

BUICK LeSABRE 400

A Budget-Priced, Conservative Luxury Car

BUICK'S LESABRE model presents something of an enigma to the middle class car buyer: It looks like the big Wildcat yet seems to have some of the characteristics of the smaller Special; in price, it's exactly in between Special and Wildcat; and, in performance, it's stronger than the 6-cyl. Specials but weaker than both the V-8 Special and the far-bigger-engined Wildcat. So, what does it offer the buyer?

For one, it has all the luxury of appointment, interior space and trunk room of the more expensive car. For another, it has the economy of operation of the

less-costly car along with a lower initial price. Most of all, it offers the buyer the big Buick nameplate, prestige, ride and comfort.

But what are the drawbacks? The combination of a larger car and smaller engine would seem limiting to over-the-highway performance; in-traffic maneuvering and parking ease suffer as they must with any big car; and, there are a lot of interesting competitors in this particular segment of the market—cars such as the Chevrolet Impala, Dodge Polara, Ford Galaxie, Mercury Monterey, Plymouth Fury and Pontiac Catalina, all

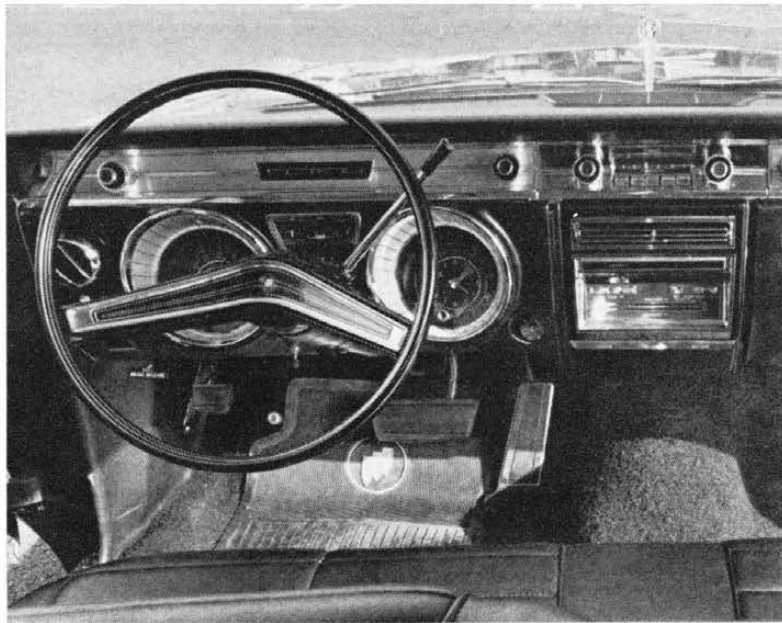
with standard V-8s of similar or larger displacement.

If big Buick name and game is what's desired though, then the LeSabre is a best-buy, particularly if it's equipped as is this road test Sport Coupe. This new sweep-back hardtop has dramatic styling, traditional Buick spaciousness, reasonable performance and some important plus factors inherited from its richer brothers: Wildcat, Electra and Riviera.

Largest plus features of the LeSabre series are its shared understructure and bodywork. These, of course, are common components with the Wildcat series and thus are designed to accept and withstand far greater loads than the lesser-powered LeSabre can impose. A typical example is in the braking system. As has been pointed out in several previous evalua-



LeSABRE CARRIES its own grillework and emblems, to distinguish it from the same-size Wildcat and larger Electra.



SCOTT MALCOLM PHOTOS

WALL-TO-WALL, chrome-lined dash: See text for comments on instrument placement.

LeSABRE

tions of the larger models, Buick boasts some of the better standard-equipment drum brakes of any current U.S. car. These are 12-in. diameter drums with 2.25-in. wide shoes in front, 2.00-in. shoes in the rear, actuated by the familiar duo-servo technique. At 320.5 sq. in. swept area, they are not the largest in the industry. However, finned aluminum drums (with cast-iron liners) on the fronts have made them consistently more effective. Additionally, finned iron rear drums are used. Now, on the LeSabre, because of its lighter weight, the finned

iron drums are used front and rear, with nearly the same effectiveness as found on the Wildcat, Electra and Riviera.

In the usual CL series of stopping tests, the LeSabre achieved only a mediocre deceleration rate of 18 ft./sec./sec. on the first stop from 80 mph, 16 on the second stop. But more important, fade indicators, such as grabbing or locking rear wheels, were notably at a minimum and both stops were made while retaining reasonable directional stability.

The LeSabre also shares the Wildcat and Electra perimeter frame and Wild-

cat bodies, although the other two series are on 126-in. wheelbases rather than the LeSabre's 123. The 3-in. difference is accommodated in the rear suspension as the frame's rear kickup has plenty of longitudinal space to allow the variation. Rear coil springs are mounted atop the Salisbury-type rear axle on the LeSabre, while they fit on the lower control arms of the Wildcat and Electra, just forward of the rear axle. All three cars utilize a 4-link rear suspension with two longitudinal lower arms and two diagonal upper arms. All arms are heavily rubber-bushed to damp out road noise.

The perimeter frame Buick uses for these three models is similar to those now used throughout the General Motors automotive line. It has torque box areas curved into the front and rear portions, which isolate the body-carrying portion

LeSABRE LINE features GM's new fastback sport coupe along with conventional sedans, hardtop sedan and convertible coupe bodies.





WIDE, WIDE trunk has flat floor and high lift-over height, but capacity is tremendous. Electric antenna mechanism is at left.

of frame, in effect, from the front and rear suspension carrying portions. Then, by mounting the stiff, self-supporting body on soft, absorbent pads, Buick achieves a layered structure which traps road and engine noises and vibrations before they can reach the passengers. The level of quiet is impressive and amplifies the only noise problem the CL testers encountered. When a side window is "cracked" or rolled down just a fraction to allow better circulation of air, wind noise is at an irritatingly high level. And now that the engineers have learned to control the noise from below, it looks as if they'll have to go to work on that from above.

Buick has increased its front tread width and at 63 in. it is just as wide as certain "wide track" products. The drag-link type of front suspension, whereby an

I-section lower arm and a diagonal, rubber-bushed strut form a wider-based control arm, has been adopted to Buick, too, along with virtually all other GM cars. It gives a better ride by allowing the front wheels to move a fraction of an inch rearward when overriding bumps, thus eliminating some harshness. As to its effect on handling and stability, we would say that the LeSabre is at least as good as Buicks we've tested before.

A BIG feature of the LeSabre is its smaller, lighter engine. The 300-cu. in. V-8 used as standard equipment comes directly from the Special line and is descendent from those super-light aluminum V-8s of 1961-63. Although it is now completely cast in iron, it still weighs only 466.6 lb. (without clutch and flywheel) where Oldsmobile's 330-cu. in.

V-8 weighs 559.9 lb., Pontiac's 326 weighs 596.3 lb. and Chevrolet's 327 weighs 533.9 lb. in similar form. This light engine weight helps give the LeSabre a fore-aft weight distribution of 55/45%, which in turn means good balance and tractive ability. (The test car was equipped with air conditioning which raises front end weight by some 3%.)

At 4262 lb. curb weight, this LeSabre was really no lightweight and it required lots of work by the little 300-incher to make it move. The accompanying data panel gives statistics, but not the whole story: The combination of the Super Turbine 400 transmission with the 300 V-8 is the reason for the acceptably brisk performance. The torque converter, three speeds forward and pitch-switching feature, of this excellent transmission, all contribute considerably to the impetus. ▶

AIR CONDITIONING unit adds to complication of under-hood area.

DISTINCTIVELY STYLED tail treatment of Buicks features a "jig-saw" look. Taillights are in outer portion but blend well into design.



LeSABRE

As mentioned, the engine no longer has any aluminum components. The cylinder heads and intake manifold were redesigned for iron in '65 models, thereby eliminating any possibility of bimetallic electrolytic reaction in the coolant. This had been a service problem in certain parts of the country. By-products of the return to iron for the cylinder head were increases in valve size, elimination of inserted valve guides and streamlining of the gas passages. The iron intake manifold allowed inclusion of an exhaust heat jacket under the carburetor riser for quicker cold-weather warm-ups.

Standard engine for the LeSabre is the 300-cu. in. V-8 rated at 210 bhp. This engine has 9:1 compression and a single 2-throat carburetor. Torque is 310 ft.-lb. at 2400 rpm. With changes to 11:1 compression and a 4-barrel carburetor, horsepower goes up to 250 at 4800 and torque improves to 335 at 3000 rpm. No other engine option is available, although Buick installs its 401- and 425-cu. in. V-8s in the same chassis under the Wildcat and Electra name tags. The two 300 V-8s, however, are options in the lighter Special series where they generally give better performance because of lighter vehicle weight.

THE STANDARD LeSabre has a 3-speed manual transmission which has first and second gear ratios of 2.58 and 1.48:1. Only second and third gears have synchronous meshing and the shift lever is up on the steering column. This, however, can (and needs to) be improved upon. Buick offers the Muncie Gear 4-speed, with its 2.20 first, 1.64 second, 1.31 third and all synchromesh gearing as an option. Or, the buyer can select between 2- or 3-speed automatic

transmissions—both of which have switch-pitch torque converters. The 2-speed costs \$210 extra, the 3-speed \$231, so that extra gear works out at \$21 additional. At that price, it's an outstanding bargain.

The 3-speed automatic offers just as much improvement in performance over the 2-speed unit as does a 4-speed manual over a 3-speed. Not only is the gear spacing better, and more compatible to a variety of driving conditions, but the "tighter" torque converter gives better performance. For instance, the overall starting ratio of the 2-speed "Super Turbine 300" is 1.765 (gear) x 2.45 (stall torque ratio) is 4.52:1, where the "Super Turbine 400" has 2.48 x 2.22, or 5.51; then, when the 300 shifts to high it goes to 1:1 where the 400 shifts to 1.48:1 (second).

The transmission's variable torque converter stator vanes ("switch-the-pitch") change from 2.22 to 1.8:1 on the 400, from 2.45 to 1.8 on the 300. The changeable stators give a kick-down effect in top gear, going from 1.8 back to 2.22 (or 2.45) upon command by throttle and allowing the engine to rev up a bit. The pitch returns to 1.8 when the engine is idling, to reduce the car's creeping tendencies.

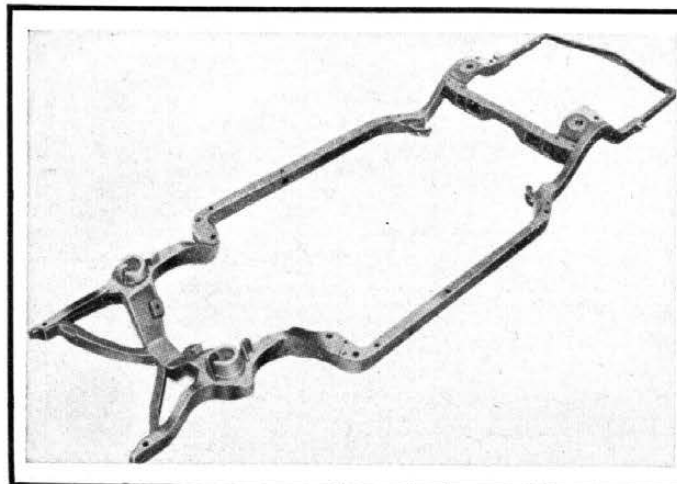
After driving the 3-speed ST-400, the CL testers wondered why Buick even offers the 300 for the LeSabre. The 400 gives so much more flexibility to driving the car that any comparative demonstration is sure to sell the 400. With only two speeds, a car this heavy and as relatively low-powered as it would be with the 210-bhp engine (19.9 lb./bhp) must be pretty sluggish indeed.

Testing a variety of Buick products over the past few years, CL has observed

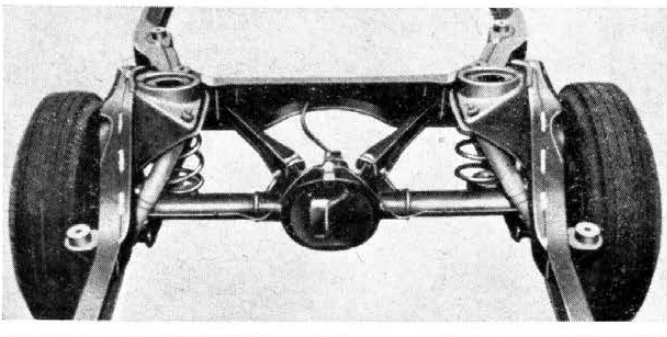
and commented on a continuing and improving quality of workmanship and engineering. This quality is particularly apparent in the upper-line vehicles, but extends, too, albeit more subtly, to the lowest-priced-big-car LeSabre. It looks as if it was designed to fit together, and as if the panels were stamped and trimmed and painted all in one operation so that it does. Although virtually the first unit off the assembly line for '65, the test car showed only a few minor flaws in assembly and finish—things we would normally expect the dealer to rectify upon our first service call with the car.

IN THE OVERALL concept, we found several points for disagreement. For one, the sweeping rear roofline creates a serious blind spot to the right rear; for another, the huge heavy doors of this 2-door hardtop were quite awkward to handle, and, when sandwiched in between other parked cars, were impossible to open far enough to allow passengers to squeeze out. Trying to push open the uphill door when the car is parked across a slope can be pretty strenuous, too. We wonder if, perhaps, power doors should be the next luxury option.

While we're at it, we'd like to wonder, too, if the Buick stylists didn't get the instrument panel upside down. Two large, round, hooded faces enclose speedometer, clock and warning lights, one on each side of the steering column. Between is the automatic transmission indicator quadrant and fuel gauges; above that the signal and high-beam indicator lights, plus the usual switches and knobs, in a wall-to-wall chromed band. All this is topped by another hood running the width of the dash. Now, even elementary driving logic tells us that the speedometer and warning lights ought to be up higher, closer to the line of sight of the driver, and the signal lights lower, as they don't need to be watched so closely. As it is, the driver has to take his eyes off the road and look down at his left knee to see the speed at which he's traveling. And, if he



FRAME AND REAR suspension of LeSabre: Frame has "swept hip" torque boxes at rear, more definite boxes at front. Frame is shared by Wildcat and Electra models, too. Rear springs, mount on stamped pads atop rear axle, which is steadied by two parallel, two diagonal stabilizing arms.



reaches for the fresh-air inlet control, he's likely to pull the knob off the radio as it's in confusingly close proximity and is exactly the same shape.

On the other hand, Buick has a huge bin-type of glove compartment on the right side and this seems immensely practical, unlike the mail-slot box in Pontiacs (Dec. CL). It tips outward to reveal its contents and is large enough to contain most of the paraphernalia found stuffed into the average car.

Two minor features among the Le-

Sabre's lengthy list of options which caught our fancy were the tilting steering wheel, which with seven positions must come up just-right for nearly everyone, and also the speed-minder. This latter item is a simple safety device which attaches to the speedometer and sounds a harsh buzzer when the driver exceeds the pre-set speed. The sound is guaranteed to wake up even a sleeping co-driver, too.

It is in the luxurious appointment that the measure of the LeSabre as a conservative, sophisticated transport emerges. A

full step above the other cars in its class, the LeSabre's material, workmanship and design deserve praise. More than mere surface-glazing or wood-like applique, interior trim is tasteful and not overdone.

This sort of thing should appeal winningly to the style-conscious young matron, or the up-and-coming junior executive, both of whom want their luxury image at a budget price. If we can characterize in a word or two, the LeSabre might be said to be just that, a budget-priced, conservative luxury car. ■

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST

1965 BUICK LeSabre Sport Coupe

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	.....\$3061
Price, as tested	.....4262
Curb weight, lb	.....4180
Test weight	.....4520
distribution, %	.....56/44
Tire size	.....8.15-15
Tire capacity, lb	.....4720
Brake swept area	.....320.5
Engine type	.....V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke	.....3.75 x 3.40
Displacement, cu. in	.....300
Compression ratio	.....11.0
Carburetion	.....1 x 4
Bhp @ rpm	.....250 @ 4800
equivalent mph	.....125
Torque, lb.-ft.	.....335 @ 3000
equivalent mph	.....78

EXTRA-COST OPTIONS
250-hhp V-8, auto. trans., safety & access. groups, power brakes & steering, power windows, air cond., radio, electric antenna, vinyl interior, dual exhaust, tinted w.s., wsw tires.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	.....123.0
Tread, f & r	.....63.0
Overall length, in	.....216.9
width	.....80.0
height	.....55.2
equivalent vol, cu. ft.	.....553
Frontal area, sq. ft.	.....24.5
Ground clearance, in.	.....5.6
Steering ratio, o/a	.....20.4
turns, lock to lock	.....4.1
turning circle, ft.	.....n.a.
Hip room, front	.....63.7
Hip room, rear	.....62.9
Pedal to seat back, max.	.....43.0
Floor to ground	.....13.0
Luggage vol, cu. ft.	.....n.a.
Fuel tank capacity, gal.	.....25

GEAR RATIOS

3rd (1.00) overall	.....3.08
2nd (1.48)	.....4.56
1st (2.48)	.....7.64
1st (2.48 x 2.22)	.....16.96



CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test wt)	.....18.1
Cu. ft./ton mile	.....199
Mph/1000 rpm	.....26.1
Engine revs/mile	.....2300
Piston travel, ft./mile	.....1305
Car Life wear index	.....30.1

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (4000), mph	.....106
Shifts, @ mph (auto.)	
3rd ( )	.....
2nd (4250)	.....75
1st (4200)	.....44
Total drag at 60 mph, lb.	.....140

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	.....29.3
60 mph	.....57.2
90 mph	.....91.0

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	.....3.2
0-40	.....4.6
0-50	.....6.6
0-60	.....9.2
0-70	.....12.3
0-80	.....15.9
0-100	.....29.5
Standing ¼ mile, sec17.1
speed at end, mph83

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg15-18
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