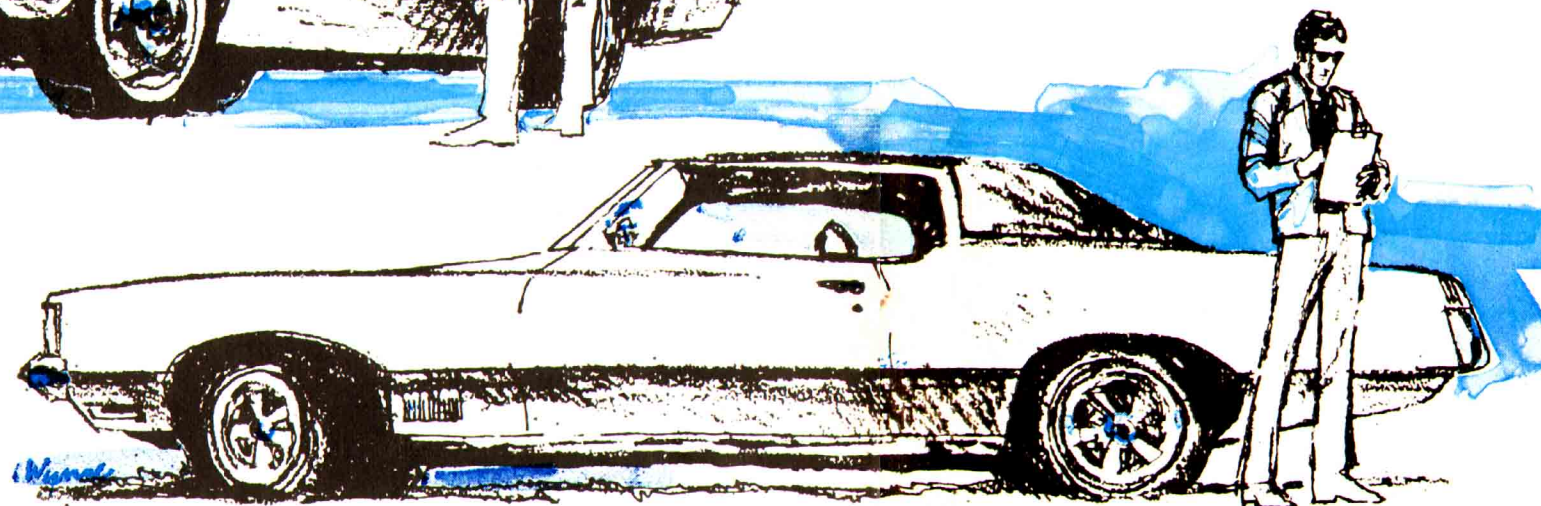


Illustrations: Cliff Wynne



# Three for the Road

Chevy's aspiring  
Monte Carlo tangles with  
the Grand Prix and  
Thunderbird

By Bill Sanders

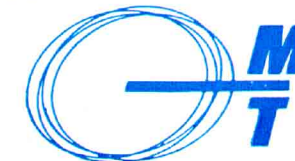
In 1954 Signore Pietro—"Mille Miglia"—Lamborghini de Cinecittà, the famous Italian designer and coachbuilder, uttered his historic statement, "*La Bonnetto Longue es Que Bella.*" Loosely translated that means, "If the hood ain't long, something's wrong." The Italians have made an art of long hoods and short decks on their cars for some time now. For a couple of reasons. It's aesthetically pleasing, and more important, a long hood is usually necessary to accommodate the long V12 engines Italians are fond of. Any superfluous sheetmetal hanging over the rear end would be kind of dumb, so *voilà*, the long hood, short deck.

From the aesthetic standpoint, that look has now caught on in the U.S., and a new breed, the Luxury-Personal-Performance car has come of age with it. There are several domestic cars that fit the category. Some have been around for awhile. But, in 1969 the Pontiac Grand Prix started the avant garde trend: long, long hood, short deck and an extended grille, euphemistically emulating some famous radiator-grille combinations. The '69 Grand Prix was an immediate success. With the introduction of the Chevrolet Monte Carlo for 1970 and a completely redesigned Thunderbird from Ford, the Luxury-Personal-Performance field has offerings in every price category. MT thought it would be interesting to see what value you can get in the different categories on a comparison basis, somewhat on the order of department stores and mail order houses that offer "good," "better" and "best" merchandise.

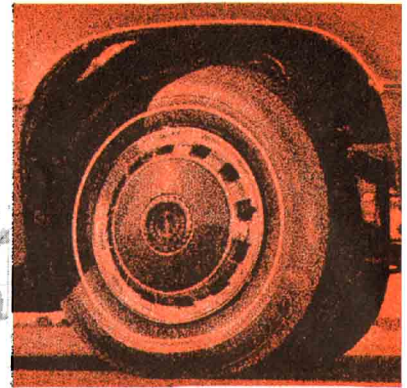
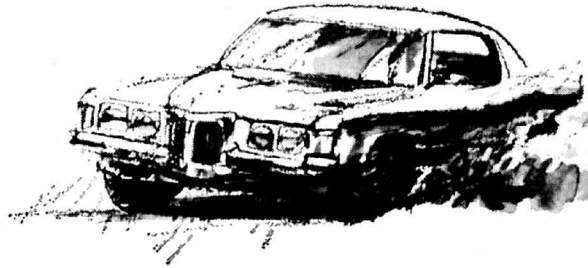
### Luxury As Ride, Comfort & Convenience

Chevrolet's all-new entry, the Monte Carlo, is based on the Chevelle sedan 116-inch wheelbase, but has its own frame, although many chassis parts are interchangeable with the Chevelle. The Monte Carlo frame is eight inches longer than the Chevelle sedan frame in order to give it added hood length. Since our domestic cars carry V8s instead of V12s, as the Italian cars do, the added hood length is just for looks and leaves a lot of room between the radiator and engine. With an entirely different body, the Monte Carlo frame also has to be different for the body attachments. To achieve a six-foot hood length, four inches have been added in front of the Monte Carlo cowl and another four inches forward of the front wheels. With all the sectioning, the longer frame and the unusual weight distribution, as compared to the Chevelle, Chevrolet engineers have

*continued*



*Three luxury cars that make it flat through the corners . . . it may be the start of a positive trend.*



increased spring and shock rates, added a larger front stabilizer bar and installed a standard rear stabilizer bar that is available only as an option on the Chevelle SS 396. With all the changes and additions, the Monte Carlo has come out with an unusually comfortable ride and big car solid feeling for a car on a 116-inch wheelbase.

The Monte Carlo's luxuriously comfortable ride can be attributed to several factors. It's not affected as much by roll as it has more inertia, being a bigger car. And, a standard item on the SS 454, which our test car was, is an automatic leveling control. Rear shocks have air bags which are pressurized and extend the shocks as more weight is added to the rear. The system is fully automatic and is activated by sensing valves in the rear suspension links. An engine-operated vacuum pump supplies air as needed. The automatic leveling control is also available on the Grand Prix. Tread width is wider on the Monte Carlo than on the Chevelle. It all adds up to big car comfort and ride.

Luxury appointments also rate high on the MC. A windshield antenna is standard, as it is on all '70 Chevrolets. The Chevrolet radio tape deck combination is an unusual and exclusive unitized system that allows the tape cartridge to fit into the radio dial. The dash layout is good, reminiscent of some European GT cars with a wood burl applique. Only the gauges for the temperature, amps and fuel are poor in that they are rather small.

Seating comfort is on a par with Chevelle or Chevy and is good. Rear seat leg room is inadequate with the front seats in an aft position, but surprisingly not bad when the front seats are moved forward. Rear seat headroom is definitely restricted.

Only the Grand Prix is essentially unchanged from its introduction last year. We liked the ride and comfort then and still do. The GP's capsulized, compartmentalized driving seat and dash still rate high. After all, this type of luxury is meant to be enjoyed by the driver, and the Grand Prix certainly gives it. It wasn't meant to be a limousine, so the lack of rear seat room isn't a cardinal sin. If you get one of these cars, especially the Monte Carlo or Grand Prix, you should realize what you are sacrificing for a performance-oriented vehicle. The Grand Prix still has the wrap around dash merging into a center console that surrounds you. Since no suspension changes have been made to the GP, the ride is still firm and comfortable. Front seats are excellent buckets with good support. Even though the Monte Carlo hood is as long as that on the GP, the hood on the latter still looks like it's longer and still takes a little getting used to. Looking out through the windshield it gives the impression of being a much longer car.

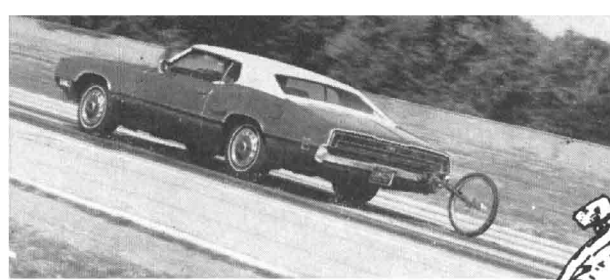
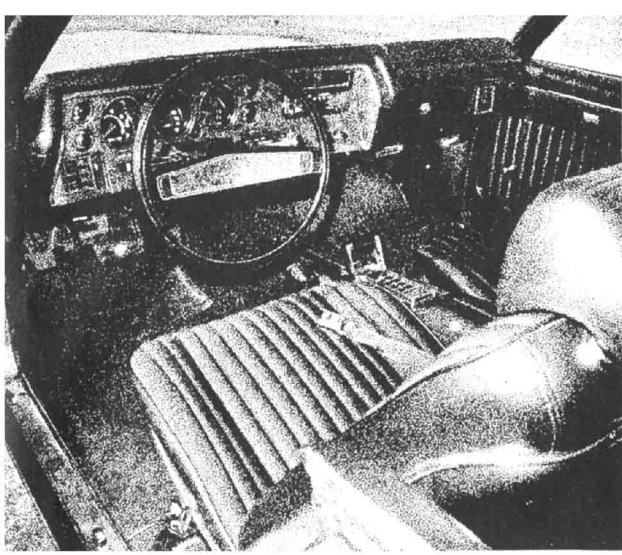
Items that have changed on the GP include interior door handles that are easier to use and new reading/map lights

in the headliner light. The new lights shine over the shoulders of both the driver and passenger and are the kind of small touches that come in so handy.

And then there's the Thunderbird. Ford does make a four-door T-bird, in case you didn't know. But, who wants a Luxury-Personal-Performance four-door sedan? Evidently not many. So we'll move on to the two-door version, which in '69 was sleek and is now even sleeker. The '70 'Bird is practically an entirely new car, even without what should be called a major change. The '69 'Bird two-door was slung low to the road with great lines. The '70 'Bird two-door is even lower, 1.4 inches lower to be exact. That may not sound like much, but the visual result is amazing. The first thing that comes to mind when looking at the two-door in profile is the beautiful custom work of the late '40s and early '50s. The '70 'Bird is reminiscent of some of those early creations and looks like it has been chopped and channeled with meticulous care, with a roofline that blends smoothly into the rear deck.

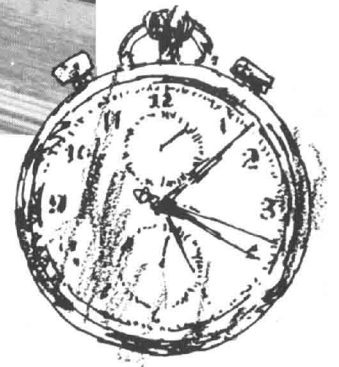
The different height in suspension is due to a complete suspension change. That was done because Ford decided to go to radial tires for 1970 and the tires and suspension had to be built to be compatible. In fact, Ford worked closely with Goodrich to build a tire to accommodate excellent ride qualities and to which they could tailor the suspension. We thought the '69 had excellent ride comfort and couldn't be improved upon. We were wrong. With the tailored suspension, there is more shock and spring control with lower calibration, and with the radials, ride comfort is supreme, especially at freeway speeds. That's because radial tires tend to become more perfectly round the faster they go, while bias tires tend to bulge at higher speeds. On the other hand, there is supposed to be more low speed "thump" with radials, but it wasn't noticeable on the Thunderbird. Ride improvement is also affected by the fact that the total car shell sits lower due to the suspension changes, giving a lower center of gravity, while the engine is still at the same height as in '69. Also for '70, the Thunderbird has gotten the Mark III noise insulation package, so noise levels at all speeds are greatly reduced. The car is now extremely quiet inside, especially at high speeds.

Front seating arrangements are essentially the same as last year, but bucket seats have been redesigned with integral head restraints. The new buckets are softly padded, including the head restraints, and afford plush seating comfort. Rear seats are comfortable, too, but again, there's no leg room. The extreme lowness of the roof is apparent in the back seat, but headroom isn't restricted. As part of the group image, the T-bird has the radio antenna located in the windshield this year. The small wires are unobtrusive and reception isn't hampered. Because the roof slopes so



photography: Fred Enke

A new introduction, the Monte Carlo is an unqualified success in every respect, especially with the 454 engine. Thunderbird, too, is practically an entirely new automobile with radial tires and a redesigned suspension that adds a lot to ride and handling. And, the Grand Prix is still the same stormer, performer it was in 1969.



much in the rear, the rear window is quite small, although it doesn't affect rear viewing. It completes the intimate feeling of the car. The dash layout is good, but the clock is directly ahead through the steering wheel, a spot that would be much better utilized by the fuel and temperature or fuel and oil pressure gauges. Exiting from the rear seat is a little difficult, especially for women, and the door could use a handle for rear seat passengers.

The T-bird is a posh car and it gets the posh treatment. This year quality control is really rigid. Stethoscopes are used to detect air leaks in doors and windows. The number of electrical connections and vacuum fittings has been reduced. It even goes through an in-plant road test.

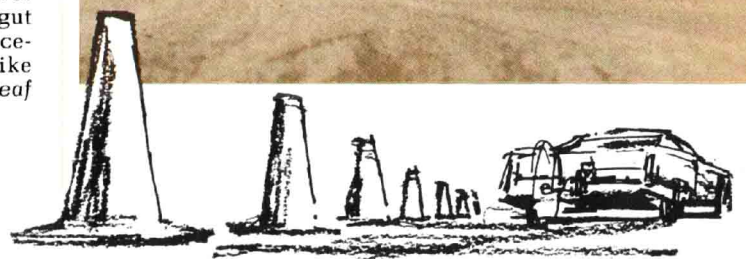
### Luxury & Performance

We wanted to get the biggest engines in each line for this road test, so our Monte Carlo had Chevy's new 454 four-barrel V8, the Grand Prix had Pontiac's new 455 four-barrel V8 and the Thunderbird had Ford's reliable 429 four-barrel V8. Initial plans called for the '70 Thunderbird to have the 460-cubic-inch V8 Lincoln engine as an option, but with smog control devices, Ford engineers felt the standard 429 offered nearly as much power. The Monte Carlo will be available in a convertible model sometime after the first of the year and will be even heavier in that trim, so the 454 is a good engine to have around.

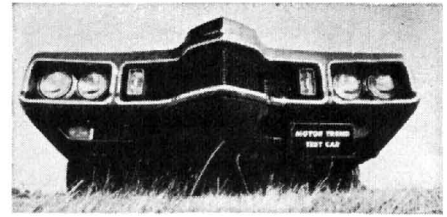
With the best power-to-weight ratio, the Monte Carlo had some credible acceleration results. Our test car did 0 to 60 in seven seconds flat and a quarter-mile in 14.9 seconds at 92 mph. To say that acceleration is brisk would be an understatement. Any acceleration movements, such as passing, are accomplished with dispatch. A 3.31:1 axle ratio allows quiet cruising, but also is low enough, combined with the 360 horsepower engine, to give snappy performance. None of these cars is built to be pestered around a road course, but under normal driving conditions, the Monte Carlo goes through curves relatively flat. It understeers but it isn't drastic. Variable ratio power steering is standard and is well suited to the car. Front disc brakes are standard on the SS Monte Carlo. They're good to have although they didn't give any spectacular results. At low speeds our test Monte Carlo stopped adequately, but at 60 mph it became very unstable and the stopping distance was longer.

Performance was one of the most notable differences we could detect in the Grand Prix over the '69. The new 455 engine gives a much more generous feeling of torque to the road. The '69 428-cubic-inch V8 option had the horsepower and the response, but the 455 has a definite big car gut feeling of oblique power. That feeling is especially noticeable when running with the air conditioner on. It's like

*text continued on page 102 — chart on overleaf*



*The emphasis is on posh . . . luxury is the word.  
Excellent performance just adds to the appeal.*



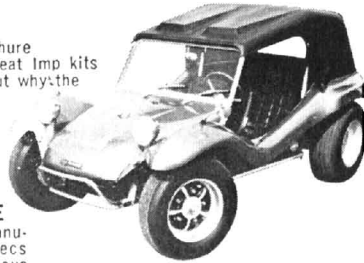
<b>PERFORMANCE</b>			
<b>Acceleration</b>	<b>MONTE CARLO</b>	<b>GRAND PRIX</b>	<b>THUNDERBIRD</b>
0-30 mph	3.0 secs.	3.0 secs.	3.1 secs.
0-45 mph	5.0 secs.	5.0 secs.	6.1 secs.
0-60 mph	7.0 secs.	7.8 secs.	9.0 secs.
0-75 mph	10.2 secs.	11.4 secs.	13.5 secs.
<b>Standing Start 1/4-Mile</b>	14.9 secs./92.0 mph	15.5 secs./88.0 mph	16.9 secs./84.6 mph
<b>Passing Speeds</b>			
40-60 mph	4.0 secs.	4.0 secs.	4.0 secs.
50-70 mph	4.1 secs.	4.7 secs.	5.2 secs.
<b>Speeds in Gears</b>			
1st . . . .mph @ rpm	45 @ 4800	45 @ 4600	54 @ 4600
2nd . . . .mph @ rpm	78 @ 4800	77 @ 4600	90 @ 4600
3rd . . . .mph @ rpm	118 @ 4800	115 @ 4600	98 @ 3500
<b>MPH Per 1000 RPM (in top gear)</b>	24.6	25.0	28.0
<b>Stopping Distances</b>			
From 30 mph	26.3 ft.	23.1 ft.	30.0 ft.
From 60 mph	150.0 ft.	144.2 ft.	136.4 ft.
<b>SPECIFICATIONS</b>			
	<b>MONTE CARLO</b>	<b>GRAND PRIX</b>	<b>THUNDERBIRD</b>
<b>Engine</b>	90° OHV V8	90° OHV V8	90° OHV V8
<b>Bore &amp; Stroke — ins.</b>	4.251 x 4.00	4.15 x 4.21	4.36 x 3.59
<b>Displacement — cu. in.</b>	454	455	429
<b>HP @ RPM</b>	360 @ 4400	370 @ 4600	360 @ 4600
<b>Torque: lbs.-ft. @ rpm</b>	500 @ 3200	500 @ 3100	480 @ 2800
<b>Compression Ratio</b>	10.25:1	10.25:1	10.5:1
<b>Carburetion</b>	1 — 4-bbl.	1 — 4-bbl.	1 — 4-bbl.
<b>Transmission</b>	Automatic	Automatic	Automatic
<b>Final Drive Ratio</b>	3.31:1	3.07:1	2.80:1
<b>Steering Type</b>	Variable ratio power	Variable ratio power	Power
<b>Steering Ratio</b>	16.1 to 12.4:1	16.0 to 12.4:1	21.9:1
<b>Turning Diameter (Curb-to-curb-ft.)</b>	N.A.	39.3	39.8
<b>Wheel Turns (lock-to-lock)</b>	4.0	2.9	3.6
<b>Tire Size</b>	G70 x 15	G78 x 14	215R x 15
<b>Brakes</b>	Power front disc, drum rear	Power front disc, drum rear	Power front disc, drum rear
<b>Front Suspension</b>	Independent, coil springs	Independent with control arms and coil springs	Independent, coil springs
<b>Rear Suspension</b>	Linked; Salisbury axle, control arms	4-link pivot control arms, coil springs	Trailing link coil springs
<b>Body/Frame Construction</b>	Body/Frame	Body/Frame	Body/Frame
<b>Wheelbase — ins.</b>	116.0	118.0	115.0
<b>Overall Length — ins.</b>	205.8	210.2	212.5
<b>Width — ins.</b>	75.6	75.7	78.0
<b>Height — ins.</b>	52.9	52.1	51.0
<b>Front Track — ins.</b>	60.3	62.0	62.0
<b>Rear Track — ins.</b>	59.3	60.0	62.0
<b>Curb Weight — lbs.</b>	3575	3885	4545
<b>Fuel Capacity — gals.</b>	20.0 (18.0-Calif.)	21.5	24.1
<b>Oil Capacity — qts.</b>	4	5	4



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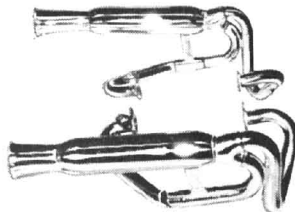
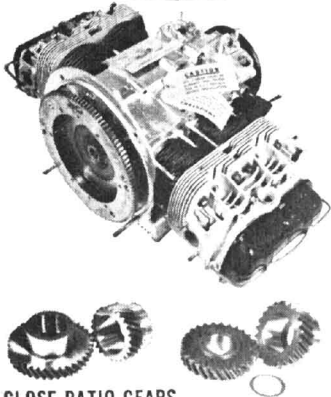
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## THREE FOR THE ROAD

continued

there's always plenty of power in reserve, and with all that torque there's never going to be any hangups. Acceleration was quite close to the Monte Carlo, although the Grand Prix started to fall off as the speeds went higher. Even with the bigger engine, handling was the same as in '69 — excellent. With front disc brakes, stopping distances were similar to '69 and stops were relatively stable.

Thunderbird performance was almost identical to that of the '69 model. It maintains a consistent acceleration record after repeated runs. Unlike the Monte Carlo or Grand Prix, the 'Bird is not specifically a performance-oriented car, but is more at home with the luxury aspects. For instance, acceleration may not be as rapid, but it is fluid smooth with no quick shifting movements. Handling is something else. The new suspension and radials have imparted new dimensions to this heavy car's mobility. There is very little understeer, it's close to neutral, and it will oversteer into a velvet soft drift when pushed. There is never any alarming feeling that traction is going, it's just a graceful slide. Just a touch of the steering wheel and throttle brings it right back. Control is uncanny. It handles beautifully for a big car. The combination of disc brakes and radial tires make for some good stopping distances, too. Stability was always there with our test car, it pulled down straight and true. Ford's anti-skid brake system is available for the Thunderbird and is a good insurance safety option.

Long hoods and short decks look good, but that's not all you pay for. There are no reservations about any of these three cars, they are all substantial automobiles. From a standpoint of "good," "better," "best," Chevrolet, as the low man on the totem, is offering an all-around fine car. The Monte Carlo has a lot of luxury, a lot of performance and a lot of value packed under its Chevrolet marque. The Grand Prix, as the innovator of the "personal" touch, still has that and a lot more. And, the Thunderbird not only exudes custom luxury at every pore, it has the ride and handling to match. /MT



"... and racing stripes ..."