

By STEVE KELLY ■ Back when economy was the "word" in car buying, American Motors ruled the "king of the hill" position. Unfortunately, dealers and corporate officials, who had all the business they could handle, figured on this era to last a hundred years. That kind of thinking—and planning—nearly shut AM's doors forever. History has an intriguing way of repeating itself—and in less than 100-year increments. The horsepower race prevalent in the mid-fifties emerged anew in the early sixties, and the public was in such a rush to grab up performance cars they hardly slowed while passing an AM dealership packed with shiny new stick-shift, six-cylinder sedans.

But they're coming in now, many for the first time, while others are "repeats." Economy isn't bringing them in either. Cars like the Javelin and AMX have turned the tide. Performance-mindedness at American Motors isn't as new as their latest products. Two years ago they introduced their thin-wall-casting, 290 cubic inch V8, and then the 343 became available in the first 1967 cars. Steep rear axle gears, high-performance camshafts and valve train, and a few other goodies were cataloged and released through dealers by mid-'67. Speed equipment makers were in the act too, setting up production on high-rise intake manifolds, headers, exhausts, suspension aids and ignitions for AM engines. But it took the smooth styling of the Javelin to entice potential customers onto the dealer's property. Then the real kicker broke in early '68: AMX, styled and named after an early "idea" car that no one thought would see the light of day for at least five years, and then not from AMC. The surprise-package AMX is mostly the handiwork of Roy D. Chapin, Jr., AMC President, and his band of corporate "thinking-ahead" men.

AM is once again in the enviable position of having a product worth duplicating by its competitors. 'Bout like 1958 again, but better. Much better. And the dealers can count their money once more, although they've learned to keep their eyes peeled for any gathering up the street.

Accompanying the AMX introduction was a new engine, a 390 cubic inch, 315-hp V8. It was brought out with and for the AMX, but has since been released for use in Rebel and Ambassador models. Externally, the 390 doesn't exhibit much difference from the 290 and 343. But inside there's a forged steel crankshaft with forged connecting rods versus cast counterparts in the smaller engines. Compression ratio is 10.2:1. Carburetion is via a single Carter AFB on a medium-rise cast iron intake, which will also fit the smaller powerplants. Quite a bit of redesigning was involved in this project, the largest engine ever produced by AM. The cam-shaft remains hydraulic, and is almost a duplicate of that used in the 280-hp, 343 cubic inch V8. Low end torque wasn't much of a problem in controlling or obtaining, so the four-speed offered with the 390 has ratios of 2.23, 1.77, 1.35 and 1.00:1, gears one through four respectively. The smaller V8's have a four-speed using a 2.64:1 low gear and higher numerical ratios throughout the range than on the 390 box. This situation, though, will be changed on a running basis as the lower-ganged four-speeds are used up.

The only transmissions offered with the AMX are the four-speed and three-speed automatic. And AMX's are built only with the V8's, starting with a 290 cubic inch, 225-hp version and working upward.

Our lengthy test of the AMX took in two separate, and vastly different, models. The first, an automatic transmission-equipped white coupe, came with all the comforts of upper-middle-class life, including air conditioning and stereo tape. The latter test car was spartan in optional accessories and had a four-speed and 3.55:1 rear axle gear. Both were 390-powered.

Plain driving brings out the ultra-firm ride, yet proves it's not abusive to one's physical well-being. Firmness is there for a reason. Whip it through a tight turn or a sweeping curve and you'll soon know the exact reason. It's called handling, and the AMX displays it. The short 97-inch wheelbase can get you in trouble, though, if caution isn't one of your driving habits. While the vehicle is completely controllable when operated correctly, there are a few drivers who might find out how the road looks while traveling backward if they put too much emphasis on the gas and not enough on their thinking. 'Course these are the guys who can cause trouble in a parking lot, but it's best that everyone knows just how temperamental the car can become. Braking is assisted by this firmness also. Nose dive is virtually nonexistent, and the optional power front disc/rear drum brakes really squeeze down on the asphalt for quick stops.

The AMX qualifies as a sports car without question. It isn't a competitor



AMX

THE IMAGE CHANGER

Ruggedness of AMX stood out during rough-road ordeals and drag tests. AMX has earned F.I.A. International records under guidance of Craig Breedlove. Externally, 390 V8 is identical to 343 and 290, but is significantly changed inside. Our pair of test cars differed widely in equipment, but were equally impressive. Styling is tastefully done.

photography: Gerry Stiles

to the Corvette, either, as some might assume. Base price is better than a thousand dollars less than Chevy's 'Vette, but this means there aren't quite as many trick items included with the package. Items like disappearing wipers and lights, light monitors, etc., all cost money; and that's one reason Corvettes are more expensive. AMX is in the mid-\$3000 class, opening up a new marketplace for domestic-built cars.

The AMX also qualifies as a strong drag car. Our air-conditioned test car put down a 14.91 e.t. in pure stock condition. Only the air cleaner was removed. No other alterations were made, not even to ignition settings. We were impressed, mostly because it did the job so easily. No loud noises, and we stayed below 3500 rpm on our automatic shifts.

The four-speed car did much better. Weighing in at 3280 pounds, 120 pounds less than the automatic machine, was a help. We tinkered slightly with the stick-shift car to get our best run of 14.06 e.t. at Irwindale Raceway. Both cars achieved a significant performance gain after removal of the air cleaner. The new breed of emission control has a feeder running from the right-side exhaust manifold to

the air cleaner inlet. This warms air going to the carb, cutting down on low-speed and cold-operating exhaust emissions. When this is off, all that cool air to the carb really makes a difference, noticeable through the seat-of-the-pants method as well as time clock registrations.

After obtaining mid-14-second runs with the four-speed AMX, we removed the power steering drive belt and air pump (required on stick-shift cars) smog control belt. This cut our times by over a tenth of a second. A pair of 26½-inch-diameter Casler stock slicks were then attached, resulting in consistent 14.20 e.t.'s. Our slowest recorded time with the Caslers was 14.27. Our best was 14.06 seconds. Speeds dropped from the 98-99 mph region with the stock tires to the 96-97 mph bracket, due to the added tire diameter of the Caslers. But e.t.'s count in quarter-miling and they certainly showed improvement after the new tires were installed.

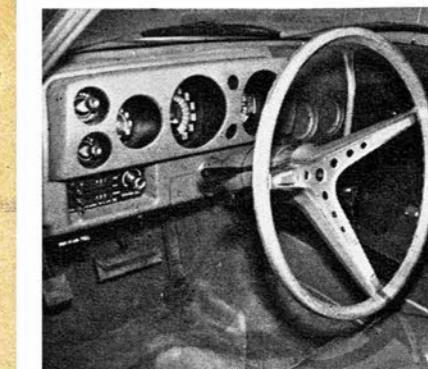
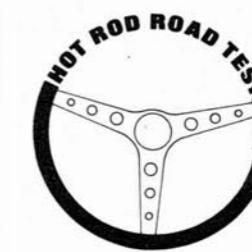
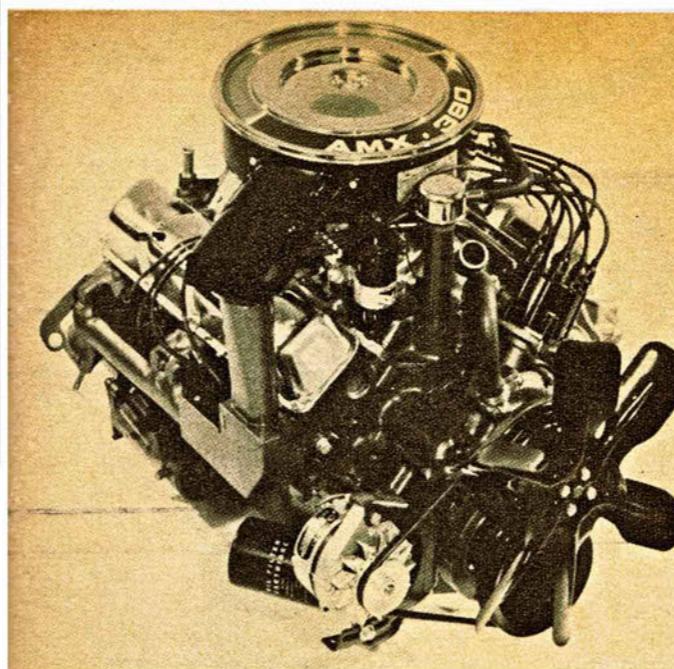
American Motors seems aware of two prominent weak points on their cars in drag race use but hasn't changed them, for a number of reasons. They are the shift linkage and the clutch. After five or six runs down Irwindale's 1320, the clutch

was ready for a rest—and it got one. Slippage between gear changes really is noticeable at that point. Gear changing can be just as big a problem. Luckily, the stock linkage didn't start acting up until we were headed home from the track. But it is no less irritating than on the race course. Since AM is not the only manufacturer to produce cars with sloppy- and/or ill-shifting linkage, we can only offer the same suggestion for the AMX as we do for other cars: Replace the linkage. The standard linkage has a bad habit of hanging up between gears, has an ultra-long throw and a wide gate. We've heard that criticism before.

Absolutely no wheel hop was noticed in all our testing. Acceleration from 4500 rpm didn't produce hop with either street or slick tires. We point this out because it is the direct opposite of other stock AM machines. The cure—or reason—lies in a torque link kit standard on AMX's and parts-counter-available for Javelins and Americans. It's a simple arm running rearward from the axle housing top to the car underbody. Does the job quite well. A lower (higher numerically) gear might cause wheel hop, in which case there are a number of after-market bolt-on traction bars made to fit.

Street operation, the major use of most cars, reveals a couple of points worthy of improvement. The highly touted "flow-through" ventilation is far from adequate. In fact, it's not much improved over an early Javelin we drove with almost no interior flow-through. Quite a bit of advertising is done about this feature, but we'd suggest funneling some

(Continued on following page)



Spacious interior is comfortable, but would benefit from full instrumentation and distinctive trim. Foot-applied parking brake makes sense. Cutaway view reveals unit construction and sturdy underpinnings. AMX is one foot shorter than Javelin in wheelbase and overall length.



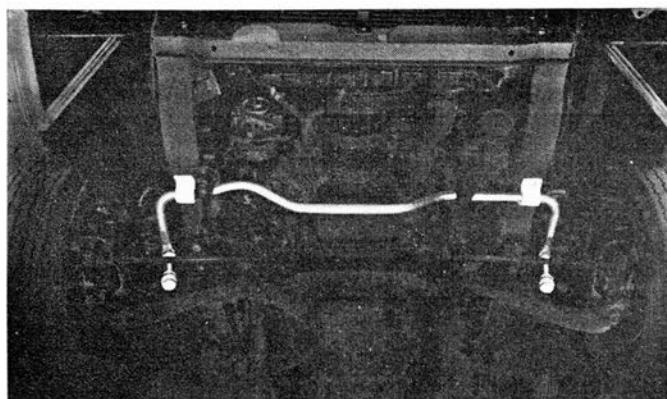
AMX: THE IMAGE CHANGER

advertising money over for refinement (our apologies to the ad agency), and then going back and shouting the message. The dash treatment needs more distinction and sporty-car personality. Presently, it's identical to the Javelin. Full instrumentation, with the too-small and glare-catching-face tachometer centered in front of the driver, would be the first step. Then add warning lights and gauges, and round out the job with wood trim. We put a P.I.P. trim kit on the stick-shift car, and the contrast to stock is startling. The console-mounted shifter for the automatic is obviously a holdover from "Mind Changer" (ad campaign) days. It sticks up in the way of a driver's hand headed for ashtray or radio and seems to have about as much imagination connected with its design as a radio antenna.

Other sporty cars should have luggage room like the AMX. Enough space exists behind the front bucket seats (reclining, of course) to carry a full set of tires. Trunk space is broadened by use of a collapsible spare that takes up about 15 inches of space. Small children can ride in the aft section, and it wouldn't be too hard to rig up small jump seats here for their use. Seating comfort and leg room are genuinely good, even for long-legged drivers. We recommend the tiltaway steering column option for all, since the stock position is great for driving but rough on exits.

Through cars like the AMX, American Motors is quickly pulling themselves out of the stock market cellar and emerging as a strong competitor to the "Big Three" gang. They've done it by improving current designs and developing new cars for new markets. Long-time customers haven't been overlooked in the process, which is heartening. Performance- and sports car-minded people have simply been added to the list. And the median age of their customers has seen a downward trend, evidenced by the 27-year-old average of the first 100 AMX customers.

We're hanging on to the four-speed AMX for another month to find out just how quickly it will run with off-the-shelf parts, as well as to compare its performance with other cars. We've got a feeling it will do fine in both categories. In the meantime, we'll just keep tooling the little blue AMX on our daily rounds, and to quote a statement heard quite frequently around the office: "That ain't all bad!" We agree. ■■



Near-one-inch-diameter front stabilizer is standard. Really does the job. Routine servicing is exceptionally easy, but crossmember restricts pan removal with engine in car.

VEHICLES

AMX sport coupe (automatic)

AMX sport coupe (4-spd)

PRICE

Base	\$3245.00	.....	\$3245.00
As tested	\$4480.80	.....	\$3795.15

ENGINE

Type	OHV V8 (90°V)	.....	OHV V8 (90°V)
Cylinders	8	.....	8
Bore and stroke	4.165 x 3.574 in.	.....	4.165 x 3.574 in.
Displacement	390 cu. in.	.....	390 cu. in.
Compression Ratio	10.2:1	.....	10.2:1
Horsepower	315 @ 4600 rpm	.....	315 @ 4600 rpm
Torque	425 lbs.-ft. @ 3200 rpm	.....	425 lbs.-ft. @ 3200 rpm
Valves: Intake	2.025 in. dia.	.....	2.025 in. dia.
Exhaust	1.625 in. dia.	.....	1.625 in. dia.
Camshaft:		.....
Lift	.425-inch, intake & exhaust	.....	.425-inch, intake & exhaust
Duration	266° intake & exhaust	.....	266° intake & exhaust
Overlap	.44°	.....	.44°
Tappets	Hydraulic	.....	Hydraulic
Carburetion	Carter AFB 4-bbl	.....	Carter AFB 4-bbl
Exhaust System	Dual; 2.0-inch dia. pipe throughout	.....	Dual; 2.0-inch dia. pipe throughout

TRANSMISSION

Type	Shift-Command 3-speed automatic. Torque converter with planetary gears. Floor shif ed	.....	4-speed manual, synchromesh in all forward gears. Floor mounted shift
Ratios: 1st	2.40:1	.....	2.23:1
2nd	1.47:1	.....	1.77:1
3rd	1.00:1	.....	1.35:1
4th		.....	1.00:1
Clutch		.....	Borg & Beck, semi-certrifugal. Dry type. 10.5 in. dia.

DIFFERENTIAL

Type	1-piece housing, conventional live axle. Dana limited slip	.....	1-piece housing, conventional live axle. Dana limited slip
Ring gear diameter	8.75 in.	.....	8.75 in.
Final drive ratio	3.15:1	.....	3.54:1

BRAKES

Type	Bendix, front disc/rear drum with integral power assist	.....	Bendix, front disc/rear drum with integral power assist
Dimensions: Front	Disc, 11.19 in. dia.	.....	11.19 in. dia.
Rear	Drum, 10.00 in. dia.	.....	10.00 in. dia.
Total swept area	371 sq. in.	.....	371 sq. in.
Total effective area	104.9 sq. in.	.....	104.9 sq. in.
Percent brake effectiveness — front	65%	.....	65%

SUSPENSION

Front	Independent. Direct action coil springs over upper A-arm	.....	All dimensions, specifications and parts listed under Suspension are identical for both cars tested
Rear	Hotchkiss type. 4 1/2-leaf semi-elliptic springs, 53.0 x 2.5 in.	.....
Shocks	Direct acting, telescopic	.....
Stabilizer	Front only. SAE 1090 steel .94-inch dia.	.....
Tires	E70x14 wide pattern	.....
Wheel rim width	6.0 in. (5.5 in., std.)	.....
Steering:		.....
Type	Recirculating ball with integral rotary valve power assist. Sae: low	.....
Gear ratio	15.0:1	.....
Overall ratio	18.1:1	.....
Turning circle	33.5 feet, curb to curb	.....
Wheel diameter	16.0 in.	.....
Wheel turns lock to lock	3.8:1	.....

PERFORMANCE

Standing start quarter-mile (best)	14.91 sec.	.....	14.06 sec., 98.36 mph
sec., 94.43 mph		.....

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Best reading	15.87 mpg	.....	14.70 mpg
Poorest	11.66 mpg	.....	10.15 mpg
Average	13.50 mpg	.....	12.29 mpg
Recommended fuel	Premium	.....	Premium

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	97.0 in.	.....
Front track	58.36 in.	.....
Rear track	57.00 in.	.....
Overall height	51.73 in.	.....
Overall width	71.57 in.	.....
Overall length	177.22 in.	.....
Test weight	3400 lb.	.....	3280 lb.
Body/frame construction	Single-unit	.....
Crankcase capacity w/filter	5 qt.	.....
Cooling system	13 qt.	.....
Fuel tank	19 gal.	.....

NOTE: Data listed is for car tested, and reflects optional equipment in some cases.