

Rambler American 440

*The Original Plain Jane Compact Car
Just Got Back From The Beauty Parlor*

IF THE RAMBLER American once was the epitome of economy, both in finish and performance, that image has undergone at least a partial metamorphosis with the introduction of American Motors' 1964 models. The new Americans have a look of quality and luxury of design heretofore little exploited in the field of basic transportation.

The economy of operation is still there, as the test data on this American 440 sedan show, but it now comes as a pleasing by-product rather than as a chief reason for existence (or purchase). The new American comes out looking like the tasteful, well-balanced, sensible small compact the country has been waiting for.

What's so different about the '64 Rambler? For one thing, it now has style, with a capital S. Abounding in

good looks, the '64 has it all over the previous Americans, which looked either A) too bulbous, or B) too boxy. The telephone-booth-on-wheels look has been replaced with simple, honest lines and a minimum of tinsel trim. AMC chief stylist Richard A. Teague should be commended.

For another thing, the '64 American has evolved into a thoroughly dependable, thoroughly reliable piece of machinery. A new front suspension has given it improved roadability, refinements elsewhere give it long life with minimum service requirements. The mechanical components are all conventional, well-proved designs which, if a bit antediluvian, at least perform their individual tasks in admirable efficiency.

Just as all the American Motors efforts went into the big change for the

Classics and Ambassadors in 1963, all that company's resources went into the new American for '64. The result is easily the best American ever.

The change, apparently, was dictated by market demands—sales of the previous Americans slipped considerably during mid-'63, which reflected in a decline in corporate earnings during the third fiscal quarter. While total Rambler sales were setting new records for the company, the sales of Americans were well below those of the previous year. How well does AMC expect the '64 American to do? At introduction time, production of Americans was about 37.5% of the AMC total, where the year before it had been only 25%.

Market demands, too, evidently helped make the decision to change the American to its '64 format. Reflect-

ing the trends of the era, the American is slightly longer, a little lower, sleeker, and a whole lot more spacious inside. The latter factor is a most remarkable achievement, and eliminates one of the major objections to the Rambler American sedans, that of a too-narrow (for more than two people) rear seat.

In figures, the back seat has gained 26.2% width more although the car is actually 1.44 in. narrower. AMC's body engineers did it by increasing the wheelbase, from 100 to 106 in., thereby moving the rear seat just ahead of the restricting rear wheel wells. There

genious adaptation of it to the new product have created similar, yet identifiably different, models.

It all began with AMC's changeover to its "Uniside" system of unit-body construction for the '63 Classic/Ambassador line. In this method, the major components are the door frames, to which are successively welded the stamped-out floor-pan, cowl, roof and rear panels. The resulting body is, according to AMC, "as tough as a hickory nut."

The Uniside system worked so well (there are few, if any, door alignment

though differing little in basic layout, it has a few worthwhile improvements. The front suspension now has molded rubber "Clevebloc" type bushings on the upper trunnion which seal out dirt and retain their silicone lubricant for the life of the car. The lower trunnion has a ball-joint connection to a single lower control arm and steering knuckle (lubrication every 33,000 miles or 3 years). The rear multileaf springs are 7 in. longer (52 in.) and have butyl-rubber center liners, polyethylene tip liners and new "Silentbloc" front bushings. Also, the rear spring eyes are mounted on a higher plane than are the front eyes, so that when the car leans during cornering, a small amount of roll understeer is induced.

Heavy-duty springs are offered both front and rear, to compensate for air conditioning and heavier station wagon bodies; these change the spring rate at the wheel from 69 lb.-in. to 86 lb.-in. in front and from 91 to either 102 or 120 lb.-in. at the rear. The standard shock absorbers have 1-in. pistons, and provide adequate damping action even for the soft standard suspension.

The suspension and general, overall handling were extremely satisfactory to *Car Life's* usually picky editors. The ride was excellent, without the chopping action of a short wheelbase car, and the cornering good, too—once the tires were given more inflation. Standard pressure for the 6.00-14s is 24 psi; pumping the front tires to 28 psi eliminated some of the understeer "fight" and gave easier, surer control. Then the only complaint was about the slow, 29:1 steering ratio of the manual system and that can be improved by the power steering option which has a 21.2:1 overall ratio, and which reduces the steering wheel turns from 6 to 4.3, lock to lock. The manual steering, incidentally, is a worm and roller unit made by Gemmer, the pow-



CLEAN, SMART styling of American is improvement over previous versions, should set into motion an industry-wide trend and also improve sales.

are additional benefits in leg room and trunk space, all in a package which rates as the second smallest 4-door sedan produced in the U.S. (only the Corvair is smaller, 360 cu. ft. vs. 383 cu. ft., in total volume).

The new American represents a clever approach to the problem of increasing size and capacity without increasing cost, or vehicle weight. By utilizing body/chassis dies from already existing models, AMC is able to get maximum use (and lower unit cost) from expensive manufacturing equipment. Careful original design and in-

problems, for one thing) it was decided to adapt it to the new American. By welding narrower (by 3 in.) lateral pieces—cowl, roof, floor, etc.—to same Unisides, a new smaller body was created. To get the shorter wheelbase, the axes of the front and rear wheels were moved relatively closer to the body unit (the Classic/Ambassador has a 112-in. wheelbase), an easy project because of different front and rear fender treatment to create the separate identity.

To go with this new body, the suspension was somewhat up-dated. Al-

TILT-BACK seats are available with Twin Stick transmission option.



HANDLING IS improved with new suspension, though it incorporates little that is different. Higher pressures in front tires also help.



Rambler American 440

er is a recirculating ball system produced by the Saginaw Division of GM.

Maneuverability of the American is, as always, excellent. With the shortest turning circle (36 ft.) of any current U.S. built car, plus very modest front and rear overhangs, the car can be slipped into and out of the tightest parking places, nipped into a traffic "hole" on the freeway and zipped along a winding road with sporting enthusiasm.

American Motors offers three similar engines for the American series, any one of which seems to do the job expected without untoward strain. The basic unit, of course, is the flathead 6-cyl. which enables AMC to offer the lowest-priced cars in the industry. Standard for the high-line 440 models is an overhead valve variation of the same engine; installed in the highest-priced 440-H models, and optional for the others, is a warmed-up 138-bhp version. All three engines share the same block, with a 3.125-in. bore and a 4.25-in. stroke (195.6-cu. in. displacement). The main differences are in the heads, the carburetion, pistons and camshafts.

The flathead engine has 8.0:1 compression, the overheads 8.7:1 from a wedge-top piston rather than a flattop. The flathead has a Carter RBS 1-barrel carburetor of 1.25-in. venturi diameter, the 125-bhp ohv a single, 1.16-in. venturi Holley 1909. The 138-bhp ohv has a 2-barrel Carter WCD, with 1.06-in. venturis. The ohv engines have

244° valve duration, the flathead 248° but slightly less lift, 0.371 vs. 0.324 in. Although cam duration is somewhat less than "wild" and compression and carburetion a bit on the conservative side, the 138's specific output of 0.705 bhp/cu. in. displacement compares favorably with some of the big, hot V-8 options offered elsewhere.

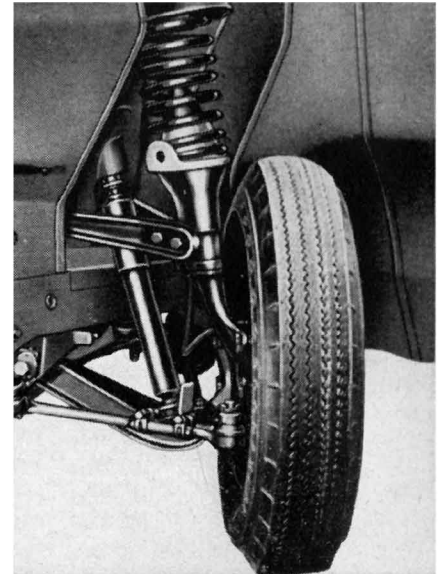
Because of the long-stroke characteristics of the American 6-cyl., the crankshaft revolutions are held to a slower speed than most of its contemporaries; with torque peaks at only 1600 rpm (flathead) and 1800 rpm (ohv), there's little need to turn them fast. As a result, AMC puts axle ratios into the Americans to allow them to go humming down the highways at relatively few rpm. This reflects in the lesser fuel consumption that is characteristic of Rambler operation. In the case of our overdrive-equipped test car, the engine turns only 2900 rpm at 65-mph cruising speed on the freeways. Our lowest fuel consumption was 19 mpg, while the best accomplished by our office lightfoot, was an amazing 23.6 mpg. Overall, for the first 1000 miles of testing, the fuel consumption rate was 20.1 mpg.

Performance doesn't seem to suffer from this astringency, either. The acceleration is quite brisk, for such a modestly powered vehicle. Undoubtedly aiding performance, however, is the 3.78:1 rear axle ratio specified for overdrive-equipped cars. This gives a 9.87:1 multiplication in 1st, and 7.72:1

in 2nd gear. Overdrive (0.70) drops the final drive to 2.64:1; the lowest gear ratio for other manual or automatic transmission Americans is 2.73—the Mobilgas Economy Run gearing.

The test car had Rambler's "Twin Stick" shift lever arrangement, which works out well once the driver gets used to having two shift levers sprouting from where there's normally but one. The arrangement facilitates both upshifting and downshifting, and, in effect, gives the driver four good usable forward gears. Second overdrive is impractical, as it (1.34) is too close to 3rd normal (1.00); the same applies to 1st overdrive (1.83) which is too close to 2nd normal (1.91), although both can be reached by the simple expedient of exceeding the minimum cut-in speed of 25 mph.

With the Twin Stick/console option comes Rambler's fine individually adjustable seats. These allow even Neanderthally-shaped drivers to achieve a comfortable driving posture.



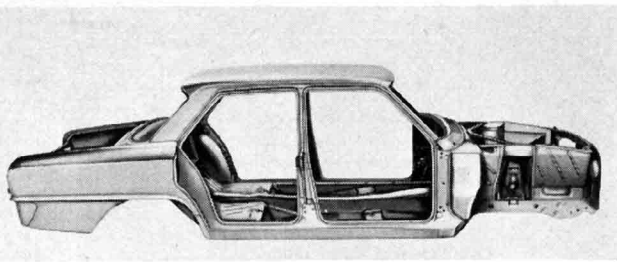
FRONT-END components are redesigned, use rubber-bushed trunnion.

SMALL OVERHANG makes parking, nipping through traffic easier. Front and rear bumpers are identical.

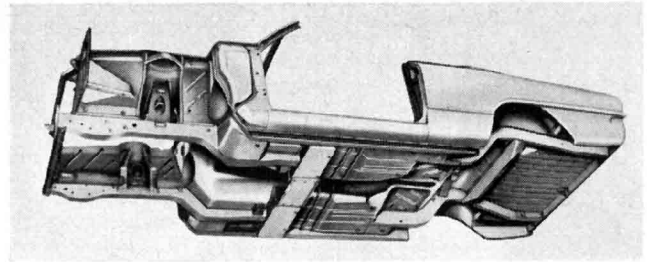


TIME-PROVED Six, in ohv form with 2-barrel carburetor, has plenty of working space surrounding it under hood.





BASIC BODY structure, called "Uniside," begins taking shape with side panels which are shared with Classic.



UNDERBODY PANELS are jig-welded to sides, for sturdy unitized structure. Convertible has extra strengthening.

Elsewhere in the interior we checked off a high quality of both material and workmanship in all but one place. The headlining, a self-supporting one-piece formation of Royalite plastic, sagged and flapped. Its texture, reminiscent of cardboard left out in the rain too long, and motley color didn't quite harmonize with the rest of the interior. A sticking throttle pedal also disappointed

the testers as it made coordinated, smooth gearshifts virtually impossible.

What of the rest of the interior: it's finished (in the 440) in good loop pile carpeting, sturdy side and door panels, and what looks to be a long-wearing upholstery fabric. The curved glass windows slide up and down with only a light touch on the cranks.

How good is this new Rambler

American? Generally, *Car Life's* editors thought it very good, an outstanding value in transportation. Will it hold up under hard, everyday usage? The *Car Life* staff will put 10,000 test miles on this particular specimen and make a supplementary report on its findings. From all preliminary indications, it looks as if it will be a very enjoyable 10,000 miles. ■

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



1964 RAMBLER AMERICAN Model 440—4-door sedan

SPECIFICATIONS

List price.....	\$2139
Price, as tested.....	2660
Curb weight, lb.....	2630
Test weight.....	2960
distribution, %.....	57.3/42.7
Tire size.....	6.00-14
Tire capacity, lb @ 24 psi.....	3200
Brake swept area.....	226.2
Engine type.....	IL-6, ohv
Bore & stroke.....	3.125 x 4.25
Displacement, cu in.....	195.6
Compression ratio.....	8.7
Carburetion.....	1 x 2
Bhp @ rpm.....	138 @ 4500
equivalent mph.....	112
Torque, lb-ft.....	185 @ 1800
equivalent mph.....	48

EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

Overdrive 138-bhp engine, reclining seats, radio, outside mirror, safety belts, w.s. washer.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.....	106.0
Tread, f and r.....	56/55
Over-all length, in.....	177.3
width.....	68.6
height.....	54.5
equivalent vol, cu ft.....	383.5
Frontal area, sq ft.....	20.8
Ground clearance, in.....	6.0
Steering ratio, o/a.....	29.0
turns, lock to lock.....	6.0
turning circle, ft.....	36.0
Hip room, front.....	2 x 22.5
Hip room, rear.....	57.1
Pedal to seat back, max.....	40.0
Floor to ground.....	9.5
Luggage vol, cu ft.....	12.0
Fuel tank capacity, gal.....	16.0

GEAR RATIOS

4th (0.70), overdrive.....	2.64
3rd (1.00).....	3.78
2nd (1.91).....	7.72
1st (2.61).....	9.87

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (3500), mph (o/d).....	95
Shifts, @ mph (manual)	
3rd (4500).....	85
2nd (4500).....	44
1st (4500).....	32

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.....	5.3
0-40.....	7.9
0-50.....	11.2
0-60.....	15.3
0-70.....	20.0
0-80.....	25.5
0-90.....	35.4
Standing 1/4 mile, sec.....	20.2
speed at end, mph.....	71

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg.....	19-23
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SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual.....	27.6
60 mph.....	56.7
90 mph.....	85.8

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt).....	21.4
Cu ft/ton mile.....	84.0
Mph/1000 rpm.....	26.9
Engine revs/mile (od).....	2230
Piston travel, ft/mile.....	1895
Car Life wear index.....	42.5

PULLING POWER

70 mph, (3rd) max. gradient, %.....	8.5
50..... (3rd).....	14.0
30..... (1st).....	28.5
Total drag at 60 mph, lb.....	145

