

# Portland Observer Auto Review

## Auto Review: 2006 Chrysler PT Cruiser GT Turbo Convertible

BY KATHLEEN CARR

In 2001, the insightful designers at Chrysler captured America's attention with the release of the PT Cruiser. The challenge of a retro car like the PT Cruiser is in maintaining the cool quotient after being on the market for five years.

The PT Cruiser vaguely resembles a panel truck of the 1930s, overlaid with street-rod styling from the 1950s. Bulging fenders, fender-mounted headlights and taillights, and a tall-wide grille helps give the PT Cruiser its unique look. Another distinctive feature is its basic stance, which makes the wagon look like it's leaning forward. To tweak the "Wow" effect of the 2006 PT Cruiser, it gets a make over inside and out with updated front and

rear fascias, a new larger, lower grille with a Chrysler's winged badge, new headlights and round fog lamps. We drove the GT convertible, which is a two-door and sits three inches lower than the sedans. With the top up the convertible looks like a custom chopped-rod, complimented with a large-diameter chrome exhaust tip and 17-inch 15-spoke chrome-clad wheels. Drop the top and the "gangster-mobile" turns into a "chick car". The interior has a new instrument panel with larger gauges, new seat materials, a Chrysler signature analog clock, a new center console with sliding armrest and MP3 play capability for all audio systems. The audio controls are mounted higher in the center stack and a



TOP DOWN STYLE

**SPECS:** 2.4-liter, 4-cylinder engine, high output turbocharged at 230 hp.; 4-Speed 'AutoStick' automatic transmission; \$31,500 MSRP. MPG is 19 City / 26 Highway \* Premium Fuel Only

passenger grab-handle is added for easier entry and exit.

The PT Cruiser is fun to drive, but it's not a sports car. In essence this is a tall practical economy car. New for 2006, the PT Cruiser GT adds fire under the hood with all the slick go-fast hardware that makes this particular model a joy to drive. Chrysler tweaked the engine output to 230 horsepower and 245-lbs. of torque for the High-Output Turbo engine in the PT Cruiser GT. Acceleration with the two-turbocharged engines is quick. The turbo engine really is a kick, even with the Autostick transmission, which lets you shift manually without a clutch.

Chrysler firmed up the suspension to provide more control. A rumbly exhaust makes the GT sound more like what hot-rodders wanted when

the hot-rod body was first introduced. You know it's a turbo because of the telltale whine as it spools up, though chambers in the intake manifold act as sound dampers. The GT can get to 60 mph in about 7 seconds, which is decent. The GT acts more like a muscle car than its body says it is.

The most impressive part of the PT convertible is the solid ride. I looked for the characteristic ragtop shutter as I traversed road bumps and found precious little evidence of it. Ragtops are notoriously bad for wind noise while cruising but Chrysler has handled this issue as well. The convertible top is easy to

operate and the "smart glass" windows drop a bit-or all the way, depending on which detent you've activated. Engineers took away two of the hatchback doors, leaving two long doors instead. They strengthened the rear seat structure and redesigned the novel sports bar that extends, wing-like, above the rear seat area. This looks tight and offers rear seat passengers less wind buffeting.

The 2006 PT Turbo GT appeals to people of all ages and lifestyles with its whimsical-gangster-mobile retro design. Let the top down, kick in the turbo and take her for a spin!

# 9 Billboards for R&B Diva

## Mary J. Blige dominates awards

(AP)—Mary J. Blige won big at this year's Billboard Music Awards as her chart-topping comeback album "The Breakthrough" landed the R&B diva a leading nine honors.

Among the awards the 35-year-old singer claimed Monday night were R&B/Hip-Hop artist of the year, female R&B artist of the year and R&B/Hip-Hop album of the year.

"The Breakthrough" shot to No. 1 after it debuted on the Billboard charts in December 2005 and has sold 2.6 million copies since.

Blige, in white go-go boots and a sparkly mini-dress, rocked the full house by belting out a medley of her "Enough Crying" and "Take Me As I Am" during the two-hour show aired live from the MGM Grand in Las Vegas.

Blige said she's already reached the pinnacle of her career by enduring personal struggles that once led her to sing hopefully about having "no more drama" in her life.

"I've realized if I don't (love) myself, nobody will. Nobody is going to love me more than I do," Blige told reporters after the show.

Chris Brown, a 17-year-old lothario who calls his music "Hip-Hop with a swagger," won new artist of the year, male of artist of the year and artist of the year awards.

"I'm 17. That's crazy, it's mind-boggling," said Brown. "My mom, she still keeps me humble. She tells me to take out the trash, ya know, clean my room."

Newcomers Rihanna and idol-turned-country star Carrie Underwood also walked away with high honors.



Mary J. Blige poses with her awards Monday at the Billboard Music Awards in Las Vegas. (AP photo)

The 18-year-old from Barbados edged out Blige and Beyonce for the top songstress honor.

"I really can't feel my legs, this is

phenomenal," said Rihanna as she accepted the award for best female artist of the year award. "That was a really tough category."

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## Baseball Honors Civil Rights Movement

(AP) -- Major league baseball will pay tribute to the civil rights movement with an exhibition game between the World Series champion St. Louis Cardinals and the Cleveland Indians in Memphis, Tenn., on March 31.

The game will raise money for the National Civil Rights Museum, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Jackie Robinson Foundation, the Negro Leagues Museum and Memphis charities.

With the game, which would be repeated annually, baseball officials hope to attract more young blacks to the sport.

The Indians, who made Larry Doby the AL's first black player and Frank Robinson the first black manager in baseball, didn't hesitate when the commissioner's office suggested the game, team officials said.

Also planned for the tribute is a five-minute documentary by Spike Lee on civil rights pioneers and baseball's role in the movement.

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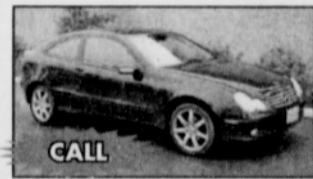
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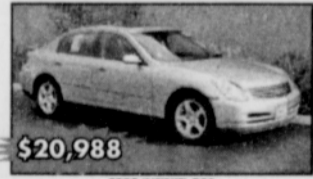
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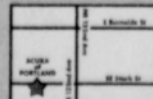
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