

1960  
**LARK**  
Convertible



A luxury compact that combines  
"show" with "go"—the Lark VIII



Power-operated top, standard equipment on all Lark convertibles, folds neatly into compartment behind rear seat. Two rugged latches on upper windshield frame clamp the leading edge of top against grooved rubber sealing strip.

by Chuck Nerpel  
Technical Editor

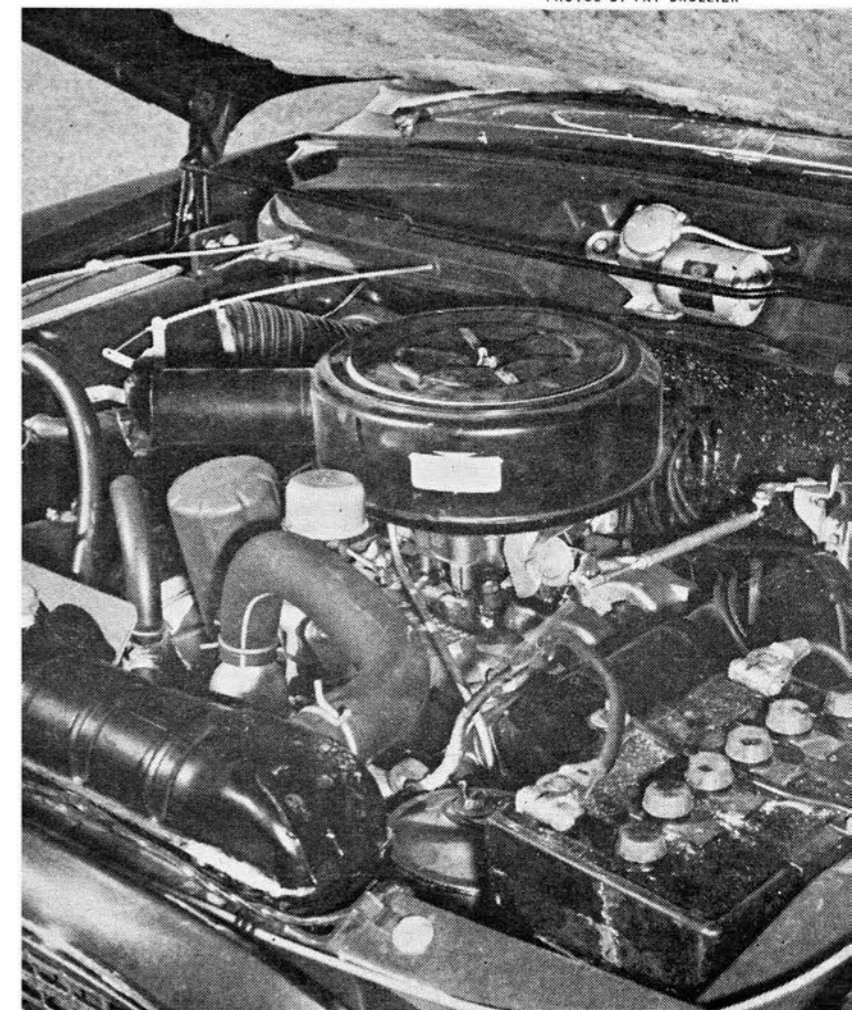
**A**N EVER-INCREASING NUMBER of imports, most of them economy cars, has led to a new way of thinking among domestic car buyers, and the major Detroit manufacturers have responded with compact cars scaled to American needs and budgets. Economy, low upkeep and modest purchase price are the selling points, but all sorts of optional extras are offered, and customer response to these options may start a new class of car—the luxury compact.

Studebaker's Lark, which debuted in 1959, followed American Motors into the compact field and offers two-door and four-door sedans and station wagons with six- or eight-cylinder engines—and for 1960, a convertible.

For years, soft-topped automobiles known as roadsters were popular but rather restricted to use in warm climates, due mainly to their liberal supply of outside air—even with flapping side curtains. Roll-up windows and snug, well-insulated tops soon made the convertible a desirable year-around car in any climate. Till now, however, this body style has been available only in the larger sporty-type domestic cars or the smaller imports.

The 1960 model year finds a wide variety of American compacts with more coming, but currently the Lark is the only one offering a convertible. Due to the increased amount of hand fitting necessary for soft tops, plus the mechanism involved in folding them down, and heavier frames to add rigidity lost by elimination of the steel top, convertibles have always cost more than conventional sedans of the same model. Add to this all the goodies optionally available for the Lark, such as powerpack 195-hp V8 engine, automatic transmission, power steering and brakes, limited-slip differential, radio, heater, reclining

PHOTOS BY PAT BROLIER



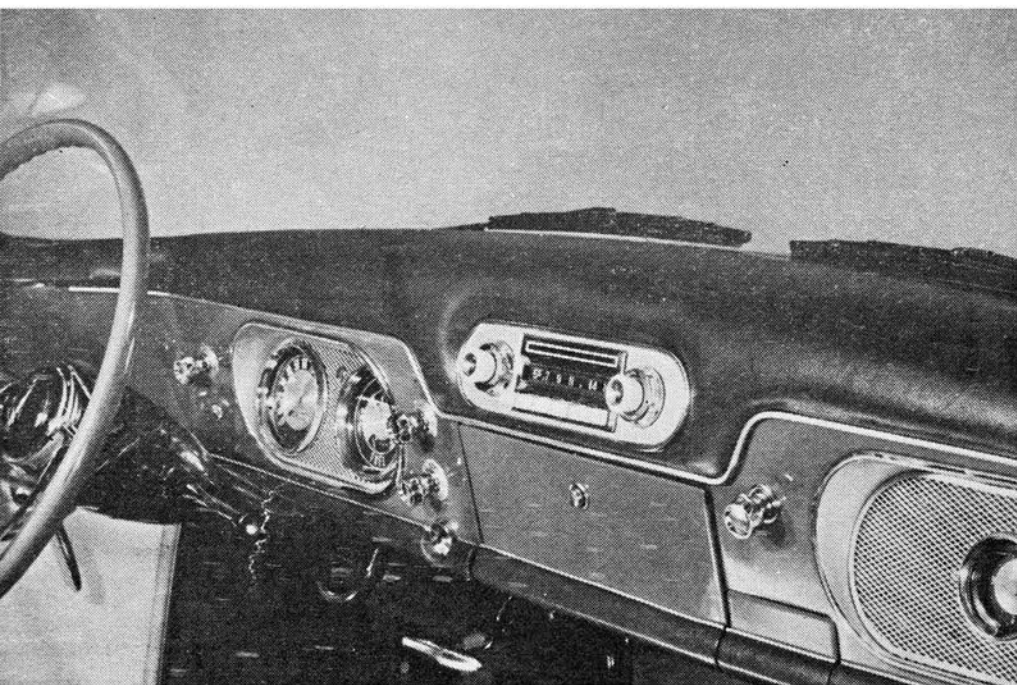
Big V8 engine loaded with power accessories crowds the engine compartment but has enough hood clearance for deep carburetor air filter. Easy access to plugs, points, carburetor and top-mounted screw-on oil filter reduces tune-up and maintenance service costs.

# LARK continued



Head-on, the Lark VIII convertible resembles other hardtop models. Only major front-end styling change for 1960 is new chrome texture for grille and vents.

With its "jewel box" appointments, the Lark VIII adds a plush touch to rugged construction and sparkling performance



Newly designed dash, featuring easy-to-read instrument cluster, center glove box and radio, has non-glare cowl and padded strip on lower edge to protect knees.

seats, adjustable headrests, bumper guards, wheel discs, whitewall tires and several other irresistible items—and you have a veritable jewel box compact convertible, that goes.

Cost has also gone . . . up, as factory-recommended f.o.b. retail of this little package is nearly \$3500. We have seen some rather stark imports sell for a lot more, while offering less in the way of options and performance, with the possible exception of better fuel mileage.

The Lark's 259.2-cubic-inch engine is small by present V8 standards and is dragged down on fuel consumption by the power accessories, but the dual-exhaust system and optional four-barrel carburetor make it possible to crank out 195 hp at 4500 rpm, sufficient for over 70 mph in the ¼-mile.

We thrashed the Lark V8 pretty good during our cross-country road tests, slamming the little car into tight corners, taking advantage of the maneuverability of its short 108-inch wheelbase, powering out by holding it in 2nd gear (possible with the use of LOW selector once the gearbox has upshifted into 2nd), and generally driving at or over the maximum speed limits. This is possibly the most fuel-consuming type of driving one can possibly indulge in, yet overall mileage totaled 14.5 mpg. Fuel consumption, however, is not in the economy or compact car range, mainly due to the many power accessories that are using gasoline indirectly to perform their functions. Loaded with these as the test car was, highway mileage at high cruising speeds in the 17 to 18-mpg range is possible.

Handling characteristics vary according to the passenger load. With only the driver and one passenger aboard, lean is very noticeable but stabilizes well below the panic point. With a pair of rear seat passengers, or with about 200 pounds of luggage compartment load, cornering is flat with good resistance to bottoming, even over sharp dips at speed. Much of this stability over dips is due to front springing customized to suit the weight on the front wheels. The Lark V8 is not just a Lark chassis with a bigger engine, as the spring rate on the variable-rate front coil springs is 25 to 30 pounds more for each wheel than the springs on six-cylinder models. Rear springing is by semi-elliptical leaves designed to maintain the car in level position with 700-pound loads. The rear axle is mounted forward of the center of the spring and torque windup is held in check by the shorter and stiffer forward side of the spring.

We mentioned earlier the heavier frames necessary with convertibles, but the Lark goes one better in striving

for rigidity and rattle-free operation. A deep box-section frame with an extra-thick "X" cross-member is much stiffer than the box-section, ladder-crossmember type used in the steel-topped Larks. Body sections for the convertible feature built-in sheet metal box sections to provide additional resistance to twist and deformities that loosen hinges, latches, and cause poor fits to develop in doors and trunk lids.

Larger brakes are also supplied with the V8 Lark with 11-inch front drums and 10-inch rear drums—a full inch larger than those supplied on the six-cylinder models. In addition, brake lining widths are greater and give a total of 172.8 square inches of effective lining area. This little convertible really stops on a dime, and repeatedly without fade, despite 3250 pounds of curb weight. With the lining area provided it figures out to about 105 square inches of lining per ton of vehicle, comparable to many of the large domestic cars. Add to this the ease by which added pressure can be attained through the Hydrovac power assist, and we have a sensible, adequate set of brakes.

Cruising through the sweeping curves of a wide highway or threading the congested traffic lanes of a big city requires a steering that is light but quick. The Lark V8's Bendix power unit requires only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  turns lock-to-lock, responds to the pressure of one finger, yet gives a positive feeling that the steering wheel is actually attached to the road wheels. The steering box itself, a cam-and-roller unit, is center-mounted in the front of the chassis, which allows tie rods of equal length and provides uniform steering geometry to the full turning range to both left and right.

Quiet and cozy with windows up, the padded convertible top is solid and rattle-free. A flick of the front latches, a touch of the under-dash lever, and the top folds neatly into a recess behind the rear seat. Preferred operation, of course, is with the car standing still. Further finish to the smart convertible lines and as a protector for the folded top is a heavy plastic tonneau cover, with plenty of snap-on buttons to insure a taut fit.

Under the hood, unseen but noticeable changes have been incorporated in the engine, carburetion and engine mountings. Modifications to the combustion chamber to reduce high-compression rumble result in smooth, quiet engine operation at all speeds. Engine and transmission mounts, which are now made of long-lasting, oil-resistant synthetic butyl, are furnished with different rebound rates custom-tailored to the various engine and gearbox combinations available. Studebaker engineers found that one standard for these mounts did not absorb the different vibration frequencies of the V8s, the sixes, and the manual or automatic transmissions. The manifold and automatic choke cam have been altered to shorten warm-up time and reduce the fast-idle period after a cold-engine start.

There are off-the-beaten-path roads and sweeping open highways all over this country that just demand to be driven in a lively, comfortable car. Combine the driving thrills of positive steering and good acceleration with the open-air advantages of a top-down convertible, and you have it in one package in what could be considered a new class of touring car—the luxury compact Lark VIII.

## MT '60 LARK ROAD TEST



### Car At a Glance

#### Things We Like

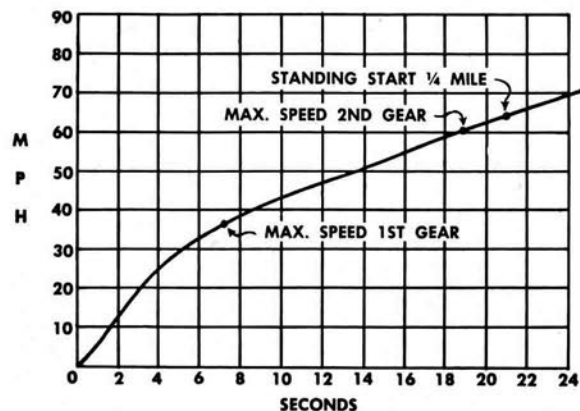
Compactness  
Driving ease  
Good brakes  
Passenger comfort  
Rugged frame and body  
Lively performance

#### Things We Don't Like

Relatively low gas mileage for compact car  
Noticeable but not uncomfortable body lean on sharp turns

### Acceleration

0-45 mph 9.0 secs. 0-60 14.9  
Quarter-mile 20.6 secs., 71 mph  
30-50 5.1 45-60 5.7 50-75 14.9



### Stopping Distance

From 60 mph to standstill 198 ft.  
(In 4.5 secs. with maximum of 0.68-G deceleration)  
Stop after maximum acceleration to end of 1/4-mile 320 ft.  
(In 5.7 secs. with maximum of 0.74-G deceleration)

### Gas Mileage

Stop-and-go heavy traffic	Mpg 13.9
Normal traffic	14.6
Open highway, steady cruise	19.1
Open highway, fast cruise	17.9