

## Best buys of a vintage '86 car crop listed

By Gary Witzenburg  
News Special Writer

The 1986 cars are out and it's the best crop yet. More real winners than ever before, nary a loser in the bunch.

For prospective buyers, it's no longer a question of separating the good from the bad. The problem is choosing from varying degrees of good.

But separate the huge new-car field into logical categories, then compare price vs. value, features and all-around performance and some clear "best buys" emerge. Others, not so obvious, manage to squeak out close victories over a number of worthy competitors.

Keep in mind that a "best buy" may not be the absolute best in class and it is probably not the least expensive. But it does offer, in my view, the best overall combination of price, value, quality, styling, engineering, performance, handling, standard and optional features, reliability and resale.

**HERE, THEN,** are the best-buy picks of this impressive '86 litter:

■ **Econocar:** Chevrolet Sprint — The jury's out on Yugo, other Japanese subcompacts keep moving up-scale, so Chevy's tiny Suzuki-built Sprint is the best-buy fuel-squeezer for '86. Cute, solid and sprightly, it gives 44 mpg EPA city, 50 highway and starts at \$5,380 for the three-door hatchback, \$5,580 for the Sprint Plus five-door.

■ **Econosport:** Volkswagen GTI — A bundle of taut sinew in plain but efficient VW Golf clothes. More power and

***"Whatever you do, shop carefully and compare. . . Don't buy on impulse or without test-driving first. Most importantly, buy a car that you really like — one that suits your needs, lifestyle and self-image, one that feels good on the road and that you're proud to be seen in."***



NEWS ARTWORK / HANK VAN FLETEREN

torque, new convenience options and sweetened warranty protection add value for '86. A lot of grins per dollar at about \$9,200.

■ **Small sedan:** Mazda 323 — Quick, fun to drive, appealingly styled, bigger inside than it looks. Multi-port injection, a unique suspension and a tight, quiet body put the 323 a cut above the GLC it replaces, as well as the competition. Prices range from \$5,495 for the base three-door hatchback to \$7,595 for the luxury sedan.

■ **Medium sedan:** Ford Taurus and Mercury Sable — These domestic Audi 5000s feature futuristic good looks, V-6 power and the smoothest, road-grippingest suspension this side of the Atlantic. Ample room for six inside (five with front buckets), plus user-friendly controls and a convenience list as long as a Johnny Carson commercial break. Look for them in January with prices starting at just under \$10,000 for Taurus, \$11,000 for Sable.

■ **Large sedan:** Chevrolet Caprice — The famous Impala name bites the dust after 28 years as Caprice becomes Chevy's big-car value leader for '86. Standard V-6, optional V-8; two-door, four-door or wagon; a lot of comfortable bulk for the buck at a bit over \$10,200.

■ **Luxury sedan:** Audi 5000CS Quattro — Audi's flagship weds all-wheel drive, anti-lock brakes and turbo five-cylinder power under a roomy, slippery-sleek four-door body. The ultimate all-weather cruiser, fully equipped at \$27,975 sedan, \$29,185 wagon.

Please see **Best buys/2D**

## Confused by the new-car market? You should be!

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of this confusion was offered by Volkswagen, three each.

of financial matters — real estate, stocks,



# Best buys Our expert lists best values in '86 car lineup

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■ **Sport sedan:** Dodge Lancer and Chrysler LeBaron GTS — Still best buys for the buck in this highly competitive class, these roomy, handsome hatchbacks give glued-to-the-road handling, a new optional engine with vibration-smoothing balance shafts and available turbo power. About \$9,400 for the base Lancer, \$9,750 for the GTS.

■ **Sport coupe:** Toyota Celica — All-new front-drive, slick as a frightened fish, Toyota's Celica sets new standards in the affordable sport coupe group. Fully independent suspension and a fuel-injected four are standard, while the hot GT-S boasts a twin-cam 16-valve engine. About \$9,100 buys the base ST, \$12,000 the GT-S coupe.

■ **Luxury sport coupe:** Lincoln Continental Mark VII LSC — The completely competent hot-rod Lincoln. Two hundred V-8 horses with port fuel injection, road-hugging air suspension, standard anti-lock brakes, plenty of quiet, comfort and luxury for a mere \$24,000.

■ **Sports/GT:** Mazda RX-7 — Lusty rotary power, a sexy new body and a trick rear suspension move Mazda's RX-7 well into Porsche territory for '86. Crank it into a curve and the rear wheels point slightly outward to help turn it in, then shift inward on cure to keep the back end nailed to the road. The vase two-seater starts at just under \$12,000, the 2+2 at \$12,500.

**FOUR OF** these 10 are designed and produced in America. One, Audi's

## 10 best car buys for '86

	1986	1985
<b>Econocar:</b>	Chevrolet Sprint	Dodge/Plymouth Colt
<b>Econosport:</b>	Volkswagen GTI	Volkswagen GTI
<b>Small sedan:</b>	Mazda 323	Toyota Corolla
<b>Medium sedan:</b>	Taurus/Sable	Mazda 626
<b>Large sedan:</b>	Chevrolet Caprice	Olds Delta 88
<b>Luxury sedan</b>	Audi 5000CS Quattro	Cadillac de Ville
<b>Sport sedan:</b>	Lancer/LeBaron GTS	Lancer/LeBaron GTS
<b>Sport coupe:</b>	Toyota Celica	Nissan 200-SX
<b>Luxury sport coupe</b>	Lincoln Mark VII LSC	Lincoln Mark VII LSC
<b>Sports/GT:</b>	Mazda RX-7	Chevrolet Corvette

5000 Turbo Quattro, is thoroughly German; another, Volkswagen's GTI, is a German design but built in VW's Pennsylvania plant. The others are Japanese; but one, the Chevrolet Sprint, is imported and marketed by General Motors' Chevrolet Division.

The categories are logical, but a little explanation is in order. "Econocars" are the least expensive and most fuel-efficient autos on the market. "Econosports" are higher-performance, crisper-handling, fun-to-drive sporty versions of certain econocars and small sedans, most listing for less than \$10,000.

"Small sedans," for classification purposes, are family four-doors (and some two-doors and wagons) less than 175 inches long. "Medium sedans" fall between 175 and 190 inches in length and "large sedans" are those over 190 inches. "Luxury sedans," regardless of size, are defined as those with base prices over \$15,000.

The fast-growing "sport sedan" class includes those special four-doors with higher performance, tighter suspensions and a certain sporting character that makes them especially enjoyable to drive. The many stylish two-door coupes and hatchbacks on the market are divided into two classes, "sport coupes" costing less than \$15,000 and "luxury sport coupes" costing more. Finally, the "sports/GT" group includes both two-seat sports cars and high-performance four-seat coupes.

Under this system, different versions of the same car can fall into different categories. The basic Dodge and Plymouth Colts, for example, are "econocars," while the up-level versions are "small sedans" and Colt Turbos are definitely "econosports." Mustangs and Camaros are "sport coupes," but Mustang GTs and Camaro Z-28s are "sports/GTs." Pontiac's 6000 is a "medium sedan," but the

limited-production 6000 STE is very much a "sport sedan." You get the idea.

Whatever you do, shop carefully and compare feature-for-feature. Don't buy on impulse or without test-driving first. Most importantly, buy a car that you really like — one that suits your needs, lifestyle and self-image, one that feels good on the road and that you're proud to be seen in.

Because if you really like your car, you'll take better care of it, it will serve you better, you'll get more back from it at resale time, you'll put up with its shortcomings more cheerfully and your whole ownership experience will be a happier one.

Gary Witzenburg is an automotive engineer, race driver and free-lance auto writer based in Los Angeles.

## Merger bids confirmed by BMW

By United Press International

German auto maker BMW has acknowledged that it held several discussions with U.S. auto makers concerning some sort of merger or liaison. Automotive News reported this week.

The trade publication said that General Motors, which has about \$7.8 billion in ready cash to spend, has been the BMW's most serious suitor, but that the German prestige auto maker will most probably remain independent.

A BMW official in Munich last week confirmed that the firm had been in contact with "several" auto makers, but refused to characterize

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# Higgins Stronger yen may reflect deep change

## From page 1D

position at any realistic rate.

lish a position there. So it's going to hit them on their bottom line."

"If they view us as just on our latest temporary kick, they'll just hunker down and ride right through it and