



ROAD TEST CHEVROLET AVEO LS

The 'American Revolution' breaks out in Bupyong, South Korea.

BY DANIEL PUND

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM FETS

As lineage goes, the Chevrolet Aveo's might have a slight pedigree advantage over that of Anna Nicole Smith's son.

This inexpensive car from Chevy is the latest in a particularly motley branch of the automotive family tree—an American-branded car made in Korea. Think Ford's Kia-built Aspire and Festiva. Think Pontiac's desecration of that once-revered name, the LeMans, built by Daewoo. These are not cars in the Gearhead Hall of Fame.

I once lived in a flat beneath an erotic dancer who drove a Festiva with a bumper sticker that read, "You've been a bad boy, go to my room!" Other than that, the Festiva was not, you know, a *stimulating* car.

Ah, but we were talking about the new Aveo—which you may pronounce ah-vay-oh or av-ee-oh, your pick. You could also call it a Kalos, since that is the name of the Daewoo model on which it is based. Well, actually more than just "based"—more

like "basically identical to." This refugee Chevy, which is nonetheless featured in the division's much-ballyhooed "American Revolution" advertising campaign, is built in Bupyong, South Korea, which is not in Wisconsin but is fun to say aloud. Over the last year, GM has also quietly introduced three other Daewoos under the Suzuki badge. The General has a controlling interest in both companies.

Forgive us, then, if we were planning to take this car lightly. When it was dropped off in our parking lot, we... well, we didn't really notice. Chevrolet says the Aveo was styled at Italdesign-Giugiaro in Moncalieri, Italy. And we have no reason to believe the company is lying. Chevy describes the five-door Aveo as having a "particularly striking design." This is what's known as overstatement. Truth is, the Aveo comes from the same post-modern-dork design school as the Toyota Echo and Suzuki Aerio—both competitors of the Aveo. Tall, upright, and narrow, all

these cars violate a certain innate human sense of proportion. Also, the tall, bluff sides of the Aveo make the respectably sized wheels (14-inches) look like casters under a toolbox. Nothing screams "econobox" quite like really small tires. At 58.9 inches high, the Aveo five-door pokes between two and three inches higher into the atmosphere than a Dodge Neon, Ford Focus, or Honda Civic, but it rides on a wheelbase between 5.4 and 7.4 inches shorter and is an inch or two narrower than those sedans.

There is, nonetheless, beauty inside the Aveo. Pop open one of its flyweight doors, and you'll find 50 cubic feet of interior space in front and 41 in the rear, despite its modest exterior dimensions. That's about the same amount of interior room as in most of its competitors. Be aware, however, that some of that generous number of cubes is high up around the driver's head because of the tall roof. But the Aveo, at least the five-door we tested, is a well-packaged device. The rear bench seat sits far rearward in the car—placing rear-seat passenger heads near the backlight. This arrangement sacrifices cargo room—there's a puny seven cubic feet of storage behind the rear seats. But unless you need to take five people *and* their baggage, the Aveo will do just fine. In the current vogue, the seats are all mounted high in the body. You feel more like you're sitting on a kitchen chair than in a bucket seat. Also, it makes the driver look and feel like a geek.

Being that most practical of small vehi-

cles, a hatchback, you can also convert that rear-seat space into cargo room. Fold the 60/40-split seatbacks, pivot the bench forward, and secure it with tethers to the front headrests, and you get a more-than-credible 42 cubic feet of cargo room. The whole tether thing is a bit cheesy-looking, but it works.

It was the interior that gave us the first inkling this might not be as bad a car as we'd expected. Our test car, a well-optioned LS, costs only \$14,160, but the interior is finished in decent-looking, low-sheen plastics. The Aveo doesn't look any cheaper inside than do several more-expensive, U.S.-built GM models. Daewoo even tried—somewhat half-heartedly—to add a bit of funkiness to the interior design. The center stack is bordered by strips of dimpled black plastic. Kia likely would have just used one big swath of hard black plastic instead. The two center vents are shaped like tubes that protrude from the

face of the dash instead of just simple grate-covered holes. Daewoo might be reaching for a sort-of Beetle/Mini style, but the splashes of style are subtle and inconsistent enough to make them look like little more than afterthoughts applied to an otherwise conventional interior.

There are touches of true cheapness inside, too. When you push the right stalk up to turn on the windshield wipers, you might think you've broken something. It resists moving, and when it does, it emits a cracking sound, as if you'd snapped a piece of plastic in two. The tiny sun visors, which are too small to block many solar rays, return to their recesses in the headliner with a hollow *thwack!* These are easily forgiven faults, though, since the car costs only about half the price of the average new car sold in America.

All Aveos come standard with a tachometer, a tilting steering wheel, adjustable seatbelt anchors, floor mats, and

two power outlets up front. These are items one cannot necessarily take for granted in this lowliest ring of the automotive food chain. The slightly cheaper Kia Rio, for example, offers none of these standard. Our LS model added A/C, power windows, power door locks with remote keyless entry, and a CD player with MP3 playback capability.

But availability of amenities does not a good car make. Even the sweetest-singing stereo sounds like the intercom system at Kroger if it's drowned out by a buzzing engine, humming tires, and howling winds. Although this particular stereo isn't exactly sweet, you can at least hear it clearly because the Aveo runs in relative quiet. At full throttle, the Aveo makes 76 decibels of racket. Not exactly Lexus territory, but it is quieter than the Kia Rio and virtually all cars one rung higher on the price ladder (Honda Civic, Nissan Sentra, Toyota Corolla, et al.). And the Aveo matches those



THE VERDICT

Highs: Decent fit and finish for the price. Roomy interior, not a penalty box. Charming "chirp" when you lock it.

Lows: A couple thousand more gets you into a nicer used car or a new Ford Focus. Not developed at the Nürburgring. Embarrassing "chirp" when you lock it.

The Verdict: It's a better transportation pod than a Kia Rio.



sedans for quiet at a 70-mph cruise.

That said, the noises you do hear are not especially pleasant ones. The DOHC 103-hp, 1.6-liter iron-block four-cylinder is on the buzzy side at high revs. And despite a dual-path intake intended to fatten a skimpy torque curve, you'll need to rev this little motor to move out with anything resembling haste. At 10.2 seconds to 60 mph, our Aveo, equipped with a five-speed manual, is about as sprightly as the 96-hp Kia Rio and nips the Scion xB by a few 10ths of a second. It trails the Civic/Corolla/Focus camp by an average of about a second.

Because of the paucity of torque (107 pound-feet at 3600 rpm), you'll be working the tall shifter constantly to stay up with the traffic flow—and you'll be happy you chose not to pay \$850 for the optional four-speed automatic. By enthusiast standards, the Aveo's shifter has perhaps the worst feel of any on the market.



The throws are long—an impression exacerbated by the lengthy stalk. The action is limp. Even while in gear, the shifter flops around as if it were connected to nothing at all. This is not satisfying motoring. Yet we never missed a shift. And judging by our continued forward progress, we concluded that the shifter must indeed be connected to something.

As the shift quality suggests, this is not a vehicle made for the pleasure of operation. It is, instead, a well-realized transportation module—certainly considering the weight and cost constraints in this class. Its strut-front, twist-beam-rear suspension is tuned for a soft ride, in the manner of most Korean cars. Tar strips and gritty pavement are less noticeable in the Aveo than in most Japanese or American small cars. Only large potholes and frost heaves reveal the low-budget mechanicals with a mighty *thwack*. In daily traffic machinations, the Aveo feels



nimble enough, even with its feel-free steering. It doesn't feel tippy in the way that tall, cheap cars often do on a curving off-ramp. Its narrow Hankook tires return enough grip (0.74 g) to avoid embarrassing early-onset squealing. And its disc and drum brakes are trusty, returning 199-foot stops from 70 mph with a reasonably firm and linear pedal. That's better braking performance than that of most other small cars on the market. ABS is a \$400 option

COUNTERPOINT

PATTI MAKI

This is cute. I like the styling *a lot*. I like the little aero wing atop the hatch. Granted this is an econocar, but it looks great and has good standard features for its price. Cheap? It's an econocar, get it? It's not a sports car, it's not a supercar. It's just a cute little car for people who don't have a lot of money or don't work at a car magazine or aren't hung up on lookin' good, or phat, or whatever. In further defense of the little guy, \$14K is still a significant amount of money for many people. I wasn't expecting luxury, and what I found was not disappointing as proletarian transportation. All power to the Aveo!

ANDRÉ IDZIKOWSKI

Inexpensive entry-level cars tend to be little more than cramped, bland-looking, relatively slow appliances for getting from point A to point B. Chevy's new Aveo had a few pleasant surprises for us when we first drove it. The styling of our little LS wagon has lots of interesting lines that give it an almost sporty look. Inside, with the driver's seat adjusted for a six-foot-tall driver, there's a generous amount of leg- and headroom in the back seat for a similarly sized adult passenger. The diamond-patterned material covering the inner door panels also looked and felt upscale, something most bottom-buck cars usually lack. Like others in this class, the Aveo isn't quick, but it does have some features that make it less appliance-like.

AARON ROBINSON

Confession: I got a button for midget boxes that squirt through traffic burning gas by the teaspoons. The Aveo pushes it. The stick shift could be sharper, and I'd like the chassis to feel less wander-prone at 75 mph, but the Aveo does metro commuting with distinction. It packages adults with room to spare and doesn't drill their ears with engine noise. Somebody who likes driving designed the Aveo's dash, and the rear seats fold flat for incidental furniture moves. A few more bucks lands the even better Scion xB, but only for one more model year and only in select parts of the country. With the new Aveo, Chevy makes life a little sweeter for closet lovers of rolling closets.



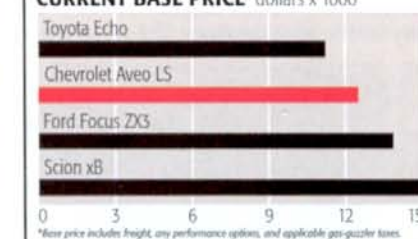
that our car did not have.

There is a Special Value edition of the Aveo that starts at \$9995. But that is an automotive hair shirt, and one suspects it exists only so Chevy can advertise a starting price under \$10,000. The LS model, which will be more popular, starts at a still rock-bottom \$12,585. None of the options on our test car (which raised the price by \$1575) improves the driving experience. So forget the \$225 rear spoiler and the \$725 sunroof and the rest, and you'll still have a well-equipped small car for less than \$13,000. That's substantially cheaper than a Scion (xA or xB) or even an Echo with a similar level of equipment. It's about the same as a Hyundai Accent and slightly more than a Kia Rio. If, however, you buy one of those Korean-brand Korean cars, you get the mondo five-year/60,000-mile basic warranty (with a 10-year/100,000-mile powertrain warranty). But the American-brand Korean car, the Aveo, is offered with a less-gen-

erous three-year/36,000-mile warranty.

Unlike its predecessors, there is no shame in driving an Aveo. But neither is there pleasure. That counts as a success in this class of transportation.

CURRENT BASE PRICE* dollars x 1000



*Base price includes freight, any performance options, and applicable gas-guzzler taxes.

ACCELERATION seconds 0-60 mph 1/4-mile



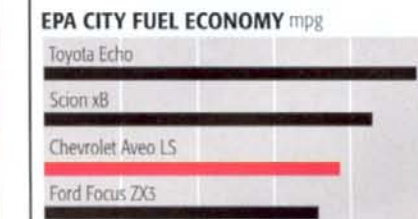
BRAKING 70-0 mph, feet



ROADHOLDING 300-foot skidpad, g



EPA CITY FUEL ECONOMY mpg



C/D TEST RESULTS

ACCELERATION		Seconds
Zero to 30 mph		2.7
40 mph		4.8
50 mph		6.8
60 mph		10.2
70 mph		13.6
80 mph		17.8
90 mph		25.6
100 mph		35.7
Street start, 5-60 mph		11.0
Top-gear acceleration, 30-50 mph		13.5
50-70 mph		15.4
Standing 1/4-mile		17.4 sec @ 79 mph
Top speed (drag limited)		110 mph

BRAKING	
70-0 mph @ impending lockup	199 ft
Modulation	poor fair good excellent
Front-rear balance	poor fair good excellent

HANDLING	
Roadholding, 300-ft-dia skidpad	0.74 g
Understeer	minimal moderate excessive

FUEL ECONOMY	
EPA city driving	27 mpg
EPA highway driving	36 mpg
C/D-observed	24 mpg

INTERIOR SOUND LEVEL	
Idle	45 dBA
Full-throttle acceleration	76 dBA
70-mph cruising	70 dBA

CHEVROLET AVEO LS

Vehicle type: front-engine, front-wheel-drive, 5-passenger, 5-door sedan

Price as tested: \$14,160

Price and option breakdown: base Chevrolet Aveo LS (includes \$540 freight), \$12,585; sunroof, \$725; 14-inch aluminum wheels, \$375; premium sound system, \$250; rear spoiler, \$225

Major standard accessories: power windows and locks; remote locking; A/C; tilting steering wheel; rear defroster and wiper

Sound system: Chevrolet AM-FM radio/CD-MP3 player, 6 speakers

ENGINE

Type	inline-4, iron block and aluminum head
Bore x stroke	3.11 x 3.21 in, 79.0 x 81.5mm
Displacement	98 cu in, 1598cc
Compression ratio	9.5:1
Fuel-delivery system	port injection
Valve gear	belt-driven double overhead cams; 4 valves per cylinder, hydraulic lifters
Power (SAE net)	103 bhp @ 6000 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	107 lb-ft @ 3600 rpm
Redline	6500 rpm

DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	5-speed manual
Final-drive ratio	3.94:1
Gear	Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max test speed
I	3.55 4.7 31 mph (6500 rpm)
II	1.95 8.6 56 mph (6500 rpm)
III	1.28 13.1 85 mph (6500 rpm)
IV	0.97 17.3 106 mph (6150 rpm)
V	0.76 22.0 110 mph (5000 rpm)

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	97.6 in
Track, front/rear	57.1/55.5 in
Length/width/height	152.8/65.8/58.9 in
Ground clearance	6.4 in
Drag area, Cd (0.35) x frontal area (22.9 sq ft)	8.0 sq ft
Curb weight	2543 lb
Weight distribution, F/R	62.4/37.6%
Curb weight per horsepower	24.7 lb
Fuel capacity	11.9 gal

CHASSIS/BODY

Type	unit construction
Body material	welded steel stampings

INTERIOR

SAE volume, front seat	50 cu ft
rear seat	41 cu ft
cargo, seats up/down	7/42 cu ft

Front-seat adjustments: fore-and-aft, seatback angle; driver only; height

Restraint systems, front: manual 3-point belts, driver and passenger front airbags; rear: manual 3-point belts

SUSPENSION

Front	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs; anti-roll bar
Rear	trailing arms integral with a transverse member; coil springs

STEERING

Type	rack-and-pinion with hydraulic power assist
Steering ratio	16.0:1
Turns lock-to-lock	3.1
Turning circle curb-to-curb	30.2 ft

BRAKES

Type	hydraulic with vacuum power assist
Front	10.1 x 1.0-in vented disc
Rear	7.8 x 1.4-in cast-iron drum

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size/type	5.5 x 14 in/cast aluminum
Tires	Hankook Optimo H420, P185/60R-14 82H
Test inflation pressures, F/R	30/30 psi
Spare	high-pressure compact