

Detroit Auto Scene ROAD REPORT

2012 Sonic Drives with Real Authority

BY GERALD SCOTT
NEWS DEPT.

We finally got hold of the all-new 2012 Chevrolet Sonic as a road test car and it was quite a fun week of driving to behold.

That's not a given. Most Americans, including me, don't like or gravitate to subcompacts largely due to the "safety factor" – the idea that you just don't feel safe in a sub because you get buffeted about in traffic by large pickup trucks and SUVs, much less 18-wheelers.

Mind you, when I cite the safety factor I'm talking about the overall vehicle feel and not actual crashworthiness or crumple zones.

Well, let the record show that our test car, a 2012 Sonic 5-door LTZ trim level, was the first car of this size in which I felt safe relative to the traffic around me.

Not only did I feel safe, but I thought the car had what previous entries in this category clearly lacked – the sense that it drove with authority.

Never thought I'd say that about any such vehicle weighing all of 2,684 pounds, but the Sonic is the real deal, you might say.

The test car came with a 1.4L Ecotec turbo engine mated to a six-speed manual transmission.

The end result was a car that was, simply, fun to drive.

Sonic's affection kinda-sorta reminded me of the Pontiac Vibe, if you remember that mini-car, which was the sister to the Toyota Matrix.

I mean that as a compliment because I test-drove the Vibe and found it to be peppy and spirited in its own right. And it felt safe to drive, had a certain "authority" and now I must say that this driving and road handling DNA has been forwarded nicely by GM.

The all-new 2012 Sonic is a small car with a large array of amenities. It is offered in two body styles: a four-door sedan and a five-door, each

with distinctive design elements, including motorcycle-inspired round headlamps. Sonic also delivers class-leading rear-seat roominess and connectivity features that enhance the driving experience.

The Sonic is equipped with power-dense four-cylinder engines, including the aforementioned Ecotec 1.4L turbo, and it is designed to be one of the safest vehicles in the segment, with 10 standard air bags.

Production of the Sonic takes place at the General Motors Orion Assembly Center in Michigan, making it the only subcompact built in the United States. The plant received a \$545 million investment in upgrades and retooling, and will help restore approximately 1,000 jobs in the metropolitan Detroit area.

Sonic's cabin complements the motorcycle-inspired exterior with a detailed instrument cluster featuring a large, round analog tachometer set within an asymmetrical LCD readout, with a large digital speedometer display.

The mid-instrument panel surface is available in two colors (dark titanium and brick) and flows seamlessly into the upper doors, with premium low-glass finishes.

Next, the automatic shift knob has a "cobra head" design, while the manual shifter has a chrome-finished knob.

Tubular outboard climate outlets protrude from the instrument panel surface.

The interior includes storage compartments in the center stack and doors. The rear seats fold virtually flat for carrying larger items. Front bucket seats are standard and heated front seats are available.

Meanwhile, note that the Chevrolet Sonic models are powered by efficient, power-dense, small-displacement engines, including the Ecotec 1.4L turbo and the Ecotec 1.8L – the same engines used in the Chevrolet Cruze. Three transmissions are available: a



2012 Chevrolet Sonic LTZ interior dashboard view.

five-speed manual and six-speed automatic with the 1.8L and a six-speed manual with the 1.4L turbo.

The Ecotec 1.4L turbo's power ratings are 138 horsepower (103 kW) and 148 lb.-ft. of torque (200 Nm) between 1,850 rpm and 4,900 rpm.

The wide rpm range for the maximum torque – a specific trait of turbocharged engines – helps the engine deliver a better driving experience and performance.

Premium design elements give the engine world-class smoothness and durability, including a low-mass hollow-frame cast iron block, dual overhead camshafts with variable valve timing, chain-driven cams and roller-finger camshaft followers, piston-cooling oil jets and integrated oil cooler, a variable-flow oil pump and an electronically controlled thermostat.

The 1.4L's turbocharger is integrated within the exhaust manifold, for reduced weight and greater packaging flexibility in small vehicles. A reinforced crankshaft and stronger connecting rods deliver additional strength to support the engine's pressurized power and torque over a wide rpm band.

Engineers who also work on the Corvette tuned the Sonic's ride and handling, giving it a more direct feel, while balancing the vehicle for the broad range of driving conditions in North America.

All models feature a MacPherson strut front suspension with coil springs and stabilizer bar.

So here we have the only subcompact made in the U.S.



2012 Chevrolet Sonic LTZ.

these days – all OEMs complained that there wasn't a business case to build the super small cars in the U.S. because the cost of labor and other factors were too high.

The challenge for Chevrolet and the marketers supporting the Sonic will be to convince the buying public that the car is as good or better than its segment competitors, which include the Ford Fiesta, Honda Fit, Hyundai Accent, Kia Rio and Nissan Versa.

With the EPA forcing severe new mileage requirements coming up on 2016 - 2025 model year vehicles in the U.S., subcompacts like the Sonic might just be the new normal on the domestic front.

That is to say, Americans seemingly always gravitated to the large SUVs and pickup trucks, in part, because of both real safety concerns as well as the idea that you were riding "above" traffic, the sedan chair effect.

That's no exaggeration. The ad agencies that support the OEMs have done these extensive studies detailing the root causes and how-and-where factors to explain why car buyers gravitate to certain styles and sizes of vehicles.

And the studies say that American consumers tend to want to buy and drive the larger cars because of those aforementioned, intrinsic safety and comfort concerns. Along comes the Sonic, riding in the face of those tendencies.

As noted at the outset, one really does feel comfortable and safe inside the vehicle.

Chevrolet offers the Sonic in three trim levels including the LS, the LT and the LTZ, the latter of which was our test vehicle.

It's a small car, but it has a class-leading number of safe-

ty features. It was also designated by the IIHS (Insurance Institute for Highway Safety) as a Top Safety Pick as far as crashworthiness and crumple zones go. So the endorsements say it is small but safe after all.

Chevrolet says the Sonic was "developed first and foremost to be fun to drive – with ride and handling characteristics not expected in this segment."

I think we can endorse that claim in that it really is a fun car to drive, it has the authority mentioned earlier and the third-party endorsements say it's safe to boot.

So it remains an interesting experiment by General Motors in creating a small car that's fuel efficient, fun to drive, has crashworthiness and will be the type of vehicle GM will need to meet those future CAFE mileage and emissions standards.

So that was all of the ingredients that went into our fun week with the Chevrolet Sonic. Any car's best endorsement is seeing them on the road, so look for one soon.

2012 CHEVROLET SONIC LTZ

- Base Price: \$17,235
- As Tested: \$19,545
- Engine: Ecotec 1.4L
- Mileage: 29 city; 40 hwy
- Length: 159 inches
- Wheelbase: 99.4 inches
- Trans: 6-spd. man.
- Curb wt. 2,684 lbs.
- Assembly: GM Orion Assy.

OPTIONS:

- Premium power sunroof with sliding shade and tilt feature (\$850); Ecotec Turbo 1.4L engine that includes six-speed manual transmission (\$700); destination charge \$760.

METRO DETROIT'S BEST SELECTION, PRICES AND SERVICE!



SHOP MICHIGAN'S LARGEST INDOOR SHOWROOM!
— Over 120 Vehicles Inside to choose from! —



2012 CRUZE
LEASE FOR \$149 24 months
BUY FOR \$247 a month
100 AVAILABLE! ONLY \$499 DOWN

2012 MALIBU
LEASE FOR \$149 24 months
BUY FOR \$258 a month
200 AVAILABLE! ONLY \$499 DOWN



2012 EQUINOX
LEASE FOR \$246 39 months
BUY FOR \$325 a month
50 AVAILABLE! ONLY \$499 DOWN

2012 TRAVERSE
LEASE FOR \$249 24 months
BUY FOR \$375 a month
40 AVAILABLE! ONLY \$499 DOWN

Matick Chevy's Concierge Service
FREE PICKUP AND DELIVERY
FOR SALES OR SERVICE.



Mon & Thur 8:30am-9pm
Tue, Wed & Fri 8:30am-6pm
Saturday 10am-4pm

OPEN EVERY SATURDAY for SALES and SERVICE

MatickChevy.com

313-531-7100

Telegraph & in Redford

96

CRUZE Disclaimer: Lease: Payment plus tax, title, license and documentation fees, 24 months with 10,000 miles per year. With approved credit, 800+ credit score and Non-GM Lease in household. No security deposit required. MSRP: \$18,500. Purchase: Payment plus tax, title, license and documentation fees, 24 months with 10,000 miles per year. With approved credit, 800+ credit score and GM vehicle in household. MSRP: \$18,500. MALIBU Disclaimer: Lease: Payment plus tax, title, license and documentation fees, 24 months with 10,000 miles per year. With approved credit, 800+ credit score and GM vehicle in household. MSRP: \$22,755. Purchase: Payment plus tax, title, license and documentation fees, 24 months with 10,000 miles per year. With approved credit, 800+ credit score and GM vehicle in household. No security deposit required. MSRP: \$24,200. EQUINOX Disclaimer: Lease: Payment plus tax, title, license and documentation fees, 39 months with 10,000 miles per year. With approved credit, 800+ credit score and GM vehicle in household. MSRP: \$24,200. TRAVERSE Disclaimer: Lease: Payment plus tax, title, license and documentation fees, 24 months with 10,000 miles per year. With approved credit, 800+ credit score and Non-GM Lease in household. No security deposit required. MSRP: \$30,000. Purchase: Payment plus tax, title, license and documentation fees, 24 months with 10,000 miles per year. With approved credit, 800+ credit score and Non-GM Lease in household. No security deposit required. MSRP: \$30,000.

Village Automotive Repair

COMMERCIAL ACCOUNTS WELCOME – "FREE SHUTTLE"

FREE Winter INSPECTION ASE

AMSOIL Full Synthetic OIL CHANGE \$60 5 QTS. • MOST CARS & TRUCKS

FREE Battery Check ACDELCO BATTERIES Sold Here

RENTAL CARS & TOWING AVAILABLE GM DEALER CERTIFIED TECHS

31470 Mound Rd. Warren
East side of Mound 2 blocks North of 13 Mile
1-586-275-2777

We guarantee the lowest price or it's free!

Your GM Card Redemption Center!
buff whelan chevrolet
586-274-0396

OVER 1,000
New Chevrolets in Stock!
WE GUARANTEE THE LOWEST PRICES OR IT'S FREE!

2012 IMPALA LT



Stk.#10317
WAS \$28,050 • NOW \$20,929
BUY FOR \$310* + tax
Power Locks, Power Windows, Power Mirrors, Keyless Entry, Remote Start, Bluetooth, OnStar, XM Radio and more!

2012 CRUZE LS



NO SECURITY DEPOSIT
LEASE FOR \$193* + tax
24 Mos./10,000 Miles
Automatic, Power Locks, Power Windows, Power Mirrors, OnStar, XM Radio and more!

2012 MALIBU LS



NO SECURITY DEPOSIT
LEASE FOR \$179* + tax
24 Mos./10,000 Miles
Steering Wheel Controls, Bluetooth, Bodyside Moldings, Power Locks, Power Windows, Power Mirrors, Keyless Entry, OnStar, XM Radio and more!

2012 EQUINOX LS



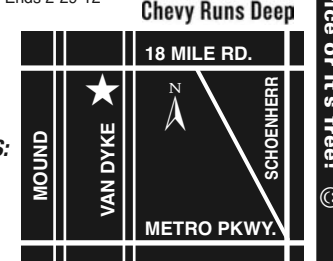
LEASE FOR \$277* + tax
39 Mos./12,000 Miles
Steering Wheel Controls, Bluetooth, XM Radio/OnStar, Power Locks, Power Windows, Cruise and more!

*All prices based on GM Employee pricing. Leases require 1st payment, taxes, security deposit, and plate fee up front unless otherwise noted. Pictures may not represent actual vehicle. Must qualify for GM owner loyalty. Purchase payment is based on approved credit. 75 months at 2.99%, plus tax, title and plate. Ends 2-29-12

Free shuttle service to home, office or shopping.
buff whelan chevrolet
WHERE THE DEALS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE, EVERY DAY SINCE 1970!

Van Dyke • South of 18 Mile Sterling Heights
Jeff Caul
586-274-0396
PEP QUOTES BY PHONE OR EMAIL: JEFF CAUL AT JCAUL@BUFFWHELAN.COM

CONVENIENT HOURS:
Mon. & Thurs. 8:30 am – 9 pm
Tues., Wed., Fri. 8:30 am – 6:30 pm



We guarantee the lowest price or it's free!