The present generation of the Grand Am was introduced three years ago as a 1999 model and has received few changes since. This year, the main change is under the hood, with the advent of a new 2.2L four-cylinder engine. The Grand Am is available as a two- or four-door sedan, in SE, SE1, GT and GT1 versions.

**A brand-new engine**

For several years now, General Motors has not seemed to attach much importance to its four-cylinder engines. More often than not, these engines were coarse, noisy underachievers and not all that reliable. The brand-new 2.2L four-cylinder ECOTEC engine will attempt to erase the memory of its rustic predecessors. The four-valve-per-cylinder newcomer puts out 140 horsepower and 150 pound-feet of torque—not sufficient for hauling a trailer, says GM, which recommends only the V-6 for towing. On the other hand, the new four cylinder does provide very acceptable acceleration. Its smooth performance is a nice surprise, and it is well adapted to the car. It accelerates very noisily, but once it reaches cruising speeds, it becomes more discrete.

The four-speed automatic transmission shifts very smoothly, as is generally the case with GM’s automatics. At 100 km/h, it runs the engine at around 2,500 rpm, which should make it the envy of all those cars with more powerful engines that run 500 rpm or more faster at the same speed.

GM’s engineers are either getting better at the science of balanced handling or their bosses are allowing them more leeway or bigger budgets, but for whatever reason, the Grand Am’s suspension proves very pleasant at all times. The starting point, of course, is to have a rigid body shell to which a firmly compliant suspension can be attached. Here, the result is a comfortable ride even on bumpy roads, where the reaction may be firm but is never harsh. The Grand Am takes curves on all types of pavement as well or better than the majority of the other vehicles in its category.

The well-weighted power steering is stable, quite precise and with the right amount of quickness. Unfortunately, it transmits little in the way of road feedback. Braking is very powerful and fade resistant.

At the CAA-Quebec inspection centre, we noted that the engine compartment is well designed and that the structure is quite sturdy. However, there is still room for improvement. Several joints including the ones around the front shock tower housings are not sealed, the front brake discs do not have backing plates, there are holes in the front fender liners, and the gas filler pipe is not protected.

**Interior and trunk**

As the car is a bit low and the doors do not open very wide, access is relatively difficult, especially on the driver’s side because the steering wheel is quite close to the seat. You also have to watch the wide doorsills, which can dirty your clothes. The front seats are comfortable for most occupants though the slightly convex curve of the seatbacks may not suit all body types.

The rear bench, roomy enough for two adults, provides just average comfort because of the low cushion. Tall individuals have ample foot room but will find that headroom is tight. The release straps to unlock the 60-40 split-fold seatback are located in the trunk, which is not very practical.
The trunk is roomy but hard to load and unload because of a narrow opening and a high, wide sill. The trunk hinges can easily squash things placed underneath.

Interior finish is improving but still perfectible. Soundproofing also leaves much to be desired, with acceleration and especially road noise too prevalent.

It is disappointing to still find a vehicle that requires you to roll down the window to adjust the right-hand mirror, and a radio with a volume button that is not lit at night. Though the radio is located above the heating controls, both are too low to be easily used without taking your eyes off the road, and the heating controls are too close to the gearshift lever.

Safety features include front air bags, anti-lock brakes, good headlights, traction control and good visibility. The front head restraints cannot be locked in a raised position and they are wide enough to create a blind zone for some drivers. There are no head restraints in the rear. The top of the dash reflects almost constantly in the windshield.

**Conclusion**

The Grand Am is a better-balanced vehicle with the new four-cylinder engine, and it still offers a good quality-to-price ratio. Thanks to its competent handling, it is more than just a simple means of getting from point A to point B. Still more improvements may be on the way. Robert Lutz, GM’s new president, has been hinting that the Pontiac division has BMW in its sights. Mr. Lutz has also declared that grooved body panels are on their way out. If giant General Motors can shake loose from its torpor and its notoriously top-heavy administration, and that seems to be the case, it could make life uncomfortable for the competition. In the meantime, the engineers will have to make the effort to improve quality at every level.

**FOR**

- Well-adapted engine (4-cylinder)
- Smooth ride
- Handling
- Powerful brakes
- Comfortable front seats
- Smooth automatic transmission

**AGAINST**

- Noisy acceleration
- Numb steering
- Dashtop reflections
- Narrow trunk opening
- High, wide trunk sill
- Reflections in windshield

**2002 PONTIAC GRAND AM**

- **Engine:** 16-valve, 2.2-litre 4 cylinder; 12-valve, 3.4-litre V-6
- **Horsepower:** 140 h.p. @ 5600 rpm; 170 or 175 h.p. @ 4800 rpm
- **Torque:** 150 lb.-ft. @ 4000 rpm; 195 or 205 lb.-ft. @ 4000 rpm
- **Transmission:** 5-speed manual; 4-speed automatic
- **Suspension:** fully independent
- **Brakes:** disc/drum (GT and GT1: 4-wheel disc)
- **Length:** 473.8 cm
- **Width:** 178.8 cm
- **Wheelbase:** 271.8 cm
- **Tires:** P215/60R15; P225/50R16
- **Weight:** 1,383 to 1,437 kg
- **Air bags:** standard front
- **Towing capacity:** 454 kg, with V-6 only

**Fuel consumption with four-cylinder and automatic transmission:**
- Transport Canada rating: city: 10.1 L/100 km (28 mpg); highway: 6.8 L/100 km (42 mpg)
- Test result: 11.5 L/100 (25 mpg)

**Fuel tank capacity:** 54.1 litres

**Acceleration:** 0-100 km/h: 8.6 seconds 60-100 km/h: 5.8 seconds

**Competition:** Chrysler Sebring, Daewoo Leganza, Ford Taurus, Honda Accord, Hyundai Sonata, Kia Magentis, Mazda 626, Nissan Altima, Subaru Legacy, Toyota Camry

**Maintenance (cost may vary from dealer to dealer):**
Frequency: 3 months/6,000 km; total cost to 100,000 km: $1,310

**Warranty:**
- Full basic coverage: 3 years/60,000 km
- Powertrain: 3 years/60,000 km
- Surface corrosion: 3 years/60,000 km
- Perforation damage: 6 years/160,000 km
- Emissions control system: 3 years/60,000 km (full coverage); 8 years/130,000 km (catalytic converter and electronic control module)

**Factory replacement parts:**
Rear bumper: $963  
Front brake disk: $178
Brake pads: $187  
Muffler: $395  
Front fender: $359

**Average insurance premium** (Quebec City, replacement cost endorsement, claim-free insurance record, female driver or male driver 30 to 40 years old): $807 to $1,022

**Price according to trim line:**
SE: $21,405  
SE1: $23,055
GT: $26,595  
GT1: $27,830

**Main options:**
Automatic transmission: $1,085  
Sun roof and alloy wheels: $1,120
V-6 engine: $935 (SE1)  
Sun roof: $810
Alloy wheels: $410

**Price as tested:** $23,030  
**Freight and preparation:** $830

**Dealers:** Quebec: 159; Canada: 683

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