

ARIZONA DRIVER

THE ENTHUSIAST'S GUIDE TO LIFE BEHIND THE WHEEL

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Pontiac Solstice
Hyundai Sonata
Honda Pilot
Auction Results

PONTIAC SOLSTICE GXP

Pontiac is planning an aggressive move with the popular new Solstice sports car. For 2007, Pontiac will offer a turbocharged version of the two-seater producing 260 horsepower and 260 lb.ft. of torque. The special edition, called the GXP, develops an impressive 130-hp per liter — that's 47 percent more than the current standard version. The GXP is expected to accelerate from 0 to 60 mph in 5.3 seconds with either the standard five-speed manual transmission or the optional five-speed automatic. The GXP package will include a sport suspension, four-wheel disc brakes with anti-lock, limited-slip rear differential and 18-inch polished aluminum wheels. Pricing has not yet been announced. (See our review of the base Pontiac Solstice starting on page 22.) ▼



Pontiac Solstice GXP

Pontiac Builds Some Actual Excitement.

By Barbara and Bill Schaffer



- Pontiac's first production two-seat roadster
- 170 hp 2.4L Ecotec engine
- Built on new rear-drive Kappa platform
- Near 50/50 weight distribution
- Four-wheel independent SLA suspension
- AM/FM and CD stereo with six speakers
- Standard Aisin five-speed manual transmission
- Available Hydra-Matic 5L40-E five-speed automatic transmission
- Eighteen-inch five-spoke aluminum alloy wheels



Robert Lutz, GM Vice Chairman, Product Development, proclaimed that General Motors would build a roadster for the masses; and they did it; and it is good. The Pontiac Solstice sports car is the best thing GM has done in years—with the possible exception of the Corvette Z06 (which is nearly three times the price of the Solstice).

First shown at the 2002 Detroit auto show as a concept vehicle, the 2006 Solstice is now a part of the Pontiac lineup. We've been reading a great deal about it and were excited to get it for a full week of testing. The only downside is that we could only take one child at a time. (Now that we think about it, there are times when that could be a very good thing.)

In keeping with traditional sports car architecture, the Solstice starts from the new General Motors World rear-drive platform. The unibody frame is engineered to provide extra strength and rigidity by using unique details like an enclosed tunnel that houses the transmission and driveshaft.

The sleek and progressive design of this classic roadster has a low and aggressive stance. It features a long clamshell hood and a short rear deck. The sides of the Solstice are clean with fluid lines and wide 18-inch wheels and tires that are pushed as far toward the corners as possible.

The body color extends into the cabin, giving the Solstice a seamless appearance when the top is down. Cockpit-style instruments are intuitively placed around the driver and the pedals are placed perfectly for easy heel-and-toe driving.

The 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine powering the Solstice is the GM Ecotec, but the name sounds more like something powering an economy sedan



The Pontiac Solstice is mounted on top of a rigid frame which provides for an efficient short and long arm suspension at all four wheels. This setup is a fundamental engineering factor in providing the new two-seat roadster with its excellent handling characteristics and road feel.

than a sports car. Nevertheless, the 170 horsepower does a very good job with 0 to 60 mph acceleration times arriving in 7.4 seconds. For those of us who always cry for "more power" there is a turbocharged version in the works with an estimated 260 horsepower. That should really make the Solstice a standout.

Fuel economy is more in keeping with the engine name. The EPA rates the Solstice at 20 mpg for city driving and 28 mpg on the highway. We averaged 24.7 mpg in combined driving.

We were impressed by the five-speed manual transmission that clicked between the gears with the same precision we get from some expensive German cars. An available option is a GM-developed five-speed automatic transmission. A limited-slip differential option divides power equally between both rear wheels during normal conditions, but in low-traction situations switches the power to the wheel with the best traction.

The Solstice has a manually operated top that lowers behind the seats in a separate, fully enclosed compartment with no visible convertible top stack. The top operation is a little bit cumbersome, and it was necessary to flip up two wings on the rear edge of the cloth top every time we got into the trunk. Like all sports cars, the Solstice is a little difficult to get in and out of when the top is up. The top may not be the easiest to use, but it does a good job of sealing the interior and keeping wind noise down.

Standard equipment on the Solstice leans more to the mechanical than convenience and luxury. It comes with five-

spoke painted wheels, four-wheel disc brakes, racing style seats, AM/FM/CD audio and tilt wheel for a starting price of \$19,995 including delivery. To dress it up, there are several option packages including leather seating, polished wheels, XM radio, CD changer, power locks, keyless entry, cruise control, power windows, air conditioning and anti-lock brakes, which jump the price to \$25,000. Still, that's not a bad price for an exciting and fully loaded roadster.

The Solstice is aimed squarely against the popular Mazda Miata, and Pontiac has hit a home run. It has actually been outselling the Miata early in the first couple of months of 2006. It's just as much fun to drive as the Miata, and performance figures are very close, as is the driving experience. The Miata might have a little more refinement than the Solstice, but drivers will enjoy either of these great cars.

This vehicle was quickly conceived and developed, initially in a four-month period, and it's very well done. It shows that GM still has the leadership and talent to build great cars. The Solstice has unique roadster styling that sets it apart from anything on the market, and then it delivers with performance and handling to match. It has captured the hearts of sport car enthusiasts, and it has certainly captured our attention.

With its fantastic looks, good performance and near perfect 50/50 balance, the Solstice has hit this home run for the Pontiac brand at a time when the company needs it most. ■



2006 Pontiac Solstice

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

18-inch alloy wheels; Racing-inspired sport seats; AM/FM/CD stereo; Rear window defogger; Rake-adjustable wheel.

Base Price: \$19,420

Options:

Air conditioning\$960

Carpeted floor mats\$60

Limited slip differential\$195

4-Wheel antilock brakes.....\$400

Premium pkg. (Leather seats, etc.) ..\$590

18-Inch polished wheels\$495

Monsoon audio\$395

Audio w/ in-dash 6-CD changer\$495

XM Satellite radio.....\$325

Power package (power locks,

outside mirrors and windows,

keyless entry).....\$625

Convenience pkg.(cruise control,

driver info center, fog lights)\$465

Total Options\$5,005

Freight.....\$575

Price as Tested.....\$25,000

DIMENSIONS

EPA SizeTwo-seater

Weight.....2,860 lb.

Wheelbase95.1 in.

Length..... 157.2 in.

Width.....71.3 in.

Height50.1 in.

Fuel Capacity13.8 gal.

Cargo Capacity(top up) 3.8 cu. ft.

MECHANICAL

Engine2.5L DOHC 4-Cyl.

Horsepower170@6600

Torque166@4800

Transmission5-spd. man.

Drive.....rear wheel

BrakesDisc ABS

Tires245/45R18

PERFORMANCE

0 to 60 mph.....7.4 sec.

EPA economy rating20/28 mpg

Our actual fuel econ24.7 mpg

COMPETITORS

Mazda MX-5 Miata