop in the form of a 280-horsepower turbocharged V6, all-wheel drive powertrain and low-profile performance rubber. The truck could sizzle to 60 mph in 4.9 seconds. So what could possibly be wrong with that? Well, first off the price, \$25,500 and up. But the lesson learned from the Syclone was the buying public will not buy a truck that isn't a truck. The Syclone's payload capacity was a measly 500 pounds and its towing capacity was a hotly contested topic. Perhaps the Syclone's

cramped cabin should also be mentioned as many in the media, including myself, wanted an extended-cab version.

The next truck to step up to the plate was Chevy's Pickup From Hell, the 454 SS. The truck, only available in black the first year or two, had 405 lbs/ft of big-block torque which translated into real truck usefulness. The overall performance of the 454 SS played to mixed reviews in the media. Its 0-60 times of 7.5 and quarter mile runs of 16.07 at 86 mph for the inaugural '90 model and 15.78 at just under 90 mph for the '91 were seen as good for a full-size but disappointing when weighed against the hi-po hype that surrounded the truck. The 454 SS has been dropped from the Bow Tie lineup because of slow sales.

The next performance player was the GMC Typhoon which was a cross pollination of an S-series Jimmy and the Syclone. This truck was a hit as GMC moved most of the very limited number of units they produced. The Typhoon was capable of 5.4-second 0-60 performance and could seat five adults in leather-covered luxury. The Typhoon has what I believe to be the best combination of handling and ride in any truck. Needless to say I am a big fan of the Typhoon and cried in my Wheaties for days when I heard it was being discontinued. Part of the shock was I had heard a four-door test mule was being evaluated and I had just signed up with The GM Card to earn bonus money to buy one. As I understand it, the problem centers around the Jimmy/Blazer redesign originally scheduled for '94. It seems the limited number of Typhoons produced would not be enough to offset the retooling costs necessary to convert the new body style. Hopefully, GMC will make use of the delay period and reconsider the Typhoon's fate. I have three grand in credit card receipts that say "Build 'Em!"

Ford was kind enough to state from the get-go only 10,000 units of its Lightning super truck would be produced. Since 10,000 didn't make it out the door in '93, production will continue into '94. When the last Lightning hits the road what are we going to be left with? The Ford Splash is a neat little package and the SuperCab is a good move. The pluses are the truck's lowered stance, flareside bed and bright colors—but what if people want more power? Chevy and GMC offer a full-size Sport/GT that consists of monochromatic paint and a stock 5.7-liter V8. The Dodge Ram sport truck will offer the 5.2-liter as standard trim and the 5.9-liter as an option. No V10. Which may leave those who desire performance asking, "Where's the beef?"

# Currents

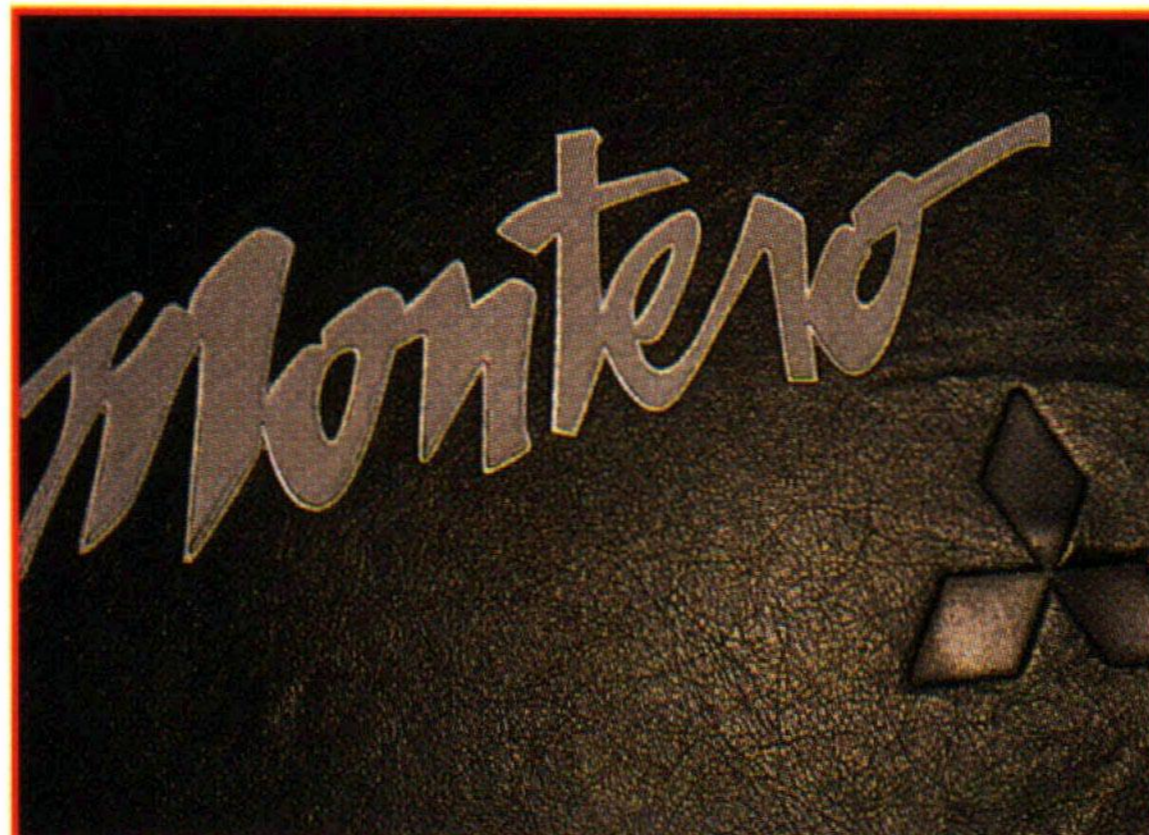


## MONTERO REACHES ONE MILLION PLATEAU

In just over 11 years of production the Mitsubishi Montero has eclipsed 1,000,000 in worldwide sales. The Montero, marketed as the Pajero elsewhere in the world, was introduced in Japan during April of 1982. The Montero has racked up more than its fair share of off-road rally victories and has had an interesting evolution.

When they arrived on American soil in 1983, the Montero was offered with a four-cylinder powerplant, manual transmission and locking and unlocking hubs. As the model years passed an automatic transmission and V6 powerplant found their way into the mix.

After nine years of refinements



and trim upgrades, Mitsubishi redesigned the Montero from the ground up in 1992. Mitsubishi designers penned an upscale exterior which was filled with luxurious interior appointments. The Montero also received the all-new Active-Trac™ four-wheel drive system. This go-anywhere drivetrain feature shift-on-the-fly engagement or disengagement of the four-wheel drive system at speeds up to 62 mph.

Also noteworthy for less than ideal driving situations is Mitsubishi's Multi-Mode ABS system which, unlike many conventional ABS systems, works in two- and four-wheel drive with the differential locked or unlocked. When in two-wheel drive, the Mitsubishi's synchronized clutch allows the front wheels to spin free. This bypasses the transfer case and its parasitic drag which in turn improves the Montero's fuel economy figures. The Montero has EPA fuel mileage figures of 15 city and 18 highway. We experienced 17.2 mpg performance over varying terrain and driving conditions.

On or off the highway, the Montero's suspension is up to the task. Up front, the Montero's sus-

pension consists of an independent double wishbone with unequal length A-arms, torsion bars and a 1.10-inch sway bar. Also available are optional three-way adjustable shocks that are controlled via a toggle switch in the cockpit. The rear setup features a rigid axle located by three links. Progressive-taper coil springs and a one-inch sway bar help enhance rear end ride quality. Power is delivered by a 3.0-liter 151-horsepower V6 engine.

The Montero is available in base, RS, LS and top-of-the-line SR models with a wide variety of interior comfort and convenience appointments.

## CHEVY'S 454SS RIDES OFF INTO THE SUNSET

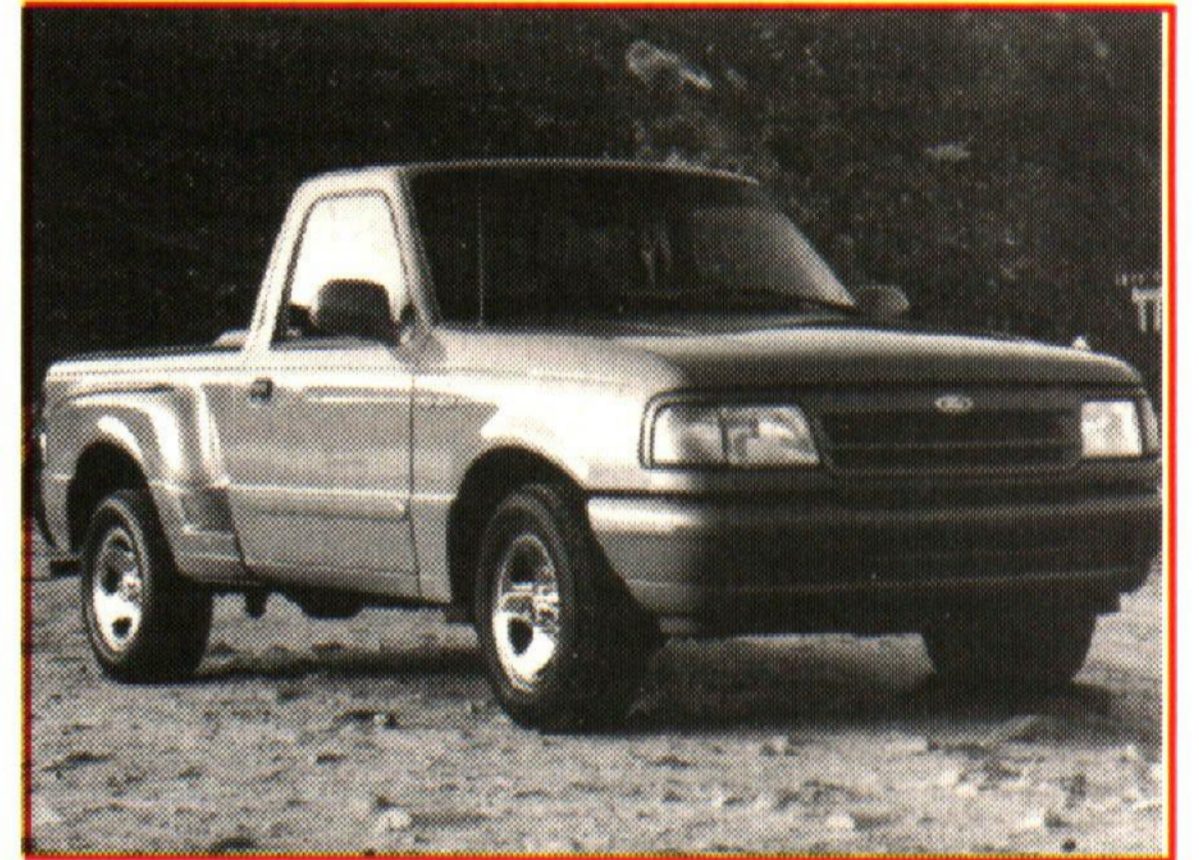
**A**s we turn the corner and head into the 1994 model year we'll be leaving behind a good friend. The Chevy 454SS pickup has been pulled from Chevrolet's lineup. The "Pickup From Hell" has fallen victim to stricter emissions requirements,

stiffer CAFE standards and slumping sales. The big-block truck, available in only black when it was introduced in 1990, got off to a good start as Chevy sold more than 13,000 units in '90. In '91, it was like the carpet had been pulled out from under the truck: sales barely eclipsed 1000. The '92 model year saw drivetrain improvements but for all their efforts GM engineers were rewarded with too few takers in '92 to noticeably impact GM's full-size sales figures. Eight months into 1993 and 454SS sales are a handful over 750. So the sporty 454SS will join the Syclone in the graveyard of muscle trucks. The GMC Typhoon is teetering on extinction as well. Does this mean the Ford Lightning's fate is sealed? We don't think so. The 454SS with all its grunt was a straight-line performer. The Syclone was a great road-racer type truck but it sacrificed its truckness in the pursuit of performance. The Syclone's payload capacity was 500 pounds and its tow rating was a donut—zero. It also sported a \$25,000-plus out-the-door price. The truck's interior was quite cramped and for 25k you could choose from more than a



dozen excellent sports cars. Arguing about the Lightning's future is a moot point as Ford will produce 10,000 units and call it quits. Let's hope the Lightning is a hit and sparks someone else to step up to the performance-truck plate.

### **FINALLY A CONCEPT VEHICLE MAKES A DIFFERENCE**



**T**he ASC Ranger Open Air Flare was an aggressive variation on the then newly redesigned Ford Ranger. It featured wrap-around rear glass borrowed from '50s five-window pickups, a huge ASC spoiler sunroof, 17-inch wheels and radical ground effects. The flareside bed on the truck found its way onto the Ranger Splash sport truck. This truck will again influence the Ford product line as the Blue Oval boys announced the pending release of an extended-cab version of the Splash. We applaud this move as we feel the standard-cab is too confining for people over six feet tall. And, as mentioned above, a cramped cockpit played a role in the GMC Syclone's ultimate demise. The SuperCab Splash will be offered in four-wheel drive configuration initially, then, later in the production run, two-wheel drive.

### **PIKE'S PEAK RECORDSETTER**

**L**eonard Vahsholtz piloted a specially prepared Ford F-150 up the twisty 12.42-mile Pike's Peak road course in record time. The 71st running of the Hill Climb saw Vahsholtz carve his way to the 14,110-foot summit in a mere 11 minutes, 47.22 seconds

and claim the Super Truck record shattering the old mark by 30 seconds. Vahsholtz won the class by five seconds over Clive Smith, the record holder going into the event. Clive's factory backed Chevy S-10 four-wheel drive pickup developed a pronounced push in the upper section of the course.

After winning the Super Truck class, Vahsholtz boarded a chopper and was shuttled back to the starting line. Later in the day, he strapped himself into a Ford Probe V8 stock car and scaled the mountain again, and once again was victorious. Vahsholtz is the first driver to win two classes in the Pike's Peak Hill Climb on the same day.

The Showroom Stock truck class win went to 64 year-old Bill Mears, the patriarch of the Mears Gang, who came out of retirement for the event to drive a specially-prepared Dodge Ram. In scooping up the winner's trophy, he left his son Roger and grandson Roger, Jr. with long faces.



## MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

The National Association of Sport Trucks, Inc. (NAST), a rapidly growing group of full-size American-made pickup truck and sport/utility owners and accessory manufacturers, has recently been established by brothers Rob and Don Miguel.

If you're interested in one of the nation's fastest growing sport truck organizations contact NAST by calling Don Miguel in Northern California at (510) 455-4369 or Rob Miguel in Southern California at (714) 777-3222 or write to NAST, P.O. Box 71, Yorba Linda, CA 92686. □