

LAST MONTH, *Car Life* tested and reviewed the Buick Special Skylark for 1965 and included a comprehensive outline of the mechanical features of the then forthcoming Gran Sport option for that automotive package. "It might be simply said," we wrote, "that the Gran Sport takes over where the Skylark falls off." After a subsequent 2000 miles of touring and testing in a shiny black Skylark GS, we have no cause to alter or rephrase the statement.

However, the question does arise, after testing the Gran Sport in context with the Olds 442, the Pontiac GTO and the Dodge 426-S, "Does the GS go far enough?"

That the Gran Sport package makes the Skylark a better, more attractive entity to the automotive enthusiast must be acceded to by anyone examining the "before-and-after" specifications of both models. Where the non-GS models tend to be rather bland

and uninspiring, the GS comes off stronger, more distinctive and with something its owner can appreciate.

The Gran Sport option is \$200.53 and it is built into Skylark coupe, convertible or hardtop models only. It includes a 401-cu. in., 325-bhp V-8 engine, an all-synchromesh transmission (3-speed), stronger chassis and rear axle, revised springs and shock absorbers, oversize tires on 6-in. wide rims and special exterior trimwork.

Edward D. Rollert, Buick Division General Manager, calls it "a completely engineered performance car . . . designed to appeal to sports car enthusiasts."

Does it fulfill those lofty goals? Well, in CL's opinion, not really. While it is a nice, turbine-smooth sort of high-performing car, it's a long way from being either a sports car or, if you will, a "performance car." Where the GS slips is in its creators' assumption that sporting characteristics are

achieved by imbuing the car with outstanding acceleration alone.

The sports (or read it "sporting," or "performance") car enthusiast can outline the qualifications with his eyes closed. A car must brake as well as it can accelerate, it must corner and handle as well as it can cruise, and most of all it must have a balance of all these qualities. Performance, in the automotive sense, then must apply to the car as a whole, not just its linear acceleration and maximum speed. Performance has to mean fuel consumption, brake effectiveness, handling qualities, parking ease, heater warm-up and steering effort as well; all those facets of automotive activity must be considered in relating performance.

Now the Gran Sport, with a lb./bhp ratio of 12.4:1 (at test weight), just has to be a good sprinter; that much horsepower in a 3700-lb. car provides a virtually irresistible force. Even when this ability is limited by GM's 2.5-speed automatic transmission, the straight-line results are impressive (see data panel). Either manual transmission would just make it more-so. So, we give the GS double plus marks in this department.

Then we come to the braking, and



BRIGHT METAL trim is cleaned off the sides for the Gran Sport package. Simulated "ventiport" plate replaces fore-to-aft sweep spear.

here is where even the GS Skylark flunks the course. Despite enlarged front wheel brake cylinders and a harder lining material, the power-as-

sisted brakes would achieve only 21 and 19 ft./sec./sec. deceleration rates in CL's usual two successive stops from 80 mph. On both stops the rear

BUICK SKYLARK GRAN SPORT



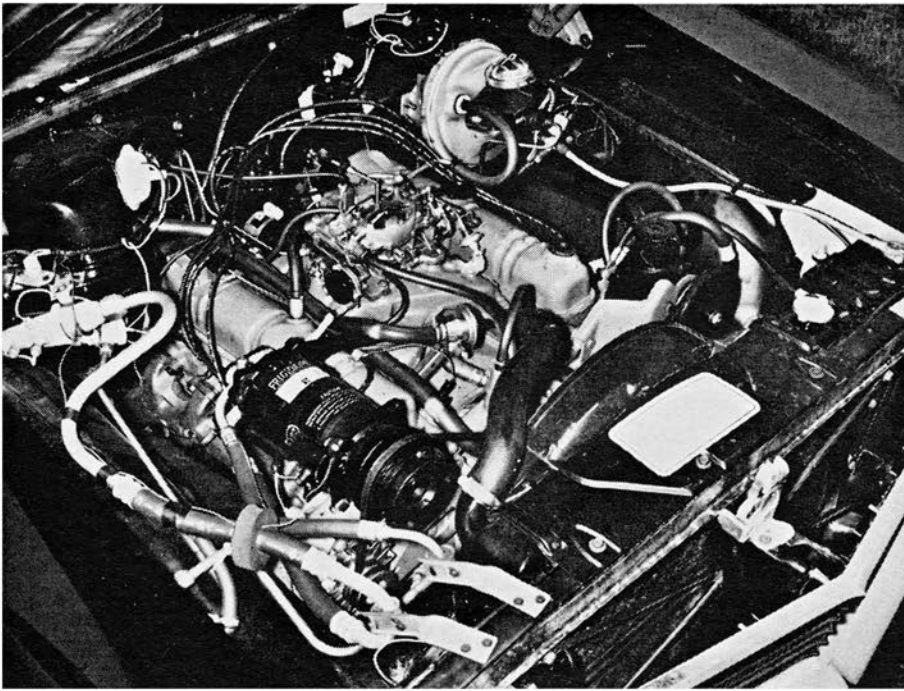
UP FRONT along console is a housing for tachometer. Test Gran Sport was fitted with 2-speed, rather than 3-speed automatic transmission.



Does the GS Go Far Enough to Suit the Enthusiasts' Market?

WALL-TO-WALL taillights are distinctive feature of Skylark styling, but turned out to be completely invisible from the sides.





BENEATH THAT tangle of wires and air conditioner hoses, engineers have installed Buick's Wildcat engine with 325 wild horses.

GRAN SPORT

wheels locked from excessive pressure once the front wheel brakes began to fade. The problem is the small, Chevy II-sized 9.5 x 2.5-in. drums: They can't dissipate heat fast enough to keep up with the load imposed upon them. Olds and Pontiac offer finned drums and metallic lining options, which alleviate this problem, but not Buick.

Handling has been improved, to a

point, with the GS modifications to the Skylark chassis. Use of the convertible's stiffer, stronger perimeter frame has somewhat reduced the vertical flutter noted in last month's Skylark examination. The more resilient springs have firmed up the boulevard ride to the point where it is palatable to the enthusiast, without being objectionable to his mother-in-

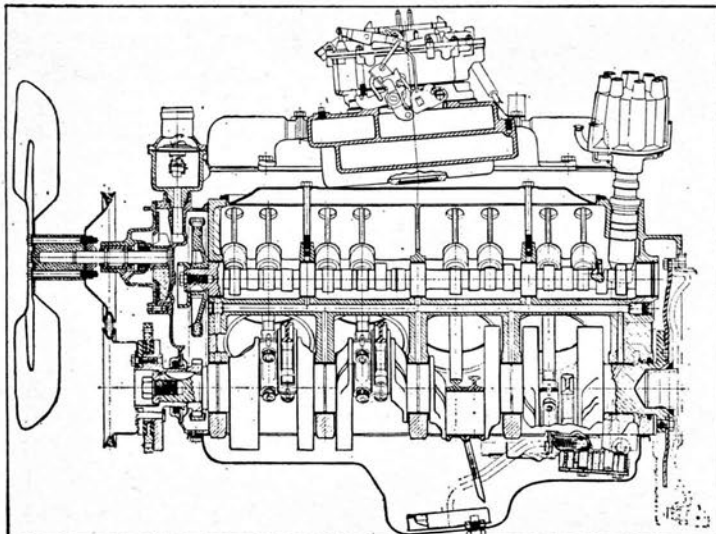
law. Harder compound bushings for suspension arms have taken much extra play out of handling, so that the GS develops positive actions and control. A 0.94-in. stabilizer bar across the front helps reduce body lean in cornering.

The chassis/suspension modifications are well thought out and do the job asked of them. It is another facet of the basic re-design that defeats the purpose: weight, or at least the distribution of that weight. The installation of the 401-cu. in. engine adds 134 lb. more weight over the 300-cu. in. V-8, or about 300 lb. over the standard Special V-6 around which the original car was designed. Add power steering, power brakes and an air conditioner, and there's another 200 lb. onto the front wheels. The net result is a car, such as the test GS, that has 58.3% of its bulk poised over its front wheels and only 41.7% on the rear. With most of the weight off the driving wheels, traction is poor on wet or dusty surfaces. With such an imbalance, cornering speed is reduced to the adhesive limits of the rear tires. Since the coefficient of friction is a function of weight, the rear tires can break traction long before the fronts, producing skids, slides and spins. A few sandbags in the trunk would help the situation.

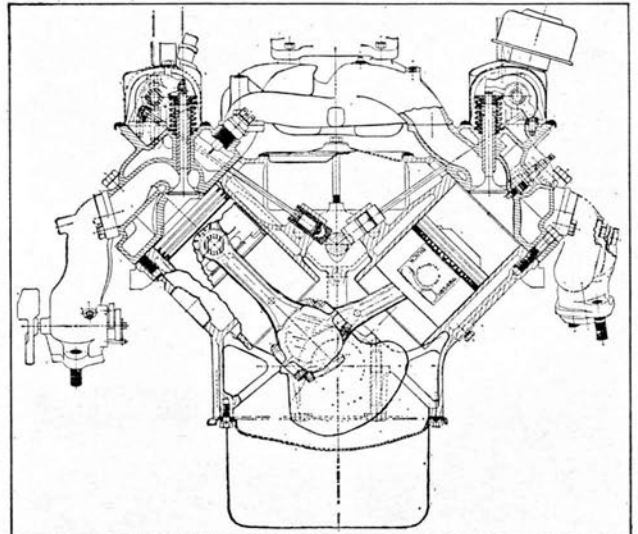
So, the Skylark Gran Sport has taut handling, but lacks the balance of chassis weight distribution to utilize it. It has gasping acceleration but not the brakes to counteract it. What about other aspects of its performance?

Buick scores highly in the other departments. Parking and maneuvering at about-town-speeds are comfort-

SECTIONED VIEW through centerline of 401-cu. in. engine displays sturdy lower end of Buick's big V-8.



END SECTIONAL bares intake and exhaust passages, shows full-skirt, dome-topped pistons and pent-roof chambers.



able and easy, heater and air conditioner work flawlessly, the automatic transmission is smooth and responsive, and fuel consumption is no more than 3 mpg over that of the smaller V-8.

Mentioned earlier was the combination of the automatic transmission with this big engine. Analysis of the over-the-road behavior gives the combination plus signs; the two complement each other. Where the 2.5-speed automatic (one geared ratio, direct, and a switchable pitch in the torque converter) is weak, the engine is strong. The automatic's in-between gear of

1.765:1 is neither low enough for a really strong starting gear, nor is it high enough for a long-legged intermediate, and the switchable pitch has only a limited range of effectiveness (below 60 mph). So, the low-speed torque characteristics of the engine (445 lb./ft. at 2800 rpm) provide the strongest urge in the in-between areas. Although substitution of GM's 3.5-speed automatic, used by Buick with this engine in its Wildcats and Electras, would put more pep into the acceleration, it isn't absolutely needed.

There's no doubt that the Gran

Sport option is more desirable to the automotive enthusiast than the straight Skylark, even though a V-6 equipped car would provide an almost ideal chassis balance, be easier on brakes and fuel, and, in the long run, be a better buy. It is easy to be impressed by that great surge of smooth, thrusting power and to be carried away by its fleetness on the highway. Then, too, the GS, with its distinctive grille-work and tasteful lack of over-ornamentation, provides the knowledgeable with a car that looks, as well as acts, different from the norm. ■

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST

1965 BUICK Skylark Gran Sport

SPECIFICATIONS

List price.....	\$2751
Price, as tested.....	3829
Curb weight, lb.....	3700
Test weight.....	4030
Tire size.....	7.75-14
Tire capacity, lb. @ 24 psi.....	4480
Brake swept area.....	268.6
Engine type.....	V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke.....	4.1875 x 3.64
Displacement, cu. in.....	401
Compression ratio.....	10.25
Carburetion.....	1 x 4
Bhp @ rpm.....	325 @ 4400
equivalent mph.....	106
Torque, lb.-ft.....	445 @ 2800
equivalent mph.....	68

EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

Gran Sport pkg., tinted glass, w.s. washer, auto. trans., power steering, power brakes, air cond., console, outside mirror, convenience lights, back-up lights, radio, bucket seats.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.....	115.0
Tread, f & r.....	58.0
Overall length, in.....	203.4
width.....	73.9
height.....	54.0
equivalent vol., cu. ft.....	468
Frontal area, sq. ft.....	22.1
Ground clearance, in.....	5.4
Steering ratio, o/a.....	20.9
turns, lock to lock.....	4.1
turning circle, ft.....	40.6
Hip room, front.....	2 x 23.0
Hip room, rear.....	59.9
Pedal to seat back, max.....	43.0
Floor to ground.....	9.0
Luggage vol., cu. ft.....	16.1
Fuel tank capacity, gal.....	20.0

GEAR RATIOS

2nd (1.00) overall.....	3.08
2nd (1.00 x 2.45).....	7.55
1st (1.765).....	5.33
1st (1.765 x 2.45).....	13.3



CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test wt.).....	12.4
Cu. ft./ton mile.....	145
Mph/1000 rpm.....	24.1
Engine revs./mile.....	2490
Piston travel, ft./mile.....	1510
Car Life wear index.....	37.9

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (5000), mph.....	121
Shifts, @ mph (auto.).....	
3rd ().....	
2nd ().....	
1st (4500).....	61
Total drag at 60 mph, lb.....	135

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.....	3.0
0-40.....	4.2
0-50.....	5.6
0-60.....	7.4
0-70.....	9.8
0-80.....	12.6
0-100.....	21.4
Standing 1/4 mile, sec.....	15.3
speed at end, mph.....	88

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual.....	30.0
60 mph.....	60.3
90 mph.....	92.0

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg.....	13-16
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