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It has always looked like a hot rod, and soon it will have the power to live up to that image — thanks to a little device called a turbocharger.

The original Chrysler PT Cruiser was an order-form-depleting success well before its arrival at showrooms a couple of years ago. And with more power really being the only issue on the minds of buyers, demand will most likely outstrip supply once again when PT Turbo arrives this fall.

In case you haven't already guessed from the frequent PT sightings in your neighborhood, Chrysler has had no trouble selling every single Cruiser it has managed to crank out of its Toluca, Mexico assembly plant. In its first two years, 2000 and 2001, PTs were being churned out at a rate of 180,000 cars a year. For 2002, the factory increased capacity to 310,000 cars per year. Dealers are finally able to stock a decent number of examples for buyers to examine.

The success of the PT Cruiser should be a big surprise to no one. After all, this is a car that not only defies every styling convention in the book, but does so with a great deal of flair and panache. On the practical side, you'll find a roomy and comfortable interior, multi-adjustable cargo area (the rear seat can be folded or removed completely, depending on space requirements) and an easy-to-load hatch design that earns this Chrysler high marks for versatility.

Then there's the customization factor that gives PT owners virtually free reign to turn their steeds into flame-decaled rods, 'woodies' and panel vans, with a little help from aftermarket suppliers as well as from DaimlerChrysler.

A vast aftermarket army also provides extra go-power through bolt-on turbocharger and supercharger kits (one company, hemicruiser.com, will even build you a V8-powered PT if that turns your crank). Seeing the demand for more power, the aftermarket's immense attention to the little car, and the need to keep things fresh in

showrooms have all been factors in the creation of the PT Turbo. It's a straight-from-the-factory model, complete with warranty, that'll deliver more of the kind of performance the PT's street-rod looks deserve.

Turbocharging the PT is about the only option for increasing power as Chrysler never built the car to have anything but a four-cylinder engine bolted between its fenders (hence a lack of room for a bigger engine). In prepping the standard 2.4-litre DOHC powerplant for its newly assigned task, the cylinder block, head and crankshaft have been revised to handle the extra stress. Even the exhaust system has been altered for maximum performance.

From these extra efforts, the PT Turbo puts out a much more spirited 215 horsepower and a fat 245 lb.-ft. of torque at 3,600 RPM. By comparison, a non-turbo PT is worth 150 horsepower and just 162 lb.-ft. of torque at a higher 4,000 RPM.

Transmission choices consist of a five-speed Getrag-built manual or optional four-speed automatic equipped with Chrysler's manual-style AutoStick shifter.

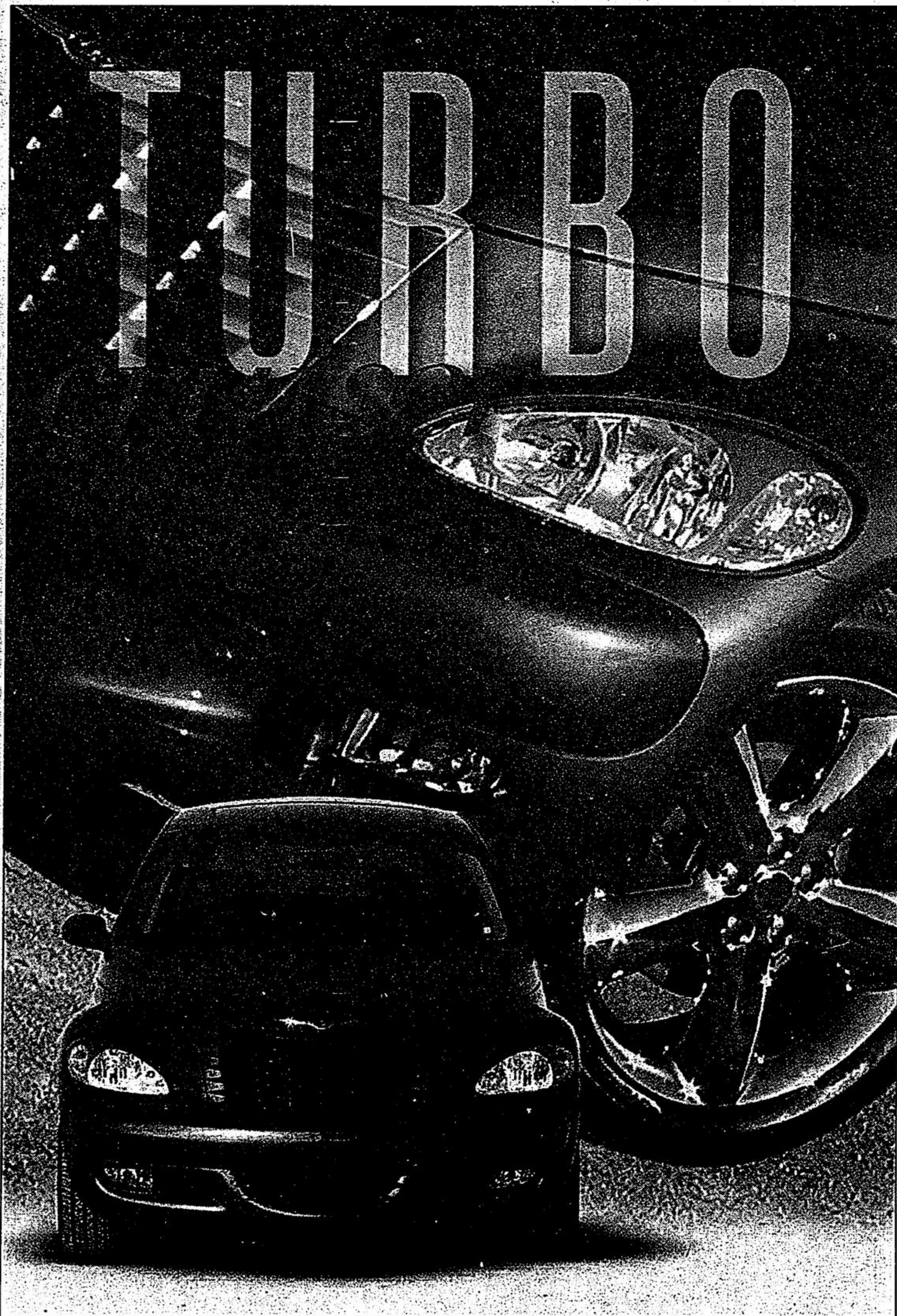
TUNED SUSPENSION

The PT's handling has also been tweaked with a specially tuned suspension, four-wheel disc brakes, ABS and 17-inch five-spoke alloy wheels.





Among the exclusive PT Turbo items that come with this package are special front seats with lumbar adjustment, silver-faced gauges and turbo badging on the tachometer as well as on the liftgate.

Besides the extra tariff (about \$8,500 above the base PT), the only penalty is the addition of 55-90 kilograms in weight, depending on the transmission selected.

The addition of the turbo option significantly changes the character of the PT Cruiser. No longer just a uniquely styled, mild-mannered fashion statement, the added boost turns it into a rarin'-to-go pocket rocket that backs up its street-fighter looks with some honest-to-goodness muscle.



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