

(engines, transmissions, suspensions) as possible. Once Pontiac sealed the bargain with the preposterous-sounding promise of 50 mpg on the EPA highway test, the division's talented Turk was off and running. He filled his shopping cart with Pontiac's own 2.5-liter engine (a.k.a. Iron Duke), two X-car transaxles (a three-speed automatic and a four-speed manual), one front suspension from the Chevette, another from the X-car, seat hardware from the J-car, mirrors from the Firebird, etc., etc.

A few inventions were also necessary. The mill-and-drill process (C/D, August) of attaching plastic body panels to

a sheet-steel unit-construction underbody is the most important one; Aldi-kaci claims this was the solution that made plastic competitive in cost with steel at the anticipated volume of 100,000 cars per year. Beyond this, the P-car is really just a very shrewd shuffling of off-the-shelf components. What's so smart about it is that ordinary front-drive hardware has been redesigned to rear duty, creating a sports car that is both exciting and quite different from any other American-made product.

Of course, it's been done elsewhere before—by Fiat with the X1/9 and by Lancia with the Scorpion. If anything,

Detroit should be scolded for not having picked up on the plan sooner, particularly when you consider that local assembly lines have been pumping out the proper ingredients—transverse four-cylinder powertrains—for the last six model years.

Even with plenty of time to consider the mid-engined adventure, not all was sweetness and light along the road to invention. The Iron Duke is a faithful but heavy servant, as its cognomen suggests. It wears a throttle-body fuel injector on top, but the rest of this engine is right up there on the sophistication scale with anvils and boat anchors. Moreover, the transaxles are much

