New World and Telegraph-On Line Motoring Editor, Jafa Raza, goes to the South of France with its echoes of by-gone American men of letters, particularly Fitzgerald and Hemingway, for the launch of the fifth generation of an icon

What makes the Chevrolet Corvette the World's best-selling Sports Car?

So you are surprised that the world's best selling sports car is not Japanese or German, but quintessentially American. Frankly, I myself, in common with some of my colleagues at the Corvette launch in the French Riviera, were not *au fait* with this palatable fact. There would have been cause for anti-American envy a few years back, but this has given way, albeit reluctantly, to an acceptance that without the formidable American industrial presence here, especially in motor manufacture, the British economy would be the poorer.

There is another factor. Most of us are no longer parish pump villagers, we are either fully-fledged, or unenthusiastic citizens of the global universe. But none of this affected our judgement of the Corvette. The origin of the car was irrelevant. Our first task was to establish whether the Corvette could live up to its fabulous billing.

Two other famous stable mates of the Corvette, the Chevrolet Camaro, the Chevrolet Blazer and the Cadillac Seville were all equally inviting in the car park outside our hotel, I did not conceal our eagerness to grab a Corvette before the others did.

The 2000 Corvette is the fifth generation of an aristocratic and polished breed.

Its makers describe it as a "muscular two-seater sports car". It first appeared in the 1950s. Most film buffs and admirers of the American way of life may not know much about cars, but they have seen so much of the Corvette on screen that they may be able to tell you a thing or two about its thrilling performance.

The much-loved Chevrolet 'small block' engine powers the latest Corvette. Chevrolet engineers tell us that the 'small block' is mounted behind the front axle to optimise weight distribution. The manual version of the Corvette leaps from 0-62mph in 5.2 seconds. It has a top speed of 169mph. Their American owners must be frustrated by the strict 55mph limit on the motorways. They can do little about it because the American police take a grave view of speeding. It is likely that the affluent owners of the Corvette sports model vent their frustrations on privately owned racing tracks!

The car is not indifferent to the environment. It has two catalytic converters. You have a choice of six-speed manual or four-speed electronic automatic transmission.

My long-standing complaint about most sports cars is that they are uncomfortable, and the ride is far from pleasant. Perhaps this is because they are modelled on authentic racing cars where the emphasis on discomfort seems deliberate, obviously to wonderfully concentrate the mind of the driver!

The Corvette's designers and engineers have skilfully eliminated the discomfort syndrome. It probably has the best ride, handling and road holding in the business. Certainly that was my exhilarating experience at top speeds on open French roads, where they are not as fussy as the Americans about speed violations. For this highly civilised level of comfort, we must be thankful to the creators of the car's ingenious suspension. This has independent double wishbones, front and rear. Corvette engineers point out that the front upper control arms are made of wrought aluminium; the rest of cast alloys. The company holds the patent on Corvette's

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synthetic cantilever springs, which are mounted crossways at front and rear.

As for the superb handling and smooth ride, they can be attributed to the adroit tuning of springs and dampers. GM engineers point out: "The Corvette buyer can order variable shock detection, with a choice of three different settings - ***Tour, Sport and Performance.*** The system reacts to the vehicle's movements so that at high speeds the dampers automatically switch to a rigid bias. Speed sensitive servo steering further enhances the Corvette's sporty handling."

What about the all-important safety factor? The Corvette's elaborate safety measures will only help when you drive sensibly, not like a maniac. The normal well-adjusted driver will find much comfort in ABS and traction control, which are standard. You also have "An Active Handling System" as an option. This is a clever electronic device, which deals with over steer or understeer by selectively applying the brakes and throttle to keep the car on an even keel.

The Corvette is available as a full convertible, or as a coupe T-top. At the moment it is only available in left-hand drive for the good reason that it is selling like hot cakes and GM have to pull out all the stops for a Europe clamouring for the Corvette. The Japanese are said to be delighted with the Corvette.

The History of the Corvette

The 1950's The Biginning

The Corvette debuted in January of 1953 as a show car in the GM Motorama. It was a stylish two-seat convertible, designed to show the world that GM could create a sports car to compete with European nameplates like Jaguar and MG. All 1953 Corvettes were Polo White with red interiors.

The response to the Motorama show car was overwhelmingly positive, and production began that June in Flint, Michigan. It would change the landscape of the American road forever.

The 1953 Corvettes were built by hand and appeared nearly identical to the Motorama car. They were powered by the existing Chevrolet 235-cu.-in. 6-cylinder engine that was modified with a three-carburetor design and dual exhaust to give it more sports car-like performance. Named the Blue Flame Special, this engine generated 150 horsepower, and it was teamed with a 2-speed Powerglide automatic transmission. This powertrain, however, did not live up to the performance expectations of sports car buyers. Although sales climbed to 3640 units in 1954, they fell off dramatically to just 700 in 1955 setting off rumors that Corvette might be a short-lived automotive experiment. But Zora Arkus-Duntov had different ideas.

Arkus-Duntov, an engineer on the Corvette team since 1953 and a former European road racer, set out to give Corvette the two things it needed most — better performance and better handling. Corvette's evolution into a true sports car began in 1955 when a 265-cu.-in. V8 that generated 195 horsepower was offered; and by the end of the model year, a 3-speed manual transmission was also available.

In 1955, driving a prototype V8-powered Corvette, Zora Arkus-Duntov set a new record in the Daytona "Measured Mile" at just over 150 miles per hour.

Corvette received its first major styling update in 1956. Changes included an all-new body with "scooped out" sides, outside door handles, roll-up windows and an optional removable hardtop.

Corvette got a performance boost to go along with its styling in 1957. The 283-cu.-in. V8 was modified with fuel injection to produce an unprecedented 283 horsepower, and a new 4-speed manual transmission was offered as a $188 option — making Corvette one of the first cars in the world to mate a fuel-injected V8 engine with a 4-speed manual gearbox.

Corvette lit up the streets in 1958 in more ways than one. The fuel-injected 283-cu.-in. V8 was now producing up to 290 horsepower, and Corvette's new body design featured four headlights.

The 1960's Gaining Momentum

In 1960, Corvette production topped the 10,000 mark for the first time. It was now carving out a solid niche in the market and becoming a part of American culture.

In each year between 1960 and 1962, performance and styling enhancements made it more and more appealing to a wide variety of buyers. 1961 was the first year for Corvette trademark quad taillights. In 1962, engine displacement was increased to 327 cu. in. and top horsepower was up to 360.

But the most exciting changes were still a year away.

In 1963, Chevrolet unveiled its all-new Corvette Coupe and Convertible models — the Sting Rays. This was the first time Corvette was available as a hardtop coupe model as well as the traditional convertible. Both cars featured an all-new body design that was significantly trimmer and more stylish than the previous generation. It was also the first year for concealed headlamps. The chassis was all new as well, including an independent rear suspension.

The 1963 Sting Ray Coupe featured a split rear-window design, but it was replaced with a single-piece rear window in 1964 because owners complained about visibility. Today, a 1963 split-window Coupe is a cherished prize among collectors.

The Sting Rays were the automotive success story of the year. Chevrolet had to add a second shift to its St. Louis, Missouri assembly plant to keep up with demand, and dealers reported owners waiting months for their cars to be built. By the end of the model year, Corvette production would surpass the 20,000-unit milestone.

The Sting Rays continued the Corvette evolution through the mid-1960s. In 1965, the 396-cu.-in. "Big Block" V8 was available in Corvette. It was rated at 425 horsepower. Four-wheel disc brakes were also made standard, although buyers could choose drum brakes as a cost-delete option while supplies of parts lasted.

In 1967, the limited-production L88 Corvette was officially rated at 430 horsepower, although some Corvette historians believe that figure was artificially low. Only 20 of the L88 Corvettes were built.

The all-new 1968 Corvette was dramatically different in appearance from any other Corvette. Bearing a striking resemblance to Chevrolet's "Mako Shark II" concept vehicle, it literally changed the way people looked at cars. Along with its bold new look, the 1968 Corvettes introduced hidden windshield wipers and removable T-Tops on Coupe models. In 1968, Corvette production hit a new record of 28,566. Corvette received its most radical styling change in 1968, and this basic body design would continue to evolve for 15 years.

The 1970's A Time of Change

The 1970s were a time of great change for Corvette. While a late production start for the 1970 model year prevented the first cars from rolling off the assembly line until January, sales rebounded in 1971 and continued to climb. But at the same time, outside forces, such as the oil embargo and increasing government regulations, were having an impact on Corvette performance.

The original high-performance LT1 engine, a 350-cu.-in. "Small Block," was introduced in 1970. It generated 370 horsepower. That year, the "Big Block" displacement was increased to 454 cu. in., and was rated at 390 horsepower in the LS5 version.

In 1971, a special-purpose "Big Block" V8 was available that produced 425 horsepower. But 1971 was the last year for "gross" horsepower ratings. The industry changed to a "net" rating system that accounted for the exhaust system, vehicle accessories and other components. It provided a truer measure of an engine's performance and is still used today.

The Convertible model was dropped at the end of the 1975 model year. The next Corvette Convertible would not be available until 1986.

In 1977, Corvette hit the 1/2-

million milestone as the 500,000th car rolled off the assembly line. Leather seats were standard for the first time, although buyers could choose cloth as a no-cost option. Production reached 49,213 units.

Corvette celebrated its 25th anniversary in 1978 and, in recognition of this event, was selected to be the Official Pace Car of the Indianapolis 500. Two special models were produced for public sale — a Pace Car appearance edition and a special Silver Anniversary paint package.

In 1979, Corvette production hit 53,807 units — a record that still stands today.

The 1980's Anticipation

Sales of Corvette remained strong in the early '80s. It was clearly now a part of the American fabric, attracting buyers with its rich heritage and dramatic styling.

There were no 1983 Corvettes produced for public sale, but 43 pilot models of the new-generation Corvette were built in 1983 for testing purposes. Today, one of those 1983 pilots is on display at the Corvette Assembly Plant in Bowling Green, Kentucky. The rest were scrapped.

Chevrolet introduced the first all-new Corvette since 1968. It featured an all-new body design, a double-wishbone front suspension and five-link independent rear suspension teamed with Goodyear Gatorback unidirectional tires. Inside, the cockpit surrounded the driver and featured advanced electronic instrumentation. The introduction of the 1984 Corvette was one of the most eagerly awaited vehicle announcements in recent history. It was named Motor Trends "Car of The Year."

For 1986, the Corvette Convertible was back! To celebrate the convertible's return, Corvette again paced the Indy 500 and all convertibles were designated Pace Car replicas. The evolution of Corvette as a world-class performance car also continued with the addition of new standard 4-wheel ABS, an increase in maximum horsepower to 230 from its 5.7 Liter V8 and continued suspension fine-tuning. The PASS-Key¨ theft-deterrent system was also added as standard equipment on all models.

Corvette handling made great strides in 1989 with the Performance Handling Package becoming standard equipment, along with new 17-inch wheels and tires. The Selective Ride Control adjustable suspension system was also introduced — allowing drivers to choose between three different operating modes: "Touring," "Sport" and "Performance." A new 6-speed manual transmission was also offered, giving drivers added ability to maximize the Corvette power range.

The 1990's Surge in Performance

ZR-1 roared to life in 1990 with an all-new 375 horsepower LT5 engine under its hood. Designed in a cooperative effort between General Motors and Lotus, the LT5's dual overhead cam, 32-valve design made Corvette the talk of the automotive world. To help distinguish the appearance of the ZR-1 from standard Corvette Coupes, it was given an all-new convex rear fascia and quad rectangular taillights. All Corvettes received a new cockpit design that included digital readouts and analog gauges as well as a driver air bag. The maximum horsepower of the standard L98 engine was increased to 250.

Corvette received styling refinements for 1991 that included wrap-around front parking/cornering lamps, new side-panel louvers and a ZR-1 style convex rear fascia on all models. To help differentiate the look of the ZR-1, its center high-mounted stop lamp remained on the roof, while it was integrated into the rear fascia on both Coupe and Convertible.

Corvette performance continued to grow in 1992 with the introduction of the second-generation LT1 — putting a 300-horsepower engine back in the standard Corvette. The engine was designated LT1 because it was the first Chevy "Small Block" to surpass the horsepower of the original LT1 in 1970. The Acceleration Slip Regulation (ASR) system and Goodyear GS-C asymmetrical tires were also introduced as standard equipment. ZR-1 received a ZR-1 badge on the sides of its clam shell hood. The one-millionth Corvette was built on July 2, 1992 in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

For 1993, LT5 output was boosted to 405 horsepower, and a special 40th Anniversary package was available on all models. Passive Keyless Entry (PKE) was also added as standard equipment.

The cockpit of Corvette was transformed for 1994 with a new single-piece instrument panel, a front-passenger air bag, and new door panels. Both the standard and Sport seats were also restyled, and leather seats became standard equipment.

The most noticeable change on the 1995 Corvette was the revised gill panel design. This also marked the last year for the ZR-1. Corvette served as the Official 1995 Indianapolis 500 Pace Car.

Two distinctive Corvettes are part of the 1996 lineup: the Grand Sport and Collector Edition. Both celebrate the rich heritage of the Corvette, and mark the end of the current style. The new optional LT4 engine is introduced (required on Grand Sport).

Corvette American Legend:The Beginning

Author Noland Adams is highly regarded within the Corvette community for his carefully researched and meticulously detailed reference books about 1953 through 1967 Corvetts. The Complete Corvette Restoration & Technical Guide Vol 1. 1953-1962 and The Complete Corvette Restoration & Technical Guide Vol 2. 1963-1967 are serious reading for serious restorers and enthusiasts.

In his latest book, Corvette American Legend : The Beginning, Adams tells the story of the 1953 Corvette. Though just as detailed and thoroughly researched as his Restoration and Technical Guides, this book is much easier to read. In fact, Adams perhaps takes a cue from M.F. Dobbins, another well respected Corvette author. *The Beginning* is filled with black and white archive photographs showing step-by-step details of the assembly process and introduction of the 1953 Corvette. Each photograph is paired with a descriptive caption, many of which are lengthy and contain wonderful tidbits of useful information.

The Beginning contains 18 chapters, which trace the 1953 Corvette from its conception through its development and production, all the way to its formal introduction to the public. The last chapter is devoted to the advertisements and promotional photos GM used to launch its new sportscar to the public.

This hardbound book is approximately 8½ x 11 inches in a horizontal format, and is approximately 1-inch thick. List priced at £24.95, Corvette American Legend : The Beginning competes with the many coffee-table books about Corvette, but offers a whole lot more than most in the way of detailed historical information. This is an excellent book for any Corvette enthusiast's library.

The large red number 1 in the lower right corner of the cover suggests that Adams may be planning to add other titles in the future. Let's hope he does!

Corvette American Legend : The Beginning is available online from Amazon Books for £17.47, a 30% discount off list.

www.amazon.com

2000 Chevrolet Corvette

The favorite sports car for the milleneum

The Chevrolet Corvette is a two-seater sports car available as a hard top coupe, a hatchback coupe, and a convertible. This high performance sports car has endured while some of its closest competitors have been discontinued. Though it is a low sales volume vehicle in the Chevrolet lineup, it is the highest performance vehicle sold by General Motors. Nearly 75% of Corvette buyers are men with a significant number having graduated from college. Most buyers are primarily professionals or managers. The function of the Corvette is performance; each part of the car being designed for maximum performance relating to acceleration, braking and handling. The Corvette offers a high level of comfort with such standard features as leather seating surfaces, air conditioning and power door locks and windows. Originally introduced as a production car in 1953, the Corvette is the oldest surviving name in American performance cars to date. The C5 Corvette incorporates many new production techniques including a hydro-formed chassis, full length perimeter frame and flexible sheet-molded compound body panels. The 2000 is a carryover with minor revisions including upgrades to the Z51 suspension and new 5-spoke aluminum wheels.

Major Standard Features include Air conditioning, Driver side airbag, Passenger side airbag, Alloy wheels, Anti-lock brakes, Anti-theft vehicle, Cruise control, Rear defogger, Keyless entry unlock, Power locks, Power mirrors, Heated side mirror, Power steering, Power windows, AM/FM radio, Cassette, Anti-theft radio, Driver power seats, Leather seats, Tachometer, Tilt steering, Traction control, Automatic transmission

Your dream Corvette starts right here.

1. COUPE TRUNK CAPACITY — There's actually more room for luggage than you'd find in most full-size sedans — an impressive 24.8 cubic feet.

2. COUPE REMOVABLE ROOF PANEL — Alightweight, one-piece panel. Latches are easy to use, and no special tool is required. Choose from a standard body-color panel, an optional transparent roof panel, or both.

3. HEAD-UP DISPLAY — Program this option to display a variety of useful information (including vehicle speed and engine rpm) on the windshield for fast viewing.

4. CONVERTIBLE TOP — Includes a glass rear window with integral electric defogger. Top colors are Black, Light Oak or White, depending on exterior color selected.

5. ACTIVE HANDLING OPTION — Corvette Active Handling works with ABS and Traction Control to help enhance vehicle handling in cornering situations.

6. CENTER CONSOLE — A lockable storage compartment (with cassette or CD holder) and a cup holder are close at hand.

7. OPTIONAL MEMORY PACKAGE* — "Remembers" pre-set positions for climate control, seat, mirror, radio and (if you also select this option) power telescoping steering column. Great for households with more than one driver.

8. MANUAL TILT WHEEL/POWER TELESCOPING STEERING COLUMN* — This option combines the standard manual Tilt-Wheel feature with a power telescoping column.

9. CONVERTIBLE TRUNK — Afully enclosed, lockable trunk is standard. Cargo volume is 13.9 cubic feet with the top in the up position (11.2 cubic feet with the top down).

Sophisticated safety technology

Its what you expect from one of theworld's most advanced automobiles.

The comprehensive safety package in every 2000 Corvette includes *standard occupant-protection features* such as driver and passenger air bags, energy-absorbing front and rear crush zones and safety-cage construction with integral side door beams.

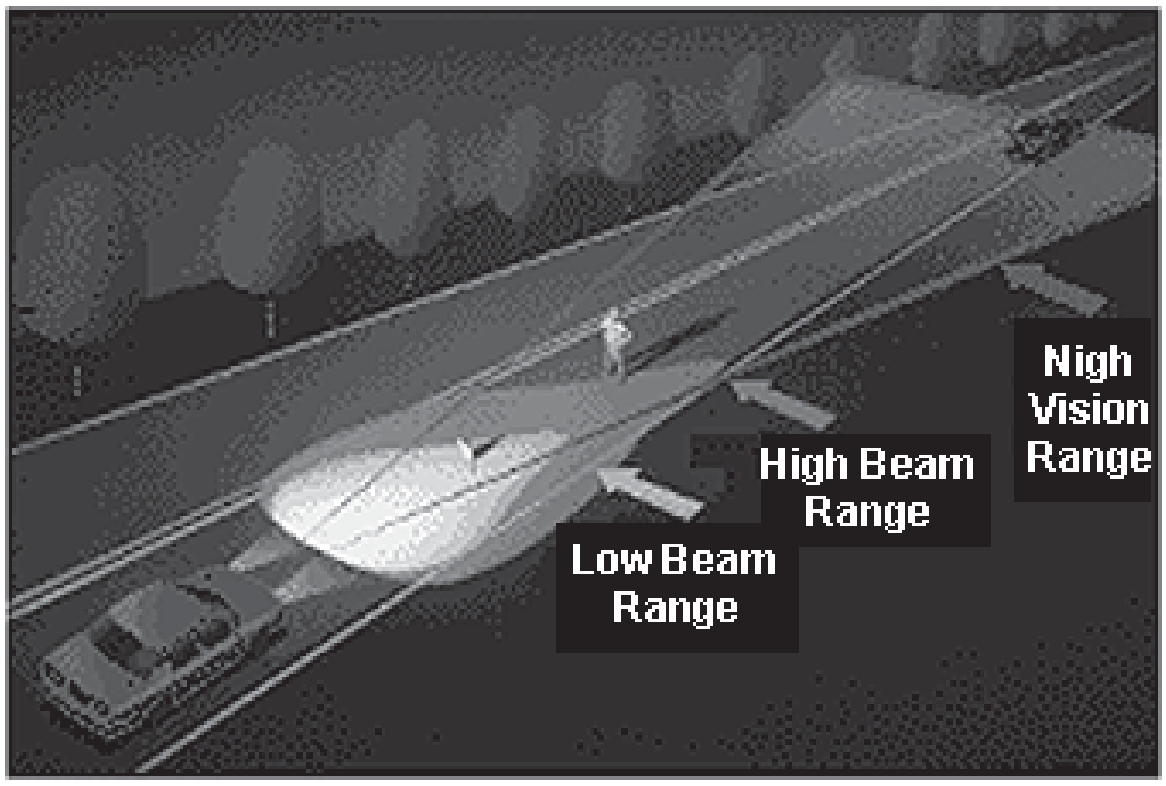
Equally important are Corvette's many *standard crash-avoidance features*, including Daytime Running Lamps, a four-wheel antilock brake system (ABS) and Traction Control. Corvette is also one of the few sports cars in the world to offer the advancedstability technology of Active Handling (optional).

Standard personal security features in every Corvette include a Remote Keyless Entry system, a totally passive theft-deterrent system with a horn alarm, and power door locks with a lockout protection feature.

"Seeing beyond you headlights may save your life" says motoring correspondent ***Jafar Raza*** as he gives the thumbs up to Cadillac's new innovative safety feature, launched in Cap Farrat a few weeks ago.

Cadillac's vision into the future

Picture this. You are driving down a narrow country lane. It's dark, wet and headlights from an oncoming vehicle have temporarily blinded you. During this moment of blindness, a fox darts in front of your car and you hit it. The fox is killed outright. Damage to your car looks minimal, but it will cost you over £1000 to repair. It could have been worse, but then again, had you been driving a Cadillac, it could have been avoided completely.



General Motor's premium brand has always attracted plenty of attention. Born in 1903, Cadillac has constantly introduced leading innovations such as interchangeable parts, syncromesh transmissions and stabilitrak. In 1999, Cadillac is introducing another leading innovation, it's called Night Vision and it could just save a life. Integrated into the Cadillac Seville's grille, Night Vision uses a camera to scan the road ahead to provide the driver with an extended view of the road beyond the cars headlamps. Effectively a thermal imaging device, the camera creates pictures by detecting heat omitted from moving objects in front of the car. It can therefore detect the heat from humans, deer, other vehicles and our aforementioned fox.

To alert the driver of a moving object, an image is displayed on the windscreen by a head up display (HUD). This ensures the driver will always be focused on the road rather than on a display screen inside the cabin. Looking like a black and white photo negative, the HUD shows hotter objects as white and cooler objects in black.

The electronic module that controls Night Vision's camera was developed by Raytheon Systems. Inside the module is a small disk, which rotates at 1800 rpm. This acts as a shutter for the camera, which generates 30 stills a second. Kept at constant room temperature, Cadillac say the module can detect surrounding heat differences as small as 0.3 Celsius. They also boast that 'Night Vision remains fully functional at outside temperatures ranging from minus 40 degrees to 75 degrees C.'

Night Vision is a smart innovation by Cadillac. Wanting to increase its slice of the European luxury car market, Cadillac recognised the benefit of infra-red technology to help night-time driving. In Europe as a whole, around 45% of all accidents occur during darkness. Yet only one eighth of traffic occurs between the hours of 8pm and 6am. Thus, Cadillac's motivation behind developing Night Vision came from the need to increase a driver's field of sight beyond the headlights. Good thinking Cadillac. Sorry Volvo, this is one cool safety device you didn't invent.

Night Vision is so powerful, Cadillac claims it 'enables drivers to see between three and five times further than would normally be the case with standard headlights'. Thus giving the driver more time to react to the danger ahead.

Cadillac's direct price competitors include the BMW 5 and 7 series, Jaguar's XJ series and the Mercedes E-class. It is not inconceivable that this clientele would want an innovation like Night Vision on their way home from the Opera to their Surrey home.

With its svelte exterior, luxury interior and technologically advanced Northstar engine, Night Vision is just another feather in the Cadillac Seville's cap – or rather, it's owners cap. And given that BMW's, Jaguar's and Mercedes' are almost commonplace in this brand's target market, owning a Cadillac is not just a conversation piece, it's a bragging right. It's little surprise then Cadillac's advertisement at this year's London Motor Show was 'Don't stay in the dark. Discover one of the most innovative luxury saloons in Europe today: the Cadillac Seville', and save the foxes.

Cadillac' 00 Seville ST Fitted with Night Vision Heat seeking sensors behind front grille

Jafar Raza reports on New World's Car of the Year

The Peugeot 406 is supreme in its class. There are many impressive contenders but we had no hesitation in making our decision. This was not influenced by the many prestigious awards the 406 has very deservedly accumulated, but by its outstanding qualities in every essential department

The New Peugeot 406: Beneficiary of a Thousand engineering Changes

It is superbly styled and drives like a dream. Pininfarina were entrusted with the task of restyling and they have accomplished the task with artistic aplomb. Over one thousand changes engineering changes include two new engines with even higher standards of safety. The object of the restyling was to preserve and capitalize on the elegance of the original design with some deft, daring and seductive changes to the saloon and the estate. The 406 coupe remains untouched, probably because its legion of admirers is happy with it and would regard even slight cosmetic touches as sacrilegious.All 406 models have striking new wheel trims or new alloy wheels.

There are six models in the range: L, LX, GLX, GTX, Executive and V6.

A new generation of petrol engines, the EW with an ally crankcase has greatly improved the performance and consumption of the 406. That is a significant development when you consider that the 406 have for most of its existence has been a brilliant exemplar in this regard.

The 406s have by 5 speed manual gear boxes or 4 speed automatic boxes governed by an electronic control system known as "auto-adaptive". One of the qualities that in our view make the 406 such a remarkable car is the silken smoothness of gear change. This is effortless, gentle and precise, a technical marvel, which combined with glorious handling and immaculate road holding, transport one to new heights of driving ecstasy.

The ABS and electronic braking system are standard. This, Peugeot say, not only divides the braking force between the front and rear axles but when braking on corners, divides the force between the two wheels on the rear axle to benefit the outer wheel which carries the most load. The car reminds one of the observation made of the style and technique of the illustrious Bjorn Borg, the iceman of tennis by another genius, Ilie Nastase. The Romanian said of Borg: "He does not play tennis, he plays something else.'

PEUGEOT 406: Smarter than a SMART bomb – now possible to monitor oil level before starting the engine and the distance to be covered before the next service, all on the dashboard - A car with a high IQ

Satellite-assisted navigation

This complete system guides the driver to the destination of his/her choice by providing visual directions on a screen and vocal indications over the vehicle's car radio. What's more, its features - a GPS antenna (which provides localization by satellite), a gyrometer (which continuously transmits the vehicle's direction to the system) and a CD-Rom player (which stores the road maps) - are all totally integrated.

Automatic intelligent gearbox

By adapting to your way of driving, this gearbox cuts back on fuel consumption. It analyzes both your driving style and the environment, then shifts gears accordingly.

The HDI Common rail 110 horsepower engine was designed by Peugeot engineers for improved comfort. The roller-and-pawl valve driving system reduces vibrations to accelerator pedal at low revs, to reduce discomfort in your legs.

New features for Added safety:

A high-yield driver's airbag and a conical airbag were created for better shock absorption to prevent whiplash

an electronic brake proportioning valve individually manages the many parameters (load, adhesion, trajectory) of each wheel's braking pressure

A new RD2 car stero system with a removable-face CD player

New features for added power:

A new 2.0-litre gas engine for more power, more torque, and less fuel consumption

A modulated-power steering which adapts to the car's driving conditions and responds to changes in engine speed

New features for added style:

A ribbed hood and a honeycomb radiator grill (instead of bars) Bumpers with chrome inserts - Diamond headlights with smooth glas, A redesigned trunk hood

The Peerless Yaris!

Robert Govender is grateful to Toyota's Yaris for giving him one of the most exhilarating driving experiences in his two decades as a motoring correspondent.

Nothing special or extraordinary about this, it happens to most motoring writers who manage to stay a similar course. I have test driven about 2000 cars of most makes on British and European roads during a long and rewarding career. As I advance, or regress, towards the twilight years I nostalgically look back at some beautiful moments.

I shall always vividly remember the undisputed champion of the small car sector, the perfect and pugnacious Yaris, a lapidary Toyota achievement.

The normally taciturn. Dr. Shei Toyoda, Director of Toyota Motor Corporation, who can teach the English a thing or two about understatement, is emphatic about the very special Yaris qualities: "Yaris is an extremely important car for us in Toyota. It will be the core model of our growth strategy in Europe. It is a truly modern compact car, which recognizes the transport challenges of the 21st century. Yaris is a European car, built without compromise and with a clear human dimension. It uses advanced technology, clever design and modern engineering to deliver new standards. ……"

When it was launched on the European compact car market, it revealed some rare attributes: compact body but large interior space; high technology engine with variable valve timing; practical and appealing centre information display and effective active and passive safety features.

It certainly has character. I had the Yaris for a week, but that was enough for me to be seduced by its its magnetic spell. I have never been seduced so effortlessly before! Lots of power, wonderful stability, and sheer ecstasy to drive. My only complaint is that for so majestic a car, the Yaris has a wimp of what, we in India, call a "hooter. It is embarrassingly feeble. Toyota should do something about that and give it a "hooter" worthy of one of the finest cars ever to leave a Toyota factory, perhaps any car factory.

Toyota, once supreme in their field, has had to contend with some fierce competition, particularly in the compact sector. About 12 years ago, I bought a Starlet, for which I had a high regard. The Starlet was the object of much praise by the press and the buying public. But clearly, with so many able newcomers on the field, Toyota had to do something different. They obviously gave much thought to the new job and aimed for the highest standards in every department. They have hit the jackpot with the Yaris. I am glad some other perceptive motoring correspondents take a similar view. One chap on a Sunday paper was, not long ago, considering naming it his paper's car of the year.

This most seductive car, structurally and aesthetically in a class of its own, deserves such an accolade.

The Yaris has some very sound safety features, and fuel economy to please Scrooge!

The prudent buyer will also be interested in the ***Yaris Peace of Mind*** package.

This includes regular Health & Safety checks by Toyota dealers. Ah! I hear you say, given that dealers are not always the most helpful people in the world, and that some have the ethical outlook of East End barrow boys, is the packaged not a bit fanciful? Toyota is in earnest about their ***Peace of Mind*** package and I don't think the company is going to take a frivolous view of dealers who don't deliver.

Warranty is unrivalled in its class – three years or 60,000 miles for mechanical parts, anti-corrosion perforation for 12 years. Toyota claim that servicing costs are "minimal." And they mean what they say – the Yaris will need a full service only once every 20,000 miles. Interim oil change every 10,000 miles or one year takes just 30 minutes.

The Yaris has one of the largest interiors in its division. Small car, big, brave heart. To sum up allow me to use a boxing maxim I picked 50 years ago when I was still at varsity: "A good little 'un will beat a heavy 'un any day." This referred to the matchless exploits of the truly marvelous Henry Hank Armstrong who held three world titles simultaneously, the featherweight, lightweight and welterweight. That record still stands. The Yaris is the reincarnation of the incomparable Henry in another guise!

Shogun drives a permanent wedge between a Prime Minister and her husband

THE SHOGUN: More than a touch of class; it is simply smothered by it.

The marriage was al ready on the rocks but the straw that broke the camel's back was the Mitsubishi Pajero, better known in Britain as the Shogun. This was a real life drama as entrancing as some well made soaps. It had two star names, the ruling Prime Minister and her scientist husband. It was also very un-Asian in that it was a very public display of marital discord. Asians just don't like washing dirty linen in public.

For all their pious claims to upholding family values, they are not beyond reproach. Their marriages, though far les frequently than others, also prove to be ordeal by fire.

When Sheikh Hasina, long denied by gerrymandering and fraudulent polls, finally became Prime Minister of Bangladesh in 1966, the public was given the impression that theirs was a happy marriage. They had two children in their 20s living in the United States.

But about six months ago, the truth surfaced when the Prime Minister's husband, Dr. Mia, a nuclear phycisist and former head of the country's atomic energy commission, returned to the Prime Minister's residence in Dhaka.

Dr Mia was enraged when he found his room "was being occupied by some thugs" and left in a huff.

He had had enough he said of being pushed around by his wife's "underlings", and decided to hit back, especially after he was denied the use of the £45,000 Mitsubishi Pajero the couple owned. He was told that it had been given to an "underling." He was curtly told that that told he had been banned from driving it. Dr Mia went ballistic. He kicked in the headlights of the Pajero.

In a more reflective mood later, he confessed to a Dhaka newspaper that he "had this to draw the attention of the Prime Minister He added: "I had no intention of breaking the headlights but they simply shattered when I kicked them."

Dr Mia also added for good measure that the Prime Minister was "half educated and simply not fit to govern. "

Dr Mia's unscientific behaviour earned him widespread condemnation in the Bangladeshi press. One of them described his own unique form of road rage as "nuclear insanity."

This did not upset Dr Mia, who magnanimously replied: "I think it's a good comment. Scientists sometimes behave in a strange fashion."

We had the Shogun two months after Dr Mia had inflicted such grievious bodily harm on the unoffending Pajero. We can understand his frustration at over hius banning. Not many will go to such extremes in similar circumstances, but I am sure the massed ranks Shogun owners will also sympathise with the scientist.

Not surprising when we learn that the Shogun (Pajero or Monterro in some countries) is one of the world's best selling off roaders. Over 21 million have been manufactured in 14 years with over 2000 units sold every year in 158 countries.

The Shogun's irresistible charm lies in its style, luxury, safety and economy. They say once a Shogun owner always a Shogun owner. What better confirmation of this than by a scientist like Dr Mia. Had they been a little more considerate and given him the use of the Pajero, he may have thought more kindly of his wife who he dismisses as "half educated and unfit to govern."

The New Fiesta was launched in Barcelona in October. Robert Govender who tested the very first Fiesta in 1977, was there to welcome the latest incarnation of Britain's best-selling small car over the past 15 years.

Still as Economical as Ever, and much more Stylish too!

The new Fiestas are con spicuously stylish. The exterior has been redesigned with some eye-catching features – trapezoid headlamps, body coloured bumpers and mathematically precise and aesthetically appealing new lines in the bonnet and front wings.

The line-up is: ***Encore, Finesse, Zetec, LX*** and ***Ghia.*** The sporty ***Zetec-S model,*** apparently something of a sensation, was an absent friend. This reportedly alluring model takes its bow in the showrooms in early 2000.

The Fiesta is the first car in its division with head-and-chest side airbags. There's also air-conditioning and ABS with new trim options, a security immobilizer and a high-level third brake light as standard.

Ian MaAllister, Chairman and MD of Ford, has got it right: "Part of its (the Fiesta's) attraction is undoubtedly its excellent value for money."

The new Fiestas, like their predecessors, retain the charm, practicality and dignity that appeals to male and female and the young and not so young. It is a gentle, unaggressive, yet lively and vigorous car. Its appeal has always been to the prudent car-buyer, one who is not concerned with power and thrust, but with a comfortable ride, easy handling and secure road holding. The Fiesta persons, and Britain seems to be full of them, are economy conscious. They set great store by frugal fuel consumption. The Fiesta is as charming as Shakespeare's Portia. It is also as parsimonious as Shylock.

In addition service is reasonable, and there is a sensible insurance rating starting from 4E.

The facia is bright and cheerful, especially in winter nights when drivers appreciate a warm and hospitable ambience. There's plenty of leg and headroom, and a quite spacious boot.

Barcelona's rural and main roads, originally built for more primitive forms of transport, have not completely adjusted to a relatively new phenomenon – democratic car ownership on a mass scale and an industrial growth that spawns juggernauts. The roads are still very much like they were in pre-Civil War times when cars were few and mule- driven wagons were many. The roads are hazardous and particularly treacherous in the rural areas. The Fiestas were reassuringly serene and unruffled. They also called for an equable, unexcitable driving temperament.

With this combination, we did the necessary. Drive safely and enjoyably. On more urbane roads, such as in this country, the Fiestas will give you even greater pleasure.

Car manufacturers make much of a car's potency. Ford have wisely refused to play that game with the Fiestas. Their appeal is not to the power lust, but to reason. About time too, for there are probably more people in Britain who attach greater importance to safety, security and reliability than to speed and tinsel glamour.

FORD FIESTA ZETEC-S: The elegant embodiment of Ford's "value for money policy."