

Fast Paced



Hot Lapping Indy in Pontiac's 138-mph Fiero Pace Car

By Leonard Emanuelson

To the average car enthusiast a pace car is just another decal-laden special edition that carries with it a couple of extra grand on the sticker price and the hope "someday it'll be worth a lot of money." This proliferation of pace cars from NASCAR, CART, and USAC causes plenty of confusion about which car is the pace car. Undoubtedly, the most prestigious pace car is the one chosen to lead the pack at Indy. Automakers lobby for the distinction about 2½

years in advance. The qualifications usually stipulate the car be a new (interesting) model and capable of running 125 mph and stopping from 125 mph in 500 feet in modified condition.

And while some cars are natural contenders for the pace car chores, like the Fiero, some are not, and factory engineering teams and performance groups are put through months of agony making the cars perform up to the standards. The Fiero brings a lot of firsts to the Indy Pace Car program. It is the first 4-cylinder pace car since 1912. It's also the first mid-engined pace car. And, even more startling, this is the fastest pace car, by a wide margin, ever to circle the brickyard.

Not quite what you would expect from a diminutive 4-banger. When reported lap speeds of 138 mph started

filtering around the speedway, you could hear the murmuring: "Man, that little turbo Fiero sure does run," and "They must be running that prototype V6." Not the case. In fact, the 138 mph lap averages have been achieved with a normally aspirated 4-banger with a 2-barrel Holley carb. The engine package is a mild version of Pontiac's Super Duty displacing 165 c.i.d. and producing 232 horsepower. More power is available, but the Fiero so far exceeds requirements now that the driveability (which is excellent) need not be compromised.

The success the Fiero is enjoying as a pace car is no accident. Before the Fiero was even introduced to the public, an off-highway performance and race program was initiated. A "total" Super Duty parts program with cooper-