



CAR LIFE
ROAD TEST

Rambler American 440-H

SOME TIME AGO, during conversations with American Motors Corp. styling vice president Dick Teague, *Car Life* suggested a somewhat specialized version of the company's diminutive American. This would be an "Executive's Commuter Car," fitted out with supple, gen-you-wine leather upholstery and paneled in polished hardwood. An air conditioner would be mounted in the trunk and it would use the then-new 232-cu. in. 7-main bearing Six coupled with the Borg-Warner "Shift Command" automatic transmission; AMC's disc brake option would be standard equipment. The instrument panel would display simple, round dials lined up abreast.

52 CAR LIFE

Rally 'Round the Flagpole, Boys, Here's One We Should Salute!

And, coming only as a 2-door hardtop (perhaps as the Tarpon fastback), it would be shorn of excess exterior trim and depend on rich, deep coloring for its tasteful appeal.

Such a vehicle, we intoned, would immediately appeal to the traffic-harassed business baron faced with the necessity of traveling about our largest cities bereft of chauffeur. It would be well-balanced, highly maneuverable, and carry the status of a diamond—a small package, but oh, how desirable.

Teague, with pleasant forbearance, heard out the proposal and then smiled. "We already have such a car. It's called the American 440-H hardtop, and instead of that leather and hardwood, it has luxurious vinyl-pleated bucket seats and a nice console." Or words to that effect.

Thus challenged, we had to see for ourselves. And, while we discovered several other voids in the proposed table of specifications, it did prove that the basis for our original assumption

was valid. This could be the executive's answer to the bumper-to-bumper bustle.

What Teague has wrought with the American—which he largely wrought in the first place—is an almost standardized top-of-the-line hardtop treatment. There is the ever-present console, with a stowage compartment beneath a ribbed and lockable lid, and a sturdy stirring stick sprouting forth for the Shift Command automatic mixmaster. There are the firm bucket seats, which, while more individual benches than buckets, are covered with soft vinyl molded into lateral ribs of spongy security. There is the thick floor rug and—AMC's exclusive touch—the ball-bearing-suspended ashtray.

But this is, basically, an economy car. Features abound that are intended to satisfy demands for ease of maintenance and prudence of manufacture rather than opulence. Therefore, the headliner is the stiff, pop-in plastic panel, with waffle-weave pattern, which AMC pioneered. Kick panels are a tough plastic molding which have fresh air inlets regulated by simple sliding shut-offs on the back side. The instrument panel is unchanged from other models, which are unchanged from last year, which CL characterized as *gauche*, which upset Teague.

What is, of course, of major interest about the test car is the engine and transmission combination. Interestingly enough, AMC would seem to be ignoring its self-imposed strictures about hyped-up horsepower. In fitting its latest 232-cu. in. Six under the American hood, the company insists it be the most powerful version. Unlike the standard version in the recently-tested Typhoon (CL, Oct. '64), the American engine generated 10 more bhp for a total of 155 bhp.

The 7-main bearing engine actually comes in three versions, although the most powerful is the only one available for American. The standard, fitted with a single-barrel Holley carburetor as sole differentiation, develops 145 bhp at 4300 rpm, 215 lb.-ft. of torque at 1600 rpm. By opening up the 1.5-in. throat of the Holley to a pair of 1.187-in. venturis of a Carter WCD, the power peak moves up 100 rpm and 10 bhp. Torque increases to 222 lb.-ft. AMC's third version of this engine, which appears only in the cheaper Classics, has a de-stroked (to 3 in.) displacement of 199 cu. in. A thimble-like Carter RBS carburetor with single 1.25-in. barrel chokes it down to 128 bhp at 4400 rpm and serves Rambler's economizing image.

Purchasers of this high-powered American may have any transmission, so long as it's a Shift-Command Flash-O-Matic. That wowie-kazaam is AMC's nomenclature for the Warner Gear torque converter and 3-speed transmis-



RECLINING BUCKET seats have cross-ribbed cushions but are little changed from last year. Stout, stubby shift lever for automatic juts up from console.



GENE BOOTH PHOTOS

REFLECTING TASTEFUL lines and pleasant overall size, the American hardtop is excellent basic around-town personal car.

sion, becoming a rarity on American cars despite its once popular status. This gearbox has the capability of being held in intermediate gears; it will not shift out of Low when the lever is at the 1 notch, stays in (or moves into) Second with the move to the 2 detent, but goes through all three gears when located at D.

This transmission, combined with the standard 3.31:1 rear axle ratio for this power train, overcame all our previous disenchantment with the American (CL, Jan. '64). Though that was powered by the older, 4-main bearing 196.5-cu. in. ohv Six (still used for most Americans), it had the intriguing but disappointing "Twin-Stick" arrangement for the over-

drive transmission (which called for a 2.64:1 rear axle). As a result, the newer car seldom was in the position, as the earlier car perennially was, of being in the wrong place without the right gear ratio. First and second were, at last, useful ratios—augmented, of course, by the converter's low-speed multiplication factor.

A mechanical linkage between carburetor and shift control provides the means of changing gears and, while somewhat outdated by more modern methods of some other automatics, seemed to perform its task without fault. There was a looseness in the transmission itself, however, that on occasion would produce some embar-

rasing lags in gear-changing. Nonetheless, it would be heartless to say that the combination was anything but happy, since in juxtaposition with other American power trains, it is indeed that.

With that much power, and that means of transmitting it, it was no surprise that the American was such a lively performer. Scaling just under 3200 lb. in test configuration, the American demonstrated a commendable briskness which was all the more exciting because of the weakish power-to-weight

ratio. In actual performance figures, it was on par with the smaller V-8 equipped Classics and generates almost the steam which, say, a Dodge Dart with a 273 V-8 can boil. Though the 2-barrel breathing permits inhaling the air necessary at 4400 rpm, that was for all practical purposes the top limit. The thought of enlarging the valves, shaving the head and warming the camshaft contours, however, is an almost overpowering urge—just because they're there.

The test car was commendably firm

in ride. It would lean somewhat in the turns, to be sure, but there was no excess of slop in the suspension. And this was at stock stiffness. Heavy duty equipment can be ordered at the time of delivery, altering the 69 lb./in. front rate at the wheel to 86 and the 91 at the rear wheel to 102 lb./in. (with an additional leaf to the standard 4-leaf spring). An ever-so-slight chop is present as a result of the short wheelbase, but unpleasantness is really remote.

Considering its performance, the American handles with competence, though hardly to the extent of gladdening a sports car buff. For one thing, the rear tires scrub loose with ease and, for another, there is a bit too much plowing at the outboard front wheel in a sharp, fast turn. An anti-roll bar, which the American lacks, would be a great improvement in giving the impression of better handling, but of course would not really alter the basic characteristics.

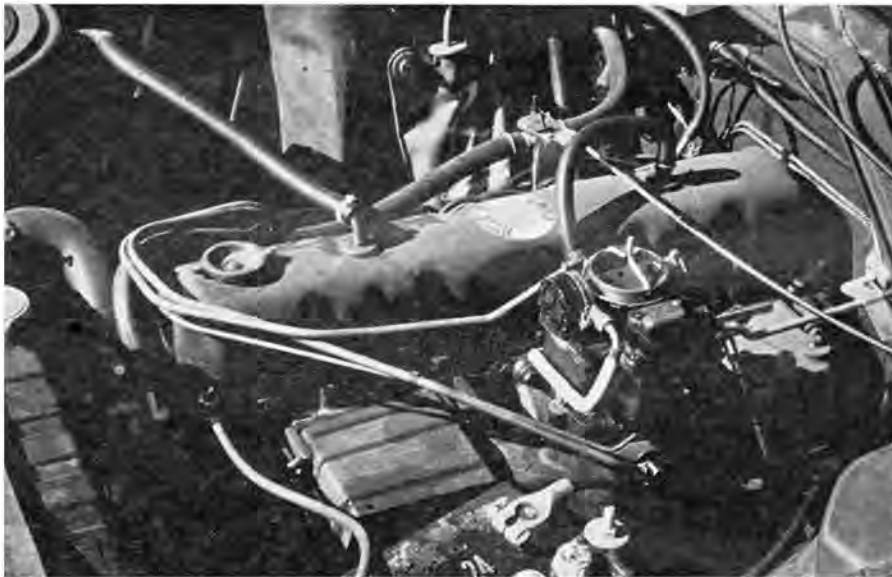
The steering, compared with the earlier American sampled, was an absolute joy. Instead of the standard Gemmergeared steering, the integral Saginaw power-assisted unit was fitted. The result was greater "quickness" (21.2:1 rather than 29:1), less twisting on the wheel (4.2 turns as opposed to 6), and the more obvious effortlessness (not overlooking the difference between recirculating ball and worm-and-roller).

Unlike the previous test car, brakes on the new American resisted glazing over although they were hard-pressed to avoid fade. With the Wagner brake system, there was hardly any tendency to grab or pull, but the lighter rear end loading did help ultimate lock-up for those wheels. Maximum deceleration rates averaged an uninspiring 18 ft./sec./sec. Wistful visions of those optional Bendix disc brakes on AMC's larger cars flashed through our minds as we waited for the American to grind to a halt during the test stops.

When the redesigned American appeared in the fall of 1963, it was hailed as a clever adaptation of the larger Classic body panels into a smaller "Uniside" structure. Moreover, it was cute. And it still is, since there has been only minor facelifting applied to the car to identify the latest model year. The test hardtop had a somewhat novel treatment for roofline trim.

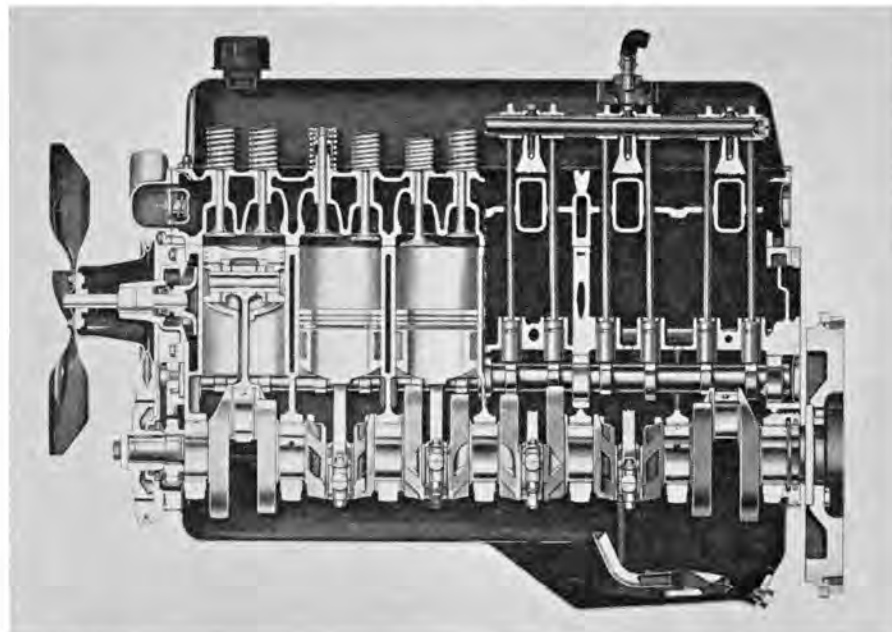
Aside from appearance, however, the uniside body is a relatively weighty one considering its size. This is apparently an unavoidable penalty of such construction. In the 177.25-in. long American, there is close to 1.5 tons of metal, glass, rubber, plastic and fuel. On the other hand, all that material is jigsawed together most solidly. The body was tightly assembled and almost entirely free of rattles and squeaks. One exception was under the instrument panel, where an occasional groan manifested

American



ROOM TO SPARE around 7-main bearing Six encourages home maintenance. Two-barrel carburetor lets engine churn out 155 bhp in American.

STURDY BOTTOM end of 232 Six results in extreme smoothness, capable of misleading passengers into thinking the car has a V-8 engine.



itself. There also was a sometimes drumming of the front suspension workings carried into the passenger compartment by the body panels, but this in itself was proof of the drum-head-taut construction.

Throughout the car, there was only one example of unforgivable—rather than merely disappointing—design. That was the Goldbergian throttle pedal linkage which, by virtue of tortured and twisted levers and angles, had excessive friction and stickiness. Operation was either all-open or all-off. As such, it

was impossible to achieve really controllable throttle action and our fuel consumption figures tended to reflect that fact. It is a shame that Ford's new suspended throttle with greased-action cable linkage isn't more widespread in the industry.

Yet, the sum of the many parts is wholly pleasant. The American, at least in the test version, is well-powered enough to feel frisky, diminutive enough to be nimble, and handsome enough to swell pride. There was nothing, aside from outright limousine service, which

the car did not perform and perform well. It seemed so much fun that one staff member, suspected of being something of a heretic anyway, started talking about trading off his Corvair Spyder for one. The American may have lacked most of the suggested accoutrements to make it appeal to the high-placed (and priced) business executive, but it still did the job envisioned. And perhaps a lot more of the less well-heeled want a car filling those specifications. The American is for them. ■

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST

1965 RAMBLER American 440-H

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	.....\$2327
Price, as tested	.....2997
Curb weight, lb.	.....2848
Test weight	.....3178
distribution, %	.....56.5/43.5
Tire size	.....6.45-14
Tire capacity, lb. @ 24 psi	.....3360
Brake swept area	.....254.4
Engine type	.....1L-6, ohv
Bore & stroke	.....3.75 x 3.50
Displacement, cu. in.	.....232
Compression ratio	.....8.5
Carburetion	.....1 x 2
Bhp @ rpm	.....155 @ 4400
equivalent mph	.....93
Torque, lb.-ft.	.....222 @ 1600
equivalent mph	.....34

EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

232 engine, auto. trans., power steering, power brakes, wide bucket reclining seats & console, radio, tinted glass, wsw tires, w.s. washers.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	.....106.0
Tread, f & r	.....56/55
Overall length, in.	.....177.25
width	.....68.6
height	.....53.4
equivalent vol., cu. ft.	.....376
Frontal area, sq. ft.	.....20.3
Ground clearance, in.	.....6.0
Steering ratio, o/a	.....21.2
turns, lock to lock	.....4.3
turning circle, ft.	.....36.0
Hip room, front	.....2 x 22.5
Hip room, rear	.....56.4
Pedal to seat back, max.	.....40.0
Floor to ground	.....9.0
Luggage vol., cu. ft.	.....12.0
Fuel tank capacity, gal.	.....16.0

GEAR RATIOS

3rd (1.00) overall	.....3.31
2nd (1.45)	.....4.80
1st (2.39)	.....7.92
1st (2.39 x 2.02)	.....15.99



CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test wt)	.....20.5
Cu. ft./ton mile	.....143.0
Mph/1000 rpm	.....21.0
Engine revs/mile	.....2850
Piston travel, ft./mile	.....1660
Car Life wear index	.....39.0

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (4280), mph	.....90
Shifts, @ mph (auto.)	
3rd ( )	.....
2nd (3800)	.....55
1st (3800)	.....34
Total drag at 60 mph, lb.	.....135

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	.....27.5
60 mph	.....60.0
80 mph	.....80.3

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec	.....3.6
0-40	.....5.6
0-50	.....7.8
0-60	.....10.9
0-70	.....14.9
0-80	.....21.3
0-90	.....34.4
Standing 1/4 mile, sec	.....18.3
speed at end, mph	.....76

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg15-18
-------------------	------------

