

COMPARISON TEST \$15,000 CHEAP SKATES

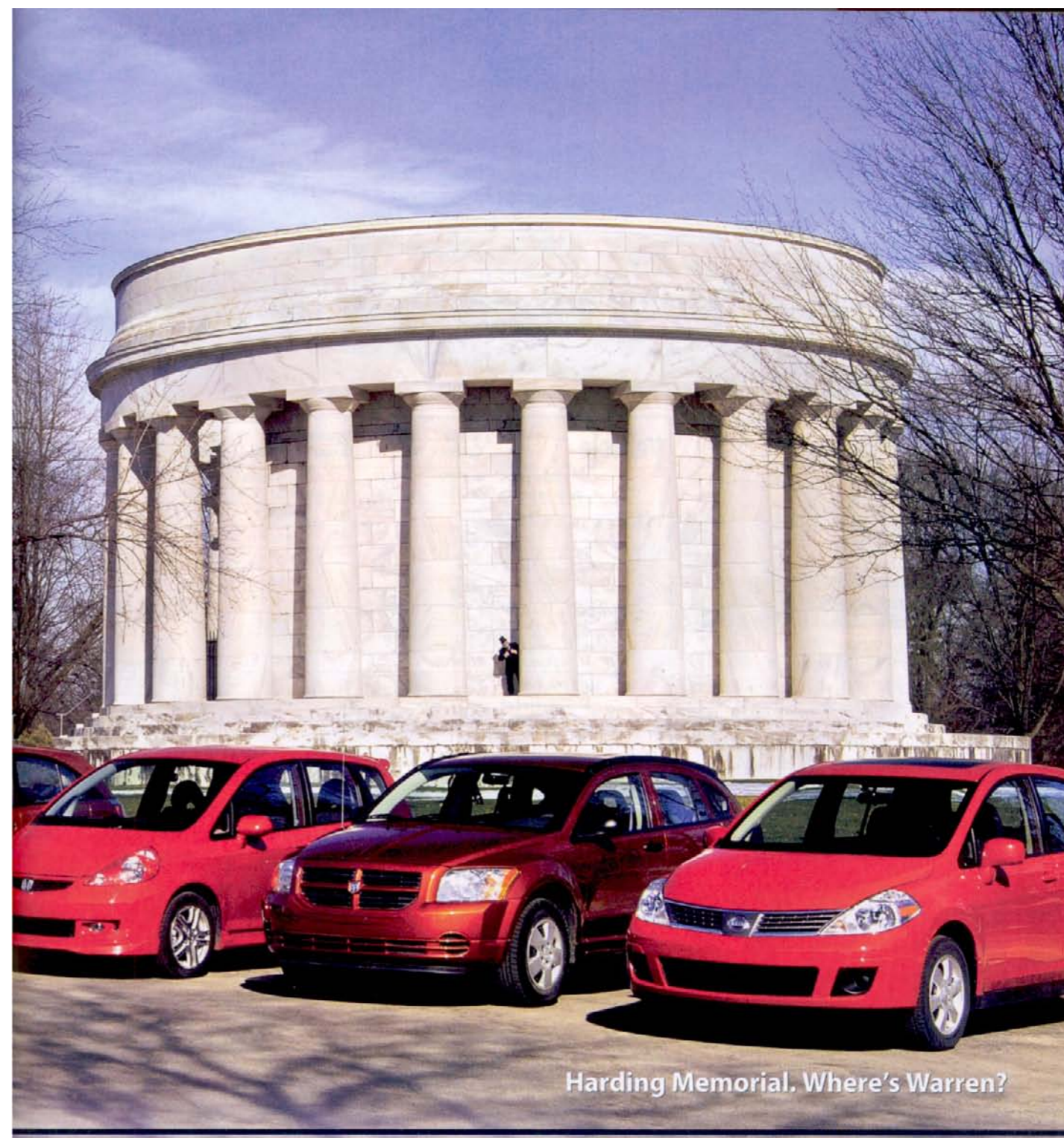


Dodge Caliber SE
Honda Fit Sport
Hyundai Accent GLS
Kia Rio5 SX
Nissan Versa 1.8SL
Suzuki Reno
Toyota Yaris S

Seven economobiles seek fame (but no one's fortune) on the trail of seven presidents from Ohio.

BY JOHN PHILLIPS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON KILEY



Harding Memorial. Where's Warren?

Our goal was to drop monofilament line and sharpened hook into the vehicular stream, then wait to see how many bottom feeders would rise to the bait. Actually, "bottom feeders" proved an unfair descriptor. We're talkin' \$15,000 entry-level economobiles here, a niche recently stirred into vibrancy by the threat of three-dollar fuel. What we learned is that this species is no longer the domain of the "penalty box," a term previously applied to the desperate duds of yore.

Remember the Yugo?

Today, there exist econoboxes aplenty with base prices in the \$15,000 region, including the Chevy Cobalt, Ford Focus, and Honda Civic. Properly equipped, though, those models can easily empty wallets to the tune of 18 grand. And the truth is, we were more curious about the extra-petite newcomers—the Dodge Caliber, the Honda Fit, the Nissan Versa, and the Toyota Yaris. We asked for a new Aveo sedan, but Chevy says it won't be ready for months.

Then we fleshed out our school of guppies with more familiar fish—the Suzuki Reno, the Hyundai Accent, and the Kia Rio.

With that, we had an artful group of seven, perfect for touring the birthplaces of the seven Presidents who hail from Ohio. This 1000-mile clockwise trek, during which our contestants averaged an honorable 31 mpg, led us across the top of the state and down through the steel triangle of Niles, Youngstown, and Akron. We raced past the capitol in Columbus, then



along the muddy Ohio River from Portsmouth to Cincinnati. And then we beat it north, in a straight shot paralleling the Indiana border. In all, we spent four days zinging front-drive inline-fours connected to manual transmissions, stopping every few hours to explain ourselves to not-very-amused museum curators with blue hair.

**Seventh Place
Suzuki Reno**

The Suzuki Reno is actually a rebadged Daewoo, but at least it possesses one jet-set attribute: styling by Italdesign-Giugiaro. Whether the Reno was named after a crusty city in western Nevada or after a former attorney general is unclear, but the car remains largely flavorless.

We carped about its gooey shifter, which felt like a hemp rope attached to plastic forks. Ditto the lifeless steering,

Vehicle	Dodge Caliber	Honda Fit	Hyundai Accent	Kia Rio5	Nissan Versa	Suzuki Reno	Toyota Yaris	
base price/ price as tested	\$13,985/ \$15,185	\$15,000*/ \$15,000	\$12,995/ \$14,560	\$14,040/ \$14,510	\$13,000*/ \$15,500	\$13,879/ \$13,879	\$13,905/ \$15,255	
dimensions, in	length	173.8	157.4	168.5	158.1	169.1	169.3	
	width	68.8	66.2	66.7	66.7	67.9	66.5	
	height	60.4	60.0	57.9	57.9	60.4	56.7	
	wheelbase	103.7	96.5	98.4	98.4	102.4	100.4	
	track, front/rear	59.8/59.8	57.3/57.1	57.9/57.9	57.9/57.5	58.3/58.5	58.3/57.9	
	weight, pounds	2999	2481	2587	2567	2742	2790	2377
weight distribution, % front/rear		57.5/42.5	61.5/38.5	61.7/38.3	61.7/38.3	59.2/40.8	62.0/38.0	59.5/40.5
	fuel tank, gallons	13.6	10.8	11.9	11.9	13.2	14.5	11.1
recommended octane rating	87	87	87	87	87	87	87	
interior volume, cu ft	front	52	52	52	52	52	49	
	rear	43	38	40	40	43	38	
	cargo, seats up/down	19/48	21/42	12/32*	16/50	18/50	9/45	13/32*

*Estimated. **Best in test.**

which tracked okay but never telegraphed road surfaces, nor did it reveal much about the poor front Kumhros, which were yawling by the time we reached the end of each President's driveway. In the Reno's favor were swift performance (best top-gear acceleration, and it tied the Fit for quickest sprint to 60 mph), vast suspension travel, and a pillowy ride. The downside was dive, squat, roll, yaw—an encyclopedia of body motions.

This Suzuki too vociferously advertised its modest roots, from the cheap rubber accordion surrounding its wiper and turn-signal stalks, to the tinkling of pebbles striking its undercarriage, to the six shades of gray in its cockpit. What's more, the Reno tied for the worst braking and greatest engine NVH.

At least it was fitted with a wide, firm front seat, with a long cushion and superb adjustability. The commodious driver's footwell was distinguished by a dead pedal both fat and perfectly positioned. And the Reno was also quick, with a flexible powertrain that minimized the need to row its rosy shifter. Otherwise, the Reno deserves a place on airport rental lots, where it will serve reliably and economically and be forgotten by check-in.

**Sixth Place
Dodge Caliber SE**

The Caliber is the longest, widest, and heaviest vehicle in this comparo, but its 1.8-liter engine (two larger sizes are avail-

Suzuki Reno

Highs: Strong performance, spacious front footwells, comfortable seats, pillowy ride.

Lows: Spongy shifter, a queen of roll and yaw, too obviously an economy car.

The Verdict: Acceptably good at everything, superb at nothing.



Dodge Caliber and Garfield.



JAMES A. GARFIELD, 20th President.

Born in 1831 in a log cabin near Mentor, Ohio, Garfield went on to become a brigadier general in the Civil War, then became the leading Republican in the House without ever taking a \$70,000 golfing trip with Jack Abramoff.

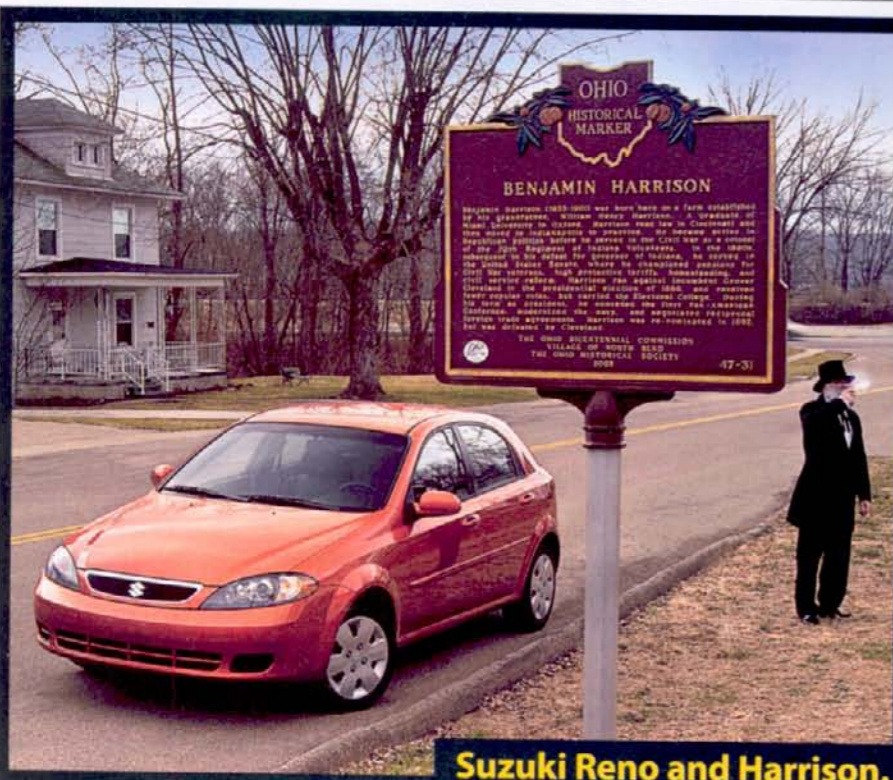
As President, Garfield is best remembered for reigning in New York Senator Roscoe Conkling, a dispenser of patronage and the controller of New York City's Customs House. Garfield's presidency lasted not four years but four months. That's because Charles Guiteau, who was seeking a consular post, cleverly ensured he'd never get the post by shooting the President in a Washington railroad station in 1881. Garfield hung onto life for a few weeks, long enough for Alexander Graham Bell to search for the bullet using an electrical device he had invented that was not a phone. Alas, retracting the slug proved less crucial than controlling infection and hemorrhaging. Like McKinley, who'd be aerated by flying lead two decades later, Garfield exited D.C. before he was ready.



BENJAMIN HARRISON, 23rd

President. Benjamin Harrison, born in North Bend, Ohio, in 1833, should not be confused with William Henry Harrison (his grandfather, also our ninth President) or with George Harrison, a soft-spoken guitar player. Early in his life, Harrison was known as "Little Ben," because he stood only five feet six. In later years, he became stiff and formal and was nicknamed the "Human Iceberg." On the eve of his election, Harrison went to bed early. "I knew that my staying up would not alter the result if I were defeated," he explained, "while if I was elected I had a hard day in front of me, so a night's rest seemed best in either event." He never once called a store to ask if they had Prince Albert in a can.

As President, Harrison signed the Sherman Antitrust Act and the McKinley Tariff Act, and supported the construction of a two-ocean navy. Pneumonia felled him in 1901.



Suzuki Reno and Harrison.



Dodge Caliber SE

Highs: Air-conditioned glove box, illuminated cup holders, will haul a month's worth of groceries.

Lows: Clunky two-step shifter, vague steering, abrupt clutch.

The Verdict: Shows potential but needs more development.



With the \$1000 air-conditioning option, the buyer also gets a cooled glove box.

able) makes the most power. What's more, the Caliber may be the most macho automobile extant, what with its upright, cubist deportment, implying sport-utishness. But as our test wore on, the Caliber wore thin.

For starters, the beltline is high and the windshield is perched way out on the hood. Match that with a too-low driver's seat and you feel like you're sitting in a tub. We judged the Caliber's interior surfaces to be a little too cheap and hard, and its high-effort shifter required a two-step jog from second to third and from fourth to fifth.

All that power didn't win us over, either. There's torque steer and axle tramp in hard launches, helped not at all by abrupt clutch takeup. It took 9.7 seconds

to achieve 60 mph, 1.3 seconds longer than the last manual-trans Neon we tested. And the engine edges into thrashiness at high revs, the noisiest at WOT. We'd tell you exactly where the racket began, but our Caliber had no tach.

On our handling loop, the Caliber felt heavy and clumsy, with ambiguous steering that required midcourse corrections. It wasn't until day four that we could predict how its dampers would react to Ohio's expansion joints and frost heaves. The Caliber was slowest through our lane-change test.

This Dodge does offer one of the most spacious back seats, although with three adults back there, hump boy must contend



Powertrain

	Dodge Caliber SE	Honda Fit Sport	Hyundai Accent GLS	Kia Rio5 SX	Nissan Versa 1.8SL	Suzuki Reno	Toyota Yaris 5		
engine	type	DOHC 16-valve inline-4	SOHC 16-valve inline-4	DOHC 16-valve inline-4	DOHC 16-valve inline-4	DOHC 16-valve inline-4	DOHC 16-valve inline-4		
	displacement, cu in (cc)	110 (1798)	91 (1497)	98 (1600)	98 (1600)	110 (1798)	91 (1496)		
	power, bhp @ rpm	148 @ 6500	109 @ 5800	110 @ 6000	110 @ 6000	120 @ 6000	127 @ 5600	106 @ 6000	
	torque, lb-ft @ rpm	125 @ 5200	105 @ 4800	106 @ 4500	107 @ 4500	125 @ 4800	131 @ 4000	103 @ 4200	
	redline, rpm	6750	6500	6500	6500	6600	6500	6500	
driveline	lb per bhp	20.3	22.8	23.5	23.3	22.9	22.0	22.4	
	transmission	5-sp man	5-sp man	5-sp man	5-sp man	6-sp man	5-sp man	5-sp man	
	driven wheels	front	front	front	front	front	front	front	
	gear ratios:1	3.77, 2.16, 1.41, 1.03, 0.81	3.46, 1.87, 1.32, 0.97, 0.76	3.62, 2.05, 1.37, 1.03, 0.84	3.62, 2.05, 1.37, 1.03, 0.84	3.73, 2.11, 1.45, 1.17, 0.97, 0.81	3.55, 2.16, 1.48, 1.13, 0.89	3.55, 1.90, 1.31, 0.97, 0.82	
	axle ratio:1	4.12	4.29	4.06	4.06	3.93	3.55	3.72	
C/D test results	mph per 1000 rpm	4.8, 8.4, 12.9, 17.7, 22.5	4.5, 8.4, 11.9, 16.2, 20.6	4.6, 8.1, 12.1, 16.1, 19.7	4.6, 8.1, 12.1, 16.1, 19.7	4.8, 8.5, 12.4, 15.4, 18.5, 22.2	5.3, 8.8, 12.8, 16.8, 21.3	5.2, 9.7, 14.1, 19.1, 22.6	
	acceleration, seconds	0-30 mph	3.1	2.7	3.1	2.9	2.8	2.7	2.8
		0-60 mph	9.7	8.7	10.2	9.9	9.4	8.7	8.9
		0-100 mph	30.6	31.1	32.0	37.0	30.7	33.1	30.8
		¼-mile @ mph	17.4 @ 82	16.7 @ 81	17.4 @ 80	17.3 @ 79	17.0 @ 81	16.9 @ 81	17.0 @ 82
	top-gear	rolling 5-60 mph	10.4	9.6	10.8	10.5	10.1	9.6	9.5
		30-50 mph	15.7	12.0	12.5	11.5	12.6	10.3	12.6
		50-70 mph	17.2	13.5	13.5	13.1	13.6	10.9	14.2
		top speed, mph	119 (redline ltd)	114 (drag ltd)	113 (drag ltd)	111 (drag ltd)	117 (drag ltd)	112 (gov ltd)	113 (gov ltd)
	sound level, dBA	idle	39	40	38	40	40	44	41
full-throttle		78	75	76	77	74	75	76	
70-mph cruise		72	73	69	72	70	70	72	
fuel economy, mpg	EPA city	27	33	32	32	32*	23	34	
	EPA highway	32	38	35	35	36*	30	40	
	C/D 1000-mile trip	28	35	30	30	28	28	36	

*C/D estimated. Best in test.

test avg



Chassis

	Dodge Caliber SE	Honda Fit Sport	Hyundai Accent GLS	Kia Rio5 SX	Nissan Versa 1.8SL	Suzuki Reno	Toyota Yaris 5	
front suspension	strut, coil springs, anti-roll bar	strut, coil springs, anti-roll bar	strut, coil springs, anti-roll bar	strut, coil springs, anti-roll bar	strut, coil springs, anti-roll bar	strut, coil springs, anti-roll bar	strut, coil springs, anti-roll bar	
rear suspension	multilink, coil springs, anti-roll bar	trailing arms, coil springs	trailing arms, coil springs	trailing arms, coil springs	trailing arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar	strut, coil springs, anti-roll bar	trailing arms, coil springs	
front brakes	vented disc	vented disc	vented disc	vented disc	vented disc	vented disc	vented disc	
rear brakes	drum	drum	disc	disc	drum	disc	drum	
anti-lock control	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	
stability control	no	no	no	no	no	no	no	
C/D test results	tires							
	braking, 70-0, feet	189	169	167	165	183	189	166
	roadholding, 300-foot skidpad, g	0.75	0.79	0.77	0.79	0.77	0.80	0.79
	lane change, mph	62.1	71.4	64.1	65.4	62.4	64.1	64.4

Best in test.

test avg



Hyundai Accent and Taft.

WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT, 27th

President. Taft was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1857, whereupon his mother noted: "He is very large of his age and grows fat every day." He eventually topped 300 pounds. Taft once sent a telegram to a train conductor. It read, "Stop in Hicksville. Large party waiting to catch train." When the train arrived, Taft explained to the conductor, "You can go ahead—I am the large party."



Taft disliked his own career ("Politics, when I am in it, makes me sick"), felt he was no leader ("I have no aptitude for managing an army"), and hated the campaign leading to his election ("One of the most uncomfortable four months of my life").

His administration initiated 80 antitrust suits, helped bring into being a federal income tax, created a postal savings system, and admitted Arizona and New Mexico to the Union. Taft later served as chief justice, mentioning to his fellow Supremes, "I don't remember that I was ever President." Although he died in 1930, Taft is back in the headlines for being the great-grandfather of Bob Taft, Ohio's current criminal governor.



Hyundai Accent GLS

Highs: Cushy ride, unimpeded sightlines, church-mouse quiet at idle.

Lows: A shifter attached to rubber bands, undisciplined springs and struts.

The Verdict: If you like the Accent, be sure to drive its more practical cousin, the Kia Rio5.

with a driveshaft tunnel—there for four-wheel-drive versions. With the rear seats folded, the Caliber's cargo area proved plentiful, more spacious than the Suzuki's.

Dodge hopes to sell the Caliber in 98 countries. But as it stands, this sharp-edged box feels like it's seven-eighths of the way through its development—as if it needs more Caliberation.

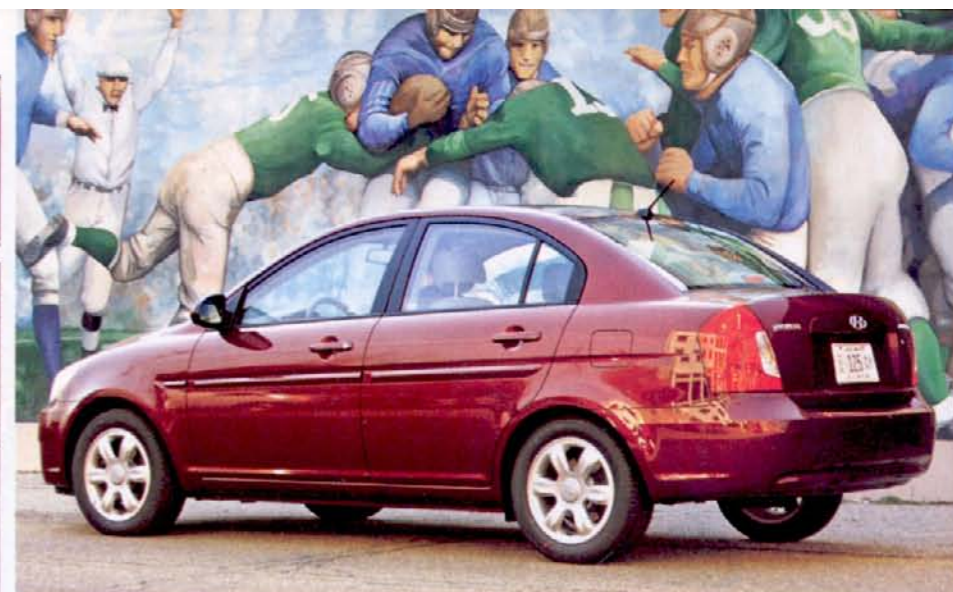
**Fifth Place
Hyundai Accent GLS**

If you haven't sampled this third-gen Accent, give it a whirl. Its wheelbase has grown 2.3 inches and its track has been widened 1.4 inches. The Accent now noses down interstates with far more author-

ity, and the new driver's seat—raised two inches and adjustable eight ways—means that freeway slogs are less wearing. Sightlines in all directions are excellent.

Moreover, the 1.6-liter twin-cam now features variable valve timing, which has broadened the power band. Let out the smooth clutch and the Accent snaps to attention right off idle. That idle, by the way, was the quietest in this group, and the Accent was quietest at a 70-mph cruise, too.

Like the Suzuki, the Hyundai was hobbled by a sloppy shifter, and it has been tuned first and foremost for a creamy ride. The ride earned praise until we reached the hills, where the springs went into full oingo-boingo mode in Turn One and hadn't



settled by the onset of Turn Two.

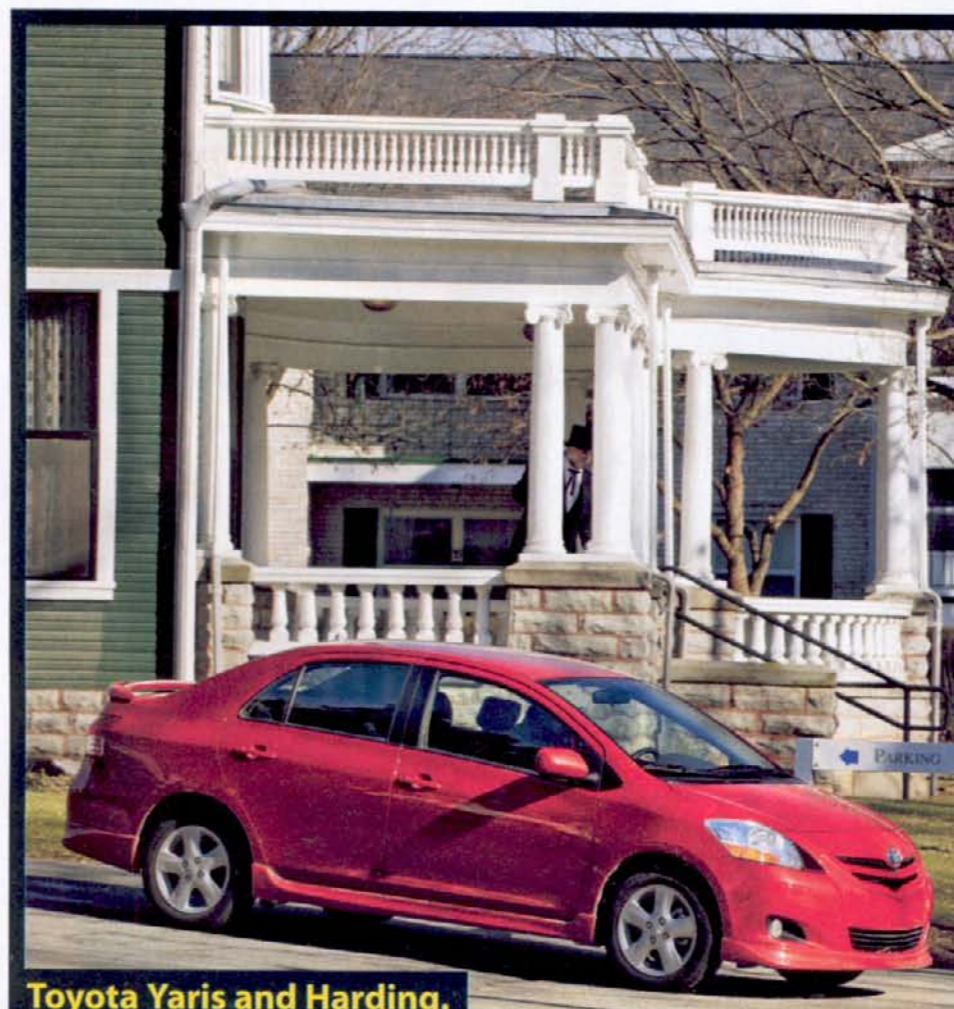
Although we wished for a firmer brake pedal, the Accent stopped in a superb 167 feet, and ABS comes standard. The IP was clean and simple, with legible white-on-black gauges. And the Accent boasted the lowest base price in this group.

Thing is, if you like this sedan, you should know that it works far better as a five-door hatch. (See the Kia Rio5 SX.)

**Fourth Place
Toyota Yaris S**

For years, the Yaris has earned raves overseas, winning 2000 Car of the Year honors in Europe and Japan. Since then, it has benefited from a longer and wider platform, in part to satisfy U.S. tastes. And any replacement for the Echo, which was about as exciting as mud, is fine by us.

In this bunch, the Yaris was the lightest contender and felt like it, especially in crosswinds. Although its little 1.5-liter engine produced the least power and torque, the Yaris's 0-to-60 time was still a half-second quicker than our group's average. Its brake pedal came suddenly to life halfway through its travel, but any 166-foot stop from 70 mph is terrific. And the Yaris's lightness paid off not only in errand-run-



Toyota Yaris and Harding.

WARREN HARDING, 29th

President. Born in 1865 in Bloomington Grove, Ohio, Harding's middle name was Gamaliel, which may have explained his several nervous breakdowns. At least his parents didn't name him Yaris. Harding adored high-sounding speeches, one of which was described by a Democratic pol as "an army of pompous phrases moving across the landscape in search of an idea." Like U.S. Grant's administration, Harding's was rife with scandals: wild poker games, nepotism, and cabinet members who took several hundred thousand dollars in bribes from oil tycoons. (Such a thing could never happen today.) To top it off, Harding married a domineering divorcee nicknamed the Duchess, yet managed a torrid affair with Carrie Phillips, followed by a so-called connection with Nan Britton, 31 years his junior. It must have been a close connection, because it resulted in a daughter. That's a lot of action in a presidency that lasted only 2.5 years. Maybe that's why Harding suffered a fatal heart attack in 1923.





Toyota Yaris S

Highs: Velvety ride, fun shifter, agile around town, best observed fuel economy.

Lows: Too much body roll, cramped rear seat, falls short on directional stability.

The Verdict: A good replacement for the Echo but not a great replacement for the Echo.



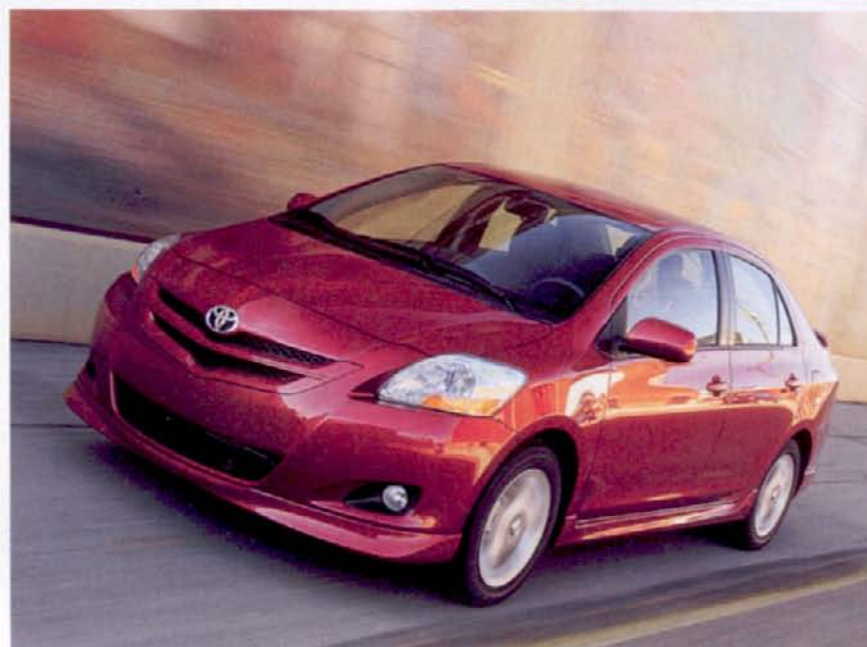
ning agility but also in economy—36 mpg, the best we observed.

So why did it finish midpack? First, the Yaris is tiny, offering the most cramped back seat (for both two or three riders) and a front seat whose cushion is too short, leaving thighs unsupported. Second, its body rolls and wallows—not as badly as the Suzuki's or the Hyundai's, but you're ever aware of the motions. Third, its steering, impressively light in town, is over-assisted at speed and directional stability suffers—you'll want to keep both hands on the wheel above 55 mph. All our testers disliked the center-mounted gauge cluster.

The Yaris is refined and offers an accurate shifter, a rarity in this class. But as new Toyotas go, it's less a home run than a nice little bunt down the third-base line.

Third Place Kia Rio5 SX

A Kia beats a Toyota? What's next, Dick Cheney mistakes a lawyer for a quail?



The Rio and the Accent share the same drivetrain and platform, and thus should have felt like the Doublemint twins. They did not. Although they have identical wheelbases, the Kia's body is 10.4 inches shorter, it benefits from tiny suspension tweaks, and it rides on Hankooks instead of Kumhos. Every tester felt the difference. The Rio tracked better than the Accent, offered better on-center feel, was slightly less sensitive to crosswinds, and its struts and springs mustered a modicum of discipline in the snaky byways above U.S. Grant's cottage—all without compromising ride.

At the test track, we proved we weren't hallucinating: The Kia's skidpad grip surpassed the Hyundai's, and the Rio5 zipped through the lane change 1.3 mph faster. What's more, the Kia's braking distances were the shortest in this comparo.



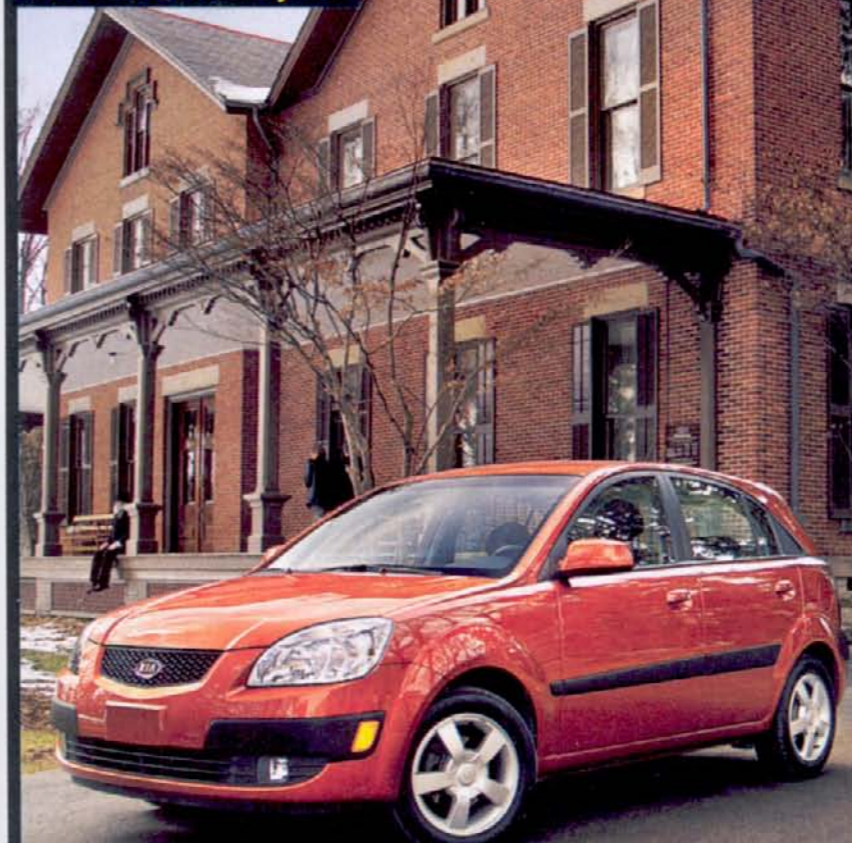
Kia Rio5 SX

Highs: Fun styling, some pretense of handling, big cargo capacity.

Lows: Another rope-a-dope shifter, no automatic door locks, a name that still draws quizzical looks.

The Verdict: Like finding a dollar bill in your bag of Fritos, it won't change your life but it's a pleasant surprise.

Kia Rio5 and Hayes.



RUTHERFORD B. HAYES, 19th President. "Rud" Hayes was born in Delaware, Ohio, in 1822, and, like Warren Harding, "suffered nervousness almost to the point of disaster." He perhaps had good reason to be nervous, having been wounded in the Civil War. Hayes is primarily remembered for having won the most fiercely disputed election in U.S. history, at least until Katherine Harris happened along. Wife Lucy Webb Hayes also made her mark by ridding the White House of all alcoholic beverages, a disappointment to Mark Twain, who had stumped for Hayes.

Hayes pledged protection to freed slaves and the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, which he predicted would then become a bastion of republicanism. This did not work out. He also helped establish the Ohio State University, which proved itself an archetype of higher learning when another Hayes—this one named Woody—slugged a Clemson football player on national television.

Hayes died in 1893 at his estate in Fremont, Ohio. As far as is known, he never once uttered the Buckeye mantra, "Three yards and a cloud of dust."



We even preferred the upstart's styling, and its cockpit benefits from subtle dabs of more youthful textures and shades. Small differences, to be sure, but in this class you grab sportiness wherever it's offered.

What the Kia couldn't do was change gears any less awkwardly than the Hyundai. What is it with the shifters in this group? How much can a decent linkage add to the overall price? Thirty bucks?

The Rio5 is a five-door hatch and thus proved far more practical than the Accent

sedan. With its seats folded, the Kia eats an amazing 50 cubic feet of groceries. But it mostly brushed aside its sibling for this reason alone: It was more fun.

Second Place Nissan Versa 1.8SL

The Versa is known as the Tiida elsewhere in the world and arrives in the U.S. first as a hatchback, assembled in the same Mexican plant that builds our Sentra. A Versa sedan follows later this year. [This is

true—Ed.] It's intended for gamblers and prostitutes and will be called the Vice Versa. [This is not—Ed.]

On the road, what you notice first about the Versa is that it feels large, "like a real car," noted one driver. It's as tall as the Dodge, in fact, with a commanding view forward. Its shifter proved as accurate as the Toyota's, but not the Honda's. The light steering was informative, and the wheel was fat and soft. And it was the lone contestant here to offer six gears, making the



Nissan Versa 1.8SL

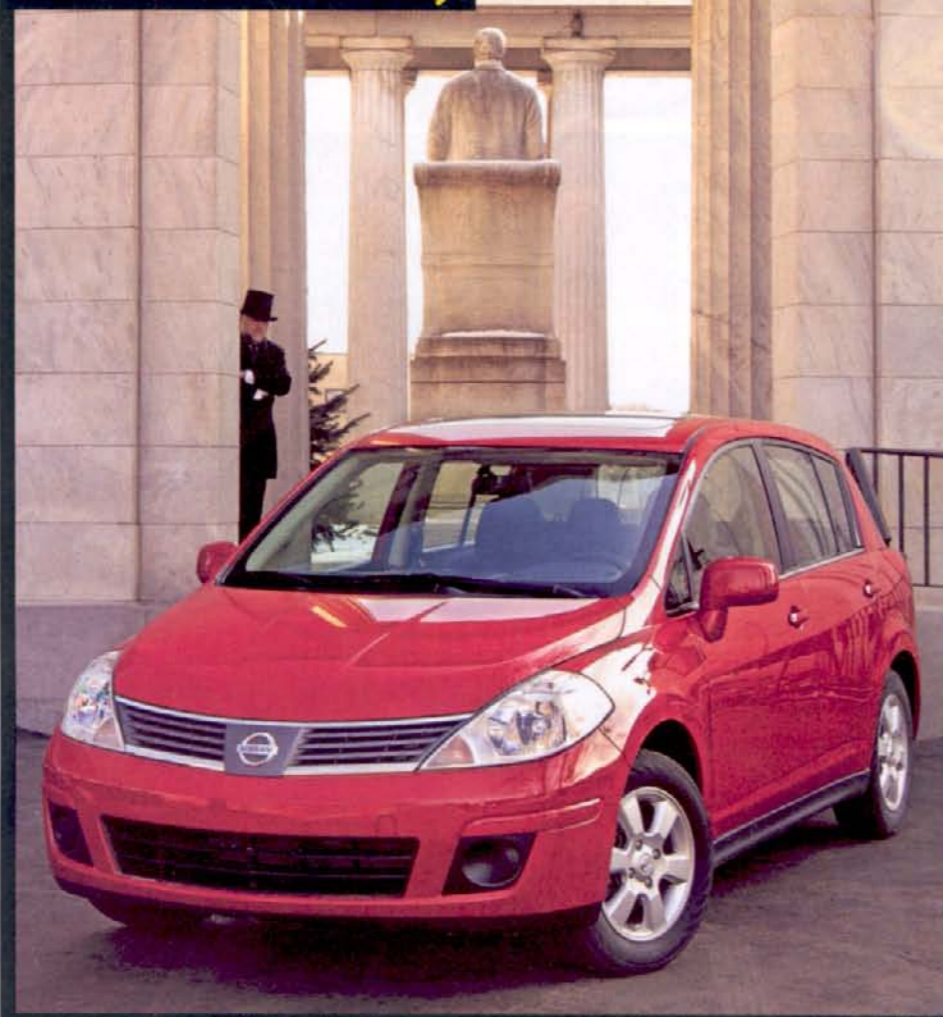
Highs: Superb ride-and-handling trade-off, a back seat for three adults, commanding view ahead.

Lows: Throttle overrun, narrow front seats, awkward recline levers.

The Verdict: If you're chiefly interested in commuting and errand hopping, this is the one.



Nissan Versa and McKinley.



WILLIAM MCKINLEY, 25th President. Born in Niles, Ohio, in 1843, McKinley is remembered for the 100-day Spanish-American War, in which the U.S. destroyed the Spanish fleet to liberate Cuba, then annexed the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, and quite a nice little beach near a liquor store. On the subject of imperialism, McKinley said he stood for "the full dinner pail." He was such an astute politician that the Speaker of the House said, "McKinley's ear is so close to the ground that it is full of grasshoppers."

McKinley's second term was pretty much spoiled by an anarchist named Leon Czolgosz, who, in 1901, shot the President during the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, which is an embarrassing place to die. But he did anyway.



Versa: Biggest back seat for two or three riders.

most of the power band.

Our complaints were few. The front footwells were narrow, and the front seats were flat, with short cushions. The door panels so intruded on the sides of the seats that the recline levers had to be inconveniently placed under the center armrest. The all-black center stack could use whiter, more legible markings. And someone needs to fiddle with the throttle calibration so the engine doesn't hang onto revs so long.

Nonetheless, at least two of us judged the Versa the best all-around value here. It can't match the Honda's overt sportiness, but its ride-and-handling trade-off may be just the ticket for buyers mainly interested in commuting and errand hopping. Moreover, the Versa won our back-seat test, with perfect scores for two or three riders. It

proved an exemplar of packaging efficiency—with the rear seats folded, it tied with the Rio5 for greatest cargo capacity. And it came standard with a buffet of amenities. That makes it, uh, Versa-tile.

First Place Honda Fit Sport

The Fit is sold in more than 70 countries and is known in Europe as the Jazz. It debuts at C/D in typical Honda show-off fashion, winning by 25 points—a cakewalk.

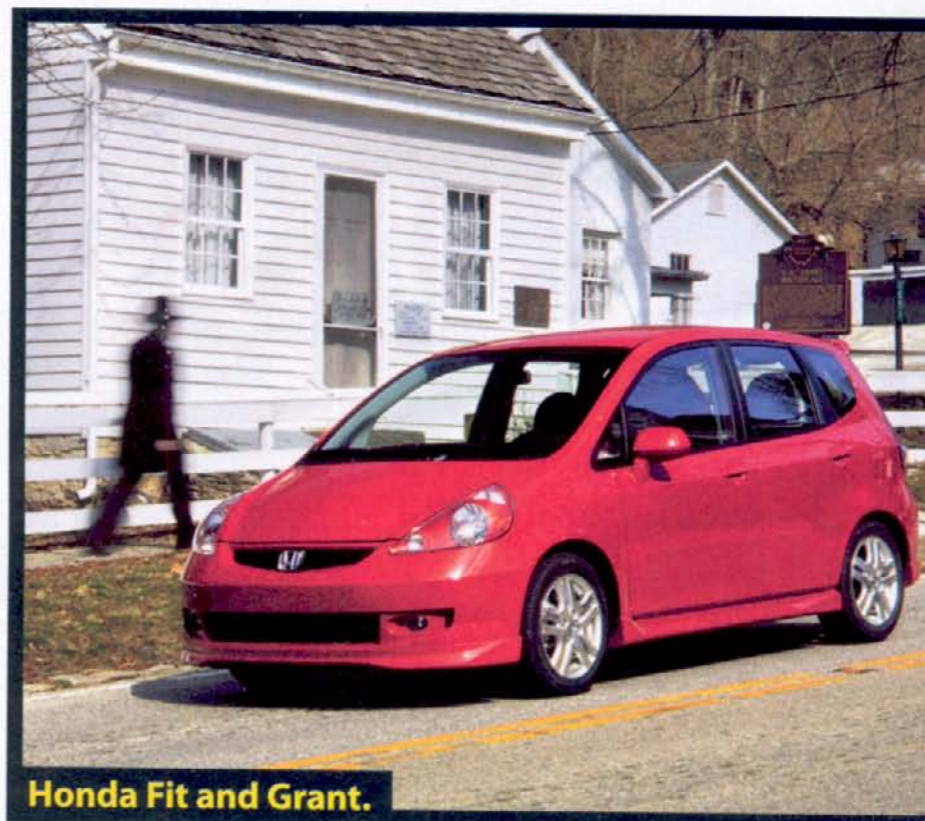
Our little red Fit was the quickest to 60 mph (tied with the Reno) and the quickest in the quarter-mile yet offered the least engine NVH and the second-best observed fuel economy. It came equipped with the most supportive seats, the most expen-

sive-looking interior, an Acura-grade gauge cluster, and the ergonomics of an Accord.

What truly set the Fit apart was its handling—not a pretense of handling but the real deal, with springs and struts that allowed one gentle rebound and no more, the only car here that felt happy storming the switchbacks. We later confirmed this when the Fit sailed through our lane-change test 6 mph faster than anything else here—faster, in fact, than a Corvette Z06.

Abetting the handling was linear, direct steering—you could pick out a pebble at an apex and reliably place the Fit's inside-front wheel directly atop it—a shifter that Hyundai and Suzuki would do well to copy, and pedals for real heel-and-toeing.

Despite its midget proportions—the least width and length, riding on the short-



Honda Fit and Grant.

ULYSSES S. GRANT, 18th President. Born in 1822 in Point Pleasant, Ohio, Grant's given name was Hiram Ulysses Grant, but the admissions office at West Point enrolled him as Ulysses Simpson Grant, an error he never corrected. Known as "Lyss," Grant washed out of the Army but later returned and became the architect of the Union victory during the Civil War. Unfortunately, he was a heavy-artillery dud as President, wandering the White House looking "bewildered" and a little "whiskeyed up"—possibly the same thing. Grant's tenure was marked by scandals: gifts from admirers, a cabinet filled with personal friends and liquor, a retroactive pay increase, an Indian agency fraud. In 1885, as Grant lay at death's door, a doctor temporarily revived him. "It is Providence!" shouted a nearby minister. "Not at all," corrected Grant's doctor. "It was the brandy."



Honda Fit Sport

Highs: Overtly sporty handling, classy interior, quick-witted in all its moves.

Lows: Mediocre rear-three-quarter visibility, no dead pedal.

The Verdict: The go-kart of economobiles.



Results

	Dodge Caliber	Honda Fit	Hyundai Accent	Kia Rio5	Nissan Versa	Suzuki Reno	Toyota Yaris
vehicle	driver comfort (10)	7	9	8	8	7	6
	ergonomics (10)	6	9	8	8	8	7
	rear-seat comfort (5)	4	4	3	3	5	4
	rear-seat space* (5)	5	3	4	5	5	4
	cargo space* (5)	5	4	3	4	4	2
	features/amenities* (10)	5	9	10	8	10	7
	fit and finish (10)	6	10	8	8	8	6
	interior styling (10)	6	9	7	8	8	6
	exterior styling (10)	6	9	6	8	8	7
	rebates/discounts* (5)	1	0	0	0	0	2
	as-tested price* (20)	18	18	19	19	18	20
total (100)	69	84	76	79	82	72	
powertrain	¼-mi acceleration* (20)	17	20	17	17	19	19
	flexibility* (5)	5	4	5	5	4	5
	fuel economy* (5)	1	5	2	2	1	5
	engine NVH (10)	6	9	7	7	8	6
	transmission (10)	5	10	6	6	8	4
	total (50)	34	48	37	37	41	34
chassis	performance* (20)	14	20	17	18	15	16
	steering feel (5)	4	5	3	4	4	2
	brake feel (5)	4	5	3	3	4	3
	handling (10)	6	10	6	7	8	5
	ride (10)	6	9	7	8	8	6
	total (50)	34	49	36	40	39	40
gotta-have-it factor (25)	13	23	13	16	20	11	
fun to drive (25)	11	24	14	16	21	11	
grand total (250)	161	228	176	188	203	160	
finishing order	6	1	5	3	2	7	

*These objective scores are calculated from the vehicles' dimensions, capabilities, rebates and discounts, and/or test results.
Best in test.

est wheelbase—the Fit will swallow an amazing 42 cubic feet of household miscellany when its rear seats are toppled. And they fold quite cleverly, without removing the headrests, into a deep well, making the cargo floor as flat as a trailer park.

We wish the Fit had a true dead pedal and that its rear-three-quarter visibility were better. Otherwise, we elect it president of the economobiles. Unlike Ohio's Presidents, this one is alive. Very alive. ■

