OLDS 88 FOR '60

Olds sharpens up appearance and offers an improved economy model to boost their chances in a highly competitive medium-price market.

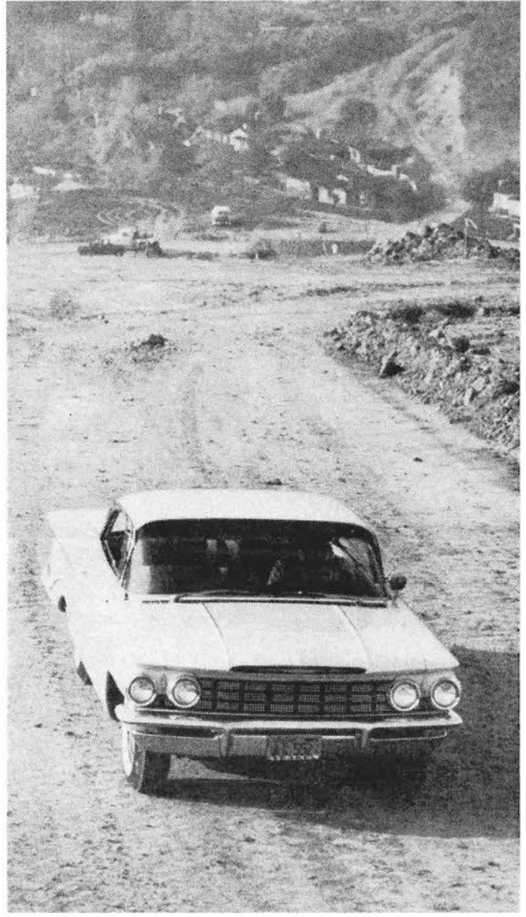
By Ray Brock

One of the oldest names on the American automobile scene is Oldsmobile. This car was quite the thing to own soon after the turn of the century and somebody even got so enthused over an early runabout that they wrote a song called "In My Merry Oldsmobile." The song is still heard occasionally, mostly as background for Olds TV commercials, and the car is still an important spoke in the Detroit wheel but quite a few changes have taken place over the years.

By the time the late 'thirties rolled around and we personally started taking an active interest in automobiles, Oldsmobile had earned a reputation as a good, solid medium-priced car with quality trim and finish. It was certainly not intended to catch the eye of the college crowd like its early predecessor and although we don't have a sales breakdown in our files for those years, we don't recall seeing too many of them on the streets

hr ROAD TEST

For 1960, Oldsmobile made an extreme departure from the abundance of chrome trim they have used in recent years. The simple segment grille and plain bumper design give a fresh, clean look for '60.



so doubt if Olds was setting the world on fire selling automobiles. This condition existed through the 'forties although we remind you that the war was responsible for a stagnant period in automobile development and even as late as 1948 Oldsmobile was just another medium-priced car that certainly wasn't threatening the sales position of Chevy, Ford, Plymouth, Buick, Studebaker and perhaps a couple of others.

And then 1949 came along and Oldsmobile suddenly had the liveliest item on the market with their V8 powered "Rockets." For the next several years, Oldsmobile owners had everything their own way when the traffic lights turned green, and sales boomed. By 1958, Oldsmobile business had increased to such a degree that they were ranked fourth in sales for the year. 1959 saw sales slip as the buying public became "compact car" conscious. Now the 1960 Oldsmobiles are here but so are three new "compacts," so just how does Oldsmobile figure to do in the 1960 model year?

To get the answer to this question, we once more called on our friends at Yeakel Oldsmobile in Los Angeles and asked to borrow a car for several days. The steel strike was in full swing at the time and Yeakel only had eight cars in stock. One of them happened to be a beautiful light yellow Super 88 Holiday coupe that was sitting on the showroom floor. This was just what we wanted so it was fitted with license plates and we drove it away.

The 1960 Oldsmobile, although extensively restyled since 1959, is still the same basic car beneath the exterior sheet metal. Three series are offered; the Dynamic 88, Super 88 and the 98. The two 88's are identical in size with 123-inch wheelbase, 61-inch tread front and rear, 80.6-inch maximum car width, 217.6 inches overall length and a height of 56.5 inches with design load. The 98 series dimensions differ only in wheelbase (126.3 inches) and length (223 inches).

The least expensive Dynamic 88 series is equipped with a 371 cubic inch V8 engine that is still quite similar in design to the "Rocket" engine first introduced in 1949. The bore is 4 inches; stroke 3.688 inches. An 8.75:1 compression ratio is used with this engine and the manufacturer recommends regular gasoline. Experiences we have had with other engines supposedly designed for regular fuel and having compression ratios of 8.5 or 8.75:1 make us a little reluctant to agree with this statement. Octane ratings of regular grades of gasoline seem to vary widely between brands and some cars we have tested would "ping" rather badly with compression ratios of 8.5:1 or so on some popular brands. An optional compression ratio is offered for the Dynamic 88; 9.75 to 1. The 8.75 and 9.75 ratio engines are identical except for compression and horsepower ratings. The 8.75:1 engine is rated 240 hp at 4400 rpm with 375 ft/lbs of torque at 2400 rpm. The optional 9.75:1 engine is rated 260

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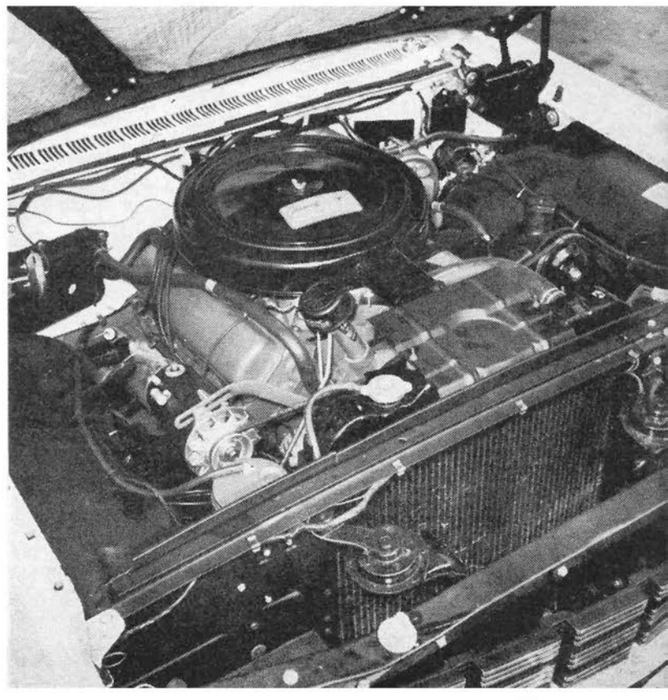
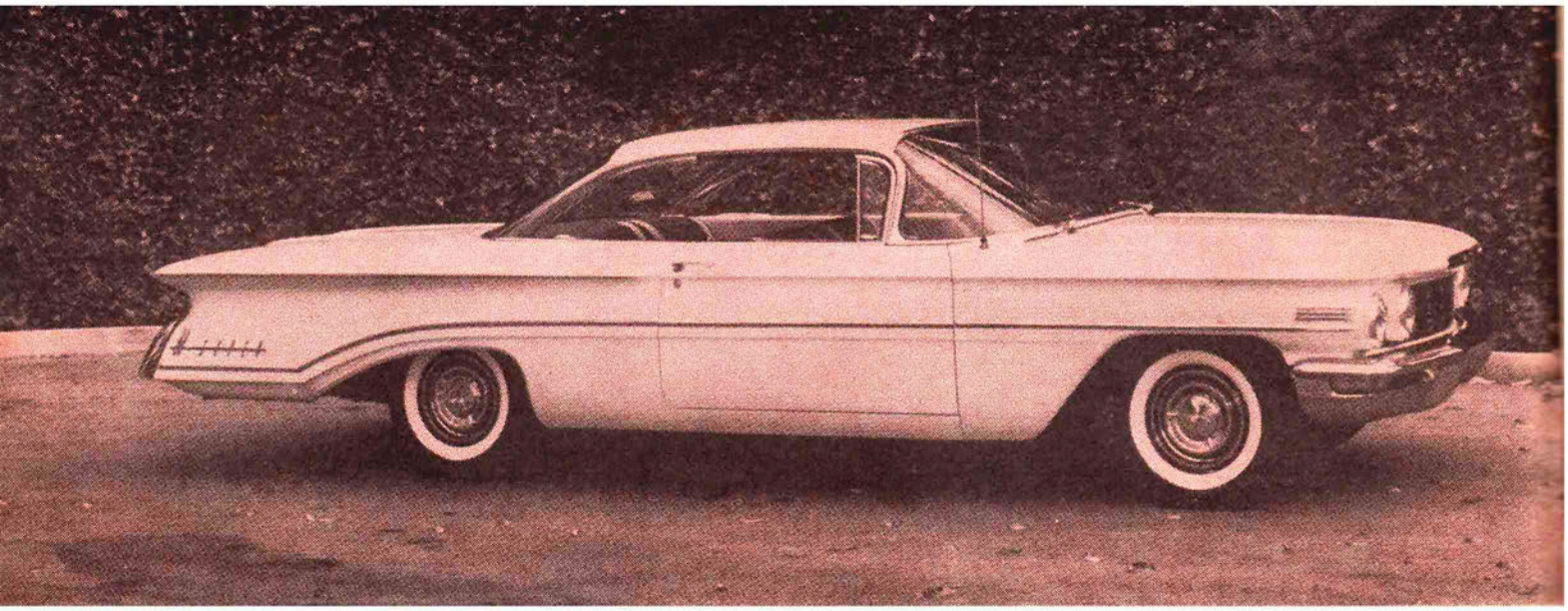
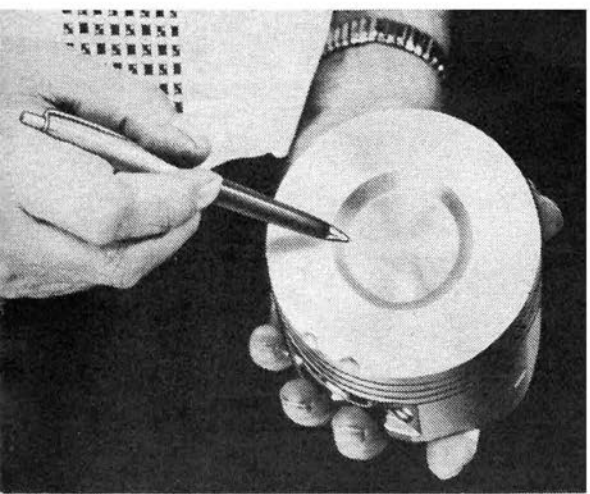


Oldsmobile engines for 1960 all have the same exterior dimensions but two displacements, two compression ratios and three horsepower ratings. Accessibility to the engine is good for tuneups and other upper-engine repairs. Four-barrel carburetion is used on the largest engine, two-barrel on the others. Olds no longer offers optional triple two-barrel carburetion.



Super 88 Holiday hardtop used for test had power steering, power brakes, Hydra-Matic and miscellaneous other accessories. The car weighed 4370 pounds minus passengers yet was quite lively in acceleration department and had excellent stopping ability.

PHOTOS BY ERIC RICKMAN



hp at 4400 rpm with 390 ft/lbs of torque at 2400 rpm. Both use a single Rochester two-barrel carburetor designed for economy. The 9.75 compression ratio requires premium gasoline but should deliver slightly better mileage. It seems to us that the higher compression and premium fuel would be less troublesome than taking chances with the lower compression and cheaper regular grades.

Oldsmobile has evidently received a number of complaints about decreasing mileage in recent years because the 371-inch Dynamic 88 engine has been fitted with a milder camshaft for 1960. This, coupled with a recalibrated two-barrel carburetor and a 2.87 rear axle ratio for the automatic transmission should improve mileage noticeably.

The Super 88 and 98 series use the same engine but with an eighth-inch larger bore. 394 cubic inches of displacement and a few other changes. The compression ratio is 9.75:1 for all models; a single Rochester four-barrel carburetor is used with a slightly hotter camshaft than the Dynamic 88 but no engine options are offered. Rated horsepower is 315 at 4600 rpm and torque is 435 at 2800 rpm. It is identical to the 394-inch V8 offered in 1959 for the Super 88 and 98 series.

Although nearly all Oldsmobiles will be sold with automatic transmissions, a column shift transmission is standard equipment for the two 88 series. It is a "high" ratio transmission with a 2.15 low gear, 1.37 second, direct in high and 2.28 reverse. The rear axle ratio used with this transmission is 3.42:1 which would certainly indicate that this combination will not set any records for speedy starts. Last year's axle ratio for standard transmissions was 3.64; this year it's higher yet. As we said, though, Oldsmobile doesn't plan to sell too many cars equipped this way so it really doesn't matter.

The automatic transmission offered as an option for the 88's and used as standard equipment for the 98 is GM's Jetaway Hydra-Matic. It is a four-speed transmission with gear ratios of 3.97, 2.55, 1.55 and 1.00. The four speeds and especially that 3.97 first gear are the reason why the heavy late model Oldsmobiles can still get the jump on lighter cars with one- or two-speed automatics. Add to this the advantage of a 1.55 third gear that can be used anytime below 75 mph for added braking effort and it is easy to see why we prefer the Hydra-Matic to the one- and two-speed automatics offered by some

UPPER LEFT—240 hp "economy" engine has 371 cubic inches and 8.75:1 compression ratio. The scooped out portion in the piston gives lower compression. Same engine with flat top pistons has 9.75:1 compression ratio and is rated 260 horses.

LEFT—Spare tire well in trunk is on the outside of the frame rail with the top of the tire tilted inward. Sheet metal pads support tire in the proper position and give wider flat floor space as well as making spare removal easy even with load.

manufacturers. There are a few three-speed automatics such as Ford's Cruise-O-Matic and Chrysler's TorqueFlite which we feel to be adequate but the single- and two-speed types in our opinion aren't as versatile in either acceleration or braking ability.

The Jetaway Hydra-Matic is a smooth shifting unit that gives little trouble as long as it is not abused. The smooth shifts are accomplished by a combination of fluid coupling and clutches which make a gradual application. If the transmission is repeatedly abused, such as at a drag strip, clutches and bands can be badly worn and cause heavy repair bills. The Jetaway and a heavy car do not make a good combination for weekly trips to the drag strip.

Axle ratios for Oldsmobiles with Hydra-Matic are 2.87 for the Dynamic 88 models, 3.07 for Super 88's and 3.23 for 98's. This is an improvement over last year when the ratios in the same order were 3.07, 3.23 and 3.42. As long as Oldsmobile has the efficient four-speed automatic transmission, it would seem quite practical to install the 2.87 axle ratio in the other series too, especially since they have higher horsepower engines. Prospective buyers can specify the 2.87 ratio when ordering Super 88's or 98's and save a few dollars over a period of time with better gasoline mileage.

Oldsmobile's suspension is identical to that used in 1959 and quite similar in fact to that used since the early fifties. Olds is the only GM product still holding out with a coil spring front suspension and leaf springs on the rear. The rest of the line has switched to coils on all four wheels. Although manufacturers using coils on the rear wheels can cite a number of supposed advantages over the leaf spring, we will side with Oldsmobile and leaf springs as long as American cars stick to the Hotchkiss drive and one-piece rear axle housing. If they switch to swing axle or DeDion in the future, we might have to concede the coil is better suited. The leaf spring not only acts as a spring but also controls side movement, torque and braking forces. Coils require radius arms and track bars with their accompanying rubber bushings that swing and sway.

We pointed out when writing up the report on the '59 Olds that the spring "rate" both front and rear was very little more than it was for the much lighter '59 Ford. The same holds true for 1960; the Olds springs are designed to give a soft ride and therefore let the car bounce around quite a bit when driven at high speeds over not-so-smooth roads. With the type of driving that we do, stronger. better acting shock absorbers would be the answer. For the average driver who doesn't have occasion to drive on the rolling desert roads that we have in the west, the '60 Olds suspension will be adequate.

Oldsmobile's 1960 body is 80.6 inches wide and the broad expanse of sheet metal in front of the windshield is hard to see over. Parking in close quarters is usually a matter of guesswork because it's impossible to see right front fender from driver's seat.

Over the past several years, while a number of our Detroit products were having their share of brake problems, Oldsmobile has always stayed a jump ahead of the demands to deliver a better than average brake and they continue to do so for 1960. Despite the fact that this car is on the heavy side of the ledger, the brakes do an excellent job of halting the car. Stops are sure, straight line and with or without the power assist, require just the right amount of pedal pressure. After repeated stops from high speeds, brake effectiveness will start to drop off some but no indication of erratic brakes is noticed. Olds brakes give plenty of warning that they are getting overheated as the pedal pressure required becomes greater. 11-inch cast iron drums are used both front and rear with 2½-inch wide front lining and 2-inch wide rear lining. Total

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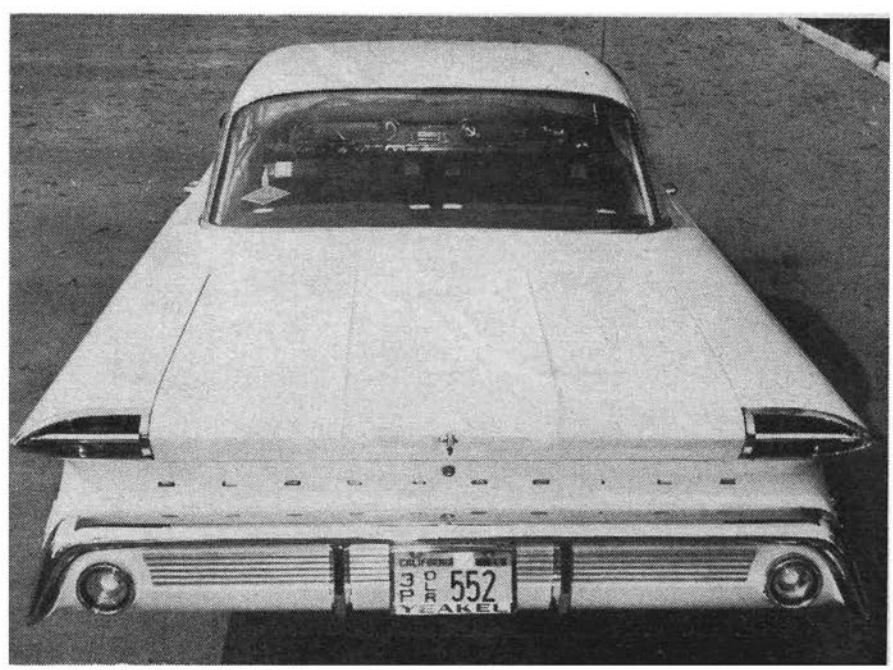

The rear window on hardtop '60 models features heat resistant glass. Upper portion of the glass is "aluminized" to reflect heat but when the sun in high overhead, it acts somewhat like a mirror; driver sees reflections when using rear view mirror.

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lining area on the shoes is 191.7 square inches but Olds has a half-inch wide groove down the middle of the lining on each shoe to help ventilate the lining and this cuts the total effective area down to 156.8 square inches. The cast iron drums have a wide bell-like flange around the inner edge of the drum to help direct air flow back inside the wheel and around the main portion of the drum while also dissipating heat from the flange into the air flow.

Although the two 88 series use a mechanical type steering unit as standard equipment, the ratio has necessarily been made so slow to permit turning the heavy cars that it is impractical. The overall ratio between steering wheel and front wheels is 33.2:1. Needless to say, we recommend the Saginaw power steering unit as being much more suitable. It has a final ratio of 21.8:1 and is a well-designed, easy turning unit. If you are considering any but the lightest of our modern automobiles, power steering is almost a required option. Of course, some of the more expensive models such as the 98 Olds offer power steering as a regular item.

Driving the 1960 Oldsmobile is a pleasureable chore. We certainly enjoyed the luxury of our Super 88 hardtop coupe test car. The car was as quite as any we have ever driven, no rush of air by the car when the windows were closed and even when the driver's side window was down, the noise level was very low. Engine noise is imperceptible at all speeds and it is obvious that Oldsmobile is in the business of selling luxury.

Although Oldsmobile offers a quiet ride, they do not necessarily offer the most comfortable ride from an angle of seating position. General Motors' entire line of cars for '60 has built themselves a problem in seating comfort by getting the seats so low to the floor that they are awkward to the uninitiated and only barely passable after you have become accustomed to them. Rear seat entry and exit is next to impossible on coupe models and only slightly better on the four-door models. On our two-door hardtop test car, rear seat passengers not only complained about entry and exit but also about the fact that their knees were jammed against the rear of the front seat. With a short legged driver, this problem would have probably been lessened but we just happen to have long legs and need room to manuever. It is amazing that our American cars have grown some two or three feet longer in the past dozen years and the modern V8 engine is shorter than its straight six or eight predecessor, yet Detroit can't seem to use any of the space gained for passenger comfort. GM isn't the only offender in this category.

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The handling ability of the 1960 Olds is not going to drive the Corvette out of business. Our Super 88 Holiday test car weighed 4370 pounds fueled up and ready to go; 54.7% or 2390 pounds was on the front wheels and the remaining 1980 pounds rested on the rear wheels. This represents a fairly heavy piece of machinery once you get it rolling and trying to change direction through tight corners is not accomplished without a fair share of tire squealing and front end pushing. Trying to bring the rear of the car around with the throttle on tight corners, we only succeeded in breaking the rear wheels loose and getting a lot of wheelspin. The Olds is both too heavy and too softly sprung for amateur road racing so should be driven in the leisurely fashion intended.

When it comes to acceleration, the Olds belies its weight by really bouncing off the line if the driver so desires. 0-30 mph times averaged 3.5 seconds; 0-60, 9 seconds; 30-60, 6 seconds; 50-80, 9.8 seconds. The standing quarter-mile required 17.0 seconds with a true speed of 83 mph registered at the end of the quarter. These times are all just slightly lower than the times we recorded with the Super 88 Holiday coupe last year. Last year's test car had more extras so weighed more but it did have more break-in miles plus a 3.23 axle ratio. Our '60 model used a 3.07 axle ratio.

Our '60 model showed just a little better mileage than the comparable '59 test car, probably also due to the different axle ratio. We averaged nearly 14 miles per gallon on the city streets and freeways and although this kind of mileage won't make Volkswagen go home, it is an improvement and the Olds is not only heavier but also a lot livelier than the VW. It will be interesting to see how the Dynamic 88 with the economy camshaft, carburetor and 2.87 axle ratio will fare in the Mobilgas Economy Run this spring.

So to sum up the 1960 Oldsmobile, we would have to say that they are still building a good, solid medium-priced car as they did back before 1949 but with enough style and "Rocket" performance to attract buyers of all age brackets. Just what the compact car introduction by GM, Ford and Chrysler will have to do with sales, we aren't sure but it doesn't look as though Oldsmobile will suffer as much as Ford, Chevy and Plymouth. It is rumored that Buick, Olds and Pontiac have their own compact cars which they will place on the market late this spring. If they do, we doubt if their sales either will affect the large Oldsmobile as much as it will the so-called low-priced three. There are a certain number of people in this country who buy in the medium-priced bracket and Olds has a reputation nearly 60 years old working for them.