

# CELICA AND SUPRA

*Gary Witzenburg comments on Toyota's new models from the land of geishas and sushi.*

We (American auto writers) are sitting in the corner of a large auditorium in Tokyo, which is filled to overflowing with Japanese journalists. At the speakers' dias are Toyota's top officials, looking nervous but confident as they are about to launch their brand new "World Super Specialty Cars," the 1982 Celica and Celica Supra. For some reason, the Japanese photographers spend most of their time shooting us.

The program consists of a film and slide presentation, several speeches (simultaneously translated for us through a set of earphones), and a question and answer period—three questions, two from the same man, all of which go essentially, inscrutably, unanswered. Afterwards there's a coffee and cookie reception at which the cars are displayed. Apparently this is the first time a Japanese carmaker has held a joint introduction for their own domestic and selected foreign press—a handful of European, Australian and South African auto writers and a baker's dozen of us Yanks.

We're not certain what the Japanese journalists think about Toyota's new Celicas and Supras, but we have mixed feelings at first exposure. The hatchback roofline is

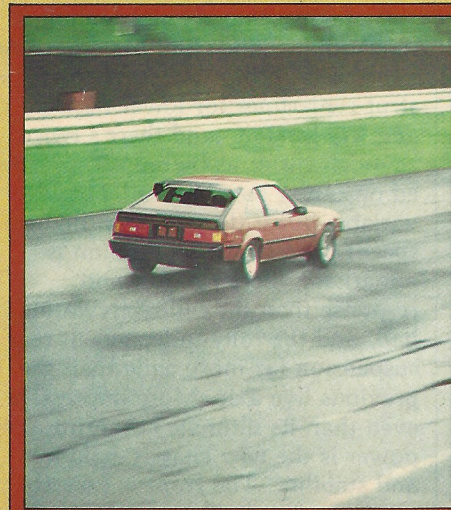
sexy-sleek and the long-nosed Supra looks fast and aggressive, but the Celica coupe has a cliché. American "formal" roofline and an odd rear deck and taillamp design that reminds us of an old Studebaker Lark. The Celica's shovel nose seems a bit severe and its flip-forward headlamps gimmicky. Its front bumper is body color and integrated, but the rear one looks like a shiny black railroad tie hung on as an afterthought. The Supra's blunt (and less aerodynamic snout has nice 928-like park and signal lamps built into a heavy-looking black bumper that wraps awkwardly around at the corners. Its entire rear end—hatch, panel and bumper—is overdone in black. All models have a clumsy, angular drop where front fender meets beltline at the windshield pillar, and there's "busy" detailing here and there. We're told that the previous, second-generation Celica, nicely-styled by Americans at Toyota's Caltex studio in California, was not well liked in the home market; so this one was designed by Japanese for Japanese.

Next day we see and drive American-market versions at the famous Fuji Speedway Grand Prix road racing course, and come away much more impressed. Visually, a pair of aerodynamic mirrors take

care of that bothersome beltline break, rear side marker lamps fit nicely into what had been contrived-looking rear fender vents, and trim and detailing seem a bit cleaner to our taste. We still can't get used to the couple's rear appearance, but the hatchback and Supra begin to grow on us as we discover what the mechanicals underneath can do.

The four-cylinder Celica is a half-inch longer, an inch wider and over an inch taller than the car it replaces and fairly bristles with new features and engineering refinements. It has wider treads front and rear, a bit more front leg- and headroom, rack-and-pinion steering replacing the former recirculating ball and vented front disc brakes vs. the previous solid discs. The slick Liftback is as aerodynamic as it looks with Cd of 0.34 in Toyota's own wind tunnel—but this is not directly comparable to American drag coefficients, which tend to run higher due to differences in facilities, test procedures and data reduction techniques.

Driving the new Celicas, though, is not a whole lot different from driving the old ones because neither the suspension design nor the powertrain is significantly changed. The 2.4-liter overhead-cam four-cylinder engine (which Toyota





builds especially for the American market) puts out the same willing 96-hp at 4800 RPM and the same 129 ft-lb of torque at 2800 RPM as it did before. The MacPherson-strut front and live-axle, coil-spring rear suspensions give about the same ride and low-speed handling. In all, the whole feeling is very familiar: competent and adequate but less than thrilling.

But there is better response from the new rack-and-pinion steering, and the cars seemed to corner better around the speedway than I expected . . . due partly to the increased tread widths and largely, we suspect, to the better-than-stock tires that were fitted to our Fuji test cars. The interior, of course, is all-new and very nice, with a full set of attractive and functional gauges in

the panel, fairly tasteful decor and trim and a new heating system that allows left/right mixing so both driver and passenger are comfortable. There's also, at last, almost enough legroom for long-legged American drivers. The only two sour notes are the trendy inverted "V" steering hub (I still think there should be horizontal spokes for proper, hooked-thumb driving) and a flip-up ashtray lid that interferes with the radio controls.

But the new Supra, folks, is a whole different animal compared to the old. First off, it's motivated by a fuel injected, 145-hp, 2.8-liter *double-overhead cam* six-cylinder engine. It's supported by modified MacPherson strut front and semi-trailing-arm independent rear suspension, guide by variable-assist

power rack-and-pinion steering and halted by four-wheel ventilated disc brakes. It delivers power through a choice of five-speed manual or four-speed overdrive automatic transmission and a standard limited-slip differential, and it sees with pop-up halogen headlamps. Inside are a space-age, eight-way adjustable driver's seat with an air-bladder lumbar adjuster, video-game-look LED tachometer, digital speedometer and graphic fuel and temperature indicators, a five-speaker home-quality stereo system and a super trip computer.

Toyota built its first DOHC engine in 1965 for a prototype of the beautiful 2000 GT sports car and began selling twin-cam sixes and fours in production cars two years later. Since that time, some 400,000 twin-cam Toyota engines have been produced for both street and racing cars. This latest version has 25% more horsepower and 7% more torque than last year's same-displacement SOHC Supra six.

We had no opportunity for straight-line acceleration testing at Fuji, but Toyota says the Supra does 0-100 Kph (62 mph) in 8.8 seconds and a quarter-mile from rest in 16.4 seconds. Subjectively, though, we felt the new six's power was inadequate—especially at off-the-line low RPM—considering the cost and complexity of its DOHC valvetrain. Another 15 or 20 hp would be very helpful in properly propelling the Supra's 2,910-lbs. On the other hand, the 5-speed manual transmission is excellent, the 4-speed lockup automatic is one of the industry's best, and the 4-wheel disc brakes performed exceptionally well (in both stopping power and stability) on lap after lap of the track.

By far the Supra's best feature is its handling. The front MacPhersons have their springs offset from the strut centerlines for lower friction and less binding, and there's twice as much caster as before for improved on-center steering feel. The variable-boost (less assist at higher speed) power rack-and-pinion is remarkably better in feel and response than the old recirculating ball, and the fully-independent rear suspension far more agile than the previous live axle. More impressive even than its ultimate cornering power is the new chassis' balance and stability. The front is easy to turn into a corner at speed, yet the





rear is near-impossible to trick into the surprise oversteer typical of many trailing-arm designs.

Frosting on the '82 Supra cake is a serious-looking, fat-tired, flared-fendered performance version that needs only the aforementioned extra horsepower to be a modern-day Japanese Trans-Am or Z-28. It sports the Celica's full set of analog gauges instead of the regular Supra's gee-whiz instrumentation and has a big sunshade over the back window that looks like some kind of racy spoiler.

In general, the Supra's cockpit is basically the Celica's with more flash and gadgetry to play with. Some of us liked the Star Wars video dashboard while others didn't, but its largest real deficiency was a lack of any sort of oil pressure or electrical system (volt or amp) gauges. The incredible eight-way seat sets a new industry standard for adjustability—fore/aft, recline, headrest vertical, headrest fore/aft, seat height, thigh support, side support and air-bag lumbar—and, once adjusted, it's incredibly supportive and comfortable. It's also standard equipment. There's a little rubber squeeze pump to inflate the lumbar bladder and three buttons on the side bolster to exhaust air in just the right places to conform precisely to your shape and preference. Another gimmick, perhaps, but a damned clever and useful one.

The radio, in recent Japanese fashion, is marvelous in its home-set



Author Witzenburg receives a few pointers about the Fuji Circuit from Dan Gurney. Or is it the other way 'round?

look, sound and complexity (but spoke only Japanese at Fuji speedway), and there's a built-in trip computer that could be a wonderfully useful toy. We couldn't figure it out at the track, but we presume that reading the owner's manual would help.

The neatest gadget of all, however, a "Navicom" computer-controlled electronic compass that graphically displays direction and distance to a pre-coded destination, is for the Japanese home market only at first. Perhaps they can't produce enough Navicom's this year to offer them in export cars. Or maybe they figure we wouldn't understand it yet.

One fascinating facet of this preview was the intense interest both Toyota and the Japanese press showed in *our* opinions. "What do you like about the car? What don't you like? Which color is best? How is the variable-assist steering?" And on. And on. They took notes, sometimes through interpreters, and recorded our comments on tape, film and video tape. Obviously, these cars' acceptance in the U.S. market is very important to Toyota; and, as Japan's largest automaker, what's important to Toyota is vitally important to Japan.

The U.S. Toyota folks even brought All American Racer Dan Gurney along for his opinion. One of our country's best all-time drivers and car builders, Gurney is also one of the sports' all-time nice guys. A big, handsome, blond-haired, blue-eyed, grown-up California kid (from New Jersey), Gurney had a wonderful time at the Fuji track, racing around and blowing our doors off in the rain and fog. Like us, he got hooked on Japan's endless variety of electronic games and gimmicks, not to mention its people and their hospitality, and grinned and laughed throughout the trip, ingratiated himself to everyone. He also liked the cars.

Toyota likes to think its new Supra is competition for the likes of Datsun's 280-ZX, Mazda's RX-7 and Porsche's 924 Turbo. We're not so sure; but watch out, Mustang, Camaro and Firebird!

