

CAR and DRIVER ROAD TEST

OPEL KADETT L

Germany's zippy little performer comes to you with Buick's blessing—and what's better, Buick's service!

You remember the Opel. That was the boxy little compact with the Buick trim and the midget wheels your old Army buddy brought back from Germany in the late 1950s. He drove it for awhile and then a wheel bearing burned out and now it sits behind his garage with mice living in the upholstery. It still makes him kind of sad, thinking about the Opel slowly being nibbled into oblivion, but keeping it in repair was just too much for any man to bear. His local Buick dealer was supposed to have all the parts and know-how to keep it running, but every time he showed up with the car the guys in the service department started to laugh and the salesman tried to get him to trade it in on a Skylark. Better to have the Opel out behind the garage than to face that sort of abuse.

That was the Opel in the 1950s. Imported by General Motors for sale by Buick as a stopgap against the imports, both it and Pontiac's Vauxhall died predictable deaths when GM's own compacts hit the market in 1959. In the case of the old Vauxhall, its demise was entirely deserved because it was a patently dumb automobile, but the Opel, thanks to its stolid, Teutonic origins, deserved better treatment. Its styling was admittedly an abortive attempt to create an American shape on a short European wheelbase, but it was mechanically rugged and left some reasonably pleasant impressions before its owner was forced to pack it in for one reason or another.

Operating on the assumption that no lasting damage had been done

to the Opel reputation during its brief tenure on the American scene, General Motors is now re-importing a new version of the car with considerable resolve. The trim profile of the Kadett series is showing up in mass-media publications and on television, and Buick dealers across the nation are selling the sharply-styled little machines with newfound enthusiasm. The Kadett is now firmly placed in fifth spot in imported car sales, ahead of such old standbys as Simca, Renault, Fiat, Hillman and SAAB.

A substantial number of Americans are working with Opel in Germany, and there is a strong Detroit flavor about the Kadett. Its styling is reminiscent of the Chevy II and the interior appointments, liberally employing color-keyed combinations of cloth and vinyl, are traceable to the good old U.S.A. In fact, the only clues to the Opel's Germanic birth can be found in the dash panel, with its control buttons labeled with simple pictograms rather than type, and

the dainty throttle, clutch and brake pedals.

The car is built in four versions, a 2-door sedan, a sport coupe, a 4-door sedan and a 2-door station wagon. All are rather tall vehicles (between 53.0 and 53.9 inches) and this impression of height is accentuated by the rectangular styling and the abbreviated 95.1-inch wheelbase. Our test car was the Deluxe Sport Coupe fitted with an inexpensive performance package which includes a 60-horsepower engine (vs. the stock 54-hp unit) and front disc brakes. It has what might be charitably described as "fastback" styling and some extra trim to set it off from its more prosaic brothers. The whole thing could hardly be described as beauty on wheels, though we found other drivers craning their necks for a better look wherever we took it.

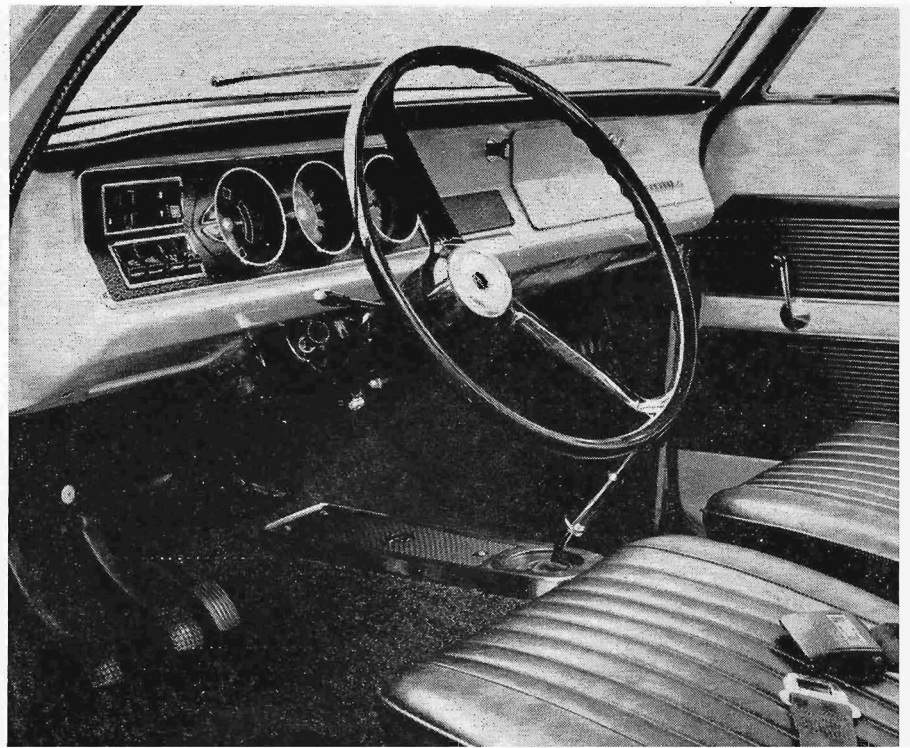
There is a surprising amount of space in the Kadett (no pun intended), including headroom, and it is really difficult to fault the Opel's



design for its creature comforts. Of course this is an economy sedan, and the seat cushioning, sound insulation, etc., are not what you could call sensational, but they are probably a cut above the norm in this price class. Instrumentation is sparse, with only a speedometer, temperature gauge and gasoline gauge present to offer the driver any measurable information. The controls and their relationships are generally good, though the oversize plastic steering wheel seems to be mounted a trifle too low. A real source of delight is the stubby gear lever that protrudes from a console between the two mildly bucketed front seats. This "four-on-the-floor" unit is standard in the Sport Coupe and is available as an option throughout the line. Its linkage is tight and its throws are positive, making it probably the neatest gearshift to be found on any small imported car. Our only complaints involve reverse gear, with a lockout that defies efficient usage, and a chromium panel around the base of the shift lever that casts a vivid reflection on the windshield.

In traffic, the Kadett L is one tough little automobile. Acceleration in first and second gears is outstanding for a car of this size, and you find yourself trying to bait people driving six-cylinder American compacts into stoplight drag races. Operating the positive controls, and winding the diminutive 65.8 cubic inch pushrod four-cylinder engine out to its 6000 rpm limit, you can destroy opponents with considerably more horsepower. You can pull over 30 mph in first gear and 50 mph in second, which provides a great deal of operating flexibility in urban traffic conditions. It is one of the few cars in this class that will break 12 seconds in reaching 50 mph, and that is a great asset when operating in tight situations.

Coupled to this gutsy low-speed acceleration, the Kadett L has extremely tight steering that will let you cut and shoot from lane to lane and in and out of parking spaces with phenomenal ease. The front suspension is a clever adaption of an old idea. Unequal-length wishbones are conventional enough, but the front cross-member of the frame conceals a transverse leaf spring which is attached to the outer ends of the lower wishbones to provide a cantilever spring system. Unlike earlier vintage examples, breakage of the spring will not result in catastrophic collapse of the front end. Half-elliptic springs are used at the rear, with excellent rear axle location provided by a short enclosed propeller shaft. The ride is tight and



firm, though the short wheelbase tends to give a choppy sensation on even the smoothest surfaces. We encountered severe susceptibility to crosswinds at speeds over 40 mph, which further reinforces the idea that this is a car primarily suited for scooting around the suburbs and carting groceries. With all of its high cards stacked in favor of acceleration, the Kadett is not a hot prospect for long journeys. The little dear is just about out of breath at 85 mph. This means that cruising at 70 is possible, though the noise level at that velocity can get fatiguing after an hour or two.

Speaking of noise, we found the two-speed heater fan can almost drive you out of your mind when operating at peak revs. The racket is such that conversation becomes difficult, even for front-seat passengers, and further disappointment is inevitable when one discovers that all the thrashing about isn't doing that much good. The heater doesn't seem powerful enough to completely

warm the car in sub-zero conditions, though it is satisfactory in any temperatures above 20°F. This is not to say that the Opel is anywhere near as chilly as the older Volkswagens or some of our favorite English tiddlers, but its heater is not up to the blast-furnace efficiency of most American units.

There is an inherent tightness about the chassis and running gear in the Opel that we like. The engine and transmission both emit a pleasant mechanical whine that lends a certain personality to the machine without creating any truly irritating noise levels. On the whole, the assembly is excellent and the brand of materials used throughout the car seems to be of the highest quality.

As an indication of the car's value, the Kadett L has almost the same performance, interior room and workmanship as the new Volkswagen 1600TL, yet is about \$350 cheaper.

Since it's already a sales success, our glowing predictions about the Opel's future in the American market would be grossly redundant, so we'll confine ourselves to predicting a long and bright future for the entire Kadett line. It's a well-styled and well-built car, and, most important, is being marketed aggressively in the U.S. through a strong dealer network. There's not much within the Opel concept that's going to tear up the enthusiasts, but a whole bunch of housewives across the nation are going to love it. And very few of the new Opels will end up behind the garage. **cjd**



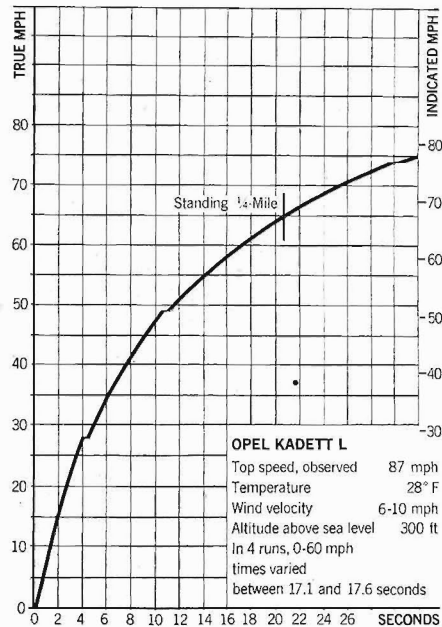
OPEL KADETT L

Importer: Buick Motor Division
General Motors Corporation
Flint, Michigan

Price as Tested: \$1898.92 POE East Coast

ACCELERATION

	Seconds
Zero To	
30 mph	4.9
40 mph	7.6
50 mph	11.5
60 mph	17.2
70 mph	25.1
Standing 1/4-mile	65 mph in 20.7



ENGINE

Water-cooled four-in-line, cast iron block, 3 main bearings
Bore x stroke..... 2.95 x 2.40 in, 75 x 61 mm
Displacement..... 65.76 cu.in, 1078 cc
Compression ratio..... 8.8 to one
Carburetion..... Single 1-bbl.
Valve gear..... Pushrod-operated overhead valves
Power (SAE)..... 60 bhp @ 5600 rpm
Torque..... 63 lbs-ft @ 3200 rpm
Specific power output..... 0.912 bhp per cu.in, 55.6 bhp per liter
Usable range of engine speeds.. 600-6000 rpm
Electrical system..... 12-volt, 38 amp-hr battery, 300W generator
Fuel recommended..... Premium
Mileage..... 26-32 mpg
Range on 8.7-gallon tank..... 220-275 miles

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch..... 6.7-inch single dry plate
Transmission..... 4-speed manual, all-synchro

Gear	Ratio	Over-all	mph/1000 rpm	Max mph
Rev	3.79	14.79	4.57	28
1st	3.76	14.67	4.60	28
2nd	2.15	8.38	8.04	49
3rd	1.40	5.47	12.33	74
4th	1.00	3.89	17.34	87
Final drive ratio			3.89 to one	

CHASSIS

Wheelbase..... 91.5 in
Track..... F 47.2 R 47.4 in
Length..... 157.0 in
Width..... 57.9 in
Height..... 53.2 in
Ground Clearance..... 6.0 in
Curb Weight..... 1520 lbs
Test Weight..... 1730 lbs
Weight distribution front/rear..... 53/47%
Pounds per bhp (test weight)..... 28.8
Suspension F: Ind., unequal-length wishbones and transverse leaf spring
R: Rigid axle, torque tube and semi-elliptic springs
Brakes..... 9.4-in discs F, 7.8-in drums R, 203 sq in swept area
Steering..... Rack and pinion
Turns, lock to lock..... 3
Turning circle..... 33 ft
Tires and wheels..... 155 x 13

CHECK LIST

ENGINE

Starting..... Good
Response..... Good
Noise..... Good
Vibration..... Good

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch action..... Good
Transmission linkage..... Excellent
Synchromesh action..... Good
Power-to-ground transmission..... Good

BRAKES

Response..... Good
Pedal pressure..... Good
Fade resistance..... Excellent
Smoothness..... Good
Directional stability..... Good

STEERING

Response..... Good
Accuracy..... Good
Feedback..... Good
Road feel..... Good

SUSPENSION

Harshness control..... Good
Roll stiffness..... Fair
Tracking..... Good
Pitch control..... Good
Shock damping..... Good

CONTROLS

Location..... Good
Relationship..... Good
Small controls..... Good

INTERIOR

Visibility..... Fair
Instrumentation..... Fair
Lighting..... Fair
Entry/exit..... Fair
Front seating comfort..... Good
Front seating room..... Good
Rear seating comfort..... Fair
Rear seating room..... Fair
Storage space..... Good
Wind noise..... Good
Road noise..... Good

WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater..... Fair
Defroster..... Fair
Ventilation..... Good
Weather sealing..... Good
Windshield wiper action..... Good

QUALITY CONTROL

Materials, exterior..... Good
Materials, interior..... Good
Exterior finish..... Good
Interior finish..... Good
Hardware and trim..... Good

GENERAL

Service accessibility..... Excellent
Luggage space..... Good
Bumper protection..... Fair
Exterior lighting..... Fair
Resistance to crosswinds..... Fair

