



## CROSS COUNTRY ROAD TEST: OLDSMOBILE 98

BY ROBERT JOHNSON

PHOTOS BY SPENCE MURRAY

*Driver's Log Note: February 23rd. Home again in Los Angeles. Just finished road testing the new Oldsmobile 98 in a nine day session. Cross-country from Lansing, Michigan to L.A. with side trips to Canada and Mexico—a three country test through snow, rain, mud, dust, good weather and the worst. The Olds ran through it all with no trouble, performed well the entire journey.*

Let's start from the beginning, back in Lansing. A factory representative handed us the keys to a new Four Door Sedan that showed a scant 17 miles on the odometer; from the moment the mechanics rolled the car out of the door to the end of our 3864 mile road test it was apparent that General Motors has a new automobile, not a rehash of the '53 line. The Four Door Sedan is one of four of the big series Oldsmobile makes this year.

The exterior body design is clean—the test car drew "oohs" and "ahs" wherever we pulled in for gas. Chrome is minimized, placed where it not only adds to the looks but protects. The Olds "look" is, of course, retained—but with "sweep-cut" doors, a lower profile; the '54 Sedan is 60½" high, lower than last year's model.

A noteworthy new feature is the panoramic windshield, a wrap-around front glass that offers more visibility to the sides and down, a safety factor to be applauded.

Exterior color schemes are new, with a different treatment done on the two-tone jobs; rear chrome striping marks the division of color.

February 16th, midnight. In Toledo, Ohio. Took delivery

*yesterday morning in Lansing; we're taking it easy, feeling the car out. Despite unseasonal warm weather in Michigan the new Olds has been running cool. Power steering is light and positive. My passenger slept soundly through a long section of bad road.*

From the start it became obvious that the new Oldsmobile handles better than the '53 models; fast maneuvering on narrow, winding roads causes surprisingly little body sway. Except on the tightest corners the car hugs, turns flat—and this with a test weight of 4600 lbs. The driver has a feeling of confidence and security in this car. In front seat or rear there is no passenger feeling of sea sickness on pitches and rolls, even at high speeds.

The steering ratio could be improved; while the power steering offsets this somewhat, the five-and-a-third turns, lock to lock, is too much. The Olds Sedan does not have the steering characteristics of a sports car nor do the GM people make claims that it does; for this reason the desirability of a faster steering ratio might be questioned, especially for a passenger car designed as a happy American compromise—but the author is convinced that the average driver would prefer more sensitivity in the handling characteristics of his family automobile. The calisthenics involved in turning a city block corner with a slow steering ratio are annoying and time consuming.

February 17th. Coming into Peru, Indiana we ran into snow. Visibility not too good, had to slow down. Panoramic windshield and adjustable seat paid off.



Keys for the new Olds are received from manager of the Customer Driveaway Service, Paul Bickert, while Nolan Walker, Olds distribution manager, looks on

The Oldsmobile electric four-way adjustable seat is a blessing on the highway and in city traffic. After hours of driving on the open road a touch of the button control will change your body attitude to a different, more relaxing position. A short driver doesn't need a pillow in this car to raise him up to see over the hood. Especially useful in traffic, the easy adjustment allows the driver to move up and closer to the windshield for better visibility.

Perhaps in the future the Oldsmobile Division of General Motors Corporation will see fit to redesign the windshield wipers, to take care of the extra glass area offered by the wrap-around glass; there is a tendency for snow and mud (encountered in a storm later during the trip) to stick in the corners. Adding another wiper, or even two, would solve this problem—as, for example, on the Buick XP300.

No difficulty was experienced with starting the Olds in hot or cold weather despite the fact that it sat at the curb during nights on the cross-country trip while driver and passenger slept.

February 18th, night driving, Kentucky. Giving the Autronic Eye a good workout. Still no criticism of car performance, no engine trouble of any kind. Gone enough miles to open her up—only car to pass us was a '54 Olds 88!

The interior of the '54 Olds Four Door is clean, functional, eye-pleasing. Instruments are well grouped, easy to read. In Los Angeles the dirt collected in the car on the journey was removed from the seats and floor with a vacuum cleaner and a damp rag in a few minutes, a tribute to the smooth finished, durable upholstery. Foam rubber in the cushions makes the seats as comfortable as is possible. Two ash trays on the dash are handy for driver and passengers. The glove compartment, relocated since '52 in the center of the panel, offers easier access than a far right location; as simple a design (and obvious after you use the compartment for awhile) as this is, it is surprising that

all American car manufacturers don't see fit to change to this arrangement.

Optional equipment in our sedan included three floor control buttons, for the Autronic Eye and the radio. It takes a little while to get used to the arrangement—the lower button operates the radio station selector, automatically choosing a clear station; this can also be done manually at the dash. Another convenient extra is the dual speaker set-up, one for the back seat, which may be turned on and off separately.

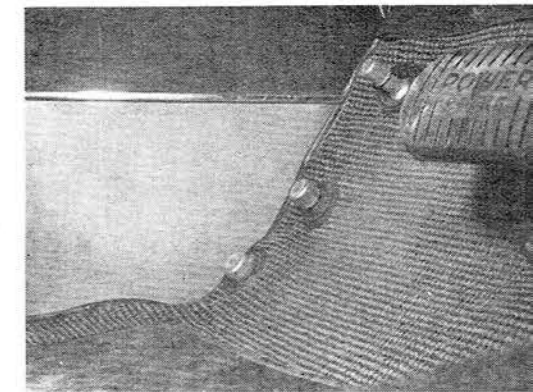
The other two floor buttons control the Autronic Eye which, as the Olds people say, handles the entire job of headlight control automatically. Top button, when you keep your foot on it, holds the head-

PERFORMANCE	
<b>TOP SPEED</b>	
Average of two-way runs.....	105.2 mph
Fastest one-way run.....	108.1 mph
<b>ACCELERATION</b>	
0-30 mph.....	4.4 sec.
0-45 mph.....	7.6 sec.
0-60 mph.....	12.0 sec.
<b>FUEL CONSUMPTION</b>	
16.43 mpg for the cross-country trip; this figure includes city traffic conditions and high speed driving on the open road.	
<b>SPEEDOMETER CORRECTIONS</b>	
Indicated 30 mph.....	29.7 actual
Indicated 45 mph.....	48.7 actual
Indicated 60 mph.....	57.9 actual
Note: basic specifications and other data appear at end of written report. Fuel used in all tests was Mobilgas premium.	

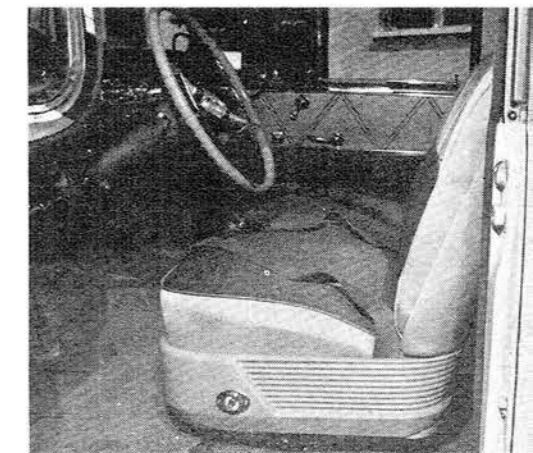
light beams on high; the button below it makes the automatic control operative or inoperative. When inoperative the beams are on low.

We discovered that the automatic control, at least in the test car, was too sensitive for all reflected light conditions; in one town a blinking signal made the beams go up and down, as did reflector buttons on a bridge in Arizona. On a clear night the moonlight reflected off the light colored hood was sufficient to keep the headlight beams on low. While the idea of

(Continued on page 57)

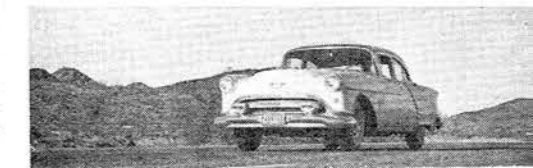


Photograph of Oldsmobile 98 floor-board shows the location of the Autronic Eye (headlight control), radio control buttons and the oversize brake pedal



Olds interior is neat and functional with instruments and controls well located. Safety belt is not standard equipment in car, was installed for road testing

Olds test car during desert acceleration test proved to be surprisingly fast considering weight of car is over 2¼ tons



### CUSTOMERS VIEW THE OLDS PLANT . . .

An interesting sidelight is offered by Oldsmobile while the "driveaway" customers are awaiting final checking of their new cars. A guide takes visitors through the sprawling assembly plant in a "train"; visitors sit in individual seats, each with a speaker through which the driver describes interesting and unusual points of the trip.

The trip—approximately an hour and a half—covers chassis assembly, the body drop (bodies are actually assembled by the Fisher Body Division at another plant) and the final checking of lights, instruments, wheels, and

so forth. An amazing fact is that a bare frame begins its trip via conveyor to end up as a finished Oldsmobile in ninety minutes.

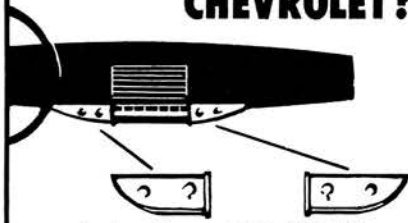
Another customer tour is through the Olds "Rocket" engine plant. Bare engine blocks (delivered from a foundry) are turned into complete engines (including a 20 minute dynamometer run) at the rate of 100 an hour; the other 10 are slated for replacement. From start to finish the engines are scarcely touched by hand other than to assist the conveyors when more than the normal capacity of blocks

piles up. Cylinder boring, component assembly, engine painting, transmission joining—all are done by machine.

It is unfortunate that only those people living west of the Rockies are able to take advantage of the Olds customer "driveaway" plan. Facilities are being expanded to take care of more "driveaways"; last year over 10,000 westerners drove Oldsmobiles from Lansing, Michigan, to their homes. General Motors Corporation hopes to soon be able to offer this unique "driveaway" plan to all buyers regardless of their home locality.



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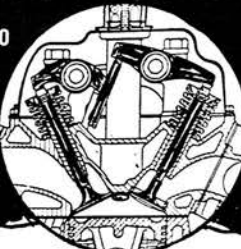
MODEL	ENGINE TO TRANSMISSION
C.F.-52...	Cadillac & Olds to 52-54 Ford & Merc
C.F.-50...	Cad & Olds to 49-51 Ford & Late 51 Merc
C.F.-40...	Cad, Olds to 32-48 Ford. Thru early 51 Merc, Linc, Ford Pickup, 1½ ton trucks thru 52
52-L.F.-52	Lincoln OHV to 52-54 Ford & Mercury
52-L.F.-50	Lincoln OHV to 49-51 Ford & Late 51 Merc
52-L.F.-40	Lincoln OHV to 32-48 Ford, early 51 Merc
L.F.-40...	49-51 Lincoln flathead to 32-48 Ford, Merc, Linc, Ford Pickups, 1½ ton trucks thru 52
C.R.F.-52	51-53 Chrysler V-8 to 52-53 Ford & Merc
C.R.F.-50	51-53 Chrysv V-8 to 49-51 Ford, late 51 Merc
C.R.F.-40	51-53 Chrysler V-8 to 32-48 Ford & 49 thru early 51 Mercury
C.S.M....	Cad & Olds to 51-54 Studebaker Commander, Standard or Overdrive Trans. Mission
C.S.A....	Cad, Olds to 53-54 Stude, Automatic Trans.

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## OLDSMOBILE ROAD TEST

(Continued from page 31)

automatically controlled headlight beams is fine, a light-sensitivity adjustment should, and undoubtedly will, be made in the electronic mechanism.

February 19th. Chattanooga, Tennessee. Rain!

A good rainstorm gave us proof that the body of the Olds test car was tight; no water seeped through around the windshield or the windows. There were no leaks in the trunk.

The Olds trunk is especially roomy, more than adequate for luggage for six. In our case it held suitcases and quite a bit of automotive test equipment with room to spare.

February 20th. Breakfast in Texarkana, Texas. Now it's dust and wind; little or no body sway in buffeting crosswinds. Engine check shows everything ok.

The tune-up on the test car was short and sweet; after 2000 miles the car was behaving perfectly. Rough roads had produced no body rattles and the engine continued to run quiet and smooth.

An additional 20 hp has been added to the 98 "rocket" engine this year—acceleration is very good considering the weight of this model runs over 2¼ tons. The Hydra-matic Super Drive is optional equipment in the 98 series. Wheelbase has been lengthened 2", from 124 to 126", for a smoother ride. The "Rocket" engine has been lowered almost 2" for a definite and noticeable C.G. improvement.

February 22nd, El Paso. Good weather for a change. If the weather holds we'll get performance data tomorrow.

A flat, long stretch of test course offered excellent conditions for timing runs in the car. The weather was clear, dry, with no wind. The temperature was 60 degrees. Acceleration and high speed runs were made on a measured quarter mile and one mile of coarse asphalt surface. Four runs of each test were made in both directions and averaged for final figures. Test equipment included a rev counter and 5th wheel, vacuum gauge, two clocks. Tire pressure taken with a reliable gauge before the tests was 32 lbs. all the way around.

The Olds odometer belied the tape, claimed the measured mile to be .97—an error of 3%. Speedometer corrections, as shown in the performance figures elsewhere on these pages, show an irregular graph curve, with high and low indicated speeds being slightly above actual, and medium speed (around 45 mph) indicated being actually below corrected figures.

February 23rd. Should hit Los Angeles this afternoon. Took a short side trip into Mexico, stopped at Juarez. Someone liked the car so well they stole two of the Fiesta type hubcaps!

(Continued on next page)

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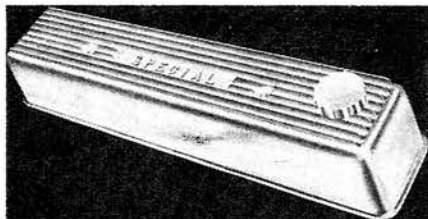
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Type: V8

Maximum brake horsepower: 185 @ 4000 rpm

Maximum torque: 284 lbs.-ft. @ 1800 rpm

Piston displacement: 324 cu. ins.

Bore & stroke: 3.75 x 3.44 ins.

Compression ratio: 8.0 to one

Valve arrangement: OHV

Fuel and Cooling System—Quadri-Jet down-draft carburetion with built-in automatic choke. Thermostatically controlled cooling and internal recirculation system. Ball-bearing, permanently lubricated water pump.

Clutch and Transmission—Synchro-Mesh Transmission with 11" single-plate semi-centrifugal dry disc clutch.

Hydra-Matic Super Drive—Optional on 98 models.

Electrical—12 V system.

Frame—I-beam, X-member construction with 5 cross members.

Suspension—Knee-action front suspension, semi-elliptic leaf springs at rear. Front and rear stabilizer. Double-action hydraulic shock absorbers, cam and lever in front and direct-acting in rear.

Power Steering—Optional

Steering

Turns, lock to lock: 5 1/3

Turning circle: 43 ft. dia.

Brakes—hydraulic. Brake lining area, 191.7 sq. in. Front brake size, 11" x 2 1/2", rear brake size, 11" x 2".

Power Brakes—Optional

Tires: 1p, 7.60 x 15"

Fuel Capacity: 18 gal.

Wheelbase: 126 in. Over-all length, 214.26 in.

Over-all width, 78.26 in.

Power Seat Control: Optional. 4-way seat adjuster, electric.

**DEADLINE DATA**

(Continued from page 14)

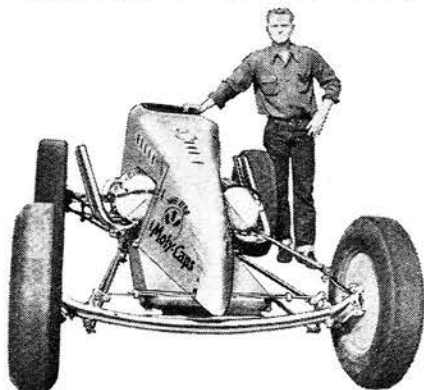
Australian engineer, recently won the Grand Prix in New Zealand.

The car is the Maybach Special, with a German engine, but in all other respects this hybrid race car is a product of Australian engineering.

It was re-designed by the senior engineer of REPCO of Australia, the biggest manufacturer of automotive parts in Australia.

When in use as a German scout car, it was blasted by a bomb in the desert fighting. It was brought to Australia by the Commonwealth Government for examination, and was eventually sold for \$22.40 to a used car yard. Here it was bought by the engineer for \$89.60. At this time it had tank tracks instead of rear wheels. With these replaced, experts considered that the engine was too heavy, but when it was tried out on a sports car chassis the car reached 100 mph in a Vintage Car Club Trial. Originally the Maybach Special had a conglomeration of foreign parts, such as a Fiat gearbox, Lancia differential, and Studebaker suspension. These were taken out in the course of the drastic transformation to make it a race car and were replaced with specially made parts. The car was soon the best hill-climbing and sprint car in Australia, and was electrically timed at 140 mph. It won several Australian trophies before its success in the New Zealand Grand Prix.

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