

AutoSunday

Honda Pilot is a proven crowd pleaser

BY ANN M. JOB
For The Associated Press

Honda is well known for its fuel-efficient cars. But the Japan-based automaker also sells America's second most popular sport utility vehicle that can accommodate at least seven people.

The sizable Honda Pilot beat out the Chevrolet Tahoe, Ford Explorer and Toyota Highlander in calendar 2009 to take second spot in U.S. sales of SUVs with three rows of seats.

The Pilot also garnered top, 5-out-of-5 stars ratings from the federal government for passenger protection in frontal and side crash tests, and it's a recommended buy of Consumer Reports.

Only the Chevrolet Traverse topped the Pilot in seven-to-eight-passenger SUV sales in the United States last year.

While the Traverse also is a Consumer Report recommended buy and has top safety

crash test ratings, its starting retail price is higher than that of the 2010 Pilot.

Specifically, starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, is \$28,605 for a 2010 two-wheel drive Pilot with 250-horsepower V-6 and automatic transmission. The 2010 Traverse has a starting MSRP, including destination charge, of \$29,999 with two-wheel drive, 281-horsepower V-6 and automatic transmission.

The test Pilot, a top-of-the-line Touring model, was comfortable for passengers, had 87 cubic feet of cargo space, provided great views out over traffic and had video and audio features to keep riders occupied.

The ride in the tester felt sturdy and comfortable. I didn't feel isolated from the road, but the Pilot's ride wasn't overly firm. The Pilot is a crossover SUV, which means it blends a car-type platform with an SUV look and accouterments. This contrasts with more brutish SUVs that use truck-based platforms.

Women will like the large storage console between the two front seats. I could put my purse in there and close the cover. This storage spot is right at the base of the center stack of the dashboard, so it's easy for short-statured people to access. Honda moved the Pilot shift lever up onto the dashboard in order to accommodate the console.

The tester had a navigation system and display screen that was large and colorful. Best of all, Honda tucked the screen under a plastic brow in the dashboard so sunlight shining in from the windshield doesn't wash out the display the way it does in some competitors.

Honda hasn't forgotten its fuel-efficient heritage in this nearly 16-foot-long SUV. The Pilot's 3.5-liter, single overhead cam V-6 has Honda's i-VTEC variable valve system as well as an additional layer of fuel efficiency via variable cylinder management.

This system automatically shuts off two or three cylinders when they're not needed as the vehicle travels, such as at low speed. This happens without the driver really noticing, and the power delivery remained smooth through the five-speed automatic transmission on the test Pilot. Note that variable cylinder management used to be available only on the top Pilot models. It was expanded to all Pilots in 2009.

Torque, or that low-end feeling of "oomph," is 253 foot-pounds at a fairly high 4,800 rpm. This contrasts with at least 266 foot-pounds at 3,600 rpm in the Traverse. Overall, the test Pilot accelerated adequately.

The federal government rating for the 2010 Pilot ranges from 17 miles per gallon in city driving and 23 mpg on the highway for a two-wheel drive model to 16/22 mpg for a four-wheel drive model. The test, four-wheel drive vehicle, averaged 18.2 mpg in city/highway travel.

With a 21-gallon fuel tank, the Pilot can travel about 395 miles in combined city and highway driving. This is less than Chevy's Traverse, which has a slightly higher government mileage rating and a 22-gallon fuel tank.



ASSOCIATED PRESS/Courtesy of Honda
The 2010 Honda Pilot comes standard with a fuel-efficient, cylinder management system.

What began as a rough-and-tumble muscle car settled down to become a savvy and sophisticated performer



BY MALCOLM GUNN
Wheelbase Communications

Four years after the first GTO set out to conquer the streets, a sleek new version brought Pontiac to even higher levels of performance and popularity.

The third-generation 1968 "Goat," as GTO was affectionately called, offered a step up in power and one of cleanest shapes to grace any mid-size domestic car. For many street racers of that era, the car was something to be admired and coveted, but not something you necessarily wanted to come up against.

All grown-up and civilized, the GTO had come a long way from its infancy. In 1964, the precocious Pontiac was no more than a normally sedate mid-size Tempest with a big-block V-8 crammed inside. This potent combination was the brainchild of John Z. DeLorean, at the time Pontiac's chief engineer, who believed that speed and performance were the keys to increased sales.

In base trim, the Tempest ran with a 110-horsepower four-cylinder engine (created from one bank of cylinders from a 389 cubic-inch V-8 that first appeared in 1961) while a Le Mans option upped the stakes with a 326-cube V-8. In the spring of 1963, during one of DeLorean's regular "skunk works" sessions, a staff member mentioned that installing the entire 389 engine into the Le Mans would be a piece of cake. In a matter of a few months, the hybrid beast went from prototype to the production line.

What was never originally meant to see the light of day became the GTO, Italian for Gran Turismo Omologato. Basically, the term was used to describe a performance car that was built from a number of readily available off-the-shelf pieces.

Ferrari was one of the first manufacturers to label a car as GTO, and it was DeLorean's idea to give his creation the same handle.

The 1964 GTO was not so much a separate brand,

Fine Lines

1968-'72 Pontiac GTO

but a reasonably priced Le Mans performance option package. Pontiac's estimate of building 5,000 such cars for its initial run turned into a flood of 15,000 orders within the first six months. All told, around 32,500 Le Mans coupes, hardtops and convertibles were fitted with the GTO essentials (325-, or optional 348-horsepower, motor; fake hood scoops, dual exhausts, heavy-duty suspension and wide-rim wheels, to name a few).

The age of the "muscle car" was upon the land.

The greased-lightning-quick GTO produced even bigger numbers for Pontiac in 1965, with more than 75,000 placed in the hands of speed-addicted buyers.

The second-generation GTO arrived in 1966 with up to 360 horsepower. By then a full-fledged Le Mans model instead of an option, the car shared its basic body styling with other mid-sized General Motors cars such as the Olds Cutlass, Chevrolet Chevelle and Buick Skylark, all of which marketed their own muscle cars. Sales fell just shy of the 100,000 mark that year, before falling back to around 80,000 in 1967 as the competition from Ford and Chrysler, not to mention corporate stablemates, took hold.

By 1968, GM's mid-sized fleet again went under the knife. The result was a bigger, heavier and sleeker design that made all earlier versions dated by comparison. Exclusive to the GTO was a body-colored ding-resistant "Endura" front bumper that was made of rubber. Despite some early problems with paint matching and chipping, the distinctive front-end became a major selling feature, especially when combined

with optional hidden headlamps. As well, more of these classier Goats were leaving Pontiac showrooms laden with air conditioning, automatic transmissions and other power-operated accessories.

The year would also see the launch of Plymouth's hugely successful Road Runner, a fun-loving no-frills muscle car, complete with Warner Bros. cartoon mascot decal and "beep-beep" horn.

DeLorean saw the Road Runner as a direct threat to the GTO's category dominance, and, in 1969, came up with Pontiac's counterpart, the GTO Judge. Named after a comedy sketch from the TV show "Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In," the Judge included a 366-horsepower, 400-cubic-inch "Ram Air" engine, Hurst T-handle floor shifter, rear spoiler (which, as it turned out, created zero down force), rally stripes and a pop-art-styled "The Judge" emblem on each front fender and rear deck. Initial cars were finished in a special orange paint, but other shades became available as production increased. Of all GTOs built that year, 10 percent were Judges. Overall sales remained strong, but below 1966's high-water mark.

The GTO of 1970 was noted for its 370-horsepower 455 cubic-inch engine that found its way to the option sheet. A newly restyled and better-looking Endura front bumper (but no hidden headlights) completed the model-year transition.

Big cubes remained for 1971 and 1972, the last year for the most stylish GTOs ever, but power had dropped as pollution equipment began taking its toll. The car once marketed as the GeeTO Tiger was losing its stripes, if not its looks.

Sadly, the once spellbinding nameplate endured a couple more years of toothless existence before disappearing in 1974.

• E-mail feature writer Malcolm Gunn at www.wheelbase.us/mailbag.html.



By 1968, the GTO had been transformed into a sleek street machine with performance to match.

Warning light is not to be ignored

Q. The brake light on my dash flashes every now and then when I go around a corner or sometimes when I accelerate, but most of the time it is off. Is this something I should worry about?

A. The short answer is yes, you should always be concerned when you have a warning light on. It's trying to tell you something. The symptoms you describe are telling me that most likely the brake fluid is a little low and when you go around a corner it is triggering the low fluid sensor in the reservoir.

The question becomes why is the fluid low? The two possibilities would be a leak, which I doubt because by now you would have a solid light or no brakes at all. The other possibility is that the brake pads have worn down and the fluid level drops corresponding to the amount of that wear.

In this case you have been given a good heads up to get in to your shop for an inspection. By not putting it off you may save the extra expense of having to replace the brake rotor.

Whenever you have a warning light always have it checked out. It is bound to save you time and money. I am always amazed when I drive past someone at night or they go past me and their dash is lit up like a Christmas tree. How can they possibly know what is going on with their car or whether or not they are doing significant damage to it?

Toyota recall

I am being asked a lot these days about the Toyota recall. Should I drive my car? When can I get it fixed?

The parts are being delivered to Toyota dealers. Contact your local Toyota dealer to schedule an appointment. Go to toyota.com/recall for the latest information. You can find out there if your car is one of the vehicles recalled for either of the two recalls involving the gas pedal issue.

Another source you can reference is driverside.com.

Chicago Auto Show

Sunday's schedule

11 a.m.-2 p.m.: Daytona 500, Live Toyota Display

11 a.m.-7 p.m.: Kia Karaoke hosted by DJ/MC Danny Hoyt, Kia Display

Noon-2 p.m.: Former Blackhawk Dennis Savard, Chevy Tuner Display

Noon-5 p.m.: Nikki live broadcast, Chevy Tuner Display

1-2 p.m.; 7-8 p.m.: Timmy Megenbier, 2009 Jetta TDI Cup Champion Volkswagen Display

1-3 p.m.: Ice Crew, Chevy Tuner Display

2-2:15 p.m.: Scotty Van Hawk, Four Feathers Racing, Toyota Display

2-4 p.m.: Liz Liz live, Chevy Tuner Display

www.chicagoautoshow.com



Doug McAllister
Under the hood