



1964 RAMBLER AMERICAN ROAD TEST

by Bob McVay, *Assistant Technical Editor*

WHAT'S NEW about the 1964 Rambler American? Just about everything. For the first time since its introduction in 1950, the original compact car is all new from stem to stern. Wheelbase is longer (106 inches), overall length has been increased from 173.10 to 177.25 inches, and the front suspension is new as well. Rambler's Classic and Ambassador lines introduced one-piece uniside construction last year, which helped them win our MOTOR TREND Car of the Year award. Now the American shares this construction, thus making all inner and outer door panels interchangeable on all 1964 Rambler sedans and wagons.

Americans for 1964 come in four series. The 220 and 330 offer two- and four-door sedans and a four-door station wagon, equipped with the standard 90-hp L-head Six. The 440 series includes a two-door hardtop, a four-door sedan, and a sharp little convertible, all with the 125-hp ohv Six. Our test car was the top-of-the-line 440-H two-door hardtop and came standard with a 138-hp, ohv engine.

Lengthening the wheelbase and overall dimensions of the American has given it noticeably more interior room. Although it's longer, its height and width have been reduced



slightly. Convertible tops are more streamlined and can be ordered in four colors: black, white, gold, or turquoise, at no extra cost. Station wagons offer 75 cubic feet of carrying capacity, an increase of nine cubic feet over last year's models. Tailgates are nearly a foot wider for easier loading, and there's an optional rear door that swings open to the side for those who don't like the conventional tailgate.

American buyers have their choice of a variety of transmissions, most of them manual. Standard is the three-speed column-mounted shift, while the E-Stick, Rambler's manual shift without a clutch pedal, is optional. Both can be ordered with optional overdrive. Rambler's popular Twin-Stick floor-mounted manual shift is an additional option, continued from last year. Two levers, one for shifting gears and one for engaging overdrive, are provided. A button on the gear-shift lever gives instant kickdown from overdrive. Our test car was equipped with the optional Flash-O-Matic, a three-speed Borg-Warner automatic transmission with a 3.31 rear-axle ratio. (Americans are available with a host of ratios, including 2.73, 3.08, 3.31, 3.78, and 4.11.) Fourteen-inch wheels with 4½-inch rims are standard, and 15-inchers are optional. Wagons come with five-inch rim widths.

American's new independent front suspension system uses molded rubber bushings in the upper trunnion instead of metal-to-metal bushings. These rubber bushings never require lubrication and have built-in sealing to keep dirt out. Front suspension lubrication intervals are 33,000 miles or three years for the lower single control arm and steering knuckle.

Rear suspension features new, 52-inch-long leaf springs that are seven inches longer than the 1963 units. The axle is connected to the springs in an off-center position to keep the car more level during starting and stopping. Butyl rubber liners are used between each leaf, while tip liners are of polyethylene.

Now let's take a ride in the 1964 American and see what it's like. The added interior space is noticeable at once, and the driving position seems more comfortable than before. The doors open wide for easy entrance and exit, and the seats give plenty of adjustment for the longest-legged driver. Our test car was a dark green, but American buyers have a choice of 14 baked-enamel finishes, with an additional 42 two-tone color combinations. Our comfortable, vinyl-trimmed buckets had adjustable head rests. The seat back adjusted to five different positions, from upright to fully reclining.

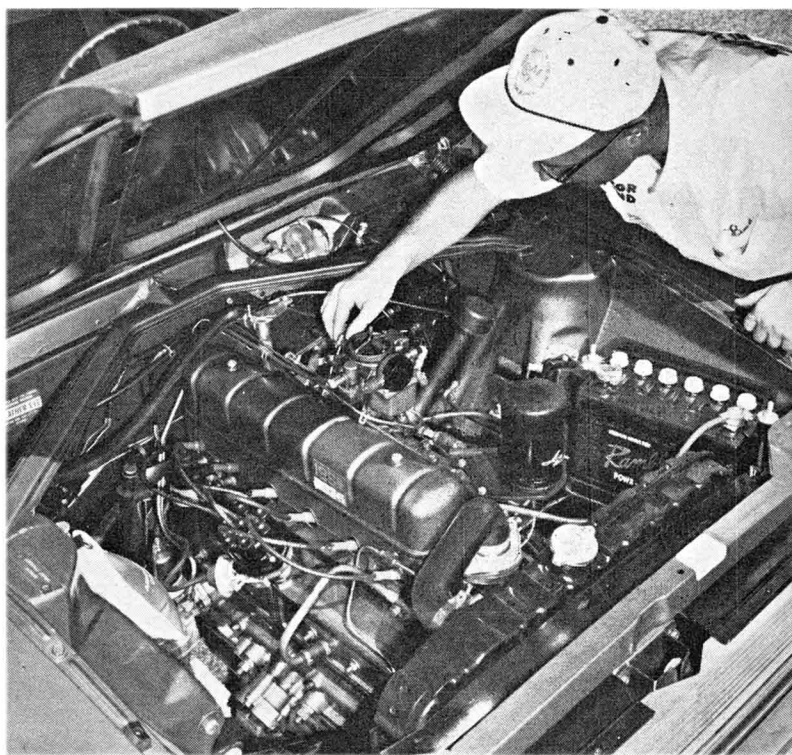
Not only does the American have plenty of leg- and hip room up front in its roomy buckets, but here's one compact with plenty of room in the back seat, too. All seats are firm and comfortable and never left us tired after a long drive.

As we tested it, the American hardtop weighed 2900 pounds. Add to this two MOTOR TREND staffers and our usual test equipment, and the weight of the car was over

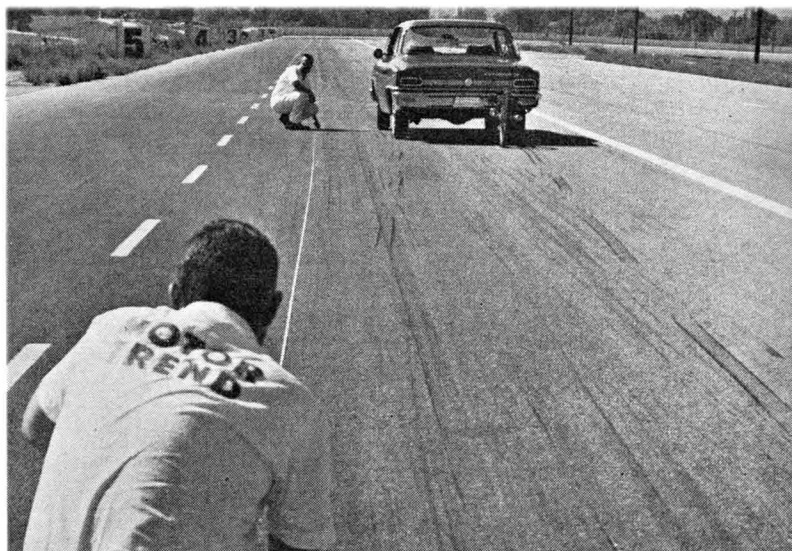
2
→



3
→



4
→



1) Dips like this bring out rattles, squeaks quickly in any car; American had none. New front suspension gives good control on rough stuff; didn't bottom, even on the hardest bump.

2) Three-quarter view shows off American's new, smoother styling, reshaped tail lights, and the center gas tank filler tube.

3) American's 138-hp Six was built for long-lasting reliability rather than flashing performance. Ohv Six uses four main bearings, solid valve lifters, and a partial-flow oil filter. The twin-barrel Carter carb gives 440-H an extra 13 horsepower.

4) Stop from 60 mph required 183 feet, which is more than average. Lots of nose dive and some wheel hop and lock-up kept American from getting better grip and shorter stopping figure.

AMERICAN *continued*

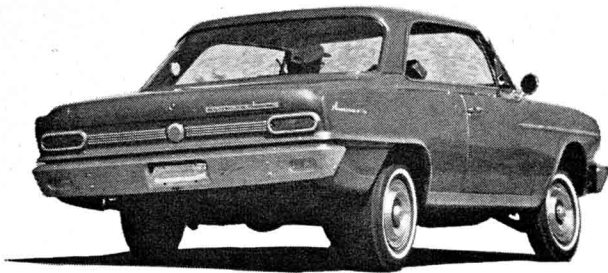
3300 pounds. There wasn't a whisper of wheelspin as the American came off the line, and the car whistled quietly from a standstill to 30, 45, and 60 mph in 5.5, 10.9, and 18.6 seconds respectively on our best run. Our measured quarter-mile run took 21.9 seconds, with 65-mph speed.

After experimenting with shift points, we got best results for acceleration and top-speed runs by leaving the lever in D-2 position. Floorboarded from a standing start, the American shifted at 28 mph and 3800 rpm the first time and again at 55 mph and 4100 rpm on our electric tachometer. We observed an actual top speed of 88 mph on Riverside's back straightaway. We feel a well-broken-in American (with the 138-hp engine) should do a shade better — probably 90 to 92 mph with a long run.

Ride is comfortable, quiet, soft, and, search though we might, we couldn't find a dip sharp enough to bottom the American's front suspension. All we ever heard was a dull thump. There was very little rebound. Cornering found the American showing more lean than we normally like, but we didn't experience any loss of control on fast bends. The car would lean over to a certain angle and then continue around in an easy-to-hold line. It did understeer but didn't plow heavily nor tend to break its rear end loose easily. It was close to neutral and gave plenty of warning before the rear end broke loose.

On hard, fast, left-hand bends, it repeated last year's problem — it flooded and lost power in the middle of the turn. The car just slowed down until the lean angle decreased and the engine caught hold again, then it continued on its way. Right-hand turns gave no problem.

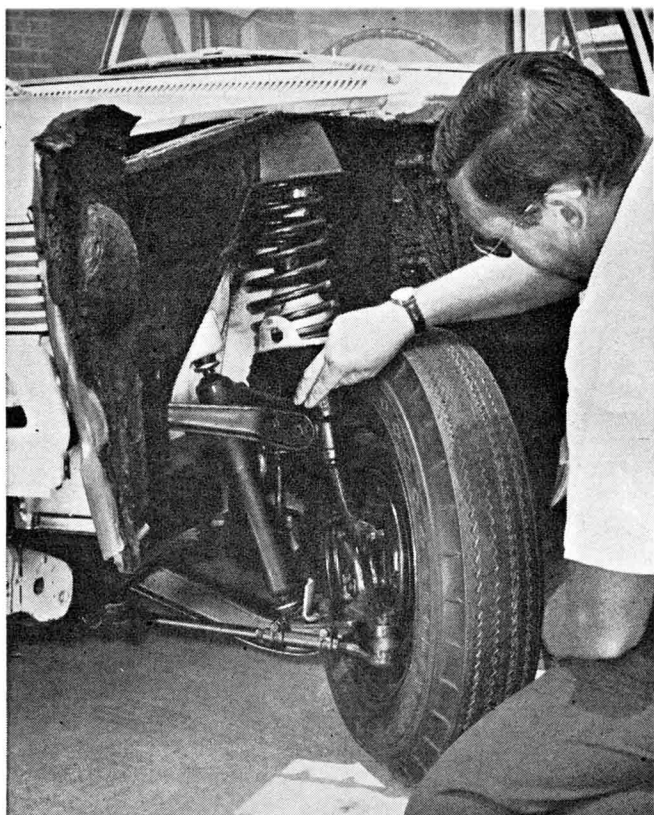
The car gives plenty of warning before it breaks loose and, if driven within its limits, should never cause a moment's worry, except in slippery weather. Here's where a faster



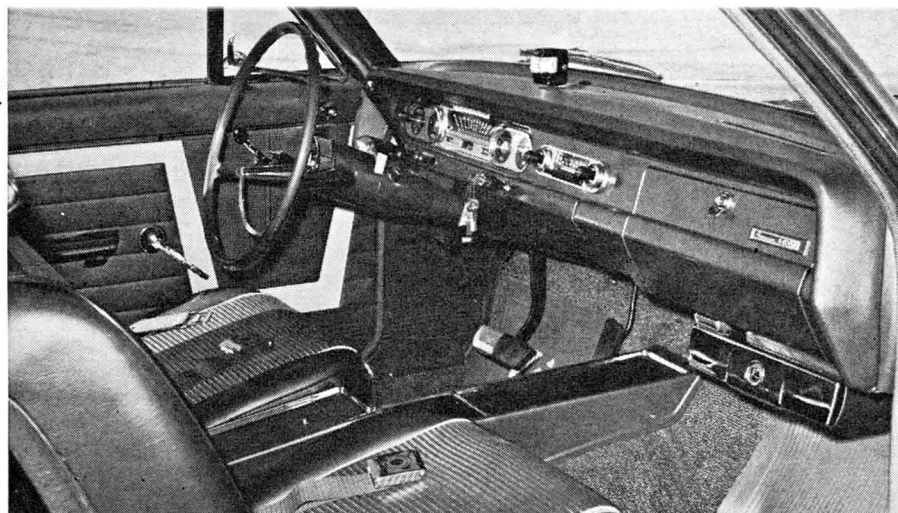
(ABOVE) The 440-H handled well on paved roads but has more body lean than we like when taking corners faster than usual.

(BELOW) On or off the road, American hardtop has good balance and control. Ramblers offer a 24-month/24,000-mile warranty on cars and factory-installed accessories subjected to "normal service." Defining term is left up to each Rambler dealer.



1
→

PHOTOS BY BOB D'OLIVO

4
←2
→5
←3
→

1) New front suspension features lubed-for-life upper pivot, 33,000-mile intervals for other front suspension points. Optional 15-inch wheels with five-inch rim widths are available on Americans.

2) New dash has no-glare finish to eliminate dazzle. Everything's easy to reach, and door handles push forward for opening.

3) Spare is horizontal. Trunk still has 22.3 cubic feet of usable luggage space.

4) Car shows lots of nose dive on hard stops. Extra safety item is dual master cylinder. If one fails, American doesn't lose all of its control or braking force.

5) Car's head rests can be adjusted for height or they can be completely removed.

6) Curved-glass windows are new for the American in 1964. A quick 3½ turns can roll them up or down with little effort.



AMERICAN *continued*

- 1) American's good balance and traction, plus six-inch ground clearance, make it a natural choice for off-the-road driving.
- 2) Front ends shows simple, uncluttered styling and new bumpers. Variable-speed vacuum wipers are standard, with electric wipers optional at slightly higher price.
- 3) American's slow steering ($5\frac{1}{4}$ turns lock to lock) took lots of wheel spinning to recover from slides like this. Power unit gives more agreeable steering ratio.



steering ratio would be appreciated, since lots of steering-wheel spinning was necessary to recover from a skid on loose dirt with the standard $5\frac{1}{4}$ turns lock to lock of the manual steering box. The Gemmer worm-and-roller steering was smooth and fairly precise in all normal driving, but when it came to parking or skid recovery, we felt that many turns were just $1\frac{1}{2}$ too many for safety.

A new integral power steering unit, called Road-Control, is optional on Americans. The new unit lowers the steering from $5\frac{1}{4}$ to four turns. Faster steering would certainly help when fast action is necessary to prevent a possible accident.

Unlike many current sedans, Rambler's American has plenty of ground clearance—six inches fully loaded. We drove it over rough dirt roads and loose sandy terrain. The car showed good traction without bottoming—an excellent point for the man who uses his car for occasional hunting or fishing trips.

We especially liked the American's side vents. On hot days they give good air circulation inside the car and kept our feet cool on long drives. Although it was too hot to try out the car's heater-defroster system, the unit on last year's American was excellent, which should speak well for the improved 1964 system. Driving position is comfortable and gave us a good view forward and to the rear.

There's not much to rave about *under* the American's hood. The ohv Six is lightly stressed, being asked maximally for only 138 hp from its 195.6 cubic inches and giving a low .74 hp per cubic inch. It uses regular gas, has an 8.7-to-1 compression ratio, a bore and stroke of $3\frac{1}{8}$ inches by $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches, and gives its maximum horsepower at 4500 rpm. American's "big" engine uses a twin-barrel Carter carburetor, which gives it a 13-hp increase over the single-barrel carb of its 125-hp twin. Being lightly stressed as it is, it should run for a good number of years with a minimum of maintenance and repairs. It's not a terribly exciting engine, but it wasn't meant to be. It does its intended task efficiently and quietly, and when you think of it, that's quite a bit



One look under the hood showed us there's plenty of elbow room for routine maintenance. As a matter of fact, it looked as if there was plenty of room for that nice little 198-hp V-8 that's optional on the Rambler Classic. We've been thinking that might make an interesting combination.

Always a strong point with Rambler, fuel economy was only fair in our test car. Driving to and from work in heavy traffic gave us 15.30 mpg, while our highest average on a long-distance cruise at legal highway speeds figured out at 18.3. Overall average after 500 miles of driving was 15.52. Of course, a similar car with overdrive could probably have done a little better. The 1963 Mobilgas Economy Run American got over 30 mpg.

If its master cylinder fails, the American won't find itself out of brakes. All Ramblers are equipped with dual master cylinders, a good safety feature. Our test car used nine-inch-diameter Bendix servo-action brakes that were self-adjusting. Our maximum-effort stops from 30 and 60 mph required 34 and 183 feet respectively. There was some wheel lock-up during panic stops, and it took a bit of steering-wheel spinning to keep the car in a relatively straight line. The car showed lots of nose dive on hard stops, which could be corrected by changing the front suspension geometry. Again, stopping distances were average, so we really can't find anything wrong with the Rambler American's braking.

The American won't win any laurels on the drag strip, nor was it intended to. We feel it does the job it was built to do quite well. It's a well built, quiet, comfortable economy compact that has grown a bit by popular demand. We like the new styling. We consider it fresh and simple, without lots of ornamentation, and it has noticeably more room inside than last year's offering.

Fit and finish of our test car were very good — there's lots of quality in the 1964 American. It should fill the bill for the man who wants reliable, economical transportation and isn't much concerned with blazing performance. Ramblers have a reputation for just that sort of thing. /MT

RAMBLER AMERICAN 440-H

2-door, 5-passenger hardtop

OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED: Flash-O-Matic transmission, radio, heater, reclining bucket seats with head rests, center console, seat belts (4), miscellaneous

BASIC PRICE: \$2281

PRICE AS TESTED: \$2857.60 (plus tax and license)

ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST: 23 miles

RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE: 4800 rpm

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph	5.5 secs.
0-45 mph	10.9
0-60 mph	18.6

Standing start 1/4-mile 21.3 secs. and 65 mph

Speeds in gears @ shift points

1st	28 mph @ 3800 rpm	3rd	88 mph @ 4500 rpm
2nd	55 mph @ 4100 rpm		

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading	33	50	55	65	73	83
Weston electric speedometer	30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear 19 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 34 ft.; from 60 mph, 183 ft.

SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

Engine

Ohv, in-line 6
Bore: 3.125 ins.
Stroke: 4.25 ins.
Displacement: 195.6 cu. ins.
Compression ratio: 8.7:1
Horsepower: 138 @ 4500 rpm
Torque: 185 lbs.-ft. @ 1800 rpm
Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.74
Carburetion: 1 2-barrel
Ignition: 12-volt coil

Gearbox

3-speed automatic; column-mounted lever

Driveshaft

1-piece, open tube

Differential

Hypoid, semi-floating
Standard ratio: 3.31:1

Suspension

Front: High-mounted, direct-acting independent coil springs and double-acting tubular shocks
Rear: Semi-elliptic springs, with double-acting tubular shocks

Steering

Gemmer worm and roller
Turning diameter: 36.0 ft.
Turns lock to lock: 5 1/4

Wheels and Tires

5-lug, steel disc wheels
6.00 x 14 2-ply tubeless rayon tires

Brakes

Bendix servo action with tandem master cylinders; self-adjusting
Front and rear: 9-in. dia. x 2 ins. wide
Effective lining area: 139.52 sq. ins.

Body and Frame

Single unit construction
Wheelbase: 106.0 ins.
Track: front, 56.0 ins.; rear, 55.0 ins.
Overall length: 177.25 ins.
Curb weight: 2900 lbs. (with full tank of gas)