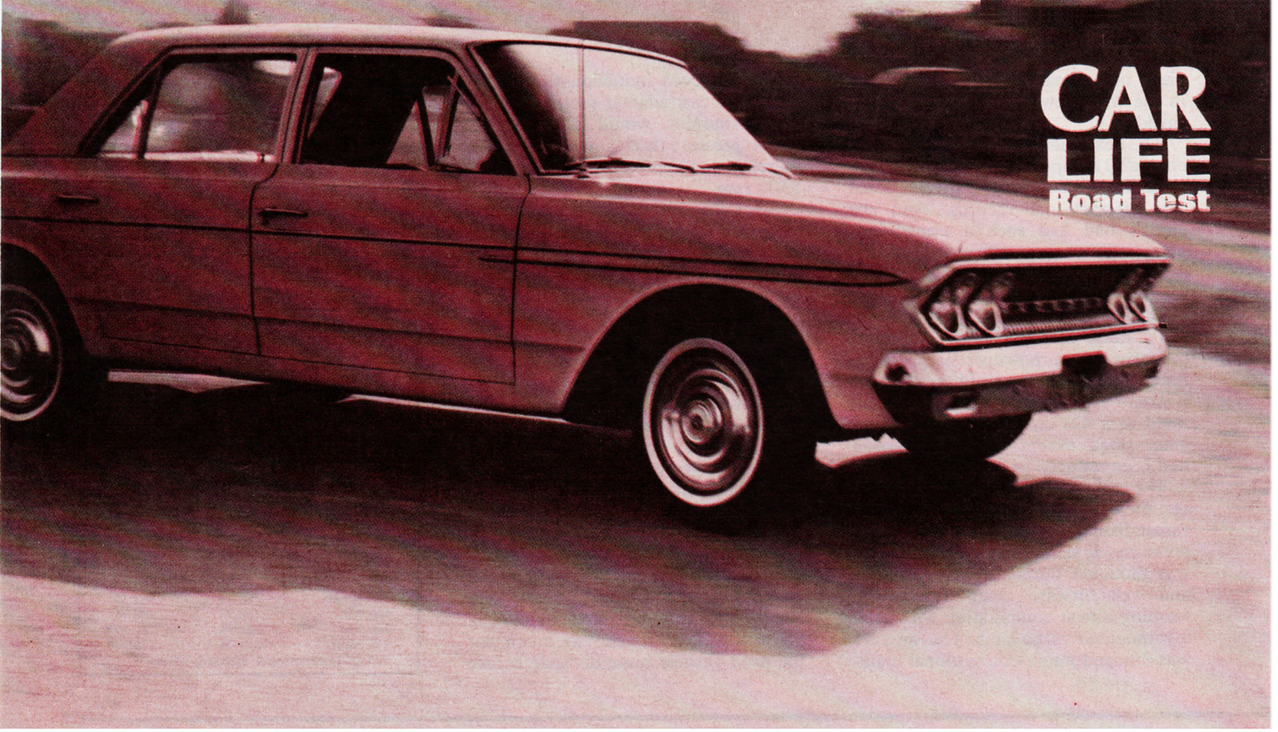


1963 RAMBLER Classic 660

Rambler redesigns its basic unit-body and emerges with a modern Classic

AMERICAN MOTORS at various times has claimed to have fostered the compact trend with its 1956 model. This car, which boasted such compact attributes as unit-body construction, light weight and economical operation, at least showed the way for other U.S. manufacturers. Subsequent sales success of this size car, both AM's and other's, proved the demand was there.

That 1956 Rambler was a big departure from the separate-body-and-frame type of construction then in vogue. But American Motors had absorbed both Nash and Hudson by then and with them considerable experience with this system. The '56 Rambler's "3-dimensional" frame, which literally turned the body into a chassis, was a big selling point.

Styling, too, of that '56 Rambler, was a sharp break from the past. A boxy, slab-sided shape, it was contemporary and salable. It had a dog-leg, wrap-around windshield and, when they came into fashion, tailfins. This basic package served well and AM probably could, with the usual yearly freshenings, have sold it in full-production quantities for several more years.

But the U.S. automobile market has never been more competitive and continuous styling and engineering improvement reflects this demand. Also, 1964 will be the year of the big change for the Big Three and the competition for public notice will be even more acute. Therefore it made good sense for American Motors to introduce new styling and bodies for the 1963 model year.

When an automobile manufacturer changes his basic body design only once in seven successful years, that change is usually pretty dramatic. And when the designer has that length of time in which to develop, build and test his ideas, the resulting car should be a mechanical masterpiece. Or, you might say, a Classic.



Although AM management long has deplored the "change for the sake of change" theory, when a change is made it is an outstanding one. The '63 Ramblers are infinitely more appealing esthetically and more satisfactory mechanically. While perpetuating the compact concept by an actual reduction of overall dimension, the new Classic and Ambassador also have that luxury-of-space feeling of large, expensive cars.

This "bigger-on-the-inside, smaller-on-the-outside" paradox is the result of some clever design work by chief stylist Richard Teague's staff and a lot of "what-does-the-customer-want?" head-scratching in the sales department. The result is that the bigger Ramblers, which had begun to look a bit dowdy and bulgy around the middle by comparison with current styles, now have a youthful fleetness accented by sharply concave front and rear styling. Although there's a bit too much lavishness with chrome (in most cases stainless steel) trim on some models, on the whole the cars are immensely eye-pleasing.

Outside of Rambler's new chassis/body construction technique, the most significant change is in the wheelbase —from 108 to 112 in. However, overall height, width and length have been reduced to produce a car 5.5% smaller than its predecessor. Interior dimensions have been increased, helped by the use of curved glass in the side windows which allow thinner doors.

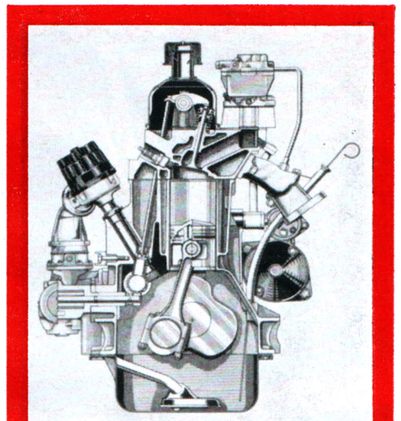
EXTERNAL DIMENSIONS

	1963	1962	1956
Wheelbase, in.	112.0	108.0	108.0
Track, rear	57.4	59.1	58.0
Overall length	188.8	189.8	191.1
width	71.3	72.4	71.3
height	54.6	57.1	58.0
Shipping weight, lb.	2729	2888	2891

There's a half-inch more hip room and 3.3 in. more headroom in the front and 3.25 in. more headroom over the rear seat.

The new Ramblers still use the basic unit-body construction introduced on AM cars for 1956. However, the manufacture of the body has been simplified by the reduction of the number of pieces involved. In addition, the use of larger stampings has achieved more precise assembly and better quality, stronger bodies. Overall weight is reduced some 150 lb. The use of large stampings for door and window openings was pioneered by Volkswagen of Germany some years back, but AM is the first American company to adapt this type of production.

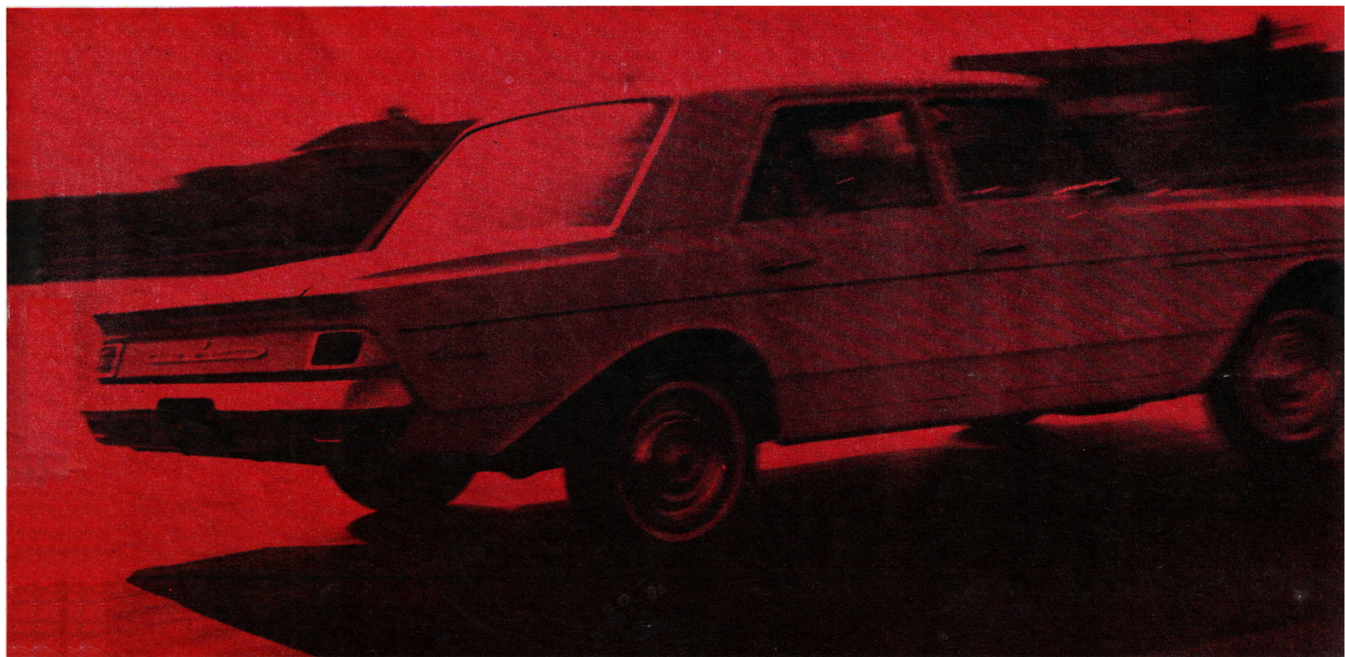
The entire exterior surface around the door openings is one stamping; also the mating interior surface. When the two are welded together at the edges, they form a strong, simple "uniside" to which are welded other large stampings for floor pan, cowl and front and rear windows. The result, Rambler says, is "strong as a hickory nut." A goodly amount of galvanized steel goes into this body to protect its undersides from corrosion and the whole thing is dipped to its roofline in a bath of rust-inhibiting primer.



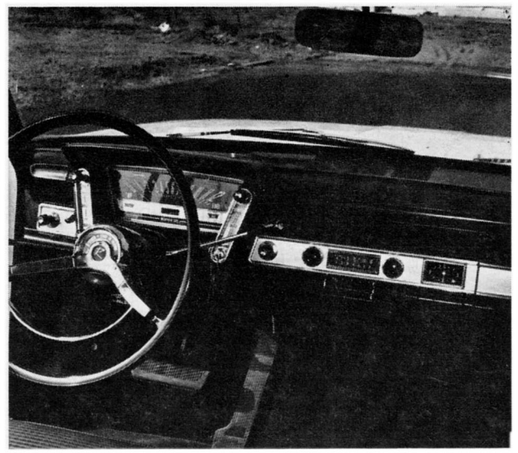
RAMBLER SIX has long stroke, overhead valves and a penchant for economy.

Car Life's first meeting with the '63 Ramblers was at the AM Proving Grounds near Kenosha, Wis. Although we didn't drive the cars, we gave them careful scrutiny and were notably impressed with the Rambler's new appearance. Further examination after their public introduction reaffirmed this impression and when we picked up the Classic 660 for testing, we decided that the car looks better each time you see it.

The 660 is the middle-priced model (550, 660, 770) of the middle line (American, Classic, Ambassador) and thus represents middle-of-the-road as a ▶







CLASSIC INTERIOR rated high, had optional reclining seats. Instrument panel, if not inspired, has knobs and gauges in legible, orderly position.

RAMBLER

transportation buy. And, at $2566 (plus license and shipping costs), *Car Life* feels it would be an acceptable bargain. This price included Rambler's new (for the Classic) E-stick automatic clutch feature, individual reclining front seats, radio and heater.

The E-stick option is the poor-man's automatic transmission, costing as it does approximately a third less ($60 vs. $187), and has some definite advantages. Basically, it is an automatic clutch operated by the gearshift lever thus eliminating the clutch pedal on the floor. The transmission is the normal 3-speed (synchromesh 2nd and 3rd) which also can be ordered with overdrive.

The E-stick was introduced on the Rambler American for 1962 but wasn't offered for the Classic until this model-year. Several running changes were made in the unit during its first year, notably a self-adjusting clutch mechanism. Clutch wear, because of the nature of its operation, could be a problem.

Reversing usual practice, the E-stick clutch requires force to engage rather than disengage it. The force is supplied by engine oil pressure and intake manifold vacuum. A solenoid connected to the shift lever relieves the pressure, disengaging the clutch, when the shift lever is moved. When the shift is completed, the pressure is again applied.

Smooth, jerk-free driving of an E-stick equipped car requires some practice. The shift from 1st to 2nd is particularly touchy in that engine speed must be exactly matched with transmission shaft speed to eliminate the annoying snap of a sloppy shift. A slightly more responsive throttle pedal would help cure the situation.

One advantage of the E-stick over the automatic was outstandingly apparent: Our fuel consumption was an actual 20.8 mpg for the entire test period. On one occasion it rose to 21.8 when the light-footed member of the staff drove. This overall figure was about 2 mpg better than *Car Life* achieved when it tested a Rambler Classic Super 6 with automatic transmission in October, 1961.

The engine is AM's familiar and economical 6-cyl. ohv unit of 195.6-cu. in. displacement and 127 bhp. This slow-turning stroker develops maximum torque at only 1600 rpm, which translates as 36 mph with the normal 3.31:1 rear axle gearing.

Performance is adequate but not outstanding. Very few people ever ask more than a 20-sec. elapsed time from the standing quarter or more than 90-mph top speed; those who do must expect to pay for it both in increased initial cost and decreased operating economy. American Motors has an answer for such demands: buy the Ambassador which comes with a 327-cu. in. ohv V-8 engine of 250 bhp.

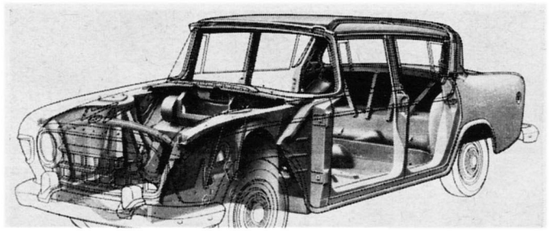
There is an additional 11 bhp available to Classic buyers, however, in virtually, but not quite, the same engine. Although of the same dimensions, this engine has a die-cast aluminum block with permanently bonded liners and a 2-barrel (1.06-in. venturis) carburetor. It is 65 lb. lighter than the iron block engine and is standard equipment in the 770 line but optional for the 550 and 660.

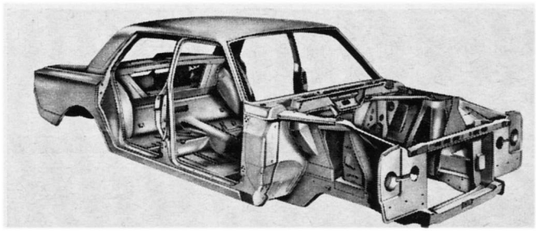
The Rambler Classic has rather strong understeer characteristics and it takes a good bit of heft, despite a

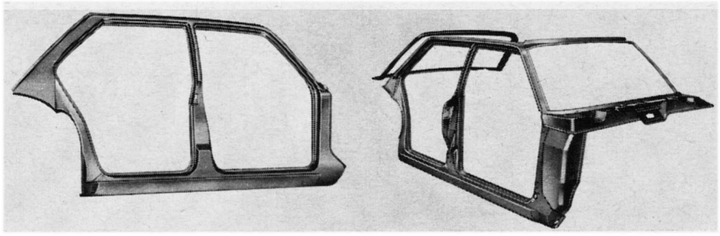












COMPARISON OF 1956 and 1963 (right) Rambler bodies show similarity of construction. New unit-body has fewer pieces, is 150 lb. lighter and is made up of stamped door and window frame "unisides" welded to floor, roof and cowl panels.

28.4:1 ratio, to move it out of a straight line. Road manners are acceptable, though, and the ride an adequate combination of stiffness and control. The brakes are good—they easily survived our two-stop test. Of Bendix self-adjusting design, they have a tandem master cylinder which divides the braking system into separate circuits, a worthwhile safety feature. Power braking is available, although not particularly needed.

Overall finish quality was commensurate with the Classic's price category and we found nothing about panel fit, trim alignment, paint quality or interior finish to carp about. On the whole, it's a reasonably well-finished, well-put-together product. ■

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



1963 RAMBLER
Classic 660 4-door sedan

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	$2230
Price, as tested	2566
Curb weight, lb.	2900
Test weight	3230
distribution, %	51/49
Tire size	6.50-14
Tire capacity, lb.	n.a.
Brake swept area	254
Engine type	6-cyl, ohv
Bore & stroke	3.12 x 4.25
Displacement, cu in.	195.6
Compression ratio	8.7
Bhp @ rpm	127 @ 4200
equivalent mph	92
Torque, lb-ft.	180 @ 1600
equivalent mph	35
Carburetion	1 x 1

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	112.0
Tread, f and r.	58.2/57.4
Over-all length, in.	188.8
width	71.3
height	54.6
equivalent vol, cu ft.	425
Frontal area, sq ft.	21.6
Ground clearance, in.	6.0
Steering ratio, o/a	28.4
turns, lock to lock	6.0
turning circle, ft.	37.0
Hip room, front	2 x 26.5
Hip room, rear	60.1
Pedal to seat back	37.5
Floor to ground	9.5
Luggage vol, cu ft.	13.7
Fuel tank capacity, gal.	19.0

EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

E-stick trans., reclining front seats, heater, tinted glass, radio, wsw tires, undercoating, wheel discs, rear view mirror, HD radiator, anti-freeze.

GEAR RATIOS

4th ( ), overall	
3rd (1.00)	3.31
2nd (1.63)	5.39
1st (2.61)	8.64

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (4200), mph	92
Shifts, rpm–mph, manual	
3rd ( )	
2nd (4500)	60
1st (4550)	38

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	5.3
0-40	9.0
0-50	13.2
0-60	19.8
0-70	28.2
0-80	39.1
0-100	
Standing ¼ mile	20.3
speed at end	61

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg	19-23

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	27.5
60 mph	56.1
90 mph	87.2

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	25.4
Cu ft/ton mile	96.5
Mph/1000 rpm	21.8
Engine revs/mile	2750
Piston travel, ft/mile	1950
Car Life wear index	53.6

PULLING POWER

3rd, lb/ton @ mph	200 @ 50
2nd	335 @ 42
1st	465 @ 34
Total drag at 60 mph, lb.	178

