

# THE CAPRICE THAT \$22.15 BUILT

PHOTOS BY DARRYL NOREBERG



**SECRET WEAPON** on the test Caprice is visible beneath the rear axle as the big Chevrolet storms through the test curve with just a touch of understeer. Improving handling this way doesn't hurt the ride at all.

***Inscrutable Chevrolet comes up with an option called F-41. For the price, no 427 Caprice should be without one.***

**T**HE FIRST TESTER climbed out of the 427 Caprice in a state of shock. "There's something fishy about this car," he said. "The first thing I noticed. . ."

But why give the secret away? A former national road-racing champion was watching when the Caprice was put through its paces at Orange County International Raceway. He couldn't believe his eyes. He said. . .

Still too easy. When the test was completed, and the testers knew what

the Caprice would do, and why it would do it, they cornered the man from Chevrolet. They asked (pay attention now, this is the punchline):

"Did you know that car has a rear anti-roll bar?"

"Why, of course," he said. "That's option F-41, a regular production-line option. It includes front and rear stabilizer bars. Costs \$22.15."

It was an unexpected bonus.

CAR LIFE set out to test what we termed Powercars, full-size cars with

the biggest engines available. Before the Intermediates became Supercars, the Powercar was the performance champ. They still sell to the buyer who wants to have the space, ride and prestige of a big car without giving away hopes for performance.

The Powercars are a formidable lot. All the Standards grew this year, with more bulk than the luxury cars of not too long ago. The engines are huge, and the quickest of the group came very close to Supercar perform-

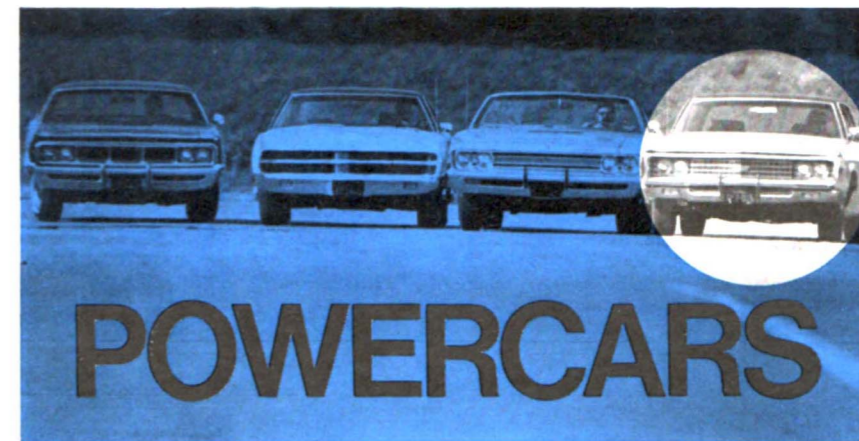
ance despite all the weight it carries.

The Caprice was a natural choice for the group. Like the Ford LTD, the Dodge Monaco and the Plymouth Fury III tested on the following pages, the Caprice is billed as the top of the line. The factory had told us all about the new body, the longer wheelbase and larger interior, the variable-ratio power steering (we like it), even the steel beams inside the doors to protect the occupants in the event of a crash (we hope we never have a first-hand opinion).

The test Caprice was expected to be a big, comfortable car, suited for going long distances with crowds of people. It was. Six adults will fit, four can sprawl. The trunk will hold all the luggage they can carry to the car. With six-way power seats and tiltable steering column, the range of driving positions was enough for every tester. The only flaw is something of a family weakness: The Caprice, like the Chevelle tested in the April CAR LIFE, had seats that are not quite as wide as the interior. The lighter testers complain that they don't sink down into the upholstery, and teeter on the edge. Heavier members of the staff don't know what the lightweights are talking about.

The controls were laid out with commendable forethought. There were only three actual instruments—speedometer, fuel gauge and clock. The car's mechanical health is monitored by warning and indicator lights. The designers assume, and they're probably right, the lights are more likely to be noticed. Almost everything is being monitored. The car had 13—yes 13—lights on the panel. The controls for lighting and so forth were easily reached and deciphered. The occasional surprise, like finding out that pushing the windshield washer button also turns on the wipers, which stay on until turned off, can be overcome with practice. The heater/air conditioner has a position for ventilation, replacing the front quarter windows. The vents do allow air to circulate through the car, although smokers preferred to have the stale smoke pulled out the window in the old-fashioned manner, rather than distributed equally around the car. (So did the non-smokers.)

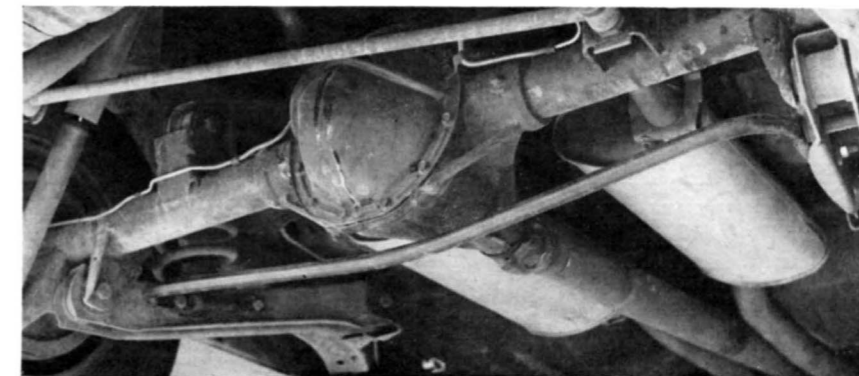
As offered in the Caprice, the 427 comes in two stages of tune, both relatively warm. The test car had a horsepower rating of 390. The lesser version has 335. Both engines come with high compression, and four-barrel carburetors. The only difference is in camshaft timing. At a guess, the factory assumes the 350-cid V-8 is better suited to the economy-minded than a two-barrel 427 would be, and that anybody who wants a 435-bhp 427 can satisfy himself with a Corvette. ▶



**STOPPING** the Caprice was easy: Step on the brake pedal, and the power-boosted discs halt the car in a short, straight line, with very little fade.



**BIG ENGINE** is all but lost in the big engine compartment. The 390-bhp/427-cid V-8 delivered plenty of performance and acceptable gas mileage.



**MECHANICS** of the rear antiroll bar are simple. No brackets, no bushings, just a shaped piece of spring steel bolted to the lower control arms. It looks like an easy add-on for any standard-size 1969 Chevrolet.

# CAPRICE continued



ROUNDING 40-mph test curve at target speed, the Caprice displayed mild understeer and moderate body lean. More power produced neutral steer.

The 390/427 was a good choice for the car. The camshaft timing isn't extreme and it didn't hamper the car's low-speed performance. There's torque where it's needed. The 390 wound to its peak without valve float or unhappy noise. The Caprice was a good half-second away from Supercar status. But performance fans have only to look at Chevrolet's smaller offerings. Space fans don't have to give up much per-

formance. The transmission was as good as the engine. GM does a fine job matching engines and transmissions. The three-speed Turbo Hydra-Matic in the test car shifted imperceptibly beneath a light foot, and quickly when put to the wood.

Big-car brakes were included on the test car. The F-41 option has wider wheels, so the test car could have wide tires. The Caprice had disc front

brakes with power assist. There was enough brake to cope with the weight of the car, and enough tire to cope with the brakes. The first stop from 80 mph showed a deceleration rate of 28 ft./sec./sec., good in any league, especially good for a heavy car. The brakes faded some as the rear drums heated. The testers compensated with heavier feet. The deceleration rate dipped to 18 on the fifth stop, but climbed back up to 26 for the eighth stop. The CAR LIFE brake test is tough: the Caprice passed it.

At this point, everything is normal: The Caprice is advertised as a big, comfortable car, and the engine provides enough power to satisfy the performance-minded driver. Why all the fuss?

Let's fill in the blanks. The first driver expected the Caprice to provide a soft, quiet ride. What he didn't expect was flat, stable cornering on a par with cars equipped with stiff springs and a harsh ride. The rear anti-roll bar doesn't work in a straight line. When both rear wheels hit a bump together, the car lets the springs soak up the shock. The bar resists lean, puts itself into action on turns, when the weight of the car is trying to make the outside wheel take all the punish-

ment. We have been impressed with rear bars on other cars, have recommended them to enthusiasts, and don't know why Chevrolet doesn't tell people about the option. When you've got it, why not flaunt it?

Just how effective the bar is fills in the second blank. The cornering photographs show the Caprice rounding our standard 40-mph curve.

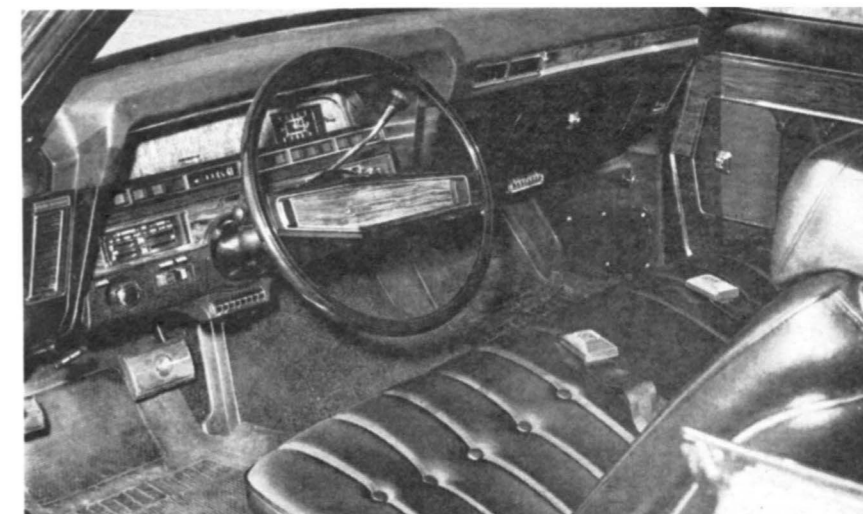
To get there, the driver ran through a handling course set up for sports cars: A 270° left, a sweep around a pylon, a jog into a narrow straight, a quick right-and-left to avoid parked cars, then hard on the brakes to slow the car and set up for the turn.

The tester could power through the hairpin, snake around and between the pylons with flicks of the steering wheel, accelerate past the parked cars and use the brakes to pitch the Caprice into the curve at the target speed.

The road racer, now campaigning in a factory car, was impressed, but he drew the wrong conclusion. What he said was, "Who's driving that car?"

The driver finished last season in a three-way tie for 10th place in one of 22 classes in one of the SCCA's six divisions.

Obviously, it wasn't the driver. It must have been the car. ■



CONTROLS were readily located and deciphered. Power seats and adjustable steering column adjust to all sizes and shapes of drivers.

TRUNK space is more than adequate. Even with the spare tire in place, the trunk will hold all the luggage four people will need for a weekend.



## 1969 CHEVROLET



### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	119
Track, f/r, in.	62/62
Overall length, in.	216
width	80
height	54
Front seat hip room, in.	56
shoulder room	62.3
head room	38
pedal-seatback, max.	40
Rear seat hip room, in.	55
shoulder room	61
leg room	35
head room	38
Door opening width, in.	44
Trunk liftover height, in.	30

### PRICES

List, FOB factory	\$3294
Equipped as tested	\$5319
Options included: 390/427 L-36 engine, \$237; Turbo-Hydro, \$221; positraction, 3.07:1, \$44; power disc brakes, \$64; F-41 handling pkg. (HD springs, shocks, rear antiroll bar), \$22; power steering, \$105, A/C, \$384; AM/FM, \$239.	

### CAPACITIES

No. of passengers	6
Luggage space, cu. ft.	18
Fuel tank, gal.	24
Crankcase, qt.	4
Transmission/dif., pt.	8/4
Radiator coolant, qt.	23

### CHASSIS/SUSPENSION

Frame type: Perimeter.  
Front suspension type: Short and long arms, and coil springs.  
ride rate at wheel, lb./in. n.a.  
antiroll bar dia., in. 0.81  
Rear suspension type: Live axle, coil springs, 3 torque control arms, track bar, antiroll bar.  
ride rate at wheel, lb./in. n.a.  
Steering system: Recirculating ball, variable ratio integral assist.  
overall ratio 15.5-19.3:1  
turns, lock to lock 3.1  
turning circle, ft. curb-curb 43.6  
Curb weight, lb. 4515  
Test weight 4830  
Distribution (driver),  
f/r 55/45

### BRAKES

Type: Power disc/drum.  
Front rotor, dia. in. 11.75  
Rear drum, dia. x width 11 x 2  
total swept area, sq. in. 368.4  
Power assist  
line psi at 100 lb. pedal 739

### WHEELS/TIRES

Wheel rim size 15 x 6JK  
optional size 15 x 6JK  
bolt no./circle dia. in. 5/4.75  
Tires: Goodyear Polyglas belted-bias, size G70-15

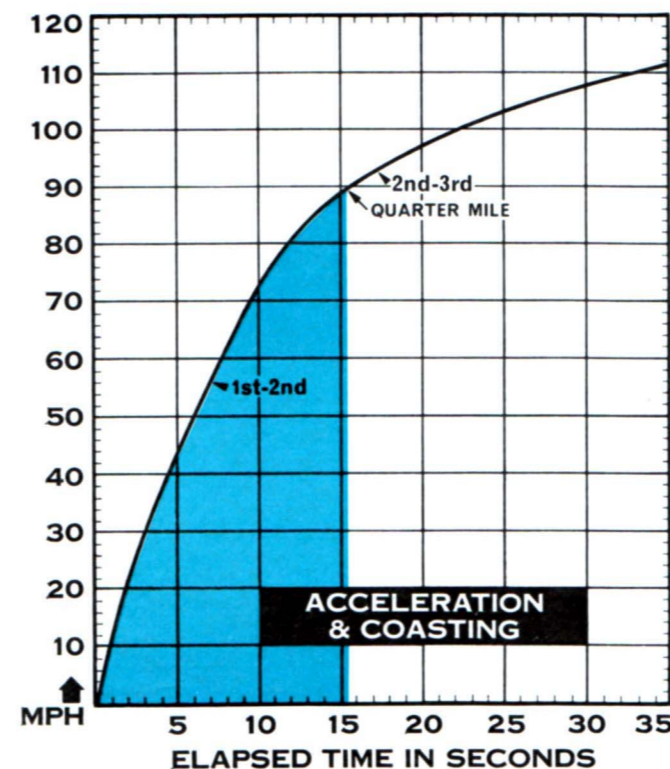
### ENGINE

Type, no. of cyl. V-8  
Bore x stroke, in. 4.25 x 3.76  
Displacement, cu. in. 427  
Compression ratio 10.25:1  
Fuel required premium  
Rated bhp @ rpm 390 @ 5400  
equivalent mph 136  
Rated torque @ rpm 460 @ 3600  
equivalent mph 90  
Carburetion: Quadra-Jet 1x4,  
throttle dia., pri./sec. 1.38/2.25  
Valve train: Hydraulic lifters, push-  
rods, overhead rocker arms.  
cam timing  
deg., int./exh. 56-114/110-62  
duration, int./exh. 350/350  
Exhaust system: Dual, reverse flow  
mufflers, and resonators.  
pipe dia., exh./tail 2.5/2.0  
Normal oil press. @ rpm 50 @ 2000  
Electrical supply, V 12  
Battery, plates/amp. hr. 66/61

### DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission type: Three-speed auto-  
matic with torque converter, "Turbo  
Hydra-Matic."  
Gear ratio 3rd (1.00:1) overall 3.07:1  
2nd (1.48:1) 4.55:1  
1st (2.48:1) 7.61:1  
1st x t.c. stall (2.1 x 2) 48 16.0:1  
Shift lever location: Column.  
Differential type: Hypoid, with limited  
slip.  
axle ratio 3.07:1

## CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



### CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test weight)	12.4
Cu. ft./ton mile	122.2
Mph/1000 rpm (high gear)	25.2
Engine revs./mile (60 mph)	2385
Piston travel, ft./mile	1450
CAR LIFE wear index	357

### PERFORMANCE

Top speed (5000), mph	126
Test shift points (rpm) @ mph	
2nd to 3rd (5500)	93
1st to 2nd (5500)	56

### ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	2.9
0-40 mph	4.3
0-50 mph	5.9
0-60 mph	7.7
0-70 mph	9.7
0-80 mph	12.2
0-90 mph	15.8
0-100 mph	22.2
Standing 1/4-mile, sec.	15.5
speed at end, mph	89.6
Passing, 30-70 mph, sec.	6.8

### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

Indicated	Actual
30 mph	26.6
40 mph	37.0
50 mph	47.0
60 mph	57.2
70 mph	67.4
80 mph	77.6
90 mph	87.7

### MAINTENANCE

Engine oil, miles/days	6000/120
oil filter, miles/days	6000/120
Chassis lubrication, miles	36,000
Antismog servicing, type/miles	tune engine, replace PCV/12,000
Air cleaner, miles	replace/24,000
Spark plugs: AC R43N	
gap (in.)	0.035
Basic timing, deg./rpm	4/600
max. cent. adv., deg./rpm	26/3800
max. vac. adv., deg./in. Hg.	15/15
Ignition point gap, in.	0.019
cam dwell angle, deg.	30
arm tension, oz.	21
Tappet clearance, int./exh.	0/0
Fuel pressure at idle, psi	7.5
Radiator cap relief press., psi	14

### BRACING

Max. deceleration rate from 80 mph	ft./sec./sec. 28
No. of stops from 80 mph (60-sec. intervals) before 20% loss in deceleration rate	6
Control loss? Slight.	
Overall brake performance	very good

### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Test conditions, mpg	10.1
Normal cond., mpg	10-12
Cruising range, miles	240-290