

# USA '85: ALL THE NEW CARS

CORVETTE IN EUROPE: NEW TECH BLITZES THE OLD WORLD

# MOTOR TREND

'85 PREVIEW TESTS

CAVALIER Z24 V-6

SHELBY CHARGER TURBO

210-HP MUSTANG GT

LE BARON GTS TURBO

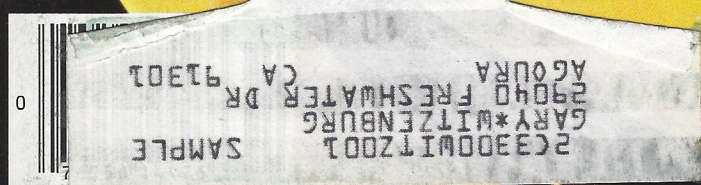
BUICK SOMERSET REGAL

OCTOBER 1984

## F=FASTER FANTASIES

GM'S F-CARS FOR 1985

Port-Injected Trans Am  
215-hp IROC-Z







# 1985 Chrysler LeBaron GTS

A Winner  
in all but name

by Gary Witzenburg

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID FRANKLIN

**Q**uick . . . cover the picture. This is a snap quiz. Question One: In 25 words or less, what's a Chrysler LeBaron?

If you said something like: "Solid, conservative sedan for people over 50," you've been paying attention.

Question Two: What's a LeBaron GTS?

"Ah," you say, "a new high-performance version of the same solid, conservative sedan."

Nice try, but guess again.

The '85 LeBaron GTS (Grand Touring Sport) is Chrysler's answer to state-of-the-art mid-size front-drive sedans like the Honda Accord and Mazda 626. In optional turbocharged form, its closest domestic competitor is the Pontiac 6000 STE. Code-named H-body and offered as a 5-door hatchback only, it replaces the Chrysler E-Class, which was really a stretched LeBaron. Though it sits on the late E-Class' 103-in. wheelbase and offers the same impressive interior room, that's where the resemblance ends.

Mechanically and philosophically, this misnomered sports sedan (like its Dodge Lancer sibling) is more of a 4-door Laser than anything resembling a "LeBaron." It shares the Laser/Daytona's powertrains (base 99-hp injected 2.2 or optional 150-hp port-in-

jected turbo 2.2; 5-speed manual or optional 3-speed automatic) and most of its excellent suspension. A preliminary test of a loaded GTS Turbo 5-speed at Chrysler's Chelsea, Michigan, proving ground produced a 9.28-sec 0-60, a 16.87-sec quarter mile, and a very impressive 60-0 stopping distance of 139 ft. Chrysler engineers say they've seen 0-60s in the 7.5 range and lateral g up to 0.85 with 5-speed Turbo pre-production prototypes.

Styling is on the conservative side of contemporary: smooth and fairly slick, with a "fast" (for a sedan) 58° windshield and a 0.37 drag coefficient. Hatchbacks are not especially common in this class—which may be why the designers shaped the body more like a conventional 4-door—but there's more than 18 cu ft of useable room under the lid and another 24 with the rear seat folded down and the cargo cover removed. Trim is nicely restrained compared to other "LeBarons," but we'd still prefer a bit less brightwork, inside and out.

The standard Road Touring suspension is surprisingly taut, firm, and responsive, without being harsh. A check of the specs reveals why: gas-pressurized front struts and rear shocks, a 1.06-in. solid front anti-roll

bar, a 1.14-in. hollow rear bar, a lateral track bar to control the trailing-arm beam rear axle, fast-ratio (14:1) power rack-and-pinion steering with a "precision response" valve to enhance road feel, and P185/70R14 all-weather (Goodyear Vector or Michelin XA4) steel-belted blackwall radials. That's better than a lot of "handling package" setups.

An optional Sport Handling package uses the same front and rear bars with higher-control gas struts and shocks, higher-rate springs, and P195/70R14 Goodyear Eagle GTs. Then there's Sport Handling II, which adds to that a set of P205/60HR15 Eagle GTs on 15-in. Shelby-type cast aluminum wheels. Bottom line: The base car goes where it's pointed with little fuss, minimum lean, good feel, and excellent wheel control; the middle option is just short of terrific; the ultimate package sticks like a Velcro fastener. All three ride nicely and are forgiving at the limit.

Inside, the base seats are Laser/Daytona-style, mild in side support (for middle-class backsides) yet comfy and nicely contoured, and their backs recline in precise 1° increments. There's full instrumentation—nice, round, readable analog gauges with a



## In sport Handling II trim, the LeBaron sticks like a Velcro fastener

7000-rpm tach, 85-mph (arghh!) speedo, and trip odo—in a shaded binacle. The deep, bib-type glovebox has coin slots and an easy-access fuse panel inside. There are storage bins in the door panels and an open cubby-box in the console. An innovative double cup-holder folds out from the dash. Power accessory controls are fingertip handy. Cable-type remote fuel door and hatch release are on the floor, just left and forward of the driver's seat. The latter locks, as does the rear seatback, for cargo security.

The heater-A/C panel is all-new, with soft-touch mode buttons and precision-feel fan and temperature levers—a *huge* improvement over Chrysler's nasty old pushbutton panel of recent years. Radios also have a modern new look and improved control functions. The only ergonomic sore point is the old-fashioned, unattractive, and somewhat clumsy multi-function (washer/wiper/cruise and turn signal) corporate control stalk. An uplevel model comes with a 60/40 split rear seatback and a bunch more standard equipment, and among the

more notable options are a well-executed digi-graphic instrument cluster, a multi-adjustable premium driver's seat (with or without leather up-

holstery), and a 12-function trip computer, a much-improved (mum until there's *good reason* to speak) Voice Alert, and an Ultimate Sound stereo AM/FM/cassette six-speaker radio (stereo in both bands) with graphic equalizer and a balance control.

How did such a car get stuck with the old LeBaron moniker? Why would they want to associate it with those other *totally different* LeBaron models? "The name surveyed well," they tell us. "It had good Chrysler identification." (Yes, but as *what*?) Considering that the other final candidates were "Commander" (an old Studebaker name) and "Laser Sedan" (can you picture a Camaro or Mustang Sedan?), we can understand the choice.

You can almost see the marketing guys sitting around the table, negotiating with the product planners: "We'll give you the full instrumentation and gas shocks if you'll give us the LeBaron name and the bright-look dash."

Oh, well. You can always remove the badges.

MT

### DATA

#### Chrysler Le Baron GTS

##### POWERTRAIN

Vehicle configuration	.....Front engine, front drive
Engine configuration	.....L-4, OHC
Displacement	.....2113 cc (135 cu in.)
Max. power (SAE net)	.....150 hp @ 5600 rpm
Max torque (SAE net)	.....168 lb-ft @ 3800 rpm
Transmission	.....5-sp. man.
Final drive	.....2.57:1

##### CHASSIS

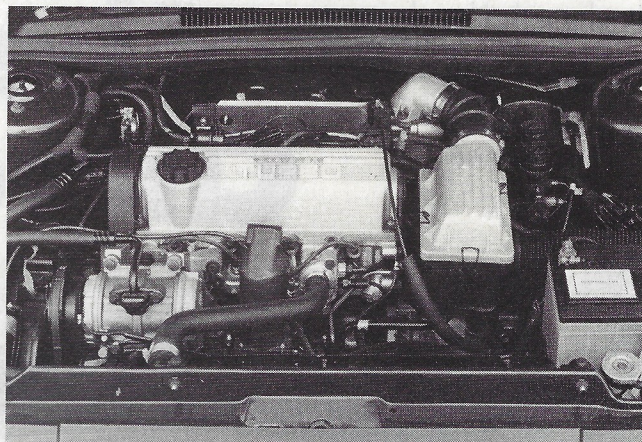
Suspension, f/r	.....Independent/beam axle
Brakes, f/r	.....Disc/drum
Steering	.....Rack and pinion
Wheels	.....15 x 6.0-in. alloy
Tires	.....P195/60VR15

##### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	.....2618 mm (103.1 in.)
Overall length	.....4581 mm (180.3 in.)
Curb weight	.....1179 kg (2600 lb)
Fuel capacity	.....53.0 L (14.0 gal)

##### PERFORMANCE

0-60 mph	.....9.28 sec
Standing quarter mile	.....16.87 sec/79.2 mph
Braking, 60-0	.....139 ft
Skidpad	.....0.85 g



Kudos for the LeBaron GTS' comprehensive and easy to read instrumentation, but the brushed chrome dash trim in evidence everywhere is right out of Grandad's Newport Fordor hardtop. The optional 2.2-liter turbo, now producing 150 hp, is able to propel the GTS through the quarter mile in under 17 sec. The turbo comes with manual or automatic gearboxes.