

story by Jim McCraw



OLDS 442

THE NAME "OLDSMOBILE" conjures up a lot of good visions for hot-rodders and drag racers: the original Rocket V-8, the '50 Olds Coupe, "Fiesta" spinner hubcaps, the '57 J-2 engine, Leonard Harris and the Albertson Olds dragster that took Top Elim at the '60 Nationals, John Smyser's "Terrible Toronado," the Hurst "Hairy Olds," and, most recently, the '67 4-4-2 Cutlass Supreme.

Oldsmobile's entry in the pony car sweepstakes is a car for the young and young-at-heart. It has more good looks than any mass-produced Detroit iron has a right to have. It has plenty of suds for highway driving, and more than enough for the drag strip. Its interior luxury is a clue to its heritage, for Oldsmobiles were for years known as the poor man's Cadillac.

Our test car was the hardtop model, painted a magnificent color called Bimini Blue, with red accent striping along the upper door panels. Its fully radiused wheel wells provided a nice frame for the ersatz wire wheels, and the fronts were further accented by red fiberglass inner wells, which we'll discuss more fully later.

Options on the car included the 4-4-2 handling package, consisting of heavy duty springs and shocks, big-diameter stabilizer bar, and an extra bar at the rear, power disc brakes, power steering, rally instruments, and F70-14 Firestone Wide

Ovals.

The power train was full of tricky options, the biggest of which is known as W-30. This is the Outside Air Induction drag racing package, consisting of a special air cleaner with twin ducts, exiting the body between sets of headlights, Rochester Quadra-Jet carb, red fiberglass inner fenders, battery relocation to the trunk, over the right rear tire, and capacitive discharge ignition system. Because of General Motors' corporate edict concerning a 10-to-1 weight/horsepower factor, this engine is rated at 350 hp, but we assure you it cranks out a lot more.

Behind the big mill, a close-ratio Muncie 4-speed and heavy clutch. And behind that, a 4-33:1 limited-slip rear axle.

This car was an interesting mixture of the racer and the boulevard machine, with the accent on luxury. The low, forward-sloping hood, the practical, yet crisply styled dash, carpeting and seats gave the 4-4-2 a special feel, which most of its cousins in the family of intermediate personal cars do not offer. The heavy duty suspension kept itself hidden until it was called upon, and the whole car behaved itself quite well during the 3000-mile test period.

Lest the picture become too rosy red, and lest you begin to believe we've found the perfect car, we'd better mention a few of the things we found objectionable in this car. The most disturbing thing

photos by Leslie Lovett



ABOVE—The Oldsmobile was one of the best-liked cars ever tested by SS&D, for its performance, looks, quality, and driveability, with a few exceptions. The 4.33 rear created a lot of unnecessary engine wear and noise, and virtually prevented cruising. The production shifter was extremely stiff and generally unmanageable on the street, but worked on the strip. LEFT—Bill Stiles (l.) and Bob Senft, of Sun Electric Co., go over the timing in an effort to get better et. W-30 mill rates at 350 hp, 435 ft.-lb. torque, with a single Quadra-Jet, capacitive discharge ignition, and hydraulic lifters. Cam carries a duration figure of 308°, with .474 in. lift at valve, 82° overlap. Valves are 2.06 diameter for intakes, 1.629 for exhausts. All of this added up to an impressive-sounding 1100 rpm idle, lots of go.

The designers and engineers at General Motors have put together an exciting package for the young, looking-for-a-new-bag carbuyer. The Oldsmobile 4-4-2 combines luxury, looks, driveability, and winning ways at the drag strip in an intermediate-sized, nicely priced machine

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about the Olds was the 4.33 rear, which made it impossible to cruise, as such. At a speed of 65 mph, the tach reading was 4000 rpm, just 1200 R's shy of the engine's redline. Everyone who drove the car admitted to driving below speed limits just to keep the noise down. The shifter mechanism was one of the stiffest we've ever encountered, especially going into reverse, and, on one occasion, the large bolt that holds the assembly to the transmission case came completely unglued, leaving us with one gear: neutral. And the ventilation system was insufficient, hot or cold, wet or dry.

After many miles of road testing, it was time to get down to the nitty gritty of performance, so we trotted the 4-4-2 over to Capitol Raceway in Annapolis, Md., for a session with the Christmas tree. A quick pass over the scales showed 3710 lb., including jack, spare, and half a tank of gas.

The first run was made, as usual, without benefit of tune, and produced a 14.78 at 96.46 mph. We found out right away that clutch-dumping 3000-rpm

starts were *not* the hot setup. Next time around, engine speed was dropped to 2500 rpm, and the clutch eased out twice, once to move the car off the line, and once to go with. This was a little better, producing a 14.61 et at 98.90 mph. Another run using the same technique showed a 14.59 at 99.33 mph. On that one, we decided to give the disc brakes a good stomping, and Boy, do they ever work. The pads were still smoking when the car arrived back at the line for the next go, but the brakes showed no sign of giving it up, and they worked the same way all day long.

After a short cooling off period, we lined up the Olds for another pass. This time, engine speed was dropped to 1800 rpm at the line, and the clutch eased out for minimum wheel-spin. Figures for this run: 14.48 at 100.33 mph. Getting better, but not exactly

a worldbeater. Still another run under the same conditions produced a 14.31 et at 101.23 mph.

With half a dozen runs under its belt, the 4-4-2 was beginning to get a little tired in the traps, so it was parked and iced down.

While the Olds was resting, we checked tire pressures and found 26 psi all around. The fronts were pumped up to 50 psi and the rears left alone. Up front, the element was removed from the air cleaner box.

With only these modifications, the car began to produce as we thought it should, turning a 14.11 at 101.35. It was time to check out the elementary things that can make or break a car at the drags. The car had been pinging quite loudly, despite a load of high test, so timing was eased back from the recommended 13° to 11°. On top of this, the manifold and carb were iced down, and cool water sprayed up into the air intakes. Oops. Elapsed time slipped back to 14.34, with a speed of 101.01. The backup run to

this one was performed with the "banzai" tactics we had started with: 3000 rpm, popped clutch, and immediate floor-boarding. All we got for our trouble was a 14.61 at 100.33, scorched tires, and a sideways car.

We backed off it again, and again the car's performance improved, to a 14.40-101.12 and a 14.35-101.12. An engine speed of 1800 rpm, and the accompanying fancy footwork on the clutch pedal seemed to be the right way to go without benefit of drag tires.

We looked around for an easy way to chop some tenths out of the 4-4-2's times, and came up with a new set of Champion J10Y plugs. Up to this point, the car had been running with the factory installed plugs which had better than 3000 miles of hard driving behind them.

The plugs, some ice, and some more water spray in the intake tubes produced something that's pretty darn rare, three identical et's at the same speed: 14.22 at 101.80.

The Bimini Blue bomb stayed right in this bracket for another half a dozen runs, done in rapid-fire fashion, with elapsed times of 14.24, 14.25, 14.27, 14.22, 14.28, and 14.25. And because of all this hard running, the Olds got too hot to handle and was parked for awhile. The en-

BELOW LEFT—The only exterior giveaway to the W-30 air induction system are these ducts, exiting over and under the parking light assemblies. Of course, if you listen carefully at the rear of the car, you can hear the horsepower churning. BELOW RIGHT—Drag tester Larry Williams shoots some cool water mist into the intake tubes to get an easy power boost from the engine.



tire top surface of the engine was packed in ice, the intake tubes were sprayed down, and the radiator core doused with water. Timing was slipped back to original 13° setting.

The next round of runs were what we had hoped for. Starting off with a 14.10 at 100.89, the Cutlass went on to a 14.12, 14.15, 14.12, then a 14.01 and finally a 13.99, all at better than 102 mph. This last round went slower than previous ones, with engine being sprayed and iced after each go, and the cooling really paid off.

Throughout the drag test, the car was run up to 5400 rpm in each gear, and going through the traps at about 5200. Every shift was made with the pedal to the wood. As we said earlier, the engine speed at the line varied from 3000 down to 1800 rpm, which seemed best overall. The car was run *with* the full exhaust system, and *without* drag tires. With these things duly noted, and considering the fact that there was a persistent headwind of 15-25 mph all day long, 13.99 seconds at 102.35 mph is more than good for a luxurious automobile like the Oldsmobile 4-4-2. In any way, shape, or form, the car is smack in the middle of NHRA B/S, and with nothing more than the usual mods, it is a threat to its supercar cousins. ■



ABOVE—The 4-4-2 with Larry Williams aboard goes full tilt at the Chrondeks. Throughout the test, the car performed flawlessly, ran strong in the low 14's. RIGHT—Bill Stiles, who did all the tuning on SS&DI's Olds test car, controls the Christmas tree on one of the car's last runs. The sideways appearance of the car is not caused by the camera, but by the tremendous torque generated by its 400-inch engine. It was agreed that, if 7-in. tires had been used over the street jobs, et's would have tumbled fantastically. As it was, traction was almost nil without a lot of left leg pumping. BELOW—Interior trappings are the touches that give the Olds an edge.

