

THE BEST CARS OF 1969



PHOTO BY DAVID GOOLEY

platform behind the seats and a curtained cubbyhole behind that. With much less sheer size than the Corvette, the GT has a larger interior. Switches, etc., are labelled in sign language. We figured most out without referring to the guidebook. Our favorite was the lever used to pry the headlights out of their sockets above the grille. When people point and wave, the GT driver shoves the lever forward and the lights spin into view, ablaze, with a loud thump. The average onlooker doesn't believe what he saw, and one group even broke into applause.

Opel GT handling was better than the sedan, but a racer has his work cut out for him. Even with the engine moved back 12 in. from its Kadett location, the GT front is heavy, and the car understeers. The inside rear wheel lifts under power, and spins in the air. In traffic or ordinary driving, the GT nips smartly about, but it's still more sedan than sports car.

So a show car made it into production without losing its looks, and sedan components can also serve as the basis for a sports car. So it's good. But why is it the best import?

What's best depends on what the import buyer wants. Low cost was the prime consideration for years, but it no longer seems to be. The imports with extras, and higher prices, are gaining ground on the cheapies all the time, and several of the major overseas builders are moving into new territory with their own versions of medium-price cars.

Speed and power? No way. The import will lose to the home-grown performance car on a dollar basis. At the very top of the scale, there are a few imported performance cars that can stay with the brutish big V-8s, but there's no such thing as an inexpensive V-12.

The imports are fun to drive, or they should be. (We can think of several exceptions.) And they look immeasurably better than the stripped sedan Detroit throws into the price wars.

The Opel GT does both, with its sporting exhaust, precise gearshift and steering, and willing engine. It darts through traffic and hums along the freeway, and the sharp good looks will be winning it glances for years. ■

Best Import

OPEL GT

JUST THE DECISION to build the Opel GT and import it ought to win some sort of prize for the makers. With that decision, the factory cleared at least two hurdles that have sent several other makers crashing to the ground.

The Opel GT began as a show car, a styling exercise with sedan parts. Year after year, beautiful creations are rolled onto the stage, and the builders make cryptic announcements about producing the car, with an engine even, if things work out. They don't, and the car is never heard of again.

And those sedan parts. The Opel Kadett is a nice little sedan, but the noise level would give Acid Rock a

bad name. Put an economy engine inside a fancy suit, and you get a pretty car with all the zip of an economy sedan, which is to say not much.

So here's the Opel GT, a show car that made it into production. Most of the lines were changed, but the appeal wasn't. During the model year we drove some unusual cars, but none attracted as much favorable attention as the GT. There's a family resemblance to Corvette in front, the obligatory ducktail spoiler in back, joined by a sleek midsection that makes the Opel GT look like the exotic import it isn't.

The sedan components are a success. The GT and its center of gravity are lower than the Kadett, which

brings body roll down to a reasonable degree, and improves cornering power. The engine has the same amount of weight to pull (GT and Kadett weigh almost exactly the same), but the slippery shape allows a taller final drive gear. Top speed is up, revs per mile are down and there's less noise from wind and engine. What howl remains didn't bother us. (A decibel meter can't distinguish between the sporty snarl of a GT car and the infuriating shriek of an economy car. But we can.)

The old bit about small on the outside, big on the inside works for the GT. Only two seats, but they're good seats. No trunk lid, but there's a nice

SPECIFICATIONS

Wheelbase, in.....	95	total swept area, sq. in.....	277
Overall length in.....	162	Engine: 1L-4	
width.....	62	Bore x stroke, in.....	3.66 x 2.75
height.....	48	Displacement, cu. in.....	115.8
No. of passengers.....	2	Compression ratio.....	9.0:1
Price, basic.....	\$3395	Rated bhp @ rpm.....	102 @ 3100
as tested.....	\$3515	Clutch: Single dry plate disc.	
Frame type: Unitized.		diameter, in.....	8
Front suspension: Short and long arms transverse.		Transmission: Four-speed manual, fully synchro-	
Rear suspension: Live axle, coil springs, torque control arms, track bar.		nized.	
Steering: Rack and pinion.		Gear ratio 4th (1.00:1).....	3.44:1
overall ratio.....	17.4:1	3rd (1.37:1).....	4.71:1
turns, lock to lock.....	3	2nd (2.16:1).....	7.34:1
turning circle, ft. curb-curb.....	33	1st (3.43:1).....	11.8:1
Curb weight.....	2070	Lb./bhp (test weight).....	23.4
Tires: UniRoyal radials 165HR-13.		Mph/1000 rpm (high gear).....	19.32
Brakes: Power assisted disc/drum.		Engine revs/mile (60 mph).....	3100
dia. x width, F/R.....	9.4/9.0 x 2.2	Piston travel, ft./mile.....	1420
		CAR LIFE Wear Index.....	44

ROAD TEST RESULTS

Speedometer reading @ 30 mph.....	28	Passing, 30-70 mph, sec.....	10.4
Speedometer reading @ 60 mph.....	59	Braking: Maximum deceleration rate	
Top Speed (5800).....	111	ft./sec./sec.....	31
Acceleration 0-30 mph, sec.....	3.3	No. of stops from 80 mph (at 60-sec. inter-	
0-40 mph.....	5.1	vals) before 20% loss in deceleration	
0-50 mph.....	7.4	rate.....	8-13% loss
0-60 mph.....	10.2	Control loss: None.	
0-70 mph.....	13.7	performance.....	excellent
0-80 mph.....	18.0	Fuel consumption under test conditions,	
Standing 1/4-mile, sec.....	17.4	mpg.....	17.6
Speed at end, mph.....	79.0	Normal cond., mpg.....	22-26

The complete road test reports published during the 1969 model year contain more specific information on the Ten Best Cars. They are available by checking the date of the issue on the Road Test Comparator (page 44) and using the coupon for ordering back issues on page 16.