



**CAR
LIFE**
Road Test

PONTIAC 421



PONTIAC'S BRIGHT AND SHINY performance image shouldn't be dulled in the least by this latest version of its big-engined bombs. The Grand Prix, to our notion, is just about the grandest Pontiac yet built, and the 421-cu. in. engine makes it truly the king of the road. The combination is so desirable it seems a shame that only a few hundred will ever roll off the assembly line.

The GP came about as Pontiac's answer to the bucket-seat craze. The body is similar to, and uses many of the same parts as, the Chevrolet Impala SS we test elsewhere in this issue. The similarity we refer to is in interior appointment and some exterior paneling (which is GM's way of making such luxuries available at a lower price). Essentially, the GP is a hardtop coupe in the now-very-popular "squared-off with false convertible-top bow bulges" roof style. It boasts bucket front seats with a console cubbyhole between and vinyl harmonizing trim throughout. In the test car, this was all a rich red and the result was very pleasing, and quite de luxe.

The Grand Prix, in effect, is a super Catalina. They share the same 120-in. wheelbase and lower body—the distinctive roof comes from the Bonneville. The Star Chief and the Bonneville are on a 123-in. wb., but the Grand Prix, with more extras supplied as standard equipment than the others, is priced higher than all but the Bonneville convertible and Custom Safari. This engine and transmission option is available on all models, at additional cost, by the way.

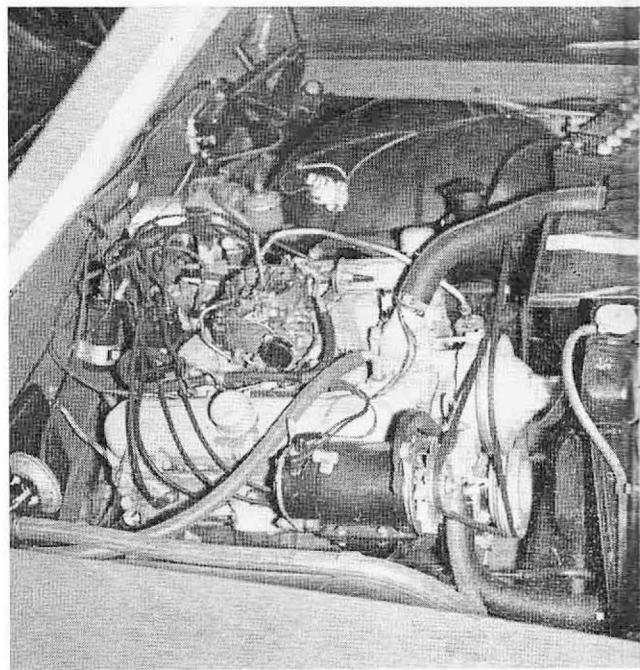
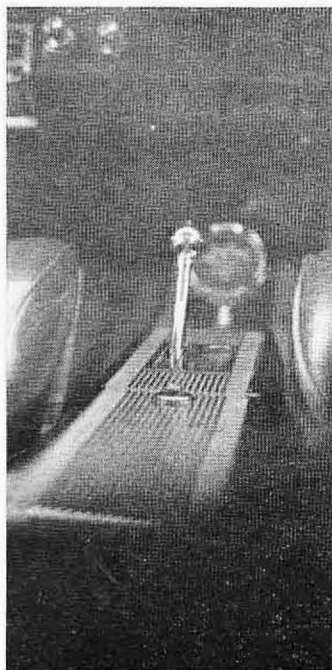
The normal Grand Prix has enough pure power and speed to satisfy all but the heaviest of feet; its standard equipment is the 303-bhp, 389-cu. in. "Trophy" V-8 engine optional for other, more sedate Pontiacs, and a heavy-duty synchromesh 3-speed manual transmission. Standard

performance equipment includes dual exhaust, tachometer, a single 4-barrel carburetor and 10.25:1 compression ratio. We tried this version with the Hydra-Matic option.

Even with this "mild" equipment, the Grand Prix with Hydra-Matic will produce enough performance to amaze your friends and confuse your opponents. Our tests on this particular model clocked the standing quarter in 15.9 sec., 0-60 in 7.2 sec., and 0-100 in 21.6 sec. This, pulling normal street equipment and a 3.23:1 rear axle ratio. One would assume, then, that this car has plenty of muscle—it does: 425 ft.-lb. of torque.

And there is more available. A triple 2-barrel carburetor "Tri-Power" setup and a boost in compression to 10.75:1 shoves the 303 output to 348 bhp at 4800 rpm. And with the optional Mickey Thompson valve train and reciprocating equipment, the horsepower figure rapidly approaches 400. Until this year, this combination has been

*The defending champion of
the Super Stocks has new
bees in its Indian bonnet.*



INTERIOR of Grand Prix features bucket seats. SHIFT LEVER is mounted in console. BIG, 421-CU. IN. engine is offered with up to 432 bhp.

the winner at Daytona, Darlington and the drag strips. And, gilding the lily and frosting the cake, there is an arm-long list of options available which will make it possible to select the car of your dreams. For instance, there are:

The Warner 4-speed transmission with either the standard "big car" ratios, 2.54 first, 1.92 second and 1.51 third, or the closer "Corvette" set, 2.20 first, 1.66 second and 1.31 third;

Limited slip differential (Saf-T-Track) with ratios from 2.56 to 6.14:1;

Power brakes, steering, windows and seat (but not on the bucket seats);

Air conditioning (except with the 425-A engines);

Aluminum wheels, drums and hubs (see photos). They're extremely attractive and efficient;

Heavy-duty radiator and oil cooler;

Heavy-duty front and rear suspension and shock absorbers;

Plus all the lights and mirrors and auxiliaries that are so pleasing to gadget-conscious Americans.

Frankly, we liked the Grand Prix for its lack of gimmick and gee gaw. Its cleanly sculpted lines are eye-catching in their simplicity and, while the car is really quite large, its bulk isn't overwhelming. Ever since S. E. Knudsen (then newly-appointed Pontiac general manager and since moved up to head Chevrolet) removed the chrome stripes from the center line of the Pontiac, it has been getting progressively better looking. This, and the similar progress in the performance department, is the reason Pontiac ranks as the fourth best selling make in the U.S.

The 421-cu. in. engine recently announced as a pro-

duction-line option by Pontiac and rated at 405 to 432 bhp should preserve this image indefinitely. While Pontiac's chief competitors are now equaling what the 389 engines were doing last year and the year before, Pontiac has kept a big jump ahead. Not only is it the biggest of the big "competition" engines, it is the most powerful in terms of torque and horsepower (see "Detroit's Cubic Inch Race," page 8). The others are just going to have to find even more cubic inches (Ford, for one, has an experimental 427-cu. in. engine, we hear). Undoubtedly, the 405-bhp Pontiac is the fastest accelerating stock production-line car we've ever driven. It also has more top speed than we care to use on the available test tracks, thus the estimated top-speed figure in our data chart.

This car will accelerate to more than 100 mph in a quarter mile, and do it in 14.3 sec. This is as fast as a fuel-injected Corvette, in similar trim.

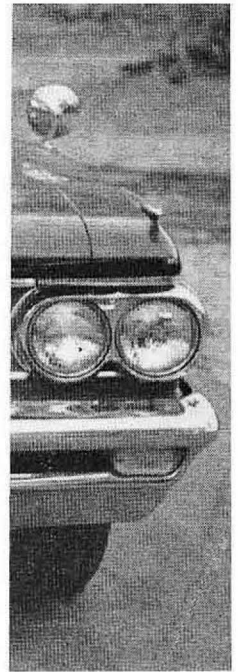
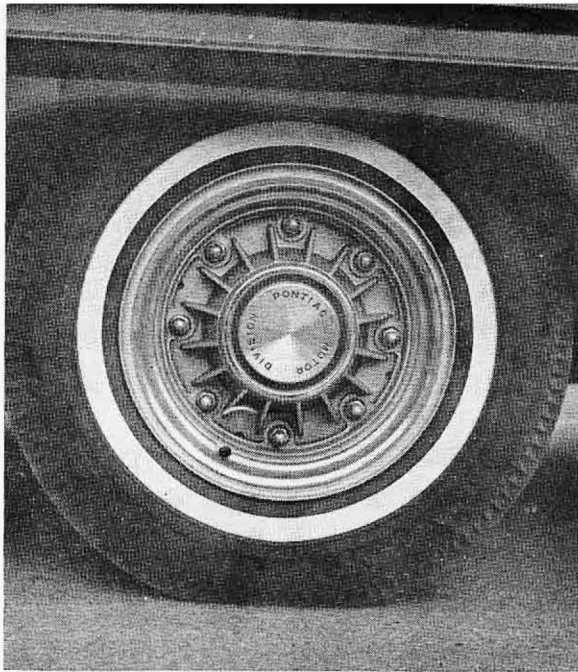
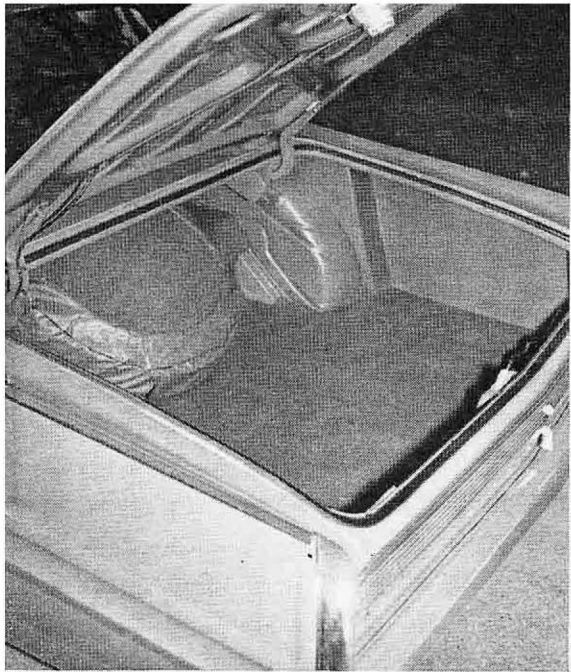
Revving just past the power peak in 1st gear produces 56 mph at 5950 rpm in a 5-sec. burst; the same in 2nd equals 85 mph at 5800 rpm in 9 sec. elapsed time. One hundred mph comes up nearly a second before the end of the quarter mile, and the engine is just beginning to sound alive in 3rd at 103 mph. There just isn't anything like a big, high-winding engine with the volume turned full on.

But unleashing all that horsepower poses some problems, too. Tire adhesion disappears in direct proportion to the amount of throttle opening. Full power starts, even with street gearing and equipment, can only be made by feathering throttle and clutch to keep the tires somewhere near the pavement. Tires break traction quickly in 2nd, too, and high gear can be just as touchy if there's moisture on the street surface. While our test car was equipped with a 3.42 axle ratio, we suspect tractive problems would be equally severe with almost any of the other ratios available. Obviously then, this isn't a car for temperamental drivers.

Pontiac wisely offers an assortment of heavy-duty options for these cars; they need them. Normal spring and shock damping are much too soft and billowy; tires and wheels too subject to heat and fracture at the speeds with which they are asked to cope. Pontiac recommends an 8.50-14 low profile rayon cord tire for serious work.

And, with a 421-cu. in. engine, all work will be serious!

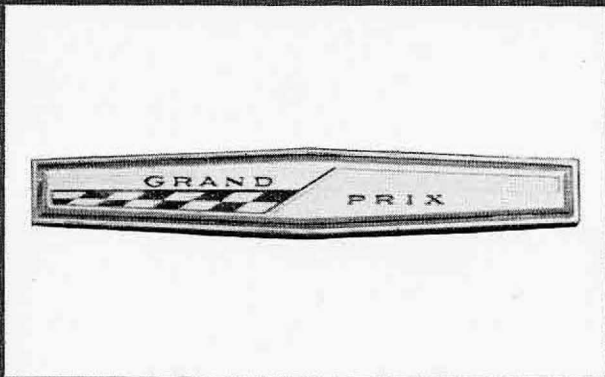




TRUNK SPACE is in keeping with Pontiac's bigness.

ALUMINUM WHEEL incorporating brake drum is desirable option.

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



PONTIAC 421

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	\$3490
Price, as tested	4173
Curb weight, lb	3990
Test weight	4330
distribution, %	55.5/44.5
Tire size	8.00-14
Tire capacity, lb	4700
Brake swept area	311
Engine type	V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke	4.095 x 4.0
Displacement, cu in.	421
Compression ratio	11.0
Bhp @ rpm	405 @ 5600
equivalent mph	131
Torque, lb-ft	425 @ 4400
equivalent mph	103

EXTRA COST OPTIONS

421-cu. in. engine, limited-slip differential, aluminum wheels, wsw tires, power steering and brakes, power windows, radio.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in	120.0
Tread, f and r	62.5
Over-all length, in	211.6
width	78.6
height	54.5
equivalent vol, cu ft	525
Frontal area, sq ft	23.8
Ground clearance, in	6.0
Steering ratio, o/a	22.5
turns, lock to lock	4.2
turning circle, ft	42.8
Hip room, front	2 x 25.0
Hip room, rear	55.2
Pedal to seat back, max.	41.5
Floor to ground	11.5
Luggage vol, cu ft	33.2
Fuel tank capacity, gal	25.0

GEAR RATIOS

4th ()	overall	3.42
3rd (1.00)		5.44
2nd (1.59)		8.51
1st (2.49)		

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (est), mph	135
best timed run	n.a.
3rd ()	
2nd (6000)	87
1st (5950)	56

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec	2.7
0-40	3.5
0-50	4.5
0-60	6.0
0-70	7.3
0-80	8.8
0-100	13.4
Standing 1/4 mile	14.3
speed at end	103

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg	9/13
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SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	30.1
60 mph	59.4
90 mph	86.6

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	10.7
Cu ft/ton mile	144.5
Mph/1000 rpm	23.4
Engine revs/mile	2560
Piston travel, ft/mile	1720
Car Life wear index	43.7

PULLING POWER

3rd, lb/ton @ mph	395 @ 60
2nd	off scale
1st	off scale
Total drag at 60 mph, lb	155

