

Oldsmobile Starfire ROAD TEST

by Bob McVay
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CURRENTLY HOLDING DOWN fourth spot in national sales, GM's Oldsmobile Division is doing its part to help GM fill four of the top five names in national sales. Chevrolet is first, naturally; Pontiac holds third place. Buick

follows Olds in the fifth position in new-car registrations for the year 1964.

From their intermediate F-85 line through the large 98 series, Oldsmobile offers a wide choice — everything from family utility to all-out luxury. And luxury aptly describes our Oldsmobile Starfire convertible test car. Its standard items, most of them found on the option lists of other cars, were bol-

stered by quite a few extras. It'd be hard to imagine a more completely equipped automobile. About the only thing it lacked was air conditioning. Standard items include Hydra-Matic with a console-mounted shift lever, electric windows, the console itself, power brakes and steering, deluxe interior and steering wheel, exterior moldings, white sidewall tires, inside and out-



side mirrors, courtesy lamps, and a parking-brake signal light. The extras listed on our spec chart make up a staggering array of items that add to comfort, convenience, and driving ease. And, as do most luxury automobiles, the Starfire carries a big price tag: \$5556.10 delivered in Los Angeles (plus local taxes and license.) Yet we've found that true luxury doesn't come any cheaper in any car.

We found the Olds Starfire an extremely comfortable road-eater. It could cruise at top highway speeds all day

long and have its driver and passengers at their destination as fresh as when they left home. Long trips are made much easier for the driver by three options: GM's seven-position, adjustable steering wheel, a four-way power seat, and Cruise-Control. Any driver can make the car fit him by using the seat and wheel adjustments. He can vary either (while driving) to prevent fatigue. The Cruise-Control can be set and forgotten, leaving him with nothing to do but steer. This eliminates the tired right leg that plagues so many long-distance drivers. Adding to the pleasure of long trips is Oldsmobile's Reverbatone

speaker, super deluxe radio, and electric antenna combination. With the top up or down, we felt we were sitting right in the concert hall, and this can make longer drives much more livable.

Now that we've discussed options, accessories, and standard equipment, let's see how the Starfire drives. First, it's a big car, but thanks to the peaked fenders, it's easy to see all four from the driver's seat. Parking and maneuvering the Starfire isn't a chore. Oldsmobile's power steering, fine for normal driving but a little too slow for best road control, helped in piloting the 123-inch-wheelbase convertible. Measuring 215 inches from tip to tip, the Starfire won't fit into everyone's garage, but it has an enormous trunk capacity and plenty of leg room front and rear, which is an exception in a convertible.

The car's riding qualities are about what we expected from a big luxury automobile: very soft and comfortable when traveling in a straight line but with lots of body lean and tire squeal around corners. The soft suspension also has very little bounce and rebound control when crossing dips and rain gutters. The suspension sometimes bottomed on bumps.

The Starfire gets along well enough in the handling department for a car of its size and weight. Its characteristics proved neither the best nor the worst we've driven. The big Olds was much more at home on high-speed super highways than charging along winding mountain roads.

Out on the highway, the big Olds really came into its own. It proved very quiet with its top up, even at high speeds. With it down and side windows up, legal speed limits didn't leave the driver and passengers feeling like they'd been through the eye of a whirlwind. The Starfire's excellent heater/defroster system (another standard item) did its job admirably well and proved powerful enough to allow top-down driving on nippy evenings in complete comfort.

Gas mileage was about average for a big, powerful automobile. City driving ranged 10-12 mpg, and highway cruising gave up to 14.5 mpg on premium fuel. Our overall average for 1400 miles was 11.6 mpg.

With 345 hp under its long, wide hood, the Starfire had adequate performance despite its multiple power-robbing options and accessories and its ponderous weight. It came off the line with only a trace of wheelspin and accelerated strongly, smoothly, and quietly to 30, 45, and 60 mph in 3.5, 6.3, and 9.7 seconds respectively. Checking our own electric tachometer against the Starfire's floor-mounted instrument showed shifts at 4400 and 4600 rpm where we left the transmission lever in DRIVE position. Shifting



Riverside's curvy road course proved Starfire was more at home on highways. Fast cornering brought out car's understeer, caused fair amount of tire scrub and body lean.



Husky, 11-inch brakes are centrifuge cast iron in steel shells. They stopped heavy Oldsmobile convertible in a straight line without undue swerve or fade. Rear wheels locked up first, and stopping distances were average. Power made pedal action light.

Big Starfire got off line with only a trace of wheelspin. Acceleration was smooth, strong, quiet. Zero to 60 mph came up in under 10 seconds—not bad for a car of this size and weight. With 345 hp on tap, passing power (see specs) was highly adequate.

by hand and starting in SUPER range improved times only fractionally. The big red convertible moved through our measured quarter-mile traps in 17.3 seconds, recording a top speed of 79 mph. It also managed a top observed speed of 105 mph down Riverside's back straight, with the tach reading 4700 rpm. The Olds pushes a huge frontal area and our test track's straight wasn't long enough to wind out the car's final potential top speed, which should be 110 mph or thereabouts.

A few quick laps around Riverside's twisting course confirmed our first im-

pressions of the car's handling. Tight corners brought out lots of body lean and caused the carburetor to flood, cutting off power. Understeer was present, as was lots of tire scrub and squeal when cornering hard with recommended 24 psi in all four tires. On the straight-aways, the car had good directional stability and wasn't noticeably affected by crosswinds.

Premium fuel was a must with Olds' 10.50 compression ratio. The big V-8, with its 345-hp output at 4800 rpm, is the only one available in the Starfire. It mounts one Rochester 4GC, four-throat

carburetor, and it's as smooth, quiet, and willing a V-8 you're likely to find. Dual exhausts are standard, giving a pleasantly sporting, yet perfectly acceptable growl. The reverse-flow mufflers have separate resonators.

The Starfire convertible was very easy to live with. Our only major objection was the trouble we had putting the top down. We had to jump back and forth between folding the top material properly and lowering the top by degrees so we could fasten down the boot. We found the only way to fasten the middle snaps was to stand on the back seat.

PHOTOS BY PAT BROLLIER, DARRYL NORENBURG



Console holds controls for power windows, T-shift lever, tach. We'd like to see the tachometer mounted where driver can use it.

Carpeted trunk has enormous capacity for luggage of all sizes. Luxuries include trunk light and an automatic deck-lid release.



Huge tail lights and sturdy bumpers bolster safety. High windshield keeps passengers from getting that windblown look at high-

way speeds with top down. With it up, there's very little of usual billowing, drumming that so often goes with convertibles.

OLDS STARFIRE *continued*

One of the Starfire's strong points was its stopping ability. We gave the brakes a good workout by hauling the car down after each acceleration run. We backed up and stepped on the pedal a couple of times to adjust things, then began our stopping tests. The first stop from 30 mph took 35 feet with no swerving or fade, but the stop from 60 mph was the real eye-opener. The Olds stopped four times in a row from 60 mph in an almost straight line. The brakes didn't fade completely. Wheel lock-up was a problem, but the car

refused to swerve — a big safety factor. Stopping distance from 60 mph was a little longer than average: 167 feet. Oldsmobile offers optional metallic linings for its husky, 11-inch, duo-servo drum brakes, and we feel they'd be a good choice, especially for towing or mountain driving. The car's soft suspension gave considerable nose dive during panic stops, but the 11-inch, cast-iron drums did their job well. The front brakes do most of the work — 56 per cent of the effective braking.

The old wives' tale of convertibles being drafty and noisy just didn't fit the Olds Starfire. A well fitted and properly assembled steel body sits on a

Guard-Beam perimeter frame, with torque boxes at each corner letting the body be mounted directly to the frame side rails. Plenty of rubber and sound-deadening material have gone into this automobile. It was whisper-quiet over rough or smooth roads. Coil springs on each corner, plus double-acting shock absorbers, soak up all bumps and road irregularities. The foam-padded seat cushions eliminate the few jostles that might otherwise reach the passengers. There was road vibration through the steering wheel, but only an occasional tremor.

No suspension options are offered for this car, so the owner who wants



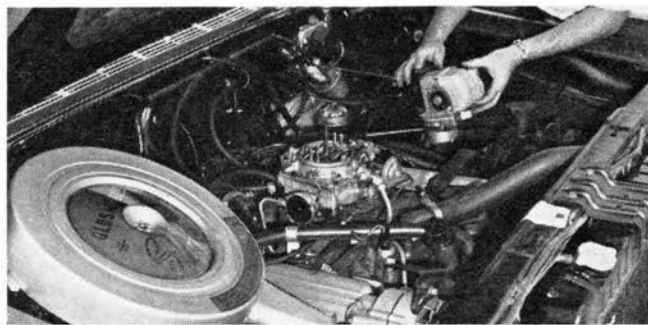
Top is automatic, but it had to be folded by hand to get it to fit into well. We found top boot hard to snap securely in place.



Foam-padded boot prevents damage to material. It takes extra-long reach or standing on back seat to get all snaps fastened.



Luxury interior has plenty of rear leg room. Foam-padded contour seats, carpets, and seat pockets are pleasant extra touches.



Oldsmobile's Cruise-Control unit adds to comfortable touring. Starfire's 10.5-to-1 compression ratio demands top premium gas.

more precise road manners will have to find sources other than his Oldsmobile dealer.

Standard rear axle ratio on the Starfire is 3.42. This lets the engine loaf at any legal cruising speed. Axle ratios all the way to a high 2.56 are available, and the engine certainly wouldn't have any trouble pulling it. But, as it came

from the factory, we felt the car was well matched to its axle — it gave a good overall balance of acceleration and leisurely cruising without undue engine strain. At California's legal 65-mph limit, the big Olds 394-inch V-8 was turning a modest 3000 rpm, just 200 rpm below its best torque output.

For those who enjoy living in the lap

of luxury while driving, Oldsmobile's top convertible has lots to offer. It looks, drives, and rides like the biggest, yet maneuvers with the ease and control of a smaller car. If that's your cup of tea, the Starfire will be hard to beat; just set the Cruise-Control, turn up the Reverbatone, relax, and steer. Ah, Luxury!

/MT

OLDSMOBILE STARFIRE

2-door, 5-passenger convertible

OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED: Tinted glass, electric vent panes, 4-way power seat, safety belts, deck release, no-glare inside mirror, outside mirror, crankcase vent, Cruise-Control, tilting steering wheel, simulated wire wheel covers, back-up and cornering lights, super deluxe radio, power antenna, Reverbatone speakers

BASE PRICE: \$4753

PRICE AS TESTED: \$5556.10 (plus tax and license)

ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST: 452 miles

RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE: 5500 rpm

PERFORMANCE

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph	3.5 secs.
0-45 mph	6.3
0-60 mph	9.7

PASSING TIMES AND DISTANCES

40-60 mph	5.0 secs., 365 ft.
50-70 mph	6.5 secs., 572 ft.

Standing start ¼-mile 17.3 secs. and 79 mph

Speeds in gears @ rpm

1st	29 mph @ 4400 rpm	3rd	105 mph @ 4700 rpm
2nd	70 mph @ 4600 rpm		

Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading	30	46	52	63	73	84
Weston electric speedometer	30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed mph per 1000 rpm in top gear

Stopping Distances—from 30 mph, 35 ft.; from 60 mph, 167 ft.

SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

Engine

Ohv V-8
Bore: 4.125 ins.
Stroke: 3.688 ins.
Displacement: 394 cu. ins.
Compression ratio: 10.5:1
Horsepower: 345 @ 4800 rpm
Torque: 440 lbs.-ft. @ 3200 rpm
Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.88
Carburetion: 1 4-bbl.
Ignition: 12-volt coil

Gearbox

Hydra-Matic 3-speed automatic, console lever

Driveshaft

1-piece, open tube

Differential

Hypoid, semi-floating
Standard ratio: 3.42:1

Suspension

Front: Independent with coil springs; tubular, double-acting shocks; anti-roll bar
Rear: Solid axle; coil springs; control arms; tubular, double-acting shocks

Steering

Ball nut with integral-gear power assist
Turning diameter: 42.8 ft.
Turns lock to lock: 3.8

Wheels and Tires

14-in. drop-center, welded steel wheels
8.50 x 14 rayon whitewall tires

Brakes

Duo-servo single hydraulic system, cast-iron drums with integral power assist
Front: 11-in. dia. x 2.5 ins. wide
Rear: 11-in. dia. x 2.0 ins. wide
Effective lining area: 163.5 sq. ins.

Body and Frame

Guard-Beam frame with box-section side rails, 4 crossmembers
Wheelbase: 123 ins.
Track: front, 62.2 ins.; rear, 61.1 ins.
Overall length: 215.3 ins.
Overall width: 77.8 ins.
Curb weight: 4460 lbs.