

Pontiac Aztek

The **Pontiac Aztek** is a mid-size crossover marketed by General Motors from model years 2001 to 2005, along with its corporate cousin, the Buick Rendezvous.

As a 4-door crossover with a front engine and four-wheel drive, the Aztek featured a four-speed automatic transmission with a V-6 engine. Marketed by Pontiac as a "sport recreational vehicle," the Aztek used a shortened platform shared with GM's minivans (e.g., the Pontiac Montana) featuring 94 cubic feet of cargo room with its rear seats removed. The design employed conventional rear swing-open kammback rather than sliding doors and a bi-parting rear tailgate, the lower section formed with seat indentations and cupholders. Other features included a rear center console that doubled as a removable cooler, rear stereo controls in the cargo area, a sliding cargo floor with grocery compartments and an available camping package with an attachable tent. The Aztek has seen a resurgence in popularity and public interest thanks to its association with the TV series *Breaking Bad* as the car driven by main protagonist Walter White. When filming ended in 2013, one of the Azteks used in filming, which was wrecked and undrivable, sold at auction for US\$7,800.^{[4][5]}

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| Pontiac Aztek | |
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| Overview | |
| Manufacturer | General Motors |
| Production | July 2000 – August 2005 |
| Assembly | Mexico: Ramos Arizpe (Ramos Arizpe Assembly) |
| Designer | Tom Peters (chief designer: 1997) ^{[1][2][3]} |
| Body and chassis | |
| Class | Mid-size crossover SUV |
| Body style | 4-door SUV |
| Layout | FF/F4 layout |
| Platform | U-body/GMT250 |
| Related | Buick Rendezvous |
| Powertrain | |
| Engine | 3.4 L LA1 V6 |
| Transmission | 4-speed 4T65-E automatic |
| Dimensions | |
| Wheelbase | 108.3 in (2,751 mm) |
| Length | 182.1 in (4,625 mm) |
| Width | 73.7 in (1,872 mm) |
| Height | 66.7 in (1,694 mm) |
| Curb weight | 3,779–4,043 lb (1,714–1,834 kg) |
| Chronology | |
| Predecessor | Pontiac Sunrunner (Canada) |
| Successor | Pontiac Torrent |

External links

Original concept

First shown to the public in 1999, the Pontiac Aztek concept car was well received.^[6] It featured "Xtreme" futuristic styling and promised maximum versatility in support of a young and active lifestyle for its intended "Generation X" buyer demographic.

The Pontiac Aztek went on sale in summer 2000 as a 2001 model.^[7]

The production edition of the Aztek was launched with the tagline "Quite possibly the most versatile vehicle on the planet" in conjunction with CBS's hit game show, Survivor in 2000.^[8]

Styling



The Aztek was styled under the direction of Tom Peters, who would later design the Chevrolet Corvette (C7).^{[1][2][3]} According to an analysis in 2000, BusinessWeek said the Aztek was to signal a design renaissance for GM,^[3] and to "make a statement about breaking from GM's instinct for caution."^[3] One designer said that during the design process, the Aztek was made "aggressive for the sake of being aggressive."^[3] Peters, the Chief Designer said "we wanted to do a bold, in-your-face vehicle that wasn't for everybody."^[3] The 2000 Business Week study said the Aztek was "the first awkward step toward innovation by a company that has avoided that path," likening "the debacle to Ford's remodeling of its 1996 Taurus sedan."^[3] The front of the vehicle seems to be an attempt at reviving an appearance Pontiac used in the 1970s with the Pontiac GTO, and was a shared appearance with the Grand Am.

Ultimately, the Aztek was criticized for its styling. Mickey Kaus described the Aztek as having "awkwardly empty and square front wheel wells" and a "gratuitous, fierce animalistic snout, which may have been what prompted incoming GM executive Bob Lutz to famously say that many of the company's products looked like 'angry kitchen appliances.'"^[9] James Hall, vice-president at AutoPacific Inc ^[3] ranked the Aztek as one of the ten ugliest cars of all time, Karl Brauer, CEO and editor-in-chief of TotalCarScore.com said the Aztek featured "atrocious proportions wrapped in plastic body cladding," and "looked like a station wagon stretched out by a car bomb."^[10]

A poll in The Daily Telegraph in August 2008 placed the Aztek at number one of the "100 ugliest cars" of all time.^[11] An article by Edmunds.com placed the car first of the "100 Worst Cars of All Time" not only because of its styling but also because it "destroyed an 84-year-old automaker."^[12] Time magazine in 2007 named the Aztek one of the 50 worst cars of all time (adding that underneath "was a useful, competent crossover"),^[13] and again in 2010 as one of the 50 worst inventions of all time.^[14]

Technology and notable features

The Aztek was produced at General Motors' Ramos Arizpe, Mexico, assembly plant, where it shared an assembly line with the Buick Rendezvous. In Canada, it filled the gap left since the Sunrunner's discontinuation in 1997, while in the US and Mexico it was the first Pontiac-badged SUV ever sold. At launch, the Aztek was available with either front-wheel drive or Versatrak, a full-time, fully automatic all-wheel drive system which provided traction in the snow or rain and could handle moderately rough off-road surfaces.

The Aztek was one of the first automobiles to be designed entirely using computerized rapid-prototyping/rapid-visualization tools. The dashboard was designed by Johnson Controls, and featured Pontiac's trademark red lighting scheme along with an optional heads-up display.^[15]

The Aztek was able to carry within its interior a standard 4 feet (1.2 m) by 8 feet (2.4 m) sheet of plywood and was available with two rear cargo area options: a pull-out cargo tray that held up to 400 pounds (180 kg) that rolled on built-in wheels when removed from the vehicle, or a versatile cargo net system that held up to 200 pounds (91 kg) and could be configured (a claimed) 22 different ways. Options included a center console that doubled as a removable cooler and a tent/inflatable mattress package that, along with a built-in air compressor, allowed the Aztek to double as a camper. Extending this image was a seat-back mounted backpack, and a number of specialty racks for bicycles, canoes, snowboards, and other such items. An optional 10 speaker Pioneer stereo system provided a set of controls located at the rear of the vehicle for tail-gate parties as well as an unusual 2-piece tailgate with built-in cup-holders and contoured seating area for added comfort.

Safety

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) gave the Aztek a *Marginal* overall score in the frontal offset test. However, they did not conduct a side-impact test.^[16]

2004 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Crash Test Ratings:^[17]

- Frontal Driver: ★★★★★
- Frontal Passenger: ★★★★★
- Side Driver: ★★★★★
- Side Rear Passenger: ★★★★★

Yearly American sales

| Calendar year | Total American sales |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 2000 | 11,201 ^[18] |
| 2001 ^[19] | 27,322 |
| 2002 | 27,793 |
| 2003 ^[20] | 27,354 |
| 2004 ^[21] | 20,588 |
| 2005 | 5,020 |
| 2006 ^[22] | 347 |
| 2007 ^[23] | 69 |
| Total: | 119,692 |

Praise and criticism

GM forecast sales of up to 75,000 Azteks per year and needed to produce 30,000 annually to break even. Just 27,793 were sold in 2002, which was the model's best-selling year.^[24]

Pricing of the Aztek was also an issue at launch: the vehicle was too expensive for its intended "Generation X" audience and was priced significantly higher than competing vehicles. After the 2001 model year, the GT model was dropped and pricing was slashed, in addition to extremely generous rebates and cut-rate financing instituted by GM in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

The Aztek had among the highest CSI (Customer Satisfaction Index) scores in its class, and won the appellation of "Most Appealing Entry Sport Utility Vehicle" in 2001 from J.D. Power and Associates, an independent consumer survey organization which noted: "The Aztek scores highest or second highest in every APEAL component measure except exterior styling."

Matthew DeBord of *The Big Money* argued that despite its poor reviews and sales, the Aztek was the car that, in the long run, could save GM. He praised GM for being daring and trying to create an entirely new market in vehicles, rather than simply copying successful formulas. He argued that the Aztek's failure is similar to the failure of the Apple's Newton and Mac Portable – two failed products that revolutionized the computer industry and became the basis for later successful products made by Apple.^[25]

The Aztek's "Design by Committee" was criticized in Steve McConnell's software design book, *Code Complete 2*.^[26]

Year to year changes

2001

- All new model available as base model and GT both in front-wheel drive and all-wheel drive, the latter boasting an independent rear suspension.
- In February 2001, a red Aztek served as the pace car for the Daytona 500.^[27]

2002

- Cladding smoothed and changed to body colored, front marker light/indicators changed from amber to clear, spoiler added to rear glass gate.



2001 Pontiac Aztek

2003

- Aztek "Rally Edition" introduced, which was an option package which featured a lowered front suspension, a larger rear spoiler, body colored grille and 17" chrome wheels. Though some regarded it as a model of its own, since it would resurface the Rally name to GM since the discontinuation of the GMC Rally.
- DVD entertainment system, XM satellite radio and a tire pressure monitoring system added to the options list.



2002–2005 Pontiac Aztek

2004

- A CD/MP3 player became an available option.
- A Limited Edition model was available, with standard leather trimmed seats, a higher grade stereo system, a rear spoiler, aluminum interior trim, standard heads-up display, and an adjustable 6-way driver's seat.

2005

In its final model year, the Aztek gained hands-free operation of its On-Star system. Exterior color offerings also changed.

The Aztek was discontinued after the 2005 model year, and was replaced by the Theta platform Pontiac Torrent. The Aztek's production line in Ramos Arizpe, Mexico, was retooled to build the Chevrolet HHR, although Buick Rendezvous production continued for another two years. The last Pontiac Aztek finally rolled off the assembly line on August 31, 2005.

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External links

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