

ADVERTISING FEATURE

WHEELS

Prowler has cost-no-object look, but a sane price tag

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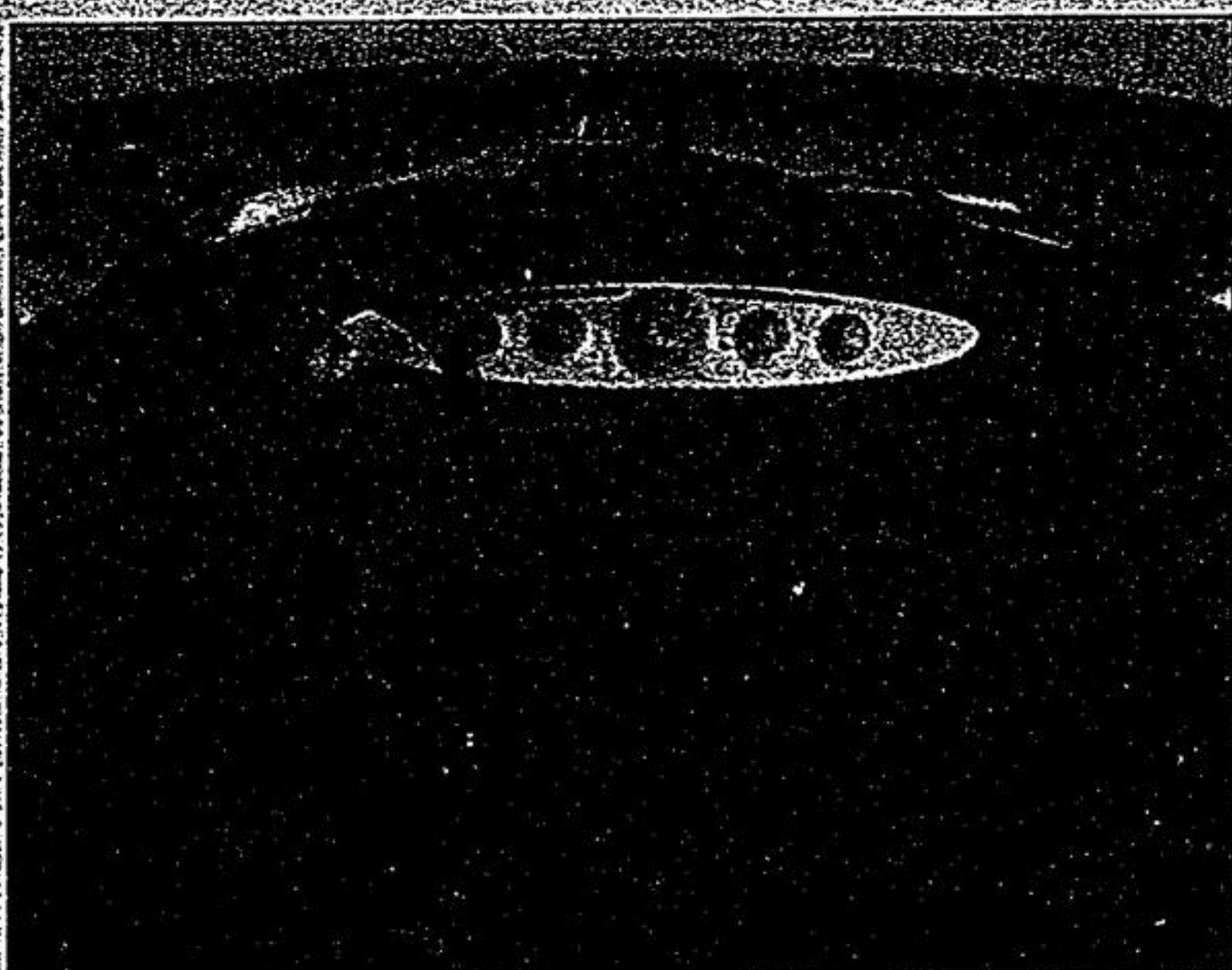
found in any Chrysler minivan. The front suspension is Viper based as is the rear with a few parts from the Cirrus/Stratus. The gauges came from the Eagle Vision TSi as did the original engine in this car, the cast iron 3.5-litre V6.

Instead of cost-no-object, Chrysler built a car that looks that way but at a sane price, and that's what makes this car so intriguing to me.

Tested here is the 1999 version now offered in a second color, Prowler Yellow. The engine is still the 3.5-litre but now it's all aluminum. Now it produces 18 per cent more power (253 hp or 39 more) with a 15 per cent increase in torque (255 lb/ft up by 34 lb/ft).

The engine is in the front and it is connected to the rear transaxle by a prop shaft. The transmission features Chrysler's Autostick.

It is a normal electronic, four-speed automatic with the shifter in 'D'. Pull it back one notch and the shift gate allows the lever to be pushed transversely up and down through the gears sequentially.



The retro-styled dashboard is made mostly of magnesium to help save weight.

It's hard to explain but easy to use and it does allow the driver the choice of gear instead of a computer in the trans management system.

What makes concept cars look so great are the 18-20-inch tires they use. Stunning in those big boots, subsequent production cars with 14- and 15-inch tires often look ungainly, the Hyundai Tiburon being a prime example.

The Prowler proudly wears 17-inch, five-spoke, and 20-inch five-spoke wheels front/rear. There is no question these make the car.

The four-wheel disc brakes, at 15-inches in diameter, are as big or bigger than most wheels on most passenger cars.

Oddly, the Prowler does not have anti-lock brakes, probably due to too much road grunge interfering with sensors. Nonetheless, the brakes are progressive, but a knowledge of threshold braking can come in very handy on

places like highway 401. The convertible top is very fiddly, but that's a consequence of the uncompromising design, and something you have to be prepared to live with.

With the hood up, the view outside consists of slits for each door, and a low-line front windshield. Getting in and out with the top fixed is not impossible, but it helps to be slim and lithe.

Drop the top and all is forgotten. With an acoustically honed exhaust note, the car may have a V6, but it's no slouch.

This is added by the fact much of the car is made of 900 lbs of aluminum holding the left down to 2,838 lbs. The instrument panel is made of magnesium and combines more than 20 stampings and plastic components to save weight.

With 20-inches of rubber (P295/40HR20 Goodyear runflats on 10-inch rims) at the rear, there's a lot of

traction when you hit the gas. The engine starts to howl at 3,500 rpm and climbs without hesitation to the redline.

Slap the AutoStick to the right just before topping out and the whole beautiful combination of motion and sound starts all over again.

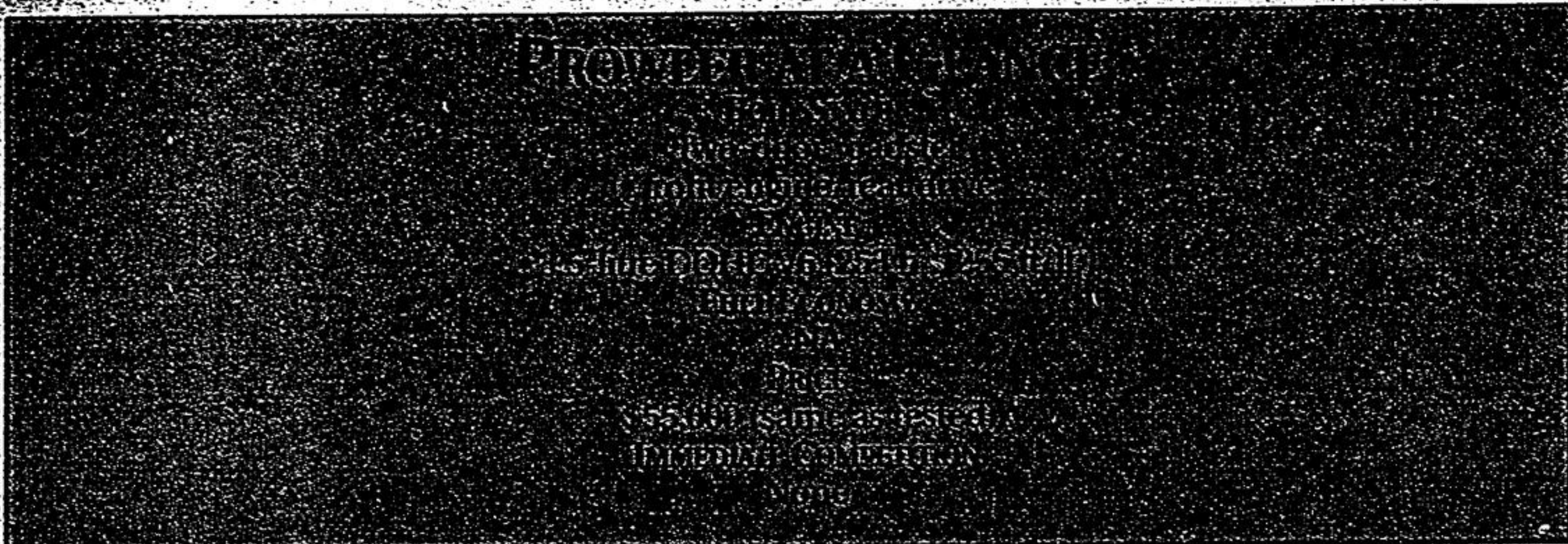
Priced as tested at \$55,000, the Prowler is easily as impressive as anything else out there and I'm talking the Ferrari 348 Cabrio and Jag XK8 encountered on Highway 407 where two-way smiles of recognition said it all.

I'm told red will be the next color offered for the Prowler and there are rumors that next spring we'll have it in jet black with those five-spoke wheels resplendent in glistening chrome-mouth watering.

The fact that Chrysler went through with this car, and the Dodge Viper, shows they've got the guts to try and stand out from the crowd.

It's the kind of in-your-face spirit that car buyers are looking for in a world of plain-Jane aero-dictated sedans.

That was the original objective with the Prowler and it sure has worked - just ask Mercedes-Benz.



Doug Love
General Manager

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