by Jim Wright
Technical Editor

MT Road Test

!!! BUICK SKYLARK ROAD TEST

THERE'LL BE NO mistaking the new Buick Special for a compact. From the outside, its lean lines give it the look of a standard-sized car, but with a 115-inch wheelbase, the Special is solidly in the intermediate class — right where it's really been all the time (even though the general public and press have preferred to call it a compact). Hereafter, we'll call this size range intermediate.

Not only is the '64 a new size, it's also a completely new car from bumper to bumper. The Special originally had unitized body/frame construction, but this has been dropped in favor of the more conventional separate frame and body. This seems a step backward, but according to the factory, unitized construction works well only on cars up to a certain size. GM feels the noise control problems involved with this structure on larger cars just aren't worth the weight savings or supposedly simpler construction. It's a moot question at best.

The new frame is called a perimeter type, because the side rails more or less follow the perimeter of the body. The rails are boxed for greater strength. Coil springs are still used all around, just as they have been since 1961.

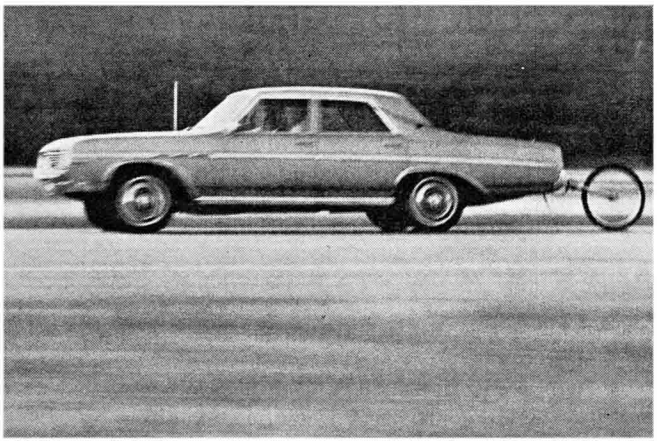
Buick's experiment with the all-aluminum engine has been shelved, and the new engine uses a cast-iron block. It still has the aluminum heads, intake manifold, and accessories of the old engine. In outward appearance and size, the new engine is identical to the all-aluminum job. On the inside, it's been bored and stroked to bring the displacement up to 300 cubic inches. With its two-barrel carburetor and 9-to-1 compression ratio, it delivers 210 hp at 4600 rpm and 310 pounds-feet of torque at 2400 rpm. A four-barrel, 11-to-1 compression option gives 250 hp at 4800 rpm and 335 pounds-feet of torque at 3000 rpm. Also available is the V-6. This engine uses the same bore and stroke as the V-8 to get 225 cubic inches' displacement and is rated at 155 horsepower at 4400 rpm.

The new automatic transmission is a dandy, and since this issue carries a complete technical analysis of it on page 71, we won't go into detail except to say it's about 100 per cent improved over the old transmission, with no drawbacks.

Three series are offered: the Special, Special Deluxe, and Skylark. Since the Skylark has always been this intermediate's best seller, MT chose this model to test. The usual choice would be a two-door hardtop, but this year the four-door sedan looks so good we decided on it. The test car was equipped with power steering and brakes, the big engine, Super Turbine 300 automatic transmission, 3.08 axle, heater, radio, and whitewalls.

At the time we did our test, the car hadn't been released to the public and was still under wraps. So all the performance

Even though the Buick Special (left) has grown up to the point where it's almost as large as a standard-sized car, it has lost very few of its small-car features. Skylark is longer and looks it, yet in town or out on highways, the Special is still light-handling and highly maneuverable. Its styling is clean and fresh, and while it retains a strong family resemblance to the big Buick, the Special is still original enough to have its own individual character. The '64 Special is being introduced with a complete line of options for performance and comfort, and the prospective buyer should be able to order his car tailor-made to his personal driving needs.



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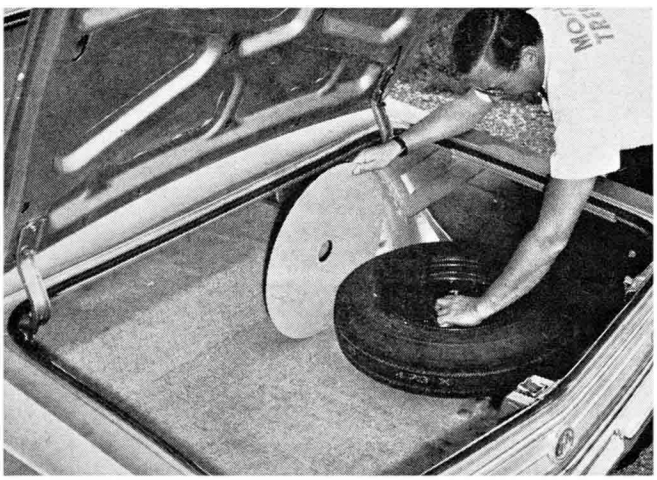

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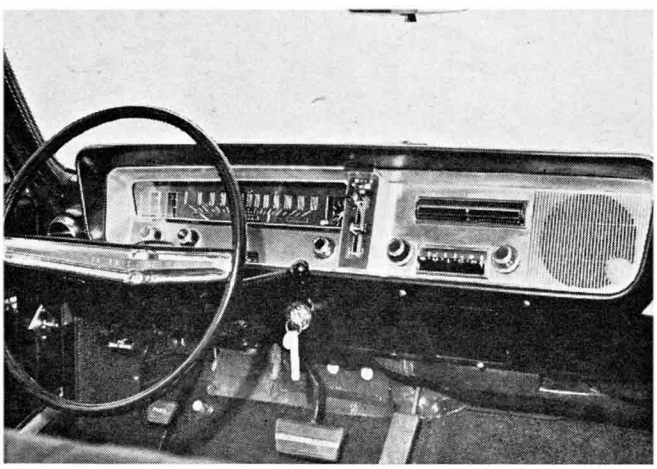

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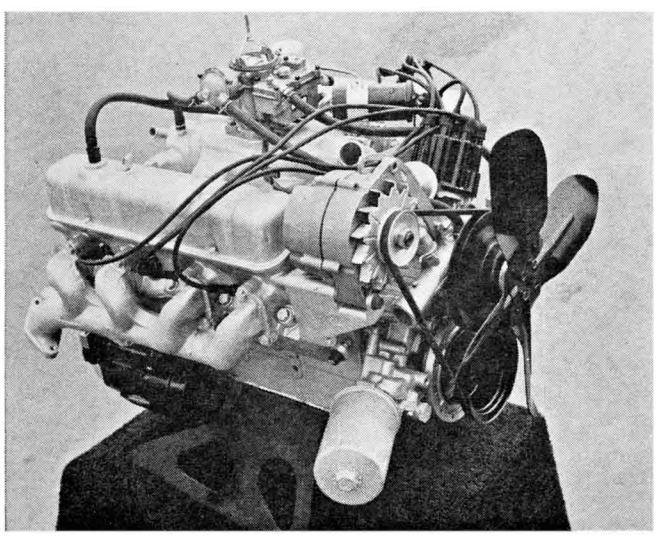

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testing was done at the GM Proving Grounds at Milford, Michigan, while our on-the-road phases were handled in and around that same area.

Even though the '64 is bigger and heavier than its predecessors, it packs a bigger performance punch. Loaded down with the usual two men and test equipment, the four-door Skylark was still able to click off sub-10-second 0-60-mph runs time after time. At the far end of the standing quarter-mile, our electric speedometer was reading an honest 81 mph, while the clocks recorded an ET of 17.4 seconds. The 0-30, 0-45, and 0-60-mph runs averaged 3.8, 6.3, and 9.4 seconds.

Earlier in the year, Buick had mentioned that the GM experimental lab was working on a "black box" that would take the place of the number-two man in the test crew. He's the one who usually watches the clocks and electric speedometer on the acceleration runs, while the other man concentrates on driving. We used the black box for this test.

All acceleration times were made with the automatic transmission in D position. We tried several preliminary runs starting in L and force-shifting to D at 5200 rpm, but this didn't give such good times as letting the automatic shift for itself. In D, the automatic shift took place at 4400 rpm (at wide-open throttle), which was at 60 mph in the test car. The shift was smooth, with minimum slippage. Despite our rather low opinion of all two-speed automatics, this new transmission comes very close to performing on a par with the best three-speeds. The reason for this is the switch-the-pitch feature of the torque converter stator blades, which gives two separate torque multiplications and adds a higher degree of flexibility to the two-speed.

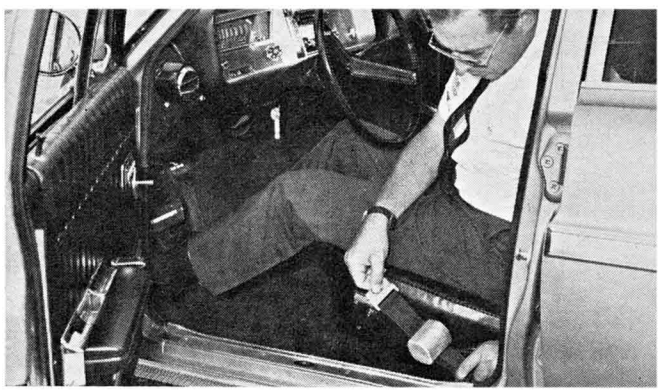
We weren't able to run as complete a fuel check as we usually do, but from all indications, a consumption average would run from 12 to 14 mpg around town and 16 to 18 mpg on the open road. The big engine demands premium gas, while both the 9-to-1 compression ratio V-8 and V-6 engines will get along quite well on regular.

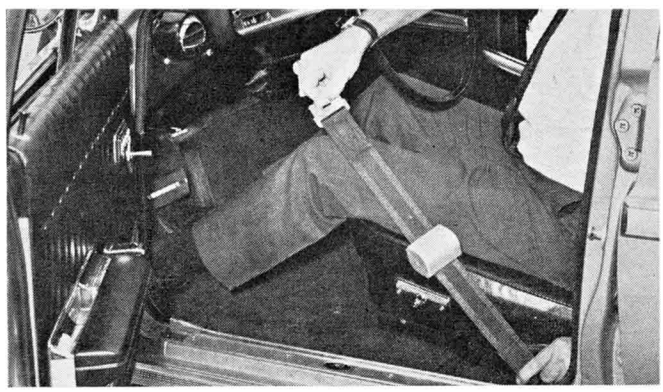
The '64 includes a big improvement in the brake department. Bigger drums are used this year, and the effective lining area is up to 142.1 square inches (from 123.77 last year). Cooling fins and a wide cooling flange are incorporated in the cast-iron drums. Repeated maximum-effort stops showed that brake fade didn't occur so soon or so badly as it did on the earlier Specials we tested. When the brakes did fade, they bounced back quickly after a short cool-down period. Stopping distances were short, and the car handled very well, taking minimum effort on our part to keep it in a straight line.

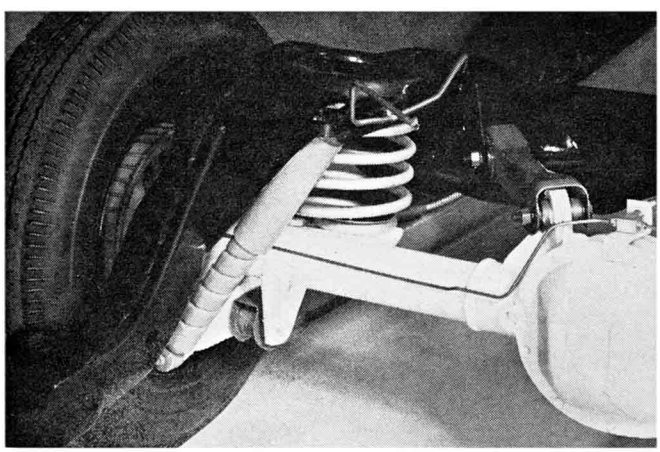
The Special has an overall length of 203.5 inches: 11.4 inches longer than last year's model. Still, it's an easy car to herd through in-town traffic. Getting it in and out of parking spaces doesn't present any problem. Suspension is softer than we like, but this gives the Skylark a good boulevard ride. At highway cruising speeds, the test car showed good directional stability, but the light shock absorbers didn't give enough control when damping even slight dips in the high-

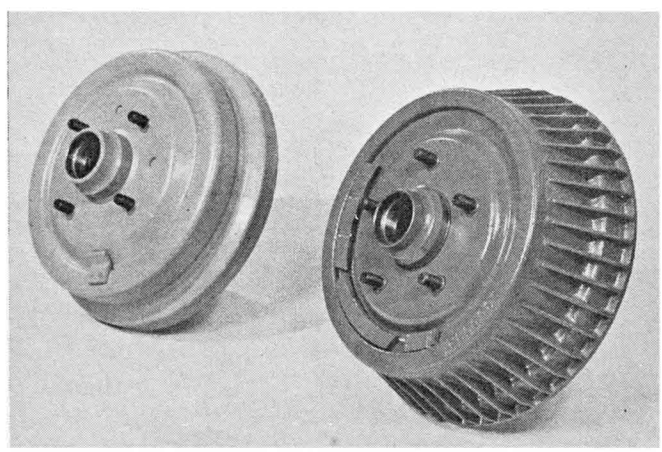
*1) Acceleration of the automatic-equipped test car was very quick over its entire range – could be a winner at the drags. 2) Trunk compartment includes plenty of usable area. Flat floor, with no lumps or humps, will let things be packed easily. 3) Dash shows style in its simplicity. Yet we feel simplicity is being carried too far through extensive use of warning lights. 4) New engine uses cast-iron block, offers more cubic inches. External configuration is identical to old all-aluminum mill. (**RIGHT**) Like most of today's soft-riding Detroit sedans, the Special can be cornered hard without the car getting awkward.*

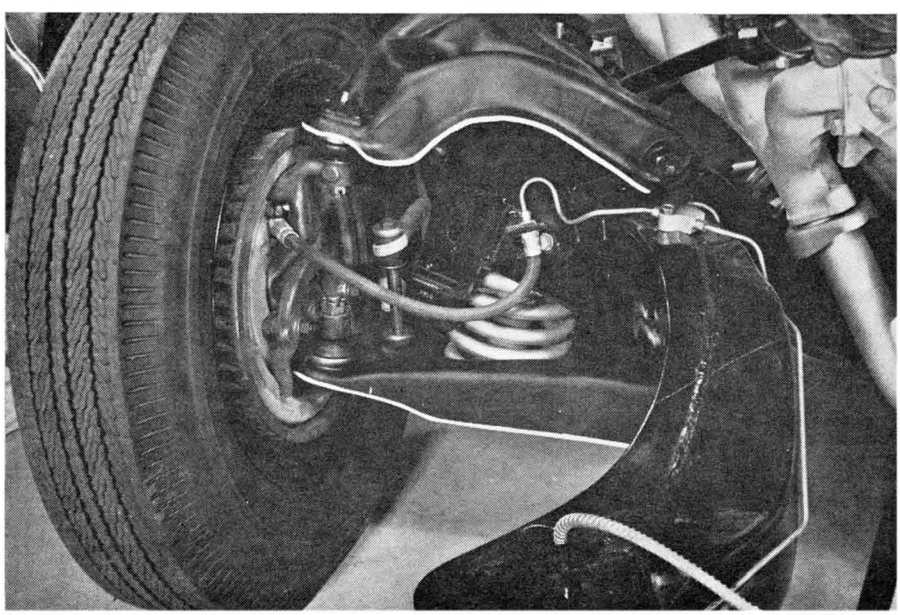
PHOTOS BY PAT D'OLIVO











(LEFT TO RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM) *Very little lean, good balance are noticeable as Skylark is driven through series of 50-mph esses at over 75 mph. There was no tire squeal, and at this particular speed, the Skylark was understeering only slightly.* ■ *All the manufacturers will be offering some form of handy seat belt retractor this year.* ■ *Rear suspension detail shows location of control arms, gives the Skylark a high degree of rear-end stability.* ■ *The smaller '61-63 brake drum on the left has been replaced by the much larger finned unit on the right. '64s will stop more quickly, suffer less from brake fade than predecessors.* ■ *Front suspension detail shows husky upper and lower A-arms, anti-roll bar, and full ball-joint system.*

way. Wind and road noises, at speed, are kept low, and normal conversation isn't made to sound like mumbling between front- and rear-seat passengers.

An anti-roll bar at the front (despite the soft suspension) lets fast corners be taken without excessive lean. Four control arms keep the rear axle under control during hard acceleration or braking. Two of them angle out from the top of the differential to the frame rails, and this keeps rear-end side sway to a minimum. On short, hard corners, the front end pushes some, but not to an annoying degree. On faster, sweeping bends, understeer is barely noticeable. With the exception of the light shocks, we couldn't find too much in the car's handling characteristics that bothered us. It's a good car to drive —fast or slow.

Since the test car was one of the first off the assembly line, we were prepared to overlook minor faults in trim and panel fits, but we didn't have to. Everything fit as it should, and everything worked as it should.

The interior has enough room to carry six in reasonable comfort, while seat adjustment and steering wheel placement are such that both short and tall drivers shouldn't have any trouble finding a comfortable position. Since most of our test cars usually have bucket (" ") seats, we've gotten kind of used to them. As a result, we never did feel quite at home on the bench seat in the test car. At the time of our test, the factory people weren't quite sure but thought that buckets would be available optionally on the four-door Skylark.

The instrument panel doesn't include too many instruments as such, but the speedometer is large and easy to read, and all control knobs and switches are easy to reach. All-around visibility is good. The trunk compartment offers a good amount of usable space – at least enough for the average family.

Personally, we'd have liked to see Buick stick with the shorter wheelbase in this line, but still, at 115 inches, the new Special isn't *too* big. We don't see any reason why it still shouldn't appeal to those who feel that standard-sized cars are too big. /MT

BUICK SKYLARK

4-door, 6-passenger sedan

OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED: 250-hp engine, automatic transmission, power steering and brakes, electric seat and windows, radio, heater, whitewalls

BASIC PRICE: NA

PRICE AS TESTED: NA

ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST: 1834 miles

RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE: 5200 rpm

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph.....3.8 secs.
0-45 mph.....6.3
0-60 mph.....9.4

Standing start ¼-mile 17.4 secs. and 81 mph

Speeds in gears @ 4400 rpm (shift point)

Low..... 60 mph
High.....105 (top speed)

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading.....	30	45	50	61	71	82
Weston electric speedometer...	30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear.....24 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 27 ft.; from 60 mph, 146 ft.

SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

Engine
Ohv V-8
Bore: 3.750 ins.
Stroke: 3.40 ins.
Displacement: 300 cu. ins.
Compression ratio: 11.0:1
Horsepower: 250 @ 4800 rpm
Torque: 325 lbs.-ft. @ 3000 rpm
Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.83
Ignition: 12-volt coil

Gearbox
2-speed automatic, with torque converter and 2-position stator blades

Driveshaft
1-piece, open tube

Differential
Hypoid, semi-floating
Installed ratio: 3.08:1

Suspension
Front: Independent, with coil springs, upper and lower control arms, direct-acting tubular shocks and anti-roll bar
Rear: Rigid axle, with coil springs, direct-acting tubular shocks; drive and torque taken through control arms

Steering
Recirculating ball nut — integral with power piston
Turning diameter: 40.8 ft.
Turns lock to lock: 4.06

Wheels and Tires
5-lug, steel disc wheels
7.00 x 14 2-ply rayon tubeless tires

Brakes
Hydraulic, duo-servo, with power assist; finned cast-iron drums; self-adjusting
Front: 9½-in. dia. x 2½ ins. wide
Rear: 9½-in. dia. x 2.0 ins. wide
Effective lining area: 142.1 sq. ins.

Body and Frame
Perimeter-type frame and separate body
Wheelbase: 115.0 ins.
Track: front and rear, 58.0 ins.
Overall length: 203.5 ins.