

## INTRODUCTION

An automobile company can manufacture many things, but it can't create a high-performance image without the hardware. The Oldsmobile Division of General Motors has built millions of America's favorite V8s over the past 35 years, and its Rocket-powered cars have packed the history books with highlighted deeds at speed. The real-world results of Lansing's engineering integrity are far closer at hand, being demonstrated every hour of every day for all of us to see, on roads and racetracks of the USA.

With a heritage rich in performance and so many proven parts and pieces available in all corners of the country, Oldsmobile enthusiasts have a virtually unlimited storehouse of hands-on raw materials with which to work. In fact, there are brand-new, high-performance Oldsmobile factory parts being produced today. And there are established sources of information and communication for everyone.

There are Oldsmobile books and organizations to answer questions, and there are factory and aftermarket parts to alter or assemble decades of Oldsmobile motoring combinations. But best of all, there's enough "individuality potential" in the Oldsmobile marque to satisfy even the most jaded show or go soul.

Volume One of Oldsmobile In Action shows how certain talented individuals interpret Oldsmobile high-performance. It also illustrates some of the Oldsmobile Division's 90 years of automaking experience that helped inspire these endeavors. But mostly it shows the Oldsmobile edge. GM's Lansing division has the industry's premiere performance pedigree. It comes built-in today, in every Olds piece, part and car that's all-American made.

# PERFORMANCE HISTORY-PART 1

## ROCKETS ATTACK ROAD AND TRACK

By Dennis Castele and Al Kirschenbaum

The exploits of Warren Johnson rocketing down the dragstrip in his low-slung Hurst/Olds, and A. J. Foyt and Dave Marcis thundering around the superspeedways in NASCAR Cutlasses are well known today. But are they the first drivers to take their motorized mounts to victory under the Oldsmobile banner? Certainly not! Oldsmobile has a rich heritage in the production of cars, and by entering open competitions shortly after the turn of the century, Oldsmobile began its checkered flag and trophy collection.

Oldsmobile traces its history to August of 1897 when automotive pioneer, Ransom Eli Olds, built a handful of motorized carriages. Shortly after the beginning of the 20th century, Oldsmobile became firmly involved in motorsports. Early competition cars were based on the nimble Curved Dash, single-cylinder runabouts that literally began the drive to put America on wheels.

In 1902 came the first effort of an Olds-built, wire-wheeled, motorized slingshot designed for speed runs on the Florida sands. The first edition speedster was dubbed "The Pirate." With some modifications for the 1903 season, the

Oldsmobile racer became the Olds "Flyer." It established a world's lightweight speed record of 54 mph.

While speed course activities brought fame for the single-cylinder Oldsmobiles, cross-country travel offered perhaps an even greater challenge. An organized roadway network was almost unheard of in those days, and anyone setting out on a trek across our nation faced genuine adventure.



The now-legendary "Cannonball" Baker won the 1923 coast-to-coast trophy dash in this high-gear-only, six-cylinder machine.



This early Olds ran cross-country motoring contests on a single-cylinder engine. Performance cars attracted crowds even back then.

In October of 1901, Olds Motor Work employee, Roy Chapin, dazzled those attending the second annual New York Auto Show at the old Madison Square Garden when he and his little Olds arrived after a seven-day blast from Detroit. To demonstrate the value of its product, Oldsmobile stayed with the cross-country car concept for the next few years.

In 1903, a factory team made a San Francisco to New York run. The following year, a pair of Oldsmobiles made an historic 3800-mile run from New York to Portland, Oregon. One of

those record-setting machines—officially dubbed “Old Scout”—remains in Oldsmobile’s vintage car collection today.

By 1908, Oldsmobile had become a genuine cornerstone in the newly formed General Motors Corporation. Gradually, Oldsmobile designers and engineers achieved a solid reputation as *the* GM innovator. Both the image and engineering carried over from autosports competition to every Oldsmobile sold to the public.

In 1910, Oldsmobile introduced one of the most powerful production motorcars ever to set tire to roadway—the awesome

Limited. During its three-year production run, less than 1000 of these brutish models were built. Power came from a 500-cubic-inch, six-cylinder engine. To promote this powerful new machine, Oldsmobile commissioned artist William Harnden Foster to paint a scene with the Olds Limited racing the fabled 20th Century Limited railroad train of the same memorable era. Oldsmobile then widely distributed copies of Foster’s work and took advantage of the illustration showing the Olds leading the locomotive!

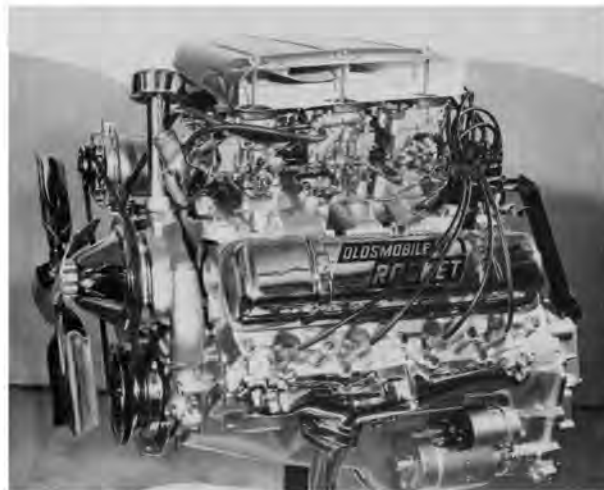
A rakish Olds Autocrat speedster was a 1911 Vanderbilt Cup entrant. In the



*Fifty years of speed at Daytona Beach are represented by these record-breaking Oldsmobiles. Powered by a single-cylinder powerplant, the 1903 Olds Pirate was the first motor vehicle on record to exceed the one-mile-per-minute speed. NASCAR’s 160-mile Grand National stock car race at Daytona was won in 1953 by this Bill Blair-driven Olds at a new record speed average of 89.5 mph. That’s about half as fast as comparable NASCAR Oldsmobiles run today.*



*Competing against the very best, fully prepped American and foreign entries, this Olds rocketed to victory back in '50 in the Mexican Road Race.*



*The thrill of Oldsmobile performance wasn’t limited to just genuine on-track racers. By the late-Fifties, the general public could buy high-performance Detroit automobiles that could be driven right off the showroom floor. Buyers of 1957 and 1958 Olds models could opt for this 371-cubic-inch, triple two-barrel J-2 Rocket rated at 300 horses.*



*Oldsmobile again demonstrated its engineering leadership when it introduced this V8 turbomotor at the International Automobile Show in New York in April, 1962. Fitted to F-85 Jetfire models for two exciting years, the all-aluminum Rockette put out one horsepower for each of its 215 cubic inches.*

## PERFORMANCE HISTORY-PART 1

1920s, Olds teamed up with a pair of motorsports legends for the purpose of setting records. In 1923, Erwin "Cannonball" Baker assumed the controls of a newly introduced Model 30 six-cylinder touring car, with only high gear, for a New York to Los Angeles bash. Just two years later, Floyd Clymer set stock car records, climbing Lookout Mountain and Pike's Peak in an Oldsmobile.

Continuing to prosper as an automotive innovator, Olds also made production inroads in plating and automotive finishing areas. In the 1940 model year, the smooth-shifting HydraMatic automatic transmission was

introduced in an Olds.

But the real performance blockbuster came with the 1949 model year and the first high-winding, overhead-valve Rocket V8 engine. This was not Oldsmobile's first V8; that had come in 1915. The new 303-cubic-inch V8, most often found under the hood of the new 88 model, quickly became the spirited darling of the American motoring public.

Racers took an instant liking to the big Rocket V8. Bill France had organized race-hungry stock car drivers in the southeastern regions of the U.S., and the Rocket 88 appeared to be the perfect setup for those early battles on the NASCAR trail. France made the most of

the natural rivalry between the thundering overhead-valve-powered Olds Rocket V8 and the high-pitched growl of the stepdown Hudson Hornet six-cylinders.

Capturing major NASCAR wins wheeling Oldsmobiles were Joe Littlejohn, Curtis Turner, Billy Blair and the flamboyant Flock family. Jim Rathman drove a Chicago-based "Hellzapoppin" '55 Olds stocker to many northern race course wins. A heavy-duty NASCAR crowd-pleaser named Junior Johnson had a tough task beating the 1955 Olds on the southern stocker circuits.

The racing Pettys had considerable success with the Olds nameplate as well.



*Production excitement took many forms. Hot Toronados rocketed up Pike's Peak and smoked all four tires on the dragstrip. Underhood, the Toro model was far from ignored. This 1968 force-air production option included longer cam timing, heat-treated valve springs and hot rod-type distributor modifications to pull 400 horsepower from the Toronado's 455 V8.*



*Straightaway rocketships appearing during the Sixties' supercar excitement were mostly based on the popular 4-4-2 intermediate series. What the factory didn't build, the racers did. Steel-bodied, fuel-burning Funny Cars came in both two- and four-wheel-drive. There were even periods when Oldsmobiles virtually dominated entire classes of national drag racing competition. In 1968, Olds offered enough production models to fit quite a few of those categories.*



*Far from its original production form, this Olds 455 led the Rocket's attack on the Can-Am series. Some of these lightweights were overbored to 503 cubic inches! This all-aluminum 455 used Lucas fuel-injection and twin TRW turbochargers to make 659 horsepower and 554 foot-pounds of torque.*

Poppa Lee won the famous photo-finish Daytona 500 in a 1959 Oldsmobile. Richard Petty cut his competition teeth on a 1957 Olds Rocket in the old NASCAR convertible categories. In later years, NASCAR favorite, Buddy Baker got behind an Oldsmobile wheel and set Daytona 500 records in 1977 in a Grand National Cutlass.

On an entirely different racing avenue, Oregon logger Hershel McGriff challenged the best domestic stock cars and exotic race-prepped imports and topped them all in the 1950 Carrera Panamerica Mexico, better known as the legendary Mexican Road Race. McGriff (whose family still races today) and co-driver Ray Elliott took a mostly stock Olds 88 two-door sedan and challenged more than 2000 miles of the roughest road imaginable. Average speed was a respectable 79 mph and included considerable time travelling over the century mph mark. The big 88 was up to the task and required only two new tires, an oil change and a fresh set of spark plugs. A total of 132 cars started the event in Juarez, Mexico, and less than half the entrants finished.

Drag racers found the early Rocket powerplants to their liking and many subsequent racers of Olds power have found success in the straightaway format. Able to withstand the added loads of fuel injection, exotic racing fuels and supercharging, the Rocket V8 became a familiar powerplant in many early dragsters, gassers, competition roadsters and lakes racers. As a home for dominating potent Oldsmobiles, the early A/Gas Supercharged class was actually a forerunner of today's Funny Car categories. Stock-bodied Olds machines also did well in class and eliminator action. Late-model Oldsmobiles continue to dominate many categories of sanctioned quarter-mile competition.

To take advantage of the image and the interest provided by their winning deeds at speed, Oldsmobile produced not only the hot Rocket engines of the era, but some of the hottest production models as well. A variety of hot rods and roadsters installed the quick and popular Olds V8, rapidly establishing it on the street. In addition, many kits became popular that fit Oldsmobile engines into others' frames and chassis.

History's most recent decades have found Oldsmobile and Olds-powered machinery involved in a variety of autosports endeavors. They include boat competition, tractor pulls, drag races, Grand National stock car contests, off-road events, the Can-Am series and rally races. Oldsmobile stands as the oldest of today's car builders and its

name graces motorsports record books extending back to 1897. If racers like Warren Johnson, A. J. Foyt, Dave Marcis, Dyno Don Nicholson, Andy Mannarino, Dave Smith, Jim Robinson, Guy Light, F. J. Smith, Ed Koerner,

Ron Edwards, Don Holben, Al Provoost, Jack McCormack, Rock Running and John Lingenfelter have anything to say or do about Oldsmobile performance, there'll be many more pages of *Oldsmobile In Action* to fill.

## OLDSMOBILE V8 ENGINE AVAILABILITY

CUBIC INCHES	BORE (in inches)	STROKE	MODEL YEARS AVAILABLE
215	3.500	2.800	1961-1963
303	3.750	3.437	1949-1953
324	3.875	3.437	1954-1956
371	4.000	3.688	1957-1960
394	4.125	3.688	1959-1964
330	3.938	3.385	1964-1967
400	4.000	3.975	1965-1967
400	3.870	4.250	1968-1969
425	4.125	3.975	1965-1967
350	4.057	3.385	1968-1980
455	4.125	4.250	1968-1976
403	4.350	3.385	1976-1977
260	3.500	3.385	1976-1982
307	3.800	3.385	1980-current
260D	3.500	3.385	1979-1980 (diesel)
350D	4.057	3.385	1978-current (diesel)

RICHARD BRADY PHOTO



RICHARD BRADY PHOTO



TIM MARSHALL PHOTO



*With an extensive performance history in decades past, Oldsmobiles continue to be mechanical naturals in competition. On-going engineering programs have provided a Rocket V8 racing combination for virtually everyone. Jack McCormack's Don Holben-driven Hurst/Olds uses a stock late-model 307-cubic-inch small-block for power. Ed Koerner's street roadster launches behind a 350-cubic-inch, diesel-block-based, C.J. Batten-prepped modified-style Rocket engine. Andy Mannarino's ferocious Pro Stock Ciera is powered by the latest Olds Rocket V8—a 500-cubic-inch DRCE!*