

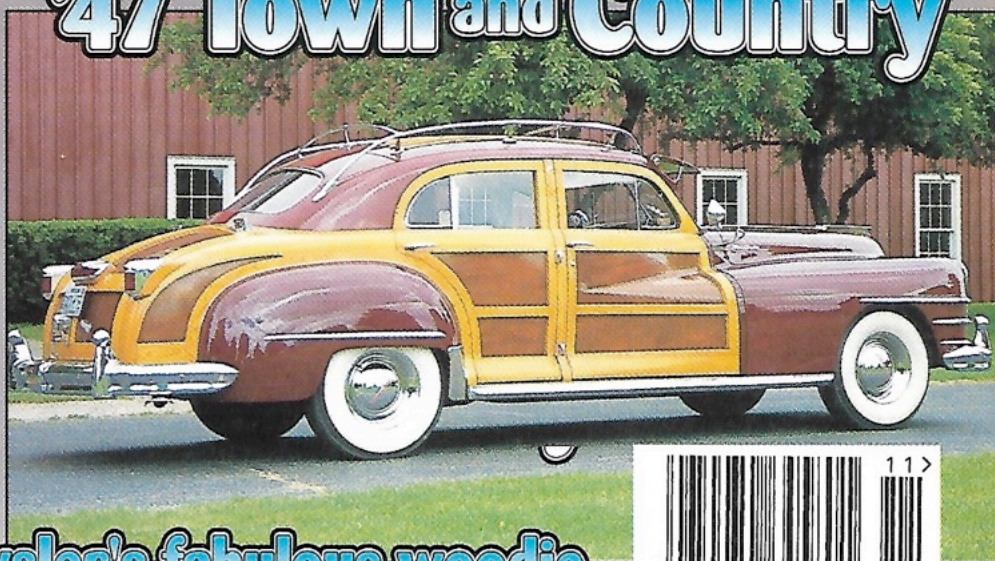
CARS & PARTS®



'68 Hurst/Olds Your father's Oldsmobile

- Sweet '34 Ford coupe
- Pebble Beach Concours;
Woodward Dream
Cruise; Meadow Brook;
Mopar Nats.; 'Dearborn';
'Mad Dogs & Englishmen'
- Route 66 Tour
- Zap! Tracing a short!

'47 Town and Country



Chrysler's fabulous woodie





1968 Hurst/Olds

A diamond in the rough

1

Photos by the author

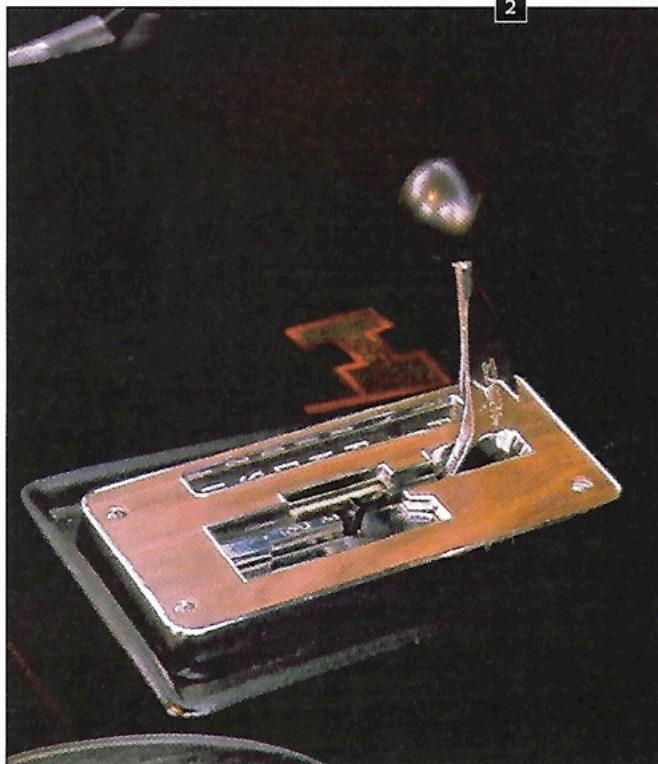
1. Subtle elegance, the 1968 Hurst/Olds was designed to be the “gentleman’s hot rod.” Special hidden headlights were written out of the proposal due to time limitations. The Hurst/Olds was not offered until very late in the 1968 run.

by Thomas Glatch

American muscle cars of the 1960s had a “bad boy” image. These performance machines had a reputation for being rude, crude, and a little lewd. Consider the market they were targeting: young males with a modicum of money and a need for speed. The muscle car recipe was to mix an enormous engine with a stripped-down low-cost compact, intermediate or “pony” car, and throw on some splashy graphics and add a catchy name. So muscle cars’ bad reputation was justifiably earned. But out of the mass of performance products the Big Four churned out during that era, there was one diamond in the rough: the 1968 Hurst/Olds.

The target audience of the Hurst/Olds was different. George Hurst, the man behind the famous Hurst shifters, envisioned a car he called an “executive hot rod” or a “gentleman’s hot rod.” As such, the Hurst/Olds would be an exclusive automobile, with as much emphasis on handling and creature comfort as on straight-line performance. And if anyone could pull this off, it was George Hurst.

2



2. Driving was enhanced by the Hurst “Dual-Gate” shifter that could be driven in drive, or shifted sequentially through the gears for maximum performance. All Hurst/Olds were equipped with automatic transmissions (only George Hurst’s prototype was equipped with a four-speed).

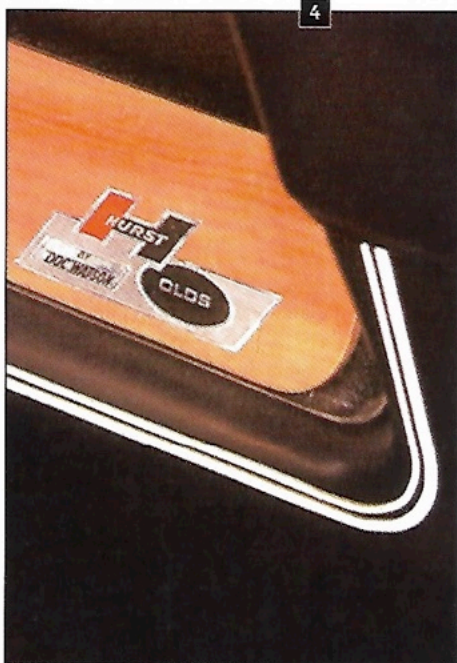


3

3. The Hurst/Olds offered a degree of comfort superior to most muscle cars.

4. Walnut applique and a Hurst/Olds emblem were added to the instrument panel.

In the late 1950s, as the performance market began heating up, George Hurst began selling motor mounts and conversion kits for hot rod engine swaps. In 1961, Hurst began offering his trademark shifters. As the American automobile market began shifting from three-on-the-tree to four-on-the-floor, it was quickly apparent that GM, Ford, and Chrysler had a lot to learn about floor shifter design. Hurst's brilliant "Golden Shifter" was the cure. Built like a rock, with solid linkage and a positive movement between the all-important 2-3 gear change, Hurst's shifter stormed the market. So confident was Hurst of his products, he offered a lifetime unconditional guarantee. Detroit took notice, and in 1964, when the revolutionary Pontiac GTO hit the market, it was equipped with a Hurst Golden Shifter. George Hurst also tackled the automatic transmission market that year, introducing the famous Hurst "Dual-Gate" that allowed a driver to shift sequentially through the gears, or



4

just motor in drive.

George Hurst was also a master marketer and showman, and did everything imaginable to showcase his products. Among other promotions, he and his chief engineer, Jack "Doc" Watson, built a twin-engined Olds Toronado exhibition drag racer called the "Hurst Hairy Olds," which helped cement his relationship with the Oldsmobile Division. Hurst's reputation was growing, and he was to drag racing what Carroll Shelby was to road racing. With Hurst Performance expanding, the time was right for a new project.

Hurst Performance built many prototype cars over the years. Some were proposals to the Big Four of cars Hurst would produce for them. Others were personal cars of George Hurst, a hot rodder at heart who always liked to experiment, and who always liked to show off what his team could accomplish. The 1968 Olds Cutlass that he unveiled was both personal transportation and a proposal. Though basically stock looking, under the hood was a 390-hp 455-cid monster motor based on the Toronado engine. The result was an Oldsmobile that could out-accelerate just about anything on the road. But more than just straight-line speed, this Olds could corner better than any other mid-size performance machine, even a bit better than the Olds 4-4-2 on which it was based, a car already known as "the handler." This was not only a superb automobile, but one Hurst could produce for Oldsmobile, and such subcontracting work was an area into which Hurst Performance wanted to expand.

Hurst and Watson did what Oldsmobile could not: install a truly mon-

5

5. The 1968 Hurst/Olds was painted "Peruvian Silver," a 1967 Toronado color, on the Lansing assembly line. Hurst added the black paint on the hood, roof and trunk, along with hand pinstriping.





6. H/O badging appeared on the leading edge on the right side of the trunk lid. An "air brake" spoiler was also axed from the production cars due to a lack of development time.

ster motor into a mid-sized car. General Motors had a strict policy that limited compact and intermediate cars to engines of no more than 400 cubic inches. General Motors was the Microsoft of the 1960s, and constantly under anti-trust threats. To keep up the appearance of good corporate citizens, GM had a strict anti-racing policy, and had the 400-cid rule for all small- and medium-sized cars, with the exception of the flagship Corvette. Try as the divisional General Managers might, top management would not budge on this mandate, and it was made clear that the consequences would be very serious for any infractions of this rule. So while Ford had its 428 Torino and Mustang, and Mopar its 426 Hemi and 440 Coronet, GTX, Road Runner, and Barracuda, GM's divisions made do with much less.

But there was nothing in the corporate mandate that could prevent a private party from installing a larger engine in a GM compact or intermediate, and many dealers made quite a reputation of doing just that. Royal Pontiac in Royal Oak, Michigan was Pontiac's "back door" racing connection, and was famous for installing the 428 engine in Firebirds and GTOs. Chevy dealers like Baldwin Chevrolet, Long Island, New York; Nickey Chevrolet (with the backwards "k"), Chicago, Ill.; Berger Chevrolet, Grand Rapids, Mich.; Dana Chevrolet, Los Angeles, Calif., and road racer Don Yenko, Cannonburg, Pa., were among the big players in the 396 to 427 conversion business. So why not Hurst Performance, but on a bigger, factory authorized level? With this thought in mind, George Hurst and Doc Watson went to work.

In a proposal to Oldsmobile management, Doc Watson wrote:

A problem consistent with new car merchandising is ... how do you get prospects in the front door of the dealership? Following is a proposal for a vehicle that can help solve that problem, plus open new venues for Oldsmobile image building. That vehicle is the HURST OLDS! A vehicle keyed to the perfor-

HURST/OLDS HISTORY

- 1968** The first and the fastest of the Hurst/Olds. 390-hp (SAE gross)/455 cid. All painted Peruvian Silver with black stripes, black interior. Production: 515 (56 Sport Coupes, B-pillar sedans; 419 Holiday Coupes).
- 1969** Much wilder with Cameo white paint, Hurst Fire Frost gold stripes and panels, and a monster "mailbox" hood scoop and functional rear wing. 380 hp/455 cid. Production: 908 (906 coupes, 2 convertibles).
- 1972** The Hurst/Olds selected as Indy 500 pace car. Cutlass Supreme hardtop or convertible, along with the W-25 fiberglass hood and Dual-Gate shifter. Cameo white with reflective gold appliques. Hardtops included a unique half-padded vinyl roof, with power sunroof optional. 270 hp or 300 hp (SAE net)/455 cid. Production: 629 (130 convertibles, 499 hardtops - including 220 sunroof-equipped hardtops).
- 1973** For the first time two colors were offered, Cameo white and Ebony black, both with gold accents. Convertible no longer available on Cutlass platform. Heavily-padded vinyl roof added, which made the quarter windows smaller. 250 hp/455 cid. Production: 1,097.
- 1974** Indy 500 pace car again. Black or white paint, with gold trim. Also 92 H/O conversions done on 1974 Delta 88 convertibles. 230 hp/455 cid. Production: 1,800 Cutlass coupes, 92 Delta 88 convertibles.
- 1975** First installation of T-tops. White or black paint again, but vinyl roofs could be mixed or matched. 350-cid or 455-cid. Production: 2,535.
- 1979** Now on downsized Cutlass body, first H/O to be built entirely by Oldsmobile Division. White or black paint, but more choices of interior trims. Gold hood, top, trunk, grille and aluminum wheels. Most expensive H/O at \$2,054 extra. 170 hp/350 cid. Production: 2,499.
- 1983** 15th Anniversary Edition, only in black with silver rocker panels. 180 hp/307 cid, with Hurst "Lightning Rod" shifter. Production: 3,000.
- 1984** Identical to 1983 H/O except silver with black trim. 180 hp/307 cid, with Hurst "Lightning Rod" shifter. Production: 3,500.
- 1988** Four 1988 H/Os were built on the last rear wheel drive Cutlass platform by Doc Watson to commemorate the 20th anniversary. Body kits were also sold that could be installed on any 1981-88 Cutlass.

mance oriented enthusiast automotive market. A vehicle that can help Oldsmobile re-establish itself as the leader in the "super-car" market. A vehicle that will give the "ACTION" styling of the 4-4-2 even more meaning to the automotive enthusiasts of this country.

The basic Hurst Olds consists of:

1. A 1968 Oldsmobile 4-4-2
2. 455-cubic-inch special W-30 engine
3. Turbo-Hydramatic (three-speed automatic) transmission equipped with a Hurst dual/gate transmission control.
4. 3.91 to 1 anti-spin rear axle.
5. Special H.O. exterior emblems.
6. The normal complement of standard General Motors safety devices plus the full line of Oldsmobile options.

A Hurst Olds would also be available with the following options...

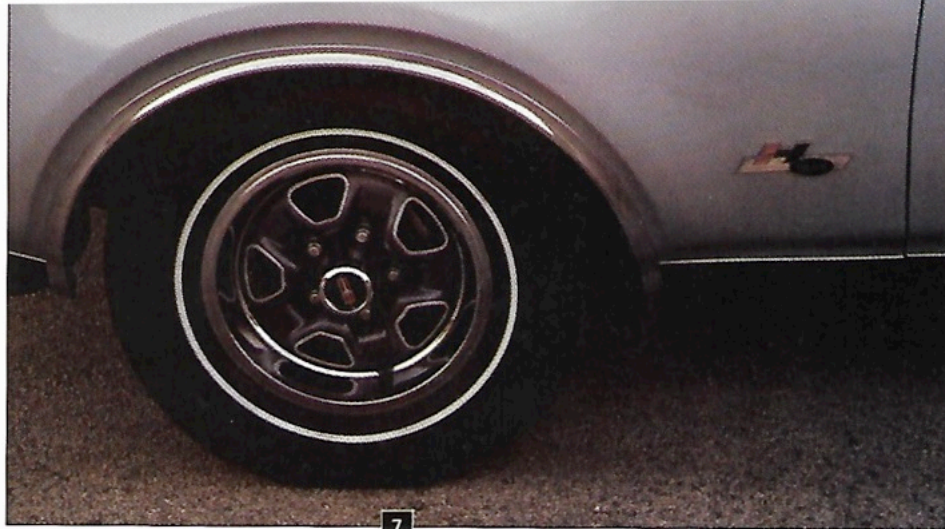
1. Hurst custom paint job - A unique performance enthusiast oriented paint scheme of "Hurst Gold" Firefrost and Black. (This would be available only with the order of Black interior trim.)

2. A custom front-end treatment consisting of a restyled grille with hide-away head lamps. The reason for this styling technique is to establish a strong "competition look" identity ...

3. A new concept in sports vehicle accessories, a "Braking Spoiler." This electrically operated "wing" is activated by stepping on the brake pedal ...

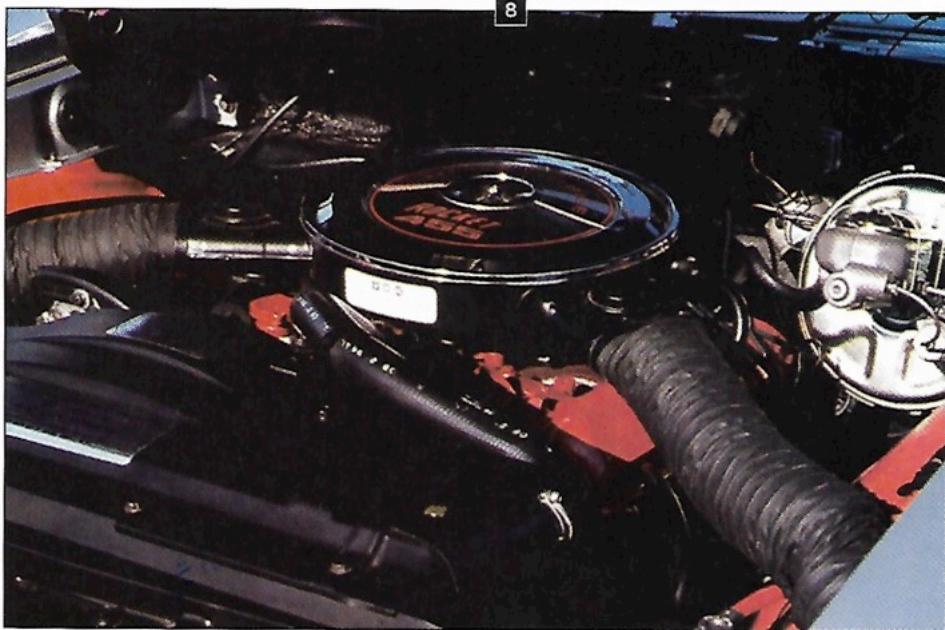
The main purpose for doing any vehicles in this manner at all is to gain notoriety for the project through the enthusiast press.

Watson's proposal was made late in 1967. General Motors Vice President E.M. "Pete" Estes gave his approval, despite refusing a similar proposal from Pontiac a year before to build a 428 Firebird (but that would have been done in-house). Oldsmobile Chief Engineer John Beltz assigned Ted Lucas, Dale Smith, and Bob Stempel to assist Watson and Hurst. Hurst Performance, in turn, contracted with Demmer Engineering in Lansing to provide space and assistance in the conversions. The end of the model year was approaching and Hurst had to



7

7. Attractive 14-inch sport wheels were used with G70x14 Goodyear bias-belted Polyglas tires. H/O badging also appeared on the fender just aft of each front wheel.



8

8. The magic behind the Hurst/Olds was this 455-cid V-8 that developed 390 hp (SAE gross) on non-air conditioned cars, and 380 hp with air. The Toronado-derived engine used the "Forced Air" induction system of the 4-4-2 W-30 performance option.

hurry. Gone was the Hurst Gold and Black paint scheme, since gold was not an Olds option that year. Instead, the cars were painted "Peruvian Silver," a 1967 Toronado color that was still on hand. The hideaway headlights and pop-up rear spoiler also had to be canned, since there was not enough development time. Otherwise, Watson's proposal remained intact as production was readied. Even the projected price of \$4,115.96 was close to the actual cost of \$4,288.

The original plan was for 500 to be built. But two days after the announcement of the Hurst/Olds went out to the dealers, 2,600 orders had been taken. Allocating 500 cars among more than 3,000 dealers proved to be difficult, with some major dealers getting more than one car, while others received none. To meet demand, an extra 15 cars were built, bringing the total to 515 - 419 "Holiday Hardtops" and 56 of the stronger, lighter "Sport Coupes" (B-pillar

sedans) geared for competition.

History records that the Lansing assembly line produced the special-order Cutlasses in a batch, because of the non-standard paint. The cars were then shipped across town to Demmer's building where the 455 engines were to be installed, and the black paint, hand pin-striping, H/O emblems and trim, Hurst "Dual-Gate" shifter (all H/Os were automatics), and walnut dash applique added. In fact, the 455 engines were installed right on the Lansing assembly line, since the Demmer building did not have the facilities for the engine swap. Of course, heads would have rolled had top GM management found out about this flagrant infraction of the 400-cid rule, so this fact remained everyone's little secret, at least until recently when all of the players had retired from General Motors. So well was the secret kept, that Bob Stempel, who was an engineer on the project, eventually advanced all the way to Chairman-of-the-Board of GM. A

position he probably wouldn't have attained if the cat had been let out of the bag. We can imagine there were some awfully tense people in Lansing during the days the cars were assembled!

Our feature Hurst/Olds is owned by a true Olds fanatic, Mike Lietke of Kansasville, Wis. He's the fifth owner of this mostly original car, which has only received fresh paint and detailing with the help of Phil Thunhorst and John Woelful. "I've tried my best to keep this car as original as possible," he said, to which he still has the original window sticker and Protect-O-Plate. Among other awards, his H/O took first place in the Olds Club of America Nationals in 1998. A professional firefighter in Racine, Wis., Lietke has his share of excitement on a regular basis, but nothing quite matches the thrill of his almost-new '68 Hurst/Olds.

Other than the mighty 455 under the hood and the special trim, the H/O is based on the Olds 4-4-2 W-30. Jack "Doc" Watson, Hurst's "Shifty Doctor," attended to the Hurst/Olds, while over at Oldsmobile, its advertising featured the mythical "Doctor Q" creating the 4-4-2 W-30 in his laboratory. How do these monsters compare? Mike Lietke owns both our feature 1968 Hurst/Olds and the nearly original 1968 4-4-2 W-30 featured in the September 2000 issue of *Cars & Parts*. "Both cars drive almost identical," he claims, "but the Hurst feels quicker." Vintage road tests prove him out, with the H/O running at least a half-second faster through the traps. It's the difference between 360 hp for the 4-4-2 W-30 versus 390 hp for the H/O. Handling and braking might be slightly better on the H/O, since there is a bit less weight over the front wheels. Both engines are based on the same block, but the 455 has 55 cubic inches more cast iron bored out of it than the standard 400 and weighs 12 pounds less. The lighter weight is right where it is needed for better cornering, and the extra power and torque can easily be felt. Still, it is obvious that both "doctors" have practiced some serious medicine.

The 1968 Hurst/Olds would prove to be the first of a long line of Hurst/Olds limited editions. Hurst Performance would also go on to build limited production cars for Dodge, AMC, Buick, Pontiac and Chrysler. But subsequent H/Os were less subtle in style, and had less performance. They still had the reputation of limited production and above-average performance, but none approached the original concept of George Hurst's powerful yet elegant "executive hot rod."

While the Hurst/Olds was a great suc-

SPECIFICATIONS
1968 OLDSMOBILE 4-4-2 "HURST/OLDS"

Custom by Demmer Engineering, Lansing, Mich.

GENERAL DATA

Body style: 2-dr.
Holiday Hardtop
Passenger capacity: 5
Base price: \$4,288

BASIC SPECIFICATIONS

Wheelbase: 112"
Length: 201.6"
Width: 76.6"
Height: 52.8"
Weight (curb): 3,603
Front tread: 59"
Rear tread: 59"

INTERIOR SPECIFICATIONS

Headroom: 37.4"
Legroom (front): 42.9"
Hip room: 23.4"
Shoulder room: 58.3"
Trunk capacity:
17.5 cu. ft.

ENGINE

Type: 90-degree
V-8, cast iron block and heads. High-performance cylinder heads; high-lift, long duration camshaft; special carburetor

jetting; special distributor curve; specially machined crankshaft.
Displacement: 455 cu. in.
HP @ RPM: 390 @ 5,000 (380 w/air conditioning)
Torque @ RPM: 500 lbs.-ft. @ 3,200
Compression ratio: 10.5:1
Bore x stroke: 4.125 x 4.250"
Induction system: Forced-air induction to single Rochester 4-bbl. carburetor
Ignition system: Single breaker, conventional
Fuel: Premium high octane
Exhaust: Dual
Valve configuration: Overhead, hydraulic lifters
Main bearings: 5

TRANSMISSION

Type: 3-spd. Turbo Hydramatic
Shifter: Hurst Dual-Gate w/neutral loc-out
Ratios:
1st - 2.48:1
2nd - 1.48:1
3rd - 1.00:1

DIFFERENTIAL

Type: Hypoid heavy duty limited slip (standard)
Ratio: 3.91:1 (standard), 3.08:1 (w/air)

SUSPENSION

Front: Independent coil spring
Rear: Link coil spring, stabilizer bar

FRAME

Type: Full perimeter, body-on-frame

STEERING

Type: Power recirculating ball
Ratio: 24:1
Turning circle: 40.9' (curb to curb)
Turns, lock to lock: 5.56

BRAKES

Front: Disc, power assist
Rear: Drum
Effective swept area: 348.4 sq. in.

TIRES

Size: G70 x 14"
Type: Goodyear Wide Oval bias-belted Polyglas

CAPACITIES

Cooling system: 16.2 qts.
Gasoline tank: 20 gals.
Engine oil: 4 qts.
Transmission: 8 pts.
Rear axle: 3.7 pts.

CALCULATED DATA

HP/CID: 0.857
LBS/HP: 9.24
LBS/CID: 7.925

PERFORMANCE*

Acceleration:
0-30 2.65 sec.
0-45 4.10 sec.
0-60 6.65 sec.
0-75 8.25 sec.
40-60 2.8 sec.
50-70 3.3 sec.

Speed in gears @ 5,400 rpm:
1st - 52 mph
2nd - 92 mph
3rd - 132 mph
MPH per 1,000 RPM:
24.5 mph

Standing 1/4 mile: 13.97 sec. @ 97.30 mph **

Stopping distances: from 30 mph: 18' from 60 mph: 91' from 60 mph (wet): 208'


Fuel mileage: 8.1 to 12.5 mpg (average 10.2)

*Source: *Motor Trend*, September 1968, with two aboard

** *Car Craft*, August 1968, published a quarter mile time of 12.97 sec. @ 108.17 mph



9. Front view of the 1968 Hurst/Olds prototype featuring retractable headlights. This feature was withdrawn before production. (Photo courtesy Hurst/Olds Club of America)

cess over the years, there is a sad footnote. George Hurst lost control of his empire in 1970. Sunbeam Industries bought out Hurst's partner and gained controlling interest in the company Hurst founded. Hurst was promised an executive position and a seat on the board. He received neither. A broken man, Hurst never was able to reestablish another successful business, and he died all too young in 1983. Still, the spirit of the great hot rodder and promoter lives on in the first cars to bear his name and his vision, the 1968 Hurst/Olds. 



10. Rear view of the 1968 Hurst/Olds prototype. The rear spoiler was to raise when the brake pedal was pressed to add downforce to aid rear wheel braking. This too was dropped from production. (Photo courtesy Hurst/Olds Club of America)