

Ford Explorer: The Lincoln of sport-utility trucks

Under the photo of Ford's newest 4x4 vehicle, the caption reads: "Ford's new four-door Explorer hopes to capture lots of Cherokee buyers."

And so does GMC/Chevrolet with four-door Jimmy/Blazer, and Nissan with four-door Pathfinder, and Toyota with the four-door 4Runner; and the list goes on and on.

While Chrysler may be on shaky ground with some of its offerings, there is no question of the impact Chryco has made with the Magic-wagon duo of Caravan and Voyager, plus the Cherokee, which it inherited with its buyout of American Motors.

The Cherokee, in its many modes up to and including the leather-loaded Cherokee Limited, was a niche marketing landmark. Almost overnight Kiss 'N Ride parking lots were emptied of Volvo wagons and re-injected with Cherokees. It seems the well-to-do set suddenly found out it was chic to drive the kiddies to the Waldorf School in a truck, albeit loaded to the gunwales with as many options as the bank account could carry.

Ford and GM, along with majors such as Nissan and Toyota, had been producing good, solid sport-utility trucks (what the auto industry calls the market segment) but they lacked the cachet of four doors and a hatch at the back. The funny thing is the

Road Worthy

By JIM ROBINSON

Jeep isn't all that good, what with dog-cart springing, and a selection of old GM engines including the first-generation 2.8-litre V6 and an even older inline six that AMC-Chryco offers at the top of the line. Couple that to a somewhat cramped interior and GM-sourced controls such as the wipers and cruise and you have an old vehicle kept just young enough to be attractive.

While GM took the sensible approach of stretching its popular Blazer and Jimmy, Ford decided to come up with a totally new vehicle and the name Explorer borrowed from a special-edition pickup of a few years ago.

This is definitely not a stretch. You can find beefier chassis and suspensions. But I must say crawling underneath and looking at the transfer case and the other mechanicals makes one aware of why this is a heavy vehicle. With gas shocks and mega-thick stabilizer bars, handling is sprightly despite the leaf springs at the rear



Ford took a clean sheet of paper to design its four-door Explorer, the Lincoln of the sport-utility truck market segment.

and good ol' Twin I-Beams at the front.

Pushing all that weight is a new engine, a 4.0-litre V6 some readers will remember as the 2.9-litre V6 formerly found in the Merkur Scorpio. It pumps out 155 hp and a boat-pulling 220 ft.-lbs. of torque. With a ball hitch through the convenient hole in the rear bumper, you can haul 3,500 lbs. Order the towing package, and you're in 5,000-lb. country.

You've got the grunt, now you've got to look rugged and stylish all at the same time, ergo, the Explorer's shape. The nose is

lifted from the F150 pickup so it has a working man's look right off the bat. Ford says the rest of the truck "is virtually all new. Its aerodynamic styling results in a 0.43 coefficient of drag, the lowest ever for a Ford utility vehicle." Now that is barndoor-like to me, but Ford, to its credit, has concentrated on flush-mounted glass to help air flow. The test rig came in optional Eddie Bauer livery of Hunter Green and Sandalwood Cream - just the ticket for Deerpark or the Benmiller.

All this go and show doesn't come cheap. The Explorer has a base price of \$21,695. The elec-

tronic overdrive automatic trans costs a whopping \$1,005. With the \$8,860 Eddie Bauer package and optional leather seats at \$553, the cost starts to escalate. One bargain option is \$654 for the JBL audio system with nine speakers.

There's even a sub-woofer sealed in its own special 10-litre enclosure and powered by its own amplifier. The "bio-simplified" system cranks out 145 watts of power and is custom equalized to the Explorer's interior.

Anyway, the full list, including the \$334 tilt sun roof, hits \$32,314. Included even on the base model is Ford's push-button transfer case control. Forget about yanking levers down on the floor or getting out in the muck to lock the hubs. The Explorer is driven normally in 2WD. Push the dash-mounted button for 4WD on-the-fly, whether you're moving or stopped, and you're in 4WD. The button below is for 4-Low, and you simply push that for serious off-road travelling. It's that simple.

With its presence, style and amenities, the Explorer is, in effect, the Lincoln of sport-utility trucks. With its push-button transfer case and its up-scale standard features and desirable options, Ford's new Explorer has become the *ne plus ultra* of its class.

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Queen's Park Report

Income tax changes help

BILL 11

An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act

This week I want to explain the benefits of Bill 11 - an Act to Amend the Income Tax Act. The Honourable Shelley Wark-Martyn, Minister of Revenue, moved second reading of this Bill earlier this month. The legislation implements changes to the Ontario Tax Reduction Program to provide greater relief for low-income families in Ontario with children or disabled dependents.

Section 1 of the Bill deals with administrative changes. Under the terms of the federal-provincial tax collection agreement, the federal government administers Ontario's personal income tax act. To ensure consistency in income tax administration, many provisions in the federal act also apply to Ontario income tax.

For clarity, our legislation contains a table listing common words or expressions in the federal act together with their corresponding provincial replacements. For example, the "Department of National Revenue" in the federal act is read as "Ministry of Revenue" in the Ontario act.

It is Section 2 of the Bill, however, which enriches tax relief for low-income families in Ontario. In addition to a basic Ontario Tax Reduction amount of \$167, a low-income taxpayer will be eligible for a \$200 supplement for each dependent child age 18 or under and a further \$200 for each disabled dependent. The supplement amounts to \$400 for a child with disabilities.

These supplements are totalled to arrive at a personal amount that reduces the Ontario income tax otherwise payable. If the personal amount is greater than the income tax figure, then no income tax is payable. If the personal amount is less than the Ontario income tax, a formula is used to

reduce the tax payable. The tax will be reduced by the difference where three times the personal amount exceeds twice the tax payable.

As a result of these changes, the income level where Ontario income tax becomes payable will be increased. For example, a single working parent supporting two children currently starts to pay Ontario income tax at an income of about \$14,100. With the proposed changes in the Tax Reduction Program, the same taxpayer will not pay Ontario income tax until an income level of about \$18,700 has been reached.

When the former Treasurer introduced these changes last May, he projected that 115,000 families in Ontario might benefit from them. I believe this enrichment of the Ontario Tax Reduction Program is a step in the right direction towards our government's goal of ensuring that people who live at or below the poverty line should not pay Ontario income tax.

On that note, with the 1990 taxation and calendar year drawing to a close, I would like to take this opportunity to wish the people of Halton North all the best for 1991.

Queen's Park Report

By NOEL DUIGNAN
MPP HaltonNorth



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