

What's new

'85 Spectrum

The Spectrum is Chevrolet's latest attempt at stemming the seemingly relentless flow of Japanese subcompacts to this country. The Spectrum is made by Isuzu (Isuzu is a 34-percent owned affiliate of General Motors).

In Japan.

The Spectrum joins the Sprint (made by Suzuki—in Japan—for Chevrolet). Soon they will be joined by the Nova (a joint venture between Toyota and Chevrolet to be built in the U.S.) In the future, it is reported that General Motors may be importing vehicles built by the Korean Daewoo firm. In Korea.

It can be argued logically therefore (and somewhat embarrassingly), that General Motors' strategy for combating Japanese imports is to flood the U.S. with Japanese imports—with Chevrolet bowties on the grille. However unpatriotic this might appear, however duplicitous it may seem, the record should show that General Motors has taken the public position from Day One that it is pro free trade, that it is firmly against import quotas.

Well it should be. The import quotas are a bigger problem for Chevrolet than many Japanese companies. Already with the Spectrum Chevrolet has a problem. It can't sell enough of them. Or it can sell too many, depending on how you look at it. Here's how it works.

Isuzu is allowed, under the import quotas, to bring 49,500 vehicles into the U.S. for '85. Including Spectrum. That's it. If it had its way, Chevrolet would take 49,500 Spectrums. It would like even more. Isuzu will let it have 29,500. No more.

Why does Chevrolet need so many Japanese subcompacts? Because there is a trend, dear reader, that you should be aware of. One that's being hidden behind today's headlines. The subcompact is not dead. No. Exactly the opposite. The subcompact market is the fastest growing major market segment of all. Forget the glory stories you're reading about large cars, about mid-size cars. Sure, those segments have been growing lately, too, but that's not news. The news is this: All

segments have been growing—and subcompacts are gonna keep growing.

In 1984, subcompacts will have accounted for just under 37 percent of total U.S. car sales—about 3.4 million units total. In the near future, that percentage is expected to keep expanding to the point where subcompacts comprise fully 40-45 percent of the U.S. market, according to GM projections. Today, Chevrolet's share of the subcompact market is 15 percent. For a bread-and-butter American car company, ironically, it is not enough.

"Small cars mean big business for Chevrolet today, tomorrow and in the future," says Chevrolet general manager Bob Burger. "Our objective is selling you your first car . . . and keep you so happy that your next car will be a Chevrolet."

Look at a map of the U.S. You're Bob Burger. You can sell only so many Suzuki-built Sprints. Those damn quotas again. Let's see . . . OK, we'll sell those on the West Coast—not enough of 'em for the whole U.S. East Coast . . . OK, let's bring in this Spectrum

from Isuzu. Just 29,500 units? That's all we can get? OK, that'll have to do for now.

Actually, General Motors would like 200,000 Spectrums a year, which gives you some idea of how much the General is really *bristling against* the quotas. The only people against the quotas, it seems, are those that don't have Japanese cars to sell. And Chrysler. General Motors has plenty of Japanese cars to sell . . .

Spectrum will be sold in 16 Eastern states, from Vermont right down to Florida and including New York and New Jersey. Almost half of the imported cars sold in the U.S. are sold in these 16 states, according to Chevrolet. It is available both as a two-door hatchback and four-door sedan, both on a 94.5-inch wheelbase, both powered through their front wheels by a 1.5-liter four-cylinder engine. Curb weight is about 1,900 pounds.

Everything about the Spectrum reads like any other good, contemporary Japanese small car. MacPherson struts up front, trailing arm rear suspension, rack-and-pinion steering, five-speed transmission—it is Everycar, Japanese-style.

Driving the Spectrum is another matter. To its credit it has a strong engine, capable of rattling off 0-50 times in the 8.5-second range (manual transaxle). It also has strong fuel economy numbers. Thanks in part to an unusually high compression ratio (9.6:1), the Spectrum achieves 38/43 city/highway MPG with the five-speed—near tops for a gas-powered car—and 33-35 MPG with automatic transaxle, highest of any automatic in the business, according to Chevrolet.

Disappointing is the engine's buzziness. It's noisier and vibrates more than, say, a Honda engine, the noise being enough in some circumstances to compete with the radio.

The interior is generic Japanese, meaning comfort and convenience are given useful priority. According to Chevrolet, Spectrum has the highest EPA interior volume in its class. There is practical room for

1985 Chevy/Isuzu Spectrum

Test car:	Production model supplied by Chevrolet
Base Price:	\$6,295
Wheelbase:	94.5
Layout:	Transverse front-engine, front-wheel-drive
Horsepower:	70 @ 5,400 RPM
Curb Weight:	1,874 pounds (three-door, manual)
Zero to 50 (seconds):	8.5

four passengers, plus a good deal of luggage area.

Ride is superior, especially for a car in this class. Enthusiasts likely will be disappointed to note that this "plus" comes at the expense of handling. Spectrum rides on almost comically small 155/80 x 13 radials that tuck under and scream at the slightest provocation. Like turning the steering wheel, for example. And don't look for the Spectrum's sway bars—it hasn't any. Which is too bad. With its Isuzu Impulse-influenced styling (which drew many favorable comments) and strong engine, the Spectrum could easily be transformed into an attractive GTI competitor. Chevrolet's posture: For 29,500 units, how can you afford to spend any more money on R&D?

As it stands with the quotas, rumors say Chevrolet will lose money on the Spectrum until it can import more cars. The quotas may be revised when they come up for review in March.

Those damn quotas . . . what's a baseball, hot dogs and apple-pie kind of car company to do?

—George D. Levy

Jeep CJ-7

There are cars into which you strap yourself so that the controls become extensions of your limbs. You use your whole body to corner, to brake and to drive, picking up valuable sensory input from everything you touch. At one with machine, you are, which suits an enthusiast just fine.



Chevy's Spectrum: Stemming the tide of Japanese imports.

Then there is the Jeep.
It should be put in a completely different category in your search for automotive fun. It is not a car. It is a Jeep. In a Jeep you are not one, but more like three or four with the machine. Three or four flailing limbs, perhaps. Or minds.

The Jeep family (sold by American Motors, of course) includes two-door hardtop Cherokees, four-door Wagoneers and a larger Grand Wagoneer, but the traditional off-road military-type four-wheel-drive CJ-7 is probably the model best associated with the simple name Jeep.

The impression you get driving a Jeep is that you are sitting up on top of the Jeep, not exactly in it. You do not sit in a sled, for example. Or a unicycle. The seats are upright, and the pedals are over the floor, not in front of a firewall. You can drive a Jeep with your back perpendicular to the road, and your feet parallel with it. Or you can walk.

You can shift early, late, fast, slow or kick the Jeep into gear with a cowboy boot, and the smoothness of the vehicle making progress down the road doesn't change. You can abandon any and all consideration of smoothness when driving a Jeep.

You can also say goodbye to your ear drums if you're riding in a soft-top Jeep. On the highway you may pass soft-top Jeeps while you're in the relative comfort and silence of your normal street car and never know exactly what kind of loud, pressurized noise is assaulting the Jeep driver. Until you sample this machine. Luckily, a hardtop with doors is available.

If you're looking for something that you can drive over big things so hard that it tosses you out of the driver's seat, this is your vehicle. It has nothing in the chassis or

componentry that is related to a car. At least no contemporary car. It has two large solid axles front and back hung on the frame by leaf springs. Thick, stiff leaf springs.

It has none of the utility of a truck, other than the fact that in low range on the four-wheel-drive transfer case and in low gear you could probably tow your real car out of a deep gully or pull down that dead elm in the yard. Top speed in fifth gear in low range is 25 MPH. Two engines will be available in 1985 for the CJ-7, a 2.5-liter pushrod four and an in-line 4.2-liter six. Three transmissions are offered. The four- and five-speed manuals come with both engines, a three-speed-automatic an option with the six-cylinder.

Our test car was a four-cylinder, five-speed, with enough power to push the tall front-end and flat windshield to about 65 MPH before fear and a not-too-low threshold of pain forced us to lift. We don't know how long it took. We do know that the five-speed worked direct and smooth, considering it was long enough you could scratch your ankle on the shifter joint under the rubber boot.

And we also had no trouble controlling directional movement, the steering being the faster four-turns-lock-to-lock power recirculating ball type instead of the standard 5.25-turns non-assisted unit. Four turns is not very quick, though the turning circle of the Jeep is a relatively small 36 feet. You spend some time rotating the wheel, sailing ship style, whenever parking, turning street corners or squeezing between ill-spaced boulders.

Handling is a little hard to describe on a vehicle with a higher front roll center than rear. Try picturing a tricycle going backward if you want some idea of the roll attitude of the Jeep in a corner.

Overall, this a four-wheeled thing meant not for the fast lane, but still fun to drive. The only relation this vehicle has to a car is it shares the same road. Part of the time. The real reason to get a Jeep CJ-7 is to take it way off the road. Where you can become one with nature, and forget what you know about cars.

—Phil Berg

Continued on Page 16

1985 Jeep CJ-7

Test car:Pilot model supplied by American Motors; 2,581 miles
Base Price:\$7,873
Wheelbase:93.4 inches
Layout:Front-engine, 2.5-liter in-line four-cylinder, rear or four-wheel-drive
Horsepower:105 @ 4,800
Curb Weight:2,602 pounds
Zero to 60 (seconds):N/A



Phil Berg

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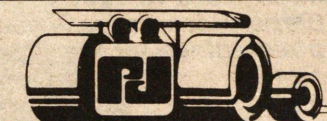
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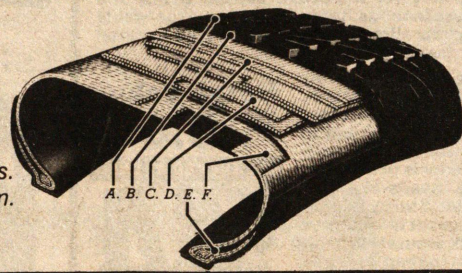
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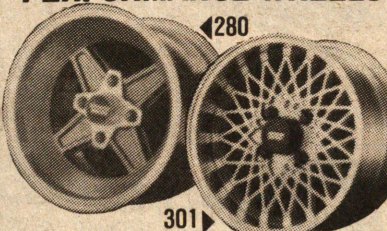
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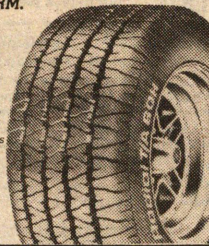
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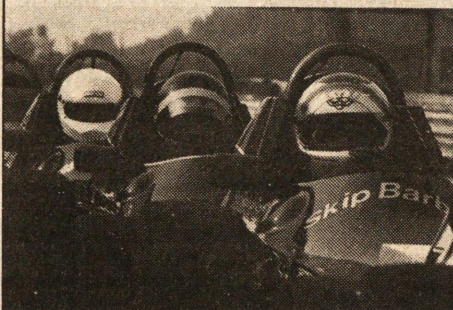
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What's new

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Diomante Rolls

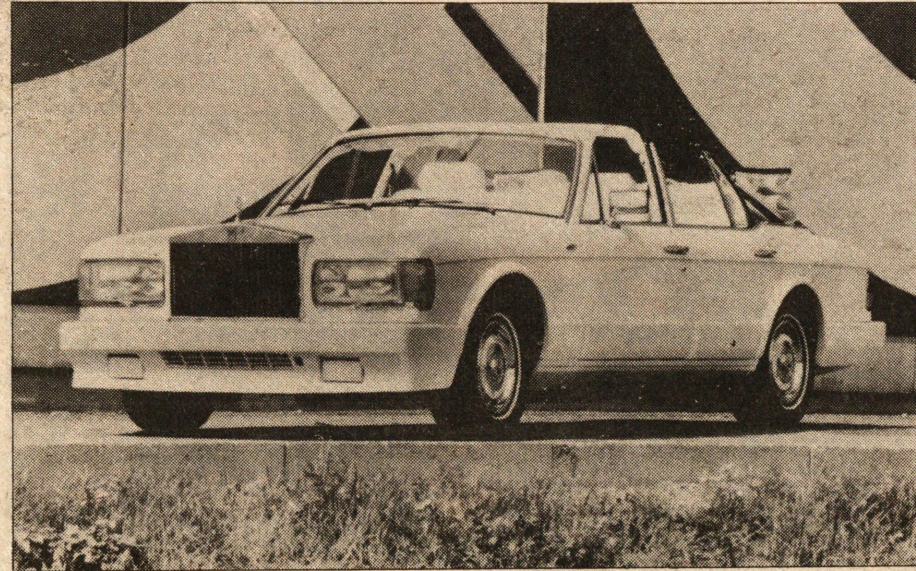
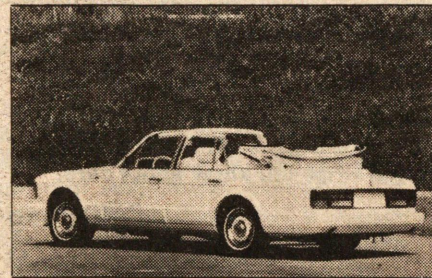
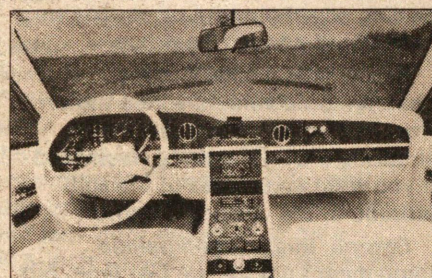
Do you have the same problems we do? Seem to own so many Rolls-Royce Silver Spirits that it's become difficult to tell them apart? Relax. And while you're at it, take time to write a check and call Europe's busiest Rolls conversion specialist, Salvatore Diomante.

This stunning exercise in wealth and white is as yet unnamed, but already it has drawn more attention than a clothed sun bather in the areas it's been spotted on the prowl—the French Riviera between Monte Carlo and Nice. Its appearance in the company of so many folks trying to keep up with the Rothschilds had the phones ringing off the hooks back at the Rolls ranch in Crewe.

Most wanted to know where the car came from and how they could get their hands on one. The British officers wouldn't answer, but instead rang up Achilli Motors of Milan (acting broker for Saudi-based Al Ajda Automotive) to convince the car's owner to cool it in Monte Carlo.

Unlike all other Rolls-Royce specials made to clients' wishes through Al Ajda, Diomante's job wasn't to stretch the chassis and construct a larger Rolls. Instead, he was given freedom to shorten it and was politely requested to remove the top. Not a simple job, as it turned out.

The owner—an unnamed Arab prince who resides in the South of France—would not make himself



available for comment, but we understand he is very pleased with his new ride.

Aside from the obvious add-ons, here's some of the magic Diomante had to perform:

The chassis needed to be reinforced substantially to give the open body the structural strength needed. The B-pillar had to be rebuilt with more rake toward the back in order to improve access to the seats and still achieve the intended look. And a central roll-bar was added both to stiffen body structure and help support a soft top.

The major change to the original Silver Spirit (used because its chassis is the most modern and best-made by the Crewe crew) is the tail. It was shortened almost six inches.

Diomante did his best to give the car some character without changing or spoiling the Rolls image. Whether he accomplished his goal is purely subjective.

As for the interior, the car's original design was preserved as much as possible. Neither the dashboard nor its comprehensive instrumentation suffered alteration. The only addition was an elegant central console required to house a complete Clarion stereo system. And, as usual with Diomante's R-Rs, the rear door panels integrate small tables for passenger convenience. The upholstery? White Italian leather.

A short test drive was pure pleasure, but because a Rolls is not our usual commuter car, we can report nothing more than that. Interior wind turbulence definitely was not a problem. Al Ajda has lost none of the car's luxury and leisure.

In fact, the only problem we encountered at all with the special Rolls was with its electrically operated convertible top. The mechanism needs some tweaking for smoother operation. Even Arab princes have problems. And the car's silhouette might be improved if the folded roof were more integrated into the styling.

But, Diomante has time to practice. You see, the prince's sister has just placed her order for a second snow white Roller.

—Reported by Giancarlo Perini, written by Nick Pivot

Essay in white: Diomante's sparkling Roller.

Giancarlo Perini photos