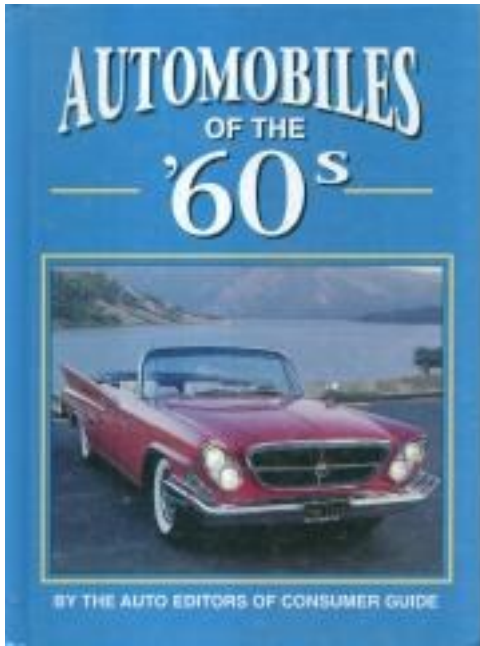


Automobiles of the 60s



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The symmetry was perfect. It was the Sixties, and just as American society at large was engulfed in violent change, so too did the domestic auto industry hurtle into a turbulent and controversial part of its history.

The horsepower race that had begun in the Fifties accelerated in the Sixties. On top of that, the auto industry

expanded its offerings to include a previously unheard-of variety of cars: big personal-luxury hardtops, miserly compacts, potent muscle machines, and sporty pony-cars--something for every taste and budget.

Detroit's marketing language was equally memorable: Wide-Tracks, Scat Packs, Super Sports, and Cobra Jets. All this, plus gasoline that seemed pricey if it topped 30 cents a gallon, combined to make for a unique generation of cars.

Cars of the Sixties were a powerful expression of America's waning postwar euphoria. Here was a decade that produced the Pontiac GTO, a showroom model that could do 0-60 mph about 6 seconds; and the Studebaker Avanti, which crossed the Bonneville Salt Flats at 170 mph. Today, such rowdy performance strikes many as a guilty pleasure, and a mere echo of an era that is long gone. Indeed, by the Seventies a whole host of economic, social, and environmental factors conspired against the flash and dazzle offered by the cars of the Sixties. From cockpit safety to tailpipe emissions--the federal government mandated requirements for those and more.

Ironically, it was the car-buying habits of the public that encouraged the heavy hand of government interference--the same heavy hand that the public soon grew to loathe. Consistently, and to Detroit's undoubted puzzlement, consumers showed themselves unmoved by technical progress and innovation. Consumer apathy caused

Chevy's cleverly engineered Corvair to fail in its mission as an economy compact. Buyers yawned at the 61 Pontiac Tempest and its innovative rear transaxle and all-independent suspension; the conventionally engineered Tempest that arrived after 1963 handily outsold the 61. The front-drive 66 Toronado could not match the sales figures of the entirely orthodox Buick Riviera. And Pontiac's economical 1966 overhead-cam six-cylinder engine was almost completely ignored by a public that overwhelmingly preferred gas-guzzling V-8s. It's significant that most of the decade's technical inno-

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