

GM gets it really right

by Barbara and Bill Schaffer



General Motors is spending time lately getting it right! We just got out of the phenomenal all-new 2007 Chevrolet Tahoe (along with the Corvette Z06) and we just went to the introduction of the new and much improved GMC Yukon, Yukon Denali and Cadillac Escalade. These are all vehicles that GM "got right." They appear to be on an incredible roll.

The previous generation Tahoe was good and sold well up until the gas crunch last year. When fuel economy started dictating buying habits, GM rushed ahead and brought out the newest generation of their highly profitable full size SUVs. The impetus for the earlier introduction was their improved fuel economy, which they anticipate being the best in the segment, but that's only the tip of the iceberg of the improvements and refinements.

With the new leaner exterior design the Tahoe expresses a more sporty and agile look. It features large wheels and a wider track that offer a more powerful and capable stance. Improved aerodynamics

also contribute to the sleek look, and the raked windshield and smoother roofline accentuate its new length. Adding to the sporty look are standard 17-inch and optional 20-inch wheels.

The entirely new interior is filled with high quality materials and an excellent fit and finish. Six gauges fill the instrument pod that sits below the arched dash. The center stack is well organized with the most used navigation screen and audio controls mounted on top over the climate control. The bottom row of buttons includes controls for the adjustable pedals, a shut-off for the backup warning system and other controls not used as often. There are also dual plugs in the dash for cell phone or iPod chargers.

The heart of the new Tahoe is the latest generation small-block V-8, which now includes an advanced Active Fuel Management system that shuts off four cylinders during low engine load conditions, in addition to many other refinements. The two-wheel-drive version is rated 16 mpg

for city driving and 22 mpg on the highway. In combined driving, we averaged 18.7 mpg, which we thought was good for a 5300-pound vehicle and with our less than economical driving style; however we would probably average 22 mpg if Barbara were the only driver.

The 5.3-liter V-8 produces a robust 320 horsepower and 340 lb.ft. of torque. The transmission in our rear-wheel drive test vehicle was a four-speed automatic. Later in the model year, the standard engine for the two-wheel drive will be a 290-hp, 4.8-liter V-8, but without the cylinder deactivation.

As expected, the acceleration levels of the new engine were significantly improved with 0 to 60 mph times of 8.5 seconds. We recorded 76 mph in our unofficial acceleration test, which runs about one-eighth mile. That makes the Tahoe one of the best accelerating full size SUVs we've driven, except for some of the new near 400 horsepower models that have popped up recently.

General Motors is encouraging the use of



The Chevrolet Tahoe has a standard electronic stability control system that uses brake controls to help the vehicle maintain control in the event of a potential skid. The system also uses software algorithms to predict vehicle "tip-up" on a flat road and again applies the appropriate brakes to mitigate the chances for a rollover.

E85 fuel (E85 comprises 85 percent ethanol, which is a renewable resource fuel produced in the United States) and our vehicle had the \$1,000 flex fuel option.

Even the two-wheel-drive LS model (\$33,990 including destination charge) has a long list of standard features including dual zone climate control, cruise control, StabiliTrak (stability control), tire pressure monitoring and more.

We drove the top-level LTZ model (\$44,015), which adds features like leather, four heated seats, remote starter, Bose speakers, XM Satellite radio, power rear liftgate, Autoride Suspension, 20-inch polished wheels; heated washer fluid system, rain sensing wipers and much more. Our test vehicle also had a very good navigation system (\$2,145), rear view camera (\$195), and rear seat entertainment system (\$1,295), taking it to a lofty \$48,140. However, it's a very impressive vehicle.

The Tahoe is new from the ground up, with a new frame and a choice of three different suspension systems. The standard system is called Premium Smooth Ride, while the LTZ we drove comes with the Z55 system with Autoride. For drivers that go off road, the Z71 (available later in the model year) will be the best choice.

If we were blindfolded, we doubt that we could tell the difference between the Tahoe and one of the town cars that transport people to the airport. It's that smooth and that quiet. The Autoride system in our test vehicle takes the handling to a new dimension with real-time damping to reduce body motion and the dip and dive of acceleration and braking. Autoride also incorporates an air-lift/auto-leveling system that automatically raises the vehicles ride height when carrying passengers or heavy payload.

The other driving elements of the Tahoe include a precise rack and pinion steering system and large four-wheel disc brakes. The brakes have a strong positive feel with none of the mushy pedal feel of previous models.

For a daily driver or on a road trip, we enjoyed everything, except for the fuel economy, about the Tahoe. We especially appreciate the features like the backup camera, heated seats, DVD system to entertain the kids, and the navigation system. In addition, it's very comfortable and easy to drive.

Chevrolet planners have done an excellent job on the new Tahoe. It reaches a new level of refinement, not seen before on Chevrolet cars or trucks. ■

Chevrolet Tahoe LTZ

STANDARD EQUIPMENT

20-inch polished aluminum wheels, Heated front and second row leather seats; Power liftgate; RainSense wipers; Heated washer fluid; Autoride suspension; Power release on second row seats; All power, Cruise; XM Satellite Radio; Power adjustable pedals; Remote vehicle start; Ultrasonic rear parking assist; Sunroof; Tire pressure monitoring system; and much more.

Base Price: \$43,140
 Options: Second row bucket seats....\$49
 Navigation/radio\$2,145
 Rear view camera\$195
 Rear seat entertainment\$1,295
 Total Options\$4,125
 Freight\$875
 Price as Tested.....\$48,140

DIMENSIONS

EPA SizeSpec. Purp
 Weight.....5,233 lb.
 Wheelbase116.0 in.
 Length.....202.0 in.
 Width.....79 in.
 Height76.9 in.
 Fuel Capacity26 gal.
 Cargo Capacity16.9 to 108.9 cu. ft.

MECHANICAL

Engine.....5.3L V-8 Flexi Fuel
 Horsepower320@5300
 Torque340@4200
 Transmission4-Spd. Auto
 DriveRear wheel
 BrakesDisc ABS
 Tires275/55R20

PERFORMANCE

0 to 60 mph.....85 sec.
 Top speedLimited 112 mph
 EPA economy rating16/22 mpg
 Our actual fuel econ18.7 mpg

COMPETITORS

Ford Expedition, GMC Yukon, Hummer H2, Infiniti Q56, Nissan Armada, Toyota Sequoia