

EDITOR'S REPORT By Don Werner

OLDS' NEW STARFIRE

SEVERAL TIMES in recent years Detroit has injected a sporty flavor into some of its cars by fitting them out with the interior trimmings of sports cars. The gadgets generally resorted to have been tachometers, floor shifts and, if nothing else, bucket seats. Two outstanding examples of such treatment are the Thunderbirds and the Chrysler 300 series. Recently Chevrolet dressed up a Corvair coupe in this way, called it the Monza and was promptly rocked back on its heels by the enthusiastic reaction of car buyers.

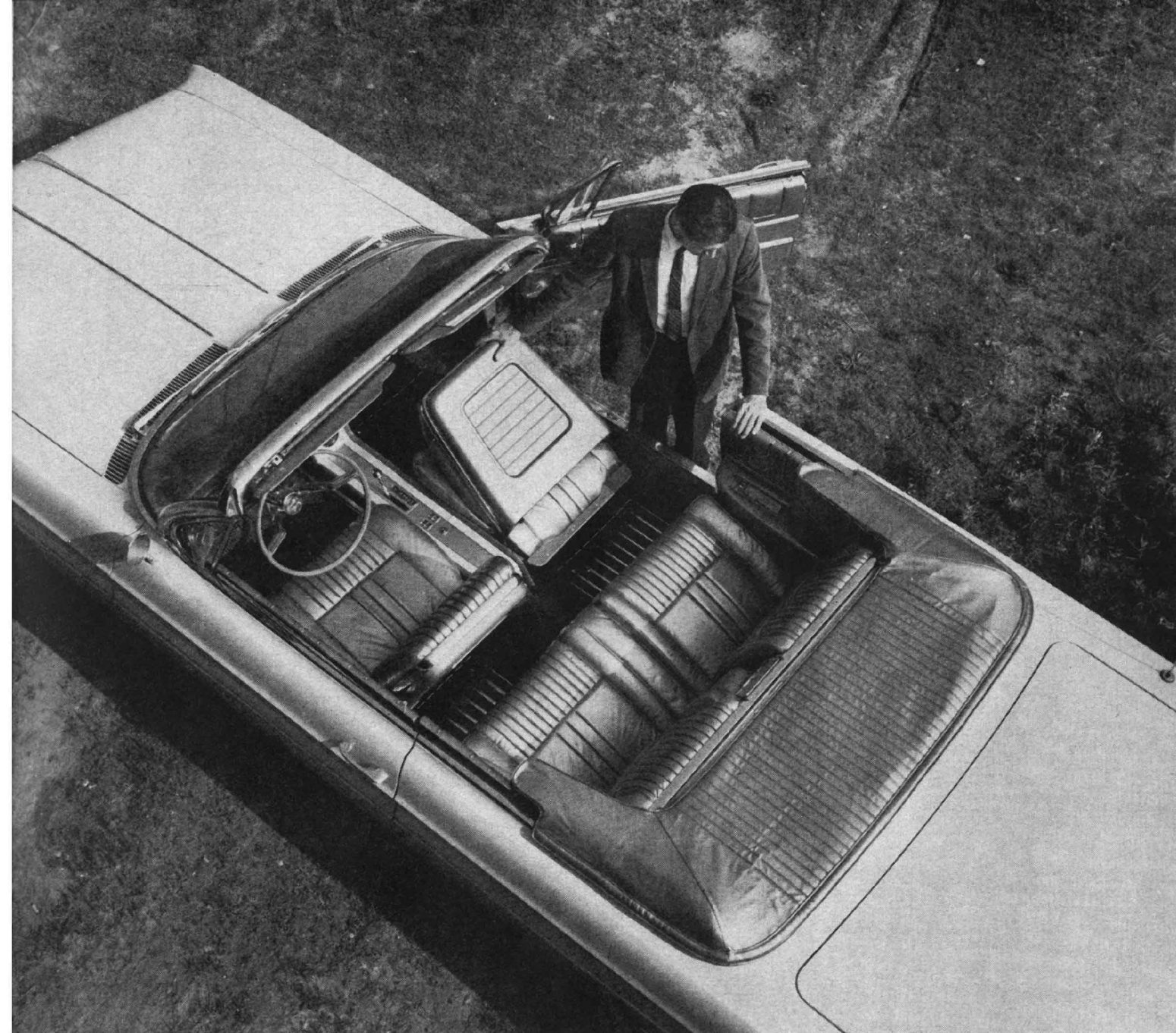
Now we have, in this issue, reports on the Chevrolet Impala SS, the Buick Skylark and the Falcon Futura. Coming next month, in *MOTOR TREND*, are the F-85 Cutlass and the Comet S-22. And right here, on these pages, is a look at the Oldsmobile Starfire.

In order to further study this new trend, one of the first versions of the new Starfire was driven extensively by *MOTOR TREND* editors. The standard Olds 98 and Dynamic 88 had been previously road tested and reported upon in March *MOTOR TREND* and since the basic engineering differences between the sedans and the Starfire are slight, a formal road test was unnecessary. So only the special characteristics of the Starfire were examined.

The Starfire is a convertible of the middle Olds Super 88 series, with a rated engine output of 330 hp instead of the standard 325, obtained by raising compression from 10 to 10.25 ratio. The only other significant power train alteration is the use of larger 3.42 rear axle ratio as standard equipment.

A good look at the Starfire interior is provided by the big overhead view opposite, with a closeup detail photo on the page. Most obvious are the front seats, which have a bucket appearance but which lack sufficient contour, and hence the chief advantages, of that type. In the rear a conventional bench seat has been used with padded tucks to simulate the bucket shape. One unusual feature in this area is the rear seat radio speaker—an item rare in convertibles—which has been recessed between the seat backs.

The center console, carrying the gear selector lever and the tach, has the appearance of being improvised since its side panels do not extend to the floor and fully conceal the transmission hump. The tach in its location is read with difficulty while driving and, consequently, loses much of its value.



The floor-mounted gear selector for the Hydramatic is an arrangement more for appearance, since it is not used for going up and down through the gears as with a manual box. Yet it is a better location than a column-mounted lever in this special case, chiefly because it is a natural position and easier to use.

The Starfire's console does not extend back into the rear seat leg area and, in this respect, it is an improvement over other interior layouts of this type in that it does not make passengers entering the rear from the opposite side crawl over an obstruction.

What the Starfire misses most, of course, is a distinctive exterior, such as the Thunderbird has. This is unfortunate, because the Oldsmobile is a superior car in many respects and with a more individualistic appearance overall it might very well have turned out to be sensational. Yet it is an interesting development and one that should be watched closely.

A base price comparison shows the Starfire listing at \$4647, the Thunderbird as a convertible at \$4637 and the Chrysler 300-G soft top at \$5841. The mere \$10 difference between the T-Bird and the Starfire indicates what Olds is shooting at. /MT

