

AMX Debut

American Motors scoops the field with an exciting new 2-seat "Fun" machine that has everything but a big price tag.

— By Bill Sanders



"It." That's the word. No definition necessary. Some people have "It." Some cars have "It." Such an endowment is the great enigma. "It" isn't necessarily contingent upon great beauty, a big price tag or ostentation. "It" can be planned, but doesn't always succeed. The first unpretentious MG TC, with big, gangly wire wheels... had "It." Ask anybody. They'll shoot you three or four cars right off the top of their head without losing a snap of their chewing gum.

Perhaps it's involuntary, but occasionally a jaded attitude becomes discernible as our sedentary years take their toll and a blasé sophistication sets in. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, "POW," "ZAP," "WHAM." Right between the eyes. A car with "It." In living color. Sitting there in front of you. Turn on time. Pop, Op, Mod, Camp. Somebody has finally done it. A car with "It" . . . that any guy can afford. Who? American Motors. American Motors?

Yes, they've done the deed. AMX is here and it's about time. If a short wheelbase, 2-seater in the GT tradition is your bag, AMX is a salty little bomb, and will really let you know it. Not content with a brand new car,

American Motors has also introduced a brand new engine, a 390-cu.-in. V-8, the highest displacement engine ever offered by AMC. The AMX has a standard 290-cu.-in. V-8, with a 343-cu.-in. V-8 and the 390 available as options, so there are a variety of packages to build on. Our test cars, yes, cars, we had two, were both equipped with the big 390. Several years of engineering and development have produced an unusually rugged engine in the 390. A beefed up block includes such important features as a forged steel crankshaft and connecting rods, plus heavier-duty bearings. A new intake manifold featuring intake runner passages that were scientifically flow-designed for higher airflow efficiency gives better breathing and a higher power/torque output. A 10.2:1 compression ratio and a hp rating of 315 @ 4100 rpm give this little jewel plenty of "GO."

To eliminate the hypocrisy of "base price," AMC has done away with the 3-speed transmission and instead offers an all syncromesh, 4-on-the-floor gearbox as the standard transmission. The only optional unit is their 3-speed Shift-Command, console mounted automatic. One of our test cars had the

4-speed, the other the automatic. Four-on-the-floor is nice to have, but on the AMX the bell housing is located well forward, necessitating an extremely long throw on the shift lever, which takes some getting used to. We drove the automatic first, and this probably had some bearing on the uncomfortable feeling with the 4. AMC's Shift-Command automatic is a smooth, easy shifting transmission. No horse-shoes, special mountings or gimmicks. Just 1-2 Drive and a straight stick lever. Actually, we got our best times with the automatic. Perhaps this would be improved with more time on the 4-speed, but who knows maybe the sedentary years are taking their toll. The standard rear end ratio is 3.15:1. Options up to 4.44:1 are available with the 4-speed. A 2.87:1 is the only option with the automatic. A Twin-Grip Differential is a good option with the 390 V-8. With 425 lbs.-ft. torque at 3200 rpm putting the horses where you want them, the twin-grip comes in handy.

Handling the AMX is something else. It has approximately the same dimensions as the Corvette, a wheelbase of 97 inches, with front tread measuring 58.36 inches and rear, 57 inches even.



Wheelbase is 12 inches shorter than the Javelin. An all-steel, unit construction body/frame is carried in an extractable manner by the wide track stance in tandem with the short wheelbase. Standard, heavy-duty suspension components include large-diameter front sway bar, heavy-duty springs and shocks, and rear traction bars designed to prevent rear axle "power-hop." Coil springs are used up front, with 4½-leaf semi-elliptics in the rear. These components, especially the short wheelbase, all combine to give unusually agile and responsive handling characteristics. Performance is exhilarating under any circumstances; on the drag strip, on a road course or on a mundane pleasure ride. Mild understeer is encountered during moderate cornering maneuvers, and, at first, the tendency is to oversteer when the corners are taken at some hairy speeds. That tendency soon leaves with the confidence junior puts to you, and the corners seem to straighten out magically. Because of its size, AMX has a short, stiff body with high bending stiffness, utilizing engine mounts as isolators and eliminating any uncomfortable lagging feeling associated with polar inertia when the urge arises to put the old lead foot into it, an urge which

At the drag a strip or on a Sunday drive, the AMX owner shouldn't develop any inferiority syndromes. Big brother Javelin is comparable, but similarity ends there. Short wheelbase and big engine in AMX make a world of difference in all performance characteristics. AMX interior is spacious for 2-seater, with huge storage area behind seats. Interior comfort is also first cabin with well contoured seats.

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration	
0-30 mph	2.9 secs.
0-45 mph	4.5 secs.
0-60 mph	6.9 secs.
0-75 mph	9.9 secs.

could become increasingly prevalent with the AMX.

High-performance, E70 x 14 tires are standard. Our test cars were equipped with power front disc (an option) and 10-inch rear drum brakes. Surprisingly little fade was encountered, especially when you consider that a few old hands such as Johnny Parsons, Rodger Ward and Mario Andretti had taken several turns through a road course with the same cars just prior to our test. Stopping is fast. Without any swerve or sway. The way you want it. Braking was almost effortless in the corners and in panic stops on the straight, giving you a comforting feeling without reservations, knowing the binders were there when you needed them. Three steering selections are available: manual, power, and "Quick-Ratio" manual. All have a turning diameter of 33.5 feet.

Interior comfort is surprisingly gratifying in a car this size. Although snug, it is far from being cramped or crowded. Two hefty men and a jumble of equipment and cameras didn't create any uncomfortable compromises, and there are a multitude of cubic inches behind the seats to stow extra gear. Slim-shelled, reclining bucket seats hold you in place and there isn't

much tendency to go slippin' and a slidin' in the hard pressed corners. A safety-styled, aircraft-type dash is one of the shared components with big brother Javelin, and the deep-set, functionally-located instruments and controls are all easy to see and reach. A big drawback with this otherwise top-drawer dash is the tachometer. It is much too small. If you are an astute tach man (or gal), this one requires too much attention away from the road to find out what and how you are doing. To say the least, it is especially frustrating when you are cornering and need all the physical coordination you can muster. Frameless side windows without vent-panes give an "open-air" look without rumpling the coif.

A car with "It" should be a solace for what ails you, should bring out a zest for living, moving, going, and AMX does. The problem was simple. Come up with an impeccable 2-seat continental body design, join it with a good performance chassis and powerplant, incorporate the result into mass production to fit the average guy's wallet, and you have a winner on your hands. American Motors should. The AMX goes a long way to fulfilling the pet phrase of Vic Raviolo, AMC group vice president: "The Walter Mitty Ferrari."

Passing Speeds (2nd gear):

40-60 mph	3.4 secs.	248.8 ft.
50-70 mph	3.8 secs.	334.4 ft.

Standing Start ¼ mile:

92 mph	15.2 secs.
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Speeds in Gear:

1st	48 mph @ 5000 rpm
2nd	79 mph @ 5000 rpm
3rd	90 mph @ 4000 rpm

MPH Per 1000 RPM: 22.5

Stopping Distance from 60 mph

from 60 mph	119 ft.
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Speedometer Error

Electric Speedometer	30	45	50	60	70	80
Car Speedometer	34	51	57	69	81	92

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE: V-8 OHV. **BORE & STROKE:** 4.17 x 3.57 in. **DISPLACEMENT:** 390 cu. in. **HP:** 315 @ 4600 rpm. **TORQUE:** 425 lbs.-ft. @ 3200 rpm. **COMPRESSION RATIO:** 10.2:1. **CARBURETION:** 1 4-bbl. Carter. **TRANSMISSION:** 4-speed manual, all syncromesh forward gears. **FINAL**

DRIVE RATIO: 3.15:1. **STEERING:** Recirculating ball type, 20.0:1 gear ratio. **TURNING DIAMETER:** 33.5 ft., curb-to-curb. **TIRES:** E70 x 14 wide profile, fiberglass-belted, high-performance. **BRAKES:** Hydraulic drum type, 10 in. diameter drum. **SUSPENSION:** Front: independent coil spring, Rear: Hypoid axle, 4½-leaf, semi-elliptic springs. **BODY/FRAME:** Unit construction. **DIMENSIONS, WEIGHTS, CAPACITIES:** Overall length: 177.2 ins. Overall width: 71.6 ins. Overall height: 51.7 ins. Wheelbase: 97.0 ins. Front track: 58.36 ins. Rear track: 57.0 ins. Curb weight: 3035 lbs. Fuel capacity: 19 gals.

OPTIONS

Tilt steering wheel; air conditioning; automatic transmission; rear bumper guards; engine block heater; heavy-duty engine cooling system; performance "GO" package; power brakes; power disc brakes; power steering; "quick-ratio" manual steering.

