

## Fours Seasons Review

### The Chrysler Sebring JXi

3rd of Four Reviews

by Jacqueline Mitchell



Convertibles are really cool when the weather is hot. But it wasn't until the dead of winter that the Sebring JXi made its way to me. This head-turning coupe was in a minority among the sport-utility vehicles hogging the roads of the Motor City from January through March.

So, I wondered, how would this warm-weather mobile handle in snow, sleet and on rain-drenched roads?

First thing first -- in northern climates, often the most important feature on a car is its heater. The 1997 Sebring warms up quickly, and the defroster did a terrific job of clearing those icy windows many a morning. The dials and controls are conveniently located within arms reach, and don't require a degree in meteorology or an understanding of weather symbols to operate.

Windy, blustery days didn't intimidate the light-weight Sebring. It hugged the road, never losing control and becoming sidelined. Fortunately, we had a fairly mild winter in Detroit this year, so I couldn't assess the Sebring's ability to plow through the snow that usually packs Michigan roads.

Still, it never warmed up enough for me to be tempted to let the top down, either. The convertible top was certainly much sturdier than I imagined it to be. It stayed in tact: no shakes, rattles, groans or signs of leaks during heavy rains.

There's a lot to like about the Sebring.

The style is fresh and sleek; definitely a stand out in a crowded parking lot. The leather interior is comfortable, and the sound system is respectable. The seats easily adjust to your favorite position, with the electronic buttons conveniently located on the bottom of the driver's seat.

I especially like the seatbelts, which are mounted on the seats instead of the door, providing a much more comfortable fit. In fact, this is the first time ever that I honestly enjoyed wearing my seatbelt -- it didn't cut across my neck or cut into my shoulder blade.

Another neat feature is the Autostick transmission control system, available only with the V6 engine, which allows the driver to shift gears manually without the hassle of a clutch.

Getting in and out of the Sebring is easier than I imagined, even though it sits low to the ground. The high rear-end, evidence of Chrysler's cab-forward design, holds a sizable trunk, suitable for carrying groceries, dry-cleaning and other cargo. Chrysler pioneered the cab-forward design in the early 90s by pushing the wheels out to the

corners of the car. This new design first appeared with the Dodge Intrepid, Chrysler Concorde and now defunct Eagle Vision.

Some annoyances: moving the seat up and back is awkward when trying to let rear passengers in, or when I'm trying to climb out. Nearly 12,000 miles into our year-long test drive, some little irritating things are cropping up. The driver-side window squeaks when you raise it up or down. And that creaking sound in the steering wheel that was serviced prior to our last review is back.

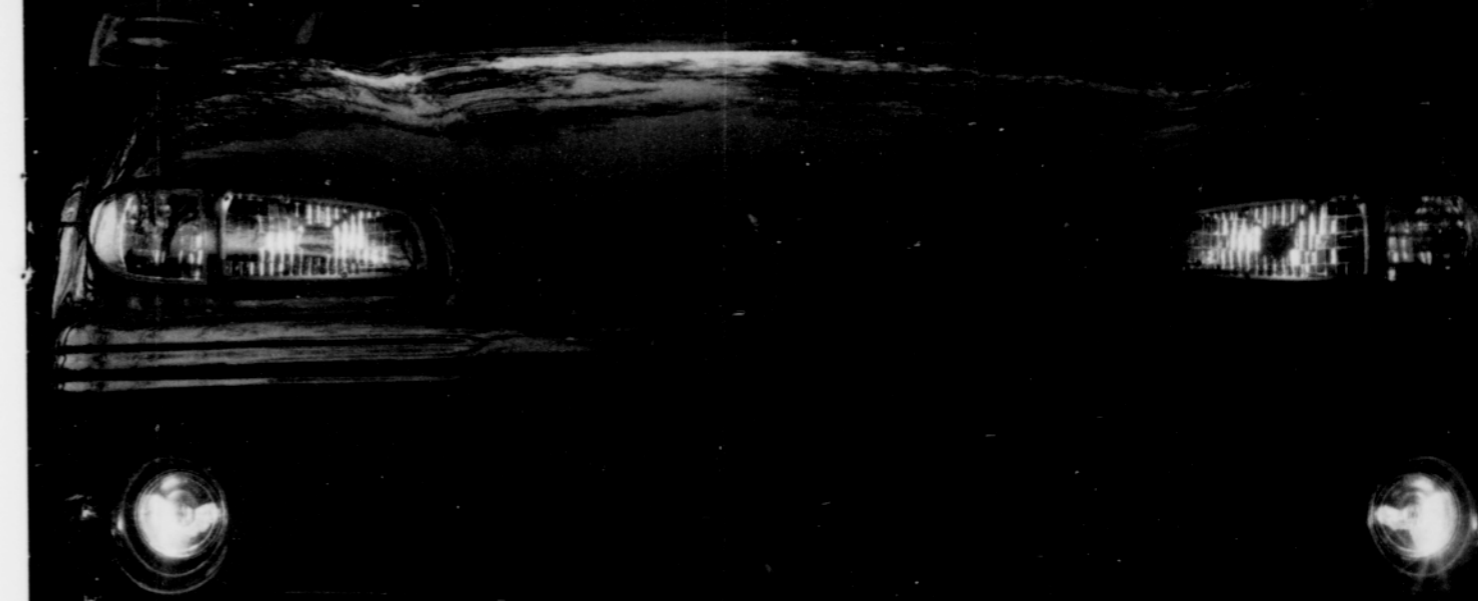
Overall, though, this seems to be a convertible for all seasons; not one that has to hibernate in a garage through a blustery winter.

#### SPECIFICATIONS

Base price.....	\$24,660
Price as tested.....	\$26,525
Engine.....	2.5-liter V6
Horsepower.....	168@5800 rpm
Acceleration (0-60).....	10 seconds
Fuel economy.....	17city/21 hwy
Tank capacity.....	15.8 gal

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