



CAR and DRIVER ROAD TEST

AMC-Hurst SC/Rambler

American Motors takes its Clark Kent model into George Hurst's phone booth and walks out with a Super Car



All right, American Motors, *this* time you've gone too far. Oh, we'll admit you had us fooled for a while. For quite some time, in fact, we mistakenly thought you were in the car business. We'll even say we hope it was good sport for you. But, now that your true colors are revealed, your intentions are apparent. Today, tri-color nickelodeons—tomorrow, the country?

When, *exactly*, do you set up your flag-making subsidiary? A red, white and blue pennant waving over every garage, right? Well, we won't stand for it—it's reactionary and authoritarian. You can take your up-dated, Chicken in Every Pot philosophy and manufacture soup for all we care.

First, American Gothic economy cars and capitalism, then sporty cars and Republicanism, and finally stock dividends and Trans-Am racing. *Enough*. It is too much of a good American thing. There's something almost cloying in the redundancy of your continued rapport with things American. What next? Servings of apple pie and milk?

Don't play the innocent with us: Stop shuffling your feet about, and none of that whistling at the ceiling, either. You know very well what we're talking about—your *hot rod*, that's what. Let's be honest, we like examples of Yankee Ingenuity as much as anyone. But when you begin building cars for the Southern California drive-in cultists—all we can say is that not even Carroll Shelby thought of *that*. Not that we object to properly reconstructed '40 Ford Tudors or '50 Olds club coupes. And it's not that we don't understand. In fact, we *know* what you're trying to do.

Where's your loyalty to the entrenched hundreds of nonagenarians who irregularly patronize your dealerships? Will they find this latest creation palatable? Not with that paint job, they won't. Even Minutemen are discreet. And what sort of a name is American Motors'/Hurst SC/Rambler? That's a mouthful for a carny pitchman. You'd have been better off to have affixed portholes to the thing and dubbed it the USS America. Is this the shattered remnant of George Romney's leadership? Where's your sense of historical perspective gone to?

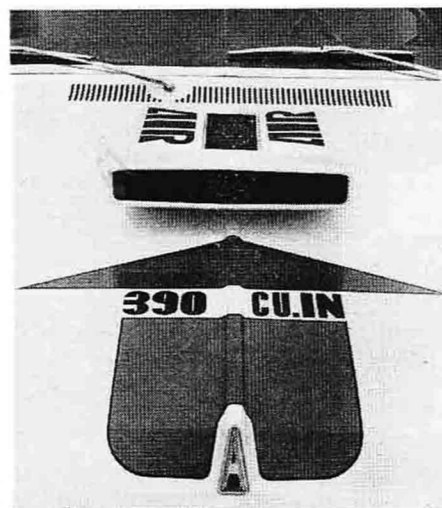
Look at it this way: Nobody demurred

First, American Gothic economy cars, then sporty cars and even Trans-Am racers. Enough, AM. And don't play innocent with us; you know very well what we're talking about—it's your *hot rod*. Where's your sense of historical perspective?

when you produced the Javelin. It's a nice little car; bland, perhaps, but nice. As for the AMX—well, everyone agrees that it's cleverly conceived. Nor is anyone perturbed about the mid-engined response to the Corvette which you'd have us believe you're building, because no one understands yet that you really mean it. But, this SC/R thing is such a blatant gas that your showrooms will be swarmed under by conglomerates of teeny boppers attired in bell-bottom pants and adorned with peace insignias. Yessir, what you've done with this new offering is lifted the lid to a whole new can of worms.

There's more and it's insidious. You're only fooling yourselves, because you're corrupting the morals of your staff. You needn't look any farther than the photo in this test for an example of what your involvement with youthful, American culture is doing to your previously prim administrators. That's right, AM, the driver in the SC/R is one of *your* guys and he's drag racing another one of your guys in that AMX right there in the parking lot of the Elmsford, New York, zone office. Efficiency? It's not our province to snitch, but everything went right to hell while those management-level employees of yours got out and gamboled around on the tarmac like 18-year-olds.

And, after testing, we can unequivocally state that we strenuously object to the car's paint job. Partially for the reasons outlined above, we find the paint distasteful. But, moreover, it's dangerous and may, indeed, be subversive. You see, small children materialized from within slot car track buildings and ran outside to place their fingerprints on the car. They babbled incoherently and smudged the windshield. Young gas station attendants lifted the hood to see if the engine was correspondingly chromium-accountered. Youthful imaginations should not be stretched to such breaking points. Others, too, reacted to the SC/R's paint. Elderly ladies in the back seats of limousines interrupted their pinochle games and lifted lorgnettes to their eyes to stare in wonderment at its passage. Hardened hackies drove onto sidewalks to make room in the streets for what was apparently the King Kong of taxicabs. Wellesley girls working on their doctorates



in Chinatown ogled and simpered at the driver. Vendors of doughy pretzels and roasted chestnuts fought to move their ancient, creaky rigs next to its parking place. Obviously readers of J. Paul Getty's *Playboy* series, they know a heavy pedestrian traffic location when they see one. The paint job creates a stir, all right, and it is American Motors—at this stage of the game, anyway. But it has to go.

It doesn't matter that you're only going to build 1000 SC/Rs. Nor does it matter that your advertisements slyly say the car is meant for the drag strip. (If so, why bother with those reclining seatbacks?) You're not fooling anyone anymore, AM; manufacturers don't go around selling \$3000 street rods for nothing these days. There's been an awful lot of talk recently about "performance image," and you've been conversant with most of it. Cars like this don't grow on corporate peyote.

That's the thing which most offends us: you can't just take your Clark Kent model into George Hurst's phonebooth and walk out with a Super Car. It's not supposed to be that easy. And if you get away with it (which you almost did) you can't just stand there and sell them for \$3000 when the other manufacturers are getting more for their Captain Marvel and Wonder Woman cars. Haven't you heard about fair trade practices?

Yep, you've almost created the Super Car to put Mighty Mouse back in his hole. Performance? It's got it. But somewhere

along the line you forgot, or chose to overlook, that performance is a rounded word and the shadings on its definition are handling and evasive capability. When performance means only quarter-mile times it's stupid and dangerous. When it means the whole thing, it leads to real involvement which, in turn, leads to responsibility and safety.

Something else which has to go, along with the paint job, is the upholstery. Not that it's uncomfortable—uninspired might be a better word. But red, white and blue headrests capping charcoal seats, carpeting and side panels? That makes as much sense as wearing a clown's makeup with a gray, flannel business suit. That's a shame, because otherwise the car has a large amount of integrity. The paint job and the token interior correlation are not only nonsensical, they're dishonest.

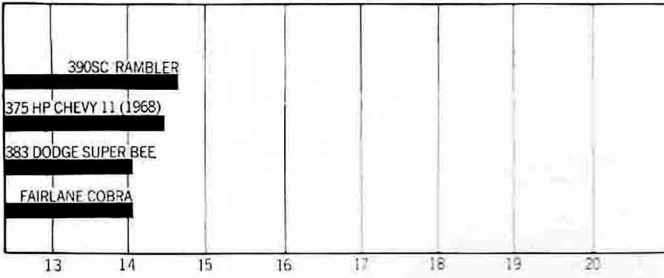
Honesty, of course, relates to the announced intention of the car and how well it fills the spot in the market for which it was created. The paint, the headrests, and the glass-packed muffler system combine to present a very distorted view of the unit. Even with 57% of the weight on the front end, even with the absurd trappings in what is otherwise an outstanding interior, and even with the paint, the SC/R comes so close to hacking it, the ribbons on the package only emphasize the near miss. They also siphon away funds which might more properly be spent on the one area in which the unit falls short—handling.

Take those bucks squandered on trick paint, the additional costs of the muffling system and the "AIR" signs atop the cold air induction system box on the hood, and substitute instead some genuine cornering components. And, for God's sake, get the center of gravity down. Besides, how many red, white and blue cars can be sold along the southeastern seaboard? Those are "Yankee" colors, men. As it stands now, the SC/R seems to be all cover illustration—like one of those scrawny pocket novels you pick up at the cigar stand to slay the boredom of a jet shuttle to Detroit. You're certain you can read it in an hour.

That's unfair to the product, because it is a vastly liveable package. It's a com-
(Text continued on page 91;
Specifications overleaf)



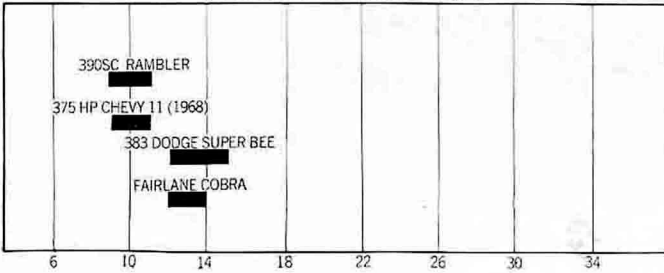
ACCELERATION standing 1/4 mile, seconds



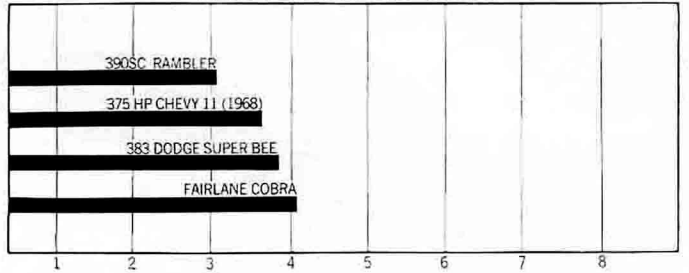
BRAKING 80-0 mph panic stop, feet



FUEL ECONOMY RANGE mpg



PRICE AS TESTED dollars x 1000



AMC SC/RAMBLER

Manufacturer: American Motors Corp.
14250 Plymouth Rd.
Detroit, Mich. 48232

Hurst Performance Research
Inc.
10711 North End Ave.
Ferndale, Mich. 48220

Vehicle type: front engine, rear-wheel-drive,
5-passenger

Price as tested: \$3059.20
(Manufacturer's suggested retail price, including all options listed below, Federal excise tax, dealer preparation and delivery charges, does not include state and local taxes, license or freight charges)

Options on test car: Radio, \$61.20

ENGINE

Type: V-8, water-cooled, cast iron block and heads, 5 main bearings
Bore x stroke: 4.17 x 3.57 in, 106.0 x 90.6 mm
Displacement: 390 cu in, 6400 cc
Compression ratio: 10.2 to one
Carburetion: 1 x 4.661 Carter AFB
Valve gear: Pushrod operated overhead valves, hydraulic lifters

Power (SAE): 315 bhp @ 4600 rpm
Torque (SAE): 425 lbs/ft @ 3200 rpm
Specific power output: 0.81 bhp/cu in, 49.3 bhp/liter
Max recommended engine speed: 5000 rpm

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission: 4-speed, all-synchro
Final drive ratio: 3.54 to one, limited-slip
Gear Ratio Mph/1000 rpm Max. test speed
I 2.23 9.4 43 mph (4600 rpm)
II 1.77 11.8 54 mph (4600 rpm)
III 1.35 15.5 71 mph (4600 rpm)
IV 1.00 20.8 106 mph (5100 rpm)

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase: 106.0 in
Track, F/R: 56.85/55.27 in
Length: 181.0 in
Width: 70.8 in
Height: 55.0 in
Ground clearance: 6.0 in
Curb weight: 3095 lbs
Weight distribution, F/R: 56.1/43.9%
Battery capacity: 12 volts, 60 amp/hr
Generator/Alternator capacity: 420 watts
Fuel capacity: 16.0 gal
Oil capacity: 4.0 qts
Water capacity: 13.0 qts

SUSPENSION

F: Ind., Unequal length control arms, coil springs, anti-sway bar
R: Rigid axle, leaf springs, torque struts

R: Rigid axle, leaf springs, torque struts

STEERING

Type: Recirculating Ball
Turns lock-to-lock: 4.8
Turning circle curb-to-curb: 40.7 ft

BRAKES

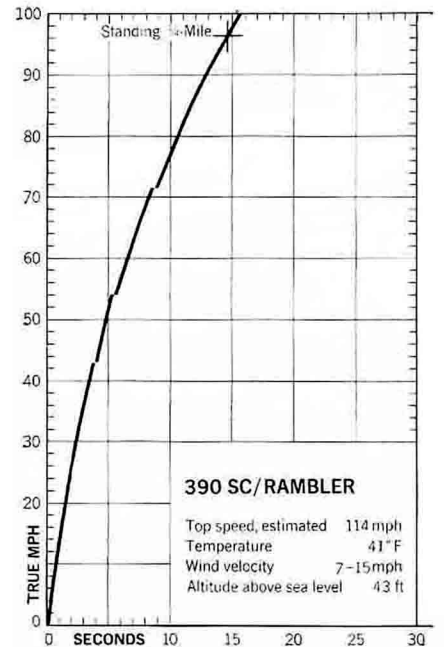
F: 11.2-in discs, power assist
R: 10.0 x 1.75-in cast iron drums, power assist

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size: 6.0 x 15-in
Wheel type: styled, stamped steel
Tire make and size: Goodyear E70-14
Tire type: Polyglas
Test inflation pressures, F/R: 28/28 psi
Tire load rating: 1400 lbs per tire @ 32 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph	2.3
40 mph	3.3
50 mph	4.6
60 mph	6.3
70 mph	8.1
80 mph	10.3
90 mph	12.8
100 mph	15.8
Standing 1/4-mile	14.7 sec @ 96.3 mph
Top speed (est.)	114 mph
80-0 mph	246 ft (0.87 G)
Fuel mileage	9-11 mpg on premium fuel
Cruising range	196-235 mi



(Continued from page 54)

fortable car of reasonable dimensions. Its size and the available torque make it agile in heavy traffic. It's a car which anyone can drive, despite the hot rod treatment—as far as it was taken. The muscle effort necessary to depress the clutch is not unusual. The Hurst 4-speed is easy to stir and the gears are, indeed, close-ratioed. Despite the 20-to-1 manual steering (over four turns, lock-to-lock) the SC/R directs well and is charitable to the biceps in parking situations. The seats are comfortable, straight forward and have an adaptability range usable, for instance, by a growing youth, his portly mother and rangy father. (There is consideration, too, for a girl friend's convenience in the seat backs which recline.) In fact, five almost normal-sized humans could ride somewhere in the car at the same time. The ashtray is within reach of the driver, the heater is adequate and the radio is where tradition decrees it should be, in the center of the dash. All in all, as a passenger package, the car is loaded with virtues.

On the drag strip, which AM would have buyers believe is the SC/R's natural habitat, the car is something else—both in acceleration over the quarter-mile and, surprisingly, in braking. AM and Hurst are claiming 14.3-second elapsed times and speeds through the traps of 98 mph.

Judging from *C/D*'s test at New York National Speedway, performances such as that are probable. The day we clocked an ET of 14.7 at a speed of 96.3 mph was not the best of all possible days. Temperatures were in the low 30s and the strip was still damp from recently removed patches of snow. Previous to the track test, the car had been driven in New York City traffic jams for 10 days where we found some imprecision in the front suspension. The front end's lack of true alignment created a shudder and a tug to the right in the steering. That's enough to cause a drop in quarter-mile times right there (to say nothing of the difference in tuning between a street machine and a stock class drag machine).

So the SC/R seems able to perform within the claims made for it by the ads. It's doubtful, however, that the exercise will have proven to be worth the effort if the car isn't a genuine drag racing success. Currently being programmed for the F/stock (Mopar 340s, W-31 Olds) class under the NHRA system, the SC/R figures to be mildly competitive at best. But predicating the 1000-car model run and the subsequent image rub off on that, as yet, unproven theory isn't smart marketing. What if the car falls on its face? Ah, but then it's not going to, right? But what if it does? Drag racing isn't Trans-Am racing and nobody cheers a car in the losing lane.

Yet there are Trans-Am aspects to the SC/R's performance—notably its ability in the braking tests. The car came to a very controlled stop from 80 mph on its *second*

run in a distance of 244 feet. That places it in the same category as a higher priced hunk of exotica tested elsewhere in this issue. Brake fade was negligible and the car remained totally controlled. Perhaps that isn't evidence of complete Trans-Am performance, but it is a lot of straight line ability. Especially for a car which remains, in essence, an austere Rambler Rogue hardtop with a Javelin engine.

It's also somewhat of a tribute to the original designers of the basic vehicle which is now over five years old. If it's somewhat of a tribute to them, it's certainly a tribute to the prodigymen at the new Hurst facility near Detroit. The last time should have been the tip-off, as regards their romance with a standard production car. In '68 that crew put together the Hurst-Olds 4-4-2, the *complete* executive's hot rod with a 455 cu. in. Olds engine and a special gray and black paint job—this year they're following it up with a white and gold version. It's a dandy car. So dandy, in fact, that the SC/R can't help but suffer some by comparison with it. Except in terms of pricing.

Therein rests the point of the SC/Rambler. No matter how correct the nit-pickers may be when they assault the impoverished patriot's Super Car, you'll get 'em everytime you ask where they can touch anything else in the performance league for a suggested retail price of \$2,998. That price represents a possible counterpoint. Maybe the car can't be produced for a profit at that price? Maybe it's a matter of taking a loss on a limited-production run in the hopes that drag racing successes will provide showroom traffic possibly convertible to an option-bedecked, 343 cu. in. equipped Rogue. So goes mass marketing nowadays. Maybe.

Certainly the sight gag additions to the basic shell wouldn't have been larded on with such a heavy hand for any other reason than to create interest and traffic. No matter why they were installed, however, they may save a few bucks for the impecunious but impulsive youth of the car-clutter ilk: Hurst T-handle and shift linkage, dual exhaust system (raucous) with special mufflers and chrome extensions, column-mounted Sun tachometer, heavy duty cooling system, NASCAR hood tie-downs with locking pins and cables, tear drop mirrors, and the mag-type wheels with Goodyear E70 x 14 Polyglas Wide-Tread tires. Even the steering wheel is sporty enough, having been lifted from the Javelin. Of that entire grouping of "speed" accessories, only the Hurst shifter setup will be truly helpful to the serious drag racer. The other things suggest something else entirely, an aura of sportiness.

The crowning glory, the gigantic, big mawmoo cold air induction system box on the hood is something new to the genre of mass produced machines. Everything is properly refined, however, AM *has* been

considerate of the driver through the simple process of labeling the thing with two sets of three-inch letters proclaiming "AIR," and a giant blue arrow pointing down the open maw for all and sundry to ponder upon. It does save the driver questions at the stop lights, because no one is going to admit that he doesn't know what "AIR" means. The box is a bit absurd, but certainly in keeping with the state of the car decoration art in California. (It's interesting to note that hood ornaments have mandatorily disappeared while scoops and boxes have proliferated throughout the industry this year. Could this be some sort of silent rebellion on the part of the Motor City guys?)

The seating position, with the present drive-in cowboy suspension, is properly White Truck. You peer down on the peasants who always stare back in fascination. In fact, you even look across the roofs of Mustangs. A street racer, maybe. A NASCAR Grand Tourer, no.

American Motors, you've created a car which makes it in almost all the categories by which they judge the Hall of Famers in the great American pastime—it can run and it can stop. It can't however, go to its left or right. Due to the trucked-up handling kit, there is little-to-no side loading during heavy cornering, the suspension *does* preclude that. Instead, there is a stage in which the front end seemingly decides it will be the center of a circle and the rear end trudges and bumps along—like one of those Chinese New Year's dragons. And, when that happens, there's nothing to be done except sit back and let it all hang out.

For lack of a better classification, the SC/R is a street rod. Playing the roadtesting game of comparing the car under scrutiny with cars we've known makes the straight line Rambler little more than a '40 Ford Tudor with a '50 Olds engine, but minus the flame paint and the dagoed front end. The Rambler is more reliable, comfortable and probably faster; however, we can't help but think about our reaction if you had created a genuine street machine with the straight line performance of the SC/R. It wouldn't have to be a stodgy, uninspired motha, either. Haul out your paints; your oranges, yellows and purples. (But save the red, white and blue for real racers.) Tack on your "AIR" boxes as you see fit. But get that e.g. down, radius out the wheel wells and give that Goodyear rubber and those heavy duty brakes a chance to work without becoming hung-up on fender lips. Go the route, because this is a chance for an extraordinarily low-priced street racer to become a real performance car.

If you do that, AM, and a bunch of 'em show up at the drag strip and *then* put the other guys on the trailer, you'd have your apple pie and be able to eat it, too.

You'd also be out of the image-creating-and-projecting business and right, smack-dab where you want to be—in the real performance ballpark. ●