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Oshawa-built Chevy Lumina takes aim at the competition

In 1990, General Motors took aim at the competition with the introduction of the all new Chevrolet Lumina. This was the first four-door in the General Motors family to use the GM-10 Chassis (other family members include the Buick Regal, Olds Cutlass Supreme and the Pontiac Grand Prix). The Lumina was specifically designed to take on the Ford Taurus and Chrysler Dynasty, but was built to provide more overall interior room and more headroom than these competitors. The obvious question: Is bigger any better?

The Lumina is built in Oshawa, Ontario. Originally there were two trim levels, Lumina and Lumina Euro. In 1991 they added a third in the form of the sporty and super-quick Z34, this model features a 3.4L V6 that produces no less than 210 horsepower. Standard in the base model is a 2.5 litre 4-cylinder engine with electronic fuel injection. A St. Catharines-built, 3.1 litre V6 with multi-port fuel injection is standard in the Euro model, making it a truly Canadian-make vehicle.

Access to the interior is easily accomplished through any of the four large doors. While touted as a full six-passenger car, the Lumina is more suited to accommodating five. The 60/40 split front seat is fairly

comfortable, but needs more lateral support especially if you use the cars sporty nature. Front and rear head-and leg-room is as the billing promises, more than adequate. The front passive restraint seat belts are acutely annoying, the shoulder belt rides too close to the driver's neck in an extremely uncomfortable manner.

Like most GM products the instrumentation on the Lumina is limited, consisting only of a speedometer and fuel gauge. All other functions are monitored by warning lights. An optional gauge package featuring a tachometer, oil pressure gauge and temperature gauge is available and is worth having for the information it provides.

The air conditioning/ventilation system works efficiently, providing ample air flow even in the rear. The climate controls are located above the radio and out of the reach of shorter drivers. In this instance, the "bigger" interior proved to be too big. Conversely, the glove box is barely big enough to hold your gloves and the grocery list. Fortunately it is augmented by molded map pockets in the doors.

The trunk capacity? You guessed it: "big". There is a wonderful cavernous space back there large enough for all the groceries or all the luggage.

It is on the road where the Lumina proves itself a worthy competitor. The 3.1 litre V6 engine with multi-port fuel injection is essentially an enlarged version of Chevy's 2.8 litre V6. The horsepower gain from the enlargement is negligible (only 10 hp). However, the torque output is an impressive 175 lbs./ft. at 2,400 RPM. This results in good acceleration from a stop position and more than adequate performance for most

driving conditions. Overall fuel economy averaged an acceptable 11.28L/100 km or 25 mpg.

The three-speed automatic transmission is well matched to the engine. The combination provides smooth positive shifts at all times. If you do a lot of highway driving, I suggest you opt for the 4-speed automatic transmission. This drops the engine rpm appreciably, reducing engine noise and improving fuel economy without effecting the engine performance.

The four-wheel independent sport suspension features a transversely mounted fibreglass leaf spring a la Corvette. The ride is firm but provides good handling characteristics and stability at highway speeds. On rough road surfaces the ride is somewhat uncomfortable but not unpleasant.

As well as making anti-lock brakes standard on the 1992 Euro, GM have made several refinements designed to improve brake performance and durability. The recalibrated booster and new friction material certainly make a world of difference in terms of stopping power and pedal feel. During the test, stopping distances averaged a commendable 116 feet from 80 km/h.

The Lumina Euro is a spacious, pleasant-to-drive mid-size family sedan, with the on-road performance being everything one could expect from a car in this price range. Given that the Taurus has had a large head start in this market segment, the Lumina does not pose a runaway threat but it does promise to be a solid competitor. In this particular instance bigger may not be better however, the additional space is certainly welcome.

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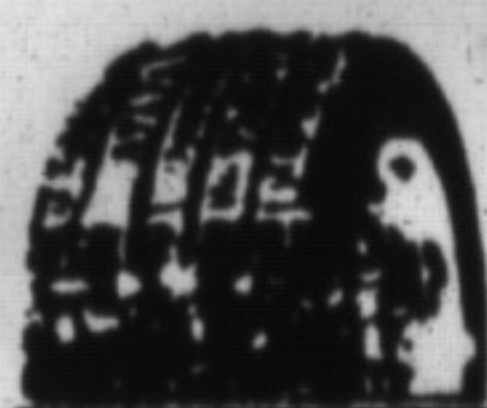
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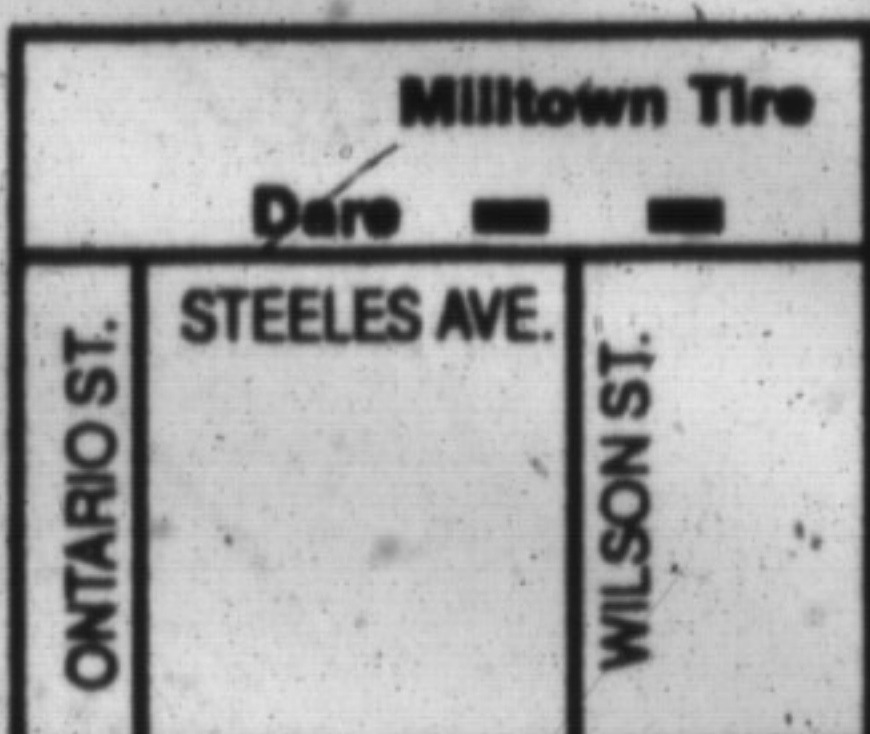


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