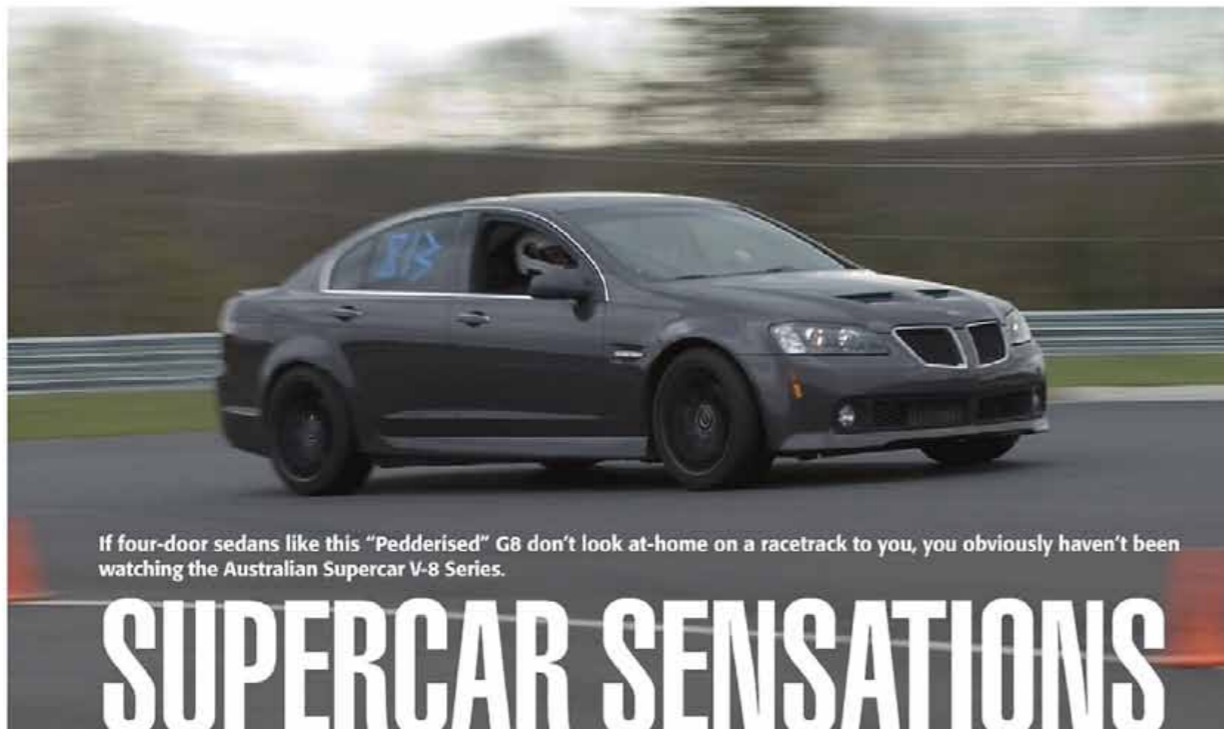


Australia's Number 1 Shock Absorber, Steering and Suspension Specialists



If four-door sedans like this "Pedderised" G8 don't look at-home on a racetrack to you, you obviously haven't been watching the Australian Supercar V-8 Series.

SUPERCAR SENSATIONS

Pedders Suspension gives the already-impressive G8 track-ready underpinnings to match its road-worthy manners.

Story and photography by Jason Scott

"Don't be fooled by the extra pair of doors," Chris Brannon said of the Pedders Suspension-equipped Pontiac G8 sitting before me in the paddock at New Jersey Motorsports Park. "This is no grocery getter."

Then again ... maybe it is ... if you routinely get your groceries at 150-plus miles per hour.

Since its introduction last spring, Pontiac's G8 sedan has been getting rave reviews from not only the performance-minded media like those of us here at *Pontiac Enthusiast* but also from

mainstream (read that: boring) media like newspapers and consumer guide-type publications.

The reports are nearly unanimous: The G8 – especially in GT or GXP trim – is an exceptional performance sedan. According to Pete Basica, president of suspension maker Pedders Suspension's U.S. operations, "The G8, in its original equipment

configuration, is a very, very good automobile, with the potential to be a great automobile."

And Pete and his buddies at Pedders Suspension are just the guys to make the G8 that great automobile of which he spoke. You see, Pedders Suspension is based in Australia and a title sponsor of the Australian V-8 Supercar Series that features cars based on sedans just like the G8 – the Holden Commodore, on which the G8 is based. Their Aussie roots also gave the Pedders team a leg-up on



WITH PARTS LIKE THESE – Pedders Suspension's Xa Track eXtreme kit – the G8 can eat Porsches for breakfast. And not just the civilized street Porsches. Even the race-bred ones are no match for a four-door Pedderised Pontiac. **LEFT** Stock Pontiac G8 sedans have been getting rave reviews since the car debuted in the Spring of 2008. Here, on the skidpad at New



SUPERCARGER To match their handling capabilities, the Pedderised G8s were equipped with ProCharger superchargers. The extra oomph from the ProCharger blower really helps get the two-ton G8s moving in a hurry. **DONUTS** Of course, with the ProCharger under the hood, it did provide a throttle-control challenge for the road course ringer drivers – Chris Brannon and Stan Wilson – who came to show us how the pros drive. Apparently the pros really like doing donuts.

the U.S. competition, because Zeta-platform cars like the G8/Commodore came out Down Under years ago. Aside from making their own components to sell in Pedders 120 suspension install centers, Pedders has even done some R&D work for GM. Needless to say, these guys have the G8's underpinnings figured out and know how to make it not only a blast to drive on the edge, but just as comfortable to drive around town as a stock G8.

To demonstrate what they've been able to achieve with the G8, Pete rang us up one day and offered to let us take his "Pedderised" G8 company cars for some hot laps around one of the most exciting new road course tracks in the country, New Jersey Motorsports Park's 1.9-mile Lightning course, during an open track

day event that would surely give us some stout competition from regular road racers.

When we arrived at NJMS, in Millville, New Jersey (about 30 minutes due west of Atlantic City), the wind was whipping about at up to 40 mph. But Pete had recruited two fearless ringers to show us just how capable the Pedderised cars were: SCCA A-Sedan GTO racer Chris Brannon and Viper-driving SCCA road racing champ, Stan Wilson. Chris and Stan would alternate driving duties throughout the day, as well as riding shotgun with folks, giving advice.

Hittin' The Skids

The first order of the day was to see how well the Pedders cars did compared

to a stock G8 on a skidpad, as a baseline comparison. Skidpads measure the maximum cornering grip a car has when running around in a circle, which tells us something about a car's maximum cornering ability on a track. For a realistic measure of skidpad performance, you need to test a car running both clockwise and counterclockwise, in case the chassis setup or weight bias impacts how well the car corners one way or another.

As one might expect, tires have a lot to do with a car's performance on the skidpad, since they're the final (and only) true link between the car and the ground.

Jersey Motorsports Park, the stock G8 turned in a very commendable .88g two-way average. **CENTER** Note this Pedderised G8 exhibits far less body roll, which helps keep all four tires on the ground for more traction. This car pulled a 1.03g peak and averaged 1.01g on the pad. Much of that control comes from better bushings and swaybars, which means it doesn't significantly impact ride quality. **RIGHT** A second Pedderised G8 had been fitted with the companies adjustable coil-over shocks. On the skidpad, this car turned in a 1.05g peak and 1.03g average ... yet the coil-overs can be softened up with the twist of a knob for an as-good-as-factory ride around town.



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SHOW CAR This car may look familiar to you: it was featured in our SEMA 2008 coverage a few issues back. Despite being a show car, owner Rick Bottom brought his Pedderised "Soul Shaker" G8 to NJMP for fun on the pad and track, too. He didn't even flinch when the racers and I took it out for some fun. **LEFT**

Pedders is pretty well known in the late-model GTO performance circles for its full range of suspension components. This one belongs to Rob Anderson of Wretched Motorsports. **CENTER** After the skidpad shenanigans ended, the Pedderised cars trotted onto the track for some sizzling hot laps. **RIGHT** The GTO chassis is remarkably similar to that of the G8 and the new fifth-gen Camaro. That, plus the company's proximity to GM's Australia-based Holden division gave the Pedders crew a leg up on the competition.

But tires aren't the only factor. Swaybars also play a huge factor, as can alignment settings. Shocks, springs and bushings also come into play.

Stan and Chris pushed (and we mean pushed) a stock G8 to a very respectable peak of .92g and two-way average of .88g on stock tires with no modifications whatsoever, which was right in-line with results from other auto magazine's results.

Next up on the pad was Rick Bottom's orange SEMA G8 show car, "Soul Shaker," that turned up in our SEMA coverage a few issues back. Rick's car was fully Pedderised (by the way, "-ised" spelling convention is an Australian thing ... and, as writers, we find it kinda fun to spell it that way) with the company's Track II hardware, starting with Pedders bushings to minimize mushiness then Pedders swaybars to take out some of the G8's body roll. Pedders struts and shocks keep the Pedders coils under control while various chassis braces ensure the chassis itself isn't acting like one big, wobbly spring. The result was impressive, to say the least: Rick's Soul Shaker scored an outstanding 1.1g best and .98g average! Best of all, the ride was actually still comfortable - nearly as comfy as a stock G8.

One of the Pedders "company cars" rolled onto the pad next, fitted with the company's Xa Track extreme system and 265/35 Michelin Pilot Sports wrapped around 19x9.5 wheels. This menacing G8 GT went 'round 'n' round to the tune of a 1.03g peak - a bit less than Rick's car - but with a higher average of 1.01G!

The final G8 that Stan and Chris gave the run around was equipped with the Xa Track extreme system plus Pedders' new adjustable coil-over shocks. It also featured slightly meatier 275/35 Bridgestone Pole Position tires on 19x9.5 Forgeline wheels. The one-way peak of 1.05g was still a tick lower than Rick's Soul Shaker. But with a 1.03g average in the hands of either Stan or Chris, it was highly consistent and stable.

Of course, we didn't trek all the way to NJMP just to do donuts on a skidpad. There was a fabulous 1.9-mile road course all around us and it was beckoning us to come and play.

High Speed Hijinks

NASCAR racers notwithstanding, cars aren't really designed to just run around in circles. They're built to go straight, turn left and right and, on occasion, even stop. Such are the reasons

why many enthusiasts feel that road courses are the truest test of a touring car's mettle.

And wouldn't you know it: We just happened to have a road course right behind us at NJMP.

The cars ran unchanged from their skidpad testing: each car's tires had been filled to 35 psi previously, and barring any leaks, that's how they remained. No shock, spring or swaybar changes were made, and no weight was removed or (God forbid!) added - the G8s are already hefty enough, tipping the scales at just over two tons.

To help move that tonnage around quicker, the Pedderised cars also sported power adders underhood, in the form of superchargers and performance-optimized computer tunes.

The supercharged G8s were able to scream out of pit road onto the track at the rising, off-camber, Turn One right-hander. On the short straight to the right-hand Turn Two kink, the cars built speed effortlessly to about 90 mph, then had to shed much of it quickly to turn in and steer toward Turn Three's

right-hand apex before setting up for the sweeping left-hand Turn Four. The Pedderised G8s responded comfortably and smoothly to steering inputs. Despite the considerable weight, the cars transitioned well from left to right-hand corners, and only when we hit the corner curbs did the cars become disrupted.

Again, the supercharged V-8s hurtled the G8s down the short chute to Turn Five - a tight, uphill, right-hander - before the long, sweeping Turn Six run to the slowest, tightest turn on the track, Turn Seven. The G8s carried incredible speed to Turn Seven - well over 110 mph - and revealed the G8's Achilles heel: its tires and brakes. The two Pedders company cars were running stock G8 calipers and rotors, which - though more than capable on the street - were under-powered on the track. Though fitted with performance-compound pads, by Turn Seven, the stock brakes were fading from having to repeatedly slow the portly car. The street tires, too, were a huge factor, as they didn't allow for short, hard deceleration. Instead, you had to scrub speed gradually - which

equated to slower lap times.

Rick's Soul Shaker featured upgraded brakes from Baer, which didn't seem to suffer from fading like the stock calipers, but we suspect that the Baer system would have performed even better with bigger rotors (for even better heat dispersal and dissipation) and certainly would have done better with race tires.

Even so, we were in for a surprise when we started comparing lap times of the Pedderised G8s to those of the other cars sharing the track with us that day - which included a Corvette Z06, two Porsche GT3s and a Nissan GTR. Those race-bred performers had been running laps all day in the 1:21-1:23 range - on race tires. Yet, despite less-than-ideal braking abilities, the supercharged G8 equipped with Pedders' Xa Track Extreme setup with adjustable coil-overs managed to run fast enough down the straights - better than 150 on the front straight - and through the corners to turn in a best time of the day of 1:18.7 with Chris Brannon at the wheel!

According to Chris, "When I threw the car into the corners, it did exactly what I wanted it to do. I kept waiting for the body to roll, or it to push off the

track, but it never happened. And this thing was on street tires." Chris continued on to say, "The (Pedderised) G8 literally felt like a car that was 1,000 pounds lighter. After putting down a 1:18.7 in it, I left the track with a new respect for the Pedderised G8."

Stan was equally impressed by the G8: "The Pedderised cars were extremely good. Today was an eye-opening experience. On the skidpad and on the track, it was a night and day difference," Wilson said, comparing the Pedderised cars to stock G8s.

Both Stan and Chris agreed the cars would have performed significantly better had they been fitted with sticky race tires, since traction was a definite limitation on the track.

But it was the lack of good tires and brakes that, perhaps, made the Pedders Suspension systems under the G8s all the more impressive. Race tires can be considered a "crutch" to overcome chassis weaknesses. The Pedderised G8s needed no such crutch: their Pedders Suspension components made the G8 a great handling automobile, just as Pete promised. And beat world-class sportscars in the process. With a two-ton, four-door sedan. If that's not a supercar, we don't know what is. ■

Chris Brannon

If you ever want to be humbled in a car, ride with race driver Chris Brannon. Chris has a natural ability to wring out every ounce of performance from whatever he drives. His aggressive style - which runs completely counter to his meek personality - makes him entertaining to watch and even more fun to ride with. A GM fan, Chris has owned "hundreds" of classic GM muscle cars, including numerous COPO Camaros. Pontiac fans will be more impressed, however, that Chris built the first SCCA A-Sedan late-model GTO and promptly went on to score the first road racing win for a production-based GTO, then went on to win the Midwest National Championship in a Touring 2-classed GTO. Prior to the GTO, Chris raced Firebird Formulas and racked up numerous wins on the way to earning his Pro racing license.



Chris with his SCCA - winning GTO.



Stan (right) confers with Pete.

Stan Wilson

Stan is "Mr. Smooth" behind the wheel. "Technical" some would call it. "Elegant" wouldn't be a stretch. Stan never missed a mark all day at New Jersey Motorsports Park. He was precise and consistent, and completely cool under pressure, able to carry on conversations with ease, even as the speedometer needle on the Pedderised G8 neared the "160" indicator. Stan learned his patience through good clean livin' that includes plenty of racing in the American Le Mans Series in a Dodge Motorsports-sponsored, race-prepared Dodge Viper SRT-10 Competition Coupe. Stan was Rookie of the Year in 2007 in the SPEED World Challenge Touring Car Series and won numerous National Championships in various levels of SCCA road racing competition.

