

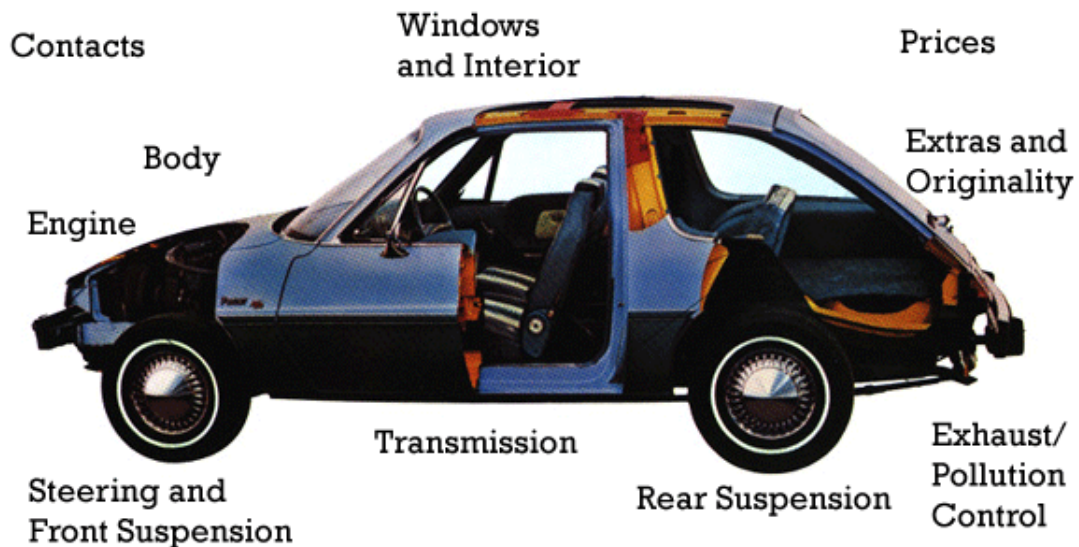
AMC Pacer Kaufberatung

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December 27, 2005

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No matter what people try to make you believe: The Pacer is a good daily driver and can cope with today's traffic easily. Nevertheless the youngest models are 20 years old and were built by a manufacturer that ceased to exist in 1987. The remnants of AMC are absorbed by DaimlerChrysler, but that doesn't mean the Mercedes Classic Center plans to take care of the parts supply in the near future, and Chrysler doesn't, either, for that matter. They only sell the leftovers.

To save you from disappointment, I made this Buyers' Guide – many inquiries via e-mail indicated that there is an interest for it. I hope this doesn't mean I won't get any feedback any more. Please take the short time to tell me whether you liked it or not, and if there are any errors.

Note: Unless this is a print-out, you can click on many references.

1 Contacts

This chapter is the first, because it is nearly impossible to keep a classic car on the road without connections to fellow aficionados, clubs and specialized vendors.

If you are in the United States, it should not be too difficult to find the right people. In Europe it's not as easy, although there are some clubs and a few vendors for AMC parts, mostly in Scandinavia and Switzerland. The links page shows you the most important sources of information on the

internet. First of all, you should subscribe to the AMC mailing list and the Pacer list, where you can get advice from lots of competent and helpful experts. The AMC list has very high traffic (some 100 e-mails a day), but you can also get it in digest mode or just post to the list and read it online.

Find current information about clubs and other contacts at <http://www.american-motors.de/en/links/>.



1.1 Clubs in Europe

- AMC-Club Switzerland/Deutschland/Österreich/France
 - Schweiz und deutschsprachiges Ausland:
Claudius Erbsmehl
Zäigli 17
CH-3274 Bühl bei Aarberg
Tel +41 32 381 11 78
Tel +41 79 443 48 40
Fax +41 32 381 16 86
r.c.erbsmehl@bluewin.ch

 - France:
Jean-Luc Jeandin
42, Rue de Colmar
68140 Munster
France
téléphone +33 3 89 77 04 41
jeandin.jl@wanadoo.fr

- AMC/Rambler Society Schweden

1.2 Clubs in the U.S., Mailing Lists and Forums

Short-lived as many internet sources are, I'd like to point you to <http://www.american-motors.de/en/links/> again.

1.3 Literature

A must for anyone who wants to work on his car is a repair manual, like a Chilton's or Clymer Shop Manual. Not bad for a start, but as soon as you want to do real work on the car, you need a TSM (technical service manual). The best source for such prints is, once again, the World Wide Web, e. g. Ebay.

There's a print magazine available for fans of America's independent manufacturers, especially AMC: AIM (American Independent Magazine).

history Foster, Patrick R., American Motors – The Last Independent, 1993 Krause Publications, Iola, WI, USA (currently out of print)

data, equipment, numbers Gunnell, John A. (editor), Standard Catalog of American Motors 1902-1987, 1993 Krause Publications, same location (currently out of print)

purchase Mitchell, Larry G., Illustrated AMC Buyer's Guide, 1994 Motorbooks International, Osceola, WI, USA

2 Pricing

2.1 Parts

“Never spend more for an acquisition than you have to.” *3rd Ferengi Rule of Acquisition*



If you want to use a Pacer as your daily driver, you have to realize that many spare parts are not readily available in your average parts shop around the corner. Having found the right corners, though, the problems are much smaller than one might think. The big advantage of the Pacer is the availability of most mechanical parts. If the Pacer is complete and driveable at the time of purchase, it's quite easy to keep it that way. Very helpful is the fact that AMC used the same or similar components through its complete model lineup. Many things were adapted by Chrysler when AMC was bought, so even parts of 90s' Jeeps can be made to fit, like the 4.0 engine, or the automatic transmission, which originally was bought from Chrysler.

If you need parts, shop around. Prices differ very much between dealers.

2.2 Cars

Shopping around gets some more complicated when you are searching for whole Pacers. If you want to buy, say, a Camaro or a Beetle, the classifieds in Old Car Trader or even classic car price charts give reliable information. At present, the Pacer is not yet considered a classic by everybody. And though it was a mass produced car, not too many are left today. The bad image helped diminishing Pacer population. Buyer and seller both can have hard times finding each other.

Larry Mitchell, president of former AMC World Clubs, predicts in his Buyer's Guide of 1994 a sunny future as collectible for the Pacer – five out of five stars he only awards to the Wagon, though, because of its less odd looks, compared to the Coupe. In my opinion, the Pacer Coupe is going to be desired much more – because of its uniqueness. The AMC enthusiast may prefer the Wagon, but there is a growing Pacer crowd of mostly young people who don't want an AMC, they want a Pacer. And those people prefer a Coupe by far. All the Pacer questions people sent me via this website concerned the Coupe.

If you want numbers, check Ebay, where Pacers in all conditions show up every once in a while. V8 Pacers are scarce and sought for – although they are barely faster than a 258 Pacer with 2 barrel carb, but much less economical. Big advantage of the 304 Pacer is that it can take any AMC V8 engine easily, even the Really Big Engines. A V8 can also be made to fit in a 6 cylinder Pacer, but not as easily.

In any case, take your time when searching for a car. A little patience can save you a lot of money. Of course it is possible to find a Pacer for less than \$1,000. But be aware that a restoration also costs money, that it can cost a lot of money, and that the restoration of a Pacer that was kept in shape by loads of bondo costs too much money. Rather buy a better one for a little more or one that wears its wrinkles and scars with pride.

3 Scheiben und Innenraum



3.1 Glas

37% of a Pacer's body are glass – and in any case it should be complete and undamaged. The compound glass windshield tends to get milky at the lower edges. Because it is glued in place, cracks caused by tension are possible. The windshield is the only glass that's still available. Check it thoroughly, as tiny scratches within the wiper radius can cause blinding mostly in rainy night drives and necessitate replacement of the windshield.

None of the other glass is available as new original stock (NOS), so used replacements have to be found which shouldn't be too difficult.

3.2 Interior



Regarding the Pacer's interior, everything you heard of other post-war classics is valid. The plastic dashboard hardens through the influence of the sun and tends to crack. The seats were available in vinyl, fabric, and leather. The vinyl is very durable, torn leather can be replaced by a leather shop, and if your Pacer has wrecked fabric seats, you are in the soup. You may be able to get a similar fabric. Otherwise you have to watch out for leather or vinyl seats. A good cloth interior is rare and precious and should by all means be protected with seat covers.

If parts should be missing, you have to go hunting, because most parts are not in any dealer's stock any more. Maybe some dealers who specialize in AMC or the Pacer can help.

Sitting in the car, check all parts and instruments for proper functionality. Clock works? Heater and ventilation buttons and switches do their job? They are vacuum operated, a search for the cause of malfunctions is very difficult. What about the warning lights, power windows, power locks, wiper, washer, horn, headlight switch? Don't forget to check the hood release. It has a tendency to lock, then rip, which sends you to the floor cursing and trying to open the hood from under the car.

4 Engine

Most Pacers are equipped with the 4.2 liter inline six cylinder engine (258ci). It has roughly the same layout as as the smaller 3.8 liter (232ci), but is much more powerful. Best engine in terms of power vs. fuel consumption is the 258 with 2 barrel carburetor. If the smaller 1 venturi carb is on the engine, the intake has to be changed if you want to upgrade to 2bbl.

The sixes are reliable and durable. Mileages beyond 250,000 are no problem, only thing they don't like are high revs. Power peak is reached at 4,800 rpm, and torque maximum is below 2,000. These engines are perfect for cruisin' and good mates for an automatic transmission. After AMC's end the 258 was continued by Chrysler, and its son, the 4.0, has been in production for Jeeps until the early 2000s. After 1980 the 258 was modified in some respects: A plastic valve cover, a lighter block and some other things made the later engines some 50 kilograms lighter than their predecessors. The Pacer has the old heavyweight with metal valve cover – luckily, because the plastic covers are prone to leak.

All American engines get oil leaks after some time (as most engines do, though not all of them as severe). AMC's sixes leak mostly from the rear crank seal. To replace it, the crank has to be removed. If it is not too bad yet, put something under the car when you park it and get used to it.

One of the Pacer's evil parts is the exhaust manifold. This part is Pacer-only, and it tends to crack. Replacements are available, but they aren't cheap, and used ones will fail soon. So if the engine is loud and you smell fumes inside the car when ventilation is turned on, don't believe the seller if he says something like it "only needs a new seal" – more often than not he's lying, and you pay the bill. Also the threads for the bolts that connect the intake with the exhausts can get bad with time, and as the material gets friable it can not be repaired.

If the car has stalling problems when warm, most likely it's the carb. Tune-up kits are cheap. The ignition module is another part that's not made for eternity. It's a mass produced part bought by AMC and inexpensive.

All other engine and drivetrain parts are durable and available, new or used. Thanks to the very active Jeep scene, many vendors offer performance parts that can allow you to get much more power out of the sixes. Mopar even offers a multipoint injection for anyone who wants to spend big bucks.

5 Body

The pictures on this page show some neuralgic parts of the Pacer's body. If you find a Pacer in that condition, on one hand that's bad because it is not rust-free. On the other hand, it could be much worse, because this Pacer at least openly shows its weaknesses. The worst case is a Pacer that was conditioned for selling at an inflated price by the use of bondo and paint. Removing the make-up is much more expensive than having a Pacer that's just rusty rebuilt by a knowledgeable body shop. A body rebuild consumes a lot of money or time – and don't forget to calculate the paint job! – so an (at least almost) rust-free car should always be preferred. You never get out what you put in a



restoration when you sell a car, so it only makes sense if you repair the car for yourself and don't think about selling it fast.



Rust endangered parts on the Pacer's body are: The front wheel wells, the floor panels (mainly under driver's and front passenger's seat), the rocker panels, the lower door edges, the rear quarter panels and the complete back below the trunk lid. No inner fenders stop the rear wheels from throwing mud and dirt everywhere in the back of the car. The dirt settles down wherever it can, and corrosion is inevitable. "Minor rust around license plate area" is very likely to translate to "full body restoration".

More rust nests are at the edges of the windows, hidden under the chrome covers. The firewall corrodes where panels are welded together, which can be the cause for water puddles in the foot wells. Other causes for that are bad door seals, leaks around the wiper motor or a loose windshield. The windshield is glued in place, something that's standard now but wasn't in the 70s. If the glue should appear to be ripped, best bet is to have the window re-glued by an expert. Don't use silicone sealant, as it contains acids that act as corrosion accelerators, and you don't need that on a Pacer. If you need a fast and cheap, yet not lasting solution, that doesn't make matters worse, use a special body sealant.

The doors weigh around 80kgs (the passenger door is heavier than the driver's door, as it's longer). No hinge can withstand that force eternally. If the door drops down when it gets opened, new hinges are due. With the giant doors, big gaps between them and the body panels are inevitable.



If the gaps differ strongly between top and bottom or left door and right door, check for signs of an accident. The gaps between hood and fenders normally are exact and not too big.

The trunk lid lifters wear out with time. When the button is pushed, the lid should go up by itself. On most Pacers, it doesn't anymore. But if it does stay up by itself, that's at least something.

6 Extras and Originality



The Pacer was available as plain and naked base model (hardly to be found in Europe), as luxury model with everything that was useful, fancy or just possible – and as almost anything in between. Front drum brakes, disc brakes, power discs. Normal paint, two-tone paint, metallic paint, vinyl

roof. Leather, fabric, vinyl, velours. No radio, am radio, 8-track player. Three-speed transmission, same with overdrive, four-speed transmission, automatic transmission. Column shift, floor shift. And so on. Some numbers on the car tell how the car went out of the factory. The VIN (vehicle identification number) is on the left outer edge of the dashboard, right behind the windshield. It tells the build year, engine and transmission. Some more numbers are on a plate at the narrow side of the driver's door (hopefully it's the original door!): model, trim, paint, and work order number reveal further details about the car's origin.

The model choices were: Pacer (base model, mostly in beige...), Pacer X (sporty, features anti-sway bar, disc brakes, floor shift, sports seats and steering wheel, alloy wheels), Pacer D/L (better equipped base model), and Limited (has it all).



Recommended options: Air conditioning, or at least vent windows, unless you live near a pole. The huge glass surfaces can turn the Pacer into a sauna. With today's traffic, disc brakes should be preferred over drums, but if your Pacer has drums, you can upgrade easily. A center console makes driving even more comfortable. Very nice are the original AMC five-spoke alloy wheels. The roof rack looks good and is very practical.

A detailed listing of all the available extras and codes would be too much for this Buyer's Guide. If you need further information, send me a message or ask one of the AMC mailing lists.

In my opinion, functionality should go over originality. The Pacer is a driver and no Ferrari.

7 Steering and Front Suspension

7.1 Steering

Most Pacers (in Europe most likely all) were equipped with power steering. This rack-and-pinion steering was developed especially for the Pacer and is one of the main reasons for the bad image of the car. Not because of bad steering qualities (the redesigned Pacer steering of later years is highly coveted for use in race cars nowadays) – but because in the first 2 years the units failed frequently because of leaks. Hardly any Pacer of the first years still has the original steering unit. In the later years that problem went away, but: Once the reputation is lost ...

Should you find leaks at the steering unit or hear strange noises when turning the steering wheel, the steering needs to be rebuilt or replaced.

7.2 Front Suspension

The front wheels are suspended individually on double control arms. The front suspension needs regular doses of grease, otherwise it's trouble-free.

8 Transmission

8.1 Manual

The standard 3-speed manual transmission wants to be used with patience. Harsh shifting causes the synchromesh rings to wear out prematurely. But would you buy a Pacer with that trans to burn rubber? The optional overdrive was made by Laycock-deNormanville and is known for its durability when used as intended. The 4-speed manual trans doesn't have any special shortcomings.

8.2 Automatic

The Pacer's automatic trans, named "torque command", is the indestructible, albeit not very economical, Chrysler 904. Most AMCs with "small" engines are equipped with this trans, as well as many Chryslers (duh!) and Jeeps until recently. Replacements are cheap, rebuild kits are available, and a knowledgeable shop should not have any problems working on it.

Check for smooth shifts, working kick-down and no slipping when under load. A *clunk* noise when shifting into reverse can be caused by worn transmission or rear axle mounts.

Slipping under heavy acceleration can have various causes. First check transmission fluid level as instructed (i.e. with warm trans and idling engine). More often than not, the fluid level is just too low. Be careful not to overfill and to keep everything clean, even little fluffs of the cloth you used to clean the stick can cause malfunction of the tranny. Oil smelling burnt is a sign that the transmission is in need of a rebuild.

9 Rear Suspension

The rear suspension of the Pacer is hardly spectacular: Ye old solid axle on leaf springs. The only frequent fault: If the Pacer puts its nose up in the air, it's not arrogance, but sagging leaf springs. Other than that, a milling noise under load or a clunky noise when decelerating are signs of worn gears.

10 Exhaust and Pollution Control

The urge to put a catalytic converter/oxygen sensor system in a classic car is not a problem outside Germany. Nevertheless there are some regulations in most parts of the world, and I'm of the opinion that keeping the air clean should be of everybody's concern, regardless of political regulations. Polluted air smells bad and causes a headache, polluted environment looks bad and makes people plain unhappy. I don't say everybody should put a modern pollution control system on their 20 year old cars, but I say, if you can afford it, consider it.

In the USA, the Pacer was available with "49 States" and "California" emission control systems. The 49 States version had: exhaust gas recirculation, air injection (manual transmissions only) fuel tank vapor control system, crankcase vapor control, thermostatically controlled air cleaner. The California version additionally came with: air injection for automatic transmissions, and catalytic converter. Most states demand that the systems the car was equipped with when it was first registered have to be fully functional, so check for completeness and a fresh emission test certificate.

Be aware that an engine that burns oil (blue smoke), runs too rich (black smoke) or has a bad head gasket (white smoke from coolant getting into the cylinders) won't pass the next emission test, so a tune-up or rebuild is due, and meanwhile it pollutes more than necessary and adds fuel to the fire of people who want to get rid of old cars in favor of modern ones, although their motives may be more inspired by economics than by care for the environment. A clean engine is a good promotion for the old car hobby.

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