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2009 Pontiac G5 Sleek, practical coupe gets 35 mpg.

Overview

The Pontiac G5 is a sporty two-door coupe that gets good fuel economy and is comfortable and enjoyable for daily commuting. It's sleek and stylish. The cabin is nice and all the controls are easy to operate. OnStar comes standard, adding safety and convenience.

For 2009, all G5 models come with an improved 2.2-engine equipped with variable valve timing. The 2009 G5 gets an EPA-rated 35 miles per gallon on the Highway, a 12 percent improvement over the base 2008 model. That kind of fuel economy puts the slickly styled G5 into the same economy range as a subcompact.

The 2009 Pontiac G5 comes in a standard version and as a sportier GT. For 2009, both are powered by the same 2.2-liter four-cylinder engine rated 155 horsepower. That's up for the standard version, down for the GT, with better fuel efficiency for both. With either model, a five-speed manual transmission is standard, a four-speed automatic is optional. Helping to maximize fuel economy with the manual transmission is a longer-legged final drive ratio (3.63:1, vs. 3.84) and, on manual base models, low rolling resistance tires. The G5 is front-wheel drive.

The G5 GT comes with a sports suspension, performance tires and wheels, four-wheel disc brakes with ABS, and StabiliTrak electronic stability control, along with upgraded premium features.

For 2009, a passenger-sensing system has been added to the dual-stage frontal airbags, and Bluetooth wireless connectivity has been added to the OnStar system, which comes standard, enabling hands-free telephone use. New equipment packages are available for 2009, also. The G5 comes standard with head-curtain airbags, a tire-pressure monitor, and XM Satellite Radio.

With any coupe, interior space and passenger capacity are compromised for sporty styling, and that's the case here. Pontiac describes the G5 as a five-passenger car, but limited rear legroom makes carrying five adults a serious challenge. We view it as a primarily a two-seater, with the capability of carrying a couple more people in a pinch. The back of the cabin is best used for parcels. Flip down the back seats and this little coupe can haul a respectable load of cargo.

The Pontiac G5 shares mechanical underpinnings with the Chevrolet Cobalt, and we think that's a good thing, but the Pontiac is available only as a coupe.

Model Lineup

The 2009 Pontiac G5 comes in two trim levels, base and GT. Both are powered by a 155-hp, 2.2 liter four-cylinder. The standard transmission is a five-speed manual; a four-speed automatic is optional (\$925).

The G5 (\$16,275) comes with air conditioning; power windows, mirrors, and door locks with remote/keyless entry; tilt steering; four-speaker AM/FM/CD/MP3 audio; 60/40 split-folding back seat; height-adjustable driver's seat; and 195/60R15 low-rolling-resistance tires on 15-inch steel wheels. OnStar and XM Satellite Radio are also standard. The standard suspension, called FE1, is tuned for a smooth ride. Brakes are discs in front, drums in the rear.

G5 options: The Sun & Sound Package (\$995) combines a sunroof with a seven-speaker Pioneer audio system. MyLink (\$995) combines one year of OnStar Directions & Connections with 16-inch machined aluminum wheels, 205/55R16 touring tires, ABS, cruise control, auxiliary USB audio port, leather wrapped steering wheel and shift knob, and steering-wheel-mounted audio controls. The Appearance Package (\$295) adds body-color side moldings, a trunk cargo net, a chrome exhaust tip, and fog lamps.

The G5 GT (\$19,575) upgrades with StabiliTrak electronic stability control, four-wheel-disc brakes with anti-lock (ABS), FE3 sport suspension, and 17-inch aluminum wheels wearing summer performance tires. The GT also adds heated seats, cruise control, foglamps, the seven-speaker stereo, leather-wrapped steering wheel and shift knob, audio and cruise controls on the steering wheel, and a chrome-tipped exhaust.

Options for both models include a sunroof (\$750), USB input (\$100), leather seats with front seat heaters (\$795), engine block heater (\$75), and remote starter (\$190). A cigarette lighter and ashtray are available (\$40). The seven-speaker stereo (\$295), ABS (\$400), and cruise control (\$275) are available for the base model.

Safety features include dual-stage frontal air bags (now with a passenger sensor) and front seat belts with pretensioners (in a crash these remove the slack). Always wear those seat belts because they are your most important line of defense in a crash. Anti-lock brakes (ABS), standard on GT and optional on the base model, can help drivers avoid accidents by allowing them to maintain control of the steering at maximum braking effort. We recommend getting ABS.

The standard OnStar service includes the General Motors Advanced Automatic Crash Notification (AACN) system, which makes crash data available to participating 911 centers, to help them dispatch the appropriate life-saving personnel and equipment to crash scenes faster. Also available is OnStar's Vehicle Diagnostics notification system that allows subscribers to receive free monthly reports via E-mail. Each diagnostic report provides information on the remaining life of the engine oil, as well as tire pressures and checks on the engine and transmission, emissions controls, braking systems, and air bags. OnStar is highly useful for navigation and we've found the OnStar operators friendly and helpful.

Walkaround

no mistaking the G5 for anything but a Pontiac. Pontiac has steadily and consistently nurtured and developed this design theme since 1961, and now it is surely one of the most, if not the most, recognizable motif in the U.S. auto industry.

The G5 has a cleaner and smoother look than Pontiacs of the past, which tended to be cluttered with stick-on body cladding.

The strength of the G5's Pontiac identity is remarkable, given that only its grille, tail lights, and other minor details distinguish it externally from a Chevrolet Cobalt. Credit its designers for doing a good job.

Interior Features

Inside the Pontiac G5 is a nice cabin. We found the cloth material on the seats quite handsome. There is plenty of legroom for two people up front. The driver's seat is adjustable for height. However, it seems to work better for raising short drivers than it does lowering down to add headroom for taller folks. The problem is that when the seat is lowered all the way to accommodate a tall driver, the seat cushion tilts a bit forward. So the G5 is better for people of average or shorter stature than it is for those who are tall.

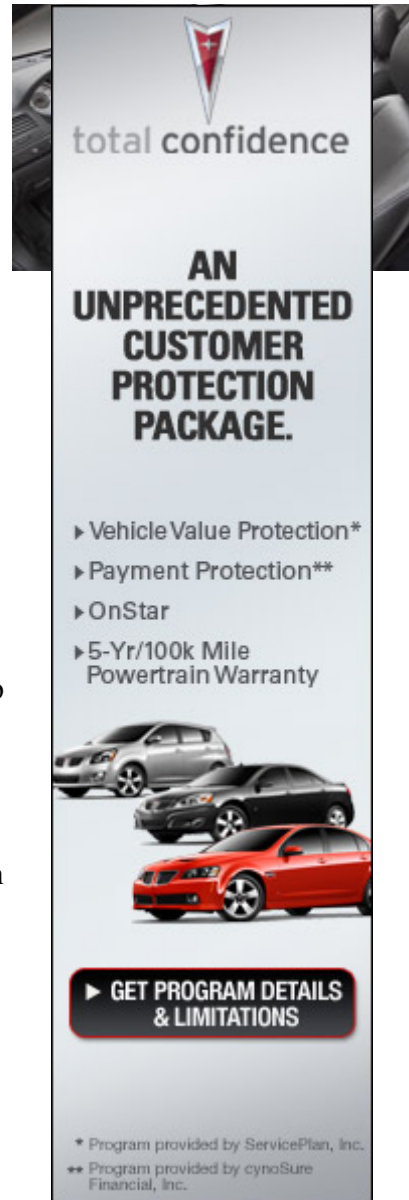
Leather seats are optional and, on the GT, are available in Ebony or the new-for-2009 Ebony/Red combination.

All the controls are easy to find and use but there is a shortage of storage bins and trays.

The back seat is barely suitable for a six-foot adult for a short trip across town. It is an excellent location, however, for parcels.

Like many coupes, which favor a low roof as they go for a streamlined look, the G5 has somewhat narrow windows. Some people like that because it makes them feel as secure as a turtle in a shell. Others find it slightly confining. One problem is poor visibility over the driver's left shoulder. Big roof pillars and a small rear window combine to make it hard to see vehicles coming up to pass.


OnStar is a nice security blanket. This option combines a global positioning system and a cellular telephone (far more powerful than a hand-held cell phone) to put the driver in contact with an OnStar center. Manned 24/7, the OnStar center can tell where the



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vehicle is located and can provide help, ranging from a calling a tow truck to providing directions when you are lost. In case of a crash severe enough to deploy the airbags the system will automatically call the center so help can be sent even if the occupants are incapacitated.

We liked the optional sunroof. On some cars the sunroof tends to scoop outside air and funnel it into the vehicle as if attempting to duplicate the tornado from *The Wizard of Oz*. That is not the case with the G5. There is so little turbulence it is possible to open the sunroof on a 20-degree day and enjoy the sunlight without freezing, with the heater turned up.

The trunk is rated at 13.9 cubic feet which is competitive in this segment. The rear seat can be folded down for carrying more cargo.

Driving Impressions

As with most sporty cars, the ride in the Pontiac G5 GT is somewhat firm, but encounters with potholes and tar strips do not result in any serious discomfort. The ride is comfortable enough for day-to-day commuting even in the Midwest where the roads are rough.



The GT steering is somewhat heavy and the effort increases during turns. The steering is tight, however. What that means is when the car is pointed straight you can turn the steering wheel a tiny bit and it doesn't feel disconnected. The car begins to respond. The G5 GT feels secure and fairly responsive on gentle or sweeping turns. However, when the turns are tighter and the speed increases the GT feels nose-heavy and not sporty.

The brakes feel great. The pedal was firm, but it was easy to slow the car either a little or a lot. Also, the front of the car didn't dip too much under hard braking, and we found it had a balanced, secure feel.

The summer performance tires that come standard on the G5 GT offer good grip on dry pavement. We found them unsuitable for winter use, however. (Maybe that's why they're called summer tires.) In packed snow (5F to 20F), we found extremely poor grip and traction even on flat terrain. Which is what we expected. We recommend all-season tires for drivers who must face wintry weather but don't want to maintain two sets of tires.

We found the G5 four-speed transmission downshifted quickly when we slammed the throttle down, and it held the gear until just past 5000 rpm. That means it was striving to get the most out of the engine.

Fuel economy is an EPA-estimated 25/35 mpg for the Pontiac G5 with five-speed manual gearbox, 24/33 mpg with the four-speed automatic. The G5 runs Regular gasoline. A special Pontiac G5 XFE model gets an EPA-rated 25/37 mpg. The GT gets an EPA-rated 25/35 mpg with manual, 23/32 mpg with automatic. We'd guess the difference for the GT is related to its performance tires.

Summary

The Pontiac G5 looks good. It has a handsome interior and a decent trunk. Pontiac has added more standard equipment for the past two years. For 2009, fuel efficiency has been improved.



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