This big one from Buick will satisfy a lot of people. Hidden behind that cloak of four-door respectability lies a surprising blend of compact-quick handling and performance-model acceleration.

by Jim Wright, *Technical Editor*

WHEN THE WILDCAT was first introduced, midway in the 1962 model year, it was Buick's entry into the personal car field and was available only as a two-door hardtop. For 1963, the Wildcat is still a personal luxury car, but the series has two additional models: a four-door hardtop and a two-door convertible.

The Wildcat's bucket-seat interior, different grille, trim treatment, and tail lights set off this model from the LeSabre, Invicta, and Electra 225 series. The vinyl-covered top, which distinguished last year's Wildcat, is available optionally only on the two-door hardtop.

MT's test car was a four-door hardtop, powered by the standard 401-cubic-inch, 325-hp V-8. This engine, with four-barrel carburetor and 10.25-to-1 compression ratio, is almost identical with last year's. The only difference is that it now sports a Delcotron alternator as standard equipment instead of a DC generator. Power is transmitted through a standard dual-range Turbine Drive transmission to a 3.42-to-1 rear axle (also standard on this model). All available power equipment, including air conditioning, was installed.

Although overall length of the car was increased over 1½ inches this year, the frame (but not the wheelbase) has been shortened 2.4 inches in front to accommodate a newly designed front bumper, so the weight of the new car remains about the same. With a full tank of gas and all our test equipment on board, the Wildcat weighed in at just under 4700 pounds.

Performance, which was exceptional in last year's model, hasn't fallen off any this year. Running on the same strip, we recorded a standing quarter-mile of 85.5 mph with an elapsed time of 17.4 seconds. The 0-30, 0-45, and 0-60-mph fractions took 3.0, 5.3, and 8.3 seconds respectively. Highest top speed we could manage was an honest 108-mph reading on our Weston electric speedometer. The long Riverside Raceway backstretch has been shortened considerably (about .4 mile) — otherwise the '63 Wildcat would no doubt have reached the 115-mph figure we got with the '62. The engine feels completely smooth all the way up to around 5500 rpm, at which point the hydraulic lifters begin to pump up.

Much of this smooth feeling is the result of the automatic transmission. In the normal DRIVE position it doesn't actually shift gears but depends almost strictly on torque multiplication within the torque converter to accomplish what other automatics get strictly by multiple gearsets.

Available optionally for the first time is a four-speed manual transmission. This is the same Warner unit used by other GM divisions and has a 2.54 low gear, 1.89 second, 1.51 third and direct fourth. Performance would be a bit better with the four-speed, although not much, because the automatic is well suited to the brute torque (445 pounds-feet at 2800 rpm) that this engine puts out.

Last year, a three-speed manual transmission wasn't available and we said the factory would probably never offer it again, but we see that they're again listing one as standard equipment on the LeSabre series.

Fuel consumption kept improving as we logged more mileage. The Wildcat had only 53 miles on it when we got it, but when we were finished, the odometer read over 1200 miles. Our overall average was 11.3 mpg, and this included the early break-in miles, when we were getting only 9.5 mpg. During the last several hundred miles, the average was up to 12.5 mpg for mixed city and freeway driving, and one open-road cruise (65 to 75 mph) produced 15.8 mpg. The air conditioner, if used, will knock about one mpg off the average at highway speeds.

You get more economy by choosing the optional 2.78 or 3.23 rear axles, but performance will decrease accordingly. Premium-grade fuel is a must for the high compression ratio of this engine. As with any four-barrel-carburetor-equipped engine, mileage is better if the secondary barrels are kept closed as much as possible.

The power-assisted brakes did an excellent job of pulling the big Buick down to quick, straight-line stops during the braking phase of our tests. The big, 12-inch drums (aluminum front, cast-iron rear) are hard to fade, but they're not fade-proof. Several hard stops from near top speed brought them to the point where they were smoking badly and wouldn't hold the car against creeping at idling speed. Driving the car to the other end of the strip allowed them to cool enough so we could make our 30- and 60-mph braking tests, and the resulting stopping distances (35 and 162 feet) were a shade shorter than we recorded with last year's model.

Front and rear suspension are unchanged this year, with the exception of the front anti-roll bar, which is slightly bigger in diameter. The boulevard ride is as smooth as any except the all-out luxury vehicles. On the open road, the Wildcat has excellent directional stability that isn't affected to any degree by any but the most severe cross-winds. Wind and engine noise are minimal, making this probably one of the quietest cars on the road. About the only time the soft suspension causes any discomfort is on roads that are potted or have a rippled surface. Under these conditions, the light shocks do a very poor job of keeping the car from skating all over the road.

Last year's car had a slight negative caster setting, which has been changed to positive this year. Although this

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MT Road Test

BUICK WILDCAT

amounted to only two degrees (one negative to one positive), it has made a world of difference in the way this car feels in corners. The front will still plough a bit on tight, slow turns, but it isn't nearly so noticeable. The resulting tire scrub in this type of cornering is at a minimum. In fact, for a big, heavy car with low-pressure tires, it's downright surprising just how far you can bend it without hearing the tires squeal. In any type of corner the car *feels* as though it weighs about half as much as it really does. With the positive caster setting, front tires should also last a few more miles. The combination of anti-roll bar at the front and control arms plus track bar at the rear keeps the Buick fairly flat when cornering.

In our last Buick road test, we stated that this was the kind of car a driver could do a 600-mile day in and still be fairly fresh at his destination. Somehow this came out in print as a 6000-mile day – which would be a heck of a long day. But anyway, the driver of a '63 model would be just as fresh at his destination as would the driver of a '62.

The new air-conditioning installation amounts to one of the major engineering changes in optional equipment for this year. Its primary feature is that the heater and air-conditioning units are in series within the same housing. This gives a big weight saving (an aluminum condenser is also used). It's also easier to service, because it's mounted right in the center of the dash. In the past, the temperature of the air conditioner was controlled by the amount of coolant flowing through the evaporator. Temperature control with this new unit is accomplished by directing part of the refrigerated air from the evaporator through the heater core of the air-mix heater and then by allowing the hot and cold air to re-mix, resulting in the desired temperature.

During maximum cooling, the water flow through the heater core is shut off to prevent any radiation of heat. The air compressor operates only when you want air conditioning.

One of the major advantages of this new system is that it has the ability to de-humidify the air inside the car with-

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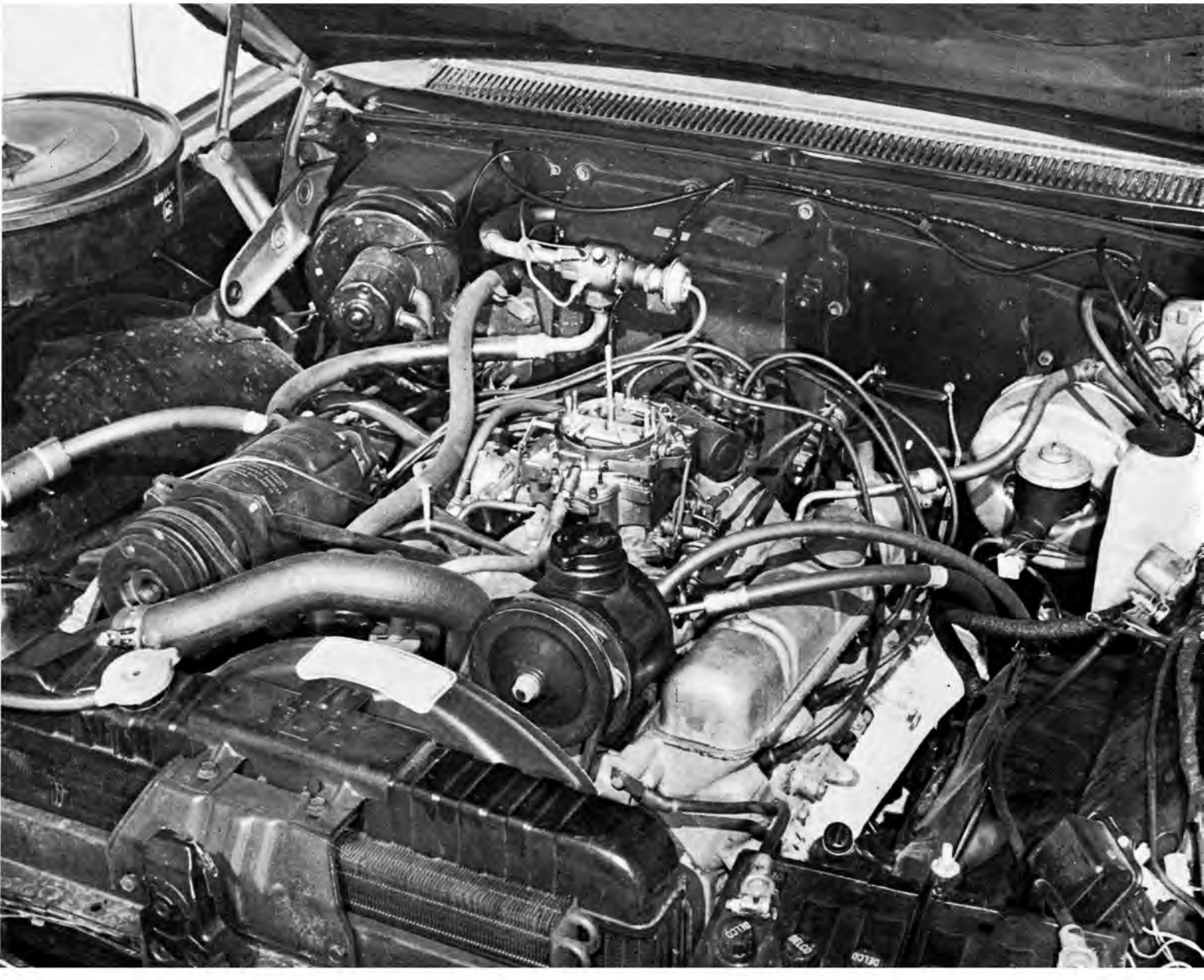
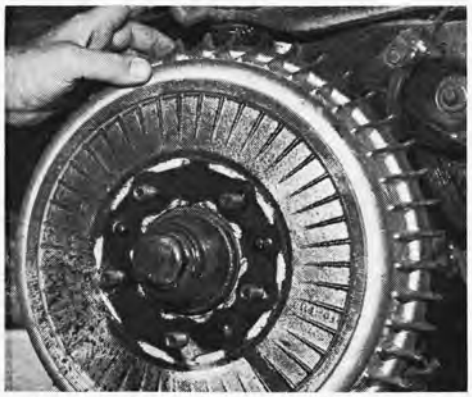




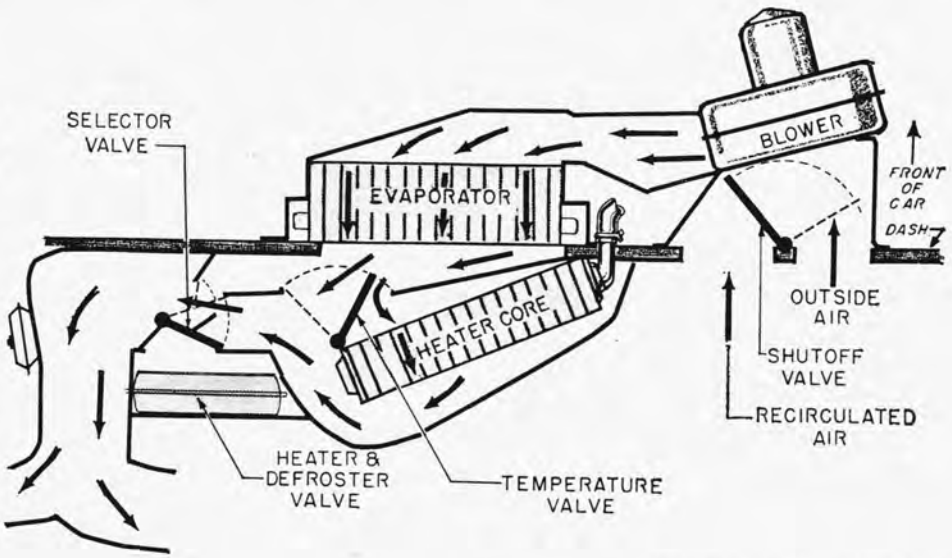
(ABOVE) *Quick cooling and added resistance to fade plus weight savings are three of the big advantages of husky aluminum drums.*

(RIGHT) *Wide-opening doors allow easy entry or exit. Upholstery materials used in seats and carpets are top quality, should wear well.*

THE WILDCAT IS A BIG, LUXURIOUS CAR, OFFERING PLENTY OF INTERIOR ROOM, WHILE HANDLING IS SURPRISINGLY LIGHT AND RESPONSIVE.

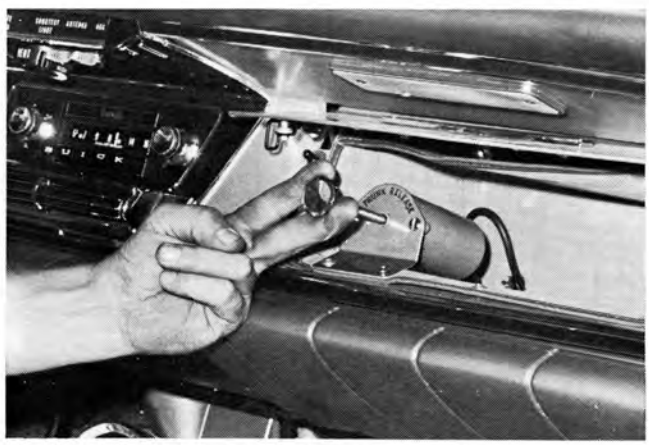
(LEFT) *Engine compartment is typical of those found in most cars today. Engine is almost hidden by a myriad of pipes and tubing of power units.*

(RIGHT) *Plan view of newly introduced air-conditioning unit shows location of various components and air flow. Biggest advantages are pin-point temperature control and easy servicing.*



PHOTOS BY PAT BROLLIER

OUR STREETS AND HIGHWAYS WOULD PROBABLY BE A LOT CLEANER IF ALL CARS HAD ONE OF THESE — AND IF EVERYBODY WOULD USE IT.



Another helpful accessory is this remote trunk compartment release. The glove box, though small, is augmented by console.

Very few cars can offer any more usable trunk area than this. Drawbacks are hard-to-reach spare and a high lip.

out decreasing the temperature. When the air passes through the evaporator, the moisture content is reduced. Then, through the tempering process of reheating part of the air as it passes through the heater coils, the air is restored to its original temperature (or whatever temperature you want). This can be a real advantage in areas where there's high humidity. We found the system worked very well in hot, wet weather, where steaming of the inside of the car was a problem. Operation of the heater and air conditioner is simplified through the use of one knob to control both.

Because our test car was one of the first off the assembly line, there were a few places where the interior and exterior detailing didn't come up to what we've come to expect from Buick craftsmen. Some of the trim wasn't well aligned, and the interior carpeting — while of top-quality material — didn't fit as well as it should have. These are minor though, and have undoubtedly been rectified on later, full-production models.

The bucket seats are separated by a console containing the shift lever, glove box, litter container, and tachometer. This interior layout is almost identical to last year's two-door model, except the front seat backs aren't hinged. Both front and rear seats are very comfortable. Hip, head, and leg room are more than adequate, and five adults can be accommodated with ease.

The dashboard has been redesigned and now features two large, round instrument clusters, one containing the speedometer, and the other the gas gauge and idiot lights. A trip odometer is included in addition to the regular odometer. The tachometer is still hard to read because of its location. Most of the control knobs have been recessed for safety, but unfortunately this makes them hard to reach from the driver's position unless the driver has very long arms.

All those power accessories tend to cramp the engine compartment, and the attendant pipes and tubing will probably keep all but the experienced plumber from tackling their own tune-ups.

The trunk compartment, which can be opened with a release knob in the glove box, looks large enough to accommodate a steamer trunk with room left over. The spare is carried on a shelf, forward in the compartment, where it's out of the way but hard to reach. The lip is high enough to get in the way of loading or unloading – but then you can't have everything. All in all, it's a particularly powerful and luxurious car. /MT

Turning into darkened streets or driveways is made easier with this turning light. It switches on with the turn indicator.

1963 BUICK WILDCAT

4-door, 5-passenger hardtop

OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED: Radio, heater, air conditioning, power seat, power windows, power steering, power brakes, tinted glass, whitewall tires

BASIC PRICE: $3871

PRICE AS TESTED: $5444.31 (plus tax and license)

ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST: 53 miles

RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE: 5500 rpm

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph.....3.0 secs.
0-45 mph.....5.3
0-60 mph.....8.3

Standing start ¼-mile 17.4 secs. and 85.5 mph

Speeds in gears @ 4400 rpm (power peak)
Drive .....108 mph (observed)

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading	30	45	50	60	70	80
Weston electric speedometer ..	30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear.....23.5 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 35 ft.; from 60 mph, 162 ft.

SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

Engine
Ohv V-8
Bore: 4.1875 ins.
Stroke: 3.64 ins.
Displacement: 401 cubic inches
Compression ratio: 10.25:1
Horsepower: 325 @ 4400 rpm
Torque: 445 lbs.-ft. @ 2800 rpm
Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.81
Ignition: 12-volt coil

Gearbox
Dual-range Turbine Drive automatic; console-mounted control lever

Driveshaft
2-piece; open tube

Differential
Hypoid — semi-floating
Standard ratio: 3.42:1

Suspension
Front: Coil springs with upper and lower control arms, direct-acting telescopic shocks, and anti-roll bar
Rear: Rigid axle with coil springs, leading control arms, track bar, and direct-acting telescopic shocks

Steering
Recirculating ball and nut — integral with power piston
Turning diameter: 45.9 ft.
Turns: 3.5 lock to lock

Wheels and Tires
5-lug steel disc wheels
7.60 x 15 4-ply rayon tires

Brakes
Hydraulic duo-servo with finned, 12-in. drums (aluminum front, cast-iron rear)
Front: 12-in. dia. x 2.25 in. wide
Rear: 12-in. dia. x 2.0 in. wide
Effective lining area: 156.9 sq. ins.

Body and Frame
"X"-type boxed frame
Wheelbase: 123 ins.
Track: front, 62 ins.; rear, 61 ins.
Overall length: 215.7 ins.
Curb weight: 4315 lbs.