

CAR LIFE  
EXTENDED  
ROAD TEST

# 1964 RAMBLER American 440 Sedan

*Can a Motorist Find Happiness in this Rambler?  
10,000 Miles Proved it Peppy and Parsimonious*

# RAMBLER



RALPH POOLE PHOTOS

FRESH, CRISP styling of the '64 Rambler Americans immediately attracts the potential buyer. Four-door sedan has generous interior space for such a reasonably-sized exterior.

**T**HERE REALLY had been no question but that the Rambler American 440 would turn out to be the most economical of the three long-term test cars in this project. And indeed it was, operating for 9002 miles at a cost of \$0.0181 per mile running expense.

A total of 444.0 gal. of gasoline, sometimes regular but more often premium, went through the American's fuel system, at a total recorded cost of \$162.96. The latter included 5 qt. of oil added during the two months, plus an oil change, new filter and wash job at 3850 miles. Overall fuel mileage, then, was 20.26 mpg for the varied types of service to which the car was subjected—long trips, about-town errands and two full sessions of acceleration trials and Tapley pull tests.

And the Rambler, more than the other two cars, showed significant improvement in performance with the miles as the various rotating and reciprocating parts settled into wear patterns of least friction. With its long-stroke Six struggling to generate 138 bhp and propel the car's 2960 lb. test weight, the American's increased sprightliness was evident even without the testing equipment to measure it.

The power peak on this engine is at 4500 rpm, a level nearly impossible to achieve. Choking off the ability to wind up are, among other things, a mild 244° camshaft duration and a log manifold-mounted 2-barrel Carter carburetor with 1.06-in. venturis. When we attempted a right-handed corner with any enthusiasm, the carburetor had a habit of sloshing its fuel charge to one side and starving the engine until centrifugal forces were reduced—by either slowing down or straightening out the line through the bend. The throttle linkage on the test car also exhibited a continual tendency to bind, at the point where the accelerator pedal slid along the flattened rod. The re-

sulting throttle openings were either too much or too little.

Lest this be taken as overly critical, we should add that the engine provided quite adequate performance to go with its economy for every driving condition outside of all out exuberance. The torque peak was reached at 1800 rpm, where all 185 lb.-ft. funneled through the transmission. That was 30 mph in direct high. In the final test, more than 3 sec. was consistently lopped off the 0-80 and almost 1.5 sec. off the 0-60 times. In the 50-70 speed range, the engine also was able to generate more pull for our Tapley Meter after the mileage had added up.

This engine is the most powerful of three available for the American and would appear to be the best choice for the driving conditions encountered by most Americans. It was the 3-speed plus overdrive transmission, controlled by Rambler's "Twin Stick" shifter arrangement in the console, which actually was at the root of our discontent.

A final drive ratio of 3.78:1 was installed in the test car, with the result that first gear was too low to be of much usefulness. Second gear provided too short a spacing and was itself low enough to serve quite adequately to start from rest. Direct high gear, then, had to do most of the work, with an engine of such small means, obviously not too satisfactory a situation. However, 2nd-overdrive could be brought into play (providing a ratio of 1.34:1) despite its closeness to 3rd-direct and 3rd-overdrive (actually a 0.70:1 ratio) was most welcome at cruising speeds.

The use of two shift levers, one of which merely engages or disengages the overdrive, took a bit of getting used to but once mastered proved to be a convenient method of controlling the recalcitrant gearing. The gearshift

lever had a button in the top to control kickdown out of overdrive, if the other lever had the planetaries plugged in. The shift linkage and the synchronizers within the transmission were often faulted, resulting in grinding gears and a concerted effort to put the gearbox into play. The balkiness was such that one of the decorative plastic plates under the console cover was the first thing to go, splintering with a loud snap shortly after we started the test; and, also, the unit had a disconcerting tendency to jump out of reverse.

Demerits must also be meted out to the steering, a non-power-assisted arrangement which required six turns between locks, for an overall ratio of 29:1. There is little reason for such an excess of turns or for the extra measure of brute muscle required to turn the wheel of a car of this size. Then, too, anyone who drives an American for any length of time will be no stranger to road shock transmitted through the front wheels. An integral-type Saginaw power assist unit is optional for this car and would be an improvement, despite its added weight, eliminating all such complaints. The basic nimbleness of the car, unhampered by excessive front or rear overhang, and its delightfully narrow turning circle of 36 ft. demand better than this standard steering system.

Increased tire pressures, which mitigated only slightly against the steering handicap, proved an effective method of improving upon the American's already good road manners. A pressure of 28 psi in front effectively changed the tire bite just enough to hold the car's understeering tendencies within quite comfortable bounds. The weight distribution of our test car, however, was another matter. When snow or ice is encountered (or even rain-slick pavement), the lightly-loaded rear end does a lot of slipping and sliding about. Nevertheless, the ride is a good blend of firm/soft, with the workings of the wheels over rough surfaces quite audible though seldom felt. Shock damping is on a high order and, despite a spring rate that permits softness of ride and considerable body lean on cornering, the car is well snubbed against road irregularities and sudden dips.

As mentioned elsewhere, the brakes were a bit of a bother. Nor is this particularly surprising on an overdrive-equipped car, lacking as it does any effect of compression braking from the engine. When first tested, the brakes registered a creditable 23 ft./sec./sec. deceleration, but exhibited serious fade after the first such stop. After 9000 miles, the effectiveness had slipped to 19 (equivalent to only 0.578 G) and the "fadeability factor" had substantially increased. This is not particularly

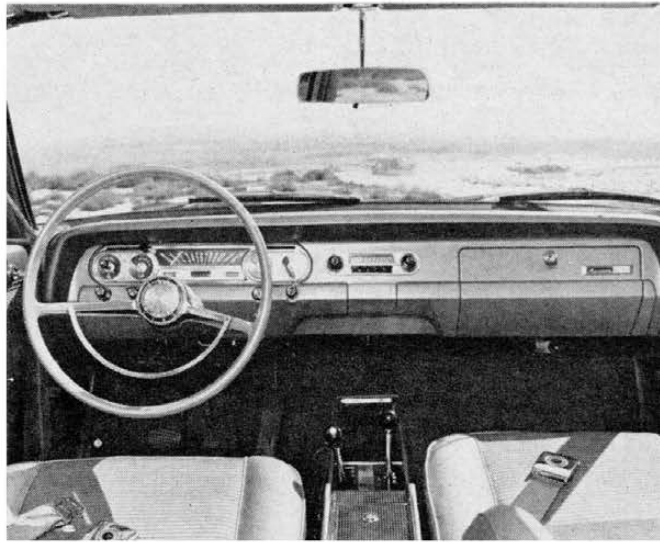


a criticism of the American alone, since it is a characteristic all too common with the modern domestic car. Also, the light rear weight tended to cause those wheels to lock up all too quickly.

Among those domestic passenger cars, the driving position of the American must be ranked with the best. The angle and height of the steering wheel was quite good and the wheel was located at an excellent compromise distance from the seat back, for those who prefer the extra control of extended-arms driving style. The seat cushion sits slightly high, a necessity to accommodate the passengers between the wells of the 106-in. wheelbase, and with the proportionally low beltline and consequently high window area the driver has an imposing command of the scenery—except for a serious blind spot caused by the rearview mirror. Seat backs, which reclined in our bucket seat test car, add to driving comfort not only by angle adjustment, but also by design: the lower edge projects over the cushion just enough to provide good support for the small of the driver's back.

Rear seat passengers were also well cared for, with generous foot, leg and knee room for a car of this size, although the seat depth was somewhat skimpy and the headroom seemed slightly restricted.

There is little point in repeating what was said in the earlier test about



**AMERICAN INSTRUMENT PANEL** is simple, but needs better organizing. Twin-Stick arrangement has kick-down button atop transmission lever.

the American's body structure except to say that the 9002 miles had little adverse effect on its strength or well-known durability. Interior appointments which seemed quite luxurious during the first test continued to hold that appeal, with the added advantage of a demonstrated durability for such things as floor rugs, upholstery materials and door paneling.

However, for Rambler to maintain its reputation of quality construction, additional effort is called for in detail finish. The little things that drive owners to distraction and dealers to drink seemed to afflict the test car. It was a veritable Keystone Kops episode when the testers started on the final session: The lock on the console dropped off and clattered across the floor, the vanity mirror on the passenger's visor

popped into his lap, assorted screws, nuts and lock washers from points unknown were piled in the glove box, and the transmission jumped out of gear before the clutch could be engaged.

The American is such a beautiful example of a stylist's *tour de force* that such shortcomings are all the more glaring. From a styling standpoint, only its instrument cluster can be singled out as *gauche*—almost grotesque—and there is every reason to expect that this will be changed in subsequent models. Staff members without exception, upon seeing the car for the first time and reading its speci-

fications, could hardly conceal their enthusiasm. After some time behind the wheel, however, a somewhat more somber judgment was often the case.

Can the auto enthusiast find happiness behind the wheel of a Rambler American? The answer to that depends, more than anything else, on the transmission selected. American Motors also lists a full variety of wheel and tire sizes for the American, particularly for the rural user, but useful to others. The car is parsimonious, peppy and has more than a little pulchritude. Perhaps with the automatic transmission (or even the standard 3-speed) and power steering (the weight bias really isn't any worse than some) and a set of screwdrivers, it may well be possible for true love to flower. ■

## CAR LIFE EXTENDED ROAD TEST

### 1964 RAMBLER American 440 4-door Sedan

#### SPECIFICATIONS & DATA

Price, as tested.....	\$2660
Test weight, lb.....	2960
distribution, % f/r.....	57.3/42.7
lb./bhp.....	21.4
Tire size.....	6.00-14
Brake swept area, sq. in.....	226.2
Wheelbase, in.....	106.0
Tread, f/r, in.....	56/55
Overall length, in.....	177.3
width.....	68.6
height.....	54.5
Fuel tank capacity, gal.....	16.0
Engine type.....	IL-6, ohv
displacement, cu. in.....	195.6
bhp @ rpm.....	138 @ 4500
torque, lb.-ft. @ rpm.....	185 @ 1800
Mph/1000 rpm (o/d).....	26.9
Engine revs/mile (o/d).....	2230
Car Life Wear Index.....	42.5

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

#### ACCELERATION

	1000 miles	(corr.)	9002
0-30 mph, sec.....	5.3	(4.9)	4.0
0-40.....	7.9	(7.3)	6.3
0-50.....	11.2	(10.2)	10.0
0-60.....	15.3	(14.4)	13.3
0-70.....	20.0	(19.8)	17.5
0-80.....	25.5	(27.2)	22.7
0-90.....	35.4	—	22.7
Standing ¼-mile, sec.....	20.2	—	18.7
speed at end, mph.....	71	—	73

#### PULLING POWER

70 mph (3rd), max. gradient, %.....	8.5	9.3
50.....(3rd).....	14.0	16.7
30.....(1st).....	28.5	28.7

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

444.0 gal. for 9002 miles.....	20.26 mpg
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