TOP 10 BEST-SELLING SPORT/UTILITY COMPARISON

EXCLUSIVE:

DROP-DEAD GORGEOUS!
We Drive the First Supercar of the 21st Century

HOT SEDAN SHOOT-OUT: JAGUAR XJR vs. MERCEDES E420 SPORT vs. AUDI A8

WIN A ‘98 BMW 323i CONVERTIBLE!
DETAILS INSIDE
## COVER STORY:
42  Mercury's Sleek Gullwing MC4  
Inside the first supercar of the 21st century

## SPECIAL SECTION: DOWN & DIRTY
**SPORT/UTILITY BEST-SELLERS**

64  What Do the Top Domestic and Import SUVs Have That Others Don't?  
Ford Explorer, Toyota 4Runner, Jeep Grand Cherokee, Nissan Pathfinder,  
Chevrolet Blazer, Isuzu Rodeo, Jeep Cherokee, Toyota RAV4,  
Chevrolet Tahoe, Subaru Legacy Outback

## ROAD TESTS
50  Audi A8 4.2 Quattro vs. Jaguar XJR vs. Mercedes-Benz E420 Sport  
A portfolio of power: Blue chip performance sedans

150  Ferrari 456 GTA  
For $230,000 you get matching luggage

## MOTORSPORT FEATURE
172  Track Test: Spec Truck Series Chevy S-10  
The fast little brother of the NASCAR Craftsman Series

## FEATURES
104  Retrospect: '55 Highway Patrol Buick  
The most famous cop car in television history

137  1997 Motor Trend Wheel Buyer's Guide  
More than 20 hot new wheels for a variety of budgets

## TRENDS
22  Headliner  
Highlights from the Geneva Auto Show

28  International Report  
First look: '98 Audi A6 gets a hot 30-valve V-6

30  Detroit Report  
First look: The '98 Lincoln Town Car you'll like!

34  Washington Report

36  Motor Trend TV and MT Online News

38  Environmotive Report

## LONG-TERM TEST REPORTS
157  One-Year Test Wrap-Up  
17,822 miles on our '96 Honda Civic EX

170  Test Updates  
'97 Infiniti Q45; '96 Oldsmobile Bravada;  
'97 Lexus ES300

## DEPARTMENTS
98  Truck Trends  
Sneak preview: Six-door Ford Expedition!

112  Performance Trends  
Shelby's new Cobra... again

128  Autronics  
From the factory: Mercedes-Benz SLK;  
Aftermarket review: Starship Voyager

## COLUMNS
10  Right of Way  
The costly relapse of mad car disease

12  Letters

121  Car Care  
Learning to read the smoke signals

154  Technologue

188  Road Test Review
Buy any normal car and you have to dicker over options, extras, and things like floor mats. Buy the new Ferrari 456 GTA and the Italian automaker generously spares you all that annoying decision-making. You see, everything included as standard on the grand touring Ferrari—including a five-piece set of sumptuous leather luggage, precision fit to the curvatures of the car's trunk and obviously liberated from the most relaxed, lanolin-swathed bovine on God's green earth.

Showing off the luggage to gape-mouthed friends seems to be its most common use, however, as the notion of subjecting the ultra-expensive virgin hides to the tortures of America's baggage handlers feels tantamount to high treason. Not only would Enzo likely roll over in his grave at the first gash, but he'd probably find his way to a pay phone and read you the riot act. Interestingly, the luggage set in our stunning black test car was wrapped in plastic, as well as protected further by individual green velour shrouds. Uh, are we supposed to take off the plastic but leave on the shrouds, or what? Perhaps the best solution would be to set up the luggage in one's living room as a shrine to beautiful cattle, and buy a set of more dispensable luggage for travel.

Free suitcases aside, the 456 GTA is still a phenomenally terrific automobile. With Pininfarina's distinctive wedge-shape styling, a 456-horsepower V-12 powerplant, aluminum and composite body panels, and more subtle clout than Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan, this is a machine that far surpasses the needs of all but the most discriminating of car enthusiasts. And if that's not enough to ensure rarity, the $229,950 pricetag should do the trick.

Following the tradition of four-seat Ferraris such as the first 250 “2+2” in 1960, the 330 of 1964, and the 72 365 GT4, the 456 GTA expands the regular 456 GT's purview one step further by including an automatic transmission. Co-designed by FFD Ricardo and Ferrari, the rear-mounted four-speed transaxle is electronically operated via interface with the Bosch Motronic M5.2 engine-control computer and is able to change from “GT” to “sport” shift-logic modes without a driver-activated pushbutton. The best tactic for city driving is to leave the metal shifter in third gear (a 1:1 ratio) and save the 0.68:1 ratio fourth cog for the highway. Nonetheless, the automatic will be welcomed by those who regularly suffer through urban traffic, as it can deliver a walloof of performance that belies its normally sedate temperament. However, be advised the character of the car remains the most rapacious in six-speed manual 456 GT form.

It's with the automatic that the 456 takes on a true dual-personality. Fire up the delicious 5.5-liter DOHC 65-degree V-12 and you won't have the urge to blip the throttle incessantly as with the manual gearbox car. Instead of powering away from stoplights and running to红线 in the first two

**FOR $230,000 YOU GET MATCHING LUGGAGE**

by C. Van Tune

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN WING
gears, you'll find yourself focusing more on the culture of driving such a machine, taking time to caress the comely cowhides, finding the correct mood music on the powerful stereo, and looking in store windows for 50-percent-off sales on Armani suits. Then, just as you're thinking this isn't so much a sports car as a touring cocoon, some smartass in a 911 tries to out-accelerate you from an intersection and sneak by you in the gutter lane.

To quote George Bush: “Not gonna happen.”

Plant your right foot on the firewall and the luxo-Ferrari transforms into an unholy she-beast from another dimension, lunging off the line with the urge of big-cube torque and rocketing its 3388 pounds to 60 mph in 4.9 seconds. With 436 horses at 6250 rpm, 298 pound-feet of torque at 4500 rpm, and a 7250-rpm redline, this 10.6:1 compression-ratio engine continues to accelerate rapidly as road speeds build.

By the time the quarter-mile elapses in 13.3 seconds at 105.2 mph, you've either blown that Porsche onto someone's manicured dichondra lawn or the Beverly Hills police have set up a roadblock and await your imminent arrival.

At wide-open throttle, the automatic shifts crisply enough to bark the rear tires on the 1-2 gear change, though during more normal driving it's as unobtrusive as a BMW or Mercedes unit. From freeway speeds the performance becomes truly staggering, with a kickdown into second gear forceful enough to pull your ears back toward the headrest and rocket you to triple-digit velocities in a heartbeat. Above 4000 rpm, the intoxicating wail of the 48 valves and dozen tuned exhaust ports is better than anything Mozart ever penned, encouraging you to really bad and taste the sweet juices of all-out top speed. We did just that, all 177 mph of heady forward motion.

And we want to do it again!

Evoking 436 horsepower from 334 cubic inches, without the aid of a trick like turbocharging or supercharging, ranks this Ferrari's V-12 as one of the most thrilling powerplants currently in production. Weighing only 518 pounds, the all-aluminum engine sits far enough rearward in the chassis to allow a 49/51-percent front/rear weight distribution (an improvement over the six-speed 456 GTs front/rear balance of 51/49 percent).

That factor, plus the inherent smart design of the car's chassis (tubular steel with weld-on aluminum bodywork, suspended by upper and lower control arms, coil springs, and anti-roll bars front and rear) produces a package that remains highly controllable and secure-feeling over a wide variety of surfaces—and at every speed up to terminal velocity. Automatic adjustable-damping shocks at all four corners and automatic-leveling rear suspension help maintain proper ride
Rich cowhides, a 200-mph speedometer, and more sex appeal than Yasmin Blee, Fiona Apple, and Tea Leoni combined promise you'll have big fun in the 456 GTA. Under the composite hood lives a 5.5-liter/436-horsepower V-12 connected to a rear-mounted four-speed automatic transaxle that'll take you to 177 mph. This is grand touring at its finest.