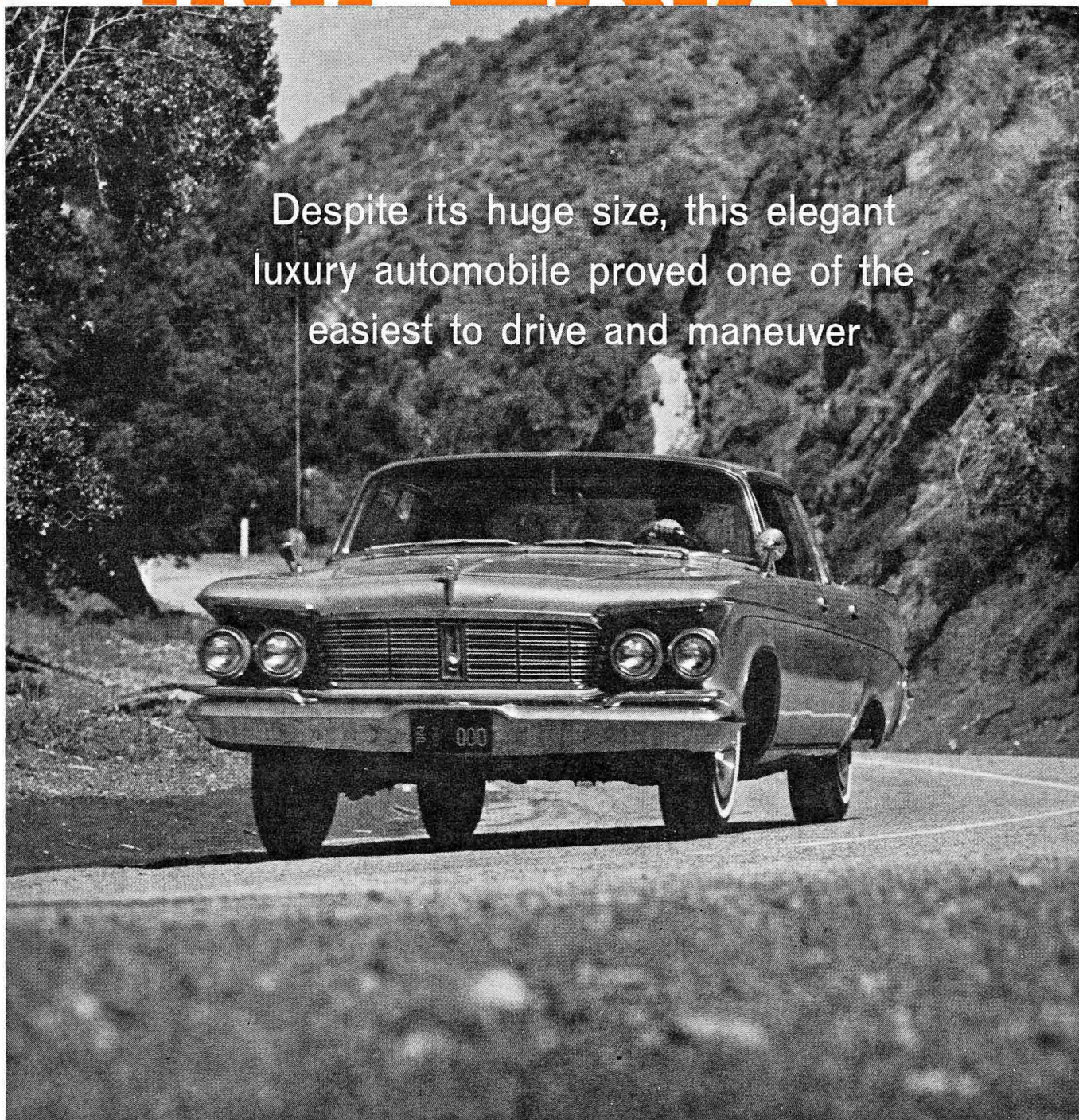


# IMPERIAL

Despite its huge size, this elegant luxury automobile proved one of the easiest to drive and maneuver



# M T Road Test

by Bob McVay, *Assistant Technical Editor*

**WHEN SIX PEOPLE** can climb out of an automobile after an all-day drive through stop-and-go traffic and crowded freeways without one complaint, it speaks well for the comfort of that automobile. Designed as luxurious, comfortable transportation for six, the Imperial for 1963 does its job very well indeed. Our passengers ranged from a petite five-foot-three to well over six feet, yet all had plenty of head and leg room and got out of the car as fresh and relaxed as they got in. Although it was a hot, muggy day in Southern California, our Imperial's adequate air-conditioning system kept everyone cool and comfortable throughout the day.

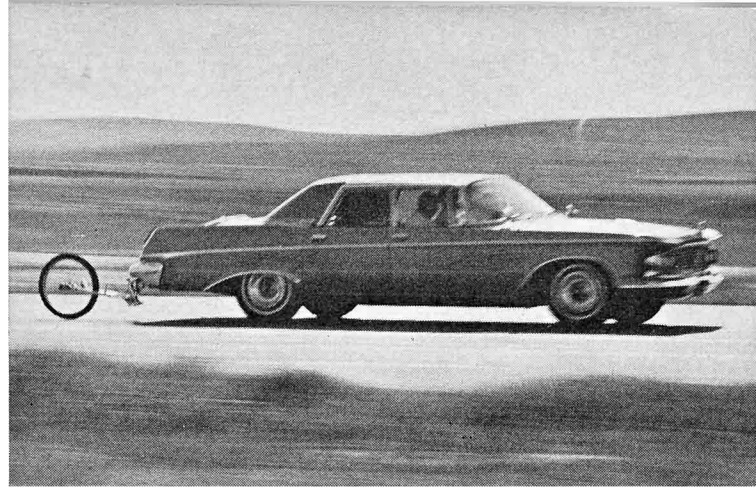
Comfort and luxury are the Imperial's biggest selling points. It isn't the fastest or the most economical automobile on the road, and it hasn't undergone any drastic styling changes over the past few years. But there are many changes for 1963 that make the Imperial better than last year's offering.

Our test car was the top number in the Imperial line-up — an Imperial LeBaron Southampton four-door hardtop. It's a big name that fits an equally big car, since the LeBaron is the largest car made in this country (short of a seven-passenger limousine). Only the four-door hardtop is offered in the LeBaron series, but the Crown Imperial series, next down the line, has a two- and four-door hardtop and a convertible. Rounding out the six-car line-up is the Custom Imperial series, offering a two- and a four-door hardtop. Twenty-one interior combinations of cloth and vinyl, cloth and leather, or all leather can be ordered (our test car had black vinyl and leather). Imperials come in 16 solid colors. Ten are metallic, and three are exclusive to the Imperial line.

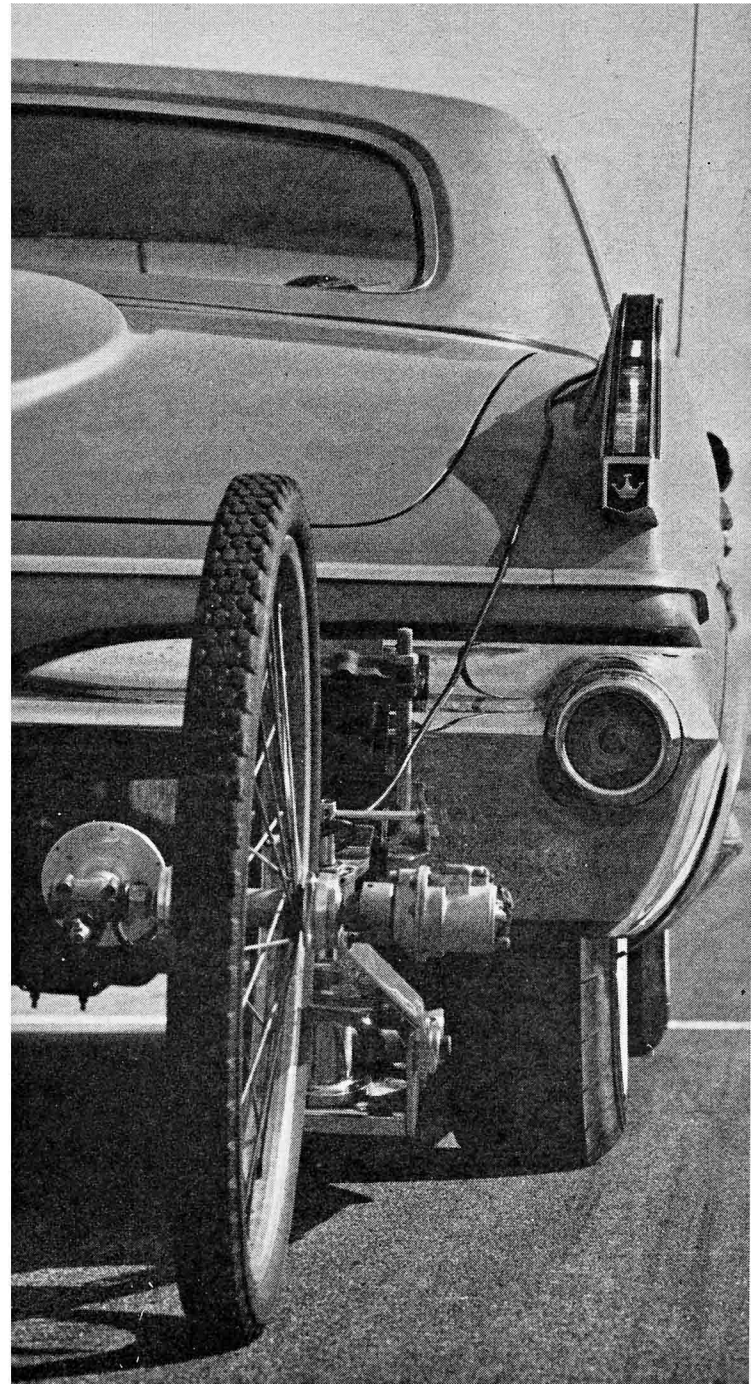
Some of the new features on this year's Imperial include a new roof line for Custom and Crown hardtops and a restyled roof for the LeBaron. These new rear roof lines allow higher rear seats, while 4.5 inches of additional leg room are available to rear-seat passengers. Here's one car a man can really stretch out in.

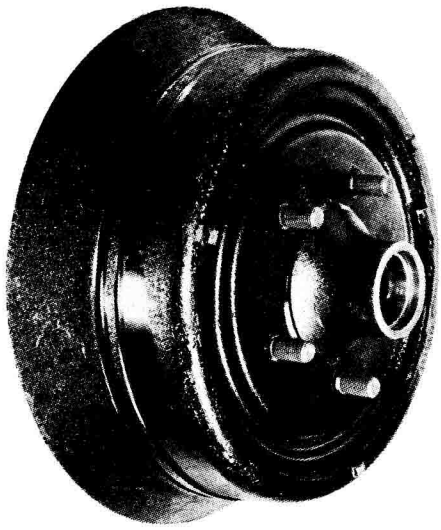
Two narrow vertical tail lights replace the well known gun-sight units familiar on past Imperials. Grilles and rear bumpers have been redesigned for 1963. There's a new automatic parking brake release and new rear-wheel parking brakes that no longer operate off the transmission. Aluminized steel is used extensively in the exhaust system to increase muffler and pipe life. Under-hood corrosion protection has been given a lot of attention through painting and zinc or cadmium plating. Imperials also share the five-year/50,000-mile warranty with other Chrysler products.

Base price of our car was \$6434, but by the time all the options were added onto the delivered price in Los Angeles, it came to \$7905.10 (including a destination charge of \$205). In addition to the optional equipment listed in our



*Imperial runs whisper-quiet at all speeds. Standard power accessories make driving almost too easy. The basic styling will be radically changed next year, but the size and luxury will remain.*

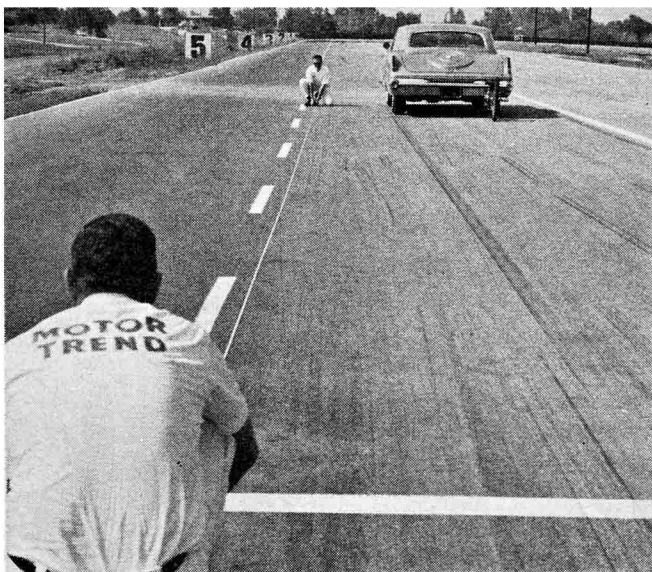




Flared brake drums increase drum mass by 37 per cent. They provide more cooling surface and help reduce drum expansion due to overheating. Brakes are self-adjusting duo-servo type.



A single-diaphragm, vacuum-suspended power brake unit is used on new Imperials. It's easier to take apart or service and is built stronger than the dual-diaphragm unit used last year. Normal stops required only light pedal pressures, but we did notice considerable fade during stops from our high-speed and acceleration runs. Panic stops from 60 mph required longer-than-average distances for a car of this size and weight.



## IMPERIAL ROAD TEST

*continued*

spec chart, the Imperial came standard with such items as Torqueflite automatic transmission, power steering-brakes-windows, padded dash, remote-control left mirror (outside), arm rest storage compartments, door-mounted courtesy lamps, and front and rear arm rests (Crown and LeBaron only).

For nearly \$8000, an owner expects something special — and he really gets it when he buys an Imperial, especially if it's a LeBaron. There's a 413-cubic-inch V-8 with a five-main-bearing crankshaft under that hood, putting out a whopping 470 pounds-feet of torque at 2800 rpm and 340 horses at 4600 rpm. With a 4.19-inch bore and a stroke of 3.75 inches, the engine's loafing at almost any speed. It does require premium gas, since it has a 10.1-to-1 compression ratio.

This big cast-iron engine has 5250 pounds of automobile to propel, but it manages with a smoothness and quietness that belie its potential performance. Our electric speedometer showed an actual 102 mph at 3800 rpm on Riverside Raceway's back straight, and with a longer run this car should easily top the 110 mark. From a standing start, the LeBaron clicked off speeds of 30, 45, and 60 mph in 4.1, 7.4, and 12.0 seconds respectively — quite a feat for a car weighing over 5600 pounds with two men and our test equipment on board.

Driving the big car through a 2.93 rear axle, Imperial's three-speed Torqueflite transmission proved very smooth and quiet during our test. It's a little faster off the line when the shifts are controlled by the transmission pushbuttons. Under full throttle in DRIVE, the unit shifted up at 40 mph and 3800 rpm and again at 79 mph and 4100 rpm. First range proved handy for holding the car at a crawl when descending downgrades, while 2 would hold it in the 30-40-mph area. Second also proved a good hill-climbing range. It would keep engine revs at a useful level, and power was on tap for instant passing without waiting for the usual kick-down from DRIVE to second. A parking pawl is new for 1963 on the Imperial. Mounted just to the left of the pushbuttons, the lever locks the transmission and automatically places it in neutral when the lever's pulled all the way down.

One nice thing about combining a big, powerful engine and a relatively high rear axle is that the Imperial gave us above-average fuel economy for a car of its large dimensions and ponderous weight. Our best figure was 14.5 mpg during a steady drive at 65-70 mph on the freeway. Driving the Imperial to and from work dropped the mileage to 11.2 mpg, while hard driving over winding roads with lots of stopping and starting took it down to 10. Our overall average for more than 1500 miles of driving figured out at 12.5 mpg, which isn't bad for this kind of automobile.

Our test car was fitted with a device called the Auto-Pilot. A reversible electric motor controlled by a sensor unit connected to the speedometer drives the throttle rod back and forth in response to a centrifugal governor. A dash-mounted knob controls the governor's weights and can be set at any desired cruising speed from 40 to 85 mph. What happens is this: We set the knob at the speed limit (65 mph in California), and when the speedometer needle hit 65, we felt a stiffening of the accelerator pedal as if someone had put a block under it. With the unit engaged and the knob pulled out, the car would continue at the set speed, uphill or down, and always stay within two-three mph of the set speed. To deactivate the Auto-Pilot, we had only to touch the brake pedal or push the knob in.

The stiffening of the accelerator served as a good warning that we'd reached the speed limit. Our LeBaron was so quiet



**(ABOVE)** Wide doors make Imperial easy to get in and out of. Handy document cases are attached to backs of comfortable, contoured front seats. Our car had more than enough leg room.

**(RIGHT)** Dash uses easy-to-read instruments instead of warning lights. All controls are well positioned, but the squared wheel and roller speedometer are a little hard to get accustomed to.

PHOTOS BY BOB D'OLIVO

and smooth it took a conscious effort to keep it within legal speed limits. However, the Auto-Pilot should be used only on long cruising trips or to rest one's accelerator foot. For these purposes we liked it, but, in the Imperial, the driver has so little to do anyway (and the car is so comfortable) that we preferred to use our good right foot and have control of the situation. Slightly better gas mileage is possible with the Auto-Pilot, since it's generally smoother than most drivers. It's a nice option if used as intended. The price is \$96.80.

Our LeBaron proved a real road burner. The combination of a soft, comfortable ride, effortless engine, and a very quiet chassis enabled us to cover long distances without fatigue. Our golden hardtop was especially at home on the open highway but proved no problem in traffic once we became used to allowing more room when parking and making turns. A car of this size doesn't lend itself to vigorous driving, but it handled well enough on winding roads — except when hard cornering flooded the carburetor, limiting the speed at which we could take the corners.

*continued*





*Under a maze of hoses, wires, and accessory components is Imperial's smooth-running 413-inch V-8. It delivers 340 hp and*

*loafs during normal driving. A closed crankcase ventilation system is standard. Bigger air cleaner has 17-inch diameter.*

## IMPERIAL ROAD TEST

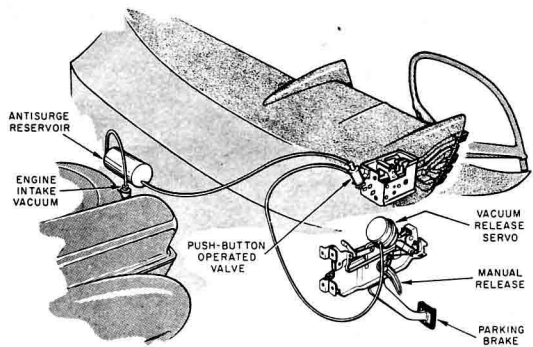
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We felt lots of understeer on turns when the tires were at the recommended 26 psi. With 40 pounds front and 37 rear, the car handled a lot better without any noticeable loss of riding comfort. We couldn't find a dip sharp enough to bottom the front independent torsion bar suspension, but the car did exhibit some nose dive on hard stops. At all legal cruising speeds, when the curves were wide and sweeping, the Imperial proved a responsive, easy-to-drive car, thanks to the full-time power steering and only 3.5 turns of the wheel lock to lock. All Imperials have a reduced turning circle, since the suspension strut wheel stops are now contoured to permit a three-degree increase in angular travel of the front wheels. Turning diameter is now 47.5 feet.

One of our main gripes about this car was the squared steering wheel. It measures 17.7 inches at its widest and only 14.7 inches at the narrowest. This creates a problem, since the turning force depends on where the driver rests his hands on the wheel. We got used to it, but it was disconcerting at first to be making a sharp turn and to find our hands first 17.7 inches apart and then 14.7 inches and back again. We'd like to see a smaller round wheel replace the present one.

Another important improvement announced on this year's Imperial is an increase in effective brake lining area — from 251 to 287 square inches. Our LeBaron's big 11-inch brakes featured the new flared drums that add 37 per cent more area for better cooling and quicker recovery from fade. The brakes proved adequate for normal driving, but the left rear wheel locked up on hard stopping from high speeds. Even with the improvements, there's a lot of car to stop, and our braking tests found the Imperial taking 37 feet for the 30-mph stop and 192 feet from 60 mph. All Imperials use self-adjusting brakes that set themselves when the car is backed up and stopped. We noticed considerable fade after our high-speed stops and when driving fairly rapidly over winding mountain roads. The engine died on hard stops, but it always started on the first spin and ran smoothly throughout our test period.

Inside and out, the LeBaron looked as if it was put together very well, but the fit and finish weren't quite up to what we've found in other cars in this price range. Our LeBaron certainly was an attention-getter wherever we parked or drove it. People would come up and ask questions, look inside, and some would just stare. We weren't sure whether they were impressed with the sheer size of the vehicle, the luxurious appointments, or if they expected to see some celebrity driving the car. /MT

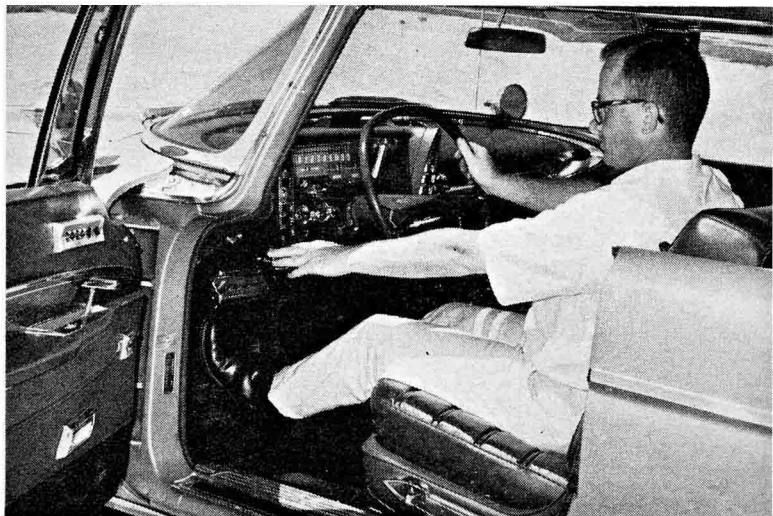
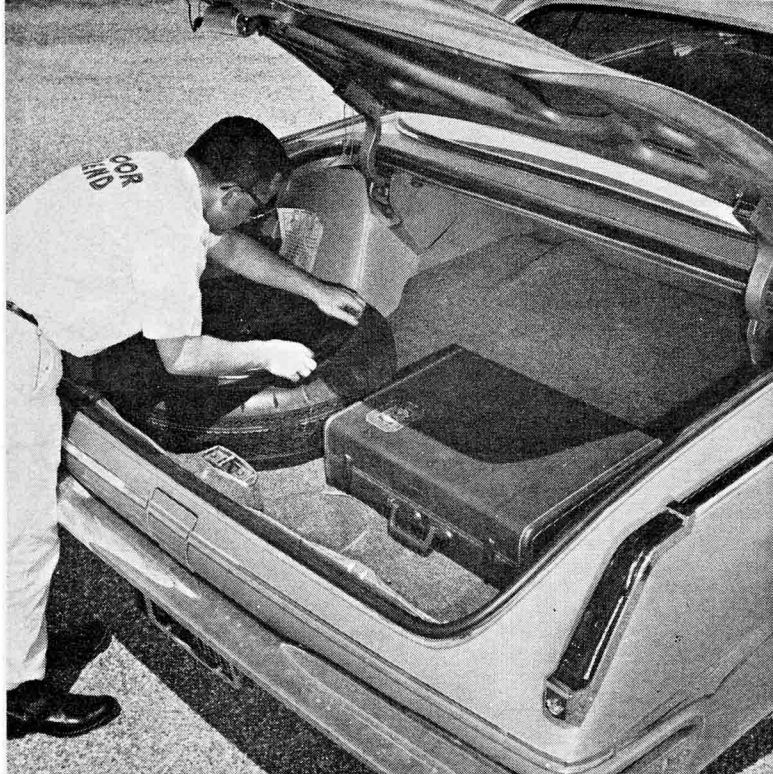


(ABOVE) New automatic parking brake release disengages parking pedal when forward or reverse gears are selected. A valve triggered by transmission pushbuttons supplies engine vacuum to a servo unit that disengages the step-on emergency brake.

(RIGHT) Imperial's trunk (carpeted) has more than enough room for several people's luggage. The larger-than-usual spare takes up some usable space, but this is a problem in all cars. A remote-control deck lid lock carries an optional price of \$53.

(RIGHT, CENTER) All Imperials have curved window glass, arm-rest compartments for small odds and ends, and heavy carpeting.

(RIGHT, BOTTOM) New transmission parking sprag locks the rear wheels, placing transmission in NEUTRAL position. We liked the six-way power seat that added greatly to overall driving comfort by enabling us to change the seating position on long trips.



**IMPERIAL LE BARON**  
4-door, 6-passenger hardtop

**OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED:** Air conditioning, radio with rear speaker, leather trim, power door locks, Auto-Pilot, remote-control deck lid lock, seat belts, whitewalls

**BASIC PRICE:** \$6434  
**PRICE AS TESTED:** \$7905.10 (plus tax and license)  
**ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST:** 3676 miles  
**RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE:** 5200 rpm

**PERFORMANCE**

**ACCELERATION (2 aboard)**  
0-30 mph ..... 4.1 secs.  
0-45 mph ..... 7.4  
0-60 mph ..... 12.0

Standing start 1/4-mile 18.8 secs. and 75 mph

Speeds in gears @ shift points  
1st ..... 40 mph @ 3800 rpm      3rd ..... 102 mph @ 3800 rpm  
2nd ..... 79 mph @ 4100 rpm

Speedometer Error on Test Car  
Car's speedometer reading .... 31    45    50    64    78    90  
Weston electric speedometer .. 30    45    50    60    70    80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear ..... 26 mph  
Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 37 ft.; from 60 mph, 192 ft.

**SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER**

<p><b>Engine</b> Ohv V-8 Bore: 4.19 ins. Stroke: 3.75 ins. Displacement: 413.0 cu. ins. Compression ratio: 10.1:1 Horsepower: 340 @ 4600 rpm Torque: 470 lbs.-ft. @ 2800 rpm Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.82 Ignition: 12-volt coil</p> <p><b>Gearbox</b> 3-speed Torqueflite automatic; dash-mounted pushbutton controls</p> <p><b>Driveshaft</b> 2-piece — open tube</p> <p><b>Differential</b> Hypoid — semi-floating Standard ratio: 2.93:1</p> <p><b>Suspension</b> Front: Independent, non-parallel control arms with torsion bars, stabilizer bar, and tubular shocks Rear: 6-leaf, parallel, semi-elliptic springs, with tubular shocks</p>	<p><b>Steering</b> Rack and sector; integral full-time power Turning diameter: 47.5 ft. Turns: 3.5 lock to lock</p> <p><b>Wheels and Tires</b> 5-bolt, steel disc wheels 8.20 x 15 4-ply rayon tires</p> <p><b>Brakes</b> Hydraulic, duo-servo, with vacuum power assist; self-adjusting Front and rear: 11-in. dia. x 3 ins. wide Effective lining area: 287.2 sq. ins.</p> <p><b>Body and Frame</b> Welded, double-channel box-section side rails, lateral X-type crossmembers Wheelbase: 129.0 ins. Track: front, 61.7 ins.; rear, 62.2 ins. Overall length: 227.8 ins. Curb weight: 5250 lbs.</p>
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