



IT'S NOT OFTEN that we test a completely new car, one without any antecedents whatsoever. The Fiero is such a car, without precedent at Pontiac, only the second 2-seater from General Motors and absolutely alone as a U.S.-built mid-engine car. One could ask whether it took a lot of courage for Pontiac to put it into production, or whether its appeal and potential are so strong that the GM division is on to a sure thing. Its novel construction and method of manufacture (see accompanying articles) required a huge investment of money as well as brainpower, and it's obvious that this product is intended to meet the challenges of European and Japanese industry head-on. The sleeping giant is not only stirring, it's stretching its muscles.

Known as the P-car project within GM, as well as to the press during the several years that its development was being revealed in bits and pieces, the 2-seat, mid-engine, 4-cylinder coupe has the designation 2M4 and the marketing name Fiero. An Italian word, *fiero* means "proud" or "dignified." The first definition is appropriate, as the Pontiac engineers, designers and production staff have given their all in bringing it to market; as for the second—well, the car may be just a bit too much fun for that.

In all, R&T staff members drove seven or eight different examples of the Fiero, most of them only briefly but three of them for extended mileage in varying conditions that included race track time at Sears Point, long-distance touring and quick around-town runs. All of the Fieros were pilot machines, that is, cars assembled in advance of regular production but built at the plant from the same machinery at a slower introductory pace. As a result, we noted several problems in the fit or operation of minor components, mostly in the interior, but as none of these problems occurred on more than one car, we didn't feel they were inherent design shortcomings.

At first look, the Fiero says, "Like me." Its size, proportions and styling all generate immediate appeal and we didn't encounter anyone who disliked its appearance. Being built with the X-car drivetrain, it is a wide car at 68.9 in., considering its 93.4-in. wheelbase. This, especially when combined with the P215/60R-14 Eagle GT tires and large wheel houses, gives it a feisty appearance, but an overly aggressive impact is avoided by the smooth, harmonious body contours. (We may see a bit more brawn expressed by the exterior when the higher-performance 2.9-liter turbocharged V-6 version makes its debut, probably as a 1985 model.) The entire body is plastic, of several types varying in rigidity and flexibility; the surfaces and paint were uniformly good as was the panel fit—especially significant given Pontiac's unique mill-and-drill process for maintaining close tolerances at the attachment points. There is little visual evidence of Pontiac heritage: the Fiero badge is all new (although some-

what reminiscent of the Trans Am's hood chicken in the graphic representation of the winged horse) while division identity is confined to the word Pontiac recessed into the left headlight door and rear fascia, and the triangular company emblems on the



AT A GLANCE

	Pontiac Fiero	Fiat X1/9	Mazda RX-7
List price	est \$9000	\$15,990	\$10,895
Curb weight, lb	2590	2160	2445
Engine	inline-4	inline-4	2-rotor Wankel
Transmission	4-sp M	5-sp M	5-sp M
0-60 mph, sec	11.6	12.4	9.7
Standing 1/4 mi, sec	18.2	18.6	17.1
Speed at end of 1/4 mi, mph	72.5	72.0	80.5
Stopping distance from 60 mph, ft	150	141	151
Interior noise at 50 mph, dBA	68	73	71
Lateral acceleration, g	0.812	0.772	0.767
Slalom speed, mph	60.6	60.7	58.6
Fuel economy, mpg	25.0	27.0	21.0
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¹Road & Track's Guide to Sports & GT cars