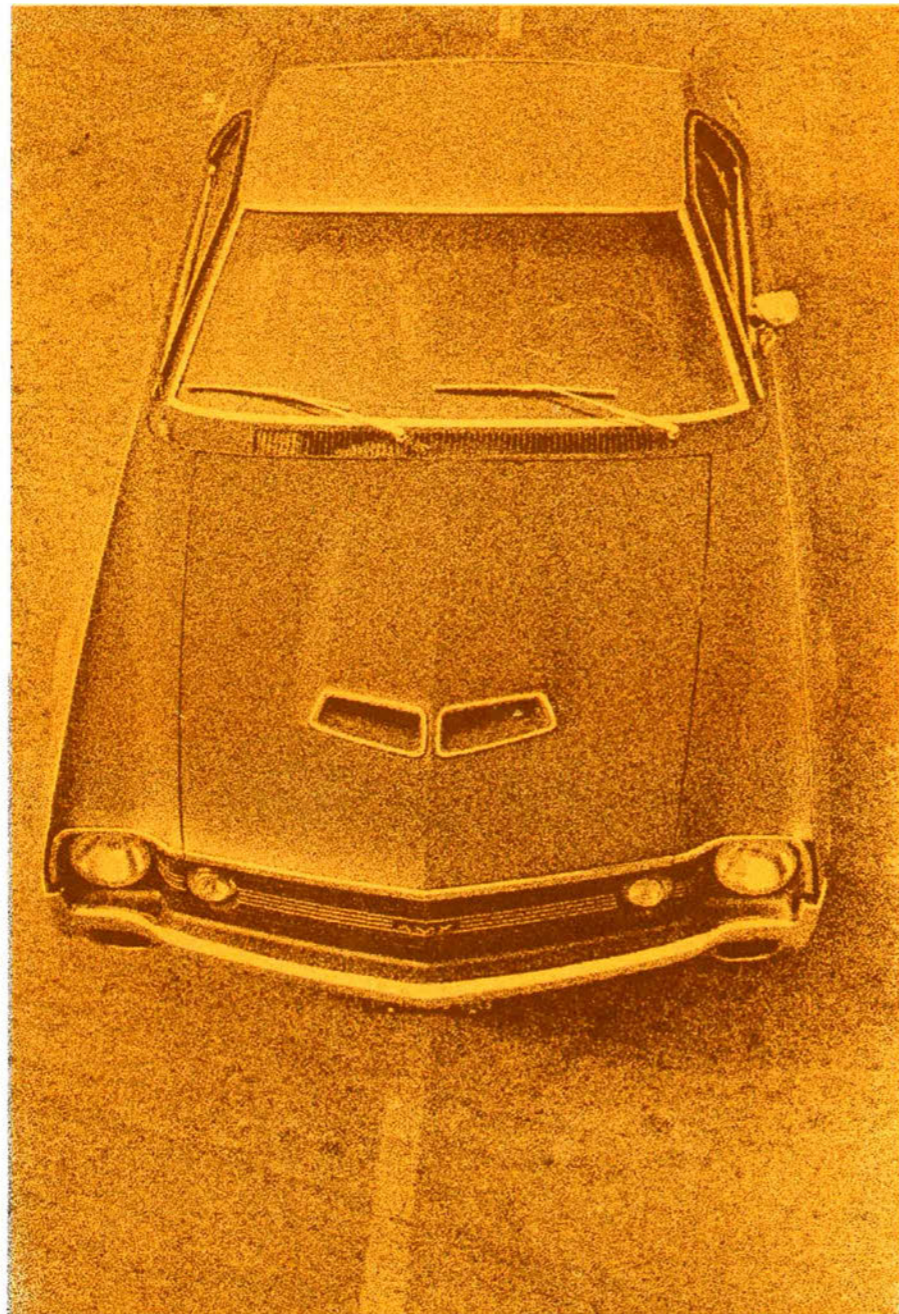


THE AMX ...A MATTER OF DETAIL

American Motors has put GT handling, performance and feel into one car, now it's a matter of blend, or aging, or something.



by Eric Dahlquist

When did Chevrolet bring this out?" The gas jockey had just taken a leisurely stroll around the car and was impressed. Under the pale, bluish glow of the station's lights, the Lime Green metallic paint shimmered up from the louvered rocker panels to the edge of the flat black on the hood and disappeared, making the front look lower than it was. A finger of flat black touched the sill under the side windows and swept up to a taper finish on the rear quarter.

"What is it anyway?"

"An AMX."

"What's an AMX? It doesn't say who makes it. It's the new Camaro, right?"

"Yeah, something like that."

This, we guess, is why the 1970 AMX will probably sell better than the 1969 AMX, which sold better at 8500 units than even the factory expected. That wonderful Dick Teague paint treatment,

a new black-out grill and 1.82 inches more nose could do the trick, removing it once and for all from the league of foot-shorter Javelins. It is sad that this should have to be done at all, since the AMX always has been as distinct a machine as you could have expected from a small company like American. Come to think of it, from the driving sense, the AMX/Javelin dissimilarities span a wider gap than the GTO and Firebird. Unfortunately, until now you couldn't tell it at a glance, and that's what the public needs.

This awareness probably wouldn't have been so acute had we not been driving a Javelin immediately before testing the AMX. Jumping from one to the other was like going from a cruise ship to a PT Boat.

Not that the Javelin flounders; quite the contrary. It is one of our best-handling regular production U.S. sporty



Ah, well, what can we say? The AMX is a great machine in so many ways but in others, it wants. Although comfortable, the seats don't go back far enough. The transmission ought to shift a bit better and the suspension is skitterish. One the other hand, it corners flat, with little understeer.



cars. The one, in fact the only one, a lot of European editors feel they might live with. But where the Javelin is comfortably firm, the AMX is as tight as the British economy. So firm, in retrospect, that the twin-control-arm-stabilized, five-leaf (per side) sprung rear end skitters across a washboard surface as a flat pebble on a pond before taking a set. And, in concert with this situation, the fender-well jamming 6 $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch wide F70x14 Goodyear Polyglass tires tend to become greasy in the rain. Remember now, the AMX has a 97-inch short wheelbase (one inch less than the Corvette), an optional variable-ratio power steering with 3.2 turns lock-to-lock, and not as much understeer as you are accustomed to, so things happen in a hurry. When she goes, she goes blindingly fast.

On the other hand, under normal circumstances, which is most of the time,

the machine displays excellent balance. Running the short 3.91:1 gear, you can power-drift through smooth corners with great exuberance, hanging the tail out with the throttle. There is virtually no lean in this car and the front end doesn't push much — the fat, one-inch diameter stabilizer does its job. As do the stiff shocks and high-rate springs.

But, there are two problems, or really one problem with two parts. As with almost all the American cars we can think of, with the possible exception of the Wampus-Kitty dune-buggy, the AMX has very small wheel travel. Therefore, in order that it not bottom, the spring rates are very high. The net effect is a poor ride on rough surfaces and if the suspension is not going to absorb the bumps, you do, occasionally crowning yourself on the hard roof in the deeper swales. And, as a ramification of all this, on very poor roads the car has the

loose interior sound of a convertible. Quite probably radials would afford a better compromise between ride, handling and wet adhesion.

From the driver's position, the imitation wood-grain dash, if not unique, is well laid out. The speedometer and the tach are directly in your vision and all the controls are easy to reach. A prime AMX selling point is its two seat configuration; i.e., there is no rear seat, not even a pretense of one. This being the situation, with no consideration to rear passengers necessary, you expect the seat travel to be more than adequate. It isn't. Frustratingly, you can't even approach the arms-out driving position, let alone being totally comfortable if you are over six feet. Silly, but true.

It is especially irksome because the new high-back clam shell buckets are genuinely well suited to the human body and you sense that possibly an excellent seat/steering wheel relationship may lie just a few inches out of reach. Finally, there is the psychological effect of generous fore/aft seat travel — it always somehow seems a touch of luxury. And as long as they're about it, someone ought to design an exhaust outlet so interior air has a place to go. Because the rear quarter-panels are fixed, opening one is out, and the ventless side windows don't seem to do much either.

We'd have to say that the AMX is one of the better constructed cars around. Everything fits properly, works and has a sturdy engineered look about it. Take the front suspension. It is of the wish-bone/coil type, same as most Detroit cars, but seems quite a bit overbuilt for the job it has to do. Maybe that's why AMC stuff always does so well in Baja.

Up until a few years ago, nobody ever took an American Motors car seriously at a stop light. No matter how the pipes sounded, or how big the tires were, the things were stones and the kids knew it. But when you see a guy sliding up his old man's driveway with a GMC 6-71 blower poking through the hood of a hotted-up Javelin in a national TV ad, you've got to know things have changed. Things like heads, cams and real cold-air packages. Our AMX had what was the 315-hp 390 V8 and is now 325 hp. Three hundred twenty-five ponies doesn't seem overwhelming in this meg-power era, but compare the acceleration figures on the AMX table with the Cobra Jet Torino and you suddenly get the idea. A 14.68-second elapsed time at 92 mph in the quarter with a full load of gear and two aboard isn't all bad, as isn't 3.2 seconds from 40 to 60 mph.

Still, the AMX's general performance had a couple of soft spots. For one, maximum horsepower is stipulated at 5000 rpm, which also happens to be the red-line. And they mean it. One or two revs over the limit and the lifters pump up and they don't come back. This could be kind of a built-in governor to keep the warranty people in good spirits, but before you start worrying about how you're going to fix 'em, you got to sell 'em, right? Who can tell what 500-700 extra rpm would be worth.

continued on page 106



AN EXCITING COLLECTION OF PLASTIC BODIED PINUPS ON PARADE

If the words "burn-out," "bleach" and "blower" stir up visions of torque-twisted frames and wrinkle-walled slicks, then you, like the editors of *Hot Rod*, *Car Craft* and *Rod & Custom* magazines, have caught the mystical malady called "funny caritis." Its symptoms are smoke-glazed eyes, fuel-fouled nostrils and vocal, shower-stall "Waa-a-aahs" echoing throughout the house. Its cure is nothing less than Petersen's *Funny Car Pictorial*; 64 full-color pages loaded with the nation's noisiest, nitro-nipping nasties.

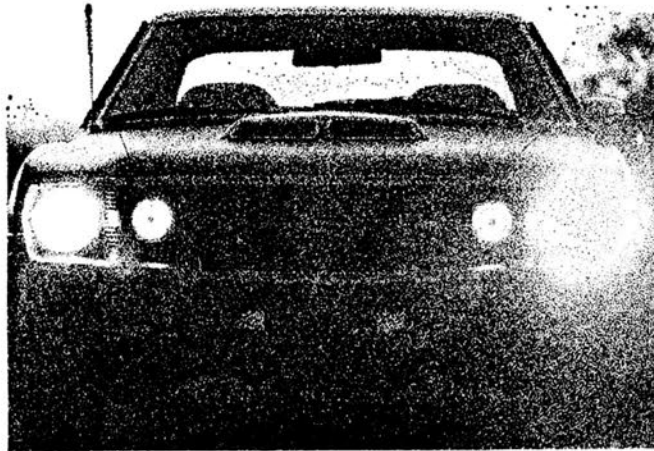
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amx

SO NEAR, AND YET...

continued

Something else is a better-working clutch (at least on our test car). The pressure plate refused to release at max rpm and the car couldn't be power shifted into high gear. Then, too, the gate on the shifter is so narrow that even an experienced manual operator occasionally wonders if he's in first or third, and it ought to be slightly widened for non-strip artists.

Because of the low red-line and numerically high gear ratio, we were able to do a top end number of 109.5 mph at Irwindale Raceway and get stopped before the "rots-a-ruck" sign at the end of the track. Braking down, a funny thing happened. The pedal effort started rising and became progressively harder. Toward the end it was a little spooky. Because the front discs stayed hot for an inordinately long period afterward, poor ventilation would appear partially responsible. On lower velocity stops from 60, distances ranging from 115-118

feet make the AMX one of America's better stopping vehicles, but don't try any Mille Miglia tricks.

The brakes are as characteristic of the car as anything. In the majority of driving situations, the car is enjoyable to have. It displays a portion of the sensation of a Corvette: two-seater, compactness, good handling, but with much greater utility and a lot less investment. Around the old standard metropolitan area, you enjoy the same sort of quick, agile maneuverability as, say, a Triumph TR-6. American Motors has almost created a true GT, but not quite. They've tip-toed all around the requirements, but haven't yet gathered it all up. If they could but lengthen the seat travel, lengthen wheel travel without ruining the handling, install a wider gate shifter, put a little more feel into the power steering and vent the brakes better, the AMX could be precisely at ground zero.

/MT

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine: V8. Bore & Stroke — ins: 4.17 x 3.57. Displacement: 390 cu. in. HP @ RPM: 325 @ 5000. Torque: 420 lbs.-ft. @ 3000 rpm. Compression Ratio: 10.0:1. Carburetion: 1-4 bbl. Transmission: Borg-Warner 4-speed. Final Drive Ratio: 3.54:1. Steering Type: Power. Steering Ratio: 21.7:1 to 16.5:1. Turning Diameter: 32.8 ft. curb-to-curb. Wheel Turns: 3.2 turns lock-to-lock. Tire Size: F70 x 14. Brakes: disc, front/drum, rear. Suspension: Front: Unequal length upper and lower control arms with coil springs. Rear: 5-leaf semi-elliptic springs. Body/Frame Construction: All steel, unit. Dimensions, Weights, Capacities: Wheelbase: 97 ins. Overall Length: 179.0 ins. Width: 71.6 ins. Height: 51.2 ins. Front Track: 59.1 ins. Rear Track: 56.6 ins. Curb Weight: 3200 lbs. Fuel Capacity: 19.0 gals. (16.0 California). Oil Capacity: 5 qts.

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration: (2 aboard)
0-30 mph 2.80 secs.
0-45 mph 4.20 secs.
0-60 mph 6.56 secs.
0-75 mph 9.70 secs.
Standing Start 1/4-mile 92 mph, 14.68 secs.
Passing Speeds (4th gear)
40-60 mph 3.2 secs. 234 ft.
50-70 mph 4.2 secs. 369 ft.

SPEEDS IN GEARS:

1st 44 mph @ 5000 rpm
2nd 60 mph @ 5000 rpm
3rd 80 mph @ 5000 rpm
4th 109 mph @ 5000 rpm
MPH per 1000 RPM: 21.5 mph

STOPPING DISTANCES:

from 30 mph 22 ft.
from 60 mph 115 ft.