



# RAMBLER

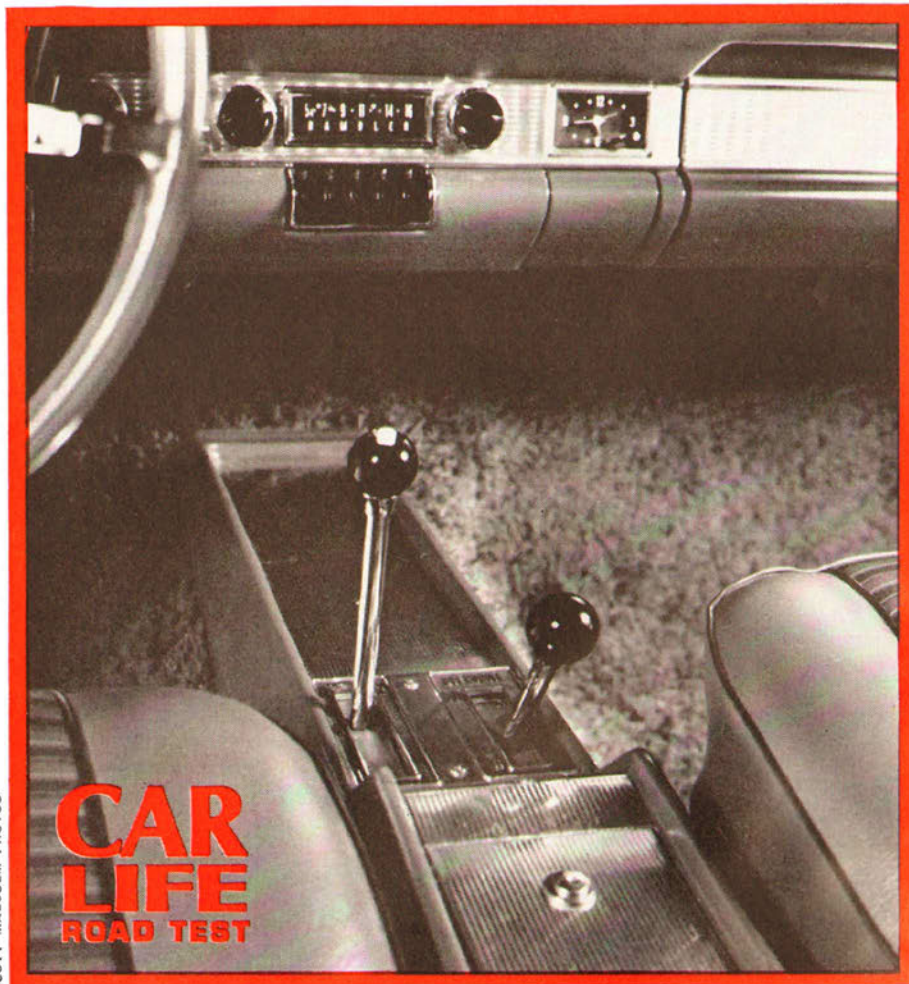
## Ambassador 990

*AMC's luxury sedan is a husky performer with its big 270-bhp V-8 bolted to a Twin Stick or automatic option*

**T**HE GREAT NUMBERS GAME now enjoying uncertain vogue in Detroit has produced a whole new generation of model names for the automakers—instead of giving the line a name of an animal or astronomical body, those who select such things have turned to simple digits.

There's nothing much wrong with the idea, as it's probably easier to remember a number than a name. After all, Cadillac has been successfully numbering its cars (Sixty Special, Sixty-Two, Seventy-Five) for years, as has Oldsmobile (F-85, 88, 98) and Chrysler (300).

American Motors got into the numbers racket in '62 with a "400" designation for all the high priced models in each of its three lines—American, Classic and Ambassador. For '63, AMC extended the system to all the other models, and thus has 220, 330, 440 and 440-H versions of the American; 550, 660 and 770 models of the Classic; and 880 and 990 Ambassadors. So, the high-priced models are now 440-H, 770 and 990.



SCOTT MALCOLM PHOTOS



SHAGGY CARPET is boon to barefoot drivers; adjustable, reclining bucket seats comfort the long-distance traveler.

## Ambassador 990

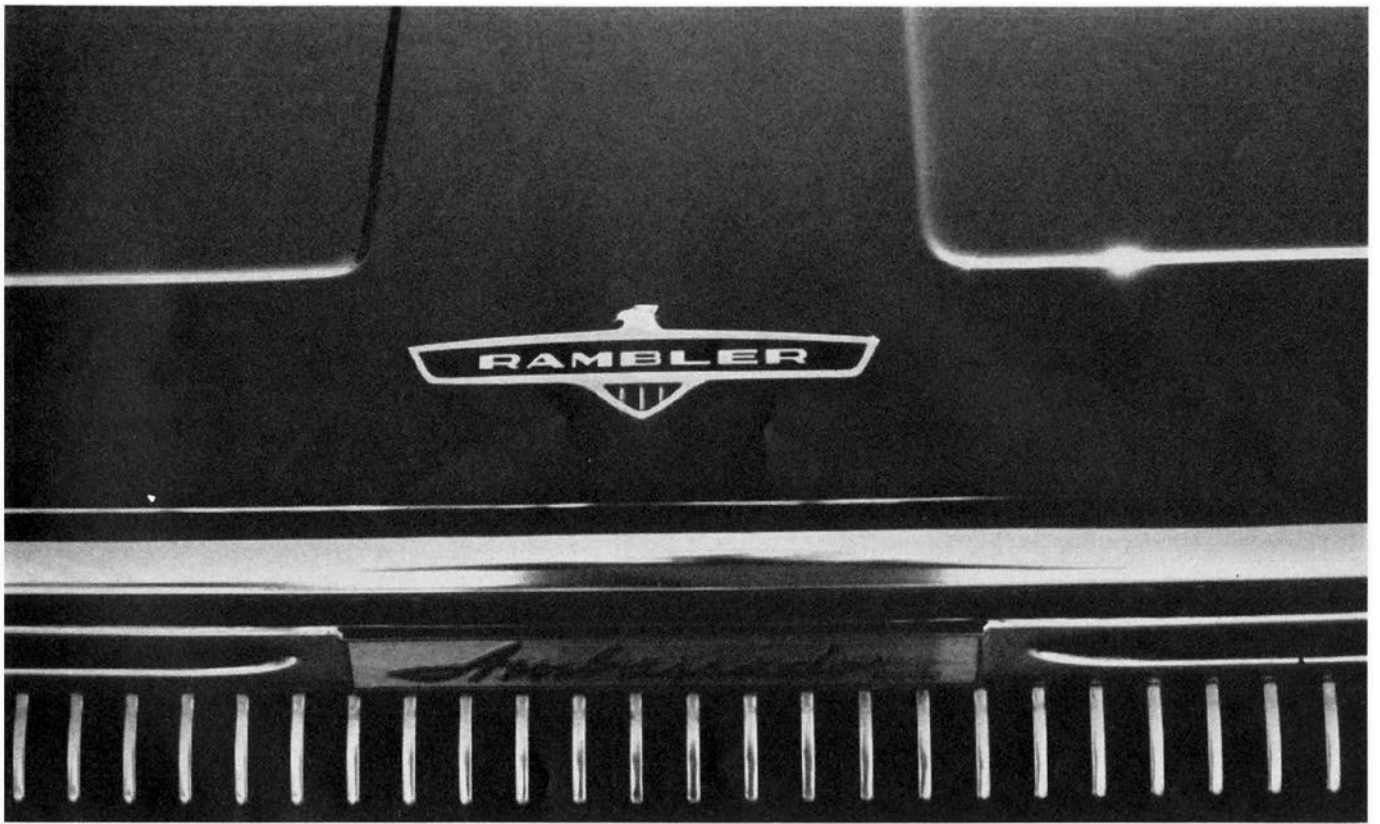
Our test cars fall into the latter category, being Ambassador 990s. Under 1962's ranking, they would have been called "400s"; no matter, they are still the most expensive passenger cars built by American Motors. It might be pointed out that both our test vehicles were listed at nearly \$800 higher than their basic price. Why? AMC prices its cars as low as possible and then charges for every gimcrack added. For instance:

The 990 2-door tested here had an f.o.b. Kenosha, Wis., price of \$2606; however, it had reclining individual seats with headrests, Twin Stick (overdrive) transmission, the 270-bhp power pack V-8 option, air conditioning, power steering and power brakes, power windows and a great assortment of convenience and safety accessories which boosted the total to \$3355.

Actually, our test is of two Amba-

sadors—the 2-door with its Twin Stick and a 4-door with similar equipment but an automatic transmission instead of the manual shift. This latter car provided us with most of our data, while the other was a particularly effective photographic model.

Our usually blasé test crew waxed so eloquent over the new Classic (see road test, January *Car Life*) that it was eager to get its hands on the new Ambassador to see if that car, too, had taken on a new personality. Our consensus: It has—it's a luxury compact with a big kick!



First of all, the Ambassador is still a compact by most standards, although its wheelbase has grown from 108 to 112 in. Overall bulk has been reduced, particularly height, which lessens the overall volume of the car nearly 6.3%. It is shorter, too, by an inch and this helps it retain its "compact" status. To put it in its place, according to size, would be to park it beside the Buick Special/Olds F-85/Pontiac Tempest

series, the Studebaker Lark, Mercury Comet, and Dodge Dart.

This saving in size, we might add, has been at no expense to the passenger. The '63 Ambassadors are fractionally larger inside than the '62s although notably smaller outside. Use of curved windows in the doors helped make doors slimmer and thus allowed wider seats; leg room was increased with the lengthened wheelbase. We

rate the Ambassador '63 as the most spacious compact we've tried.

There is another benefit from the complete redesign Rambler did on the Classic/Ambassador for '63 and that is a saving in overall weight. Although more apparent in the Classic with die-cast aluminum engine (curb weight less than 2800 lb.), the Ambassador nonetheless gains from it too. Curb weight for our test 2-door was only





**CAPACIOUS TRUNK** is a surprise in a car of such modest dimensions.

## Ambassador 990

3410 lb., some 270 lb. lighter than the last Ambassador V-8 we tried (May, 1962). This lighter bulk manifested itself in better fuel mileage and stronger performance.

Our overall mileage was 16-18 mpg. The automatic-equipped car averaged 16-17 mpg, the Twin Stick Club Sedan got 17-18 mpg. In our test of the Ambassador last May, we recorded a range of 14-17 mpg.

As is well known, an overdrive usually helps the fuel economy while limiting overall performance. Rambler's Twin Stick follows this pattern, but, because overdrive is a bit easier to use when its control lever is console-mounted, the performance is not quite so inhibited as one might suspect.

The 270-bhp, power-pack engine really moves the 2-door around in sporting fashion. In the one ¼-mile

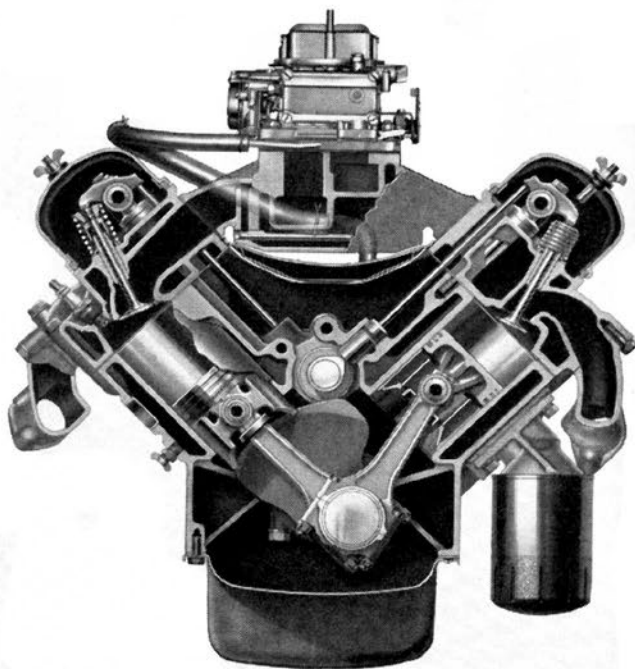
run we completed as the clutch disintegrated we had a 17-sec. elapsed time; had the clutch remained intact, the standing quarter would have been accomplished in approximately 16 sec. Our automatic-equipped car caught the quarter in 17.6 sec., and we didn't have to force shifts (the automatic shifts itself at about 4300 rpm under wide open throttle).

The clutch problem—it gave out on the first run after no more than normal abuse—was one of maladjustment, the AMC zone service manager assured us. However, we elected to finish our eval-

**4-BARREL CARBURETOR**, dual exhaust system help promote 270 bhp.



**STURDY V-8** is good example of contemporary design.



uation with a similar car equipped with the Borg-Warner 3-speed automatic transmission to obviate any further difficulties.

Placing the transmission and overdrive control levers side-by-side near the driver's right knee is not a particularly new idea—truckers have had it for years—although Rambler's application is unique among modern passenger cars. It gives a transmission control system less confusing than, say, a column-mounted shift and a dash-mounted overdrive lever, with a kick-down switch under the foot throttle. Rambler's system has the kick-down atop the shift lever, where the driver can punch it by hand for either a passing gear or down-shifting.

Twin Stick will undoubtedly be compared with the popular Warner Gear T-10 all-synchromesh, 4-speed transmission as used by virtually all other automakers as a "performance" option. Although the simpler T-10 offers four nicely separated ratios in each of its

four basic gearsets (1st—2.20, 2.36, 2.54 or 2.89:1), it doesn't quite offer the versatility of the 3-speed plus overdrive (which also is Warner Gear built). Compare the gear and overall ratios with 3.54:1 final drive:

TWIN STICK		4-SPEED	
1st	(2.49) 8.81	(2.54) 8.99	1st
2nd	(1.89) 5.97	(1.89) 6.69	2nd
2nd/od	(1.37) 4.87	(1.51) 5.34	3rd
3rd	(1.00) 3.54	(1.00) 3.54	4th
3rd/od	(0.722) 2.56		

The "Flash-O-Matic" automatic, of course, is the easiest of all to use, although we fail to see any justification for having its control lever mounted on the console like the manual shift transmissions. The automatic ratios are 2.40:1 in 1st, 1.47 in 2nd, with a maximum torque converter multiplication of 2.12—which results in an even more versatile transmission.

There's one thing about the Twin Stick, though—it helps provide one of the largest collections of levers and gadgets we've seen inside a car in many

years. We counted no less than 10 levers, 8 knobs, 5 pushbuttons and 6 door handles in the 2-door sedan.

Generally, the Rambler Ambassador has fair cornering and handling characteristics although it has a heavy understeer which changes rather readily to final oversteer on damp or icy pavement. In other words, the heavy engine up front (58% of the total weight on the front wheels) makes for a light and twitchy tail (only 42% of the weight to hold it down). The suspension seems adequate for its task, being neither too harsh nor too soft. The brakes, too, did a good job in our usual 2-stop test, something we're not able to say about a goodly number of our test vehicles.

Like the Rambler Classic we tested earlier this year, we found the Ambassador to be an attractive car for its price. With either Twin Stick or automatic transmission behind its big V-8 it becomes a good-performing, good-looking luxury compact. ■

## CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



### 1963 RAMBLER AMBASSADOR 990 Club Sedan

#### SPECIFICATIONS

List price	\$2591
Price, as tested	3355
Curb weight, lb	3410
Test weight	3755
distribution, %	58/42
Tire size	7.50-14
Tire capacity, lb @ 24 psi	4340
Brake swept area	267
Engine type	V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke	4.0 x 3.25
Displacement, cu in	327
Compression ratio	9.70
Carburetion	1 x 4
Bhp @ rpm	270 @ 4700
equivalent mph	114
Torque, lb-ft	360 @ 2600
equivalent mph	63

#### EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

Reclining bucket seats, headrests, automatic transmission, radio, air conditioning, outside mirror, wsw tires, power pack V-8, power steering.

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in	112.0
Tread, f and r	58.6/57.5
Over-all length, in	188.8
width	71.3
height	55.3
equivalent vol, cu ft	431
Frontal area, sq ft	22.0
Ground clearance, in	6.0
Steering ratio, o/a	23.9
turns, lock to lock	5.0
turning circle, ft	37.2
Hip room, front	60.2
Hip room, rear	60.1
Pedal to seat back, max	40.5
Floor to ground	12.5
Luggage vol, cu ft	13.7
Fuel tank capacity, gal	19.0

#### GEAR RATIOS

3rd (1.00), overall	3.15
2nd (1.47)	4.63
1st (2.40)	7.56
1st (2.40 x 2.12)	16.0

#### PERFORMANCE

Top speed (4700), mph	114
Shifts, rpm-mph (auto)	
3rd ( )	
2nd (4100)	68
1st (4300)	43

#### ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec	3.8
0-40	5.3
0-50	7.9
0-60	10.6
0-70	13.9
0-80	18.2
0-100	31.7
Standing 1/4 mile	17.6
speed at end	79

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mae	16-18
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#### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	29.5
60 mph	57.8
90 mph	89.6

#### CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	13.9
Cu ft/ton mile	124.5
Mph/1000 rpm	24.3
Engine revs/mile	2470
Piston travel, ft/mile	1340
Car Life wear index	33.1

#### PULLING POWER

70 mph, maximum gradient, %	16.0
50	22.2
30	off scale
Total drag at 60 mph, lb	175

