

# Rambler Classic V-8

*There are Advantages, and Problems, in Stabling a Few Extra Ponies*

**A**MONG THE INTERESTING features of the 1964 Rambler Classic are a pair of fairly recent developments from American Motors. First, there's the 287-cu. in. version of AMC's V-8 engine and, second, there's a "Shift Command" variation for its 3-speed automatic transmission. If these seem to spell out improved performance for the middle-line Ramblers, it's because that is just what was intended and just what was accomplished.

The Rambler Ambassador has never been a sluggard in the performance department, dating back to the days of the infamous Rambler Rebel (which, if memory serves correctly, actually competed in a few NASCAR track races). But the Classic, which essentially has been a cheaper Ambassador with a 6-cyl. engine, hasn't had such notoriety; its forte, like the Rambler American, has been in putting in a lot of distance between gasoline stations. Both, however, are considered to be

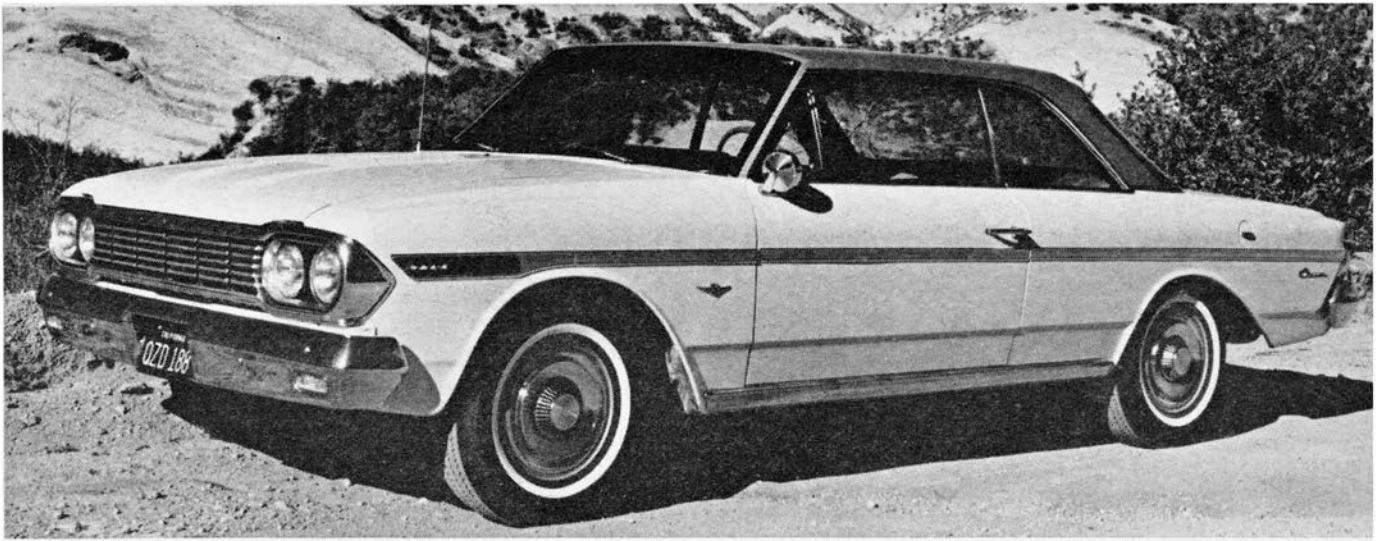
excellent road cars by their owners, the biggest difference being that one gets you there a little quicker, the other gets you there a little more economically.

The power for the Ambassador, of course, comes from a husky V-8 engine of 327 cu. in. displacement; that for the standard Classic from a 195.6-cu. in., in-line 6-cyl. Obviously, there is a great gap between the two, both in price and type of performance, which is emphasized by the second generation movement of the compact car market. So, to compete in the current trend toward smooth, strong power in lower-priced cars, AMC has created an in-between option; the 287-cu. in. V-8 in the Classic.

This competes nicely in power and performance with the 283 V-8 Chevy II and Chevelle, the 289-cu. in. V-8 Fairlane, the 260-cu. in. V-8 Falcon and the new 273-cu. in. V-8 Valiants and Darts just announced by Chrysler

Corp. These cars are all testimony to the fact that extra power, as a luxury option, is a mighty salable item in today's automotive market. At AMC, the V-8 power adds \$105 to the retail price tag of the Classic, which, the *Car Life* editors feel, is a bargain in disguise.

Along with the obviously better performance, and more power available to operate accessories such as air conditioning and power steering, the Classic V-8 buyer gets improvements in electrical system, brakes, suspension and drive train components over those in the 6-cyl. Classic. What he gets, for less cost and the sacrifice of a few cu. in. displacement, is an Ambassador. There are, however, differing qualities of upholstery and finish between the two, although a Classic 770 hardtop, like this month's test Rambler, has an extremely high "plush" factor. Comparing the two for price, the Classic 770 V-8 hardtop lists at



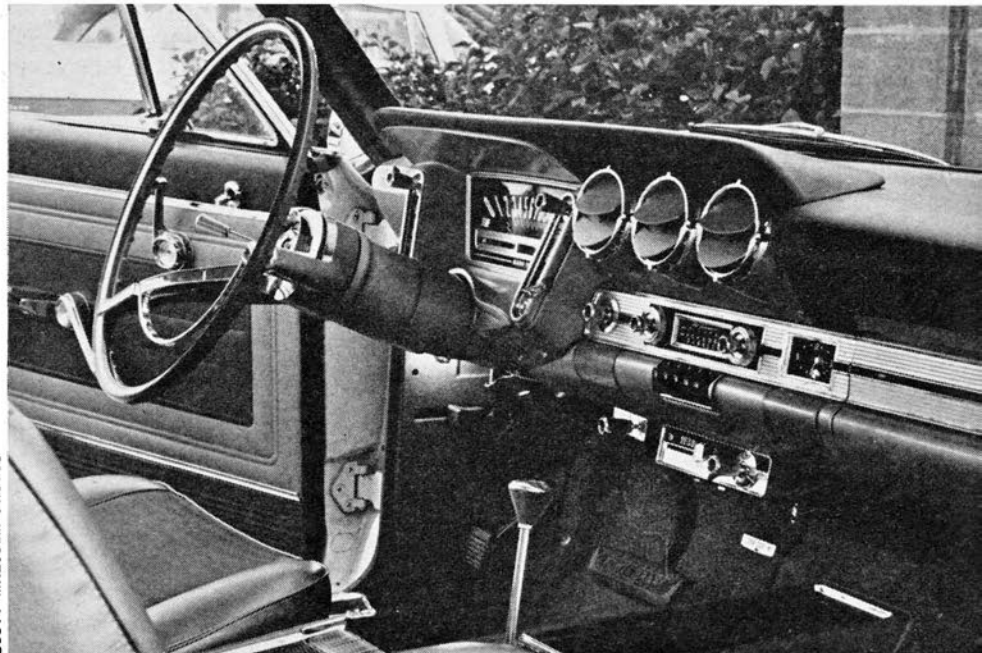
\$2491, the Ambassador 990 hardtop for \$2906.

The need for suspension and drive train changes from the Classic Six is created by the additional weight and performance of the V-8 engine. The official specifications show that the V-8 option adds 360 lb. to the total weight, while an automatic transmission adds another 30 and air conditioning (as on the test car) yet another 81 lb. Performance, as compared with that of a Classic 6-cyl. (Road Test, Jan. '63 CL), shows a 10% improvement in both acceleration and top speed.

The brakes are Bendix duo-servo instead of Wagner servo-action, with 10-in. diameter drums rather than the 9-in. of the Six. Gross lining area is increased from 153.8 to 167.5 sq. in. while the swept drum area, reflecting the 1-in. larger diameter, increases from 254.4 to 267.1 sq. in. Both systems use AMC's dual master cylinder, a tandem arrangement of the master pistons which gives separate braking systems to front and rear pairs of wheels. Wheels and tires also are larger: 5.5K-14 vs. 5K-14 wheels and 7.50-14 tires instead of 6.50-14s.

Stiffer springs help absorb the additional weight placed over the front wheels, and these are rated at 77 lb./in. at the wheels, where the 6-cyl. has 73 lb./in. Rear spring rates remain the same at 96 lb./in. With the V-8 engine, however, the front suspension gains an anti-roll bar of 0.75-in. diameter, which considerably helps the Classic's down-the-road stability. Heavy-duty springs and shock absorbers are made optional in several strengths and combinations.

A larger capacity cooling system is required for the V-8 and this takes 19 qt. instead of the Six's 10.5 qt. The 4-bladed fan's diameter is increased from 14 to 18 in., but it runs at a slower speed (92% of crankshaft speed



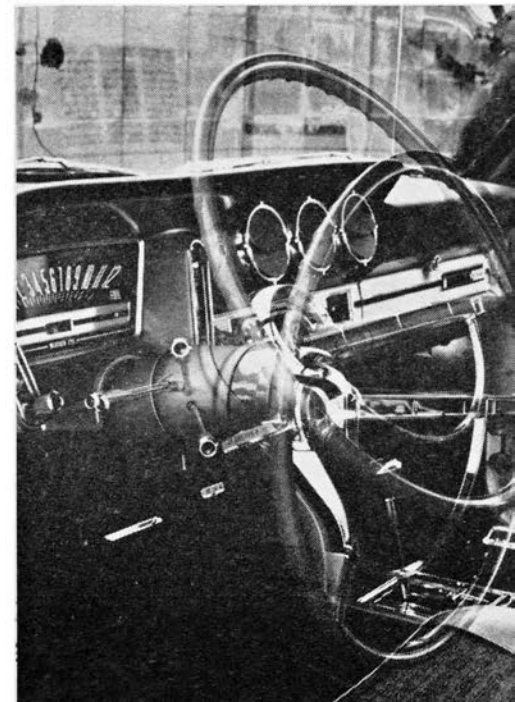
SCOTT MALCOLM PHOTOS

**PROFUSION OF LEVERS, gauges, switches and vents greets the driver of the air-conditioned, FM-equipped Classic. A logical, orderly grouping is needed. Shift lever is in console.**

**TILTING WHEEL option is an aid to the driver, but adds one more lever to the confusion.**

vs. 122% as on the Six). A heavy-duty cooling option, which goes with the air-conditioning installation, has a 7-bladed fan with a viscous-drive hub.

Obviously, the placement of the V-8 engine in a spot formerly occupied by a fairly lightweight 6-cyl. engine can create a basketful of handling problems. It was no surprise that our Classic V-8 test car didn't corner as securely as did our 1963 Classic 6-cyl. specimen. The Classic V-8's cornering posture is classic understeer, magnified. The faster the speed into the corner, or the tighter the corner becomes, the greater the pressure needed on the steering wheel rim. The Classic plows through corners with the front trying to maintain a straight line. And, to complicate matters, the lightly loaded rear (only 41.3% of the total weight) has a tendency to skip about, breaking





# Rambler Classic V-8

traction at the slightest provocation of throttle particularly on a loose or damp road surface.

The weight and distribution figures, of course, are for the 2-door hardtop model. A 4-door sedan, or 4-door station wagon, would have a much more workable balance. In fact, the Classic 770 Station Wagon, with V-8 engine and automatic transmission, would work out to a 53/47% distribution, before being loaded with passengers and/or luggage. The 6-cyl. wagon, it should be noted, has a 50/50 distribution, unloaded.

The engine itself is a fairly conventional design, albeit a little heavy for its current application. Dating back to 1956, when it was introduced for the big Ramblers and '57 Nashes and

Hudsons, it features a deep Y-block for extra stiffness, a forged crankshaft, short connecting rods, oversquare bore and stroke (the 287 has a 3.75 in. bore to the 327's 4.00 in., but both use the same 3.25-in.-stroke crankshaft), hydraulic valve lifters, solid pushrods, cast rockers and a wedge-shaped combustion chamber. Everything about it is designed for minimum wear and long service.

As used in the Classic, the AMC V-8 has 8.7:1 compression, a 2-barrel carburetor and 244° camshaft timing. It produces 198 bhp at 4700 rpm and 280 ft.-lb. torque at 2600 rpm. In its hotter, larger form, in the Ambassador, it yields 270 bhp and 360 ft.-lb. with a 4-barrel carburetor and 9.7:1 compression. By comparison, the

standard Classic 6-cyl. gives only 127 bhp and 180 ft.-lb. torque, so the Classic V-8 has around 55% more power from the very start.

Available with this V-8 engine is Rambler's usual variety of transmissions: 3-speed manual, 3-speed with overdrive, automatic and the automatic with the new "Shift Command" feature. This latter item was included in the test car's equipment, so a brief outline of its function is in order. Where the normal "Flash-O-Matic" transmission (actually a 3-speed plus torque converter unit built by Borg-Warner) has three ranges, L, D1, D2, the Shift Command has three speeds forward (the same ratios as the Flash-O), 1st, 2nd and 3rd, each with a gate in the gear selector lever's pattern. Comparatively, they select gears in these sequences:

Shift Command	Flash-O-Matic
D—2nd and 3rd	D1—1st, 2nd and 3rd
2—2nd gear	D2—2nd and 3rd gears
1—1st gear	L—1st gear

So, while the normal automatic shift patterns probably are a little more versatile in their operation, the console-mounted Shift Command does allow better control of engine and car speed. This came into good play during our acceleration tests, where we had to extract maximum rpm from the engine.

Straight-line performance may be a bit disappointing to the enthusiast, at least at first. Although decidedly more brisk than the 6-cyl. Classic, the V-8 seems to take a disproportionate amount of time to achieve 50 mph. From 50 to 80, however, acceleration is pleasantly and reassuringly strong, and much improved over the 6-cyl. versions.

We can attribute some of the sluggishness to a long, long gear ratio and the plethora of gadgets equipping this particular car. First, with a 2.87:1 axle ratio, the engine turns only 2270 rpm per mile (26.5 mph per 1000 rpm), which is definitely on the slow side. More rpm would give more pep—and manual transmission V-8s are equipped with a 3.54:1 ratio which should make their performance much more rousing (like 21.5 mph/1000 rpm). Second, the biggest power-robbing culprits are: air conditioner, power steering, alternator and fan. Totaled up, they can drain as much as 20% of the car's horsepower before it can reach the rear wheels.

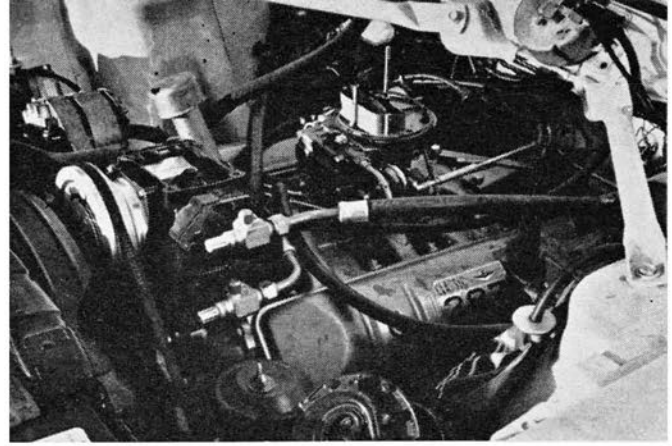
The Classic V-8's big advantage, however, is that it has enough surplus power to pull these accessories and still drive the car along at a respectable clip. And this is where the Classic V-8 shines—effortless expressway driving. The long gear allows the engine to tick over slowly, and fairly economically.

**TWO-DOOR HARDTOP** styling is new to Classic and Ambassador lines this year, calls for 1.5-in. lower roof and windshield.





**TRUNK SPACE** is adequate, even though horizontally-mounted spare tire eats up part of it; box is radio reverberator unit.



**HUSKY 287-CU. IN. V-8** is also a little hefty for the Classic. Extra power provides plenty for gadgets and smooth cruising.

The styling of the hardtop is new to AMC in '64 and comes off extremely well in line and proportion. The interior could use some restraint: Although equipped with the industry's slickest ashtray, (it operates on ball bearings), the dash is a jumble of levers and switches and gauges and

warning lights. This carry-over from the last series of Ramblers offers a prime area for improvement.

Thus *Car Life* found the '64 Rambler Classic V-8 to be long on comfort (particularly when equipped with AMC's own reclining bucket seats) and cruising ability, more than able to hold

its own in fast freeway traffic flow, but short on cornering and jack-rabbit acceleration. Its solid good-looks (with the exceptions noted) give it an extra boost in the ratings and its low (at least initially) price puts it within the reach of a great many more new-car buyers. ■

## CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



### 1964 RAMBLER Classic 770 Hardtop

#### SPECIFICATIONS

List price.....	\$2491
Price, as tested.....	\$3744
Curb weight, lb.....	3430
Test weight.....	3760
distribution, %.....	58.7/41.3
Tire size.....	7.50-14
Tire capacity, lb.....	4340
Brake swept area.....	267.1
Engine type.....	V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke.....	3.75 x 3.25
Displacement, cu. in.....	287
Compression ratio.....	8.7
Carburetion.....	1 x 2
Bhp @ rpm.....	198 @ 4700
equivalent mph.....	125
Torque, lb-ft.....	280 @ 2600
equivalent mph.....	69

#### EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

Shift Command auto. trans., air cond., reclining bucket seats, am/fm radio, wsw tires, tinted windshield, safety belts, tilting steering wheel, power steering, power brakes.

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.....	112.0
Tread, f & r.....	58.6/57.5
Overall length, in.....	190.0
width.....	71.3
height.....	54.2
equivalent vol, cu. ft.....	425
Frontal area, sq. ft.....	21.4
Ground clearance, in.....	6.0
Steering ratio, o/a.....	28.4
turns, lock to lock.....	6.0
turning circle, ft.....	37.2
Hip room, front.....	2 x 22
Hip room, rear.....	60.1
Pedal to seat back, max.....	39.0
Floor to ground.....	10.0
Luggage vol, cu. ft.....	13.7
Fuel tank capacity, gal.....	19.0

#### GEAR RATIOS

3rd (1.00) overall.....	2.87
2nd (1.47).....	4.22
1st (2.40).....	6.87
1st (2.40 x 2.12).....	14.45

#### PERFORMANCE

Top speed (3800), mph.....	100
Shifts, @ mph (forced)	
3rd ( ).....	
2nd (4400).....	80
1st (4600).....	51

#### ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.....	4.7
0-40.....	6.7
0-50.....	8.8
0-60.....	11.6
0-70.....	15.6
0-80.....	22.0
0-90.....	31.3
Standing 1/4 mile, sec.....	18.8
speed at end, mph.....	77

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg.....	15-18
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#### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual.....	27.6
60 mph.....	57.0
90 mph.....	84.0

#### CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt).....	18.9
Cu ft/ton mile.....	101
Mph/1000 rpm.....	26.5
Engine revs/mile.....	2270
Piston travel, ft/mile.....	1230
Car Life wear index.....	27.9

#### PULLING POWER

90 mph, max. gradient, %.....	4.8
70 mph (2nd).....	13.2
50 (1st).....	22.0
30 (1st).....	27.5
Total drag at 60 mph, lb.....	120

