

CAR LIFE
ROAD TEST

1964
OLDSMOBILE
Jetstar I
Sports Coupe

The Automatic Automobile is an Armchair Athlete's Delight

LAST MONTH, in testing the 425-cu. in. Buick Wildcat, we suggested that the "Executive Hot Rod" was just the thing to rejuvenate the tired businessman's weary corpuscles after an exhausting day at the money-works. That was for the personality that need-

ed an active sort of emotional outlet.

This month, we reverse directions and take a close look at a vehicle suitable and satisfying to the armchair athlete, a vehicle which will permit that tired businessman to motor homeward with minimum physical and

mental effort. In short, it's the Automatic Automobile.

Everything about the A.A. has been designed to ease the driver's chore. The transmission is automatic, the engine powerful and turbine-like, the seat is power-adjusted, the windows

raise and lower (and so does the radio antenna) at the flick of a switch, the headlamps automatically dim at the sight of an approaching car, steering and brakes are power-assisted, and the trunk can be opened without even leaving the driving seat. The radio's stations may be changed with the press of a foot-button. Even the road speed can be automatically controlled, by yet another power control device. Clearly about the only thing for the driver to do is push/pull a few buttons and guide the car down the highway.

Of course, the Automatic Automobile is a special sort of car. Yet it is no gadget-laden "dream" car whipped up by an egocentric electronic technician; rather it is an everyday car orderable at the dealer's showroom with each item mentioned. The Oldsmobile Jetstar I, in this instance, is the basic package upon which all these appurtenances are lavished.

The Jetstar I, which shouldn't be confused with Olds' also-new Jetstar series, is in physical format a virtual twin to its sister Starfire, a highly successful "sports" type of hardtop and convertible Olds has been producing for four years. Being a rather ornate sort of chariot, the Starfire represents a styling-trimming approach somewhat opposite to Pontiac's equally successful Grand Prix, which has virtually no added-on exterior trim. Oldsmobile officialdom, viewing these two disparate concepts on virtually the same body, decided to hedge its bets by offering a cleaned-off version of the Starfire. What came out, then, was the Jetstar I—a sophisticated, tasteful and appealing Oldsmobile.

As with the Starfire, the Jetstar I includes as standard equipment Oldsmobile's hottest production engine, a 345-bhp, 394-cu. in. ohv V-8, and a bucket seat interior which has shift lever and tachometer sprouting out of the tunnel console. Unlike the Starfire, the Jetstar I comes equipped with manual steering, brakes and transmission where the former has automatic and power-assists. This keeps the initial cost down (\$3592 for the Jetstar I, \$4128 for the Starfire), although the Jetstar with the same equipment runs about the same price.

Both Jetstar I and Starfire have Oldsmobile's concave rear hardtop window styling since they share the same body and chassis. However, the Starfire is also offered as a convertible, while the Jetstar I is limited, like the Grand Prix, to the one body style. That style is frankly and honestly attractive. It has sharp ridges running fore and aft along the fender tops and these terminate in crisp corners at each end which provide the driver with visual reference points with which to position his car. The handsomely

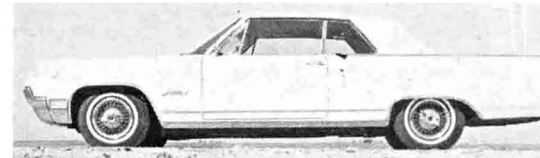
sculpted roof-line, with its thin section and inside-out backlight, tops off the car with an engaging esthetic flair.

This framework is a sophisticated piece of construction for which Olds designers should receive more credit than they have. The box-section, perimeter type of frame has two torque boxes on each side, separating the front and rear elements from the middle section. Four crossmembers add to lateral and torsional strength, and when the semi-unit body is bolted on, a solid, fairly stiff structure is the result. Although some flexing of the chassis might be noted by the most discerning critic, it certainly isn't as pronounced as that on the F-85, which has a considerably less rigid chassis. As a result, the suspension works better and handling capabilities of the larger Oldsmobile are much more acceptable than those of the smaller (see road test, Dec. '63 CL) F-85 Cutlass.

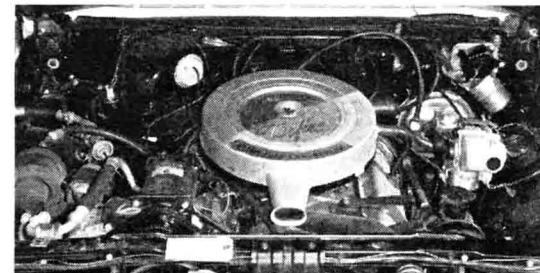
The suspension is conventional General Motors, with ball-jointed independent front and 4-link-located rigid axle rear units. A 1.062-in. anti-roll bar between the front wheels gives fairly flat, comfortable cornering, although the shock absorbers are too softly calibrated to prevent pitching motions. At 89 and 100 lb./in. rates (at the wheels, front and rear), the springs do a good job of giving a soft ride to a lightly loaded Jetstar I. But it was apparent that a vigorously driven Jetstar, or one that would be used often to carry more than two people, would need both stronger springs and shock absorbers. Fortunately, the Olds dealer has these in his option list, including a complete package for the erstwhile trailer-hauler.

The Jetstar I (and Starfire and 98 hardtop coupe) comes equipped, unless the buyer specifies otherwise, with a 3.42:1 rear axle ratio with either manual or automatic transmission. The reason is pretty obvious: it gives optimum performance with the 345-bhp engine. Other Olds have either 3.23 or 3.08:1 as standard gearing and 2.56, 2.69 and 2.87 sets also available, so it might be presumed that the Jetstar I could be ordered with any of those, too. As a compromise between good performance and good cruise, the 3.42 is pretty hard to beat, however.

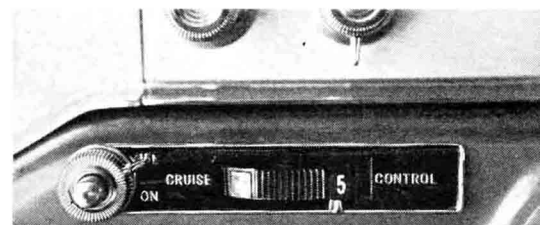
The data panel shows that the Jetstar I is a good performer, despite a transmission which wastes a good bit of time changing gears. Actually, the test crew tried to trick the automatic by accelerating the engine to higher rpm before moving the T-handled selector lever, but this succeeded only in producing longer periods of shifting (it felt as if it were trying to pull a spoon out of a jar of cold molasses). So, the test runs were made by letting the transmission shift itself, which it does



JETSTAR I (above) is cleaner, less expensive variation on the Starfire (below) theme. Both are currently offered by Olds, but convertible Starfire also is available.



PACKED ENGINE room of the Olds has many accessories surrounding the power plant.



CRUISE CONTROL dial selects speed desired, switch puts it into operation.

SHIFT SELECTOR is this vinyl-covered T-handle; reverse lock-out is thumb button.



RALPH POOLE PHOTOS

quite consistently at about 4500 rpm.

Oldsmobile causes a good deal of confusion among the ranks by calling this transmission a "4-stage" unit. In actuality, it is a 3-speed Hydra-Matic with a small torque converter, which Olds labels the "Accel-A-Rotor." This

Jetstar

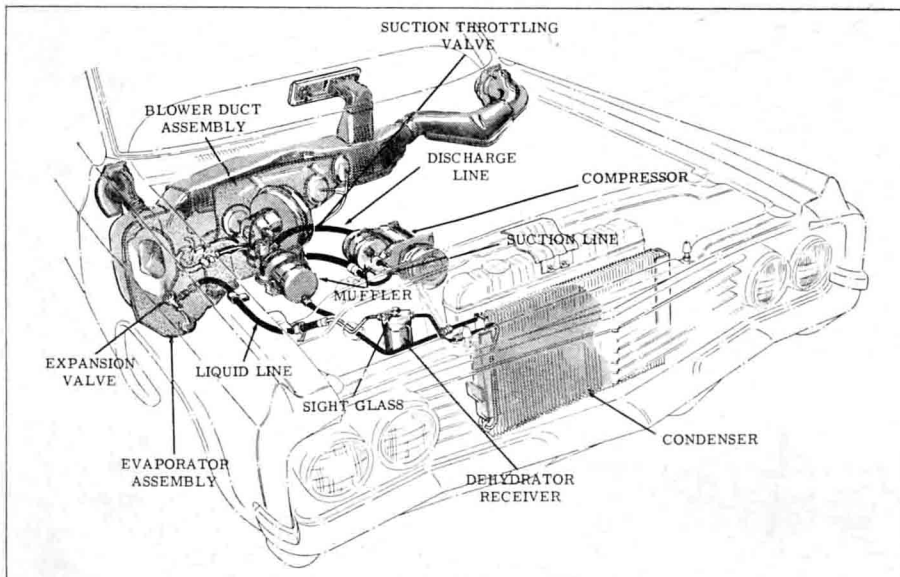
roto-rooter gives a small amount of multiplication at low engine speed, to provide more of what the engineers call "breakaway." The boost amounts to about 1.13:1, which is just enough to do the job by giving the 2.93 1st-gear section a total multiplication of 3.32:1. As the Accel-A-Rotor is a re-

action stator placed between the coupling pump and turbine, and geared to the rear wheels, its effect quickly diminishes as car speed builds up.

Happily, we noted that with the 3.42:1 axle ratio, the transmission does less "hunting" at low engine speed, although there are still those distressing surges into 1st gear when the car is moving about 5 mph. This has been a frequent complaint about this transmission, and one which has been aggravated by those long, long (like 2.56:1) axle gears Olds has used in the

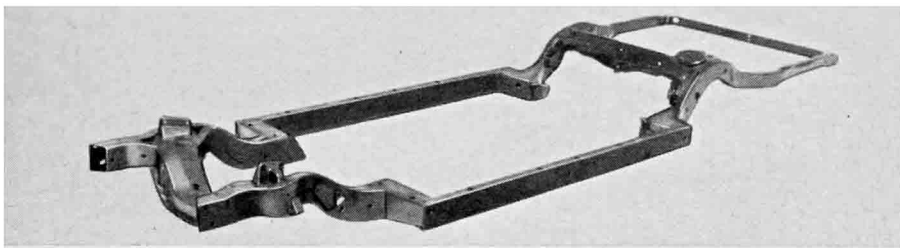
past. What happens is that the shifting mechanism, which partly depends on engine-driven oil pump pressure for its instruction, becomes confused at low engine speed (a common condition with the low axle ratio) and tells the transmission to shift into Low, which it does with a lurch because the car is still moving.

The test Jetstar I had a great array of optional equipment, which made it a lot more expensive and even more enjoyable. The one gadget it didn't have, however, although it had power

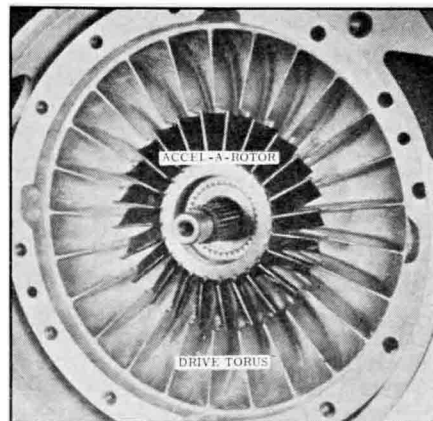
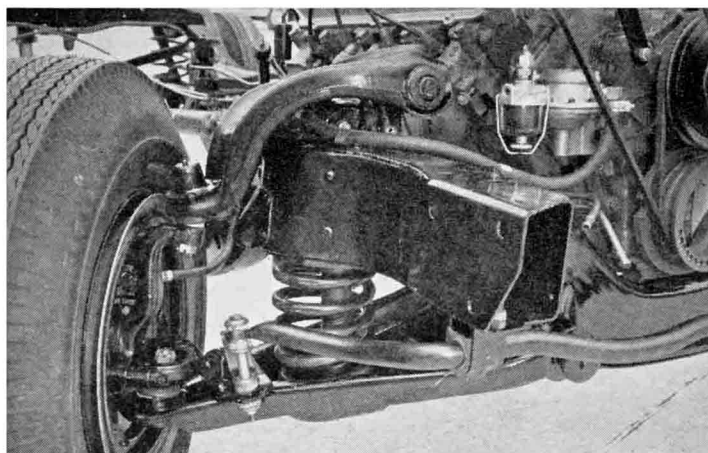


AIR CONDITIONER is built into Oldsmobiles to make a compact, if complicated unit. Compressor has electric clutch to release drag on engine when conditioner is "off."

OLDS "GUARD BEAM" frame is a perimeter type, with torque boxes connecting the two end sections to the center section. Semi-unit body adds stiffness to the whole structure.

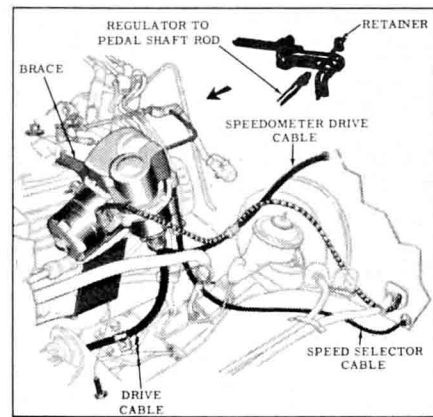


BALL-JOINT front suspension has conventional long-and-short arm layout. Large anti-roll bar reduces the lean in corners.

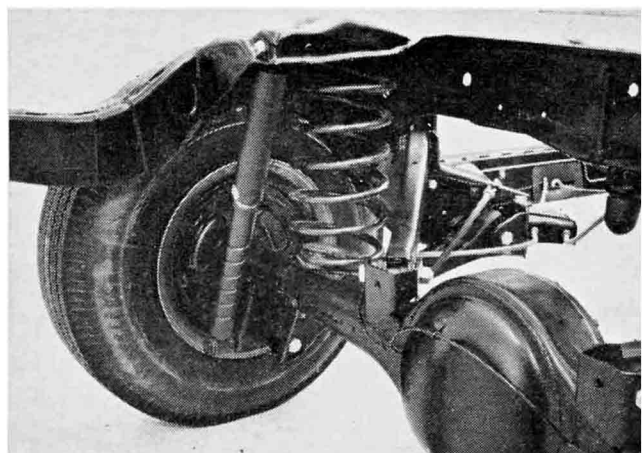


ACCEL-A-ROTOR nestles into drive torus but transmits its torque to drive line.

CONTROL unit of cruise device operates throttle by a long rod, after sensing speed from drive and selector cables.



LOWER LINKS of rear suspension take brake and drive thrust, angled upper links locate axle in a lateral plane, prevent wind-up.



antenna, steering, seat and brakes, remote control trunk release, speed control, automatic headlight dimmer, tilting steering wheel and a reverberating rear seat speaker, was a remote control outside mirror. Why? The men on the assembly line probably got tired after screwing on all these other things.

One of our favorite gadgets was the antenna, mounted on the right rear fender peak. With a flick of the switch we could raise or lower this sleek stalk while watching its progress in the rear-view mirror. A tiny electric motor at

its base accomplishes this wonder. After a thoughtless vandal one night put a right-angled kink into our slender mast, we wondered why the antenna's manufacturer hadn't gone just one step further by making the whole thing automatic—that is, when the radio was turned on, the mast would erect itself out of its nest; when the radio was shut off, the mast would retract flush with the surface, thereby foiling would-be vandals.

The new chambered, dual exhaust system is used on the Jetstar I and this

delivers an audible, interesting, and far from objectionable note.

But it was the automatic aspect of the entire gadget-laden package which really intrigued the testers. Nearly a complete antithesis to last-month's power-mad Wildcat, it wafted us, cooled and coddled, hither and yon without the expenditure of a single strenuous movement. Coupled with brisk, controllable performance and that sanitary approach to styling, it makes a very tempting confection to the sweet-toothed sort of buyer. ■

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST

1964 OLDSMOBILE Jetstar I Hardtop Coupe

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	\$3592
Price, as tested	4950
Curb weight, lb.	4440
Test weight	4780
distribution, %	57/43
Tire size	8.50-14
Tire capacity, lb @ 24 psi	5060
Brake swept area	310
Engine type	V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke	4.125 x 3.688
Displacement, cu. in.	394
Compression ratio	10.5
Carburetion	1 x 4
Bhp @ rpm	345 @ 4800
equivalent mph	112
Torque, lb-ft	440 @ 3200
equivalent mph	75

EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

Aircond., power steering, power brakes, power seat, power windows, power ant., wsw tires, guide control, auto. headlight dimmer, seat belts, remote trunk release.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	123.0
Tread, f & r	62.2/61.1
Overall length, in.	215.3
width	77.8
height	54.2
equivalent vol, cu. ft.	524
Frontal area, sq. ft.	23.4
Ground clearance, in.	4.9
Steering ratio, o/a	21.8
turns, lock to lock	3.8
turning circle, ft.	45.3
Hip room, front	2 x 25
Hip room, rear	55.2
Pedal to seat back, max.	41.0
Floor to ground	13.0
Luggage vol, cu. ft.	17.1
Fuel tank capacity, gal.	21.0

GEAR RATIOS

3rd (1.00) overall	3.42
2nd (1.56)	5.33
1st (2.93)	10.04
1st (2.93 x 1.13)	11.35



CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	13.8
Cu. ft/ton mile	122.6
Mph/1000 rpm	23.4
Engine revs/mile	2570
Piston travel, ft/mile	1580
Car Life wear index	40.6
Total drag at 60 mph, lb.	190

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (5000), mph	117
Shifts, @ mph (auto.)	
3rd ()	
2nd (4500)	67
1st (4400)	35

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	3.2
0-40	4.7
0-50	5.8
0-60	7.5
0-70	10.7
0-80	13.7
0-100	24.1
Standing 1/4 mile, sec.	16.3
speed at end, mph	86

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	27.4
60 mph	58.5
90 mph	88.2

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg.....11-14

