

# Turbo Quattro, Chevy Corvette top 'Witz's

By Gary Witzenburg

Let's make one thing clear right up front:

Every year I test a lot of cars, sweat a lot of details and statistics and come up with the "10 Best Buys." A "Best Buy" is the one car in its class that best combines all the virtues that most of us want in our vehicles — everything from performance and pizzazz to quality, economy and value for the buck.

The best buys are carefully considered objective choices, but they are not necessarily major favorites of mine. Some I love, some I like, some I'm not especially fond of — at least as transportation for myself.

Then again, each year the editors also want a few words on my own special favorites. The cars I'd most like to be marooned with on a desert island full of fun moun-

tain roads. The ones that look and feel the best to me, that make me feel the best, that get my adrenelin flowing like white wine at a Yuppie wedding.

OK, fair enough. Just remember, these are not best buys. They are simply "Witz's Picks" — purely subjective choices made without regard to price or practicality. In alphabetical order, then, here are the year's top 10 in my book.

**1. Audi 5000CS Turbo Quattro** — Audi's ultra-aero 5000S has been a special favorite ever since its '83 introduction. It's a lovely, comfortable, quiet sedan that rivals Jaguar's classic XJ6 and Ford's new Taurus and Sable as the world's most beautiful four-door. The Turbo-boosted version that followed in '84 is sweeter still. But it's the 158-horsepower, all-wheel-drive, ABS-braked 5000CS Turbo Quattro that revs my motor closest to the red line. The ultimate all-weather cruiser in sedan or wagon variations for a bit over \$31,000.

**2. Chevrolet Corvette Convertible** — A year ago Chevy's starship Corvette got ABS anti-lock brakes, a sophisticated anti-theft system and (drum-roll, please) a beautiful and beautifully engineered new convertible model. The first factory drop-top Corvette in a decade, it won affluent jaded hearts from Boston to Beverly Hills.

Improvements for '87 include low-friction roller lifters for the 230-horse V-8 engine and an optional electronic low-tire-pressure warning system. On the country's road racing tracks, Chevy's plastic fantastic Corvette has terrorized Porsches with 12 straight wins and two straight championships in the Escort Endurance pro series. On the streets and highways, it's performance-competitive with nearly anything built at roughly \$28,500 for the coupe, \$33,600 for the convertible.

**3. Ford Thunderbird Turbo Coupe** — This sexy Euro-coupe paved the way in 1983 for Ford's now-famous, industry-leading "aero-look" styling. Then it re-

ached for super-coupe status with a fat-tired, athletically inclined Turbo version just a few months later. This year it fully achieves that exalted level thanks to a subtle but effective face lift, interior upgrades and a hefty boost in power to 190 horses. The new turbo engine is now intercooled, the brakes are ABS anti-lock and the super-suspension electronically adjusts itself from "normal" to "firm" exactly when you want it to. About \$17,000 for America's best-looking, best-built, best-driving midsize coupe.

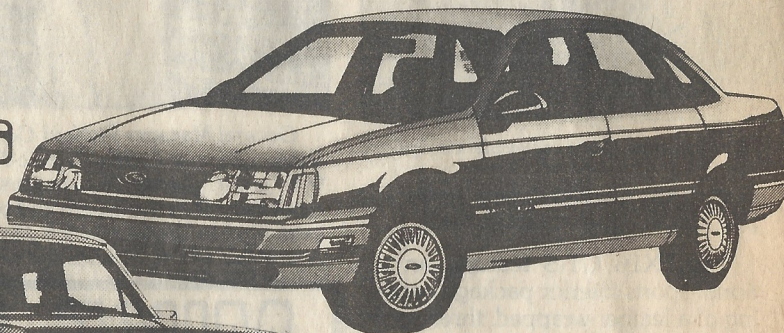
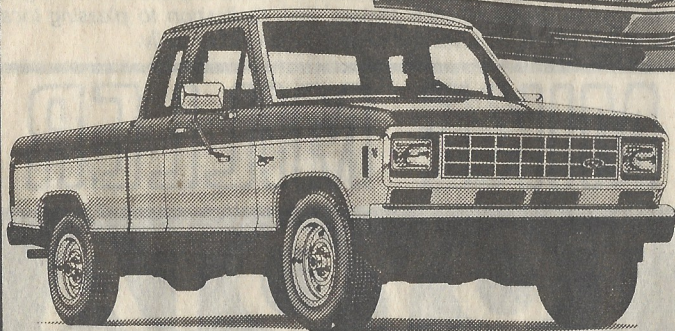
**4. Honda Prelude Si** — Leave it to Honda to take what was already one of the world's finest-handling front-drive coupes and make it even more desirable. Compared to the standard 1.8-liter Prelude, the fuel-injected 2.0-liter Si boasts an added intake valve per cylinder (for better breathing), standard air conditioning, larger tires on alloy wheels, body-colored front airdam and rear spoiler, premium stereo, power windows and mirrors, power four-wheel disc brakes, cruise control and more for about \$15,000. That's a cool two grand higher than a year ago, but still worth it.

**5. Lincoln Mark VII LSC** — Lincoln's elegantly sleek luxury coupe started out terrific and keeps getting better. It may not be made in Germany, but there's no smoother-riding, tauter-handling, better-equipped or more driver-friendly challenger in its class at anywhere near the LSC's price.

Horsepower was bumped to an even 200 last year thanks to new port fuel injection, roller hydraulic lifters and other improvements to the 5.0-liter V-8 engine. Anti-lock

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## s Picks'

brakes are standard on all Mark VIs, and the LSC has analog gauges for serious-driver credibility. About \$25,000.

**6. Mazda RX-7 Turbo** — While Germany's Porsche is the accepted leader in the sports-car class, and Chevy's Corvette is the only serious U.S. rival, Mazda of Japan last year suddenly rose to the challenge with its excellent all-new RX-7... then raised the stakes still higher with a midyear Turbo version.

The latest and hottest RX-7 even resembles Porsche's popular 944 in front, and its turbocharged, intercooled and fuel-injected rotary engine puts out an impressive 182 horses — good for sub-seven-second zero-to-60 runs and a cool 140 flat out. The racing-type four-wheel power disc brakes (with optional ABS for '87) are superb, and the trick rear suspension toes its outside rear wheel slightly outward to help turn you into a corner, then points it slightly inward for super stability through the turn. Prices start around \$14,000 and top out at just over 20 Gs for the thrill-a-minute Turbo.

**7. Mercedes-Benz 300E** — This magnificent midsize sedan just has to be the world's best overall. Besides its outstanding handling and road manners, its solidity and quality of construction, its high equipment level and interior quiet, comfort and roominess for five, the 300E is also a graceful piece of automotive art — except for an awkward-looking rear end.

The smooth 3.0-liter six delivers 177 Teutonic horses and can launch it from rest to 60 in eight seconds flat and to a top speed of 135 mph. ABS brakes and a supplemental restraint system (driver's-side airbag and an automatic belt-tensioner for the right-front passenger) are standard. Turbodiesel sedan and wagon versions (300D and 300TD) and a lower-priced 260E powered by a slightly smaller gas engine have expanded the line, but the 300E remains the class of its class at \$39,000.

**8. Mercury Sable** — Ford Motor Co. assumed styling leadership in America, if not the world, a year ago with its Ford Taurus and Mercury Sable midsize sedans and wagons. Of the two, Mercury's Sable is the most bold and futuristic. Instead of a grille, there's a full-width "light bar" in front. Roof pillars are hidden under flush glass. Drag coefficient is an impressive .32, and the gorgeous wagon is wind tunnel-rated at .34.

Controls are beautifully ergonomic, convenience features abound and there's spaciousness for six inside. A 140-horse port-injected V-6 provides more than adequate motivation, while a supple, long-travel, fully independent suspension (there's even a completely different space-saving rear suspension just for the wagon) handles bumps and curves with the world's finest. Under \$13,000 base.

**9. Porsche 944 Turbo** — Not content to field a single variation of its class-leading midrange sports car, Porsche now offers no fewer than four. Bottom of the heap is the \$21,900 "entry level" 924S, a happy combination of 944 mechanicals with the old (but more aerodynamic) 924 body and a fairly spartan interior.

Then comes the \$25,500 regular 944 with its ruggedly handsome blister-fendered body, larger wheels and tires and a much improved second-generation cabin. Then the \$28,250 944S, powered by a new 16-valve version of the 944's 2.5-liter four. The extra two valves per cylinder help to raise its power from 147 to 188 horses and lower its zero-to-60 squirt from 8.3 to 7.7 seconds. Top-of-the-heap, however, is the wonderful 944 Turbo. Considering its 217 horsepower (from the same 2.5 liters), its 6.1-second zero-to-60 punch and its 152 mph top end, you can almost understand its \$33,250 sticker. Can't you?

**10. Saab 9000 Turbo** — Saab's sleek 9000 hatchback sedan must have the industry's roomiest interior for such a modest exterior size. Measuring just 182 inches on a leggy 105-inch wheelbase, it was last year's only import sedan classified as a "large car" by the EPA (for emissions and fuel economy testing purposes) based on its total interior volume.

But there's a lot more than room and comfort under the 9000's shapely Swedish skin. Saab was the first modern practitioner of affordable turbo power nearly a decade ago, and its latest intercooled, electronically injected and computer controlled turbo four-cylinder engine gets a hefty 160 horses from 2.0 liters. Handling, ride and braking are also superb, and the 9000 suffers from none of the eccentricity of the quick but quirky 900-series Saabs. The Turbo sells for just over \$20,000, the new-for-'87 non-turbo 9000S for slightly under.