



CAR AND DRIVER ROAD TEST

OLDSMOBILE 4-4-2

The 4-4-2 is maybe the best thing that has happened to Detroit since they started building cars there



PHOTOGRAPHY: STUDIO PLACE

The Oldsmobile was one of the first post-war cars to earn a performance image . . . and one of the first to lose it. In the early Fifties, the hot cars in southern stock car racing were the Hudson Hornets and the Oldsmobile Rocket 88s. The Hudson disappeared, of course, and the Oldsmobile . . . well, the Oldsmobile sort of disappeared too, displaced from the attention of the performance-conscious public by such makes as Pontiac, Ford, Dodge, Chevy, Plymouth, Mercury, and even *Buick*, for heaven's sake.

There was a time too, when Oldsmobile was considered General Mo-

tors' experimental division—all the trick stuff was tried out on Oldsmobiles first, then passed on to the other GM divisions. Oldsmobile owners felt special; they got the first crack at new engineering features. For instance, the first of the high-performance V-8s, the Rocket engine, was first introduced by Olds. And it was in a small, light car—making it a prototype GTO, 15 years ahead of its time. And the Hydra-Matic transmission debuted in the Oldsmobile line even earlier.

This aggressive, pioneering spirit seemed to have been lost in the tasteless days of the mid-Fifties, and

for a decade Oldsmobiles were near-invisible non-cars. The 1950s were probably the worst, but matters were hardly improved by the spaceship look of the early Sixties. The bright young engineers were channeled elsewhere, and the styling studios were staffed by gorpy, unwitting creators of Pop Art. The cars suffered a decline of both popularity and quality, and their character was, at best, innocuous.

Two years ago, the atmosphere suddenly brightened. Oldsmobile's reputation as an experimental division was brought back powerfully with the introduction of the un-

The Oldsmobile 4-4-2 is a driver's car. Steering is highly responsive and the car is capable of altering its attitude quickly without any loss of stability. It's the best-handling car of its type we've ever tested



orthodox front-wheel-drive Toronado. The performance image was somewhat more difficult to recapture. There is a corporate ban on any form of racing, on power-to-weight ratios of less than 10 lbs./bhp, and, besides, Oldsmobile didn't have any engines hotter than any of the other GM divisions. To get a competitive edge, Oldsmobile needed a gimmick. Olds' engineers decided to take off at a tangent to the rest of the industry by concentrating on handling. The 4-4-2 model, introduced in 1964, was an experiment to test public reaction to a fully roadworthy car. Thus far, the public at large seems no more excited about good handling in a hot intermediate than it did in the compact Corvair, but we think it's maybe the best thing that has happened to Detroit since they started building cars there. The 1966 version of the 4-4-2 won our six-way "Super Car" test hands down, and the '67 is even better.

The 4-4-2 is the best-handling car of its type we've ever tested. Instead of the typical horrendous understeer generally found on domestic cars, the 4-4-2 is basically neutral under all conditions, although anyone who wants to hang the tail out can easily induce power oversteer, with 440 lbs./ft. of torque driving through a 3.08 rear axle ratio. In the terminology used by Oldsmobile engineers, the 4-4-2 is a "high-gain, high-response" car. This means it reacts to steering input by changing direction rapidly, and that the car is capable of making quick adjustments from one attitude (straight ahead) to another (turning) without any loss of stability. In more familiar language, it's a driver's car.

Last year our major complaint with the 4-4-2 was the absence of a disc brake option. This year front discs are available, and we strongly recommend them. The normal drum brakes are adequate for the mild usage most F-85 models will encounter, but the gutsy 4-4-2 demands the extra stopping power for repeated use that only discs can offer. In fact, the front-disc and rear-drum combination on our test car gave the shortest stopping distance of any car we have tested. In our

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normal series of panic stops from 80 mph the 4-4-2 stopped in 272 feet on the first run, for an average deceleration of .78 G, and showed very little fade on subsequent attempts. On the fourth run, it stopped in 329 feet (.65 G) and throughout the test series, pedal pressure required remained almost constant from start to stop, with the car easily maintaining a straight line.

Complementing the brakes and handling is an improved three-speed Turbo Hydra-Matic transmission, an option that replaces the former two-speed Jetaway unit. This year, the Hydra-Matic has been built especially for the 4-4-2, with torque converter ratios of 1.9 and 2.5 perfectly mated to the 400 cu. in. engine. It features a shifting arrangement that allows downshifts at any time, providing the resulting rpm do not exceed the 5200-rpm engine limit. Downshifting is automatic, simply by dropping the lever into low range and waiting for the speed to equalize with engine rpm. Zap, second gear at 88 mph. Pow, first at 53 mph. Maximum gear retardation without worrying about matching rpm with gear ratios: no more double-clutching

that manual four-speed, or cursing the inept automatic. The necessity, and much of the desirability, of having a four-speed manual transmission is swept away by the introduction of the Oldsmobile 4-4-2 Turbo Hydra-Matic.

An additional change to the 1967 drive train is the new rear axle, which is now made by Oldsmobile. It uses 31 splines on the axle stubs and an 8.75-in. ring gear to give 32 per cent more strength than in 1966. Our test car was not equipped with the limited slip option, but Oldsmobile engineers say it is an improved model with hardened case and re-designed friction plates for more positive lock-up with less heat production.

The 350-horsepower, 400 cu. in. engine is unchanged from 1966, with the exception of a new magnetic pulse generator that replaces the breaker points and condenser of the standard ignition. This device allows a wide variety in spark plug gaps and heat ranges, without the usual accompanying power loss.

Of course, the 4-4-2's major selling point is its superb suspension, which is based on stock F-85 compo-

nents. The front suspension consists of unequal-length upper and lower wishbones, with high-rate springs, heavy-duty shock absorbers, and a 0.937-in. anti-sway bar. At the rear, Oldsmobile engineers relocated upper axle control links at the chassis to provide more positive control, and topped things off by fitting a 0.875-in. anti-sway bar.

The only complaint we might register is a small one (and we've said it before): the rear axle bottoms too easily with a 4- or 5-passenger load. Without stiffer rear springs, which would increase the rear roll couple to the detriment of cornering adhesion, it's a 2-passenger car.

The 4-4-2's interior is pleasant, but not outstanding—mainly because it's a compromise between standard F-85 pieces and someone's idea of what a GT car's dashboard should look like. It contains all the right instruments (if you specify the Rally Pack option), but they are condensed into one illegible dial flanking the speedometer on the left. In the center of this dial is the smallest tachometer we've seen on any car, with oil pressure, water temperature and ammeter gauges spread around at 120° intervals. It looks more like a chrome-spangled battlefield than a serious attempt to convey information, and is totally out of keeping with the quality of the engineering features on the rest of the car. The driver's position is also compromised—you sit too close to the steering wheel (not available with the telescoping option offered on larger GM cars). The only aspects of the interior that save the 4-4-2 from mediocrity are the comfortable bucket seats, the well-located small controls, and good vision in all directions except the rear quarters, which are blocked by the currently stylish wide roof supports.

Despite these minor criticisms of the interior, the 4-4-2 is the best balance of performance and practicality we have seen. It handles well, stops fast, and rides comfortably on almost any road surface. If these are the things America really wants and needs in its passenger cars, then the 4-4-2 experiment will be a success. Spread the word. **C/D**



OLDSMOBILE 4-4-2

Manufacturer: Oldsmobile Division
General Motors Corporation
Lansing, Michigan

Number of dealers in U.S.: 3500

Vehicle type: Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive,
5-passenger sports sedan, all-
steel body with separate
chassis

Price as tested: N.A.

(Prices for the 1967 models had not been released by the manufacturers at press time. Our unofficial estimate would be ca. \$4033.08, as our test car was equipped.)

Options on test car: Deluxe front and rear seat belts, electric four-way bucket seat, reclining seat back (passenger side), vacuum trunk lid latch, Rally Pack (tachometer, oil pressure gauge, ammeter, water temp. gauge), remote control outside mirror, console, power front disc brakes, electronic ignition, handling package, automatic transmission, tilt steering wheel, wheel covers, courtesy lamps, AM radio, electric antenna, power steering.

ENGINE

Type: Water-cooled V-8, cast iron block and heads, 5 main bearings

Bore x stroke 4.00 x 3.97 in.
101.6 x 100.8 mm

Displacement 400 cu in, 6504 cc

Compression ratio 10.5-to-one

Carburetion 1 x 4-bbl Rochester RPD

Valve gear Pushrod-operated overhead valves, hydraulic lifters

Power (SAE) 350 bhp @ 5000 rpm

Torque (SAE) 440 lbs/ft @ 3600 rpm

Specific power output 0.87 bhp/cu in,
53.9 bhp/liter

Max. recommended engine speed 5200 rpm

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission 3-speed automatic,
plus torque converter

Max. torque converter ratio 2.5-to-one

Final drive ratio 3.08-to-one

Gear	Ratio	Mph/1000 rpm	Max. test speed
I	2.48	9.8	53 mph (5200 rpm)
II	1.48	16.4	88 mph (5200 rpm)
III	1.00	25.2	130 mph (5200 rpm)
R	2.08	-6.4	N.A.

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase 115.0 in

Track F: 58.0 in, R: 59.0 in

Length 203.2 in

Width 75.8 in

Height 53.6 in

Ground clearance 5.6 in

Curb weight 3684 lbs

Test weight 4284 lbs

Weight distribution, F/R 56.4/43.6%

Lbs/bhp (test weight) 12.2

Battery capacity 12 volts, 66 amp/hr

Generator/Alternator capacity 444 watts

Fuel capacity 20.0 gal

Oil capacity 4.0 qts

Water capacity 17.0 qts

SUSPENSION

F: Ind., unequal-length wishbones, coil springs, anti-sway bar

R: Rigid axle, coil springs, trailing arms with upper lateral links, anti-sway bar

STEERING

Type Recirculating ball

Turns lock-to-lock 4.5

Turning circle 41 ft

BRAKES

F: Delco Moraine 11.00-in vented discs

R: 9.5-in x 2.0-in cast iron drums

Swept area 291.01 sq in

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size and type 5.5J x 14-in, pressed steel disc, 5-bolt

Tire make, size and type Firestone F70-14

Super Sports Wide Oval (nylon cord 2-ply tubeless)

Test inflation pressures F: 28 psi, R: 28 psi

Tire load rating 1280 lbs per tire @ 24 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to 30 mph Seconds 3.0

Zero to 40 mph 4.7

Zero to 50 mph 5.7

Zero to 60 mph 7.8

Zero to 70 mph 9.8

Zero to 80 mph 12.4

Zero to 90 mph 15.6

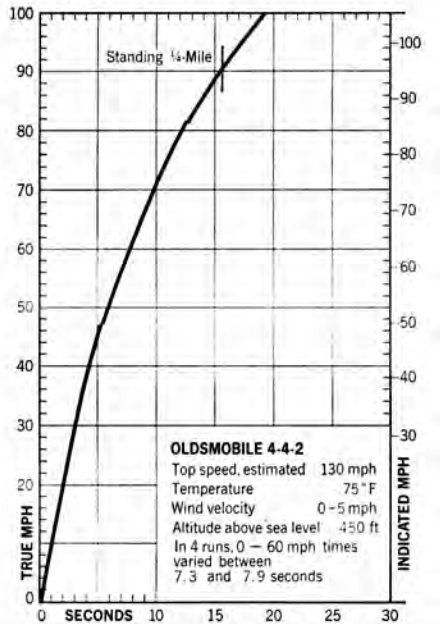
Zero to 100 mph 19.4

Standing 1/4-mile 15.8 sec @ 91 mph

80-0 mph 27.2 ft (.78G)

Fuel mileage 11-17 mpg on premium fuel

Cruising range 220-340 mi



CHECK LIST

ENGINE

Starting Excellent

Response Very Good

Vibration Good

Noise Good

DRIVE TRAIN

Shift linkage Good

Shift smoothness (auto.) Good

Drive train noise Very Good

STEERING

Effort Excellent

Response Very Good

Road feel Poor

Kickback Very Good

SUSPENSION

Ride comfort Very Good

Roll resistance Very Good

Pitch control Good

Harshness control Very Good

HANDLING

Directional control Very Good

Predictability Excellent

Evasive maneuverability Very Good

Resistance to sidewinds Very Good

BRAKES

Pedal pressure Excellent

Response Excellent

Fade resistance Very Good

Directional stability Excellent

CONTROLS

Wheel position Good

Pedal position Very Good

Gearshift position Good

Relationship Fair

Small controls Very Good

INTERIOR

Ease of entry/exit Very Good

Noise level (cruising) Good

Front seating comfort Good

Front leg room Very Good

Front head room Very Good

Front hip/shoulder room Excellent

Rear seating comfort Fair

Rear leg room Poor

Rear head room Fair

Rear hip/shoulder room Good

Instrument comprehensiveness Very Good

Instrument legibility Fair

VISION

Forward Good

Front quarter Good

Side Very Good

Rear quarter Poor

Rear Good

WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater/defroster Excellent

Ventilation Good

Weather sealing Excellent

CONSTRUCTION QUALITY

Sheet metal Very Good

Paint Very Good

Chrome Excellent

Upholstery Very Good

Padding Very Good

Hardware Excellent

GENERAL

Headlight illumination Very Good

Parking and signal lights Good

Wiper effectiveness Excellent

Service accessibility Good

Trunk space Very Good

Interior storage space Good

Bumper protection Good

