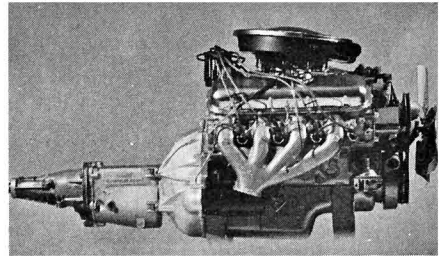


BUYING A SUPERCAR?

Don't make a move until you read this informative tech review on the do's and don'ts of purchasing a new or used high performance stocker

BY ROGER HUNTINGTON

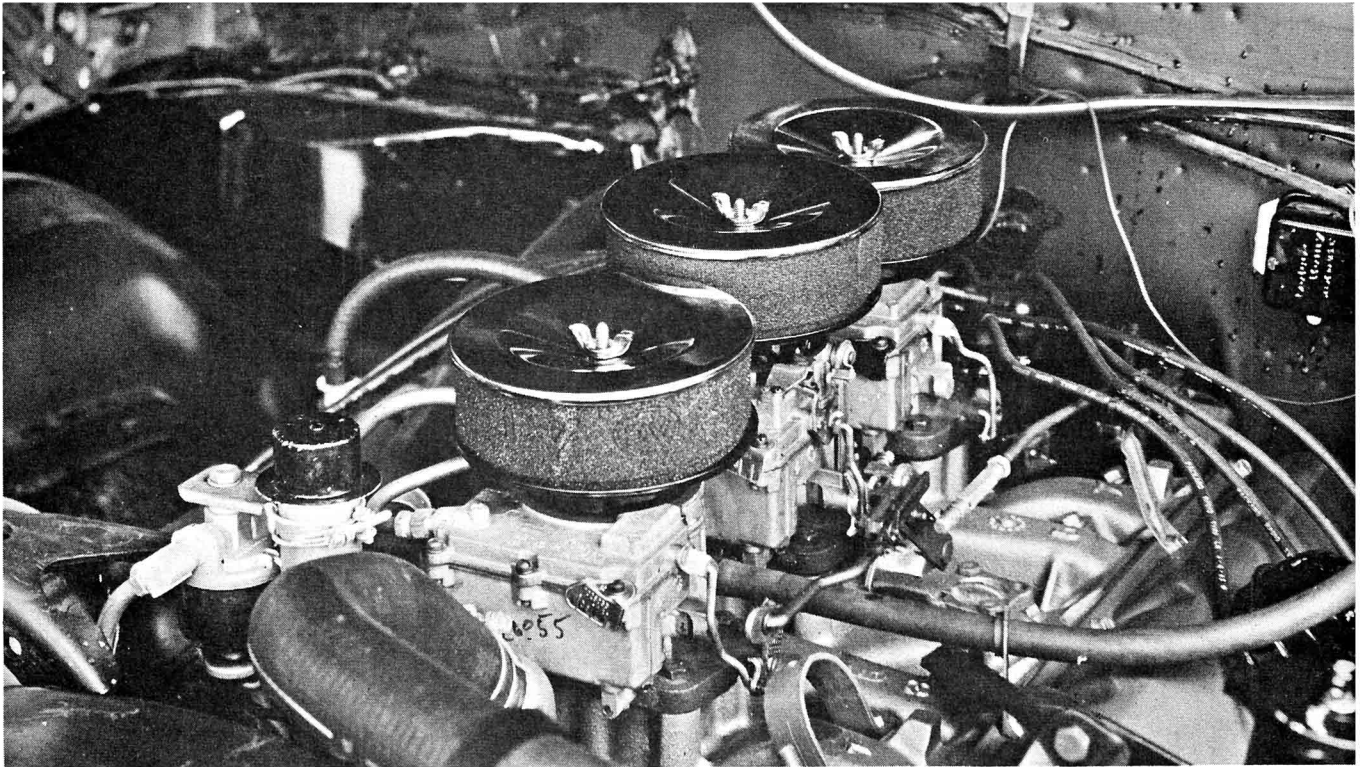


A FEW YEARS AGO, when a young fellow wanted to buy a car with a little something special in the way of performance, he started haunting the used car lots for late-model, power-pack Chevrolet or Ford V-8's. Young rodders bought *used* cars in those days, and Ford and Chevy were about the only low-priced lines that offered much in the way of performance options in the mid 1950's.

Now it's different. In today's booming economy many young people coming out of high school have good jobs and enough money to buy brand new cars. Many still in school are buying late-model used cars, and young-married couples are choosing sporty high-performance cars as family transportation. The "youth market" has mushroomed to the point that many married and unmarried men in the 30 to 35-year age group are buying youth-oriented, high-performance models



Top, new 396 Chevy porcupine powerplant has plenty of potential. Above, the 396 is stock in the Chevelle SS.



Top, tri-carb option is the most powerful package available for the Olds 442. Center, 442 offers just about the best handling package of all the supercars, but is far from the fastest. Below, '65 GTO is most desirable used car on market.



today. A few years ago this same group bought conservative, medium-priced cars.

Furthermore, the choice in high-performance models today is fantastic. Most companies have at least one model that is specifically designed for the high-performance youth market. Practically all the manufacturers are presently offering an arm-long list of optional equipment that permits the buyer to literally design his own high-performance car right on the order blank. In fact, the choice in high-performance cars today is actually bewildering, even to young buyers who study and know cars inside and out. They hardly know where to start in deciding. Maybe we can be of some help along this line.

The very first thing to do when you're thinking of buying a high-performance car, either new or used, is to decide exactly what you really want in a car. This is not as easy as it sounds. It's too easy to say that all you really want is performance—wild, neck-snapping acceleration, 6000-rpm shift points and 140-mph top speeds. But you are apt to forget that super performance like this means compromises in other important areas. For instance, a really super-performance car will likely use a lot of gas. It may have poor torque and throttle response at low speeds in everyday driving. The clutch pedal may be hard to work in stop-and-go city driving. The engine may be hard to keep in sharp tune and hard on plugs and points. The ride may be rough. Last but not least, high-performance cars cost more to buy, and more to maintain.

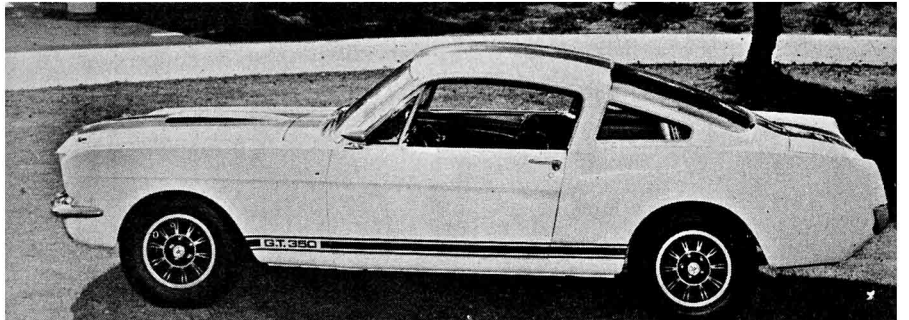
Are you prepared to accept these compromises in a high-performance car for everyday transportation? Or would you want to compromise a little more, and get a car with medium performance that's a little more practical for everyday driving? Some do and some don't. Some want all-out performance at any cost. If you're one of these people, the hardware is available, and if you're a compromiser, there's even more available.

Of course there's more to "performance" than just brute acceleration and speed. Some people value superior handling, cornering and braking. These virtues are for sale, too, but they also involve compromises. A car with superior handling usually lacks ride

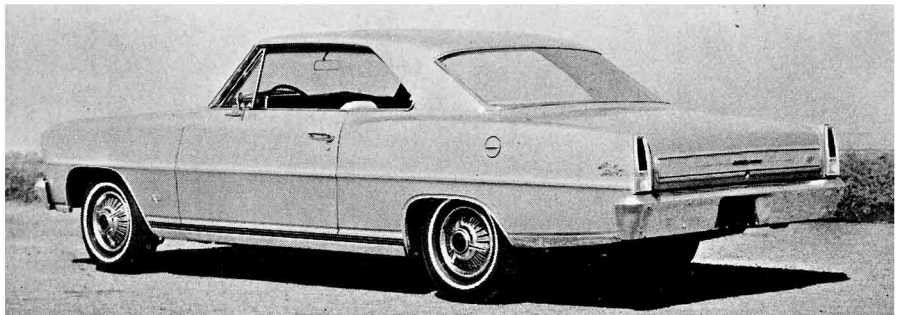
quality. It's been that way for 50 years. Are you willing to accept a rougher ride in everyday driving for that sharp cornering that you are apt to do only occasionally? And consider brakes. You can order heavy-duty brakes on most Detroit models—either discs, aluminum drums, oversize drums, or non-fade linings on standard brakes. They give very good braking under rough conditions. But what about the easy braking you do 99 percent of the time in everyday driving? Here you can't beat standard brakes. The heavy-duty brakes give higher pedal pressures, sometimes they squeak, and sometimes they're a little unstable when cold.

Are you willing to put up with these compromises to get superior handling and braking? Think it over. We've seen dozens of young fellows order very stiff suspensions and "hard"

decide first what power options best satisfy your needs



Above, Shelby's version of a super-supercar is the GT350 Mustang which sells for almost five grand. Below, Chevy II SS is smallest of muscle-mobiles.





Above, 1964 271-hp Comets can move with the latest crop of hot ones. Below, Dodge Coronet with 426 hemi is quickest.



brakes, and then never put their cars through paces that would use this extra capability. All their fun is in a straight line.

So we would urge you to think very carefully about what you really *want* in a car before you buy. What are you prepared to pay for, both in initial cost and operating cost? How many other compromises will you accept? And, most important, how will you *use* the car after you buy it? Will you really use the options you pay for? What kind of driving do you do now? Try to project from there. Basic driving habits don't change when you climb into a new car. Think it over.

Now let's consider some of the basic types of high-performance cars that are available on today's market. In the category of used cars, the choice and availability varies all over the place. It will be obvious that the choice and availability will depend primarily on the total number of these cars that Detroit builds in a model run. The larger the production volume, the more cars you'll find on the used car lots two or three years later. This is why the late trend to high-performance cars in all market segments is bringing the used car buyer a bonus in good, late-model used cars at reasonable prices. It's no trick these days to find clean jobs with power-pack engines and four-speed transmissions on the used car lots, even in smaller towns. We're starting to see a lively market in "supercars" like the Pontiac GTO which only came on the market in 1964. This is good news for all performance enthusiasts. Many of you wouldn't even dream of shelling out \$3000 for a new car. But now it's possible to get very strong used cars in the range from \$1000 to \$2000.

This wasn't so a few years ago. Finding a good high-performance used car on the lots was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

The pitfalls in buying a used high-performance car are obvious. Chances are it's had some rough miles. That's the way most people drive this type of car.

If a car is maintained properly, this kind of driving most likely won't hurt it. You'll just have to judge as best you can by a short road test (which you should insist on before buying any used car). A compression check on the cylinders is a good idea here, too.

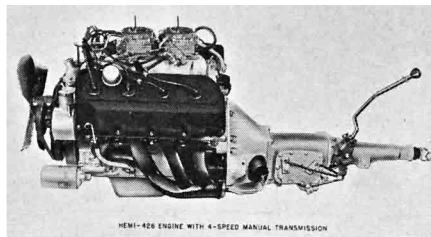
Now let's talk about buying a high-

performance new car. We will first divide the currently-available high-performance cars into three general price ranges. It's good to remember that since dealers don't usually have them in stock, it's tougher to get a fat discount, so sticker prices and actual selling prices are usually fairly close together.

The low price range is generally between \$2500 and \$2700. This range includes the smaller compacts with optional power-pack engines like the Corvair with Corsa engine (140 hp), Falcon with 200-hp V-8, Valiant or Dart with the 235-hp 273 V-8, and, lately, the Rambler American with the new 290-cu. in. V-8. Also available in this low-price range are full-size cars with these optional V-8 engines. But due to the higher weight of the car and the fact that the engines have less than 300 cubic inches, these cars cannot be considered "high-

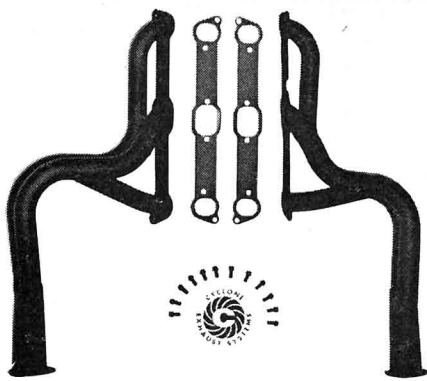
(Continued on page 68)

every manufacturer has at least one high-performance car



Above left, dual-quad 426 hemi powers Dodge and Plymouth entries. Above right, Barracuda S runs 273 engine, has disc brakes. Below, Satellite can go 160 mph.





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SUPERCARS continued

performance" combinations. There is another important line in this price range as of 1966. This is the new Pontiac Tempest Sprint Six with the 207-hp overhead-cam engine. This car is literally a "poor man's GTO", aimed directly at the low-priced, high-performance market. It's the first "package" deal that's been aimed specifically at this booming new market which is for the guy who is willing to sacrifice a little acceleration to get an everyday car that's \$500 cheaper in the showroom and gives 4 or 5 mpg better mileage on the road. In fact, all the above models would be in this same category. They sacrifice brute performance for a substantially lower initial cost and better operating economy. I have reason to believe that this market is going to boom in the next few years. I look for some fantastic new models listing for under \$3000 that will offer more performance for a very small increase in cost and fuel consumption.

I'll go out on a limb and nominate for the best values in this price range. The Tempest Sprint Six, Dart or Valiant with 235-hp engine, or the standard Chevrolet with the 195-hp 283 V-8, with all-synchro 3 or 4-speed trans are tops.

The middle price range in the high-performance market is generally between \$3000 and \$3200. This takes all the new supercars including the GTO, Olds 4-4-2, Buick Special Gran Sport, Chevelle SS 396, Fairlane and Comet GT's. Also included are their sports oriented cousins like the Barracuda Formula S, Mustang GT with 271-hp engine, and in 1967 the new Chevrolet Panther and Mercury Cougar with (?) engines. It should be pointed out that all the above cars are integrated-package models. In other words, they come standard with heavy-duty suspension to complement the higher horsepower, and a special body trim to identify the car as a special high-performance model. This concept of special model identification is apparently very important for this segment of the market. The buyers want the world to know that they have something a little different and hairier than the common herd.

Another entirely different kind of car in this price range is the full-size low to medium price cars with medium-strong optional engines. Don't get confused! These are Chevrolets, Fords, Plymouths, Dodges, and Pontiacs with optional engines running generally

from 250 to 350 hp. They can be ordered with optional 4-speed transmissions and heavy-duty suspensions give them the appearance of junior supercars. They have a touch less performance, but give better fuel economy and are more flexible on the street. This type of car is represented by the premium models like the Chev Impala and Ford Galaxie 500.

It should be pointed out that there is a fairly broad range of performance in the above list of cars. They're not all equal, the supercars are the strongest. I hesitate to go out on a limb, but I would say that their showroom capability on the quarter-mile would be around 15 seconds flat E.T. at 90 to 95 mph terminal speed. The sports jobs like the Barracuda and Mustang, with smaller engines, would be a bit slower, perhaps closer to 16 seconds, E.T. at 85 mph. The full-size power pack cars would be a shade slower than that. If you're after the ultimate in performance in this price range, you'll have to go to the supercars.

My nomination for the best values are the Olds 4-4-2 (best handler) and Pontiac GTO, Barracuda Formula S, big Chevrolet with 275-hp 327 engine, Pontiac Catalina with mild 421 engine, and a medium Dodge or Plymouth with the 4-barrel 383 engine.

Our high price range for high-performance cars runs from approximately \$3500 to \$3700. This takes in full-size cars with maximum-performance street engines. The new 426 street hemi engine in a '66 Dodge Coronet or Plymouth Belvedere would be a prime example, followed by a 427 high-performance wedge engine in a Ford Galaxie or a 427 Chevrolet Mk. IV option in a Chevrolet. All these engines are advertised at 425 horsepower, although their actual street performance potential varies widely. All of them have wild solid-lifter cams, big-port heads, very high compression, lots of carburetion, and will wind to 6500 rpm. The engine packages run from about \$500 to \$1000 above the cost of a standard V-8 option, so it's hard to buy one of these for less than \$3300 or so. Fuel consumption generally ranges from 6 to 12 miles per gallon, and the engines are quite rough, noisy and inflexible on the street. But if you want 0-60 mph times of 5 to 6 seconds off the showroom floor, and quarter-mile E.T. in the low 14's and high 13's at 100 mph, this is the way to go. Three years ago you couldn't buy this kind of acceleration out of the showroom in a street-tuned package for any amount of money. Today you can.

(Continued on page 70)

I don't think there's any question that the strongest package in this group is the new Dodge-Plymouth street hemi. Its actual output at the clutch on the showroom floor is closer to 450 than 425 horsepower. (While the Ford and Chev entries would be in the 350-425 hp range actual). It also has an advantage in being offered with a special heavy-duty Torqueflite torque converter transmission where the others are offered only with manual 4-speed. The automatic is very nice with an engine this strong on the street. You can squirt to 40 mph in the "Traffic Light Grand Prix" in about 2 seconds! The next strongest car would probably be the 427 Chevrolet, one of which won the A/Stock class at the recent NHRA Winternationals.

Another type of engine option should be mentioned in this price range. This is what I like to call "police" engines for want of a better name. They're large engines, de-tuned a little from all-out specs to make them more flexible and economical on the street, but still offering strong acceleration in full-size cars. This would include the 390-hp version of Chev's 427 engine, the 360-hp Ford Interceptor engine on the new 428 block, the 365-hp version of Chrysler's 440 block for medium Dodges and Plymouths, and the 376-hp

Pontiac 421 H.O. Tri-Power option in a light Catalina. The performance of these combinations is generally a little softer than the average supercar, mostly because the cars weigh over 4000 pounds. The combinations are not very popular in the current youth market. The initial cost and fuel consumption are high for what you get in acceleration and you could probably do better with a supercar like a GTO.

Probably the best of the bunch, though, is the 376-hp Pontiac 421 H.O. engine in a Catalina. This is brutal with either 4-speed or GM Turbo-Hydramatic converter. (The availability of automatics with all these engines is a good feature).

That's the story on car selection gang. I wish I could say you can't go wrong by following these suggestions, but these are just one man's opinion. I try to be unbiased, and think I am, but I know from experience that most car enthusiasts are "one-make" guys who are interested primarily in one make of car. They won't hear any criticism against it without an argument. And maybe this is good. Controversy makes good bench-racing and sells lots of magazines. But it's also true that these one-make guys will refuse to buy an obviously superior model in another line. If the make

they prefer doesn't have a competitive model in that range they won't buy anything until their make does offer something. This is why a lot of Ford lovers didn't buy supercars until the Fairlane and Comet GT's came out this year.

But I would still caution you to study carefully your true wants and needs in a car before you buy. And study carefully your finances before you decide between a new car or used car. That difference in initial cost between \$1000 to \$2000 is vital. Don't bite off more than you can chew. And remember that more and more good late model high-performance used cars are coming on the market every day, as the youth market booms. You can get pretty much what you want here if you look hard and long.

A word about ordering a new high-performance car: the dealer probably won't have what you want in stock because the market for these cars is more limited. Expect to order and wait for delivery a few weeks. *Don't* take something you don't really want just to get immediate delivery. You'll always regret it. Of course when you order a car on the order blank the dealer won't generally give you as good a deal, like he would to take a car off his back (Continued on page 72)

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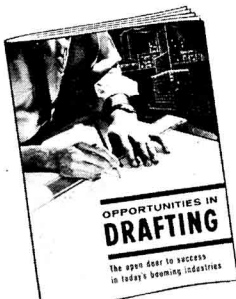
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lot. The difference will be probably at least \$200, but persevere. This is a big investment. Do it right. Another thing, don't trust the salesman to quote you all the available performance options. Chances are he doesn't know them all. Insist on seeing a complete order blank for all RPO and LPO (limited production option) equipment. There may be stuff there you never heard of which would enhance your package. And many times the cost is only a few dollars when installed on a new car being custom built at the factory. It's much cheaper than deciding you want the stuff after you get the car, and having the dealer install it. This is especially true of axle gears, heavy-duty brakes, and the like. Make sure you know what's available before you order.

Good hunting!

COMET TEST continued

Once underway on the open road we found the Cyclone to be a rather stable car even at speeds over 100 mph. The compromise suspension worked well and the tires, Firestone 500's, seemed to hold up even though we were averaging well over normal highway speeds. We felt that power steering was not really needed in this car, as we missed the normal feel of the road afforded by the manual setup. One thing that really impressed us, however, was the head-turning ability of our test car. The combination of bright red paint, rallye stripes, chrome wheel covers and the purr of the dual pipes, attracted young and old alike. The clean, sleek lines and the massive forward styling tie all the goodies into one neat image car package.

Equipped with 335 horses under the hood and a close ratio four-speed and 3.90-to-1 limited slip cogs between the rails, the GT proved to be an excellent performer. Even with the good gears it did not pack the punch of a tri-carbed GTO or a "semi-hemi" Chevelle. We were, however, able to walk away from most of the average stoplight drag racers. Shifting was exceptionally smooth except for the small uncomfortable-shaped shift knob. Running around town upshifts were made around 3000-3500 rpm, which coincidentally is when maximum torque comes in with the hot hydraulic lifter cam. Engine flexibility rates high, as no trouble was encountered lugging the engine down to 1000 rpm in top cog or winding past the 5500 rpm mark.

In the past we have had very few kind things to say about Detroit brakes in general and supercar brakes in particular. Most of the manufacturers use

one set of brakes for six, standard eight, and ultra quick supercars. Some list optional linings and drums, but dealers knew little or nothing about their whereabouts. Our test Comet was fitted with 10-inch finned drums and metallic linings to cope with the extra horses up front. Heat dissipation is good with the finned drums and the metallic linings help combat against fade during repeated panic stops. They are not as good as drums in the fade department, but discs will not be available on the Comet until 1967 so there is little choice. Five or six panic stops from 85 mph managed to fade the binders, but they would not fade under average or above average stopping conditions.

As far as all-out performance went we were a bit disappointed with the GT. The compromise suspension worked out just fine on the street and road, but left a lot to be desired for maximum strip performance. We were plagued with wheel hop and axle windup throughout our quarter mile testing, even though the car was factory fitted with the special suspension. Our best run through the eyes netted us with a 98 mph, 14.95-second time slip and that was after 12 attempts. Most runs were well into the 15's. Performance could be improved by the simple addition of adjustable Air Lifts (C60Z-5A589-A, \$49.50) available through any FoMoCo dealer. With the air bags in place the chassis can be properly preloaded to compensate for track conditions, engine tune or various suspension settings. For more serious competition good lift or traction bars would be a wise investment.

After adding 500 miles to the already racked up 8000-plus miles we felt that the Cyclone GT is a very competitive package in the supercar sweepstakes. It may not be as quick as a good running tri-carb GTO or handle as well as an Olds 442, but it sure has a lot going for it. It has image written all over it, lots of performance packed under the hood and between the rails, and man, is it ever durable. And just think next year limited models will be available with the 427 wedge, disc brakes and a maximum performance suspension that allows you to use all of those 425 ponies.

LOWER STOCK continued

you're going to have an advantage over the guy with the same engine who weighs 100 pounds over his class minimum. Keep in mind also that it is legal in the stock classes to trim the weight of the particular model to the
(Continued on page 74)