



Road Test by Bill Sanders

A look
at how the
Chevy Nova,
Rambler,
Dodge Dart,
Ford Falcon
perform
for '69

The phrase "history repeats itself" is familiar to almost everyone. And, it's very applicable in the American auto industry. Great quantities of money have been spent on research to find out what motivates people to buy cars. No one yet has come up with an invincible formula. We know it's a combination of intangibles, but how do you put that combination together for a winner.

Just a decade ago our own manufacturers, who were worried about the mounting tide of imports, especially the "Beetle," spawned a whole new generation of cars. The "compacts" were born. Every manufacturer, every division of the big corporations, got into the act. At one time there were no less than eleven domestic compacts vying for a share of the burgeoning market. It helped stem the tide, for awhile, but then history began repeating itself.

It's difficult to keep the status quo in the American auto industry, especially with that purported sales getter, the "annual model change." A malady associated with the annual model change, which could be called "largeritis" soon infected the compacts. Even if a domestic car starts life as a functional, well planned package that is generally a combination of good ideas and is successful on the sales charts, the American public has been conditioned to expect some visual changes with each succeeding model year. Not necessarily improvements, but changes. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this end is to make them larger and more luxurious. It's how we keep ahead of the Joneses.

In the past ten years domestic compacts have gotten larger and more luxurious. Some have gotten so large they are now intermediates. Some have passed into the limbo of history. One has been persecuted almost out of existence by so called "experts." The remaining "compacts" have gained in length and breadth so that in 1969 they have wheelbases and overall lengths similar to some full-size models of 20 and 30 years ago. This isn't to say they don't fill their roles as utilitarian or second car vehicles. They do. And do it very well. We chose what we feel are four representative models to test just how well.

So, the cars got larger and now there are only a handful left. But they served their purpose a few years ago. They slowed the inevitable tide. Detroit ingenuity turned to other areas. But the

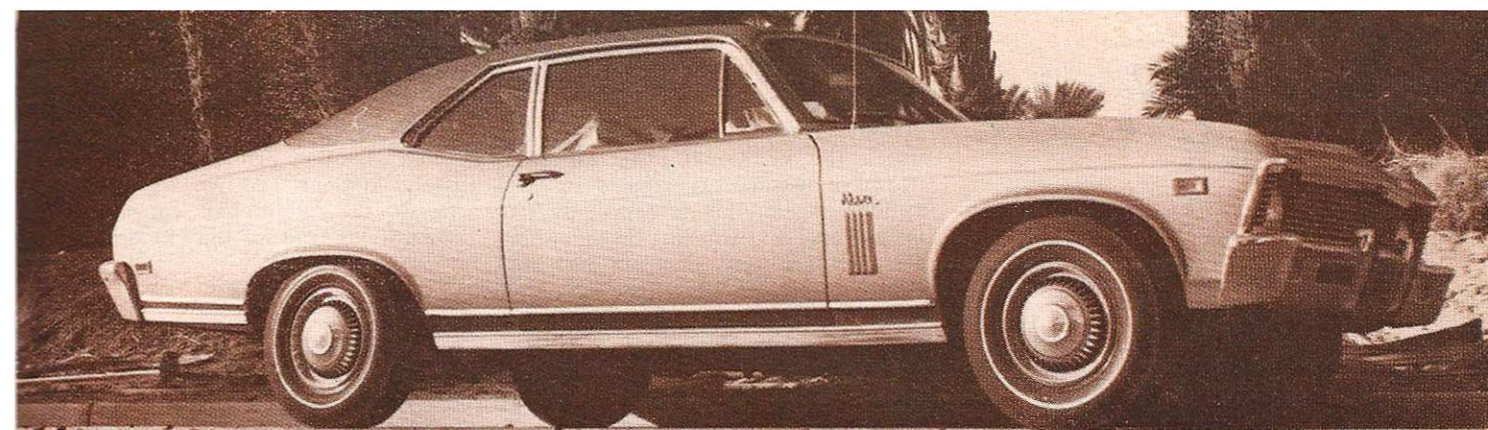
tide kept coming back. A year ago the worries began surfacing again. Imports were once more taking quite a sizeable portion of the market. Small "compact" cars to compete with those pesky imports were again announced in the works by GM and Ford. The Maverick from Ford is already out, and yes, it is a "compact." History repeats itself.

Getting Your Money's Worth

It's a good idea to pay close attention to the variety of options available when ordering your compact. You can virtually tailor the car to your needs and pay as little or as much as you feel necessary. Of the four cars tested, base prices (with base six-cylinder engine) range from \$1998 for the Rambler, to \$2661 for the Dart Custom, which is the luxury version of the Dart series. There is only a one dollar difference between the base Nova and Falcon.

Determining the powertrain is important. If you plan to use your compact strictly as a second car for transportation near home; to schools, the store and on short hops, the base engine and the standard three-speed manual transmission might suffice.

Economy Kick



CHEVY NOVA
Styling is similar to '68, resembles bigger Chevelle.



RAMBLER
With Valerie along, American Motors' baby is all class.



FORD FALCON
Trim lines give four-door good-looking profile.



DODGE DART
Custom version shows more chrome and extra trim.

Economy Kick

We ordered our four cars with the step-up six-cylinder engine, and in each case, we feel it is a worthwhile addition when weighing performance against additional cost. Step-up engines in the Falcon and Nova are \$25.91 and \$26.35 respectively. In the Rambler and Dart they are \$45.35 and \$46.35. If the car will be used mostly by the wife, or if it will see a wider range of use, such as vacations, hauling, mountain driving, a three-speed automatic is a good idea. Each of our test cars had a three-speed automatic and the price in each case is just about \$170 more. There is another way to go if the car will only be driven near home by a woman who doesn't like shifting. One example is the Chevy two-speed torque-drive auto-

matic. It costs only \$68.65 additional versus \$174.25 for the three-speed Turbo Hydra-Matic.

Power steering and brakes are also worth the additional cost, especially if you've become accustomed to these options. Again, this is especially true in the case of women. These options are quite similarly priced in each line. Our Nova had power brakes with front discs, and while still slightly higher in cost, we highly recommend them. Our only car without power steering was the Falcon. While it holds down cost, we noticed that maneuvers such as parking really became a chore, especially for our distaff drivers. Figures from Dodge show that nationally, 78 percent of all Darts are ordered with power steering, yet only four percent of Darts equipped with six-cylinder engines are ordered with power brakes.

Getting useful options and comparing their costs between lines sometimes requires investigation. In the

Dart, the "Light Group" which costs \$30.10 includes a glovebox light, a trunk light, a "headlight-on" reminder buzzer, a map light, an ash tray light and an ignition light. These are handy, useful options and we feel they are worth the additional expense. The same holds true for the "Radio Group"

Chevy Nova

(Below) High-speed cruising on desert roads didn't perturb Nova. (Opposite page, top) Engine compartment was spacious, giving easy access to plugs, coil, distributor. Instrument panel has large speedo. Clock costs extra. Dash on passenger side is flat, safely padded. Front seat head restraints are well placed for protection. (Bottom) Understeer is evident in handling. Wide tires help hold road. Rear seats are comfortable but leg room is minimal in two-door model. Trunk is deep but spare is in the way for easy packing. Trunk's opening is wide.

option with the Dart. In the Rambler and Falcon, an AM radio costs \$61.20 and \$61.40 respectively. An AM-FM radio, which our Nova had, jumps to \$133.80. Of course, a regular AM radio in the Nova is much less expensive. In the Dart, for \$195.10 you get an AM radio, plus: power steering, variable speed windshield wipers and electric washers, an interior adjustable left door mirror (which is extremely useful, especially in the rain), an air foam front seat and special wheel covers.

With careful attention to options and how your compact is equipped, you can get relatively good performance, utility and convenience, yet still hold the total cost within your budget.

Performance & Economy

Although there is a variance in displacement between 200 and 250 cubic inches, all four engines, with the exception of the Ford, are pretty evenly matched in the horsepower range. Per-

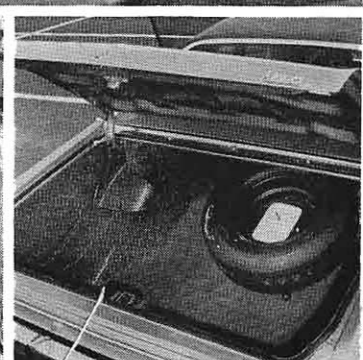
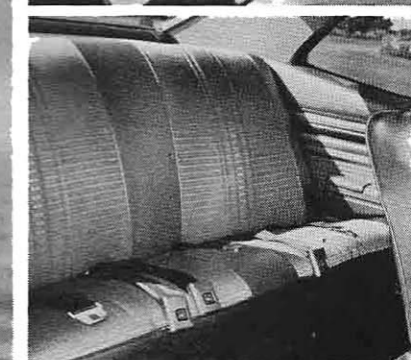
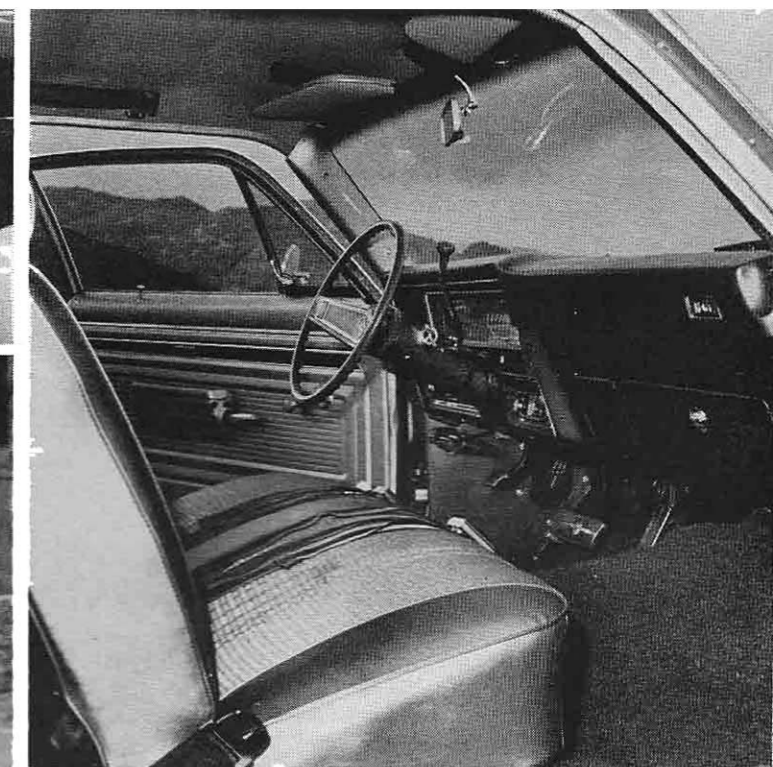
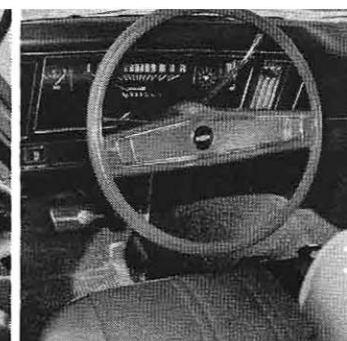
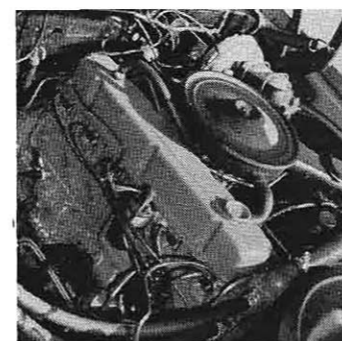
formance seems to be more dependent on power to weight ratio in this category. Performance is quite close between the Nova, Rambler and Dart. The Falcon, with only 115 horsepower, seemed a little sluggish. But what it lacked in getting away from the stop lights, it made up slightly in gas mileage, turning in a top reading of 19.1 mpg. Both the test Nova and Falcon had zero miles on the odometers when we picked up the cars; and we're certain that when each car is adequately broken in with several thousand miles, gas mileage will be better. Both the Rambler and Dart were broken in and the gas mileage figures must be considered representative.

Performance was so close there was only a tenth of a second difference, from 0 to 60 mph, between the Nova, Rambler and Dart. The Rambler ran 0 to 60 mph in 13.2 seconds while both the Nova and Dart got to 60 mph in 13.3 seconds.

How the power to weight ratio affects performance can be seen with the Rambler and Nova. The Nova, with 155 horsepower, had ten more horsepower than the Rambler. But, the Nova had the heaviest curb weight at 3020 pounds, while the Rambler was lightest at 2667 pounds. Both had the same axle ratio at 3.08:1.

Economy was good in each car, but not as good as we had expected. Gas mileage figures ranged from fourteen to almost seventeen mpg for all the cars, with the exception of the Falcon. These figures also include running on the drag strip at Orange Country Raceway and other hard driving, which put a big drain on good mileage.

The slant-6 in the Dart is a sturdy, rugged engine. Manual shifting with the Dodge three-speed automatic is easy and shifts can be made smoothly, either up or down. Falcon acceleration didn't put us through the seat with only 115 horses, but once it was going,



Economy Kick

the 200 cubic inch engine pulled the car along with no problems. On a mountain trip, climbing was good with no lugging, even in "Drive." Even in snow and slush there was no loss of traction.

Response was excellent in the Nova with plenty of power for most situations. Second gear in the three-speed automatic was handy in hilly driving and for passing. Even with down-shifting and revving in second, the engine never complained. The Rambler had the peppiest acceleration. Pick-up in "D" range was quite fast, and around town acceleration from stop lights actually got the jump on more powerful machinery.

Utility, Comfort & Convenience

Vent windows have been retained on all the compacts tested, consequently ventilation is great on all four cars. Each has big, under dash air intakes also, so an air conditioner, which adds a big bump to the price in this category, isn't a vital necessity. Carpeting, which is also an extra cost option in this group, except in the Dart Custom where it's included in the higher base price, isn't really necessary. In fact, if

you haul kids, which automatically means popsicles, sticky ice cream cones, messy suckers and soft drinks spilled on the floor, it's much easier to clean a rubber floor mat than a carpet. Our Falcon had a rubber floor mat color-keyed to the interior, which is a good idea, and is a no cost item.

Front seat leg room in the Dart was adequate and foam padded front seats were quite plush. Both the Dart and Falcon were four-door models and the Nova and Rambler were two-door coupes. The Dart had the most rear seat leg room. In fact it had more rear seat leg room than some of the full size models, supercars and luxury cars we've driven. And the Dart is a compact! Even with the slightly higher base price tag, the luxury touches in the Dart Custom are impressive. A cigarette lighter is standard, it's not on the other three cars. Rear seat door armrests have individual ash trays. Interior finish is excellent, with choice fabrics—vinyl and nylon—and close attention to quality control.

Interior comfort in the Falcon and Nova is quite similar. Neither became tiring on lengthy trips. On such a trip we noticed a tendency to slide over against the door on the Falcon bench seat, and had to move to the right repeatedly. The left door armrest in the Nova made our elbow sore on a long drive. Either it's too hard or placement

is poor. All vinyl upholstery in the Falcon, at no extra cost, is a good feature, and it's elegantly done for an inexpensive car. The same is true in the Nova. Rear seat leg room is minimal in both the Falcon and Nova.

If you enjoy lots of room, the Rambler front seat has it. Leg room is more than adequate, and with the front seat in a full aft position, straight arm driving is possible. Rambler comfort is good, considering price. Upholstery materials and quality aren't overly plush compared to the Dart, Nova or Falcon, but fill the basic needs and are satisfactory for a base price under \$2000.

Rear seat headroom is excellent in all four cars. We had at least three inches clearance below the headliner in the rear seat of each car.

Dash panels are all smooth and clean to comply with safety standards. There is a considerable variation in instrumentation. Our Dart was best with fuel, temperature and alternator gauges. The Falcon dash was simple, with only a fuel gauge, the rest were lights. Speedometer is large and the instrument panel can be checked quickly without the eyes off the road too long. A simple and functional dash sits in front of the Nova steering wheel, too. The large speedometer is easy to read. The only gauge is for fuel. Although its base price was lowest, the Rambler had

both fuel and water temperature gauges. The amps and oil pressure were by lights, and the speedometer was rather small. The Dart and Falcon had horn

Rambler

(Below) Don't lie in the middle of the track to get a brake test picture! Nose dive is apparent as Rambler stops from 60 mph. (Opposite page top, left to right) Engine compartment, while tighter than Nova, still gives good access for service. Front interior shows spartan upholstery, paneling, that keeps base price low. Instrumentation is excellent for under \$2000 base price. Rear seats are okay, but knee room just isn't there. (Bottom) Deep trunk is easy to pack with spare on side.

rings and the Nova had buttons in the center bar near the thumbs, but the Rambler had only a horn button in the center of the steering wheel, which made it difficult to hit the horn.

Trunk space is ample for all four cars. The Dart and Falcon have the lowest liftover. Spare tires in the Nova, Falcon and Rambler interfere with good space utilization. The Dart spare is under the floor, giving a smooth, expansive area to store luggage more conveniently. Without the spare, the trunk stays cleaner, keeps contents cleaner.

Handling & Ride

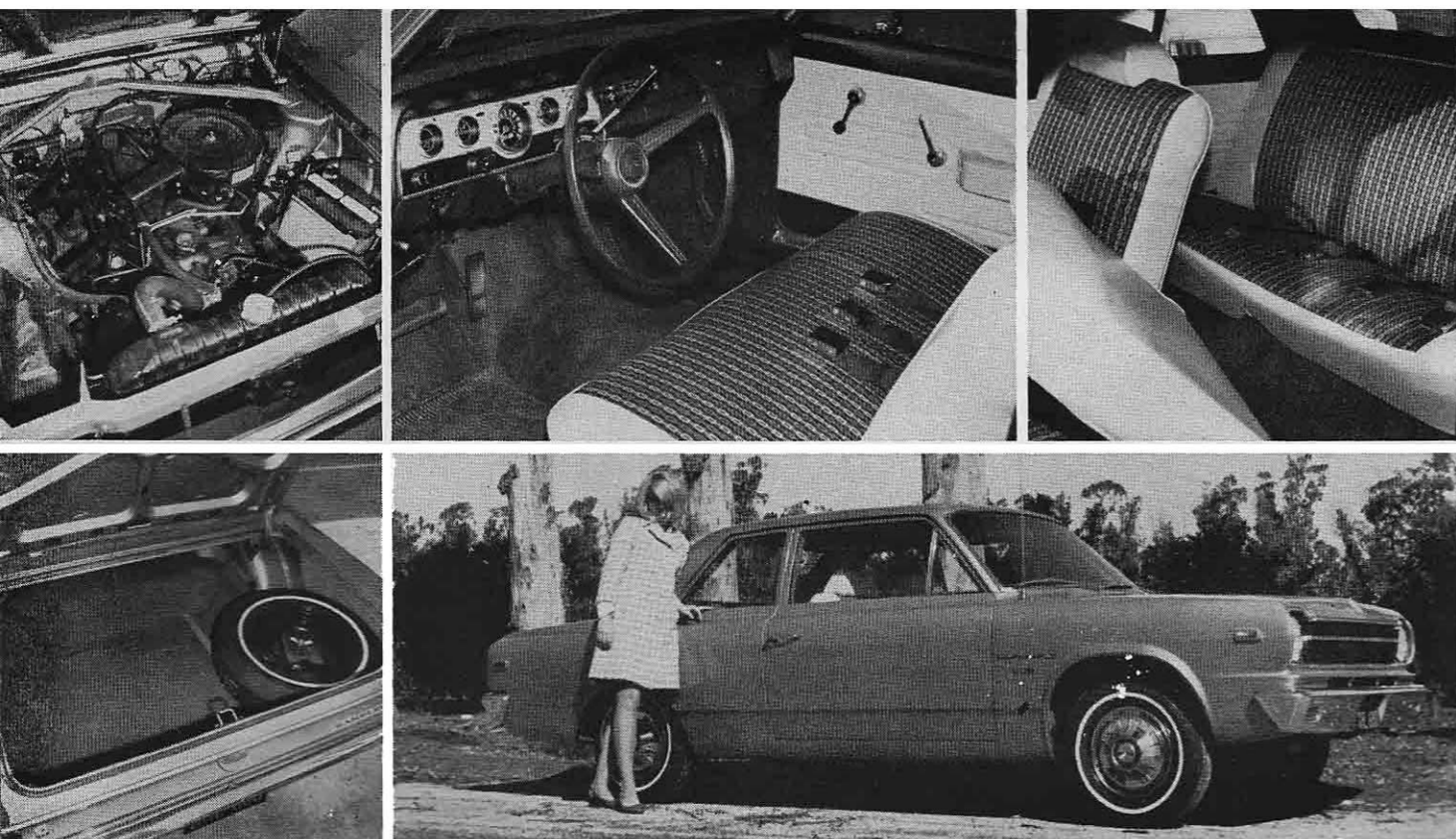
All four cars have built-in understeer to keep the unprepared from spinning unexpected doughnuts at intersections. But, with a little effort the Dart will develop a slight oversteer and come through with a nice, pleasant drift.

Suspensions are familiar applications. The Nova, Falcon and Rambler have independent front suspensions with coil springs. The Dart has Chrysler's torsion bar system with nonparallel control arms. A Salisbury axle with single leaf springs fits the Nova in the rear while the Rambler and Falcon have a Hotchkiss set-up. The Dart has multi-leaf springs in the rear.

An interesting example of added costs shows up with the Nova and Rambler. A 3.08:1 rear end ratio is standard on the Rambler, but Chevrolet charges \$2.15 for the same ratio.

The Dart has excellent handling characteristics in every way and feels great, especially when you induce the slight oversteer. Power steering feels solid, but is effortless to operate, and there's no loose feeling such as we've experi-

Photos by: Pat Brollier, Eric Dahlquist, George Foon, Bill Sanders, Gerry Stiles



Economy Kick

enced in other Chrysler products. It's an easy car to steer and to control.

Understeer is evident in the Nova and becomes more so the harder you push it, but generally it stays flat and is easy to control. There are no rear end antics. It keeps a good footprint on the road. The Nova steering column seems to have an overly high angle at first, but it is easy to get accustomed to, and it's good for straight arm driving.

Our Rambler tended to understeer noticeably, especially with four heavy

people in the car. Front end plow was tight in corners.

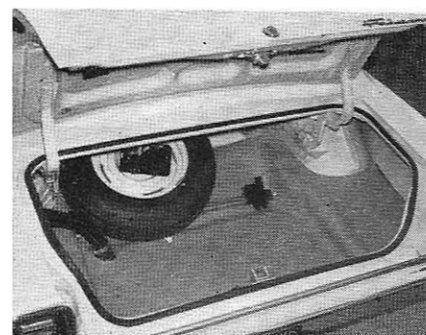
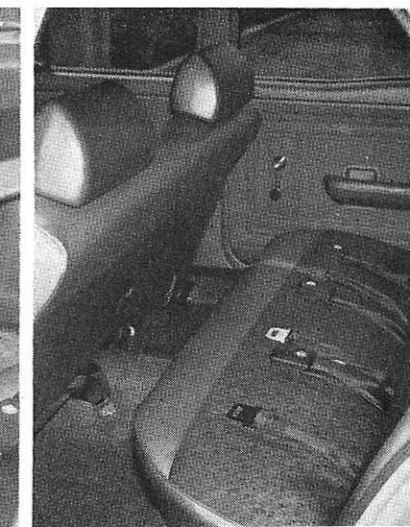
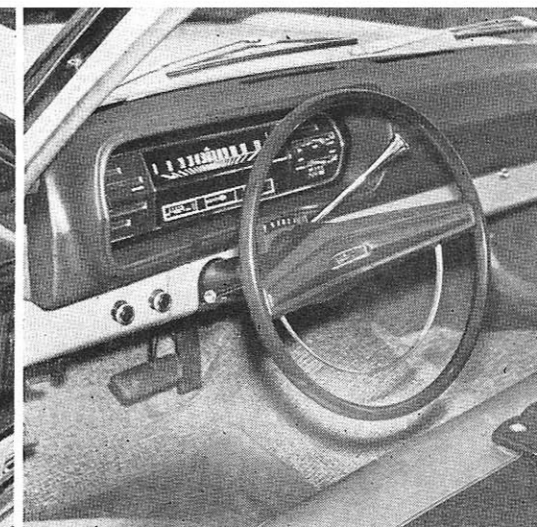
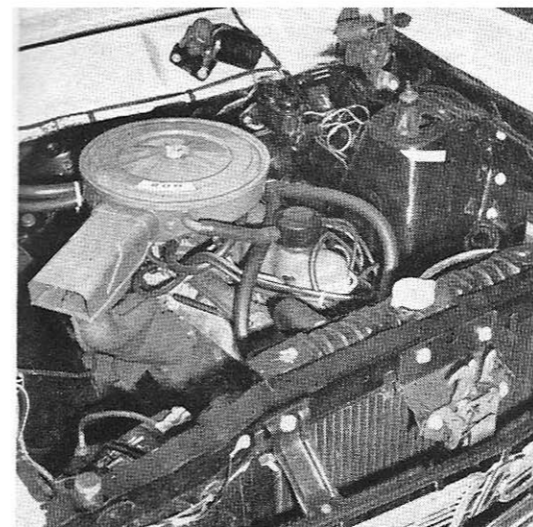
On a mountain road, Falcon handling wasn't bad. Manual steering gives a good road feel, but seems to make understeer more noticeable. On the road course at racing speeds it plowed heavily. The manual steering in our test car wasn't responsive at all. It didn't return easily after a turn, consequently the car kept turning until the wheel was jerked back.

Ride qualities are basically similar. The Dart was comfortable, but not overly mushy. With a heavy-duty suspension (\$5.30), the Nova held the road easily at high speed, but ride was a little harsh. Rambler ride qualities weren't

as firm as the Nova, but weren't overly soft. Front seats seemed quite bouncy, and in bumps there was lots of bouncing around. Cruising at 70 mph on the freeway though, the suspension afforded good control and a comfortable ride. Falcon ride too was firm, but not overly soft or mushy. The Dart, with higher mileage, Falcon and Nova were all quiet and felt extremely tight.

Braking

Getting them stopped developed into a variety of experiences, too. With front discs and power, the Nova stopped in the shortest distance, both from 60 and 30 mph. The Nova also had the best stability, which is due in part to the



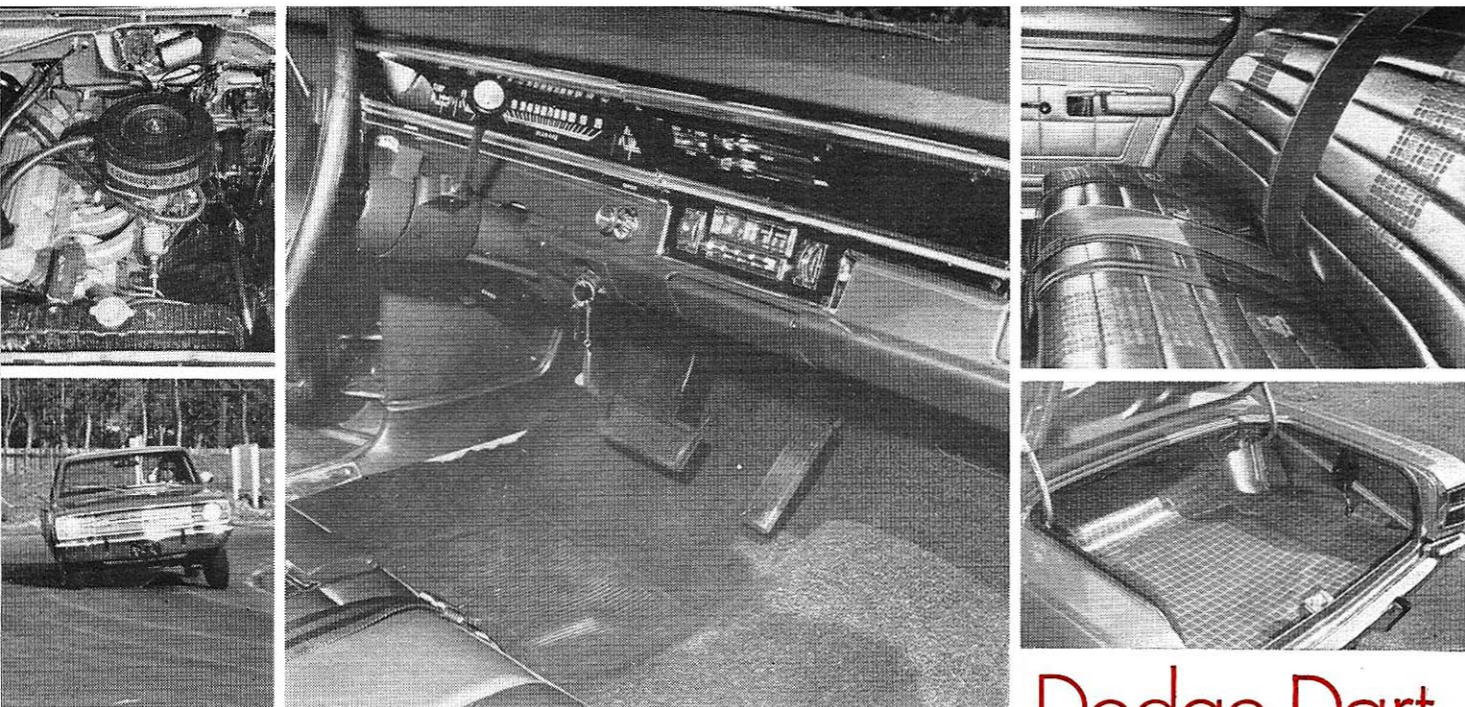
Ford Falcon

(Opposite page) Length is accentuated in rear view. Big tail lights are good feature. (Above top) Engine compartment is somewhat tight, but "6" can be serviced easily. Instruments are surrounded by ridge of padding. Dash is otherwise smooth. Speedo is large, easy-to-read. Rear seat room is minimal for four-door. Vinyl upholstery and color-keyed rubber floor mat are elegant for compact. (Center) Braking was average. Manual brakes required more pressure to stop. Trunk has low liftover. Spare and filler pipe hinder luggage placement. Space is good.

PERFORMANCE

	CHEVY NOVA	RAMBLER	DODGE DART	FORD FALCON
Acceleration				
0-30 mph	4.8 secs.	4.3 secs.	4.5 secs.	4.8 secs.
0-45 mph	8.1 secs.	7.9 secs.	8.0 secs.	9.1 secs.
0-60 mph	13.3 secs.	13.2 secs.	13.3 secs.	15.4 secs.
0-75 mph	22.5 secs.	21.4 secs.	21.8 secs.	26.8 secs.
Standing Start 1/4-Mile	71 mph 19.0 secs.	74.1 mph 18.2 secs.	72.0 mph 19.0 secs.	67 mph 20.4 secs.
Passing Speeds				
40-60 mph	7.0 secs. 512.4 ft.	6.6 secs. 483.1 ft.	8.0 secs. 586.6 ft.	9.5 secs. 695.4 ft.
50-70 mph	9.1 secs. 800.8 ft.	9.6 secs. 844.8 ft.	10.5 secs. 924.0 ft.	15.7 secs. 1381.6 ft.
Speeds in Gears				
1st . . . mph @ rpm	40 @ 4200	42 @ 4300	44 @ 4000	40 @ 3800
2nd . . . mph @ rpm	66 @ 4200	68 @ 4300	73 @ 4000	66 @ 3800
3rd . . . mph @ rpm	82 @ 3500	96 @ 4300	80 @ 3000	72 @ 3000
MPH per 1000 rpm (in top gear)	23.4	22.3	26.6	24.0
Stopping Distances				
From 30 mph	28.6 ft.	34.1 ft.	31.0 ft.	32.0 ft.
From 60 mph	139.3 ft.	180.0 ft.	140.8 ft.	141.7 ft.
Gas Mileage Range	14.7 to 16.8 mpg	14.0 to 16.3 mpg	14.6 to 16.5 mpg	18.9 to 19.1 mpg





Dodge Dart

(Top left) Slant 6 seems to fill under hood space. Plugs are hard to reach. Cornering is beautiful. Slight oversteer can be induced. (Top center) Dash is safe but handsome, has most instruments. Radio and heater controls are in center. Dart has cigarette lighter as standard. (Top right) Upholstery is luxurious. Rear seat leg and head room are excellent. Trunk has lowest liftover. With spare hidden below, all space can be utilized, trunk stays clean. (Center) Braking distances and stability were good. (Below) In super market parking lot, Dart maneuvered easily.



Economy Kick

front discs. The Dart and Falcon, with manual brakes required a lot more pedal pressure to bring them to a halt,

but stability was still good. Even with locking and unlocking the brakes, the Rambler took 180 feet to stop from 60 mph, and required much more wheel correction.

Summing Up

If you're shopping for a compact, probably the most important considera-

tion is your selection of the right options, from engine down to bumper guards. When you are considering a car in this \$2000 category, even a few unnecessary dollars here and there can total up to an astonishing figure. Check out all the options, what they include, their value to you personally and their price, then order your car accordingly.

PRICES AND OPTIONS AS TESTED

CHEVY NOVA	RAMBLER	FORD FALCON	DODGE DART CUSTOM
Base price\$2315.00	Base price\$1998.00	Base price\$2316.00	Base price\$2661.00
Custom interior 110.60	White sidewall tires .. 31.75	200 cubic inch engine .. 25.91	Light group 30.10
Custom exterior 97.95	232 cubic inch engine.. 45.35	Automatic transmission 174.03	Radio group 195.10
Automatic transmission 174.25	Automatic transmission 171.35	AM radio 61.40	Automatic transmission 175.45
250 cubic inch engine .. 26.35	Tinted windshield 22.70	Tinted glass complete . 32.44	225 cubic inch engine .. 46.35
Bumper guards front & rear 25.10	Wheel covers 21.20	Front seat head restraints 17.00	Tinted windshield 20.40
Electric clock 15.80	Light group 19.95		Undercoat & hood insulation 16.60
Performance axle ratio 2.15	AM radio 61.20		6.95 x 14 white sidewall tires 51.60
Power disc brakes 64.25	Power steering 89.70		Bumper guards front & rear 25.30
Power steering 89.55	Power brakes 42.15		
Deluxe seat belts 13.70			
Tinted glass complete.. 32.65			
Auxiliary lighting 11.10			
AM-FM radio 133.80			
Rallye wheels 35.85			
E70 x 14 white stripe tires 49.00			
Heavy-duty suspension 5.30			

SPECIFICATIONS

	CHEVY NOVA	RAMBLER	DODGE DART	FORD FALCON
Engine:	OHV in-line 6	OHV in-line 6	OHV in-line 6	OHV in-line 6
Bore & Stroke — ins.	3.87 x 3.53	3.75 x 3.50	3.40 x 4.12	3.68 x 3.13
Displacement — cu. in.	250	232	225	200
HP @ RPM	155 @ 4200	145 @ 4300	145 @ 4000	115 @ 3800
Torque: lbs.-ft. @ rpm	235 @ 1600	215 @ 1600	215 @ 2400	190 @ 2200
Compression Ratio	8.5:1	8.5:1	8.0:1	8.8:1
Carburetion	1 1-bbl.	1 1-bbl.	1 1-bbl.	1 1-bbl.
Transmission	Automatic	Automatic	Automatic	Automatic
Final Drive Ratio	3.08:1	3.08:1	2.76:1	2.83:1
Steering Type	Power	Power	Power	Manual
Steering Ratio	20.7:1	21.1:1	18.8:1	29.4:1
Turning Diameter (Curb-to-curb-ft.)	40.9	38.0	40.5	42.4
Wheel Turns (lock-to-lock)	3.5	4.5	3.5	5.25
Tire Size	E70 x 14	6.45 x 14	6.95 x 14	6.95 x 14
Brakes	Power front disc, drum rear	Power drum, front & rear	Manual drum, front & rear	Manual drum, front & rear
Front Suspension	Independent, coil springs	Independent with direct action coil springs	Independent nonparallel control arms/torsion bars	Independent, coil springs
Rear Suspension	Salisbury axle with single leaf spring	Hotchkiss	Parallel longitudinal leaf springs	Hotchkiss
Body/Frame Construction	Combination body/frame	Single unit	Unit	Unitized
Wheelbase — ins.	111.0	106.0	111.0	110.9
Overall Length — ins.	189.4	181.0	195.4	184.3
Width — ins.	72.4	70.8	69.6	73.2
Height — ins.	53.9	54.2	53.6	54.4
Front Track — ins.	59.0	56.2	57.4	58.8
Rear Track — ins.	58.9	55.0	55.6	58.5
Curb Weight — lbs.	3020	2667	2900	2870
Fuel Capacity — gals.	18.0	16.0	18.0	16.0
Oil Capacity — qts.	3.5	4.0	4.0	4.0