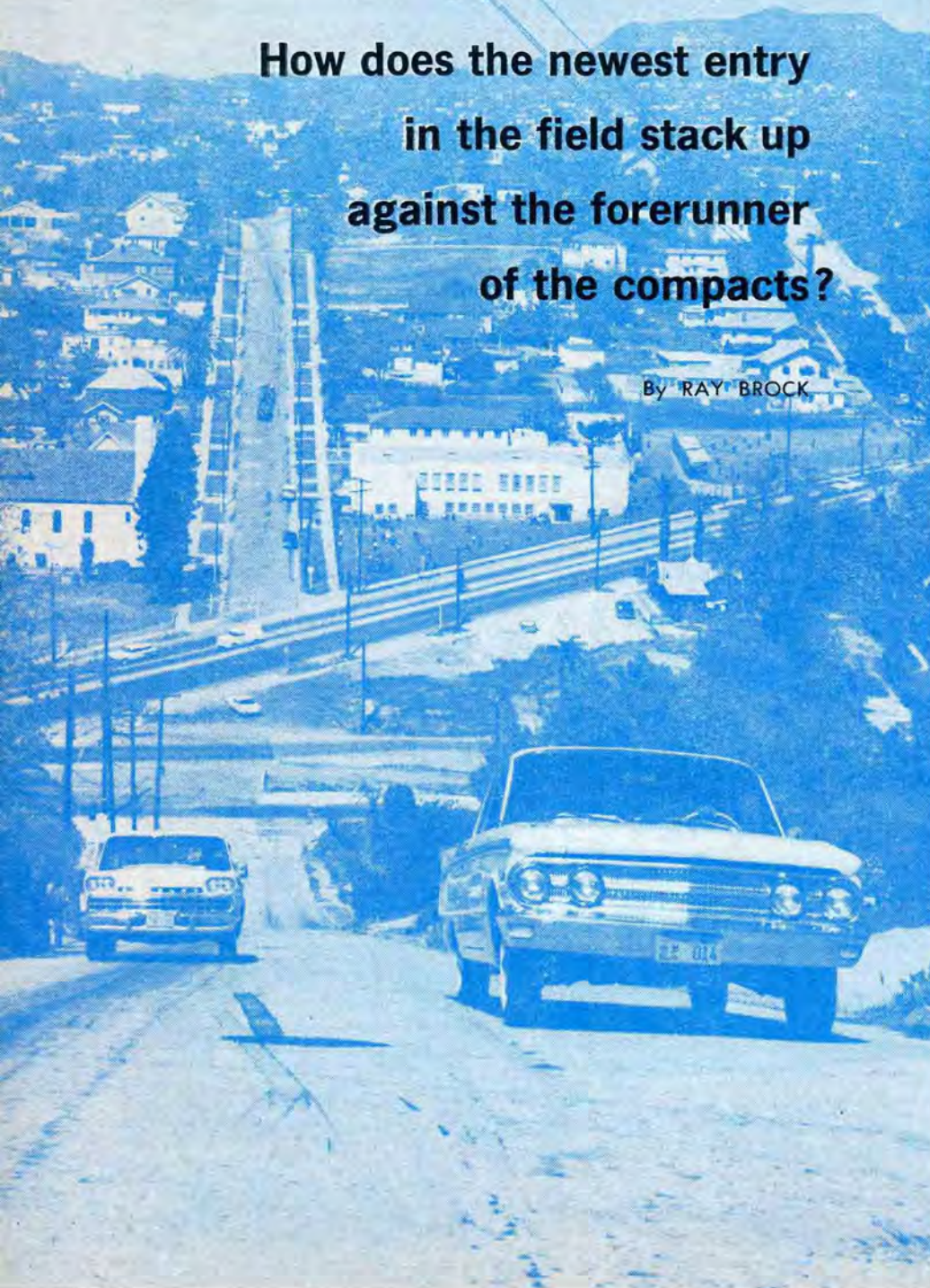


COMPACT TEST—

COMET

How does the newest entry
in the field stack up
against the forerunner
of the compacts?

By RAY BROCK



VS.



American Motors Corporation was the first U.S. automobile manufacturer to analyze the growing popularity of the imported car in this country. They realized that many of our citizens bought the offerings from Detroit only because that was all they had to choose from unless they wanted one of the small imports. American Motors decided to gamble their stake on something between the two so abandoned Nash and Hudson models to concentrate on the Rambler. They launched a campaign to sell the public "compact" cars. Their success is a well known story today and at least partially responsible for the fact that General Motors, Ford and Chrysler Corporations have added compacts to their lines.

Although some companies tried small models in the early 'fifties, Kaiser's Henry J. Hudson's Jet and even the 100-inch wheelbase Nash Rambler, the standard sized automobile had not reached the generous proportions that it has in the last five years so the early compacts flopped. By the time AM introduced their 108-inch wheelbase Rambler with

LEFT—From a standing start at the bottom of 32% Fargo street hill, the Comet could crest the top 10 seconds faster than the Rambler. Comet's time of 35 seconds was far from fast for the short climb.

RIGHT—Both cars feature unitized body construction so took to the rough back roads and chuckholes without rattles or squeaks. Rambler has best isolation of road and engine noise from car interior.

RAMBLER



a strong advertising campaign to convince the car buyer that he could have comfort and economy at the same time, the public was ready to listen. So, the Rambler six qualified as the first of the "compacts." It started the current trend and is still selling like hotcakes.

We discovered while testing the Corvair, Falcon and Valiant for the February '60 issue of HRM that comparing automobiles built for the same purpose provided interesting results. When the latest compact, Mercury's Comet, was introduced, we decided that this would be

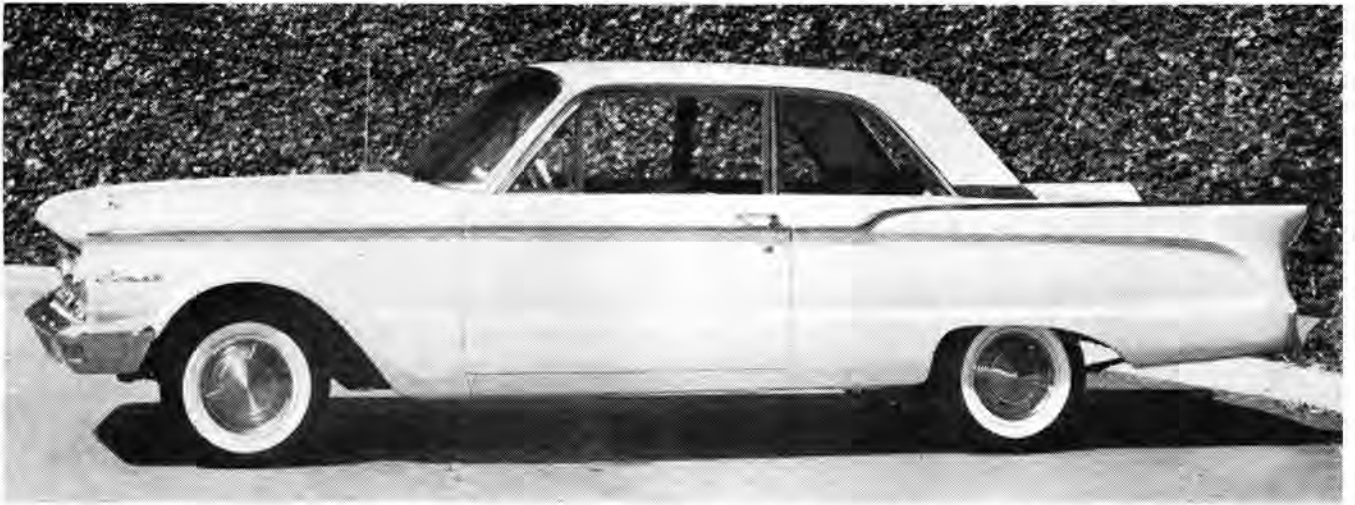
an excellent car to pit against the Rambler 6. Although one was the first and the other was the last to appear on the scene (to date), they have a lot in common.

We chose cars equipped as the average buyer might specify when choosing for himself. The Comet was a two-door model with automatic transmission, radio, heater and deluxe trim. The Rambler chosen was a four-door Super model with automatic transmission, radio, heater, power steering and power brakes. Statistics show that a majority of the cars sold

in this country are equipped with power steering and power brakes so that was the reason for choosing them on the Rambler. We would have taken them on the Comet too, but they are not offered.

In physical dimensions, the Comet has 114-inch wheelbase compared to only 108 inches for the Rambler. The Comet is 195 inches long while the Rambler is 5½ inches shorter at 189.5. In overall width, the Comet is 70.4 inches wide; the Rambler, 72.2 inches. Height finds the Comet a little lower at 54.5 inches com-

(Continued on following page)



Although on the same basic chassis as the Falcon, Comet's wheelbase has been stretched $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches to 114 inches plus 14 inches added to make the overall length 195 inches. T-Bird type styling for top gives good headroom in both front and rear seats.



COMET VS. RAMBLER continued



pared to 57.3 for the Rambler four-door.

With a full tank of fuel but no passengers or luggage, our Comet weighed 2520 pounds; the Rambler, 3240 pounds, 1400 or 55.8% of the Comet's weight was on the front wheels compared to 1820 pounds or 56.4% for the Rambler. Based on these figures, the two cars don't really seem to be too evenly matched; the Rambler has less wheelbase and length, is wider, higher and heavier than the Comet. Let's dig a little deeper.

The Comet has a 144-cubic-inch inline six-cylindered engine with overhead valves. Rambler's engine fits the same general description except for displacement, 195.6 cubic inches. Comet's horsepower rating is 90; Rambler's 127. Figured on a basis of weight to displacement and weight to power, the cars get on a more even keel. The Comet has 27.9 pounds per advertised horsepower; the Rambler, 25.6. Comet's pounds per inch ratio is 17.5 while Rambler's is 16.6.

Interior measurements found the Comet to have about 57 inches of hip room in both front and rear seats with 55 inches width at shoulder height. The Rambler

was more generous with approximately 3 inches more room for both measurements in each seat. Leg room was nearly the same for each car and although the Comet passengers have a couple of inches more head room, the Rambler has ample head clearance.

While we're discussing the interior of the cars, we will touch on the dash panel layout, seats and heating-ventilation systems. Both have convenient instrument clusters directly in front of the driver where all gauges and warning lights can be easily viewed. There is a minimum of chrome although the Comet is perhaps the fancier of the two. Last year, Rambler used a center location for the glove compartment which placed it within easy reach of both driver and passengers. For 1960, the glove box has been moved to the far right side of the dash panel where the driver can't reach it while driving, at least in a safe manner. Comet's glove box is also to the far right side, away from the driver.

Seating position in the Comet is very good except that for our own arms and legs, we couldn't get the front seat back far enough. We don't feel that we should have to apologize for being bigger than average because there are a lot of people in this country above the six foot mark that drive cars. The only way we could see to gain leg and arm room would be to redrill the seat mounting holes in the floor pan and even using this method, only about an inch could be picked up. In the Rambler, we had all the room we needed with one notch left on the front seat adjustment track. Leg room is also ample for adults in the rear seat with the front seat back, but just barely. Exiting from the rear seat of the four-door Rambler is not accomplished without a bit of twisting similar to that required in current General Motors' sedans.

Both the Comet and the Rambler we tested were equipped with optional vinyl type upholstery material. During our test period with these cars, we had several days of 90°-plus weather in Southern California and found the vinyl covering quite uncomfortable in both cars. If the cars were parked in direct sunlight, the plastic seats assumed the texture of flypaper. When driving in hot weather, both the seat of the pants and the shirt back got very damp and sticky. We realize that many people order the vinyl covering for ease of cleaning, etc., but if the car is to be used in hot, sticky weather, we would definitely recommend the cloth type which permits some air circulation.

Ventilation in the Comet is very good. Small doors can be opened beneath the dash panel on each side of the car to admit a strong blast of fresh air. These doors are designed to stay in any set position so the amount of fresh air can be controlled. For heating, the doors must be closed and then a separate set of dash knobs pulled and twisted to give the desired heat. The water heater is very good and can be adjusted to give a wide range of heat. Rambler's heater is also very good but the fresh air supply is through the same duct outlets, not separate like the Comet. With this arrangement, fresh air to the front seat foot area is not nearly as good as it is in the Comet. On hot days, the Rambler could use additional cooling. Rambler offers an optional air-conditioning unit which is quite effective but is also quite costly. For the benefit of those who have never owned an air-conditioned car, we can strongly recommend one. If you plan to keep a car several years after purchase, the extra cost of the unit is well spent both for driving pleasure and resale later on. Comet does not offer an optional air-conditioning unit but we have heard special equip-



Rambler's wheelbase is 108 inches and overall length 189.5 inches. Rambler is one of the few cars made in the U.S. today still using 15-inch wheels. Larger wheels give good road clearance and excellent air circulation to cool the brake drums.

PHOTOS BY ERIC RICKMAN

ment companies make them for the Falcon and these same units will fit a Comet.

Luggage space is nearly the same for the two cars. Comet's trunk has 26.6 cubic feet of area while the Rambler has 27.85 cubic feet. These figures include all the area in the trunk and represent a fair sized luggage space although some of the small areas above the axle hump and under the fenders can only be filled with smaller items. The Comet deck opening is high and requires all luggage be lifted 28 inches from the ground. Despite the high lift, loading luggage is easy. Rambler's opening is lower but the lid does not open high enough to suit us. Unless you are careful, you will catch the Ram-

bler deck lid with your head either while loading or unloading luggage. We found this out while getting lumps loading a portable baby crib.

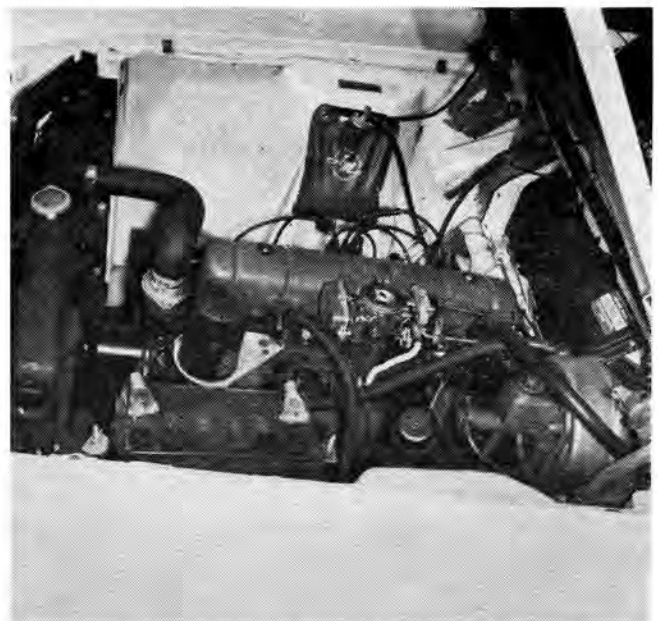
The engine, running gear and most other components used to build the Comet are borrowed from the Falcon. Styling, wheelbase and length of the Comet are about the only changes. The 144-inch overhead valve six engine is identical to Falcon's with 3.5-inch bore, 2.5-inch stroke and 8.7:1 compression. It uses a Holley single-throat carburetor with manual choke and burns the cheaper, regular grades of gasoline. The 90 horsepower rating is at 4200 rpm and the engine has 138 pounds/feet of torque at 2000 rpm.

Rambler's 195.6-inch six has a 3.125-inch bore, 4.25-inch stroke and 8.7:1 compression ratio. It uses the same Holley single-throat carburetor as the Comet but with automatic choke, and also burns regular grades of gasoline. It is rated 127 horsepower at 4200 rpm and has 180 pounds/feet of torque at 1800 rpm. An optional two-barrel Carter carburetor raises the horsepower to 138 at 1500 rpm, with 185 lbs/ft. of torque at 1800 rpm. Engine accessibility for maintenance is good on both cars and service charges should be minimal for each.

Comets are available with either a standard transmission or a two-speed
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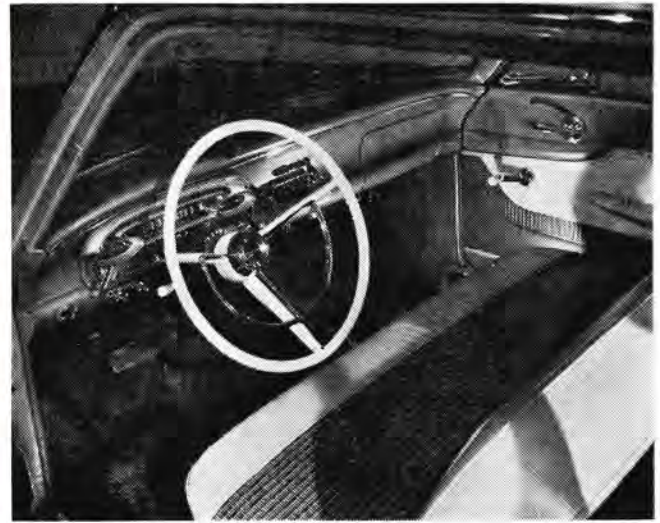
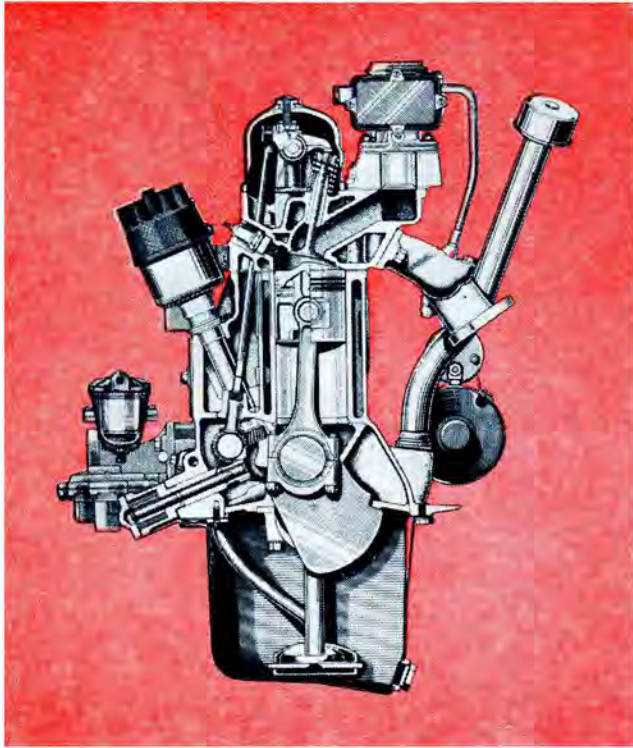
The Comet powerplant is a 144-inch in-line six with overhead valves and rocker arms. Single-throat Holley carburetor feeds fuel to intake manifold cast integrally with head. Horsepower rating is 90. Engine is an exact duplicate to one in Falcons.



Rambler 195-inch overhead valve six uses the same style single-throat Holley carburetor as the Comet. The by-pass type oil filter mounts to a bracket on cylinder head where it is easy to service. Power rating of the Rambler engine is 127.



COMET VS. RAMBLER *continued*



Comet interior styling is simple but of very high quality. All instruments are directly in front of the driver and easy to read. Shift lever for Fordomatic drive is on the column.

LEFT—Cutaway drawing of the Rambler six shows how the channel for intake gases is part of the head with a flat plate on top. This ensures good vaporization for better mileage.

automatic transmission. The standard transmission has ratios of 3.29 in first, 1.75 in second and direct drive in third. Comet does not offer an overdrive option. The two-speed Fordomatic transmission has a ratio of 1.75 in Low range, direct in Drive and has a torque converter coupling with a multiplication ratio of 2.40. The standard rear axle ratio with either transmission is 3.56 to 1 with a 3.89 optional.

Rambler's are available with three transmission selections; standard three-speed, three speed with overdrive and three-speed automatic. The standard transmission has ratios of 2.61, 1.63 and 1 to 1. The overdrive ratio is .70 to 1. Flash-O-Matic is the name of the automatic transmission and it has ratios of 2.40, 1.47 and direct in third with a torque converter stall ratio of 2.12 to 1. The manual transmission uses an axle ratio of 3.78 with optional gears of 4.11 and 4.30. With overdrive transmission, the production ratio is 4.11 with 4.38 optional. The standard Flash-O-Matic ratio is 3.31 with 3.78 optional. Our test car used the 3.31 with Flash-O-Matic.

Suspension for the Comet is identical to that used on the Falcon with the slight exception of spring rates. The front wheels use unequal length control arms with a coil spring bracketed between the midway point of the upper control arm and a reinforced spring well in the inner fender panel of the unit construc-

tion body. Rear suspension is by means of semi-elliptical leaf springs with an open driveshaft used.

Rambler suspension is coil spring on all four wheels with the front springs bracketed between extensions of the spindles and spring wells high in the front fender inner panels. The rear coils mount between the rear axle housing and pads in the unitized body underpanel. A cross-chassis track bar locates the axle sideways while a torque tube driveline controls fore and aft location plus torque and braking forces.

We alternated between the Comet and Rambler for almost two weeks of daily driving and also switched cars on a couple of trips we took so that we could come up with some opinions on the two. Starting off with the Comet, we noted that the car is solid and rattle-free, thanks to the unitized body construction and has a firm ride on the highways and freeways. Acceleration was not anything to get excited about but the car will keep up with traffic in the city without too much strain. On the open road, the Comet will keep up with 65 mph traffic with ease but has little left for passing another car at this speed.

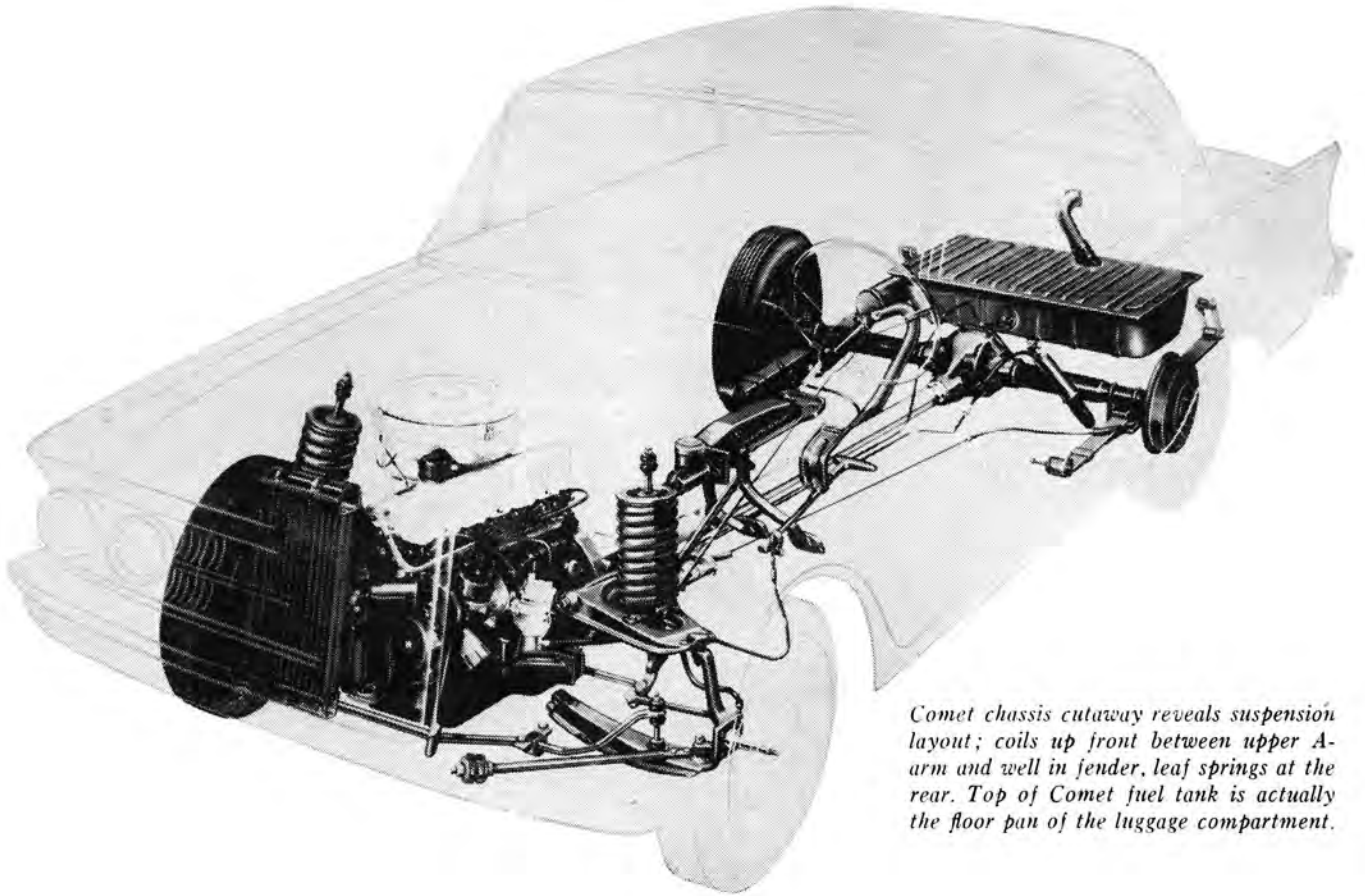
We found the steering too slow to suit our taste. It has a ratio of 27:1 and requires quite a bit of winding when maneuvering in and out of parking places or over twisting roads. Since almost every car we drive these days is equipped

with power steering, Comet's conventional steering felt a little heavy at first. Besides being slow, the maximum turning angle is also not very sharp. Almost 40 feet is required for the Comet to make a full circle turn, curb-to-curb.

Comet's brakes are excellent and never displayed a tendency to fade or become erratic, no matter how hard we used them. Drum diameter is only nine inches but with 2.25-inch wide front shoes and 1.5-inch wide rear shoes for a total lining area of 114 square inches. Balance between front and rear brakes is very good and high speed stops can be made without sliding the rear wheels.

The Comet is not a particularly quiet car at highway speeds. Insulation between engine and passenger compartment is evidently thin because the little rocker-box six can be heard plainly. Although the body is tight and devoid of squeaks, road noise is quite noticeable. We have read many words about the complexities of isolating road noise from cars with unitized body construction and evidently this is part of the problem. Wind noise is not unusually loud but added to that from the road and the engine, makes the Comet a hard car in which to converse in normal tones at 60 miles per hour.

Our first experience behind the wheel of the Rambler six left us with many impressions. First of all, the car is unusually quiet. Rambler's long experience with unitized construction is evident as



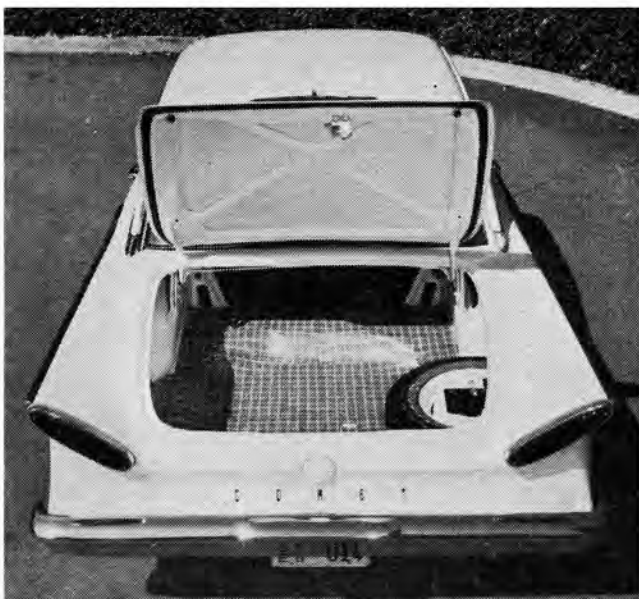
Comet chassis cutaway reveals suspension layout; coils up front between upper A-arm and well in fender, leaf springs at the rear. Top of Comet fuel tank is actually the floor pan of the luggage compartment.

there are no rattles or road noise. At highway speeds, there is a normal amount of wind noise but the engine is never heard. Both steering and brakes on our test car were excellent. The Monroe linkage type power steering has a good

“feel” and also a just-right ratio of 18.6:1. The car will turn around in a 37-foot, 3-inch circle, almost three feet less than the Comet. The brakes have nine-inch diameter drums, 2.5 inches wide on the front wheels, 2 inches wide

at the rear. Total lining area is 136 square inches and with the optional vacuum power-assist, the brakes stopped the car without fade or pull every time during our test program.

(Continued on page 104)



Comet's luggage compartment does not have as wide an opening as Rambler and requires a higher lift of luggage. Lid does open wide, however, so that the loader does not bump his head.



Rambler luggage compartment is spacious and has a wide opening but the curl-over portion that forms the rear panel of the car gets in the way of the head when loading and unloading pieces.



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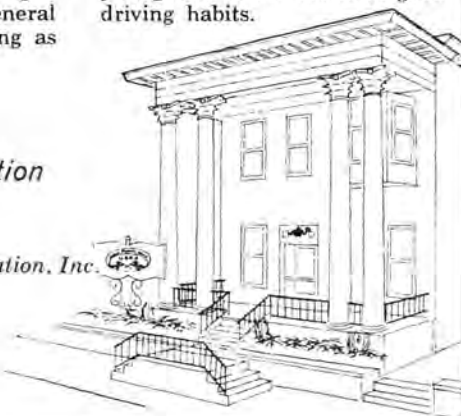
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COMET VS. RAMBLER

continued from page 33

We were surprised the first time we decided to pull up the on-ramp to one of Los Angeles' fast moving freeways and give-it-the-gun to gain speed and duck into the traffic flow. The on-ramp tapered into the freeway lanes in about 400 yards and after using about three-fourths of that distance trying to match or better the speed of a large hay truck that was overtaking us on the left, we threw in the sponge and gave the brakes a good test in the remaining distance. Of all the cars we have tested, the Rambler six is about the least inclined to get up and go. We might point out that most of the cars we test are performance models.

Last summer, we tested Rambler's Rebel with a 250-inch V8 engine and it had quite a time getting to the top of Los Angeles' steepest grade, 32% Fargo street hill. We took both the Comet and the Rambler six to Fargo street to see if they could make the top. With the same driver alternating between cars, the Comet needed 35 seconds to go from a standing start at the bottom to the top of the hill. The Rambler needed 45 seconds. Both cars crawled over the top at a very slow speed, the Rambler slowest as the times indicate. This hill is only a block long and to give you a figure for comparison, a couple of years ago we drove a Chevy V8 1/2-ton pickup with a 1000-pound load over the same distance in just 16 seconds.

Next, we took the two cars to a 1/4-mile strip where we checked their acceleration against the clock and the cars against each other. The Comet needed 6.3 seconds to go from 0 to 30 mph. Rambler needed 6.2 seconds. 0 to 60 mph times: Comet, 18.5 seconds; Rambler, 19 seconds. 30 to 60 mph passing acceleration: Comet, 12.5 seconds; Rambler, 12.7 seconds. Both cars had identical times and speeds in the standing start 1/4-mile. 21.4 seconds and 64.3 mph. Comet's two-speed automatic transmission versus Rambler's three-speed accounts for the slight differences in 0-30 and 0-60 acceleration times but when pitted against each other, the cars were never more than a car length apart and hit the finish line side by side at the end of the 1/4-mile.

On a trip of several hundred miles from Los Angeles to the Southern California desert region with side trips over a couple of lengthy mountain ranges, we had an opportunity to try out the cars under all types of conditions. Neither car seemed to be seriously affected by crosswinds with gusts to 30 mph. The Rambler suspension is much softer than that of the Comet and if you give the wheel a quick pull to miss an object in the road, it will react in a pretty loose manner. Comet suspension is not so relaxed so will take the fast changes in steering without violent sway.

(Continued on page 106)

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COMET VS. RAMBLER

continued

In the mountains, both cars took the curves with ease although the Rambler leans much more than the Comet and with its soft suspension, does not feel as steady. The slow steering ratio of the Comet was really noticed when we started running through the sharp rights and lefts at a fast clip. The Rambler was easier to direct through the curves although the Comet could actually take them a little faster due to its firm suspension.

We went from sea level to more than 6500 feet on a very warm day during our cruise and experienced no cooling problems but the Rambler engine power did seem to be affected more by the altitude than the Comet. Once we passed the 3000 foot mark, the Comet could run away from the Rambler with ease although it was by no means a match for a big V8-powered car. Neither car has enough power to pull a trailer cross country.

Mileage checks for the two cars found the Comet averaging about 2 miles per gallon better than the Rambler although in mountain driving where the Rambler had to work harder than the Comet, there was nearly 4 mpg difference. Driving at 60 mph on the open highway, we chalked up 23.2 mpg for the Comet, 20.9 mpg for the Rambler with no attempts to drive for economy. Results of the recently completed Mobilgas Economy Run show the same Rambler model averaged 23.2 mpg and Ford's Falcon with the same engine and gear ratio as the Comet averaged 25.6 mpg. These figures were turned in by expert drivers under ideal conditions and are just a couple of miles per gallon better than the figures we obtained driving at a normal cross country rate of speed.

We believe that compact sales in recent years and the acceptance of the new 1960 versions prove the American public really wants an automobile that is both thrifty to operate and easy to park but we are a little stubborn, we don't believe that everybody wants to sacrifice power. Somewhere along the line, there must be a happy compromise between size, mileage and horsepower. Stepping from one of the average V8's to either the Comet or the Rambler requires a big adjustment in driving habits and although people are doing it successfully every day, we subscribe to the theory that horsepower can be mighty handy if you are in a tight spot.

Workmanship and quality is high in both cars and despite our personal preference for more power in an automobile, we can see why Rambler has enjoyed such booming success in recent years. The Comet is tailored along similar customer-pleasing lines and it too should be a welcome new entry into the fast-changing automobile picture today.