



This isn't just AMC's annual name change—there's a new-size body, improved suspension, a 304 engine.

BY DAVID BEAN, ENGINEERING EDITOR

WE HAVE STUDIED the compact and import market," American Motors said in essence, "and we know what the buyer is looking for. He wants economy, but he also wants a stylish car, some performance, and a car that is just fun to drive."

And the new Hornet compact can indeed be considered handsome, and it has surprising economy of space and impressive performance (especially with the 304 V-8).

But fun to drive? How can any car be fun to drive with 32:1 steering ratio and column gear shift?

Somehow, communications between Marketing and Engineering must have broken down on that one item, for the rest of the Hornet is a well-styled, well-engineered compact. It seems to be everything the old Rambler (or for that matter any of the compacts) should have been. "The compact and sub-compact need the space and convenience of a domestic, but with small bulk and agility of the imports. The

Hornet is designed to do just that. It has more room than the old Rambler (nee American), yet the handling is import-like rather than scaled down domestic."

Although AMC is making a half-hearted attempt to pass it off as a Maverick competitor (a proper import fighter is on the way), the Hornet is in fact the Rambler's replacement. It's in the same size range (larger than the Maverick, smaller than the Chevy Nova). But it is not simply a restyled Rambler either. Chassis and suspension, as well as the sheetmetal, are completely new though chassis and drive train are conventional, just as they were on the old Rambler. Essentially the engineers made a bigger and better car that somehow comes out smaller. Wheelbase and track are 2 in. longer, yet the overall length is 2 in. shorter, the overall height is an inch less, the width is the same, and interior space is larger.

Not only does the Hornet have a reasonable size people box without

making it too big a box, but it also does not look like one.

Long hood, raked windshield, short deck complement the styling without causing excessive overhang, or cramping passenger space. Wider track, front and rear, not only helps the handling, but gives a brawny, self-assured stance to a car of a size that too often winds up looking like a football on a roller skate. The four-door model, which in many lines looks like an unwanted stepsister, comes off as the leader of the Hornet clan.

The all new chassis (unibody as usual) has an improved front suspension, incorporating double ball joints at the outer A-arm pivot points. Though conventional, the new system greatly improves front tire geometry change, eliminating the marked understeer of the '69s. Hornet shares this system with the entire American motors line in '70. The 1969 AMC suspension goes back many years, having been updated several times in an attempt to keep up with current U.S. practice. Even the Javelin/AMX came out with the essentially old-fashioned system, and the inherently poor geometry limited the sporty cars.

Rear suspension is still a leaf spring arrangement, with only minor modifications.

The steering ratio situation is allayed somewhat by the optional variable-ratio power-steering system. It

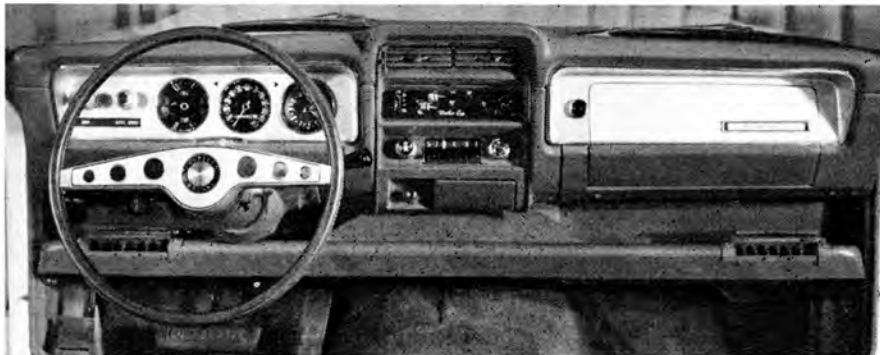
1970 HORNET

continued



FOUR-DOOR doesn't detract from handsome styling of Hornet. Handling is much improved over '69 Rambler, due to superior front suspension geometry.

DASH STYLING makes attempt to add sporting personality to Hornet, but it still says "economy car." Clock dial would accept tachometer.



ECONOMY OF SPACE is extremely good on the Hornet. Making doors thinner (only 5 in.—thin by domestic standards) is one way of gaining interior room without growing on the outside. Wide doors also have good position relative to seats.



gives 22:1 at low turning speeds, 16:1 at higher speeds. Drum brakes, only are offered, with power assist optional. AMC, like other makers, is going all belted/bias tires on the '70s—78% aspect ratio on most models, 70% on the sporting versions.

Engines include the usual AMC 199 and 232-cid sixes, with ratings of 128, 145, and 155 bhp (the latter a 232 with a larger carburetor), while a 304-cid V-8 is optional in the top-of-the-line SST model. This engine, a stroked 290, is offered only with a two-barrel carburetor and 9:1 compression ratio, retaining its economy heritage as a regular fuel engine. In case you're wondering whether that engine size makes it a street Trans-Am engine, forget it. AMC's 290 had a poor bore/stroke ratio for performance to begin with. Add 0.16 in. of stroke and it's even worse off. (Bore and stroke are 3.75 x 3.44.) This same stroke is used on the 343 engine to increase it to 360 for the rest of the American Motors line. Smog control is the main reason for the new longer-stroke engines.

So far, only a three-speed manual and a three-speed automatic transmission are offered with the smaller engines, and automatic only comes with the V-8. Hopefully, and almost sure-

ly, sportier versions are coming, with four speeds and floor shifts.

Presently on the option list is a handling kit consisting of 15% stiffer springs and shocks all around and a front sway bar on the 6-cyl. models (standard on V-8). No official mention yet of disc brakes or high-performance engines, but they, too, are almost sure to come, since both were offered in the Rambler line. There definitely will be a Scrambler version, maybe with a different name.

We had the opportunity to drive three versions of the Hornet this summer—an "06" base model (two-door sedan with a 199 six and three-speed); the handsome four-door; and the stylized V-8 powered SST. The 06 is, quite frankly, 1949 revisited. The stripped interior gives the aura of "government car" and the mushy suspension and vague steering do little to make up for the lack of power. But apparently, that's all any under \$2000 U.S.-built car is going to be. The more sensible four-door was much more tastefully brought off, retaining its utilitarian function without looking poverty stricken. The SST, supposedly the one that is to induce the economy buyers away from the spartan imports, is much better. But we are not so sure that it is going to be enough. The V-8, handling package, larger tires, power steering, and the prettier trim package certainly help.

However, the car is not the "sporty" car that the name Hornet implies, or that Marketing said they find semi-enthusiasts want. The young economy-car buyer likes his import not only because it is economical, unique, and even slightly rebellious, but because it is also fun and easy to drive. And he's not going to like the Hornet. Not yet. Handling is good, almost as good as some of the Ponycars, but it is not necessarily fun to drive. The chassis has possibilities. AMC has done a good job with conventional base. It will respond to some intelligent modifications, but right now it is still an over-size economy car.

Specifically, our first impressions were that the combination of lowering the center of gravity, raising the roll center and increasing roll stiffness resulted in a car that exhibits very little roll, even near the limit. Meanwhile, ride is very smooth and soft. But the power steering still has too high a ratio for the variable feature to be of any significance. The suspension bushings, too, seem much too resilient. Understeer is not overpowering, predictability is good, and the lack of cornering roll helps induce driver confidence. Not exactly fun to drive. It's still like a scaled down domestic car. ■



UNIT BODY/FRAME, by now a tradition with AMC, is used for Hornet. Though not yet offered, body could accept either big AMC engine.



304-CID V-8 is top of the line, produces 210 bhp using 9:1 compression ratio and two-barrel carb; 199 and 232 sizes are also offered.

COMPACT COMPARATOR

	1970 Hornet	1969 Rambler	1970 Maverick	1969 Chevy Nova
Wheelbase—in.....	108.0	106	103	111
Track Front/Rear.....	57.5/57.0	56.2/55.0	55.5/55.5	59.0/58.9
Overall Length.....	179.3	181.0	179	189
Overall Height.....	53.0	54.2	52.3	52
Overall Width.....	71.0	70.8	70.6	72.4
Approx. Wt. (base).....	2600	2700	2500	3000
Turning Circle (ft.).....	36	36	36	38
Steering Ratio (manual)	32:1	29:1	29:1	28:1
Base 6-cyl. Engine—cid	199	199	170	230
HP @ RPM.....	128 @ 4400	128 @ 4400	105 @ 4200	140 @ 4400
Leg Room F/R.....	42/37	42/35	41/32	42/37
Head Room F/R.....	38/37	39/37	38/36	38/37
Hip Room F/R.....	55/54	57/57	54/46	56/56
Base Price.....	\$1950	\$2000	\$2000	\$2300