

Small car, big world: Chevrolet Aveo not just another econobox

by Mark Maynard

If at first you don't succeed, buy the company and do it your way.

That's what General Motors did after its on-again, off-again relationship with South Korean carmaker Daewoo Motors.

GM started buying Daewoo assets for next to nothing in 2001, formed GM-DAT -- Daewoo Auto and Technology -- and went to work on a so-called global car. Today, GM owns more than 50 percent of the company, which ships cars to 120 countries.

CHEVROLET AVEO LT - The new Chevrolet Aveo LT's styling is contemporary and tasteful, inside and out. Aveo has become the icon of GM globalization. In the past, GM would have tried to build a car for every country in which it sells vehicles, with varying engines, radios, safety features and materials. Now, one car does it all. CNS Photo courtesy of Chevrolet. The first new products -- the Chevrolet Aveo sedan and hatchback -- debuted in 2003, just as gasoline prices started to rise. These cars gave GM a good, small "import" in the subcompact segment.

It was good, but not great. But now, 2 1/2 years after the cars' launch, they have been completely redone and moved upscale. They are a proud statement for the company's mission and quality.

The sedan is sold in LS or LT trim levels. The Aveo5 hatchback has one trim and a base price of \$9,995, which is about as cheap as it gets in this segment. Yes, the base LS sedan has an equipment list that includes 14-inch tires on steel wheels, crank windows and optional anti-lock braking system (\$400), but the LT test car, at \$14,775, was no throw-away.

Stand back and take a good look at the evenness of body-panel gaps and the sturdy construction. The styling is contemporary and tasteful, inside and out. Seat fabrics are durable, and the plastics don't look cheap. The back seat is raised to give occupants a better view, and unless the driver and front passenger are 6 feet 4 inches, there is decent foot and knee room, particularly for youngsters. Cubic dimensions for the trunk are 12.4 square feet, but it seems larger, and expands via the split-folding back seat.

All models use a 103-horsepower, 1.6-liter four-cylinder and five-speed manual transmission or optional four-speed automatic. Fuel mileage ratings are 26 mpg city, 34 highway for the automatic and 27/35 for the manual. All models earn the EPA's SmartWay label for above-average marks for air pollution and greenhouse gas scores.

The high mileage numbers aren't at the sacrifice of acceleration. The engine uses double overhead cams to whip up power at lower speeds, which gives enough snap to merge into highway traffic without sending up a prayer.

The four-speed automatic seems dated when other imports are moving on to five speeds, but this one works quite well. It easily grabs a gear on long uphills to keep pace with traffic, and Hold Control mode locks the transmission for second- or third-gear starts or operates the transmission as a "manu-matic."

At highway speeds, there is interior noise, but tire and shock-absorber upgrades may restore inner peace.

Aveo has become the icon of GM globalization. In the past, GM would have tried to build a car for every country it sells vehicles, with varying engines, radios, safety features and materials. Now, one car does it all, or most of it, from one global location. That's economy of scale. And now it is difficult to get anything approved at GM that isn't globally based.

The Japanese imports have long enjoyed that advantage for selling in the United States. And in the last year, Nissan, Toyota and Mazda anticipated a revival of subcompacts and made slight changes to existing subcompacts sold in Japan and brought them to the United States.

Aveo sales were strong last year, selling just more than 68,000 cars in the U.S. -- the largest market -- with 15 percent going to fleets, rental and otherwise. One obvious advantage to Aveos built in South Korea and sold in North America is that the car meets many world safety standards.

My test drives of previous generation Aveos and Daewoos left the impression of a good copy of a 10-year-old Japanese car. They were heavier, because they didn't have the budget for lighter-weight materials, and less fuel efficient, because they didn't use the latest engineering standards.

Not so for the new Aveo.

Skeptics might make the two-word snap judgment -- "rental car" -- of an '07 Aveo, but this isn't just another GM econobox.

Copley News Service

SPECS2007 Chevrolet Aveo LT
Body style: subcompact, front-wheel drive, five-passenger sedan
Engine: 103-horsepower, 1.6-liter, DOHC four-cylinder
Transmission: Five-speed manual; optional four-speed automatic
EPA fuel economy estimates: 26 mpg city, 34 highway (27/35 manual); 87 octane recommended
Fuel capacity: 11.9 gallons
DIMENSIONSTrunk space: 12.4 cubic feet
Front head/leg/shoulder room: 39.3/41.3/53.6 inches
Rear head/leg/shoulder room: 37.4/35.4/52.8 inches
Length/wheelbase: 169.7/97.6 inches
Curb weight: 2,531-2,542 pounds
FEATURESStandard equipment includes: remote locking, air conditioning with air filter, rear window defogger, power (heated) mirrors, power windows, floor mats, cruise control, deluxe cloth seats with recline and tilt head restraints, driver-seat armrest, 60/40-split folding rear seat back, vanity mirrors, remote trunk release (and on key fob), stainless steel exhaust, intermittent front wipers
Safety equipment includes: dual-stage front air bags, side air bags, front belt pretensioners with front-load limiters; optional ABS
CHASSIS Brakes: vented front discs and rear drums; 4-channel ABS optional
Steering: power rack and pinion; 33-foot turning circle
Suspension: front, MacPherson struts with

offset coil springs and stabilizer bar; semi-independent torsion beam axle with coil springs
Tires and wheels: P185/60R 14-inch all-season touring on steel wheels; optional, P185/55R 15-inch all-season touring on alloy wheels
PRICING Base: \$13,815, including \$565 freight charge; price as tested, \$14,775
Options on test car: automatic transmission, \$850; fog lights, \$110
The competition: Hyundai Accent, Kia Rio, Honda Fit, Toyota Yaris
Where assembled: Bupyong, South Korea
PLUSES: Roomy, contemporary styling, basic transportation that won't be disposable in three years.
MINUSES: A tire and shock-absorber upgrade may improve interior noise levels; anti-lock brakes as an option; no accessories for personalization

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