



FAMILY WHEELS

A Grand Design

2004 Grand Prix reflects all that's new from Pontiac.

BY WILLIAM ROEBUCK

General Motors is trying to shake off an image of heavily cladded cars and middle-of-the-road build quality, and one of the first vehicles to show off the new design effort is the 2004 Pontiac Grand Prix.



Design of new Grand Prix is both sporty and classy.

GM began assembling the Grand Prix in February at its Oshawa Car Assembly Plant 2, which was rated as the top quality plant in North and South America in 2002 in a J.D. Power and Associates Initial Quality Study. The model is arriving in showrooms now.

The design isn't significantly changed

from previous years. Yes, the wide plastic side cladding of old is gone. The new look is like a flashy refreshing. It's most dramatic at the front end, with larger headlight modules and enormous, wide-set owl eyes for fog lamps.

The Grand Prix comes in two versions, the 200-hp GT and the supercharged 260-hp GTP. Both are powered by GM's 3.8-litre 3800 Series II V6 engines. A Competition Group package, available on the GTP, boosts wheel size to 17 in. from 16, adds neat paddle shifters to the steering wheel (to manually force the four-speed automatic to shift up or down), and boasts suspension and handling benefits over the base model.

Hard acceleration in the GTP produces a nice exhaust roar. There's even a subtle rumble from the twin exhaust pipes when the car is idling. Slamming on the brakes brings the Grand Prix to a stop quickly and smoothly.

The appearance is aggressive and sporty, yet clean and classy. The rear window of this four-door, five-passenger sedan slings back coupe-like to a very short trunk.



DID YOU HEAR...?

- Each barrel of crude oil contains 159 L (42 US gal.), which yields 75 L (19 to 20 US gal.) of gasoline.
- An estimated 80% of medical problems are related to stress. Stress is part of daily life and often is useful, but too much unmanaged stress can cause health problems.

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The instruments are large and easy to read.



With the front and rear seats folded, lengthy stuff fits easily.

Actually, that's an illusion. Open the trunk lid and you'll find plenty of space – 453 litres (16 cu. ft.). And there's a bonus. Not only does the split rear seat fold, so does the front passenger seat. It means you can fit in long items such as skis or lengths of two-by-fours. Also, the trunk opening is almost 10 in. wider than before, with a lower lift-over height. I watched as GM staff slid a 2.7-m (9-ft.) long plastic kayak into the car through the trunk and closed all the doors. It made me conjure up the term SUS (for sport utility sedan) because of that cargo-carrying versatility.

Another tribute to space is rear doors that open really wide. Despite the coupe styling, I was able to get into the rear seat comfortably, though I expect anyone close to 6 ft. tall wouldn't be contented.

Up front, the leather-clad seats are comfortable and supportive. The layout of instruments and controls appears well

thought-out. Many of the controls have been rubberized to give them a soft feel. Most of the surfaces are matte instead of shiny.

"We've taken North America's favourite midsize performance sedan and raised the bar," says Peter Bannon, director of vehicle marketing for General Motors of Canada. "Grand Prix has always been a breakthrough car for Pontiac. The '97 Grand Prix broke the mold by bringing coupe styling to the sedan market, and by setting new benchmarks in handling with its Wide Track system. With its muscular styling and emphasis on total performance, the 2004 Grand Prix is an ideal choice for those who are truly passionate about driving."

After my brief test drive, I see little reason to disagree. 🌿

■ *William Roebuck is Editor of Home Digest.*