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Chevy Heads for the Hills

Ol' Number One is now involved, so there must be something to this four-wheel-drive, off-the-road epidemic

by Julian G. Schmidt



Step aside, folks, just outside the mainstream of time, and watch how it all happens. Round and round, a familiar phenomenon... Man passes by covered with hair, gradually loses it along with the elongation of his limbs, and just about the time it's all gone, a bit of primordial fuzz slightly visible and he's right back where he started.

There's such a thing as being too basic, too refined. And if nature doesn't have it, he pads and automates until comfort is his. But when his Frankenstein rises—larger than himself—he beats it back to submission in the arena of his origin.

It keeps him honest, creating his own challenge, while it keeps him safe, meeting it with his own creation rather than himself.

So Man still climbs mountains on weekends, and fords streams and cuts through underbrush, but now he does it cushioned comfortably within a new form of transportation module known commonly as the "four-wheel-drive, off-the-road vehicle."

Interestingly, this thing has been around since the Jeep, but then the pendulum was in the opposite swing and

sensual pleasure wasn't fashionable... until someone eventually noticed that sensual pleasure was becoming extinct.

So Jeep had a boom, Ford's Bronco had a boom, International Harvester, Rover and Toyota had booms, and now the swing shall be complete: Chevrolet's new K-5 Blazer will have a boom.

Success off the road is an admirable achievement for Detroit designers, because the thinking required is diametrically opposed to customary concepts. Where plastics and styling changes are primary in passenger cars, off-the-road vehicles must be virtually invulnerable. And where multiple model choices are offered in cars, simplicity is the foremost virtue off the road.

Likewise, the Blazer. Order one and you get a four-wheel-drive open utility base—single unit body integrated with a pickup box—and one seat for the driver. No doubletalk superselling, no hidden extras. Just meat. Sure, you can tailor it considerably after that, but you can't double the price of the Blazer with extras like a passenger car. Most important is its basic, adequate utility. There's a front driver's seat and a heater. Period. Stop. Even the dash is simple—speedometer and fuel gauges, with the rest of the information handled by idiot lights.

All of which has a purpose. Strength. Box and side panels are welded to door pillar structures, and the pickup box steel floor to the cab floor.

The hardtop roof option, probably necessary in most of the Blazer's natural habitat, is a one-piece item made entirely of reinforced glass fiber so that it weighs only 151 pounds. The back of the top is fitted with a lockable lift gate, but the rest is secure—side windows are not movable and doors seal tightly to the top. The top is available in only two colors—white or black textured paint.

If you're irreconcilably committed to copping out, you can add the usual "stuff" to the interior: passenger seat and buckets, three-passenger rear seat, armrests, vinyl bucket seats, console between the two front seats, and color-keyed carpeting is included when you order the hardtop.

While all else is identical, Chevy has felt the need—from habit if no other reason—to designate two different model numbers based solely on two dif-

ferent engines. The KS10 has, as a base powerplant, a 250 cubic inch six rated at 155 gross hp at 4200 rpm (120 net hp at 3800) and 235 lbs.-ft. gross torque at 1600 rpm (210 gross torque at 2000 rpm). The 307 cubic inch V-8 model—KE10—delivers 200 gross hp at 4600 rpm (150 net at 4000) and 300 gross torque at 2400 (255 at 2000). Both of these are with the base transmission of an all-synchro three-speed connected to a two-speed Dana transfer case and a standard axle ratio of 3.73:1.

Optional power teams include two engines—a 350 cubic inch, 255-hp V-8 (195 hp net at 4000 rpm, 305 net torque at 2400 rpm), with either a four-speed manual gearbox or Turbo Hydra-Matic, optional 3.07 rear axle ratio, and Posi-traction.

Distinctly aware that perhaps their largest market will be in the West, Chevy has made air conditioning available to ease the occupants' transition from metropolis to mountains. Of course, with the work required for the Blazer under its normal conditions of usage, the air conditioning unit will probably be best handled by the V-8 engine.

If you're concerned with comfort, you won't be off the road in the first place, so Chevrolet has sacrificed a soft ride for basic strength in the Blazer by installing leaf springs both front and rear. Each of the front springs has a rating of 1450 pounds, and the rear springs, 1800 pounds each. Tires are 7.35x15. This suspension may be a throwback to the Conestoga-like durability of old, but it possesses some qualities on which the Blazer's competitors compromised at the beginning, and for which they suffered miserably. The Blazer will not suffer the same humiliation. Proof of this is the Blazer's ability to carry more than 1200 pounds over its 3844-pound curb weight.

Power brakes and steering are both available, and the steering is, in fact, desirable in order to increase maneuverability over the 24:1 ratio of the manual unit. Turning diameter is 36.66 feet curb-to-curb, and 38.78 feet wall-to-wall.

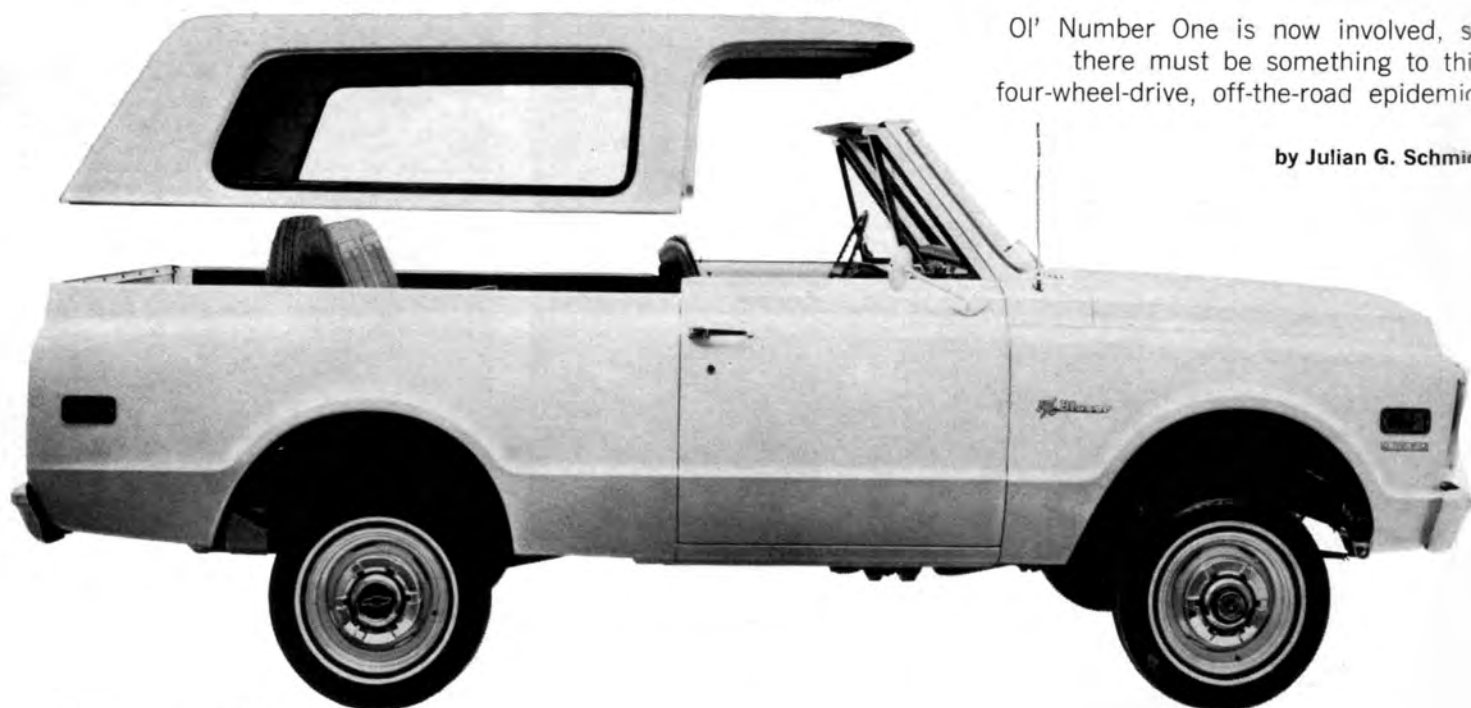
With its 104-inch wheelbase, the Blazer is quite agile, and stability is excellent with a track of 64 inches front and 61 inches rear. Total length is only 177.5 inches, and ground clearance is eight inches.



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