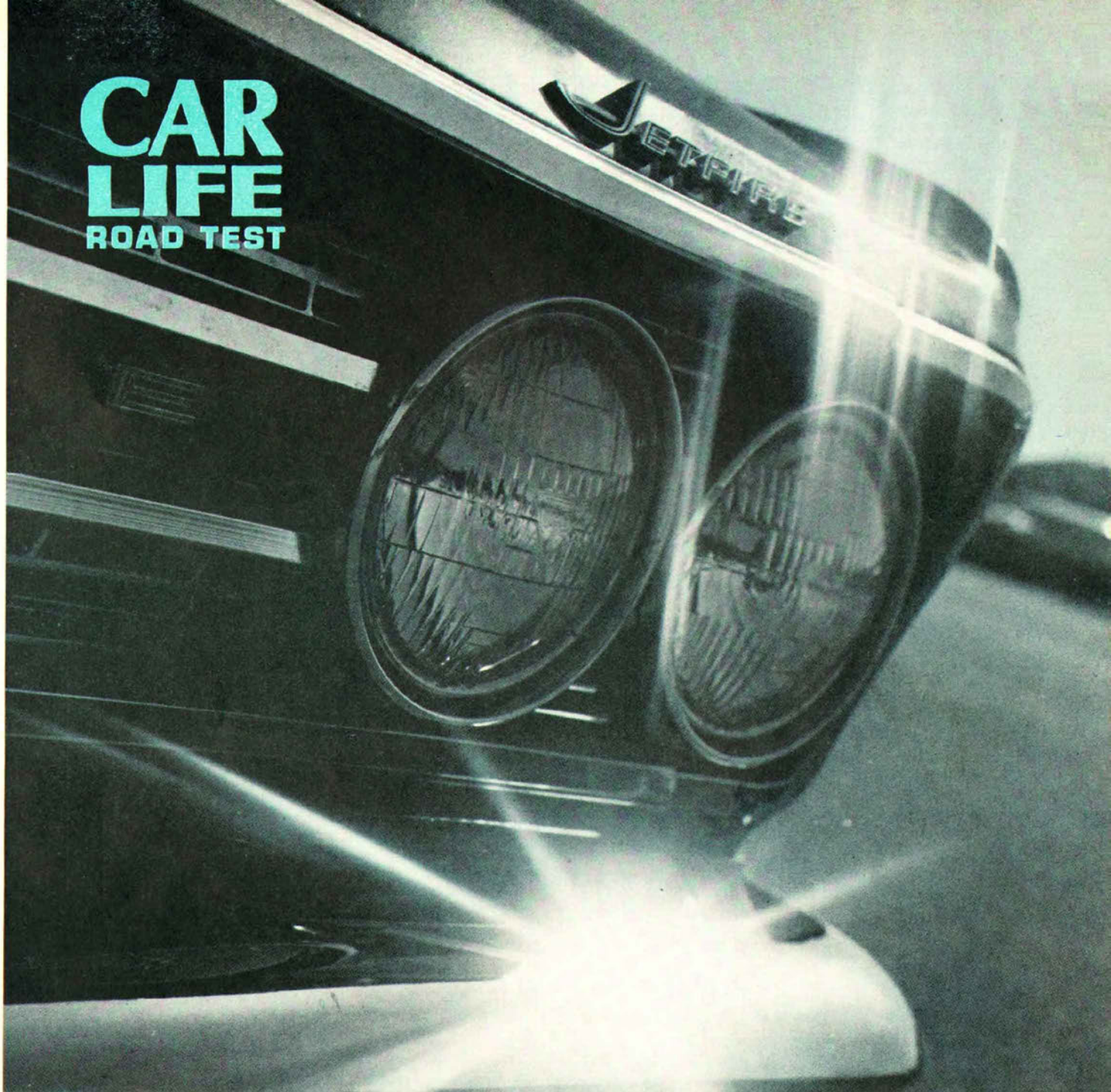


CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



MARVIN LYONS PHOTOS

WHEN CAR LIFE Editors sampled the first turbo-supercharged versions of the Oldsmobile F-85, christened the "Jetfire" by the parent company, we wondered whether this vehicle might not be improved with the then-proposed 4-speed manual transmission (CL, May 1962). At that

time, our test runs in Hydra-Matic equipped cars included comparison drives in non-blown Cutlass coupes at General Motors' Milford, Mich., proving grounds, and we were quite frankly impressed with the Jetfire package.

Now we have had an opportunity to get better acquainted (by virtue of

some 1000-plus miles) with a Jetfire fitted with the Warner T-10 all-synchromesh transmission. This unit, as is well known, does yeoman duty as the "sports" gearbox for the bulk of domestic high performance cars marketed today. In the Jetfire application, the 2.54:1 series is used, which has a

Oldsmobile F-85 Jetfire





Oldsmobile

1.92—2nd and 1.51—3rd. It might be noted here that, with the manual transmission, the Jetfire comes equipped

with an all-but-extinct manual choke control clamped under the instrument panel, on the left-hand side.

Our fancy for this car has not faded during the interim, but the hoped-for improvement in performance in the hand-shifted version failed to materialize. Nevertheless, the Jetfire's 215 bhp seemed almost excessive for the car, weighing as it did a somewhat moderate 2930 lb. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the torque developed (300 lb.-ft.) was more than enough. The brusqueness with which the driver finds himself shoved back into the seat upon stamping the throttle is a gratifying experience, all the more so because of the positive qualities of the manual gear selection.

Our test car was equipped with 6.50-14 tires (6.50-13 is standard) and several staff members were convinced the engine wasn't producing its full potential. After the engine had been checked and adjusted (timing was off 2°), we ran the acceleration tests again but

still failed to record a significant improvement. With this background in mind, we concluded that it still might be possible to produce better times with another car.

While there is little need to rehash our earlier discussion of the Jetfire application of supercharging, it bears repeating that this complex package was designed to provide positive boost throughout the speed range. This is in contrast to the far simpler Corvair turbo package, which progressively (and more slowly) builds boost to a maximum effect at the top end. Incorporation of such design features as the waste gate and anti-detonant fluid injection, while complicating the layout, definitely provides more power over a larger rpm range and produces it more rapidly at any given rpm when utilizing the high compression engine.

The price of this complexity, how-

ever, is an engine compartment brimming over with pipes, tubes, hoses, wires and rods. It's a forbidding sight to behold and without a schematic diagram it takes some time and study to determine what is which. It would have been easier (and possibly cheap-

er) to match or exceed the bhp gain by more conventional hot rod procedures, as many performance specialists have done. But the advantage of this turbocharger is its flexibility. The engine is as docile as the normal (155-bhp) version, yet is transformed into



PLUMBING AND piping atop engine account for the pow in horsepower.



TRUNK HAS adequate capacity, floor covering. Fiber cover protects luggage from spare.

Oldsmobile

a powerhouse with a mere push of a pedal. Super-tuned engines with their high performance cams, on the other hand, can be harsh and unpleasant in more domestic surroundings and economy is sacrificed. With the Jetfire, there's still a tiger at home—but it's housebroken.

The car is designed for the ultimate in boulevard ride and feels quite similar to, say, an early Thunderbird. All the comfort of the soft springing, however, has its cost: excessive body lean on turns and a porpoising glide over pavement rough spots. In its standard form, the Jetfire is fully at home in almost all city and expressway driving conditions where the soft riding qualities can be tolerated. Power steering had been installed on the car and,

while we felt this assist was really unnecessary in view of the car's weight, it reduced steering effort to virtually nothing. It had the somewhat vague feel common to this option and lacked the precise control which is necessary in vigorous driving. It does reduce the turns from the standard 5.2 to 4.1, lock-to-lock, and the overall ratio from 25.80:1 to 20.55:1.

The combination of overpowered chassis, effortless steering, tail lightness and soft suspension could easily place the driver in a sticky situation on roads with anything more than the mildest of curves. The wise driver who wants to enjoy what this car could do when given its head, therefore, will invest in heavy-duty springs and shock absorbers.

The Jetfire is perhaps the best looking Oldsmobile offered, possibly the best of the senior compacts. Devoid of almost all excess ornamentation, the styling has a tautness that is pleasing in spite of the added (4 in.) overhang built in this year. It is uncluttered and precise, and the restrained razor-edge fender line comes off well. A single slash of anodized panel, in contrast to the solid body color, decorates the length of the side panels and sets the Jetfire apart from its less powerful F-85 running mates.

Only the taillight moldings, by virtue of their very size, take on an out-of-context impact, yet the rear end treatment still remains tasteful and businesslike. The pair of chrome tail pipes jutting straight out underneath the bumper adds to the appropriate image left with the other driver still standing at the traffic light.

Our test car was a deep metallic blue and, with the white vinyl seat upholstery and black deep-pile floor



carpeting, appealed immediately to both masculine and feminine tastes. Typical GM front bucket seats (or, more correctly, individual benches) provide comfort for the occupants and adequate lateral support, in view of the limited cornering capabilities of the car.

It may be unfair to single out the Jetfire instrument panel as worse (or better) than that of many other cars, but it did leave much to be desired. Three blinking lights—for generator, temperature and oil pressure—were stylishly integrated into the fuel gauge mounting. Turn indicator arrows flanked the wide speedometer. On the chrome-ribbed transmission cover (console?) was the vacuum gauge, neatly divided into green and red halves labeled "economy" and "power" respectively, complete with a blink light to indicate low injector-fluid level. The stylists labored long to make such an attractive presentation of engine operating data, but there was one shortcoming:

nothing worked properly and only vaguely indicated anything.

The lack of a tachometer is a serious handicap and resulted in over-revving the engine on a few occasions. The vacuum gauge, virtually useless anyway, couldn't be consulted because vision was blocked by the steering wheel spoke. The fuel gauge needle wavered so badly that even guesses at fuel load were difficult. A sticking speedometer needle leaped across the dial face only after we had accelerated past 30 mph, and the odometer was so erratic that gas mileage checks couldn't be made. The absence of a coolant temperature gauge is particularly shortsighted with the turbocharger installation.

It seems to us that better instrumentation is demanded by (1) the overall high level of quality in this car, which makes the absence all the more glaring; (2) the price class into which the Jetfire falls, making such shoddiness virtually inexcusable; and (3) the na-

ture of the car, which appeals to a more exacting type of driver who insists on knowing just what his engine is doing at any time.

One other area on the car that needs some engineering attention is the clutch, a semi-centrifugal unit that increases effective clutch spring pressure as engine speed goes up. More pedal pressure is thus required and that, along with a long pedal travel, hampered the execution of clean, quick shifts at higher rpm. It probably was this clutch, more than anything else, which kept our acceleration figures below what we expected.

Nevertheless, as an almost elegant boulevard runabout in a compact but comfortable size, the Jetfire neatly fills the bill. It has eyebrow-raising acceleration that is satisfying if not spectacular, and a supercharger design that can provide boost at all speeds without seriously affecting reliability. The car's construction and finish are well done, with a quality level in keeping with its price class. ■

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1963 OLDSMOBILE F-85 Jetfire Coupe

SPECIFICATIONS

List price.....	\$3048
Price, as tested.....	3513
Curb weight, lb.....	2930
Test weight.....	3290
distribution, %.....	55/45
Tire size.....	6.50-14
Tire capacity, lb @ 24 psi.....	3520
Brake swept area.....	224
Engine type.....	s/c V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke.....	3.50 x 2.80
Displacement, cu in.....	215.5
Compression ratio.....	10.25
Carburetion.....	1 x 1
Bhp @ rpm.....	215 @ 4600
equivalent mph.....	96
Torque, lb-ft.....	300 @ 3200
equivalent mph.....	67

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.....	112.0
Tread, f and r.....	56.0
Over-all length, in.....	192.2
width.....	73.7
height.....	52.6
equivalent vol, cu ft.....	431
Frontal area, sq ft.....	21.5
Ground clearance, in.....	5.4
Steering ratio, o/a.....	20.5
turns, lock to lock.....	4.1
turning circle, ft.....	37.0
Hip room, front.....	2 x 24.2
Hip room, rear.....	51.6
Pedal to seat back, max.....	39.0
Floor to ground.....	10.7
Luggage vol, cu ft.....	15.0
Fuel tank capacity, gal.....	16.0

GEAR RATIOS

4th (1.00), overall.....	3.36
3rd (1.51).....	5.07
2nd (1.92).....	6.45
1st (2.54).....	8.54

EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

4-speed transmission, power steering, power brakes, radio, 14-in. wheels, antifreeze.

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (4800), mph.....	100
Shifts, rpm—mph.....	
3rd (4700).....	65
2nd (4800).....	53
1st (4850).....	40

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual.....	31.9
60 mph.....	61.2
90 mph.....	93.2

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt).....	15.3
Cu ft/ton mile.....	108.5
Mph/1000 rpm.....	21.0
Engine revs/mile.....	2860
Piston travel, ft/mile.....	1335
Car Life wear index.....	38.2

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.....	3.2
0-40.....	4.7
0-50.....	7.0
0-60.....	9.8
0-70.....	13.2
0-80.....	17.1
0-100.....	30.0
Standing ¼ mile.....	17.1
speed at end.....	80

PULLING POWER

4th, maximum gradient, %.....	14.1
3rd.....	24.0
2nd.....	28.1
Total drag at 60 mph, lb.....	160

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg.....	n.a.
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