



OPEL GT BIG SURPRISE...

... at your friendly Buick dealers. It looks like a Mini-Vette, and handles more like a 'Vette than an Opel.

WHAT'S AN OPEL GT? It's the Mini-Brute's Mini-Vette. It's a 1.9-liter sports car from Opel, GM's German subsidiary. It's a low cost, medium-performance GT car sold by America's huge Buick dealer organization. It's GM's bid in the lucrative low-price sports car market currently being dominated by Datsun, Triumph, MG, Fiat, et al.

But to many Americans, it's going to be "Buick's new sports car." More importantly—to its owners—it will be not only a car that will handle as well as the competition in its price range (roughly \$3500 loaded), it offers two extras not necessarily available from the others—distinctive style, plus service and parts as near as your local Buick dealer.

The big surprise is how Opel achieved the comfort, convenience, style and engineering. The first Opel GT was shown two years ago as a styling exercise on the Kadett chassis, Opel's economy sedan. The announcement last fall that it would be produced was not terribly earth shattering. Pretty, certainly; but we had our doubts about the worthiness of the en-

PHOTOS BY DAVE GOOLEY



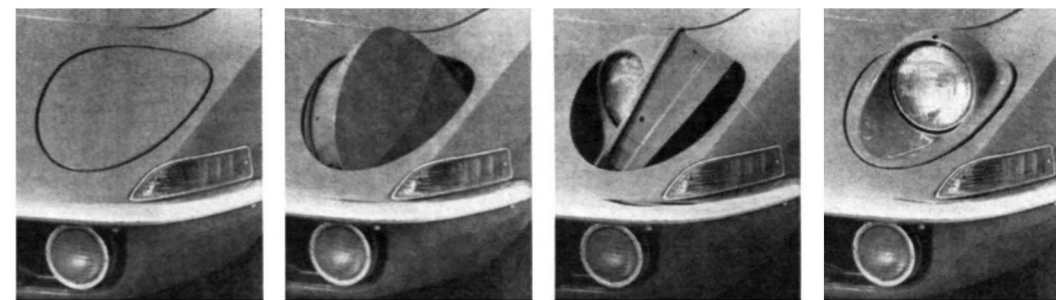
**CAR LIFE
ROAD TEST**



HANDLING was nimble and responsive at moderate speeds, but cornering near the limit of adhesion revealed too much understeer and rear wheel lifting.

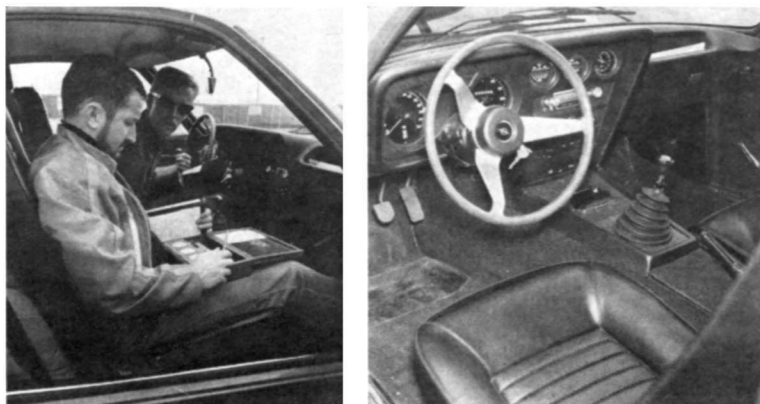
OPEL GT

continued



INTERESTING LIGHT SHOW was amusing to watch, noisy to listen to. Mechanical linkage was activated by firm push on console handle. If firm enough, lights would slam home with loud thump. Last portion of movement turned on switch—sometimes.

LARGE DOORS and roomy interior put GT a cut above most sports cars. Instrument panel was stylish yet logical; center dials angle toward driver.



gine and chassis, even though the Rallye Kadett we tested (December, 1968) was impressive in both the performance and handling departments for an economy sedan.

But rebodilying the Kadett, we felt, would not make a very sophisticated sports car. To our surprise, Opel has done essentially that (plus detail changes), and has come up with a nice integration of power, handling, size and style. The basic chassis is that of the Kadett. The engine has been moved back roughly 12 in.; the passenger compartment was shifted to the rear a proportional amount; and the smoother, lower body was added. This brings down the center of gravity (the Kadett felt very tippy) and allows the axle ratio to be lowered numerically due to the lowered drag.

Standard engine is the little 66-cid 4-cyl. ohv with 67 bhp. But optional, and the obvious choice of the enthusiast, and the one that will make the GT a genuine sports car, is the modern 102-bhp/116-cid Rallye engine. Our test car, with this engine and the standard four-speed transmission, came off on the specification sheet as a carbon of the Rallye Kadett previously tested. Only the rear axle ratio (3.44:1 vs. 3.67:1 on the sedan), and tire size, are different (165-13 radials on the GT, 155-13 on the sedan).

However, differences not apparent on paper are quickly obvious at the test track. Quarter-mile times are nearly a second quicker and five miles per hour faster. Top speed, 111 mph, is better by 10 mph over the sedan. Braking is slightly better, and handling is vastly improved with the lower center of gravity. We're not exactly sure where this extra performance came from. The engine is *supposed* to be the same. Only readily apparent inducements for quicker acceleration is 100-rpm higher redline (6000 rpm), slightly larger section tires and a very grippy clutch. It could be moved off the line very smartly, with just a whisper of wheelspin. Snap shifts were easy and the clutch and tire grip were

good enough to send a judder of torque throughout the car. The slippery shape helped on the top end.

We still don't like the transmission ratios. First and second, and third and fourth are closely spaced, leaving a knee-buckling drop between second and third. This not only has its disadvantages in acceleration, but often one is left without a proper gear for certain corners, where the choice is lugging around in third, or buzzing along well past the power peak in second. Thankfully, the GT has been spared the horrendous fan noise of the sedan. The higher rear axle gearing re-

duces the engine speed for corresponding road speed, and more attention was paid to internal aerodynamics allowing a smaller and slower radiator fan. The noise is still there, more than we would like or are used to in domestic cars; but at least it doesn't drive the passengers out of the car.

The disc/drum brake system, as expected, was top drawer. Best deceleration rates in our stops from 80 mph were excellent, though slightly erratic, between 31 and 28 ft./sec./sec. Fade was not evident in eight consecutive stops. A slight and nearly imperceptible servo-assist is added by a curiously

placed vacuum diaphragm. Instead of hanging on the firewall, diaphragm and master cylinder have been moved forward to the radiator bulkhead with a linkage rod spanning the length of the engine compartment to connect pedal to master cylinder. We're not exactly sure why. There seems to be room on the firewall.

We took the opportunity to evaluate the handling of the GT on both a very tight slalom course and on high-speed mountain roads, all on the same day. Bob Bondurant's School of High Performance driving was operating at Orange County Raceway on test day

ANY DOUBT about its ancestry? Though not an exact replica, the GT does borrow several styling details from the Corvette, especially the nose and tail treatments. It got more curious stares than the Improbables.



SPUNKY 102-bhp engine has been moved back several inches and valve cover chopped as concession to GT hood. Note casual cold air package, front mounted brake booster (upper center).

NO trunk, à la Corvette, but luggage area is larger and easier to reach than 'Vette's.



OPEL has its moment on competition driving school course. GT could stay with novices in prepared Datsuns, but had to be hung out to do it.



DISAPPOINTING weigh-in revealed a slightly heavier curb weight and worse distribution than sedan.



and we got permission from the instructor to lap the tight course with his students in Datsun 2000s. After a few laps we began to get the feel of it and we (a) surprised even ourselves, (b) watched the instructor's sneaky grin turn into a frown when we started catching his students, and (c) found the GT's two worst faults.

Later, in the mountains, we reaffirmed what we suspected on the test

track: Heavy initial understeer and rear wheel lifting. For easy "fun" driving around the neighborhood, the car seems nimble and reasonably responsive, but out at the limit, the car feels unpredictable and lacks real cornering power.

Two things: It needs a rear antiroll bar to take out some of the understeer, and a limited-slip differential to get the power to the ground coming out of a

corner. So equipped, the GT would probably be as impressive a handler as one can buy short of a more expensive Corvette or Porsche.

Interestingly, the Rallye came standard with the rear bar, and first GT press releases last fall listed a handling kit of stiff springs and shocks, rear bar, and a limited-slip differential. Later releases neglect to mention this, but show a sketch of the rear axle

with and without a rear bar. Nor do the option lists contain the handling kit or any part of it. At this writing, the kit is probably for European sale only and will be offered here when and if the demand is great enough. The sedan handling package by the way, has both items, and will bolt right on.

Inside, the Opel has one of the better people packages of the sports and GT car world. The larger members of

our staff found entrance and egress better than the Corvette and most imports. The large door, which opens high (for once the stylist lost to the comfort engineers), wide (some 43 inches, close to a full-size sedan) and handsome (stylist didn't lose all the battles). Door location relative to the seat is also good. The large seats are comfortable and pretty fair buckets.

The rest of the interior is plush,

logical and roomy. Dash has the tach and speedometer where it counts, and easily read engine instruments on the center section.

Only rub is the international symbology on the rocker switches. Took a long time for us to figure out the one with the jiggly lines on it. It was for the rear window defroster, which was heated by (you guessed it) a bunch of jiggly wires. ■

1969 OPEL GT



CHASSIS/SUSPENSION

Frame type: Unitized.
Front suspension type: Short and long arms transverse.
ride rate at wheel, lb./in. n.a.
antiroll bar dia., in. none
Rear suspension type: Live axle, coil spring, torque control arms, track bar.
ride rate at wheel, lb./in. n.a.
Steering system: Rack and pinion.
overall ratio 17.4
turns, lock to lock 3
turning circle, ft. curb-to-curb 33
Curb weight, lb. 2070
Test weight 2380
Test weight distribution, % f/r. 55/45

BRAKES

Type: Power-assisted disc/drum.
Front rotor, dia., in. 9.4
Rear drum, dia. x width 9.0 x 2.2
total swept area, sq. in. 277

WHEELS/TIRES

Wheel rim size 13 x 5J
optional size none
bolt no./circle dia. in. 4/4
Tires: UniRoyal Radials
size 165 HR-13

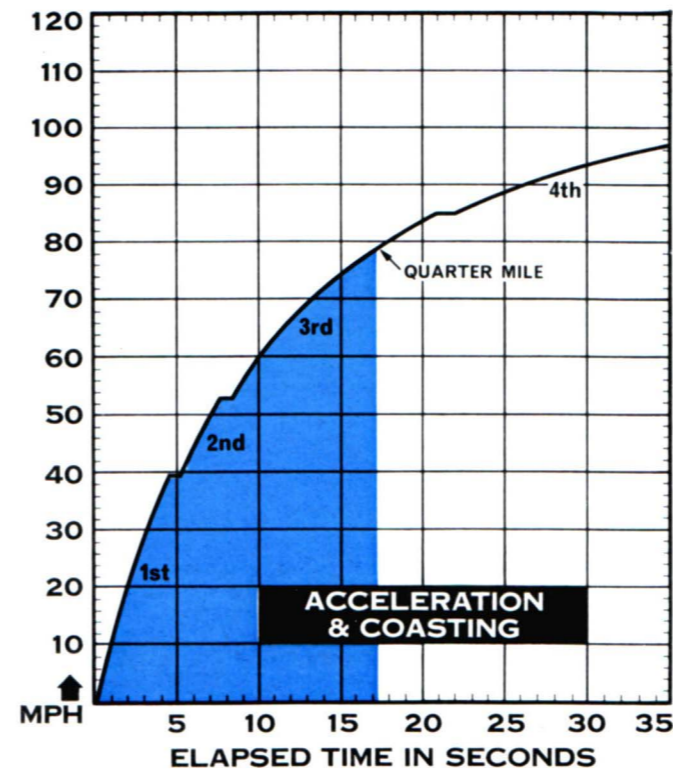
ENGINE

Type, no. of cyl. I4-4
Bore x stroke, in. 3.66 x 2.75
Displacement, cu. in. 115.8
Compression ratio 9.0:1
Fuel required premium
Rated bhp @ rpm 102 @ 5400
equivalent mph 104
Rated torque @ rpm 115 @ 3100
equivalent mph 60
Carburetion: Solex 1x2.
throttle dia., pri./sec. 0.95/1.1
Valve train: Overhead cam, tappets and rocker arms.
cam timing
deg., int./exh. 44-86/84-46
duration, int./exh. 310/310
Exhaust system: 4 into 1 manifold, reverse flow muffler, transverse resonator with dual tail pipes.
pipe dia., exh./tail 1.5/1.2
Normal oil press. @ rpm. .37 @ 3000
Electrical supply, V. 12
Battery, plates/amp. hr. n.a./44

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch type: Single dry plate disc.
dia., in. 8.0
Transmission type: Four-speed manual, fully synchronized.
Gear ratio 4th (1.00:1) overall. 3.44:1
3rd (1.37:1) 4.71:1
2nd (2.16:1) 7.34:1
1st (3.43:1) 11.8:1
Shift lever location: console.
Differential type: Hypoid.
axle ratio 3.44:1

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test weight) 23.4
Cu. ft./ton mile 119.2
Mph/1000 rpm (high gear) 19.32
Engine revs/mile (60 mph) 3100
Piston travel, ft./mile 1420
CAR LIFE wear index 44.0

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

Indicated	Actual
30 mph	28.0
40 mph	38.3
50 mph	48.7
60 mph	59.0
70 mph	69.8
80 mph	78.2
90 mph	87.0

MAINTENANCE

Engine oil, miles/days 3000/60
oil filter, miles/days 6000/120
Chassis lubrication, miles none
Antismog servicing, type/miles
clean/6000; replace/12,000
Air cleaner, miles clean/6000
Spark plugs: AC 42FS.
gap, (in.) 0.030
Basic timing, deg./rpm n.a.
max. cent. adv., deg./rpm. 34/3200
max. vac. adv., deg./in. Hg. 21/13
Ignition point gap, in. 0.018
cam dwell angle, deg. 50
arm tension, oz. 17
Tappet clearance, int./exh. 0.012/0.012
Fuel pressure at idle, psi. 2.5
Radiator cap relief press., psi. 8.0

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (5800), mph 111
Test shift points (rpm) @ mph
3rd to 4th (6000) 85
2nd to 3rd (6000) 53
1st to 2nd (6000) 39

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec. 3.3
0-40 mph 5.1
0-50 mph 7.4
0-60 mph 10.2
0-70 mph 13.7
0-80 mph 18.0
0-90 mph 26.6
0-100 mph 39.6
Standing 1/4-mile, sec. 17.4
speed at end, mph 79.0
Passing, 30-70 mph, sec. 104

BRAKING

Max. deceleration rate from 80 mph
ft./sec./sec. 31
No. of stops from 80 mph (60-sec. intervals) before 20% loss in deceleration rate 8-13% loss
Control loss? None.
Overall brake performance excellent

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Test conditions, mpg 17.6
Normal cond., mpg 22-26
Cruising range, miles 230-270

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in. 95.1
Track, f/r, in. 49/50
Overall length, in. 162
width 62
height 48
Front seat hip room, in. 2 x 21
shoulder room 50
head room 37
pedal-seatback, max. 43
Door opening width, in. 43

PRICES

List, FOB New York \$3395
Equipped as tested \$3513
Options included: 1.9S Engine \$99
rear window defroster \$19

CAPACITIES

No. of passengers 2
Luggage space, cu. ft. 7
Fuel tank, gal. 10.5
Crankcase, qt. 3
Transmission/dif., pt. 2.5/2.5
Radiator coolant, qt. 6