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AUTOFOCUS

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SECTION 9

AutoSunday

Chevrolet Aveo excels at being small and tall

By RICHARD WILLIAMSON

Scripps Howard News Service

Small cars are a big deal again. For those of us who fondly recall our glory days cruising frugally in durable Datsuns, this is cause for excitement.

This time, the domestic brands are serious competitors in the diminution derby, offering cleverly styled subcompacts packed with features that enhance the driving experience without driving the cost to excessive heights.

Buyers are responding big time to small cars. In a month of sagging sales, Chevrolet's Aveo saw sales surge 17 percent in July. Unfortunately for General Motors, the entry-level cars provide very small profit margins. But don't feel guilty for taking one off their hands.

Aveo, an Americanized version of Daewoo's

At a glance

Base price: \$13,595

Engine: 1.6 liter, 107 horsepower 4 cylinder

City/highway fuel economy: 27/34 miles per gallon

Length: 154.3 inches

Wheelbase: 97.6 inches

Curb weight: 2,546 pounds

Built at: Bupyong, South Korea

Genra, is offered in a sedan or hatchback design, in LS, 1LT and 2LT trim, retailing in a range of about \$12,000 to nearly \$18,000. That gives Chevy a price advantage over comparable Toyotas, Nissans and Hondas but less of an edge against Hyundai and Kia when you factor in the Korean rivals' longer warranties.

The hatchback, known as the Aveo5, is the new breed of small-tall cars that provide a much greater sense of roominess than the exterior dimensions would indicate. Versatility is the key to this car, with decent cargo capacity and back seats that are generous with the headroom but somewhat stingier in leg longitude. Preteen children will not complain, however. (Well, of course, they'll complain; just not about legroom).

The Aveo5 has 60/40 flip-and-fold seats as standard equipment to increase versatility, while the sedan's 60/40 seats fold but do not flip.

It's nice to see hatchbacks back on track. Derided as "econoboxes" in the egocentric "Me Decade," these days the small-tall cars are quite attractive, bearing sporty designs, cunning jewelry and surprisingly upscale interiors. Aveo5 primed for the 2009 beauty pageant with new styling built around its smooth lines and short overhangs front and rear.

Most notable in the 2009 styling is a Malibu-inspired grille that looks quite bold and toothy, framed by sweeping headlamps that seem to say: "Bring it on." Like its rivals, the Aveo presents a very stout stance for such a small car.

As a performer, Aveo is quite competent but hardly breathtaking. If you're planning to use this car as a street racer, please, get your expectations in order.

The beauty of cars like the Aveo is their minimalist approach to power. What's the smallest, most fuel-efficient engine we can install in this thing but still provide brisk performance in the city and competent highway power? What is the best transmission for such a car?

The answer appears to be the 1.6-liter, 107-horsepower, 4-cylinder engine mated to a five-speed stick. The Aveo5 proved quite spirited off the starting line, sagging somewhat in third gear on the freeway entrance ramps, but maintaining surprising passing power at speed.

On the perpetually crowded Interstate 35 between Dallas and Austin, the Aveo proved that it could pass other cars comfortably at speeds beyond 70 mph, that cruise control was a sensible feature and that its fuel economy rating of 27 city miles per gallon and 34 on the highway was no joke.

Filling the 11.9-gallon tank should cost about \$43, a price that is bound to fall if sales of cars like this one continue to rise.

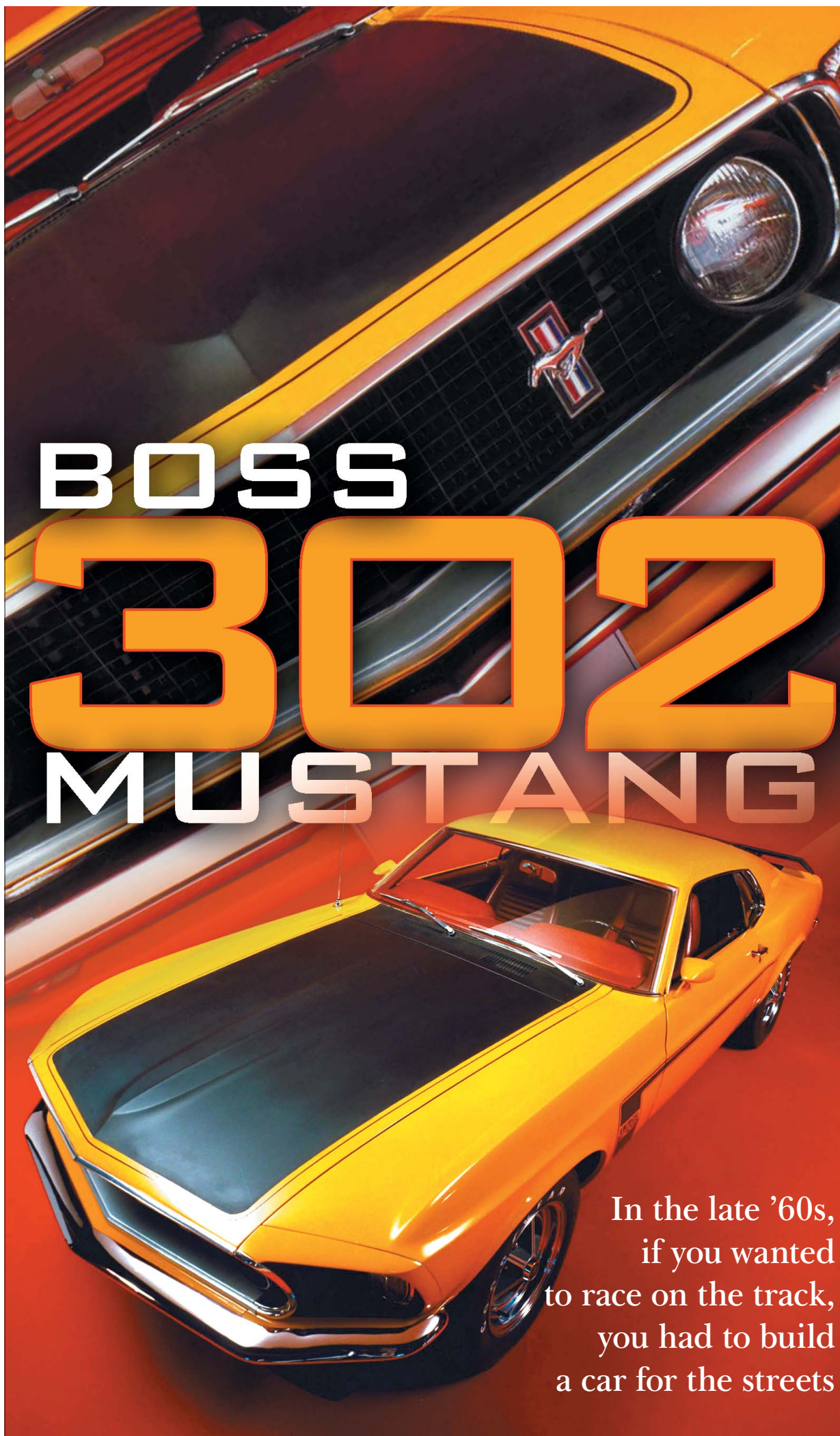
Naturally, a car that weighs not much more than a ton with a wheelbase of 97.6 inches is going to vibrate more at highway speeds than a more substantial car. But noise levels were not intrusive, and the road trip was not fatiguing.

Subcompacts like the Aveo require so few sacrifices in comfort or safety that they truly are the measure of how far cars have come since the days of Datsun.

Standard features on the Aveo include dual-stage frontal driver and passenger air bags and seat-mounted side-impact air bags.



SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE
Subcompacts like the Chevrolet Aveo require few sacrifices in comfort or safety



BOSS 302 MUSTANG

In the late '60s,
if you wanted
to race on the track,
you had to build
a car for the streets

By MALCOLM GUNN

Wheelbase Communications

Fine Lines

1969-'70 Boss 302 Mustang

Most of the millions of Ford Mustangs made in its first few years back in the mid-1960s were built for fun and pleasure on the street.

On the other hand, the very-limited-production Boss 302 Mustang was created first and foremost as a racing car. With its thundering V8 hoofbeats, the Boss made a sound that was music to the ears of Ford fans everywhere, but alarmed and intimidated the competition.

The best part about the Boss 302, however, was that anyone willing to shell out an extra \$1,200 to \$1,500 over and above a base Mustang (an extravagant sum back in 1969), could own a car that was little more than a full-on race machine with "civilian" interior and trim.

The Boss 302 was developed because Chevrolet, a late comer to the "Pony" car wars — which began with the Mustang, of course — with its 1967 Camaro, had come up with a secret weapon for winning races in the popular Trans-Am road course series. That year, the Camaro Z/28, with its special 302-cubic-inch engine, made obsolete all other competition machinery.

In the hands of team owner Roger Penske and driver extraordinaire Mark Donohue, the ultra quick and slick Z/28s were clobbering the Mustangs at what had been their own game. In 1968, Penske, Donohue and their dark blue Sonoco-sponsored Camaro captured 10 of 13 races, including an amazing string of eight consecutive victories. Suddenly, the less-powerful 289-cubic-inch Mustangs were outclassed and outgunned.

The brass at Ford needed to turn their losing situation around, and fast. At the time the company was pouring millions of dollars into a variety of racing programs

throughout the world, including NASCAR, long-distance sports cars, dragsters, rally cars and numerous forms of open-wheel classes. Weakness in any of these categories would simply not be tolerated.

With the encouragement of company president (and racing fan) Bunkie Knudsen, Ford's performance head Jacques Passino was charged with putting the Mustang back in the winner's circle. Also involved was former General Motors stylist Larry Shinoda, who had been appointed director of Ford's Special Design Office. Since the Trans Am rules demanded that each manufacturer sell a minimum 1,000 vehicles to the general public (no prototypes or one-offs allowed) before a given vehicle could be used for competition, Shinoda ensured that the new Boss 302 would at least look good in the showrooms as well as whip the Camaro on the track.

The car began with what Ford called the SportsRoof (fastback) body style. Shinoda added special touches, including the car's front and rear spoiler, rear window slats and special racing stripes. He is also credited with giving the car its name ("Boss" for his direct superior, Knudsen).

If horsepower and displacement were the primary issues, then Ford's engineers had the solution. Just as Chevrolet had mixed and matched mechanical components to create its 302 engine to fall within Trans Am's 305-cubic-inch limit, Ford took the heads from its 351-cubic-inch "Cleveland" powerplant and fitted them to the new 302-cubic-inch block. The resulting hybrid produced a claimed 290-horsepower.

However, as with the Z/28, actual output was understated to keep the automobile insurance companies happy and premiums low. Prepped for competition, however, the Boss powerplant easily generated more than 400 horses.

Right off the showroom floor, a \$3,700 base price Boss could sprint from zero to 60 mph in less than seven seconds and produce quarter-mile times of around 14.5 seconds.

On the road courses, full-race versions of the Boss 302 certainly began to take charge, but these more competitive Mustangs were still no match for the dynamic Penske/Donohue duo and their superbly prepared Z/28. By season's end, the Chevy had won six races, twice as many as both Ford teams. In the manufacturer standings, Chevrolet finished with 78 points, 14 ahead of second-place Ford.

For 1970, Bud Moore became the sole operator of Ford's two-car Trans-Am effort. To make the Boss even more competitive, a more rigid rear spoiler was added as well as a rear stabilizer bar.

The outcome of that year's championship was a squeaker with Jones beating Donohue (who was then driving an AMC Javelin) by one point. It was a more lopsided story for the constructors trophy, with the combination of Boss 302 Mustangs and Cougars equipped with similar engines beating GM, AMC and Chrysler for the title.

Following the 1970 season, both Ford and GM abandoned their corporate Trans-Am sponsorships and the series evolved into a battle of the imports, with Porsche becoming the dominant player for the next few years. Today, the rules have changed to allow pure racing machines with composite bodies that bear only minimal resemblance to vehicles that anyone would drive on the street.

Headlamps may not be dimming culprit

Q. It seems the older I get (I'm only 56), the brighter I need my headlights to be. My 1995 Chrysler LeBaron is in very good condition with 65,000 miles. But I need a brighter headlight.

A. Is there an aftermarket headlight kit available for it that could solve my problem? If not, my next step is to use the brights all the time.

Of course, I'll need to readjust their alignment so I'm not blinding oncoming traffic.

A. I won't comment on your age because I'm not far behind you. There is a replacement headlamp bulb called "True-View" made by Wagner that is a brighter light. The thing I like best about it is it's a direct replacement bulb.

Sometimes the problem is not the bulb, but the plastic lens around it that over the years degrades and can get very cloudy, not allowing much light through. You can buy a cleaning/polishing kit that might help you make those clear again. I say might because I've had both good and not so good results refinishing headlamp lenses. The cost of a new headlamp assembly makes refinishing worth a try.



Doug McAllister
Under the hood

Fuel saving tips

- Get some exercise: Want to save some real cash? Walk, bike or take public transportation and get healthy at the same time.

- Observe the speed limit: Each vehicle reaches its optimal fuel economy at a different speed (or range of speeds); your mileage may decrease 4 miles per gallon or more at speeds above 60 mph.

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Checkered flag

NFL receiver runs through two seasons

Randy Moss is pretty busy these days with his job as a wide receiver for the NFL's New England Patriots. But No. 81 also spends as much time as he can keeping up with what is going on with the No. 81 Randy Moss Motorsports entry in NASCAR's Craftsman Truck Series.

Going into yesterday's race at Martinsville, in the eight starts since Moss bought half of the team from David Dollar and changed the name, RMM has used five different drivers and has come up with two top-10 finishes and four top-15s.

Meanwhile, his race team is still looking for primary sponsorship for 2009. It costs at least \$6 million a season to run a successful truck program and, if the team can't find funding, Moss will have to reach into his own pocket to pay the bills.

"I am ready to take this all the way," Moss said. "My door is open for any sponsor wanting to team up with Randy Moss Motorsports but, at the same time, I am ready to keep this thing going myself."

Moss and a number of Patriots players watch NASCAR on television in the team hotels during game weekends.