



The 'President' looks right for a high performance car, but sports too much chrome on the front end, thereby spoiling, to some degree, its aesthetic lines. But its trim body draws appreciative glances wherever the 1955 model is parked.

# Behind the Wheel

**It's an axiom that if a high-performance car looks all right, its usually is all right, and the Studebaker 'President' looks right from the start**

**By G. M. LIGHTOWLER**

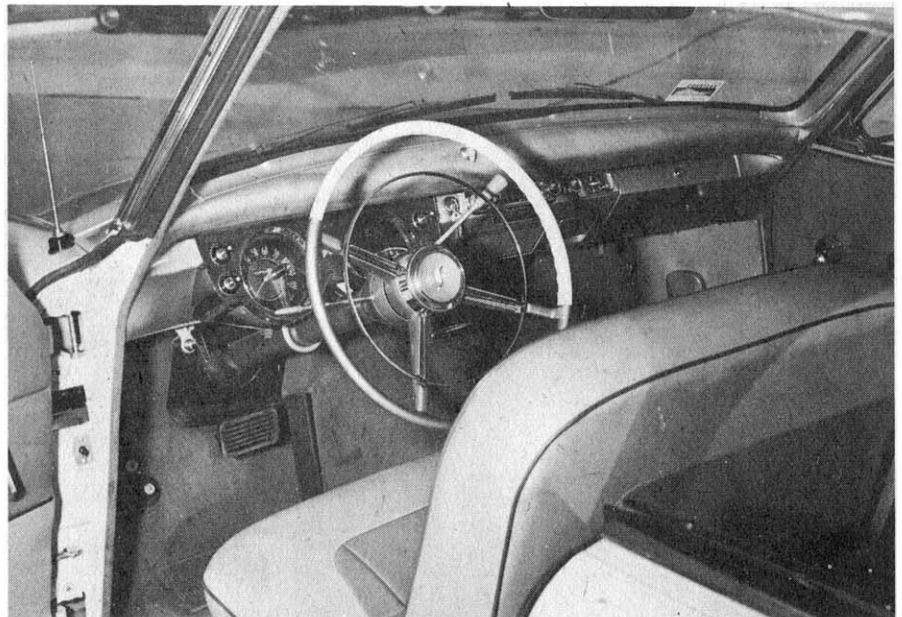
**A**S THE Studebaker-Packard Corporation was the first to introduce its new 1955 cars, we decided to road test one of its products first. For this curtain raiser we selected the latest model, the 'President' V-8 engined, hardtop convertible,

As it was not our intention to test the car from too technical an angle, we did not concentrate on obtaining a mass of accurate performance figures, but rather relied on the impressions of several persons whom we considered could be potential purchasers. We did no more with the car than an owner would do under normal conditions, or what he might have to do in the case of an emergency.

Briefly, we were very favorably impressed, and for those discriminating enough to want a domestically manufactured, sporty sedan with a high performance, the 1955 Studebaker 'President' is the answer to date.

It has always been accepted by authorities on high-performance cars that

FEBRUARY 1955



The interior is nothing short of luxurious with fine fittings and carefully blended color combinations. The instrument design and placing is not too good, however, and the steering wheel grips lead to wrong hand positioning.



1955 "President" 1A Studebaker  
 ROAD CAR TEST  
 LIFE  
 SUPPLIED BY HARRY REICHGOLD MOTOR SALES  
 ALBANY, ILLINOIS

**From the driver's seat, all around visibility is nearly perfect without adoption of wraparound windshield.**

if a car *looks* right there is every probability that it *is* right, and if it looks wrong it is most probably a dangerous machine.

The 'President' looks right for a high-performance car from the very first glance. It sits on the road in a very purposeful manner, indicating its good road-holding characteristics. Its lines show that it has been very carefully designed with consideration to streamlining and drag reduction. The only aesthetic distraction to the well-proportioned body is the somewhat lavish use of chrome in the front, which looks like a nose bag (an innovation on all the 1955 Studebakers), and the 'butter-knife' trim on the side of most of the latest models. The trim on the top of the fenders could also be dispensed with as it serves neither a utilitarian nor a decorative purpose. If this tendency to add more and more shiny metal continues it is likely to become mandatory for automobile manufacturers to get into the chrome-cleaner business, for it is very difficult to find a cleaner that does a good and lasting job on the gleaming metal.

The car we tested was painted a very attractive lemon-yellow and caught the appreciative eye of many pedestrians at the traffic lights, as well as bringing complimentary remarks from fellow motorists as we drew up beside them. The interior of the car was nothing short of luxurious, with very carefully color-blended seat covers of green vinyl and door and side coverings of the same material; the roof was encased in a white washable plastic material of pleasant texture; floor coverings were of light green nylon woven material that should wear very well. A new feature of the '55 State Coupe is the arm rest between the rear seats, which can now be raised or lowered at will. Seating three in the back is now no longer a problem.

The front seat has been raised slightly and the width increased. This has improved a driving position that was already good, and it would be difficult

to find another car that offers the driver a better position from which to control the car—and we would include European cars in this statement. In earlier models, fatigue was experienced on long trips due to the lack of support beneath the knees, but this fault has been eliminated in the '55 'President.'

The back seat, however, is still cramped, particularly if the driver is long limbed and has the front seat pushed well back. We do not consider this a serious fault since the purchaser of one of these cars will not be taking along four passengers too often—this is a car for the discriminating driver and his wife and children, not for the general ferrying of the neighborhood.

It would be nice if Studebaker would make available, at extra cost, optional bucket-type seats with individual adjustments. The front seat is not suitable for three persons due to the hump of the transmission housing; also a long-legged passenger is uncomfortable if the driver is short of stature, the bench-type seat having to be drawn so far forward that the passenger is unable to stretch his (or her) legs. Bucket seats would obviate this condition.

We were not impressed by the new arrangement of the instruments, nor their design. The attempt to make the speedometer look like a rev counter has not come off, and the chromium, jet tear-drops hanging in the center of the speedometer and the clustered gauges are distractions. The imitation gold finish surrounding the instrument panel is an addition that cheapens the appearance, and is not a good background for dials that have to be continually studied. The clock, which is positioned well to the right, has a very small face and is quite undecipherable from the driver's seat.

Light switches, climatizer controls, radio knobs and traffic indicator arm are all well positioned and within easy reach of the driver. Although it is bad practice to encourage the driver to smoke, he will nonetheless, and the provision of an ashtray would prevent him from flicking ashes out of the window and spraying the back-seat travelers if they have their windows lowered.

The adoption of the ignition switch-and-starter is good, and a convenient change from the starter button that was beneath the clutch pedal—a system that was good in concept but somewhat poor in operation.

The positioning of the brake pedal is definitely bad. When we returned our test car to the dealer we noticed a considerable number of scuff marks on the lower end of the steering column cover. On practically every occasion when the brake was applied in a hurry, the toe of the right foot came into violent contact with the column. If the pedal was sited a little lower this would be eliminated.

The car we used carried a price tag at the factory of just over \$2,600 without extras. This is a lot of money to pay for a car, irrespective of the lavishness of the finish, and one should expect certain standard accessories. But they are virtually all extras with the 'Presi-

dent,' even such necessities as turn-signals, back-up lights, windshield washers, a small light in the trunk, cigarette lighter and the outside mirror. Incidentally, the outside mirror on the car we tested is excellent and in a very convenient position—the driver has only to glance to the left and get a perfect reflection of what is going on in the rear. But when you add such other items, now considered essential, as radio, heater, etc., the price of the 'President' moves closely to the Jaguar sports sedan group.

We noticed recently that a certain contemporary of Studebaker has introduced a steering wheel that induces the driver to hold the wheel in the correct position—'twenty minutes to four.' The Studebaker wheel, with its grip-assisting indentations on the upper half of the wheel, leads the driver to place his hands incorrectly. This should be altered, as the right place for the hands for accurate and comfortable driving is on the lower segment of the wheel.

From the driving seat, all-round visibility is very nearly perfect; in fact, it is doubtful if it can be improved without making many violent changes in body construction—other manufacturers please take note. The interior rear-view mirror would be better if it were on the ledge above the instrument panel instead of being hung from the roof; however hard we tried we could not get a good deep all-round reflection; there was also a tendency for the mirror to vibrate and distort the image.

In earlier models it was difficult sometimes to see in the car with only one small interior light under the instrument panel. In the '55 'President' a very clear light is fitted on one side of the rear compartment, operated as with the light under the dash, when the doors are opened or by a small switch to the right of the parking brake.

The owner of one of these cars has little to criticize on the general interior finish, which is quite the finest we have seen for some time.

We were fortunate enough to experience some bad weather during the time we had the car at our disposal and certain minor defects showed up that would not have been apparent had the sun been shining all the time.

On a longish trip we found the car somewhat draughty, but you must consider that a convertible hardtop is always prone to let the cold air in somewhere. The main draught came from a fairly large aperture that was caused by one of the rear windows refusing to close completely tight. Where there are draughts there are usually holes that let in water, and rain seeped through several spots. None of these annoyances were really serious and a mechanic's spanner and screwdriver would probably eliminate them all.

Before dealing with the performance of the car let us say that the 'President' was one of the most exhilarating vehicles we have had the pleasure to drive for some time.

The take off from a standing start was



positively shattering to most onlookers as it was to us. In low gear (the car we had was equipped with the efficient Studebaker automatic transmission), the acceleration was impressive even to some sports car owners who were testing their Austin-Healeys and Jaguars. This low gear has a quite incredible maximum speed of 56 mph., which was attained without any great effort and in a very short space of time.

In 'normal' drive, the President' clearly showed that its 175 bhp. engine was quite capable of taking the car to speeds in excess of 100 mph., and that a cruising speed of around 75 mph. could have held without trouble for hours on end, or so long as the law allows such indulgence.

In the case of emergency there is plenty of power to spare, and a depression of the accelerator to the floor brings into operation the overtake gear, which enables the 'President' to put another car behind it even before the driver of the passed car realizes there is anything there. This sudden surge of power is not confined to the lower speed ranges, but can be physically felt as a strong push in the back when rapid acceleration is demanded at speeds above 65 mph.

Even on a wet, slick-surfaced road the car sat firmly on four wheels and gave no strong indication that its somewhat long back end would break loose. The new Firestone tubeless tires contributed to this feeling of security and however hard the car was cornered there was little or no tire squeal. The suspension, as on all Studebakers, was vastly superior to most cars and although onlookers commented on the amount of roll when cornering, and the nose-diving antics when braking hard, no great sensation was felt from the driving seat.

One serious criticism we have is the utilization of power steering. Power steering leads to oversteer characteristics and this, in such a high-performance vehicle, is definitely bad and highly dangerous. The reason for the development of power steering is to assist in the parking of those cars that have become so big and heavy that it needs an athlete to turn the wheel when the car is traveling at a reasonable speed. It is not logical to assume that the owner of a 'President,' which incidentally has a fine power-weight ratio, is going to spend all his time parking and unparking his car. On the open road the 'President' system becomes superfluous as well as dangerous, as all sympathetic feeling between the driver and the front wheels has been eliminated. No horseman can ride a horse proficiently without being in constant accord with his mount through the medium of reins, and the same applies to driving a car as potent as the 'President.' Power steering on this car is neither necessary nor advisable.

In heavy traffic the 'President' behaved perfectly, and the hill-holder was much appreciated during the two-and-a-half-hour crawl through a football traffic jam. There was a tendency for the car to overheat during this slow progress but



The Studebaker's hood height is slightly above that of the Austin-Healey. We still would like to see such a trim basic body built in a convertible style.

this may have been due to a sticking thermostat.

Starting cold after the car had been outside on a frosty night was no problem and with the automatic choke the engine fired on the first turn of the ignition key.

The layout of the new 175 bhp. engine, and its accessories allows plenty of room for adjustments to be made when necessary.

It is doubtful whether it is a good policy to continue to use the six-volt battery with all the gadgets that now depend on it for power. A 12-volt battery would now seem to be in order. Nowadays, with no starter handle being supplied (and, of course, no aperture being provided for its use), one has to rely implicitly on the battery that is being constantly called upon to supply more and more energy.

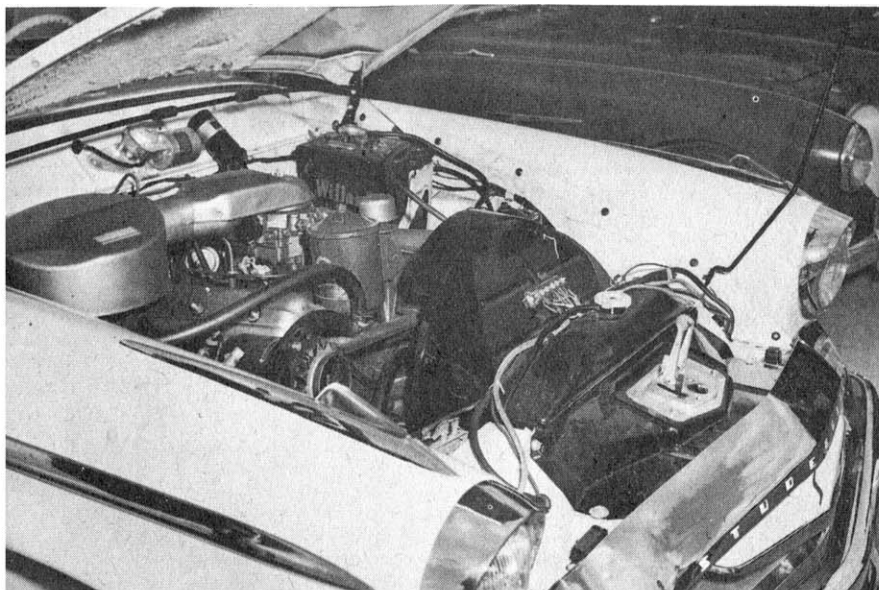
Summarizing, we would say that the 1955 Studebaker 'President' is an extremely attractive car that is ideal for the motorist who wants that little bit more, and for the man, or woman, who still appreciates the fact that driving can be a pleasure in a car that is designed

to be driven and not just to be sat in. We would, however, be more in favor of the 'President' if it had normal transmission, normal steering and, of course, bucket seats in the front.

With such a fine basis to work on, it seems a pity that the Studebaker people have not used their cars in rally-type competition. It would seem to us that the 'President' has all the attributes of a fire-class rally car and that it could be easily prepared to compete successfully against many of the imported sports sedans.

#### Specifications

Engine: V-8 type 'Wildcat' with overhead valves; bore, 3-9/16 inches and stroke, 3 1/4 inches; total capacity, 259 cubic inches (4,244 cc.). Develops 175 bhp. at 4,500 rpm. Compression ratio, 7.5:1. Oil capacity, 6 quarts; cooling system capacity, 17 1/4 quarts. Rear axle ratio, 7.5:1 or optional, 4.27:1; with overdrive, 4.27:1 or optional, 4.09:1; with automatic transmission, 3.54:1. Tubeless tires, size 7.10x15. Height (loaded), 56.31 inches; width, 71 inches; length, 204-7/16 inches. Wheelbase, 120 1/2 inches. ☆☆



The 175 bhp. power plant packs plenty of punch and is quite capable of pushing the 'President' up around the 100 mph. mark with power to spare in the pinch.