

WHEELS

New Daewoo Leganza is one of best family cars under \$25,000

From page 23

a conservative, but well-finished interior.

The seats are small and sofa soft. Tilt steering, A/C and six-speaker stereo are just a few of the built-in features.

The Cirrus LX was created as a replacement for the Breeze and Stratus for thrifty Canadians who want to mix upscale refinement with four-cylinder economy. In a sense, the Chrysler Neon has caught up to this intermediary Cirrus in many respects but the Cirrus still has a bigger, more finished feel.

Chrysler Neon LX:

Neon owners of the past loved their Neons almost as much as they loved to complain about them.

For 2000, Chrysler has tried to maintain the spunky spirit while smoothing out the rough edges. This Neon is taller, longer, wider and overall bigger.

The chassis is stiffer and the brakes are larger. Full frame doors and triple seals shore up the Neon's leaky reputation. Suspension and handling traits have all been softened. The 2.0 litre engine carries over with a broader torque curve and the fastest 0-100 km time in this class. Add up the size increase, engineering and suspension refinements, wrap it all up in LHS styling and you get a compact that looks and behaves more like its bigger Chrysler cousins.

Daewoo Leganza CDX 2.2:

The Korean-built Daewoo Leganza looks pretty good for a car that seems to have just arrived out of left field somewhere.

Daewoo boasts a staff of Mercedes and BMW-trained engineers and brags of Lotus-tuned ride and handling. This upscale version was well outfitted.

You have to look hard for econo fittings like horn buttons and goose-neck trunk hinges. The engine is willing, the platform quite stable.

Steering does not push well to the edge of the envelope but then this is the family car class, after all. The Daewoo Leganza certainly offers a new option in the search for economical family transportation.

Ford Focus ZTS:

Ford has high hopes for their latest world car, a German-designed, British-engineered model that is sweeping Europe by storm and is destined to replace both the Escort and Contour lineups in Canada.

The New Edge-styled Focus features a unique and very modern design.

The Focus is a tall car. That translates into comfortable kitchen chair-upright seating and a surprisingly spacious interior.

Standards include anti-theft system, rear seat heat ducts, and four-speaker AM/FM stereo. A tilt and telescoping steering wheel is just one of the many options. The standard 110 horsepower engine is brisk and fun to

drive. Bonus points from me for taking a fashion risk but only time will tell if Canadians accept the radical exterior styling as quickly as their European counterparts.

Saturn LS1:

The much anticipated launch of the L-Series finally gives Saturn owners a car to move up to.

Saturn's space frame is mounted on an Opel Vectra platform and the Euro-style body features Saturn's trademark dent-resistant polymer panels.

The Lotus-developed 2.2 litre engine is responsive and quick. Despite the car's Euro heritage, enough North American plushness has been dialed in to keep customers happy on this side of the ocean.

I would expect future refinements to the interior but the LS does share one peculiar trait common to all Saturns — the more you drive them, the more you like them. And as usual, the Saturn customer-comes-first philosophy seems as big a selling point as the cars. How do you compete with a company that offers a 30-day money back warranty?

Volkswagen Golf TDI:

The Golf TDI was the oddball in the group.

Volkswagen's entry-level vehicle is not just another econobox.

Interior and exterior features include front and side impact air bags, ABS, air conditioning, eight-speaker stereo cassette, anti-theft alarm system, power locks and tilt and telescoping steering wheel.

Tight rear seating makes this an unlikely family car, but small families with small kids might be willing to trade a little rear room for hatchback utility and small car nimbleness with a sport sedan flavor.

The diesel engine adds adequate acceleration with an economical advantage. Other entries may beat you in the quarter mile but you'll pass 'em at the pumps. A tank of fuel will last you about 1,200 kilometre.

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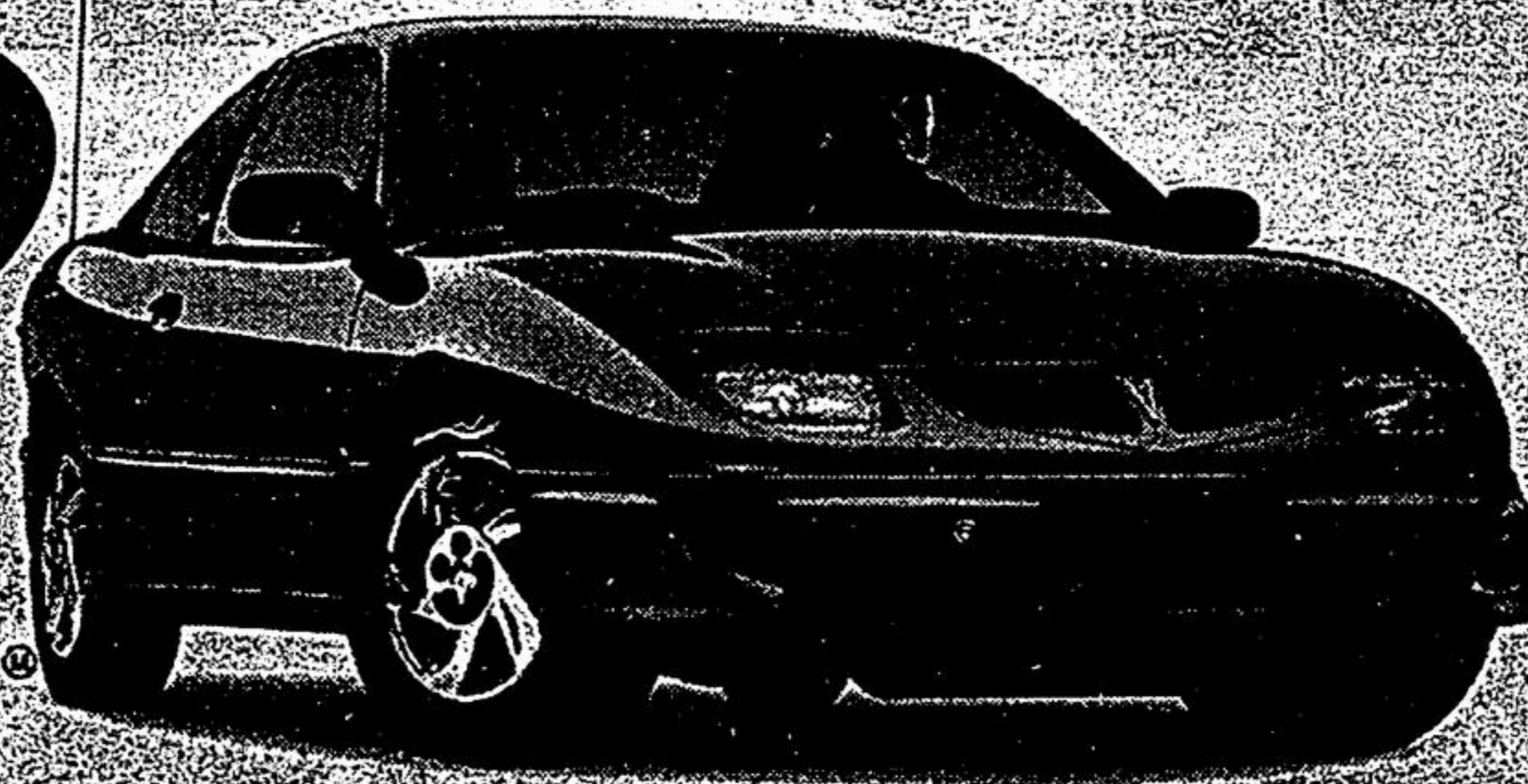
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