# OLDSMOBILE 1948-1963

## Limited Edition Premier

Rocket 88 · Super 88
Dynamic 88 · 98
Futuramic 98 · F-85
Jetfire · Starfire

Brooklands Books

*Contents*

## *Contents - Continued*

Holiday 88 sedan has some sculpturing in fenders and roof. Rear window with twin struts is separated into three sections.

# THE 1957 OLDSMOBILE

**STYLING—New body up to five inches longer, unusual bumper-grille, plus a return of the three-section rear window.**

**PERFORMANCE—Extra horses and transmission refinements may restore the accelerating ability once a top Olds feature.**

**ENGINEERING—New frame, two-piece driveshaft, ball-joint suspension and printed circuits for under-dash wiring.**

**BODY TYPES—Station wagons (four of them) return to the Olds lineup for the first time since 1950. Other series the same.**

NEW ALL the way thru—but retaining a link with the past. That's the 1957 Oldsmobile. It has a brand-new body and frame, revised suspension, bigger and more powerful engine, but still retains its Olds identity.

Probably the most significant exterior changes are the added length and lower overall height. Super 88 and 88 models have grown five inches longer, to 208.2 inches. The bigger 98 models have gone from 212.2 to 216.7 inches. Height has dropped from 60.5 inches to just over 58 inches in all three of the 1957 series.

A refinement of the Olds bumper-grille combination, which bids fair to become a real Olds trademark, dominates the front end appearance. Note that no provision is made for immediate incorporation of dual headlights, by the way.

Olds uses a more rounded roof line than some other '57 models, has an extremely interesting rear window design. An extra pair of struts supplementing normal rear pillars permits use of a three-piece window, giving the effect of an extreme wrap-around back there.

The windshield also wraps around the sides more than in the past and is deeper. Thus, glass area is increased up to 18 per cent on some models. In fact, you can almost detect a compound curve effect at the top of the 'shield, but this is purely illusion.

Olds stylists haven't yet gone in for extreme sculptured metal effects, but the way '57 rear fenders are molded is a step in that direction.

Three new station wagons are offered in the Olds lineup for '57, marking the first time this body style has been offered since 1950. (All hardtops are Holidays; wagons are tagged Fiesta models.) •

### OLDS SPECIFICATIONS

**Wheelbase:** 122-126 inches
**Length:** 208-217 inches
**Width:** 76 inches
**Height:** 58 inches
**Transmissions:**
Conventional
Hydra-Matic
**Cubic Inches:** 371
**Compression Ratio:** 9.25
**Horsepower:** 277

### OLDS BODY TYPES

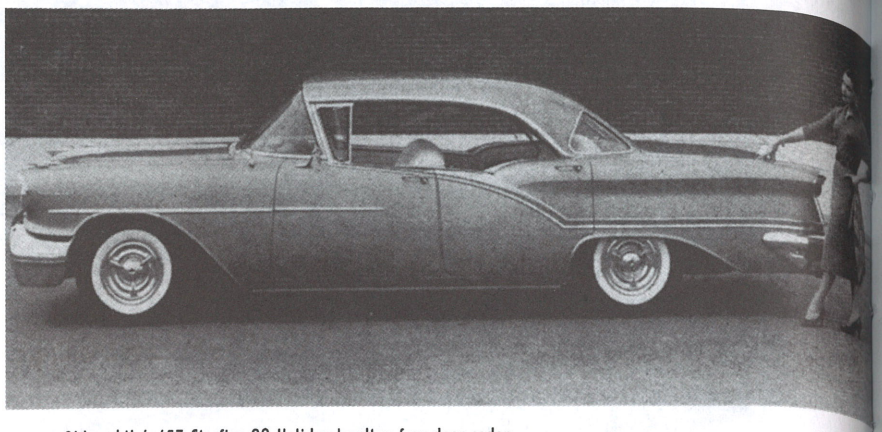
**98 SERIES**
Four-door sedan
Two-door hardtop
Four-door hardtop
Convertible

**SUPER 88 SERIES**
Two-door sedan
Four-door sedan
Two-door hardtop
Four-door hardtop
Four-door station wagon
Convertible

**88 SERIES**
Two-door sedan
Four-door sedan
Two-door hardtop
Four-door hardtop
Two-door station wagon
Four-door station wagon
Convertible

# OLDSMOBILE '57

by Don MacDonald



Oldsmobile's '57 Starfire 98 Holiday hardtop four-door sedan.

BILLED as the "most completely redesigned Oldsmobiles in 20 years," the rockets from Lansing share with Buick Specials and Supers the all-new General Motors "B" body shell. In addition, chassis and engines have been re-engineered, the former in its entirety.

Biggest chassis changes are the spread-out, almost "cow-belly" frame and the switch to ball-joint front suspension. Roadability improvement is not quite so noticeable as in other makes because Oldsmobile has been close to top in this department for a number of years.

We spent a while behind the wheel of a 1957 prototype Super 88 (on October 3, 1956) that already had accumulated an amazing total of 32,400 miles on the odometer. Performance was good though not quite so hot as cousin Buick Century, particularly in the upper passing range. Stoplight acceleration from 0 to 60 mph should work out on the average Olds (Super 88) at a shade over nine seconds. The 30 to 50 time matched the Century at 3.5. The 50 to 80 time was a little slower (10 seconds), possibly because the 277-horsepower engine reaches its torque peak (like Buick, 400 pounds-feet) at a lower 2800 rpm. This engine is standard on all models.

The car felt very stable at extreme speeds. At one point on the straightaway, the needle read 115 mph and there were still more rpms left in the engine. Since the Rockets began, their ride has always been on the firm side, and the newest model is no exception. As in all of the GM products that have switched to ball-joint suspension this year, brake dive has been all but eliminated and cornering much improved.

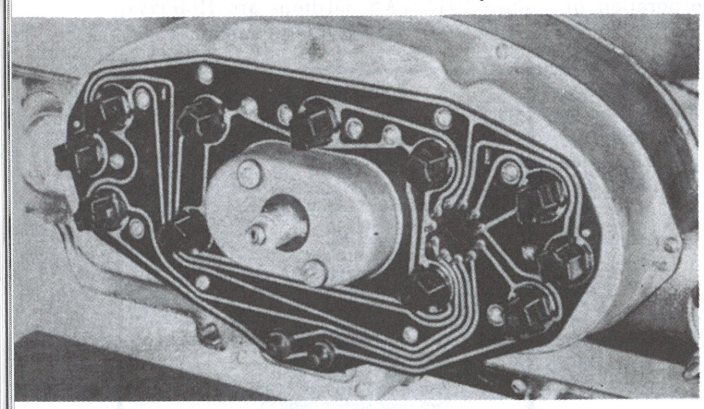
The new instrument panel has a number of unusual features, all interesting, but at least one seems to be for the sake of change—regardless. Copied from the 1956 Motorama "Delta" show car is a peculiar strut mounting of the instrument panel which, while offering greater accessibility to the instruments and possibly better air circulation, involves a wide, panel-length gap between the shelf and the windshield frame. Items as large as a package of cigarettes could slip into the gap and be lost forever. For some inexplicable reason, there isn't (at time of writing) even a grate to cover this yawning aperture.

Best feature is a true dual heater, one unit mounted under either side of the panel. Those who have suffered through lopsided defrosting (with the usual heater-defroster installation on the right side, the passenger invariably gets to see minutes before the driver during a cold-weather warm-up) will greatly appreciate the system. A neat set of electrically actuated, vacuum diaphragms operates the shutters on the blowers, replacing the non-positive cable controls used on past installations.

As far as we know, Olds is first to use "printed" electrical circuits for the instruments. Now in common use in radio and television construction, the idea should greatly simplify the maze of wiring that confronts anyone trying to fix something behind the panel.

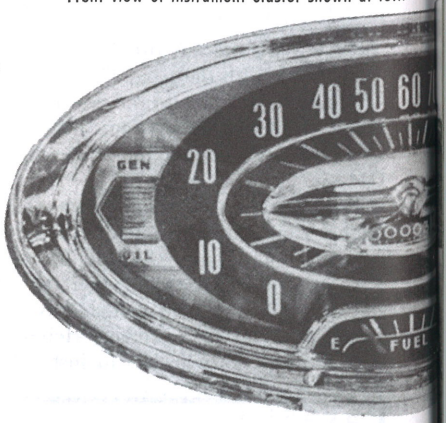
The car is comfortable to drive. All controls are handily placed and the new wheel, with its deeply recessed hub, is another feature adapted from the Delta. The three-piece rear window seems like a return to old times, but blends well with the new styling and doesn't interfere with rearward vision. Forward vision has been improved by a lower hood and 18 per cent more glass area.

Although somehow we expected an outwardly more dramatic change in Oldsmobile appearance, we must agree that it is the newest one in years. You could carry in a basket the parts that are interchangeable with last year's model.



Olds instrument cluster utilizes printed circuit to eliminate maze of wires usually found behind the dash.

Front view of instrument cluster shown at left.




*An all-new body and frame, plus mechanical improvements, make Olds really stand out.*

# OLDS ENGINEERING

OLDSMOBILE engineers have obviously been working hard in preparation for 1957. A look at the cars they've designed proves that.

Olds' 1957 models have, for example, a new frame. Well, partly new, at any rate. Basically it's similar to the I-beam, X-member design used in the past but it has been modified a great deal to handle the lower bodies.

Side rails are still of channel section but they have been spread out wider between the axles. The rails are narrower, but heavier stock is used to insure proper rigidity. (All Olds frames for '57 are alike, except that those used for longer-wheelbase 98 models are stretched four inches between the axles and have heavier side rails.)

Another gimmick which helped reduce height without impairing interior room is the two-piece driveshaft. It has an extra U-joint at the cross point of the frame X-member and keeps the drive tunnel from protruding too far into the passenger compartment. (Olds doesn't use recessed floor wells, either.)

Suspension has been changed, front and rear. A ball joint system with anti-brake dive characteristics is used at front. Conventional semi-elliptics are retained at rear, but they have mounted outside the frame rails to provide greater stability. Rear shocks are mounted between springs and frame, in a more vertical position—a departure from the so-called "sea-leg" or angled setup which has become almost standard in the industry.

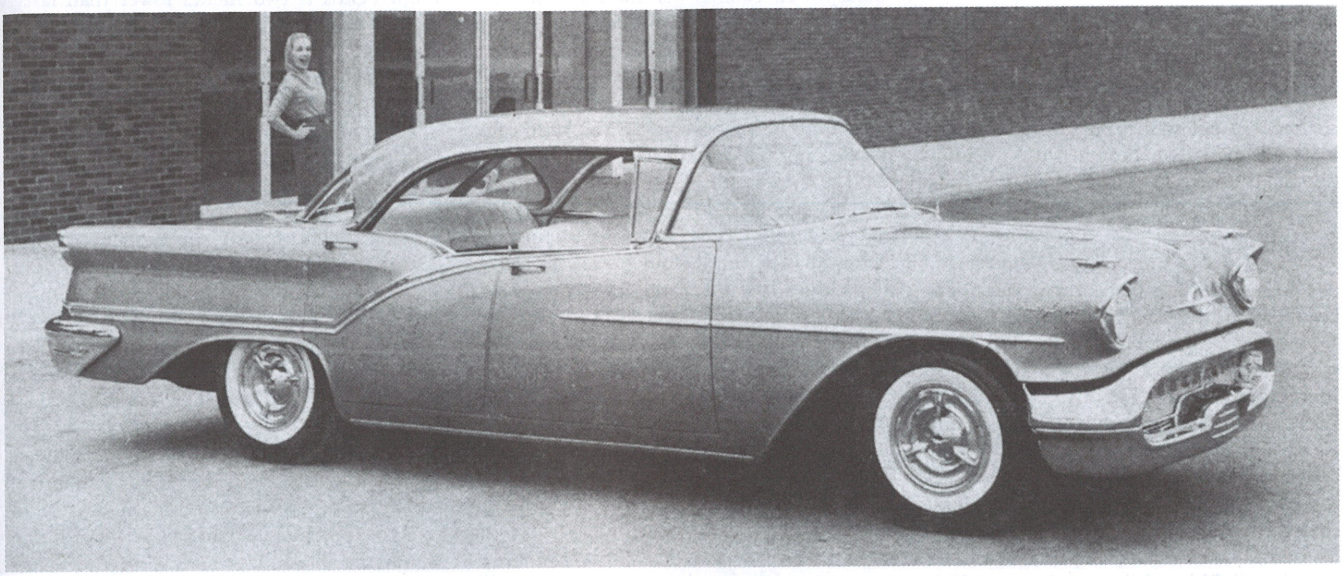
A real Olds innovation is the use of a printed circuit for instrument panel wiring. This method, used widely now in radio and television sets, does away with the spaghetti-like wiring under the dash.

The Rocket engine, a real pioneer in the OHV-8 field, has been developed further for 1957. Displacement has been upped to 371 cubic inches (by both boring and stroking a quarter of an inch) and horsepower increased to 277 hp. The same engine is used for all series now and four-barrel carburetors are standard across the board.

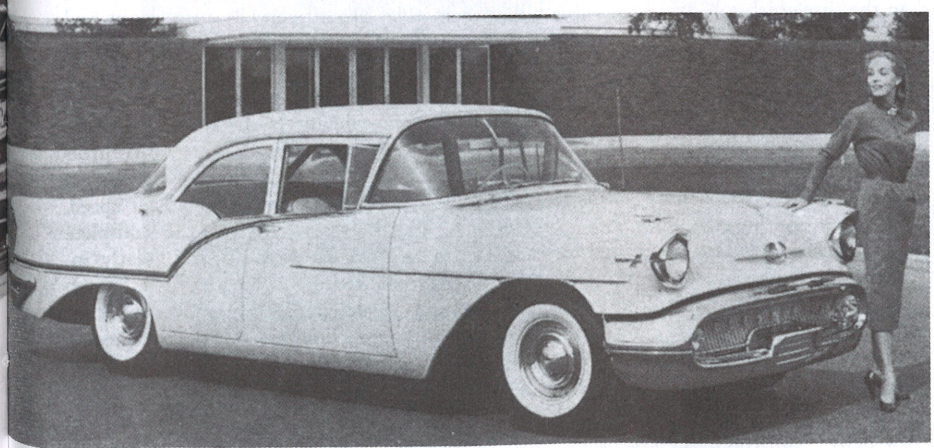
Torque, and Olds has stressed this for several years, is up to a solid 400 lb./ft. at 2800 rpm. There have been no cam lift or timing changes from 1956 and hydraulic valve lifters are still used.

Olds has gone to 14-inch wheels, but there has been no decrease in brake lining area. A flange has been added around the outer edge of the brake drums to insure proper cooling, however.

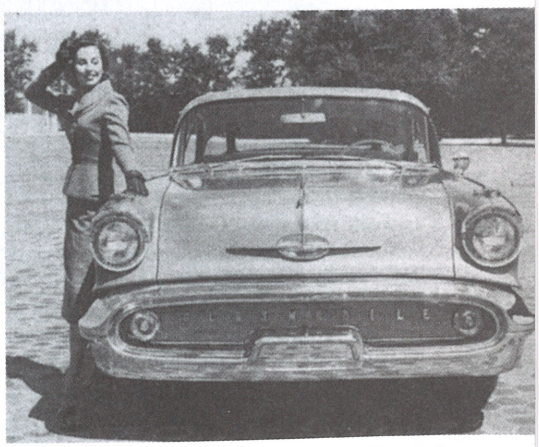
All these changes add up to the '57 Olds—a car that's certainly new, but still recognizable by old friends. The horsepower rating is not as high as some of its rivals, but engineers have concentrated upon providing more torque throughout a wider range that may make up for it. •



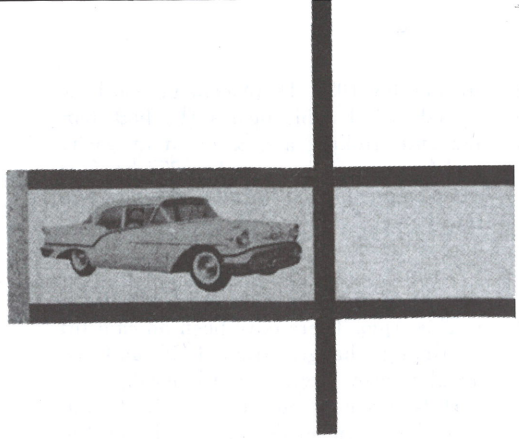
**Starfire 98 has an exclusive chrome strip from beltline to rear fender, plus deluxe wheel discs. Car is four inches longer than '56, and two inches lower. Olds' new styling has many features taken from Golden Rocket Motorama experimental.**



**Super 88, represented here by a four-door sedan, long was a top favorite because it carried bigger engine in smaller body. Some of this advantage will be lost for '57, however, because all Olds series have same 277-hp engine, giving the 88 a break.**



**Integral bumper-grille design was introduced in '56, and a fresh version for '57 suggests design may become trademark.**



# ENGINEERING REFINEMENTS, IMPROVED ROADABILITY, NEW CRISPNESS TO STYLING.

# Oldsmobile

## What's New?

Evolutionary but complete styling change. Biggest engine in the GM family. Station wagons for first time since 1948, two of them hardtop. Strut-mounted instrument panel with printed electrical circuits. Remarkable heater with vacuum-operated controls. All-new chassis with ball-joint front suspension.

## Your Choice

Oldsmobiles are made three ways. The cheapest one is the newly named Golden Rocket 88, a car priced with Buick Specials and top-line Pontiacs within the GM roster, Mercury Montereys, luxury Dodges, and DeSoto Firesweeps without. Body choice is most complete including hardtop and pillared wagons.

Sharing the same 122-inch wheelbase chassis is the Super 88, somewhat of a misnomer with its extra power connotation, for all Oldsmobiles use the same 277-horsepower engine. Again, body choice is complete except that only one wagon, the hardtop, is offered. Drop Dodge and Pontiac from the above list, move the others up one model in luxury, and you will find cars to compare.

The elongated (126-inch wheelbase) Starfire 98s can cost a pretty penny if you specify one loaded with accessories, but generally should be considered as a member of the upper-medium price range. The 8.5 inches added overall length is all in the trunk area; interior dimensions are same as in smaller Oldsmobiles. No two-door sedans or station wagons are offered in this series, but there are a convertible, two- and four-door hardtops, and a four-door sedan.

## Oldsmobile Power

Oldsmobile has reamed out its long-lived V8 to the point where it is now bigger (371 cubic inches) than the engines of both Buick and Cadillac. The 277 horsepower claimed is modest, and the rated 400 pounds-feet torque at 2800 rpm is well up in the big leagues.

To be offered soon after the new year is an optional three two-barrel carb setup, which ups horsepower to 300 at 4600 rpm. During normal driving the engine operates on one two-barrel; push the throttle past the ¾ mark and the other two carbs cut in. In terms of economy, it should be better than a single four-barrel, but only if you use the one carb. In terms of acceleration, the '57 Super 88 can go from 0 to 60 mph in 9.5 seconds, compared to 8.5 seconds for the three-barrel job.

Coming in the future will be a fuel injection system, the prototype of which we saw at GM's Arizona Proving Ground. It's a GM system similar to that used on the Chevy (see page 24), but is enclosed and fed cool air from behind the grille. Oldsmobile's General Manager, Jack Wolfram, says that for the present "they will be satisfied with three carbs." When the f.i. car can get to 60 mph much faster than it now does (only 0.2-second better than the three-carb job) you can bet you'll see fuel injection on the Olds.

Three-speed synchromesh is standard on both 88's. Hydra-Matic is extra cost option except on the 98. Most of the changes in the unit involve adapting it to the new two-piece driveshaft. Introduced last year, the transmission soon made a mark for smoothness and instant response. It uses sprag clutches and fluid couplings instead of bands as in the older design H-M.

## Oldsmobile on the Road

The company calls its new chassis "wide-stance" which perhaps is a more polite phrase for what engineers commonly call "cow-belly" construction. The side rails spread out between front and rear wheels, allowing the body floor to be between the structural members. The resulting car can be made lower with the same interior room (Olds is two inches lower than last year); weight is spread out over a wider area; and the center of gravity is lower. These things all combine to give much better stability on the road.

Oldsmobile has always been the firmest riding of GM-built cars, and this year is no exception. Relocating the upper control arms of the new ball-joint front suspension helps greatly in reducing dive during severe braking. The suspension design in itself, along with outboard mounting of the rear shock absorbers, makes Oldsmobile a much flatter cornering car than it has been in the past. New brakes incorporate a flange to suck in cooling air.

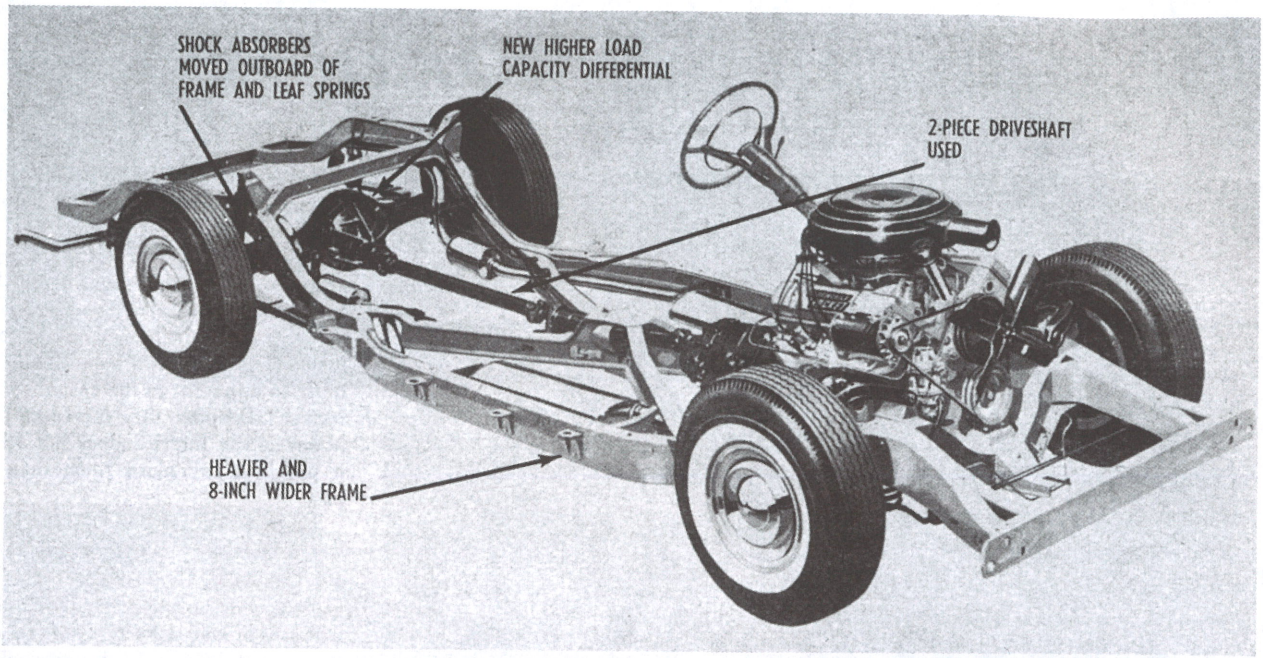
## Inside Your Oldsmobile

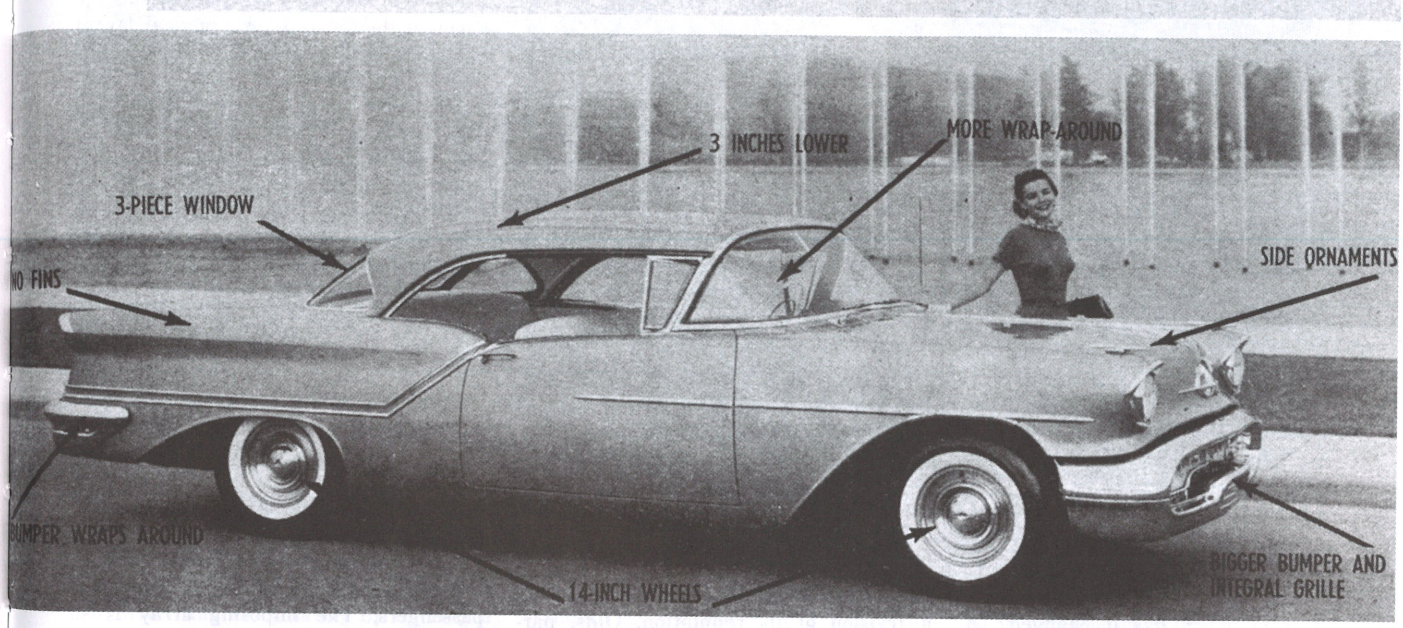
Even after thinking it over for a month, we must repeat that Oldsmobile's strut-mounted instrument panel is an oddity. It is not the mounting method so much as the unprotected gap left between the rear of the panel and the body cowl. Items left on the panel can fall through and get tangled in the works behind. Instruments themselves are attractively turned out and easy to read. Only true gauge left besides the speedometer is the gas supply indicator. The rest are warning lights.

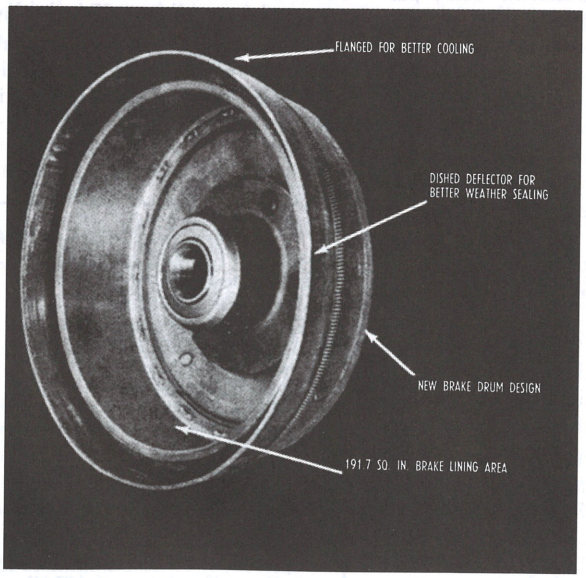
The new heater is the neatest package yet offered by anyone. Pushbutton controls actuate vacuum valves in the twin heaters to regulate shutters, increase blower speed, etc., and the provision of the complete extra unit on the driver's side greatly increases defrosting rate. When cowl-mounted air-conditioning is specified, controls are integrated with the heater.

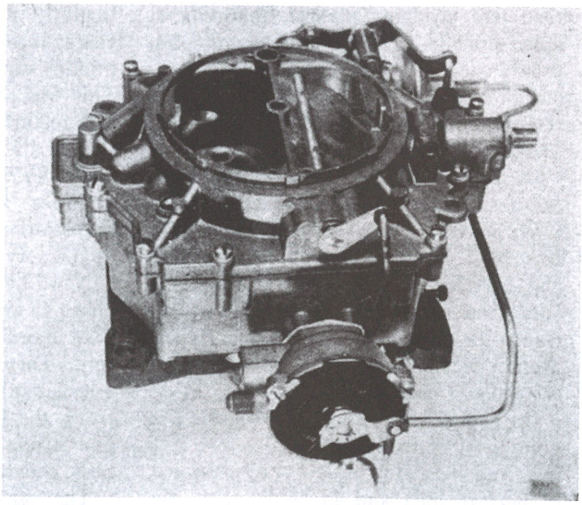
## Why Buy?

Top-notch performance, especially in lower speed ranges. High resale value. Attractive, relatively conservative styling. Outstanding new hardtop station wagon. Surefooted road car.



**QUADRI-JET CARBURETOR on '57 Olds uses front pair of throats at low speeds, all four cut in above half throttle. Automatic choke is much improved.**

SPECIAL! 1957 SHOW ISSUE!

# OLDSMOBILE ROAD TEST


**ALL NEW OLDSMOBILE FOR 1957 CONTINUES ITS GRILLE-BUMPER TREATMENT TRADITION.**

THE 1957 Oldsmobile is an all-new car. How much has it changed? A road test involving several hundreds of miles provided an easy answer: the improvements are pretty general throughout the new model, but essentially the vehicle is a refinement of what has been available in the recent past.

Of the major components, the body and frame are completely new, although fairly conventional in design. Some major features in the suspension system have also been extensively altered. About the only true carryovers are in the power train—the engine and the familiar Hydra-Matic transmission—which have moderate detail changes.

On paper, nonetheless, this sounds like quite a lot of fresh engineering and styling. And it is. But in actual appearance, in performance and in roadability, the improvements are just moderately noticable. The 1957 Olds is a product of evolution, not revolution.

With most cars this would be normal. In the case of the Olds, however, it means a revision of its reputation. Olds, particularly in the prewar and early postwar years, was associated, at least in the public's mind, with radical developments. This was the result of a number of new GM features being introduced to production in the car. A little later on, in the early 1950's, exceptional performance qualities were noted, particularly in acceleration. So the car ranked as one of the very hottest out of Detroit.

Now, however, the 1957 Olds comes closer to an average, on all counts, rather than standing apart for any notable feature. Fortunately, this average is not associated with mediocrity—on the contrary, the Olds is gifted with some very fine strong points, especially in smoothness, reliability and quality.

The car tested for this report was a Super 88 four-door hardtop, equipped with most of the popular power assists (steering, brakes, windows, antenna, seat), plus radio and heater. It was fresh from factory stock and 500 miles of normal driving were allowed before performance checks were made.

Although the 1957 Olds strongly resembles the '56 in styling, it is sufficiently distinctive to identify easily. The car is lower (two inches) and longer (five inches), the latter dimension being not quite so apparent to the casual eye as the former. Despite the increased length, however, the interior does not feel as if it provides any more room than in the past.

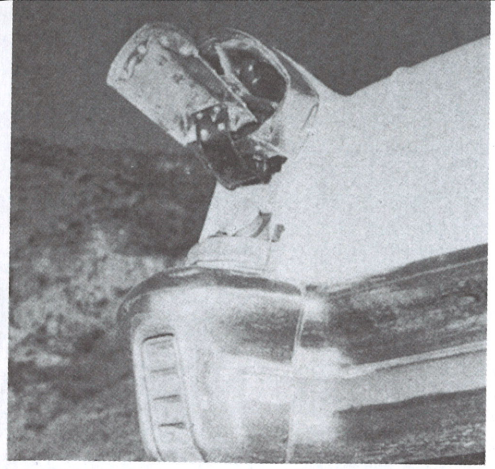
There are a few innovations in design which are either new or uncommon in other makes. The integral bumper and grille is now in its second year and while it has been redesigned, it still retains the flavor of the '56 unit. A practical layout and one that no doubt points the way for future treatments.

The rear window struts, resembling those worn by Cadillac years ago, are a surprising novelty and of questionable value structurally and as a styling device. In the case of the Olds, however, they are part of the new sculptured effects, also visible on lower panels and in the raised rear fenders.

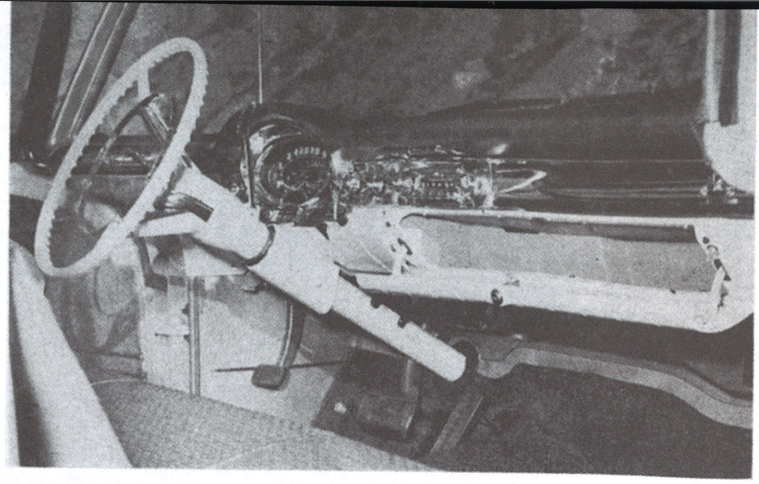
Interior highlights are the floating-type dash panel which carries a typical Olds design in heavily chromed finish. The instrument cluster, including hot and cold lights for engine temperature, is backed up by a printed electrical circuit. Heating and ventilating controls are operated by vacuum-powered pushbuttons. When full on, incidentally, this ventilation produces an unpleasant draft in the face of the driver and front seat passengers. The imposing array is so arranged as to allow a 27-inch glove box. quite probably the widest ever built into a production vehicle. This box, incidentally, is slightly deceptive—being wide but not very deep.

## OLDSMOBILE TEST DATA

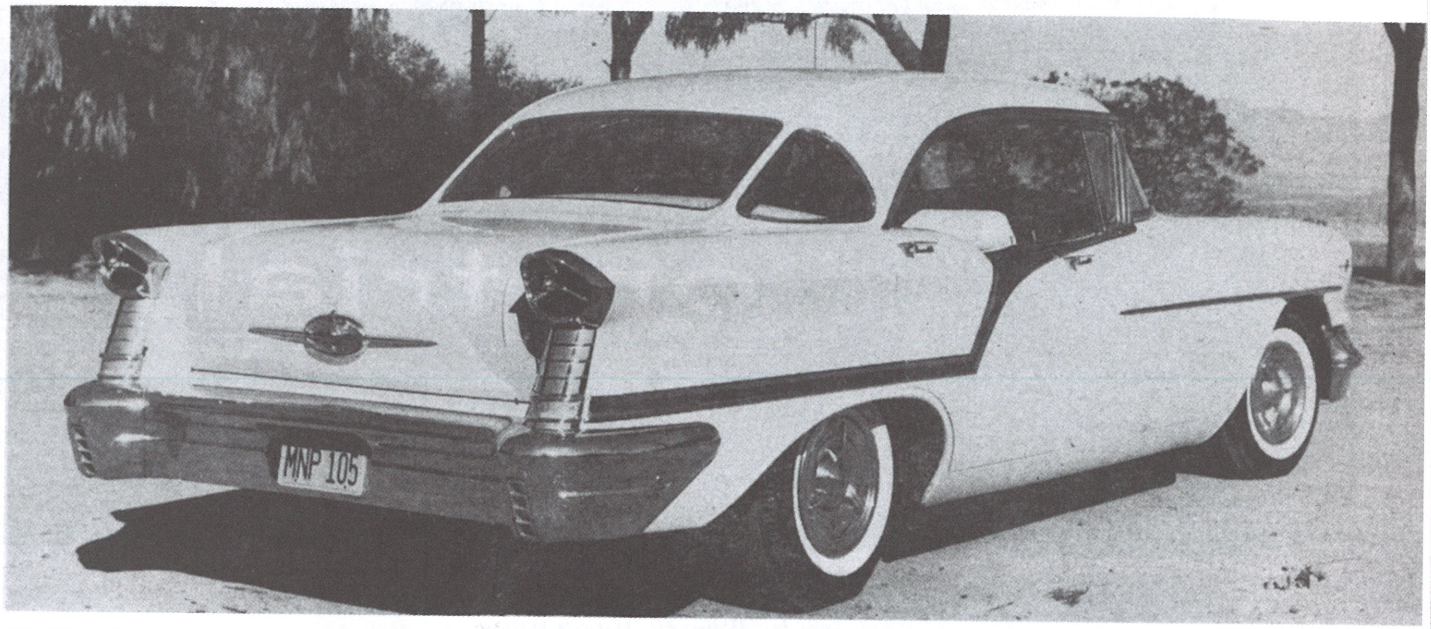
**Test Car:** 1957 Oldsmobile Super 88 four-door hardtop
**Basic Price:** $3215
**Engine:** 371-cubic-inch ohv V-8
**Compression Ratio:** 9.5-to-1
**Horsepower:** 277 @ 4400 rpm
**Torque:** 400 @ 2800 rpm
**Dimensions:** Length 208 inches, width 76, height 57, tread 59 front and 58 rear, wheelbase 122
**Dry Weight:** 4100 lbs.
**Transmission:** Hydra-Matic
**Acceleration:** 0-30 mph 3.5 seconds, 0-45 mph 6, 0-60 mph 10.1
**Gas Mileage:** 14.2 average
**Speedometer Corrections:** Indicated 30, 45 and 60 mph are actual 27, 41 and 52 mph, respectively



**GAS FILLER** cap is located below taillight on left rear fender. Simulated bumper tip exhaust can be seen, actual tips are placed under bumper.



**SHOCK-MOUNTED** instrument panel is added safety feature for all 1957 Oldsmobile models. The dash board is mounted on struts, a few inches out from the rigid firewall and will give under the impact of weight against it.




**ALL NEW BODY FOR 1957 CHANGES THE APPEARANCE OF THE OLDS BUT STILL IS RECOGNIZABLE AS A PROGRESSION FROM LAST YEAR.**

Olds has observed its responsibilities for driver and rider safety by offering a padded dash as standard equipment (on the Super 88), recessing its control knobs, mounting the clock in an easy-to-see location at the base of the windshield. In fact, it even has gone so far as to include tiny green lights above the two dash ash trays to guide the smoker in the dark. And, as is now common, the steering wheel is dished.

Performance checks showed little variation with various combinations of gears in the four-speed Hydra-Matic box (formerly known as the dual-range unit). The chief handicap to better acceleration times is getting off the mark with a minimum of wheel spin. The Rocket engine has piles of torque, is flexible and rugged. The trick is to translate as much of this enormous power as possible into forward motion.

(At the time of the road test, the optional engine equipment consisting of three two-barrel carburetors which enable a 300-hp output from the V-8 was not yet available. The test car had the standard power plant of 277 hp, universal in all three Olds series.)

Accelerating from 0-30 mph cut several tenths of a second off the 1956 time, produced 3½ seconds on the watch. At the 45-mph mark, the time was one-tenth of a second slower than the previous year. It was in the 0-60 mph test, however, that the Olds showed its biggest improvement, posting 10.1 seconds, more than 1½ seconds under the 1956 test time.

With more miles and additional tuning, the Olds will do better, of course. Yet, while these figures are highly respectable, the car is closer to the average of current Detroit products and falls approximately one second short of entering the so-called hot class. The picture would be entirely different with the 300-hp job, naturally, and the results of this test fit in with the more moderate characteristics Olds has been demonstrating of late, as mentioned earlier.

The Olds sits comfortably and a little more firmly than its companion makes among the big GM cars. On an easy curve at a reasonable speed, the body leans and then eases back to a flat stance. The peculiar process is repeated on a winding route, which causes some discomfort, especially among the passengers. The chassis now incorporates wider frame rails which has a stabilizing effect, aided by the lower center of gravity. The car is smooth, solid and quiet—the latter quality benefiting from the Hydra-Matic unit that has fewer thrashing sounds than the turbine types. The fourth gear also results in an "overdrive" effect of effortless cruising.

The look of quality is very apparent everywhere on the Olds. As with other GM products, its materials and construction are several notches above similarly priced rival makes. About the only thing that is missing in the car is a feeling of unique design. Despite all the new components, it still is very much Oldsmobile all the way—and not much that is importantly different has been added. •

# 1958 Oldsmobile

at the start. The Super 88 had a tendency to kill on a sudden stop, but starting was instant. Incidentally, when an engine does kill, I am always reminded of the ease of starting with Buick's ancient and efficient accelerator starting actuator—it's hard to beat and would seem to have its place even in these days of automatic gearboxes.

### DRIVING IN TOWN

**THE DRIVING POSITION** of all series is excellent, especially when equipped with the optional six-way power seat. The Dynamic 88 seat position was fine for me; for short persons I would suggest they invest in the height-raising abilities of the optional power seat even on the lower priced model. The seats in the three cars were all of the new contour design and extremely comfortable with one exception in all cases: for my personal likes, the edge of the front seat is a little high beneath the knees. Checking with my wife, I found her to be even more definitely of this opinion. Many days of driving, however, caused no tired feeling after long sessions at the wheel. Being able to tilt the seat to various angles, in the Super 88 and the 98, relieves strain and keeps one feeling alert.

The foot-operated parking brake is well forward and to the left and does not interfere with quickly assuming a comfortable position. For the city the rear view mirror is a bit shallow and one soon comes to place reliance on the outside mirror. Parking is easy, and as all three cars had power steering, was a pleasure since all corners of each car were visible from the driver's position. The extra 8.5 inches of overall length on the big 98 made enough difference, though, to require several more zigs or zags when parking parallel, and we did wish for less than four complete turns of the wheel from lock-to-lock.

**GENERAL FEEL** The soft and smooth ride of the two 88s becomes even more so when you transfer to the big 98 test car which had the "New-Matic Ride" air suspension. Though available on all, I would personally stick with the steel coil springs up front and the semi-elliptic leaf springs in the rear despite the presence of the trailing link rear suspension with the air ride. The Dynamic 88 and the Super 88 dipped their noses moderately on fast stops; the air-suspended 98 test car dipped more. On fast acceleration from standing position, the air suspension exhibited virtually no tail squat while the steel-sprung 88 and Super 88 dipped their tails and raised their noses a little more than performance enthusiasts would prefer.

Rounding right-angle neighborhood corners produced average lean on the 88s, the tendency to wallow on the 98 tested. Recovery from sharp corners is best on the two smaller series, but in all cases self-centering action of the front wheels was above average though not as good as was the case last year when weights were enough less to produce a better feel around fast corners.

In heavy traffic, especially during peak hours when a steady speed is impossible, Super-Drive with its top third-gear ratio is the best choice. Less braking is required and less throttle action, too, for that matter.

**BRAKES** Brake action is good, fade being induced only if you intentionally drive in spurts of the sort that make it necessary to stop at each stop light. On this score, however, the brakes are no larger than in '57, the effective lining area being 191.7 square inches. In the light of increased weight, the overall curb-weight-to-brake-area ratio is less favorable than formerly.

Brake fade stops were conducted on level highways and panic type stops were simulated with braking being commenced at 60 mph, the pedal being held hard until 20 mph was reached. The Super 88 and Dynamic 88 came out ahead of the larger and considerably heavier 98. The brakes on the smaller two retained good stopping ability and a soft pedal through the fourth successive stop with no cooling off period between. A hard pedal was evident on the fifth stop in the 88s, stopping distance was doubled on the sixth stop, and we had free wheeling on the seventh attempt. The big 98 developed a hard pedal on the fourth stop, barely stopped at all the fifth try, coasted free as if it had no brakes on the sixth attempt to stop. Two

## PERFORMANCE

| | DYNAMIC 88 | SUPER 88 | | 98 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| From Standing Start | ('58 with 265-bhp engine) | ('58 with 305-bhp engine) | ('57 with 277-bhp engine) | ('58 with 312-bhp engine) |
| 0-45 mph | 6.3 | 5.8 | 6.1 | 5.8 |
| 0-60 mph | 10.2 | 8.7 | 9.7 | 8.6 |
| Quarter-mile | 18.7 and 82 mph | 17.3 and 86 mph | 17.4 and 79.4 mph | 17.1 and 88 mph |
| Passing Speeds | | | | |
| 30-50 mph | 4.0 | 3.6 | 3.9 | 3.6 |
| 45-60 mph | 3.9 | 3.4 | 3.6 | 3.4 |
| 50-80 mph | 10.6 | 9.1 | 10.0 | 8.9 |

## FUEL CONSUMPTION

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stop-and-Go Driving | (None—all highway) | 11.1 mpg for 222 miles | 10.3 mpg for 331 miles | 10.5 mpg for 74 miles |
| Highway Average | 14.2 mpg for 197 miles | 12.7 mpg for 876 miles | 13.8 mpg for 589 miles | 12.3 mpg for 495 miles |
| Overall Average | 14.2 mpg for 197 miles | 12.4 mpg for 1098 miles | 12.3 mpg for 920 miles | 12.1 mpg for 569 miles |
| Oil Consumption | No oil added in 197 miles | No oil added in 1098 miles | One quart added in 920 miles | No oil added in 569 miles |
| Fuel Used: Mobilgas Special | | | | |