



THE HANDLER: OLDS 4-4-2



CAR LIFE
ROAD TEST

PHOTOS BY CHAN BUSH

BASIC UNDERSTEER and moderate body roll at maximum speed are apparent as 4-4-2 negotiates tight slalom circuit on Bob Bondurant's racing-school course at Orange County Raceway. In corners up to 70-80 mph, power-oversteer could be induced easily.

Long one of America's most surefooted Supercars, this swift new version still shows its claws in corners

THOUGH THE NAME "Oldsmobile" does not ordinarily leap first to mind when high-powered, top-handling automotive machinery is being discussed, it is nevertheless a fact that for years the Olds 4-4-2 has been one of the best high-performance packages built in America. This unfortunate lack of recognition is primarily due to a couple of attitudes: General Motors still maintains the

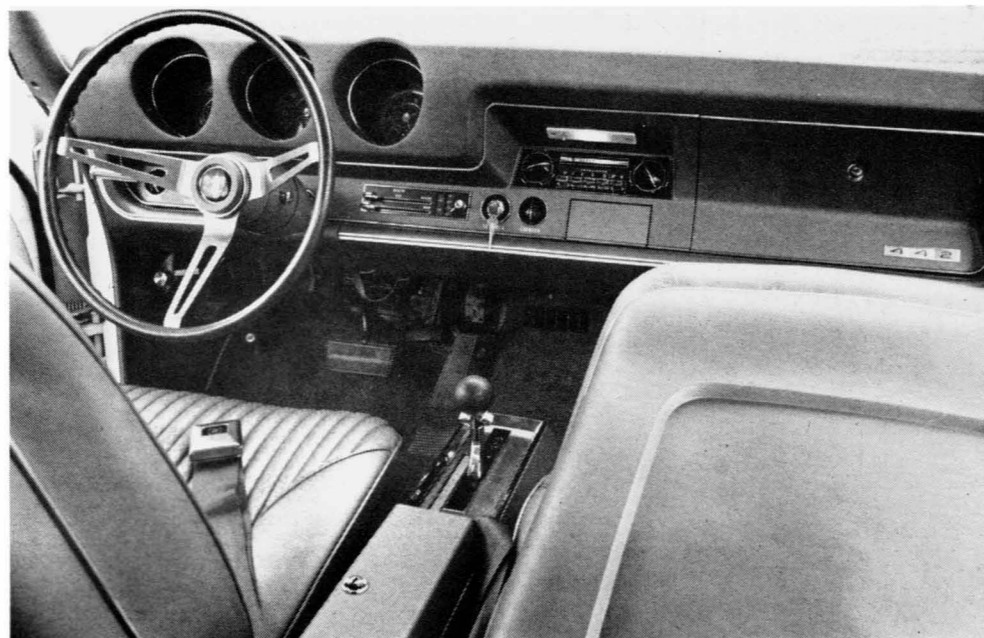
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tentative advertising approach to racing it adopted several years ago in the name of safety: and despite the demonstrated potency of several Olds products (for one, see the Toronado road test in May 1968 CAR LIFE), the Oldsmobile name still retains most of its old-time aura of expensive, luxurious gentility.

A hard test run in the 4-4-2 will change all that. Drivers who have gradually become accustomed to babying their full-sized cars around corners and curves to avoid wallow, mushy handling and sudden over- and under-steer will find themselves possessed of a brand new set of driving skills, and confidence to match. The 4-4-2 stays firm and level, due partially to a thick rear antiroll bar which effectively opposes body lean and roll, giving good control during quick cornering.

When deliberately driven to extremes, the 4-4-2 remains stable. It can be taken into a completely controllable power-oversteer attitude without difficulty, the rear end breaking loose more smoothly and progressively than nearly any other standard pas-



FRONT COMPARTMENT and instrument panel reflect comfortable but strong character of 4-4-2, as well as observance of new safety requirements, in simplicity of controls, hand-filling steering wheel and shift knob, recessed dials and projecting impact surface.

senger car, and with the degree of tail hang-out fully under throttle control.

At its test weight of just under 4000 lb., the 4-4-2 obviously needs a good deal of power to achieve really impressive acceleration. Also, being an

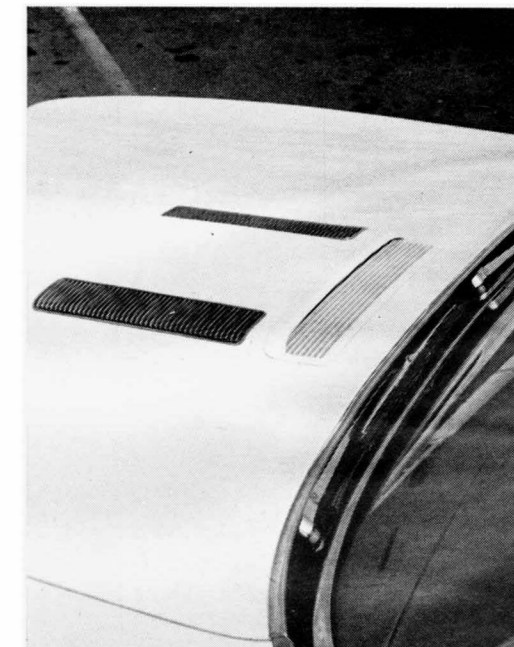
Olds, it needs engine durability for long-run owner satisfaction, and at least some measures toward fuel economy to mollify late-traders who insist on remembering the good old 18-mpg days. The two latter requisites are met



TRUNK CAPACITY is long and wide, but not deep enough for tall items, with spare pre-empting much prime luggage space. Low, extremely horizontal rear-end design gathers apparent width from narrow, oblong taillights and bumper lines.

by Oldsmobile's much-heralded new approach to drivetrain engineering, which simply combines larger displacement, long-stroke engines with numerically lower final-drive ratios. This of course, results in a domino-

theory cascade of benefits: plenty of torque for good performance; mild levels of engine tuning for long, trouble-free life; and low-rpm operation for quiet running, reduced exhaust emission and reasonably good mileage.



VANISHING WIPERS are standard on full Olds line for 1968, lurking out of sight within chamber just ahead of windshield.

The first requirement—plenty of power—is vital to this concept, and Olds fills it by making three strong engine variations available for the 4-4-2. The test car's engine is standard for the line: a 400-cid V-8 with 4-barrel

1968 OLDSMOBILE 4-4-2 2-DOOR HARDTOP



DIMENSIONS

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| Wheelbase, in. | 112.0 |
| Track, f/r, in. | 59.0/59.0 |
| Overall length, in. | 201.6 |
| width | 76.6 |
| height | 52.8 |
| Front seat hip room, in. | 23.4 x 2 |
| shoulder room | 58.3 |
| head room | 37.4 |
| pedal-seatback, max. | 42.9 |
| Rear seat hip room, in. | 52.6 |
| shoulder room | 57.2 |
| leg room | 32.2 |
| head room | 36.1 |
| Door opening width, in. | 42.0 |
| Trunk liftover height, in. | 28.5 |

PRICES

| | |
|---|--------|
| List, FOB factory | \$3127 |
| Equipped as tested | \$4059 |
| Options included: Turbo Hydra-Matic; power steering, disc brakes; high voltage ignition system; tilt away wood grain steering wheel; Rocket Rally Pac, am radio; console; remote control rearview mirror. | |

CAPACITIES

| | |
|------------------------|-------|
| No. of passengers | 5 |
| Luggage space, cu. ft. | 17.5 |
| Fuel tank, gal. | 20.0 |
| Crankcase, qt. | 4.0 |
| Transmission/dif., pt. | 8/3.7 |
| Radiator coolant, qt. | 16.2 |

CHASSIS/SUSPENSION

Frame type: Perimeter.
Front suspension type: Independent by s.l.a., coil springs, telescopic shock absorbers.
ride rate at wheel, lb./in. 158
antiroll bar dia., in. 0.937
Rear suspension type: Link coil live axle, two trailing arms, coil springs, telescopic shock absorbers, 0.875-in. dia., antiroll bar.
ride rate at wheel, lb./in. 109
Steering system: Integral assist recirculating ball gear, parallelogram linkage behind front wheels.
overall ratio 20.7:1
turns, lock to lock 4.3
turning circle, ft. curb-curb 40.0
Curb weight, lb. 3720
Test weight 4060
Distribution (driver),
% f/r 57.1/42.9

BRAKES

Type: Disc front, single leading shoe rear.
Front rotor, dia. x width, in. 11.0 x 1.83
Rear drum, dia. x width 9.5 x 1.83
total swept area, sq. in. 348.4
Power assist: Integral vacuum.
line psi at 100 lb. pedal 960

WHEELS/TIRES

Wheel rim size 14 x 6JK
optional size none
bolt no./circle dia. in. 5/4.75
Tires: Firestone Super Sport Wide Oval.
size F70-14
normal inflation, psi f/r 24/24
Capacity @ psi 5120 @ 24

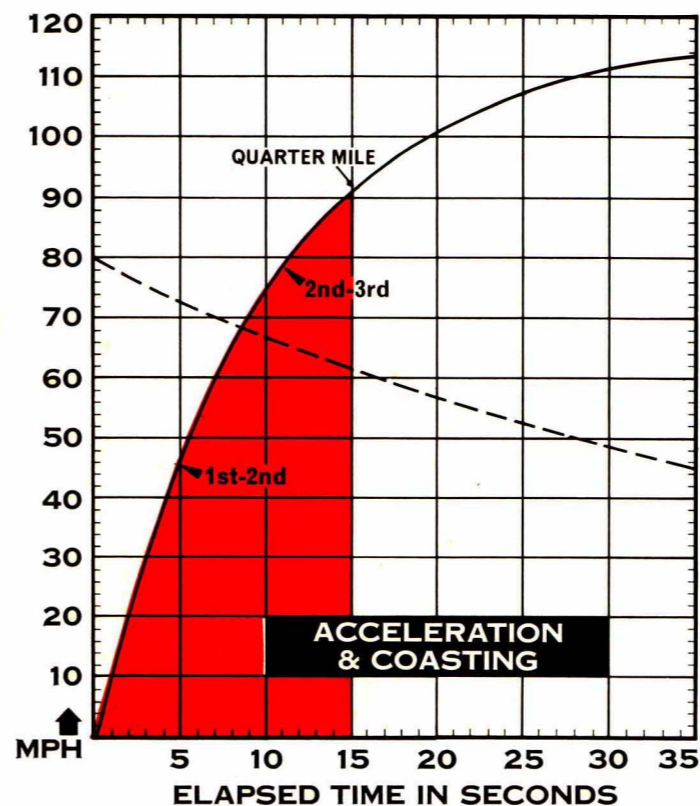
ENGINE

Type, no. of cyl. ohv 90° V-8
Bore x stroke, in. 3.87 x 4.25
Displacement, cu. in. 400
Compression ratio 10.5:1
Fuel required premium
Rated bhp @ rpm 350 @ 4800
equivalent mph 109
Rated torque @ rpm 440 @ 3200
equivalent mph 72
Carburetion: Rochester 1x4.
throttle dia., pri./sec. 1.36/2.25
Valve train: Hydraulic lifters, push-rods and overhead rocker arms.
cam timing
deg., int./exh. 30-76/78-28
duration, int./exh. 286/286
Exhaust system: Dual, reverse-flow mufflers.
pipe dia., exh./tail 2.25/2.25
Normal oil press. @ rpm .40 @ 1500
Electrical supply, V./amp 12/37
Battery, plates/amp. hr. 77/66

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission type: Three-speed automatic with torque converter.
Gear ratio 3rd (1.00:1) overall. 3.42:1
2nd (1.48:1) 5.06:1
1st (2.48:1) 8.49:1
1st x t.c. stall (2.30:1) 19.50:1
Shift lever location: Console.
Differential type: Hypoid.
axle ratio 3.42:1

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



CALCULATED DATA

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------|
| Lb./bhp (test weight) | 12.5 |
| Cu. ft./ton mile | 151.2 |
| Mph/1000 rpm (high gear) | 22.6 |
| Engine revs./mile (60 mph) | 2650 |
| Piston travel, ft./mile | 1878 |
| CAR LIFE wear index | 49.8 |
| Frontal area, sq. ft. | 22.4 |
| NHRA-AHRA class | G/SA-n.a. |

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

| | |
|----------------|------|
| 30 mph, actual | 27.6 |
| 40 mph | 37.7 |
| 50 mph | 48.5 |
| 60 mph | 58.6 |
| 70 mph | 67.8 |
| 80 mph | 77.6 |
| 90 mph | 87.3 |

MAINTENANCE

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Engine oil, miles/days | 6000/120 |
| oil filter, miles/days | 12,000/240 |
| Chassis lubrication, miles | 12,000 |
| Antismog servicing, type/miles | tuneup/12,000, replace PCV valve/12,000 |
| Air cleaner, miles | replace/24,000 |
| Spark plugs: AC 44S. | |
| gap, (in.) | 0.030 |
| Basic timing, deg./rpm | n.a. |
| max. cent. adv., | |
| deg./rpm | 22/4000 |
| max. vac. adv., deg./in. Hg. | 23/21 |
| Ignition point gap, in. | 0.016 |
| cam dwell angle, deg. | 30 |
| arm tension, oz. | 19-32 |
| Tappet clearance, int./exh. | 0/0 |
| Fuel pressure at idle, psi | 725 |
| Radiator cap relief press., psi | 15 |

PERFORMANCE

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| Top speed (5100), mph | 115 |
| Test shift points (rpm) @ mph | |
| 2nd to 3rd (5100) | 78 |
| 1st to 2nd (5100) | 46 |

ACCELERATION

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| 0-30 mph, sec. | 3.0 |
| 0-40 mph | 4.2 |
| 0-50 mph | 5.5 |
| 0-60 mph | 7.0 |
| 0-70 mph | 8.9 |
| 0-80 mph | 11.4 |
| 0-90 mph | 14.7 |
| 0-100 mph | 19.7 |
| Standing 1/4-mile, sec. | 15.13 |
| speed at end, mph | 92.2 |
| Passing, 30-70 mph, sec. | 5.9 |

BRAKING

| | |
|---|------------|
| Max. deceleration rate from 80 mph | |
| ft./sec. ² | 20 |
| No. of stops from 80 mph (60-sec. intervals) before 20% loss in deceleration rate | 8-10% loss |
| Control loss? Severe. | |
| Overall brake performance | poor |

FUEL CONSUMPTION

| | |
|-----------------------|---------|
| Test conditions, mpg | 12.2 |
| Normal cond., mpg | 11-16 |
| Cruising range, miles | 220-320 |

DRAG FACTOR

| | |
|--------------------------|------|
| Total drag @ 60 mph, lb. | n.a. |
|--------------------------|------|



VIEW FROM lower rear quarter exaggerates already considerable area covered by rear-fender/roof-panel continuum, a design element questioned by some critics, who also felt inward slope between upper door sill and roofline was extreme. Most, however, liked overall styling and preferred pin-striping shown here to more blatant racing stripes.

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carburetion and a 10.5:1 compression ratio, which develops 325 bhp at 4600 rpm and 440 lb.-ft. of torque at only 3000 rpm. The standard engine handled its chores easily and quietly even when under full acceleration.

For yet higher performance, the Olds "Force-Air" induction system can be ordered on this engine, incorporating large 13 by 2 in. air scoops below the bumper which feed cool air to the carburetor, a special camshaft for higher torque peaking speed (440 at 3600 rpm), cylinder head modifications to both the intake and exhaust ports, a free-flow exhaust system and low-friction moving components.

For the economy-minded, a somewhat milder engine is available: another 400-cid V-8, but in this case equipped with 2-barrel carburetion and 9.0:1 compression ratio. It subsists on regular fuel, and produces 290 bhp at 4600 rpm and 425 lb.-ft. of torque at 2400 rpm. This engine option includes the Hydra-Matic transmission as standard, with numerically lower ratios available than are offered with the more powerful engines.

As is proper for any performance-oriented car, the 4-4-2 can be purchased with a good many different transmissions and drive-ratio combinations. These include three manual transmissions; a 3-speed which is standard with the 4-4-2's standard 350-bhp engine, a wide-ratio 4-speed which is optional with all three engines, and a close-ratio 4-speed which

is standard with the Force-Air engine and optional with the others. This surfeit of "power-team" options is further compounded by a slather of available differential ratios, including enough choices to fully satisfy gas misers, trailer haulers or drag racers. Our test car had a 3.42:1 axle ratio, an acceleration/cruising compromise.

Our choice for the test car was Oldsmobile's strong, smooth Turbo Hydra-Matic, an optional transmission with this engine, and we liked it as well as ever. In normal driving the Hydra-Matic eased quietly up through the ratios with an occasional gentle nudge, and allowed the car to develop velocity at a deceptively swift rate. It exhibited no commotion or lag while shifting up or down under varying speed requirements, and seemed very near the design engineer's fond dream of an automatic transmission that blends imperceptibly into the action of the drive train.

But the real test of the Hydra-Matic came during our full-acceleration runs (see data panel), in which the transmission was held in each ratio up to just past the engine's power peak, then force-shifted up into the next. Here again, however, it performed very well, with excellent shift quality and smooth, positive, nearly immediate changes.

When thoroughly warmed up, the brakes operated with consistency and strength. Pedal pressure remained moderate under heavy, repeated applications, and there was only an occasional hint of squeal from the optional front discs. But when cold the rear drums locked up several times, with a severe loss of braking power. This apparently is due to an improper setup of the brake proportioning sys-

tem, but it is a problem GM has solved on other high-performance models (notably the Pontiac GTO) and can, and should, solve on the 4-4-2.

From both a style and functional standpoint, the interior of the car is clean, businesslike, and without useless ornamental clutter. The individual front seats are covered with heavy, soft vinyl, and their firmness, position and thigh support were approved by most drivers, though one dissident felt the front seat-cushion edge was too high and the seating too vertical.

In general, the instruments are well-designed and usable, except for one unfortunate device installed optionally as part of the "Rocket Rally Pac"—the "tick-tock-tach." This is simply a tachometer with a clock in its navel, but any attempt to use either component quickly results only in frustration and bewilderment. The dial is an eye-numbing turmoil of tiny numbers, circles and rules—and, worse, it is located directly behind a good driver's normal hand position on the steering wheel.

The 112-in. wheelbase and 201.6-in. overall length of the 4-4-2 are Olds' shortest (along with the F-85 and Cutlass coupes and convertibles), and presented its stylists with some thorny problems. This same 112-in.-wb chassis is used on all General Motors "intermediates," and Olds designers were particularly hard pressed to achieve simultaneous model distinction and line identification.

In action, however, there was no question that the 4-4-2 Holiday Coupe looked every bit as quick and strong as it really is—a true high-performance car, and the best handling of today's Supercars. ■