



Super, top, Century, left, Roadmaster, right, share rear bumper with integral exhaust cutaway. Roadmaster deck strips, spear, letters distinguish it from others

BUICK HAS RETAINED strong kinship in inter-series modeling for '56, with something different in trim, chassis components, and plenty of little things that will evoke a lot of comment from showroom visitors, buyers, and us.

We've often said that it's the little things that count. And you can count on '56 Buick instrumentation, for one, to start buyers counting their down payment. Unlike '55, when Supers and Roadmasters shared the same panel and Specials and Centurys divvied up another style panel, all '56s will be alike. (Roadmasters will have a padded upper panel cover which will be available as an extra-cost item on other models.)

The speedometer is similar to last year's higher-priced series—horizontal, with a thermometer-like red-line indicator. Really new, tho, are the engine operating gauges. The temperature and oil pressure gauges are made up of 2 discs, a stationary one painted red and green, and a movable one with a white pointer between 2 "windows" (which lets red and green show).

Here's how they operate: The temperature gauge shows green thru both windows until a dangerous unsafe point is ap-

proached; then it shows red thru the right window and green thru the left. If an unsafe temperature is reached, both windows show red. The oil pressure indicator operates in a like manner. The fuel gauge and ammeter look like the other gauges, but are conventional pointer-type instruments, with the needle resting in red or green as the situation demands.

With these changes, the instruments become considerably more legible. No longer can we complain (as we have about previous Buick instruments) that the dials are so small and poorly marked that you might run out of gas before observing the change on the gas gauge. The new dials are certainly a step in the right direction.

Other instrument panel changes are limited to radio grille revamping, heater control position, and installation of the heater and/or air conditioner outlets at each end of and below the instrument panel by the doors.

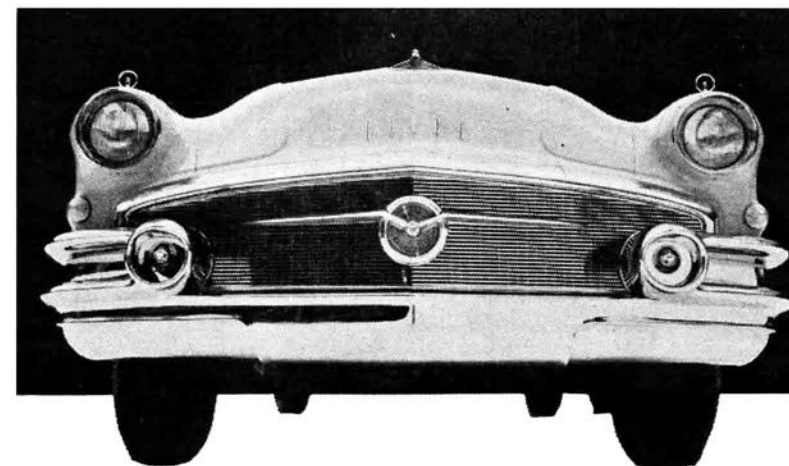
The heat, vent and defroster controls are not as conveniently positioned (midway of the panel and appended below), but you no longer require a manual of instructions to operate them knowingly.

Exterior features aren't far removed from '55 but may be indicative of future design trends. Of interest are the front parking lights—faired into the fender with a slight "blister" effect. The grille, while very close to '55s at 1st glance, is probably as far removed from Buick styling as anything to appear since '50; this is because the basic upper shell now cuts downward, instead of continuing its outward slope.

At the rear, tail lights are basically '55; Special and Century have heavy chrome trim around the tail lights, larger models have a slimmer 3/4-inch molding around theirs. The notable exception in rear-end treatment is the Roadmaster; its deck is topped with chrome strips terminating at the "cleats" introduced last year. The Roadmaster's outer bumper guards include provision for the dual exhaust outlets (optional on Century and Super).

Further Roadmaster distinction comes from a flat sweepspear (others remain contoured) with a greater kickup over the rear wheels.

Body options receive a boost with a 4-door hardtop now available in the larger Super and Roadmaster. And series identi-



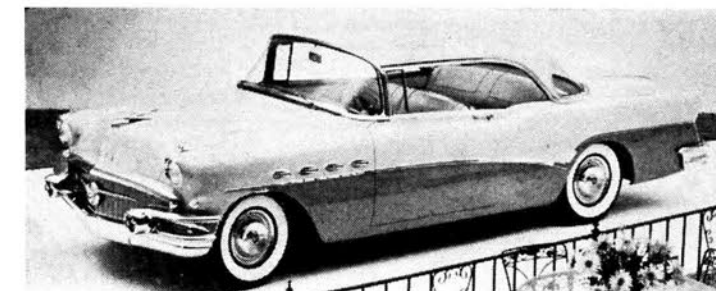
New front end with V-shaped grille has lost its amorphous curves, hangs together. All Buick series share the same displacement (322 cubic inches)

fication, found on hood and deck emblems, is complete with "1956"!

The "little" Special boasts a husky 322-cubic-inch engine for '56, an increase of 58 cubic inches to put it up with the other Buick engines in displacement. Power-wise, the Special's overhead-valve V8 is 32 horsepower stronger than in '55 (now 220), and its torque is upped to 319 pounds-feet from last year's 256. Graphically, the Special's torque curve reaches its peak at 2400 rpm, as it did in last year's 188-hp engine. Compression ratio is now 8.9 to 1, was 8.4 (one of the few differences between this engine and the more powerful V8s up the line). Compression ratio with synchromesh transmission is 7.6 to 1 (for operation on regular gas).

Century, Super and Roadmaster share a 255-hp, 322-cubic-inch V8, with 9.5 to 1 compression ratio and 4-barrel carburetor. (Last year's engine in this line-up put out 236 horsepower with 9 to 1 compression ratio.) Torque is up from last year's 330 pounds-feet at 3000 rpm to 341 at 3200.

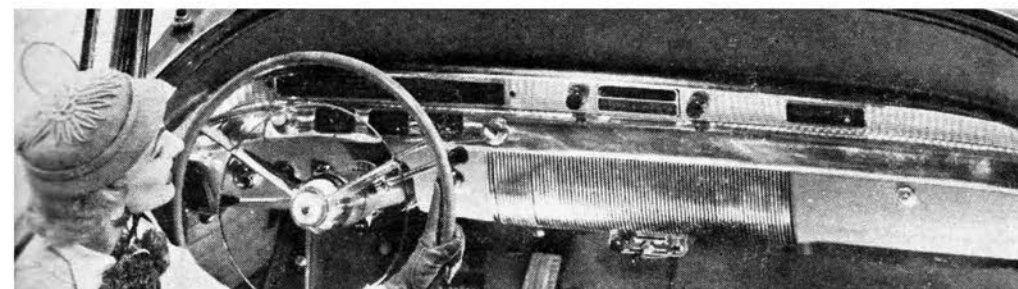
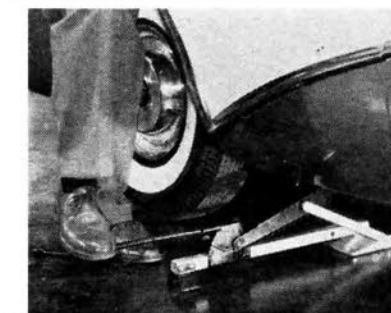
New power comes from redesigned combustion chambers. (Continued on page 56)



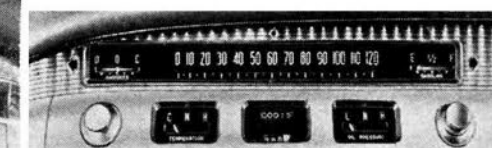
Roadmaster 2-door hardtop has clean, thin sweepspear, higher chrome kickup over wheel opening to set it apart from other Buick series

Conventional 4-door sedan continues thruout line. Full rear wheel cutouts, tho limited in '55, appear on all new Buick body types

Side-lift jack replaces usual bumper jack for '56. Operator slips jack under frame rail, uses foot power to raise car easily for tire change



Optional in other series, padded panel top is special feature standard on Roadmasters only. However, redliner speedometer, which was used sparingly in '55, is generously distributed clear across the board in '56 cars for better visibility



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'56 Buick

The new chambers were relieved on the valve side for better breathing, and the pistons were redomed for the compression ratio increase. Valve timing was altered, as was exhaust valve head design (it's "tulip-shaped" or "dished," for less gas flow restriction, more flexibility, and lively lightness.)

This new power is definitely felt in the new Buick. Before official announcement time, we were able to wring out a '55 Century 4-door hardtop that had the '56 underpinning, '56 engine, and '56 Dynaflo. We can't figure that the times we got in using a stopwatch against the speedometer are accurate, but they did at least give us some indication as to what we might expect in our road test (to come later). Starting from scratch we got to 65 mph (assuming a 5 mph error at that speed) in 10 seconds using LOW range, and about 12 using DRIVE. This is not too different from last year's Century.

For '56, Dynaflo has a second stator assembly to improve the take-off performance or acceleration at low car speeds. It's designed to give a more solid feel to the drive line in LOW or REVERSE ranges, for the low stator blade angle now occurs in all ranges, instead of in DRIVE range only.

At highway passing speeds, using LOW range to go from 32 mph to 54 mph (assumed speedometer error for 30 to 50) we made it in about 3½ seconds (about 1 second better than '55). If you stay in DRIVE, you'll take one second longer to get from 54 to 85 mph (estimated error for 50 to 80) than you will using LOW range up to 65 indicated, then manually shifting to DRIVE. Using the latter method, we clipped it around 10 seconds (almost 2 seconds faster than '55).

Altho the Century, Super and Roadmaster engines read alike in rated output, power at the wheels may be upped slightly by the Roadmaster's dual exhaust system. Transmission gear ratios and torque converter factors are the same for these cars, as is rear-axle ratio. (Special has a 3.9 ratio with standard transmission, 3.2 with Dynaflo, and the Century, Super, and Roadmaster have a 3.36 to 1 axle ratio with Dynaflo.)

The 3-speed transmission, available in the Special only, absorbs the power boost thru a heavier clutch (with suspended pedal), has higher gearing than it did in '55 (it's last year's Century and Super 3-speed transmission with the necessary modifications).

The chassis and running gear alterations common to all models include the installation of direct-acting shock absorbers at the rear, the redesign of the rear spring crossmember, a beefing-up of the siderails, inclination of the kingpins 7 degrees inward at the top from the vertical (zero

degrees) position of '55, and raising of steering arm ends.

The kingpin change and moving the steering arm upward ¼-inch, Buick engineers claim, have brought slight understeer in corners, greater directional stability, and better steering control. In the area where we were driving the engineering Buick Century, it was difficult to determine if handling in the corners is different. It is safe to assume, however, that such a change would build in understeer (the car's tendency to drift thru a corner taken exceptionally fast). As far as directional stability is concerned, the changes made are definitely for the better. When you leave the asphalt with the 2 right wheels, it takes a practically negligible effort to pull the car back. Immediately after whipping the wheel to one side, the car seeks its own straight course. It's only over a fairly bad dip that it wallows and needs wheel correction to keep it in a straight line. No more does it take much effort to steer a Buick toward the top of a crowned road.

Despite the changes for more roadability, the ride remains the same—pillowy. You seem to float over bad dips and bumps; incongruously, rough spots like tar strips are apparent in the seat of the pants.

Other chassis changes include heavier crossmembers on the Special and Century, and heavier front-center crossmember extensions and siderails on the convertibles.

The rear-axle housing has deeper sections this year, and, in order to discourage removal of factory-specified oil, no drain plug is provided in the unit. The rear coupling of the driveshaft has been redesigned to eliminate bind or transfer of end-wise forces on the shaft. Still employing torque-tube drive, Buicks for '56 have a "torque-ball" rubber compression ring housing at the axle, providing a leakproof, flexible pivot for the axle. Ring and pinion gears have been redesigned for greater strength, while axle shafts are larger in cross-section for the same reason.

Buick's new suspended brake pedal carries with it these advantages: relocation of the brake system components for better body sealing, protection of pedal linkage from weather, and improved pedal action.

On Dynaflo-equipped cars the pedal is closer to the throttle, both laterally and in height, making for an easier and quicker transfer of the throttle foot to the brake foot. If you're a left-foot-braker, it's still as easy to reach.

Brake lining of the Special is now 2¼ inches wide (it was 1¾ inches in '55). Brake shoes in all series have a ⅜-inch groove down the center, relieving a high-pressure zone over the shoe web and aiding even load distribution over the width of the brake, which should also help to eliminate the uneven braking action sometimes encountered with previous Buicks.

—Jim Lodge and Walt Woron