

New Cars Shopping Guide—3

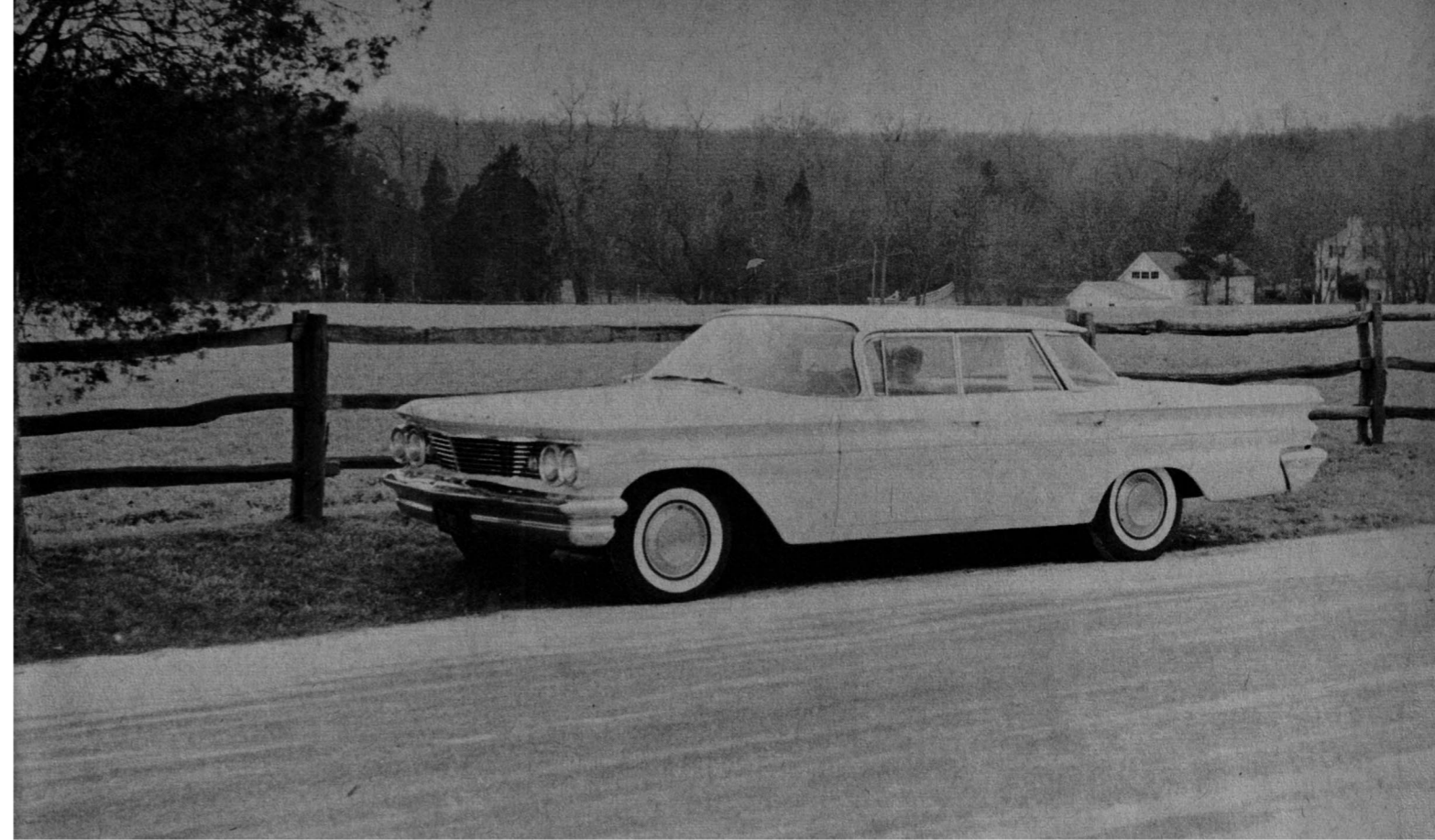
Both a race driver and top-flight mechanic for many years, our expert for this month has driven 'em all. Here's his choice—and his reasons

PONTIAC, as most automotive fans know, has come alive in the past few years. If any division of GM can single itself out as having the "experimental" car line, the boys with the "wide-track" bomb are the ones. In '60, they added the Ventura models to their line, and a most sensible addition it was. While my requirements may be a little stiffer and more analytical than the average buyer's, they're basically the same, so let's start at the beginning and see why I pick the Ventura as a hands-down personal favorite.

Primary consideration in my car-buying is price range. Right at the \$3800.00 mark there's a line where you stop paying for a better car and start paying for luxury—the impractical kind. In a full-sized passenger car, at least, you'll have to triple this figure in order to realize any substantial improvement in longevity and reliability, more than double it to better performance and comfort. And then you'd find that *no* amount of

money would really improve on what's available in economy of operation and depreciation rates. My reasoning is, therefore, that it's foolish to pay more unless you're out to impress the neighbors or can easily afford Cloud Nine-style living. Even a *loaded* Ventura—the hardtop Vista model—is below the \$3800 in delivered form, so it meets my primary qualifications here. Considering that the used-car market is a lot more receptive to cars with optional extras, why not get the use out of them and enhance trade-in value as well? The Vista is a *deluxe*, four-door sedan with a basic price of just over \$3000, leaving room for almost every option except air conditioning before exceeding the extra \$800.

My next requirement is rather all-encompassing: the car must be a workhorse. I log over 35,000 miles a year in my own car—and an equal amount in others—with very little of it being the around-town type. About a quarter of this is accumulated with well over a ton of

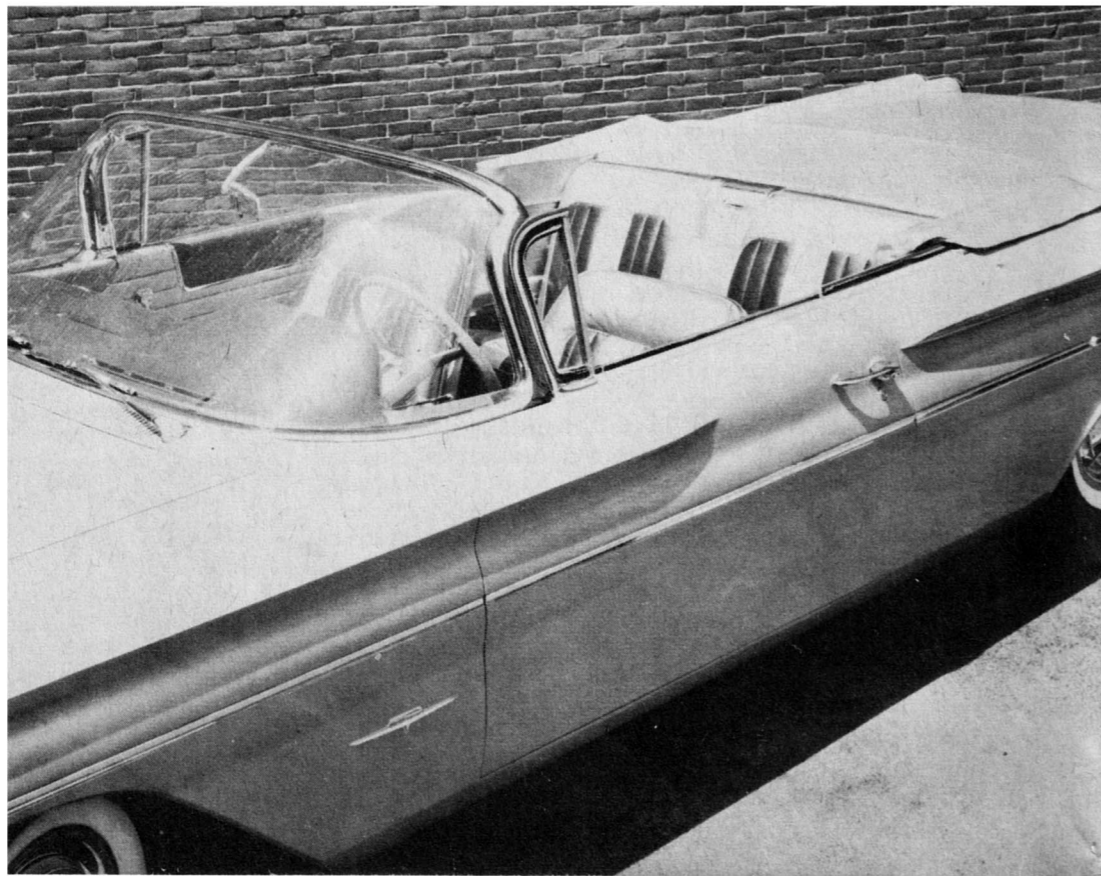


Instead of wild fins, the new Pontiac has a pleasantly sculptured look and good balance front and rear.

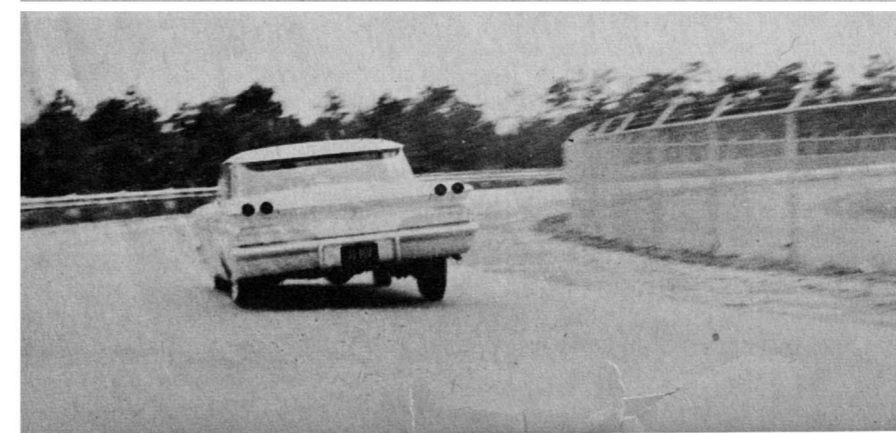
JERRY TITUS PICKS

GM'S BEST BUY

Titus admires the bucket seats of the Bonneville, but says the Ventura's bench-style is one of the best of its type to be found.



Pontiac's now-famous wide-track suspension gives the car excellent cornering stability. Directional control rates excellent.



Under really hard cornering, the Ventura's tail can be made to hop around a bit—but this detracts little from the ride.

PONTIAC VENTURA VISTA FOUR-DOOR

BASIC PRICE	\$3047.00 (As delivered in Great Neck, N. Y., with Strato-Flight transmission, 303-hp engine, and almost the full line of options, including radio—\$3789.00)
ENGINE	Tempest 425 Horsepower—303 at 4600 rpm Torque—425 foot-pounds at 2800 rpm Compression ratio—10.25 to 1 Bore—4.06" Stroke—3.75" Displacement—389 cu in. Hp per cu in.—.779
BRAKES	Bendix, with vacuum assist 11" drums, front and rear 191 sq in. of lining
TIRES	8.00 x 14 standard tubeless
REAR AXLE	3.08 standard
RATIO	2.69, 2.87, 3.23 optional
STEERING	Power, Spicer 4 turns lock-to-lock
DIMENSIONS	Wheelbase—22" Tread (both)—64" Length overall—213.7" Width overall—80" Height overall—55"
CAPACITIES	Gas tank—21.5 gal Oil—5 qts Coolant—22 qts

PERFORMANCE

Zero-30 mph	2.4 seconds
Zero-45 mph	4.4 "
Zero-60 mph	8.4 "
Zero-90 mph	19.6 "
Standing ¼-mile	18.2 seconds at 80 mph
Top speed	In excess of 110 mph actual
Speedometer error	4.1% at 60-80 mph
Brake test (series of six repeated stops from 60 mph with approx 15 ft 2 sec decelerations)—results excellent; some fade on sixth stop, pedal pressure constant	

racecar and trailer tagging along behind, so Titus-owned cars are prone to little items like frame breakage and driveline failures. In plain English, they catch hell!

How many car buyers crawl underneath and examine these components? I'm one that wouldn't dare forego it, but Pontiac has a long-standing reputation for being very liberal in the amount of good material and engineering they expend on critical parts in frame, suspension,

and steering. We've already trailered a '60 Pontiac wagon to Florida and back—over 3,000 miles—with nary a flaw, so I see no reason why the Ventura shouldn't stand the gaff. The super-smooth Strato-Flight transmission doesn't hold the greatest personal appeal, but it's still about the best automatic on the market; and its four speeds are far superior for towing to any synchromesh box.

Performance and roadability get close examination in any of my po-



A neat option is the trunk compartment light with emergency extension cord.

tential purchases—if all that sheet metal has to be around, at least it's going to Go, Stop, and Handle! The Ventura will accomplish these things with the best Detroit cars I've ever driven, even those containing special chassis options. What's more there's less effort, tire-squeal, and nosedive present while it's doing so. Happily, a top-notch, *legitimate* ride is retained. By legitimate, I mean that the ride is accomplished in the suspension, not in wild tire sizes and phoney seat upholstery. The latter gimmicks result in the "seasick ride." With the exception of some body-float, Pontiac engineers have done a prize-winning job in their chassis design.

Since we've mentioned the matter of design, take a long look at the Vista's styling. While there's certainly evidence of the current "extruded" trend, the lines are clean and functional: no horrendous fins, an even balance front and rear. I can't call it an exciting design, but it's certainly one of the best to come out of Motor City this year. The interior, however, I'm very enthusiastic about. The test car pictured here is a pale yellow, the inside brown and cream. The passenger compartment is about as pretty as it can get without being Cecil B. DeMille-ish, yet all controls and instruments are perfect in design and operation. The Bonneville bucket-type seats are a lot more appealing and comfortable, but—for a bench-type seat—the Vista's got a good one.

Now about that *wide track* . . . just what are the advantages? The good cornering stability I mentioned earlier is obviously the result of a healthy (Continued on page 71)

Jerry Titus

Picks GM's Best Buy

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front tread measurement. It doesn't do a whole lot of good in the tail, however; you can feel some hopping around back there when a corner is entered really hard. Where I've found the Pontiac chassis dimensions to really be a boon is on mud, snow, and even ice. Without some extra weight in the rear, it won't pull over these items any better than average, but its directional control is first rate. Equipped with snow tires and a sack of sand in the trunk, this is a formidable all-weather automobile.

Speaking of all-weather, the heater/defroster mechanisms are almost too good! With the blower turned up full, it'll drive you right out of the car. My wife ran a stopwatch on how long it took to clear up a completely fogged set of windows. In slightly over seven seconds after the defrosters were turned on, the only traces of fogging were in the corners of the rear window, and in another two seconds they, too, had disappeared. Even after sitting out all night with the temperature at 19° above, it took only a mile and two-tenths for the "Cold" light to go out, indicating

that the heater was ready to blast forth. Points like this may go uninvestigated when you're shopping, but they make the ensuing payments a lot more bearable! Another thing that's a plus item in the Ventura is an almost complete lack of wind noise at normal road speeds, regardless of what position the windows are in. Ever take a long trip in a car that's a "whistler?" It's worse than the Chinese Water Torture.

Technically, I see no reason to delve into the features of the Pontiac powerplant. The Ventura models can be purchased with five engine options, the main differences being in compression, carburetion and cam timing. Their super-hot one has a few extra goodies like beefed-up main bearing caps, etc. Gas-mileage-wise, they'll range from 17 mpg down to 9 mpg on an average tankful. As is common knowledge, this is a light, high-output big brother to the 283 Chevy engine which has won such wide acclaim in engineering and hot-rodding circles. It likes to be driven hard and will—in fact—carbon up if poked around for an extended period.

In summing it up, the Ventura is a hard automobile to find fault with, viewed from almost any angle. If you're shopping for *any* big car, regardless of price range, be sure and take a long look and a test drive in a Ventura. It'll soon be obvious as a top bargain for your automotive dollar. ♦ ♦

positioned clutch and brake pedals and for the domestic-type accelerator pedal.

The front seats offer scads of room, plenty for anyone up to considerably over six feet tall. The rear seat admittedly is small, especially in the knee and legroom department, but this will be the seat for the small youngsters in the families of future Shamrock owners.

The body is of fiberglass bonded with resin and is of original design, with accent on sculptured panels and straight lines. There is some superficial resemblance to the pre-'58 Thunderbird two-seater. This styling has lead some to call this car the "Irish Thunderbird," a description with which this writer cannot quite go along.

I took exception, particularly, to the lack of a glovecase on the dash and to the latter's wide expanse of highly reflective body white which casts very bothersome reflections when driving away from the sun. Curtis stated that the production model will have a padded dash done in material to match the green trim on the Naugahyde seat upholstery. The latter is very well done; the seats are soft and comfortable. The floor is covered, front and rear, with green carpeting to match the seats. The wraparound windshield will undoubtedly stimulate controversy but I can see how the overall styling does require something at least approaching a full wrap. I must say that this English-made windshield does *not* distort one's view from either of the front seats. Perhaps the British have found how to make *see-able* wraparounds. Overall detailing is unusually good for a prototype and will no doubt be even better when production begins. The trunk is large, as large as in many five-passenger sedans of popular make, and is covered with a gray plastic material. The spare wheel lies horizontally at the front of the trunk and high atop the rear axle tunnel.

The finish on the glass fiber body is one of the smoothest I have ever seen. Yet an even higher order of quality finish is the target of Curtis. He tells me that the second Shamrock, now undergoing tests, was lacquered black in order to disclose any body surface irregularities thus far overlooked in the male mold. Surprisingly, some 1200 such slight faults—not readily seen on a white body—were discovered; hence the mold is being perfected before production.

PERFORMANCE AND HANDLING

This is not intended to be a high-performance car. On the contrary, the Shamrock is an economy car with

The Shamrock— a Poor Man's T-Bird?

(Continued from page 18)

and good fore-and-aft weight distribution makes the steering light. The steering wheel has a depressed center, a half-horn ring, and quite naturally a chrome shamrock set in a green circle.

Happily the wheels are 15-inch diameter, carry 5.90 x 15 tubeless whitewall Goodyear tires. Quite low-slung, so low in fact that the proto's muffler clears the ground by only 4.5 inches, this car is principally intended as a hard road machine. Curtis tells me that the minimum road clearance has been increased on the second car, and that production models will clear the road by around 7 inches.

THE OFFICE

The driver's office is conveniently laid out. The speedometer has bold white figures on a black background in a half circle. Fuel and water temperature gauges share this single in-

strument cluster with red ammeter and oil pressure warning lights. The latter are concessions to the drivers who will be the most likely customers for this type of car, for by no stretch of the imagination can the Shamrock be called a sports car. This opinion of the writer was confirmed by Curtis, who looks upon the Shamrock as an economical, highly styled *sports-type* rig for small families.

The electrical system is 12-volt with a 52-ampere hour battery. Self-cancelling turn signals are standard as are the twin electric windshield wipers. The interior is lighted, when either door is opened, by a door pillar lamp. The buttons on the dashboard are, left to right, for the heater, choke, wipers, and lights. The ignition switch is at the left of the steering column and features key starting in the modern manner. Between the separate, almost bucket-type front seats, which adjust individually, is the lever type parking brake (also a standard Austin item). The short, well-positioned gear shift lever uses the usual Austin "H" slot movement plus reverse. Large American feet are undoubtedly responsible for the well-