

STOP/START ENGINES

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By Ezra Dyer

2015 POLARIS SLINGSHOT

PRICE: \$19,999

AVAILABLE: NOW



Three wheels, no roof, and 173 horsepower—an insurer's dream.

What in the Name of Henry Ford Is That?

It's the Polaris Slingshot, and it's street-legal.

THE FIRST TIME YOU SEE THE POLARIS Slingshot coming at you, it looks like a set piece from some big-budget Marvel movie—this is a mode of transportation for someone with a secret identity and superpowers. There's that wide arachnid front end skimming the pavement with spats and spoilers and open-wheel fenders, a prototype racer from

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THREE THINGS THAT HAPPENED WHILE I HAD THE SLINGSHOT

A woman driving in front of me stopped her minivan, got out, walked over, and said, "Okay, what is this?"

As I was putting a Captain America helmet on my kid, a guy who looked like Jack Palance said, "I like your style."

Outside the grocery store, six high schoolers stopped to take photos. I gave each one a ride around the block.

the future. Then the rest of the machine comes into view, and it gets even wilder.

The back end tapers to a point, where a hefty swing arm carries a carbon-fiber-reinforced belt that drives a single tire. From the front seats forward, it's like a car—bucket seats, steering wheel, GM

Ecotec four-cylinder hooked to a five-speed manual transmission. From the rear it's a giant mutant motorcycle. And that distinction makes all the difference—the Slingshot's odd wheel count both defines its identity and allows it to exist in the first place.

SLINGSHOT ANATOMY

DRIVEBELT The drivebelt is reinforced with carbon fiber to help withstand the Ecotec's 166 pound-feet of torque.

ROLL HOOPS Forged-aluminum roll hoops above each headrest help on the safety front, but a helmet is still a good idea.

ENGINE The General Motors Ecotec 2.4-liter four-cylinder makes 173 horsepower and previously served in the Saturn Sky and Pontiac Solstice.

WEATHERPROOFING

The seats are waterproof, as is the whole interior. So don't be afraid to park outside.

FRAME The steel triangulated space frame is minimalist, with no doors or roof structure, helping keep dry weight below 1,700 pounds.

TRANSMISSION The five-speed manual transmission is also from GM. No motorcycle-style sequential gearbox here.

Because the Slingshot has three wheels, the federal government classifies it as a motorcycle. That means, depending on the state, you might need a motorcycle license and a helmet to drive it. Of course, it's not really a motorcycle, but it's certainly not a car either. At any rate, the motorcycle designation gave Polaris, maker of snowmobiles and off-roaders called side-by-sides, the freedom to design a machine with no doors, no roof, and no windshield (it's an option). There's no climate control, no airbags. This is a minimalist transportation experience—1,725 pounds and the wind in your face. The Slingshot makes a Lotus Elise look flabby and decadent.

However, as a street vehicle the Slingshot still has to pass muster with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and its rollout was marred by two significant recalls. On January 20 Polaris issued a recall concerning the roll hoops, which might not meet specifications for hardness. And you'd want to have strong roll hoops if you experienced the defect announced the next day, which involves a bearing in the steering rack. Per the recall notice, "If the steering pinion gear disengages from the steering rack, a loss of steering control could result, increasing the risk of a crash." Polaris is not a carmaker, but right now it's learning that NHTSA has certain expectations for street vehicles, like ensuring that they steer.

Assuming all the important parts remain bolted together, the potential for vehicular mayhem is somewhat limited by Polaris's humble powertrain. By car standards, the Slingshot's got a great power-to-weight ratio, with the 2.4-liter four-cylinder putting out 173 horsepower. Zero to sixty is probably



THE PETITION

Enough with the stop/start engines.

It's a great idea, in theory. Your engine shuts off at red lights, stop signs, and busy Taco Bell drive-throughs—whenever a momentary pause provides an opportunity to save some fuel. In practice, stop/start systems are annoying, pointless, and sometimes dangerous. Your car is barely using any fuel at idle anyway, and when it fires back up it's with a burp and a shudder, like someone startled grandpa during his nap. And that's if you're lucky enough that it actually restarts. We've had three cars from three different companies execute the stop part of the equation and then fail to restart. So on the plus side, you save a thimble of fuel. Downside: Enraged truckers slash your tires as your lane sits through two traffic-light cycles behind your wondrous miracle of efficiency. Fortunately, every car with stop/start comes with another feature: a button to turn it off.



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TABLET EXTRA



REAR RUBBER

The SL model has a 255/35/20 back tire. Burnouts are possible through first and second gear.