



HONDA CRX Si

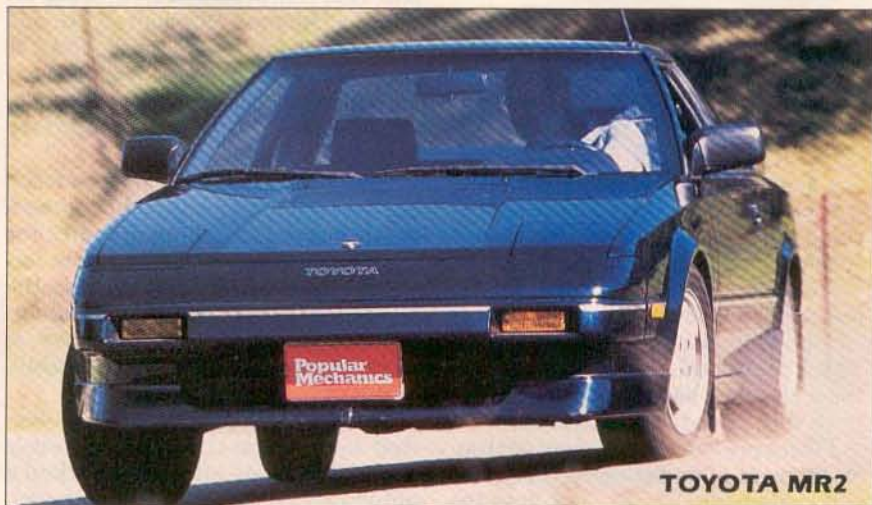
particularly when the day's activities entailed the unwinding of mountain roads. The Honda's solidly bolstered buckets kept drivers squarely in front of the wheel, regardless of what was going on outside, and if there was any criticism to be made it was for a bit too much enthusiasm: We're sure that some drivers will find their seats to be on the firm side for long hauls.

Typically Honda, all controls are almost perfectly located, giving first-time drivers a sense of instant intimacy. However, visibility, normally another Honda strong suit, was somewhat limited in the rear quarters and the new glass panel, below the hatch opening, is useful only in backup maneuvers. The CRX Si didn't exactly seduce anyone with its looks, either. Though undeniably functional, its lines seemed distinctly offbeat in contrast to the other members of the test fleet, and there were those who said they preferred the jaunty rollerskate look of the shorter original.

However, when it comes to assessing sports cars the critical portions of the anatomy are well below the vision center, and the new CRX Si satisfies these regions double in spades.

Hauled by a new sohc 4-valve engine that makes 11 hp more than the previous Si powerplant, the CRX soon established itself as the quickest member of the primary foursome in quarter-mile runs, even though 0 to 60 times weren't quite as good as we'd expected. The 1.6 pulls manfully across a remarkably broad range—unlike most multivalves, the torque peak is a commendably low 2000 rpm—and isn't as busy-sounding as Toyota's otherwise excellent 1.6.

Handling was a strong point for the original CRX, and it's continued here. The suspension has been revised, with Honda's double-wishbone system front and rear, the wheelbase has been stretched 4 in. and the track is



TOYOTA MR2

wider by 1.4 in. front, 2 in. at the rear.

All of this adds up to a package that's wonderfully stable at any speed, as predictable as the seasons and utterly devoid of vices. Though the variable ratio steering has acquired annoyingly high effort, it is as precise as the original, with plenty of feel. Braking performance also measures up to this high level of achievement—again, the best of the group—and if this isn't a combat-ready showroom stock racer right out of the box, we never saw one.

Mazda RX-7 GTU

Though it lost some character and gained some weight in the transition from original to second generation (1986), the RX-7 has also evolved into one of the most user-friendly sports cars you're likely to find anywhere. Its balance rivals the delightful little MR2, though it's a good deal more forgiving and feels generally more sophisticated.

The GTU is the sport edition of the RX-7 family, with slightly stiffer suspension and a little less in the way of luxu appointments. The GTU design-

nation commemorates Mazda's long domination of the International Motor Sports Assn. (IMSA) GTU (for GT under 3.0 liters) racing class, but as the test results indicate, the on-track heritage is well insulated.

Part of the problem lies with this car's engine. Rotary engines are historically anemic in the low-end torque department, and the RX-7's twin-rotor 13B runs true to the breed. It takes some buzzing to get the car launched and a certain amount of rowing around in the excellent 5-speed gearbox to stay in the sweet part of the powerband.

On the other hand, the rotary is among the most pleasant traveling companions devised by man, one of those rare engines that require con-

stant tach checks, to make sure it's still running. Calling the RX-7 smooth is like calling Brigitte Nielsen attractive. It only nibbles at the edges of reality.

The rotary engine is central to a sense of refinement that pervades the entire car. Although the second generation RX-7 is derivative in terms of styling, it is beautifully finished within and without. The seating drew the top rating in this group, for its comfort, appearance and wide range of adjustability, and Mazda's flash orange control markings lend a distinctive appearance to the instrument panel.

Leg and headroom are plentiful, and even though the RX-7 is outclassed by the CRX in cargo volume, it's the only other car in this group that allows the option of more than overnight luggage.

As we suggested earlier, the RX-7 is a gratifyingly precise and predictable instrument for dissecting a stretch of mountain switchbacks. Its rear suspension, consisting of trailing arms, floating hubs and camber control links, is the most sophisticated