

Weinermobile promotes coming of Oscar Mayer to Canada

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world like being in some kind of WW II bomber.

Twist the key and the GM Vortec engine comes to life but the muffled sound is a long, long way back.

Hotdogger, Chris Stevens, one of the crew and the only Canadian in the wiener-

bile fleet admitted that the width can fool beginners.

Every year, Oscar Mayer goes to major U.S. universities to recruit top business grads. Of the more than 700 applicants, only 12 per year are hired and they serve a year in the wienermobile fleet. Crew members take

intensive driver training before they are turned loose on the roads.

As I wheeled my way along Dundas St. it didn't take long to get used to using the sponsos. as gauges to where I was on the road.

Steering was heavily power assisted. It made steering

easy, if a bit too light for my tastes. When it comes to stopping, taking your time and being kind to the brakes is a good idea. Yes you can jam them on in an emergency, but fade would begin almost instantly.

In a way, it's like driving a VW. You get into a cadence and try to keep to a certain speed. You plan where you want to be in advance, but keep your options open.

The Oscar Mayer crew which also included Robin Gelfenbien and Jason Clark, have a hot dog pun for almost everything like "relishing" the test drive.

Needless to say response from pedestrians and other motorists was astounding.

And I was surprised at just how many people recognized the Oscar Mayer name. When we stopped, the crew gave out all manner of souvenirs from Wiener whistles to Wienermobile toys.

As part of bringing the product into Ontario, Oscar Mayer plans to make the wienermobile as much a part of our landscape as it has become in the U.S. where the fleet is in operation year-round at public events and parades.

So, if you spot the Wienermobile in your neighborhood, give the gang a wave and ask them to give you a tour of the wild and zany Oscar Mayer Wienermobile.

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'94 Corvette: 'American Muscle in its 40s but still potent', says writer

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lived and long-loved V8. Once restricted to about 250 hp, GM engineers found out four years ago that by reversing the coolant flow, they could get a lot more power. In the LT1 there are 300 All-American ponies and 340 ft/lb of torque. Prodigious indeed!

The convertible came with a four-speed automatic transmission but you can also have the same six-speed manual used in the ZR1. P285/40ZR17-inch tires on the back mounted on 9.5-inch wide wheels would be more than enough, you'd think, to put the power on the road. Ha Ha! Up front are a set of P255/45ZR17s on 8.5-inch wide alloy wheels.

With the top up or down you still have to throw your leg over the high side member and let yourself plunk down into the seat. Seemingly less wide than an econo-seat on a Japanese charter flight, you really are part of this car. The transmission tunnel is level with the middle of your back.

The steering wheel, with air bag, is adjustable for height and you've got to fiddle with it to see as much as you can of the instrument panel. Centre on is an orange LED screen with shows speed and gasoline level. To the left and right, minor gauges follow the half-circle instrument binnacle around and down out of sight.

Thankfully the electric seat adjusts are on the trans tunnel and so is the centre-mounted shock absorber dial for touring, sport and performance modes.

To the right on the door are the electric window flippers with (thankfully) a clearly marked switch to turn on/off the ride-control system as needed. When you start the car, the system automatically defaults to on. Climate control is simple to use and is centred on the console as is a black-out screen with a host of secondary warning notices.

Get behind the wheel and it's, as my Dutch/Canadian photographer friend said, "like being in a dragster." And that is a fair summation. You're not down in a fiberglass tub with your bum two inches from the ground like the Corvettes of the 1970s, but there's no question this is American Muscle perhaps in its 40s but still potent.

It's also brawny, sometimes a throw back, yet also civilized. I know that doesn't make a lot of sense, but this is a car which sends you a lot of messages.

With your foot down, you lunge forward with that unmistakable big V8 sound. With the top down, the wind whipping through your hair, the front end still quivers when you flash across a pothole. On a 39-degree humidex day, indulge yourself with the air conditioning on, the top battened down, and the classics booming out of the rear-mounted speakers of the Bose system.

Slow down to touring speeds and the combination of muscle car era feel is complemented, not confronted, by state-of-the-art fuel injection and engine management systems. And despite all that width of rubber, the 40th Anniversary Vette handles with great poise. It is not that knife-edge/don't-make-a-mistake-or-I'll-bite handling of a Mazda RX7. Neither is it the disappointingly slow and ponderous steering of the Porsche 928 GTS.

No, this car is like Mario Andretti. It may have been on the road for the past 40 years but is always a force to reckon with - still capable of taking on all comers anywhere, anytime and coming up the champion.