

► TOW TEST

Chevy Lumina S

By Godfrey Castle



Some of the most exciting motor racing I have ever seen was the Australia Touring car series. This comprised of two brands of vehicles - the Ford Falcon versus the Chevrolet Commodore - a duel that had people standing on their seats because it was such close, exciting racing.

Building on the image generated by those thundering Australian Chevy Commodores comes the Australian based Lumina, a slightly smaller car in size than the top selling Commodore, but styled with equally sleek, body lines that speak of power and speed. And it's not a cross dresser as with other products sold in this country - it is a Chevrolet!

In South Africa we now have the Lumina in a two model derivative plus a pick-up version or Ute. (short for Utility).

Our test vehicle, a 3.5-litre V6 known as the Lumina S, develops 190 kW at 6 500 rpm and 340 Nm of torque at 3 200 rpm. If this is not enough power to ignite your desire for an awe inspiring tow car then you can always opt for the SS version, which is powered by a thundering V8 engine that develops 250 kW and 470 Nm of torque! It's your choice.

If you opt for the Lumina S here's what you can expect in terms of performance towing a caravan with a GVM of 1 490 kg - a Jurgens Classique.

Acceleration from standstill to a 100 km/h took 15.3 seconds, braking from 100 km/h to standstill in 3.83 seconds and 1.38 seconds to do our standard two kilometre hill climb.

Fuel consumption is reasonable. Towing the big Jurgens Classique at a steady 80 km/h fuel consumption varied between 8.71-litre per hundred kilometres and

14.2 depending on whether the road is flat or hilly. At 100 km/h the fuel consumption increases to between 14.2 and 17.4-litres per hundred kilometres.

You can, of course, go a lot faster or cruise up those hills without having to pull over into the slow lane for faster traffic to overtake, without having to work the gearbox or keep an eye on the

engine temperature gauge!

You can sit back and relax, with spare horses to ready and waiting to take up the challenge of your accelerator foot, which is a nice feeling to have.

For a combination this size the towing performance is impressive.

Maximum towing weight

The Lumina S has a Tare weight of 1 580 kg, but interestingly enough, the automatic transmission model has a

have an automatic transmission and a load distribution hitch, which we would take to mean a tow hitch with an accessory such as the Yellow Blade from Trapezium (or old Tando).

The Lumina has a race bred harshness in its firm suspension. You can feel the small bumps in the road, but the car is superbly stable which, from a towing point of view, is an added bonus when towing a caravan or trailer.

Plug's in the boot!

As accustomed as we are to our traditional tow brackets the Aussies have thought up something new. Instead of the trailer light plug being mounted outside the car either on the tow bracket itself or on the vehicle's bodywork, the "female" plug is mounted on a loose wiring loom inside the boot.

So to plug the caravan lights into the vehicle this wiring loom is simply retrieved from the boot, plugged into the caravan's socket and left hanging - sandwiched between the boot lid and vehicle body sill.

It's not a bad idea - inside the boot the plug is not exposed to the elements and potential corrosion, which so often causes poor connections and dim lights on the caravan or trailer.

Built for towing

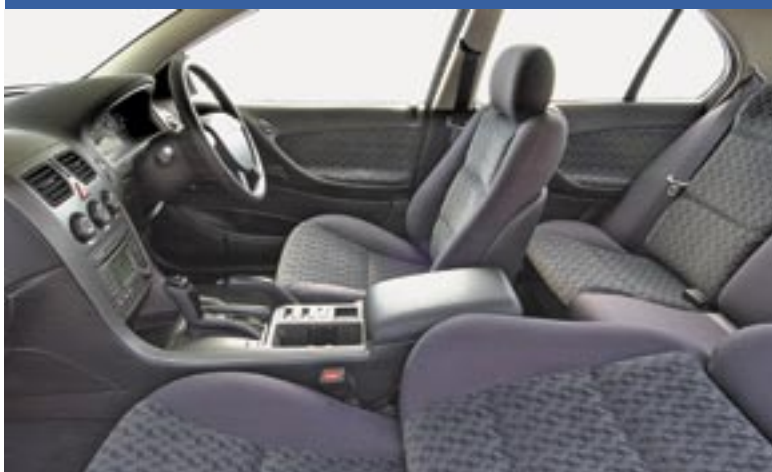
Credit where credit's

due. In this case, we must compliment Chevrolet on one of the best vehicle handbooks we have yet to come across. The extensive section on towing provides excellent, basic towing information.

Although they state that the vehicle is designed primarily as a passenger vehicle and that handling, durability and economy may be affected by towing ☉



The dashboard is pleasantly simplistic yet offers much in terms of functions, from computer information on fuel consumption to time to take a break when travelling long distance! Note the paddle controls on the steering wheel for ease of operating the radio.



Big car or small car? The interior is both compact yet spacious and provides maximum comfort for long towing trips.

higher maximum towing capacity (2 100 kg) as recommended by Chevrolet, than the manual derivative (1 600 kg).

Chevrolet also list, as essential towing equipment, a heat shield for the rear muffler and the centre bearing when towing weights of between 1 200 and 1 600 kg. For the heavier weight they stipulate that you must

a trailer, they also provide solid advice on towing.

For instance:

Use a lower gear, rather than the brakes, when descending steep hills; or: if the trailer moves off the road behind you, allow the passenger side wheels to move off as well. When it's safe to do so, carefully steer back onto the road. A sudden attempt to steer back could make the vehicle swerve dangerously; and with reference to an automatic transmission: To stop the transmission constantly changing in and out of top gear, it is recommended that the "Power" mode be selected when towing.

Plus there are numerous other helpful tips... it is just good to see that this manufacturer shows an interest in the fact that the Lumina will be used for towing, which all goes to instill a subtle confidence that the vehicle is well engineered.

Standard features

The interior is best described as stylish, befitting a car that has a motorsport heritage - not fancy, but rather well planned, easy to read and understand and functional in that all is close at hand.

A feature we liked was the onboard computer which provides instant information from current fuel consumption to average consumption, stop watch, average speed, trip time



The detachable factory-fitted towbar (just pull the pin!) may offer new challenges for stabiliser manufacturers but the interesting point is the electrical socket. It's on the end of a harness found inside the boot.

- even a "rest timer". This feature is a flashing icon that appears on a digital dashboard display and reminds the driver that they have been subjected to more than two hours of continuous driving and that it's time for a break!

Plus there are many other standard features such as air-conditioning, power steering, remote rear view mirrors, an audio system with CD-player but, with a speed-dependent volume control (it automatically increases the volume the faster you drive or decreases at slow, quieter speeds), a height adjustable front drivers seat that accommodates the tallest or shortest of us, and a remote key that allows you to lock and unlock the car from a distance away.

Other features include a cruise control (ideal for that long tow down to the coast), electrically operated windows, a height and reach adjustable steering wheel, and a service indicator.

A feature I liked was the automatic light activated headlamps and the convenience of having the radio

functions duplicated on the steering wheel.

For safety, the Lumina S is fitted with ABS brakes with electronic brake power distribution, a collapsible steering column, dual airbags, as well as side impact beams.

Safety is further improved by having seat-belt pre-tensioners which, when triggered, activate an emergency mode that automatically switches off the car's engine and fuel pump, unlocks the doors and turns on the dome lamp inside the vehicle.

Service and warranties

The service intervals on the Lumina S is every 15 000 km (compared to the V8 SS which is every 10 000 km) plus there is a three year warranty on paint work and a three year or 100 000 km warranty on the vehicle.

In addition General Motors offer a two year or 60 000 km maintenance plan. ●

In short

The Lumina S oozes sporty appeal with enough power to match the styling set by the aerofoil wing on the boot lid. It tows exceptionally well, with torque and suspension that suits towing a big caravan such as the Classique. It is also a refined motor car, one that attracts a lot of attention, but watch out for the long, low front bumper when parking. It's just above kerbstone height. Price R295 000.

