

Versatility and style

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer

The versatile new five-passenger Chevrolet HHR wagon has a cargo capacity up to 55.6 cubic feet with the rear seat folded down or 63.1 cubic feet with the rear seat removed. The front passenger seat can also be folded flat to expand the cargo area all the way to the dash.



If you like the look of the PT Cruiser, you will love the look of Chevrolet's new HHR. It reminds us of what a PT Cruiser would look like if they had applied more of a sport utility vehicle styling.

Our son-in-law laughed at it when it arrived for our week of test driving; however, his son thought it was extremely cool and couldn't wait to go for a ride. So—judging from them—we would say it's all about personal choice, maybe age, just like everything else.

The HHR had us scratching our heads a

little at first. We weren't sure if we liked it or thought it was weird. Spending a week in the little wagon made us converts. We're definitely now in the "like" column on this one. First, it's fun to drive, providing a nice balance with all the agility and nimbleness of a small car, but with a smooth solid ride and comfort we would expect from something a little larger.

Chevrolet doesn't call it anything other than the HHR, but originally when the concept debuted it was referred to as the Heritage High Roof—meaning it had a

retro styling similar to the original 1949 Chevrolet Suburban, and it has a bit higher stance and interior height than typical crossovers or wagons. Obviously the HHR name is simpler.

The HHR grille is similar to the one on the Chevy SSR roadster/truck, and it has large wide windows giving everyone in the vehicle great visibility.

The dashboard is a little retro-looking and offers easy access to all controls. We loved the power window controls just above the center console, similar to those

in the MINI Cooper. All seats (except for the driver's) fold flat for expanded cargo capacity. There are two deep covered bins built into the floor behind the second row, for added storage.

We used the HHR while we were moving some things from place to place and we were amazed at just how much "stuff" we could get into it.

The internal basis and drivetrain for the HHR are derived from the Chevrolet Cobalt sedan, with the front wheels being driven by one of two Ecotec four-cylinder en-

gines. The basic engine on the LS and the 1LT model is a 2.2-liter rated at 143 hp, while the upper level 2LT has a standard 2.4-liter version rated at 172 hp. Both engines have a dual overhead cam, twin balance shafts, electronic throttle control and other features that provide smooth powerful operations. A precise five-speed Getrag manual transmission is standard with both engines and on all models, with an optional four-speed automatic which includes a remote start feature.

There are three models to choose from,

including the base LS (\$15,990), the 1LT (\$16,990) and the 2LT we tested for \$16,425. All prices include destination charges. The 2LT comes well-equipped with all the power amenities, cruise control, air conditioning, leather-wrapped steering wheel and shift knobs, and so much more.

Our test HHR 2LT package added \$1,800 for the high output engine and cosmetic upgrades. It also came equipped with

KEEP RIGHT >>



Chevrolet HHR 2LT

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

Air conditioning; Power driver's seat; tilt wheel; Rear defog; Power windows & locks; Keyless entry, etc.

Base Price: \$16,425

Options:

2LT Equip group (2.4-liter engine, Anti-lock brakes, Fog lamps, Leather wrapped wheel and shift knobs, Redundant radio controls, Auto dim mirrors with compass)

.....\$1,800

4-spd. auto trans w/ remote start.....1,000

Power sunroof\$725

Side curtain airbags.....\$395

17-Inch polished wheels.....\$395

XM radio.....\$325

AM/FM/CD changer with MP3.....\$295

Roof luggage roof rails.....\$150

Running boards (dealer installed).....\$445

Premium mats\$105

Total Options\$5,635

Freight.....\$565

Price as Tested.....\$22,625

DIMENSIONS

EPA SizeSpec. Purp

Weight.....3,208 lb.

Wheelbase103.5 in.

Length.....176.2 in.

Width.....69.2 in.

Height65.2 in.

Fuel Capacity16.2 gal.

Cargo Capacity.....max. 63.1 cu. ft.

MECHANICAL

Engine2.4L DOHC 4-Cyl

Horsepower172@6200

Torque162@5000

Transmission4-Spd. Auto

DriveFront wheel

BrakesDisc/Drum ABS

Tires215/50R17

PERFORMANCE

0 to 60 mph.....9.5 sec.

EPA economy rating23/30 mpg

Our actual fuel economy27.5 mpg

COMPETITORS

PT Cruiser, Ford Focus wagon, Honda Element, Mazda3, Pontiac Vibe, Subaru Impreza wagon, Toyota Matrix



optional automatic transmission with remote start (\$1,000), power sunroof with express close (\$725), XM satellite radio (\$325), side curtain airbags (\$395), six-disc CD changer with MP3 player, 17-inch high polished alloy wheels (\$395), stereo with 6-disc CD changer (\$295), luggage roof rails (\$150), premium carpeted floor mats (\$150). With dealer-installed running boards the total price came to \$22,625.

The HHR rides on MacPherson struts in the front and a semi-independent torsion beam rear suspension in the rear. Brakes are disc and drum with optional anti-lock brakes. The rack-and-pinion steering which is electric powered, rather than a traditional belt powered hydraulic unit, provides good feed

back and precision adding to the is HHR agility. The two lower level models have a softer suspension with 16-inch wheels, while the 2LS has a stiffer, sportier feel, 17-inch wheels and special shocks for better ride control and handling.

The HHR comes standard with many safety features like dual-stage front airbags, theft deterrent system, LATCH child seat system and more. Also available is a side head curtain airbag for \$395.

The HHR is no hot rod, but it has plenty of power to make a 0 to 60 mph run in 9.5 seconds. We recorded 69 mph in our informal acceleration test which we run from where we pull onto the highway and accelerate to the first mailbox (about one-eighth mile).

Fuel economy is reasonable, too. The EPA rates the HHR's larger engine at 23 mpg for city and 30 mpg highway. We averaged 27.5 during our week behind the wheel.

This is such a cute vehicle. It draws so much attention from all ages but mostly with the younger set. It turned heads everywhere we went, and we're sure they weren't looking at us.

The HHR should be a big hit for Chevrolet. Even though it's a small car, it's remarkable roomy and comfortable. It has a good solid quality feel and the versatility of the large cargo area and folding back seats makes it appealing. Personally we fell in love with the versatility, drivability and overall quality of this small wagon. ■

