

bigger, heavier OLDS SUPER 88 is slower



despite more horsepower

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE OLDS 88 and then the Super 88 heralded a new era in high-performance American pleasure cars. These were "hot" automobiles that plunged into the horsepower race with a vigor. The "88" on the back of one of these cars was fair warning that it could leave just about any other driver looking at its tail lights as it took off.

To say that the performance of the 1959 model is disappointing is an understatement. Despite 394-cu.-in. piston displacement and 10 more horsepower claimed over last year's model, the Super 88 failed to impress us with performance, was a disappointment on fuel consumption.

Unitized body construction, strong and heavy in itself, is used in addition to a deep box-section "cow-belly" frame. It's big and it's heavy, but it is strong and quiet. New body-frame mounting methods have reduced road and engine noise to a minimum, but apparently at the expense of performance and fuel economy.

There are many other attractive features that are excellent and are being emphasized more than efficient performance. The rotary valve power steering unit is great. There is a good positive feel, effortless steering, and long-wearing advantages incorporating self-adjusting features that make this unit one of the best we have tested. We wonder, however, why faster steering was not supplied with this hydraulic advantage by employing 3.5 turns lock-to-lock instead of 4. It would make parking just that much easier and most certainly would not destroy the good roadholding qualities of the Super 88. On the highway and on the side road and unpaved surface, front coils and rear leaf springs smooth the ride to quiet luxury.

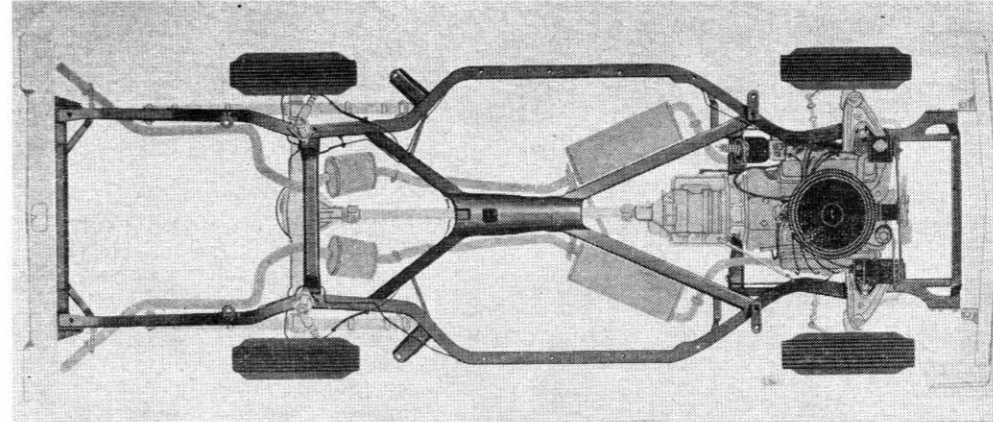
A four-speed automatic transmission with manual selector to hold it to a three-speed until reaching 72 mph, at which time it will shift into 4th, is great for city traffic and winding

roads as it does provide engine braking. This is particularly advantageous for mountain driving, for despite the extra effort Oldsmobile put into their flanged drums to reduce fade by increasing heat dissipation area and steering air over the drums, three slowdowns from 60 to 20 mph at 15 feet per second per second were all we were able to get from the test car before we experienced severe pulling to left and right of the front wheels, increased pedal pressure, and smoking brakes. There is a limit to how much pressure a fixed number of effective square inches of lining—in this case 158—will take to slow down over two tons of moving vehicle, and still get rid of the excess heat through a cast-iron drum.

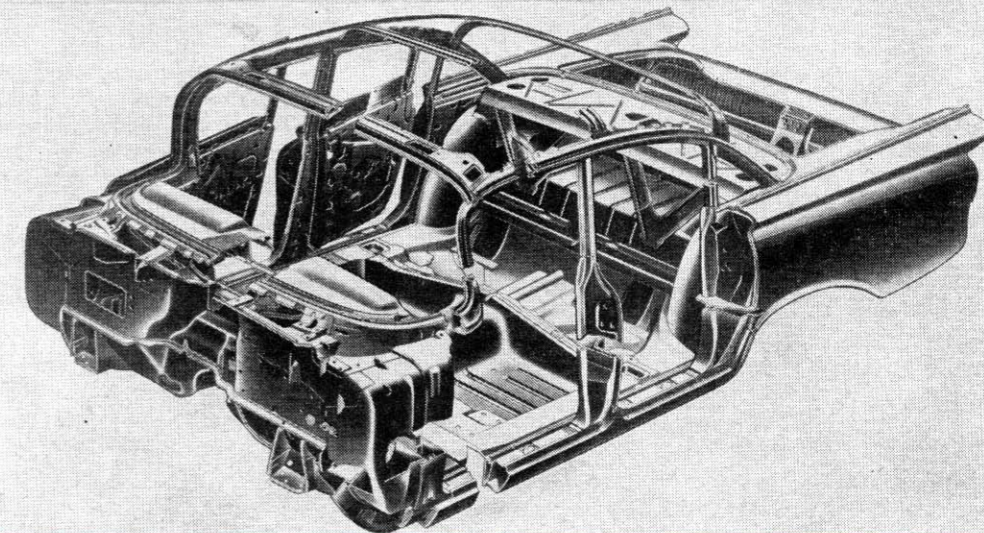
The Super 88 is surprisingly flat on those fast curves, but has quite a bit of understeer. Once the front wheels are cranked into smaller than gentle radii, they have a peculiar habit of sliding sideways a great deal more than they roll in the direction of the steer.

The Super 88 is beautifully made. Finish is excellent and the half pillar construction on the hardtop is rigid with a base that flares well into the unit body flooring. This accounts for the bank vault fit on the doors that should remain in new-car condition and fit for the life of the vehicle. Visibility with the increased glass area makes that quick peek over the shoulder in heavy traffic, and general front and rear view, unobstructed by heavy corner posts or thick panels.

We like efficient cars. We also like well-made cars. Like everyone else, we like reasonable fuel economy. When a passenger car makes good use of its advertised horsepower, and/or gets fairly good mileage, this is efficiency. In view of our memory of the older 88s, we are sorry to say that the '59 Super 88 is short on performance and fuel economy . . . but as we said, it is extremely well made.



Super 88 chassis has a wide heavy frame and "X"-type cross member. Dual exhaust option uses small resonators with mufflers. Body (right) is fabricated of steel stampings, riveted and welded into a unitized structure that gives extra stiffening and forms a strong, solid, noise-free combination when bolted to outboard mounting hangers on the frame.



by Charles Nerpel
Technical Editor

OLDSMOBILE SUPER 88 FACTS AND FIGURES

ACCELERATION

0-45 6.8 sec.
0-60 11.0
¼-mile 17.7 & 74.7 mph

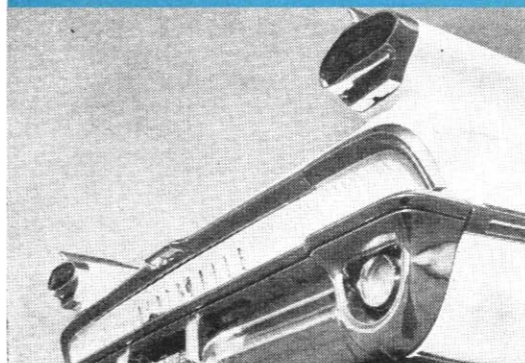
PASSING SPEEDS

30-50 4.4
45-60 4.2
50-80 12.1

GAS MILEAGE

City Driving 10.9 mpg for 345 miles
Highway Driving 11.4 mpg for 443 miles
Average 11.15 mpg for 788 miles

Steady 50-mph fuel bottle test 14.6 mpg
(Gas used: Flying A Special)



HOW MT RATES THE CAR

	POOR	GOOD	TOPS
acceleration		✓	
brakes	✓		
gas mileage	✓		
handling ease		✓	
riding comfort			✓
roadability			✓
trade-in value		✓	

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE: Ohv V8. Bore 4.13 in. Stroke 3.69 in. Stroke/bore ratio .89:1. Compression ratio 9.75:1. Displacement 394 cu. in. 1 4-bbl. carburetor. Single exhaust. Advertised bhp 315 @ 4600 rpm. Bhp per cu. in. .79. Piston speed @ max. bhp 2829 ft. per min. Max. bmep 166 psi. Max. torque 435 lbs.-ft. @ 2800 rpm.

TRANSMISSION: Hydra-Matic, automatic 4-speed, controlled coupling. Ratios 3.96:1, 2.55:1, 1.55:1, 1.00:1.

CHASSIS: Front suspension—Independent, lateral arms with coil springs. Rear—Semi-elliptical leaf springs. 9.00 x 14 tires. Power steering, ball nut, 4 turns lock-to-lock, turning diameter 46.3 ft. Overall ratio 21.8:1. Rear axle—Conventional differential, ratio 3.23:1.

DIMENSIONS: Wheelbase 123 in., overall length 218.4, overall height 56, overall width 80.8, front tread 61, rear tread 61, rear overhang 59.

PRICE: Factory-suggested retail price of test car equipped as described, including federal tax but not state and local taxes, delivery and handling charges or freight \$3990.