

RAV-4 offers excellent fit and finish

Continued from 16 B

its not very noisy.

The engine could use a few more horses. At 120, that's OK, but under a full load it starts to protest a bit, especially with the automatic transmission. Honda's station wagon-like CRV has 130, while Subaru eclipses the RAV as well with its Forester (165).

To its credit, the RAV felt sturdy under all conditions. My test vehicle had nearly 10,000 miles, but there was nary a squeak or rattle,

a Toyota hallmark. Toyota also says its fine for light off-roading. It is, but it, like most SUVs, will see mostly pavement work.

The RAV is a bit pricey. The base price was \$18,268. That included dual air bags, rear window defroster, full-time four-wheel drive, tinted glass, split folding rear seat, rack and pinion power steering, independent suspension and automatic transmission. Options included power windows, mirrors and door locks (\$1,050); cassette with four

speakers (\$415); cruise control (\$290); 16-inch alloy wheels (\$685); air conditioning (\$985) and four-wheel anti-lock brakes (\$590).

Floor mats and destination brought the as-tested price to \$22,822. Six-cylinder Explorers and Blazers start in that price range, but very few are sold that cheap. Everything the RAV-4 competes with costs about as much. And Toyota's built in dependability and reliability makes the vehicle more tempting.

Big trucks causing havoc on highway

Continued from 16 B

just since 1990 - and a whopping 50 percent on city and town roads. The number of big rigs on the road is expected to climb at least another 14 percent in the next seven years.

As the number of trucks on the road has increased, the safety record of the industry has improved, said James Lewis, a spokesman for the ATA. But as the accident rate for trucks (and for cars as well) improves, the increasing number of big rigs on the road has kept the death rate from trucks at a consistent 5,000 per year. Critics fear U.S. highways are reaching the saturation point.

Although large trucks account for only 3 percent of vehicles on the road and 7 percent of miles driven, they are involved in 12 percent of the nation's road deaths. And of those deaths, 75 percent are occupants of the other vehicle, and 10 percent are pedestrians, bicyclists and bystanders.

Lewis points out that studies of police reports show that mistakes made by drivers of cars cause 72 percent of the accidents involving trucks. But it is the size of those trucks that can make such mistakes particularly costly.

Washington state researchers found that double and triple trail-

er rigs have a threefold increased risk of crashes compared to single trailers. And the risks of fatal crashes climb sharply with weight. An 80,000-pound big rig is twice as likely to be involved in a fatal accident as a 50,000-pound truck.

Lewis disputed those figures, maintaining that triple trailers have the lowest accident rate of any vehicles on the road. For example, he said, Nevada statistics for 1993 show that triples had only .64 accidents per million road miles.

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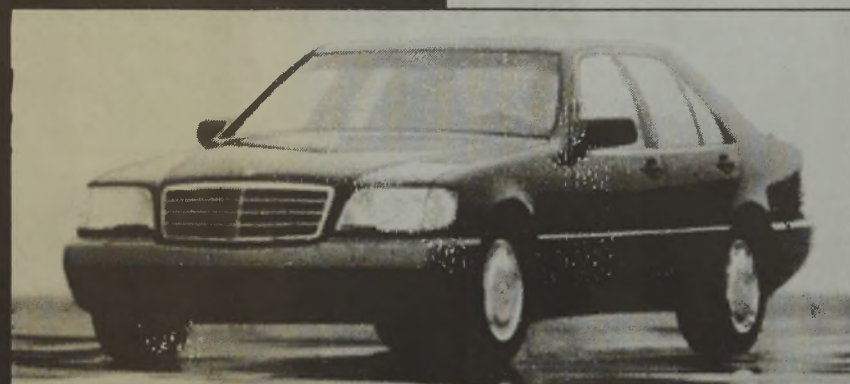


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