

Buick dealers now offer three Opel models to those who want economy, luggage space, plus room for four



OPEL KADETT & CARAVAN 1000 ROAD TEST

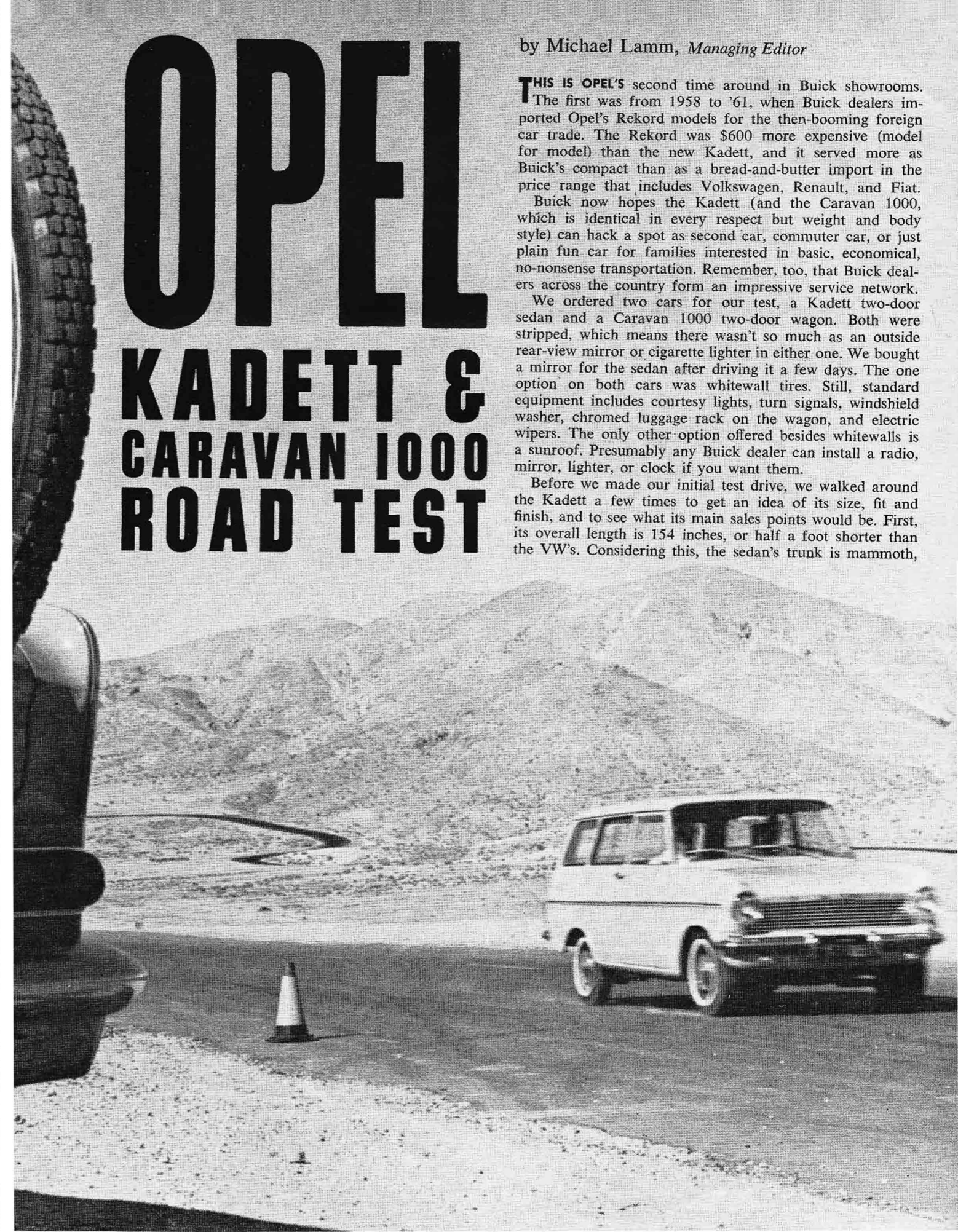
by Michael Lamm, *Managing Editor*

THIS IS OPEL'S second time around in Buick showrooms. The first was from 1958 to '61, when Buick dealers imported Opel's Rekord models for the then-booming foreign car trade. The Rekord was \$600 more expensive (model for model) than the new Kadett, and it served more as Buick's compact than as a bread-and-butter import in the price range that includes Volkswagen, Renault, and Fiat.

Buick now hopes the Kadett (and the Caravan 1000, which is identical in every respect but weight and body style) can hack a spot as second car, commuter car, or just plain fun car for families interested in basic, economical, no-nonsense transportation. Remember, too, that Buick dealers across the country form an impressive service network.

We ordered two cars for our test, a Kadett two-door sedan and a Caravan 1000 two-door wagon. Both were stripped, which means there wasn't so much as an outside rear-view mirror or cigarette lighter in either one. We bought a mirror for the sedan after driving it a few days. The one option on both cars was whitewall tires. Still, standard equipment includes courtesy lights, turn signals, windshield washer, chromed luggage rack on the wagon, and electric wipers. The only other option offered besides whitewalls is a sunroof. Presumably any Buick dealer can install a radio, mirror, lighter, or clock if you want them.

Before we made our initial test drive, we walked around the Kadett a few times to get an idea of its size, fit and finish, and to see what its main sales points would be. First, its overall length is 154 inches, or half a foot shorter than the VW's. Considering this, the sedan's trunk is mammoth,



with every bit as much room as a Corvair's. And the wagon, with the second seat folded flat, can carry anything you could stuff into a full-sized Ford. So from that standpoint, Opel has done a tremendous, almost impossible job.

As for seating, there's room for four adults, with fairly generous leg room in the back seat and no complaint at all from the driver or front-seat passenger. Opel has managed to get rid of front wheel-well encroachment by using tiny tires. The pedals are nicely spaced, without the cramped feeling or offset arrangement you get in most small imports.

Quality proved first-rate throughout — every bit as good as any Buick's. Both our test cars were well painted, well put together, and well upholstered. All seats are covered with thick, durable plastic, and our only complaint would be that the sedan (but not the wagon) still uses a mouse-hair headliner, which is impossible to clean.

As for driving these cars, they're as light and sure as anything we've been in. Steering, especially, feels like there's power behind it. One finger is all it takes to turn the wheel from lock to lock, even when the cars are standing still. On the road, it's precise and quick, with 3/4 turns to its amazingly tight 31-foot turning arc. An Opel can make a U-turn in a length and a half of a Cadillac.

Engine behavior takes a little getting used to. Being over-square (2.40-inch stroke to a 2.84-inch bore), the in-line Four gets its power at a fairly high rpm. That means you have to slip the clutch somewhat to get the car rolling, and once it's going you have to keep it wound up tight. But the engine doesn't mind screaming, and the excellent, all-synchro four-speed box lets you wind her out to very reasonable speeds in the lower gears. For instance, you almost have to shift to third to go up a hill of even the slightest grade. Yet third will take you up to 60 mph and hold you there, so there's not much lost by shifting. Likewise, second's good for almost 40, giving plenty of high-rpm punch around town. The gearbox is a delight to use, so you develop a tendency to appreciate the engine's demands rather than censure them.

These cars handle with an amazing amount of comfort and aplomb. They lean very little around corners, stick well when pushed hard, don't tend to slide out from under you. All in all, they give a surprising sense of security despite their small size. Their main enemy as far as handling goes is wind, and they're very sensitive to it — at least as much as a rear-engined car.

Acceleration isn't outstanding, but it's adequate for anyone who's mostly concerned with fuel economy. When we did our timed acceleration tests at Willow Springs, we also staged some drag races between the sedan and wagon and found out some strange things. The cars have identical engines, identical rear axle ratios, and use the same running gear. Otherwise, everything else favors the sedan — it's lighter by 110 pounds, has a more aerodynamic shape, uses smaller tires. As expected, the sedan would leap off the line well ahead of the wagon, and by the 1/8-mile mark, would be 1 1/2 car lengths ahead. But after this, with both drivers chuffing at nearly the same rpm, the wagon would inch up until at the end of the quarter it was even. In fact, in two out of three drags, the wagon edged out the sedan slightly. In one, the sedan led by about the same margin.

We later found, too, that the wagon would out-pull the sedan up hills. There's no reasonable explanation except



PHOTOS BY PAT BROLIER



1) Opel sedan and wagon share fine cornering characteristics, with very little lean and good control over rough dirt roads.
2) In drag race between two cars, sedan edged out wagon once, wagon took the sedan twice. See text for additional details.

that all cars have slight unintentional differences. You do find faster and slower cars of the same make and power.

As well as the Opels handle, their ride is predictably less satisfying. Small tires, short wheelbase, and light weight combine to give a choppy, jostling ride. Add to this the hard seats (which we like — soft seats are tiring), and it makes for a little less than extreme comfort. But people interested in this sort of car can usually overlook this, and actually there's no reason why they shouldn't.

There's a lot to be said for and about the driver's compartment. First, the seats are high, with a good, straight back. You can see all four fenders from the driver's seat. Dials in the dashboard are for temperature and fuel, with a row of different-colored lights for oil pressure, high beam, turn signals, and generator. These are so bright they're almost dazzling at night. The ignition switch has a "G" position (for "garage"), which means you can start the car without a key. And in "L" or "lock," a pin arrangement automatically hangs up the steering wheel to foil thieves.

Over on the far left, right beside the door, there's a choke knob. You usually need this to start in the morning, and we liked it better than an automatic choke, which we find doesn't always work properly. Our complaint with this choke, though, was that with it pulled out, you hit your hand on it when rolling down the front window. Opel should move the choke knob nearer the center of the dash.

Another minor nuisance is the speedometer. It uses a red ribbon that moves across a scale of numbers. In the first place, the numbers are in 20-mph increments, and that leaves too much to quick calculation. Second, you never know if you should read the top of the ribbon or the bottom, and there's about five mph difference, since its leading edge is slanted.

Opel's heater, which is standard, has controls that are almost identical with Buick's of about two years ago. It has three levers: one controlling a two-speed fan, one letting in warm air, and the third letting in cool air. The heater itself is more like a stove — it puts out enough BTUs for a car twice the Opel's size, and it does this quickly. Besides the dash-controlled vent, the front windwings are adjustable, and in both the sedan and wagon, the rear windows open.

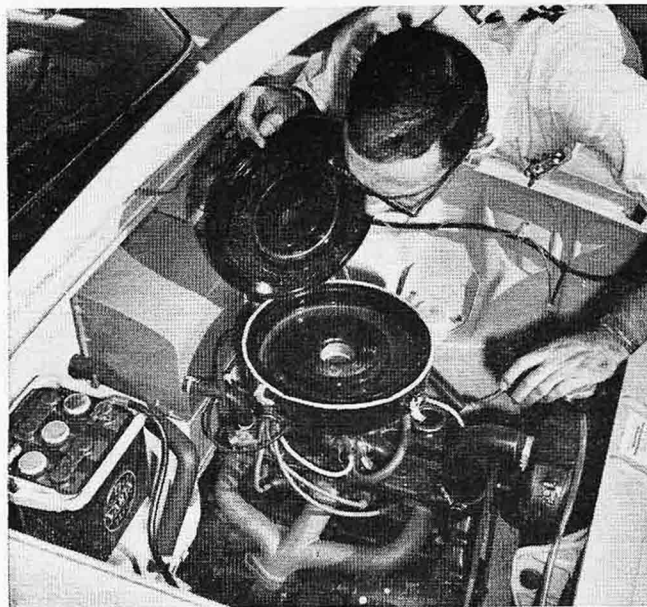
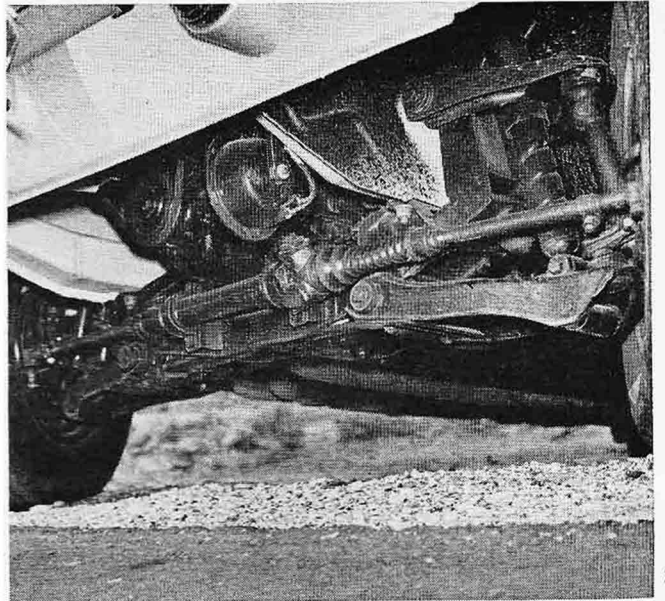
Neither of our test Opels developed the slightest squeak or rattle during the 1000 miles we drove them. In fact, their general tightness is one of their most admirable points. This was offset slightly by lack of sound insulation — engine and transmission noises are relatively high.

Gasoline mileage, which will be of major interest to most buyers, was very reasonable. Our high figure was 29 mpg at a steady 65-mph highway cruising. This could go to 32-33 mpg in flat country and at a slower speed, say around 50 mph. And our low figure was 24.1 mpg around town, giving an overall average of 26.6 mpg. Unfortunately, we could check only the sedan's mileage, because the odometer on the wagon was erratic and turned out to be about 40 per cent fast over a five-mile measuring course.

Seen as a whole and taken at their base price of about \$1700 p.o.e., new Opels should come out of Buick showrooms at a pretty steady rate. Their lines are pleasing, they're easy to work on, sturdy, well put together, very economical, and are plenty big to haul growing families. As second cars, they're ideal for around town, for commuting, and for the pleasure of driving. As first and only cars, they should give years of good service, cost very little in fuel, insurance, and maintenance, and have space enough for that occasional vacation haul across country. /MT

continued

3) Spare and gas tank stand at sides of wagon cargo area, and floor lifts up to give access to added storage space beneath.
4) Sedan's tank is also inside fender, so there's enough room for five generous-sized suitcases plus smaller odds and ends.



1) Manual choke flanks switch bank, with heater controls directly above. Opels offer good vision and unrivaled roominess.
 2) Oil-bath air cleaner tops ohv Four. Single-barrel carb feeds 1000cc, which exhaust through a well designed manifold.

3) Single transverse leaf spring lies inside lower A-arms; end is barely visible here. Opels use rack-and-pinion steering.
 4) Owner's manual lists turning circle as 32.2 feet, but our measurements showed both Opels take only 31 feet, curb to curb.

OPEL KADETT & CARAVAN 1000

2-door, 4-passenger sedan

2-door, 4-passenger station wagon

Wagon specs, where different from sedan's, are in brackets

OPTIONS ON CARS TESTED: Whitewalls

BASIC PRICE: \$1708 [\$1845] West Coast p.o.e.

PRICE AS TESTED: \$1729.60 [\$1866.60] (plus tax and license)

ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST: 395 [103] miles

RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE: 5000 rpm

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph.....	5.7 secs.
0-45 mph.....	11.9
0-60 mph.....	24.8

Standing start 1/4-mile 23.0 secs. and 57 mph

Speeds in gears @ 5000 rpm

1st.....	23 mph	3rd.....	58
2nd.....	41	4th.....	81

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading.....	29	45	51	62	74	85
Weston electric speedometer.....	30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear.....15.5 mph

Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 32 ft.; from 60 mph, 151 ft.

SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

Engine

In-line, ohv 4
 Bore: 2.84 ins.
 Stroke: 2.40 ins.
 Displacement: 60.17 cu. ins.
 Compression ratio: 7.8:1
 Horsepower: 39.5 @ 5000 rpm
 Torque: 52 lbs.-ft. @ 2500 rpm
 Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.656
 Carburetion: 1 single-barrel
 Ignition: 6-volt coil

Gearbox

4-speed manual, all synchro;
 floor-mounted lever

Driveshaft

2-piece, open tube

Differential

Hypoid, semi-floating
 Standard ratio: 3.89:1

Suspension

Front: Independent A-arms, transverse semi-elliptic springs, tubular shocks
 Rear: Rigid axle, semi-elliptic, longitudinal springs, tubular shocks

Steering

Rack and pinion
 Turning diameter: 31.0 ft.
 Turns lock to lock: 3 1/4

Wheels and Tires

4.00 x 12-inch wheels, with drop-center rims
 5.50 [6.00] x 12 tubeless tires

Brakes

Hydraulic
 Front and rear: 7.87-in. drums
 Effective lining area: 74.4 sq. ins.

Body and Frame

Unit construction
 Wheelbase: 91.5 ins.
 Track: front, 47.2 [47.6] ins.; rear, 47.4 [47.8] ins.
 Overall length: 154 ins.
 Overall width: 57.9 [58.4] ins.
 Dry weight: 1411 [1521] lbs.