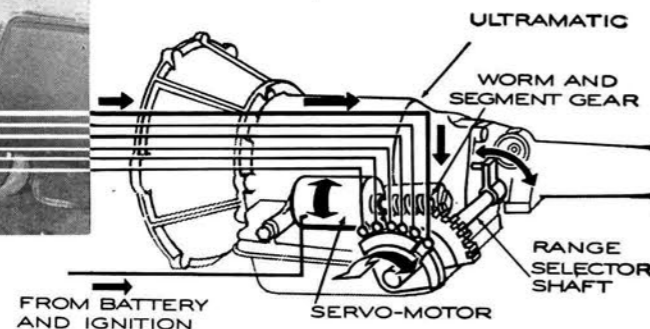


You needn't even punch these buttons. A finger's touch and the servo motor, mounted on the side of the Ultramatic, does the work



New this year is a Caribbean hardtop, styled like the convertible with twin rear antennas



New grille and headlights repeat wraparound's curve. This is the Patrician, largest 4-door

PACKARD was 55 years old on Oct. 2, 1955. Executives of the current, rejuvenated company are the 1st to admit that all has not been placid down thru the years. This was especially true during the late '30s and early '40s when Packard lost its grip on the high-price field. Once lost, one's reputation takes a long time to re-establish in *any* field, but the new Nance management has convinced the public that the company now produces a truly fine car, even tho they may not sell in quantities comparable with Cadillac.

A separate car from the Packard is the new '56 Clipper, which will be registered as such from here on in. This is more than just a legal technicality; the name Packard appears nowhere on the car. The move pretty much justifies Nance's claim that Studebaker-Packard is the country's 4th largest producer of a *full line* of cars. Between the Champion and the Caribbean, every price class is bracketed.

Biggest mechanical change is the new electrically operated pushbutton Ultramatic transmission. It is standard on the Caribbean, optional on Clippers and Packards. Unlike Chrysler's version, which is actuated by cable controls, the pushbuttons on this one signal a servo motor located on the side of the transmission. Incidentally, the transmission itself is 95 pounds lighter than before, due to extensive use of aluminum castings. It worked real fine when Walt Woron and I drove the car at the Packard Proving Grounds, but let him tell it in his own words:

The transmission controls are on an arm extending from the steering column on the right-hand side. It has 6 buttons in sequence; along the top N, L, and H, along the bottom P, R, and D. You can reach any one of these without even taking your hands off the steering wheel, around the wheel rim or thru it over the spoke. The latter method seems most convenient.

The controls are well thought out, safety-wise. I deliberately switched from DRIVE to PARK at about 70 mph.



Price leader, but blend-of-old-and-new style leader as well, Clipper Deluxe 4-door shows off huge and jelllike yet pleasing lights-bumper combination



Clipper Super's Panama hardtop looks much longer with 2nd-color satin around midriff, has suitably better performance to match its deftly remodeled looks

There was a loud ratcheting noise emanating from somewhere in the transmission, but the engineer riding with me said that it was only a built-in warning. The transmission was not being damaged, and shifted like a "pre-selector" to PARK as soon as I came to a standstill. Much the same happens if you push REVERSE while moving forward at any speed above a walking pace. There is no warning noise, but the car won't shift until you have slowed down to approximately 5 mph.

It takes about one second for the electric motor to go from PARK to REVERSE, which are at opposite ends of the sector in the actuator. The unit is, of course, wired so that you can start the car only when in PARK or NEUTRAL, and the buttons will not work at all with the ignition off. Your youngster can punch the buttons all he wants should the car be standing unattended in the driveway, but it will stay in PARK or whatever gear you may have left it in.

Surprisingly enough, there is no safety feature to prevent an inadvertent switch to LOW while driving at high speeds. We questioned Packard engineers on this and they point out that altho you will experience pretty violent deceleration if, say, you do this at 80 mph, no damage will be done to the transmission, and this capa-

bility makes an excellent extra emergency brake. NEUTRAL, on the other hand, is safetied because Ultramatic (like most other automatics) can be seriously harmed by prolonged coasting.

An electric power failure could pose a problem on a Packard or Clipper equipped with the new controls. Whatever gear it is in should this happen, you stay in. The only solution would be to call a service truck and attach a booster battery. If the unit itself fails, as with a blown fuse, it must be replaced on the spot or the car towed rear wheels up to the nearest Packard garage.

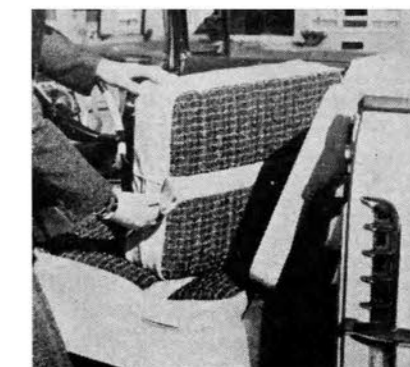
I found the instrument panel basically unchanged except that the gauges now have gold numerals, letters, and indicators on a silver background. A sweep-second clock is standard on all Packards and most Clippers. The panel is very rich looking but not the most legible in the industry.

A slightly refined torsion bar suspension system is standard on all Packards as well as Super and Custom Clippers, and altho not specified, we presume it is optional on the Clipper Deluxe. The front and rear torque arm links have been lowered, introducing a tendency toward understeer new for this system. Steering is considerably faster in all models, the number of turns from lock to lock being

decreased from 4.2 to 3.8. The column has a flexible coupling to dampen road shock, but should this diaphragm arrangement be damaged, a metal-to-metal contact takes over to prevent loss of control.

A much publicized option for Packards will be a non-slip (power-dividing) differential. Many varieties of these have been on the accessory market, but this one was developed by Packard in conjunction with their gear supplier. For a detailed report on a similar differential (Hi-Tork) see the August MT. (Continued on page 66)

Unsnap your Caribbean's tough leather seats, turn them over, and you have a party-going car with seats of brocade to impress anyone at all



PACKARD and

CLIPPER



At the very top of the line is the impressive Caribbean convertible, with twin air scoops atop its clean hood. Rear reflectors are Packard hexagons

'56 Cadillac

Early '56 Cadillacs came off the line with steering wheels that had a real lethal-looking hub, but which has now been changed on all cars to an innocuously flat plastic crest. A dash pad like

last year's stops glare before it starts.

Cadillac is practically going into the custom car business, as far as paint and trim combinations go with almost 500 solid and 2-tone options possible. With no comment, we report that air-conditioning is now available in the convertible.

—Walt Woron and Don MacDonald

'56 Packard and Clipper

Altho I didn't get a chance to drive a Packard equipped with one of these new differentials, I have had experience with Don MacDonald's car, which has a similar setup. A unit like this is admittedly non-essential (except, perhaps, for rural mail carriers), but at least once a year most of us get stuck in mud or snow, and that is where it pays off. In normal driving, it adds that little extra in satisfactory performance which makes it more than worth its additional cost (neighborhood of \$100).

Packard demonstrated this dramatically on their proving ground by slipping a pan of ice under the right rear wheel of a Caribbean not equipped with the new differential. A man stood behind it holding onto a rope attached to the car. The driver got nowhere, despite the whine of the slipping right rear wheel. Then this Caribbean was replaced by another equipped with the new differential. The pan of ice was put in place, the car was hooked chain-gang fashion to 5 other Packards (with engines off), and the driver easily towed the whole entourage off the cake of ice and down the road.

Good transmission of power is coupled to plenty of it under the hood thruout the whole Packard and Clipper line for '56. Deluxe and Super Clippers offer 240 horsepower (at 4600 rpm) and 350 pounds-feet torque (2800 rpm), while the Custom ups this to 275 and 380, respectively, at the same rpms. Packard tops the industry with 290 horsepower and, more important, 405 pounds-feet of torque available within the vital passing speed range. If you want a powerpack on top of this, you can have it; Caribbeans come equipped with a dual (4-barrel) carburetored V8 claiming 310 horsepower, a convenient 5 above Cadillac's current peak. Much of this increase can be credited to a 10 to 1 compression, an all-time publicly available high.

About the only change in body models is the addition to the Caribbean line of a 2-door hardtop, complete with a Derham-like fabric-covered steel top. Neither Packard nor Clipper offers a 4-door hardtop as yet, a fact which will probably adversely affect some sales but can't economically be remedied until 1957's new tooling.

Clippers offer you a choice of 3-speed, overdrive, or Ultramatic transmissions, whereas Packard uses the automatic as standard equipment. Every power assist in the book can be had at extra cost, except on the Caribbeans where everything except air-conditioning is standard. It would seem as tho Packard and its newly divorced mate, Clipper, are out to solidify their substantial 1955 inroads into Cadillac's previously private bailiwick. One can't help but applaud such an endeavor.

—Don MacDonald

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