

ROAD TEST

THE PACKARD '300' CAVALIER

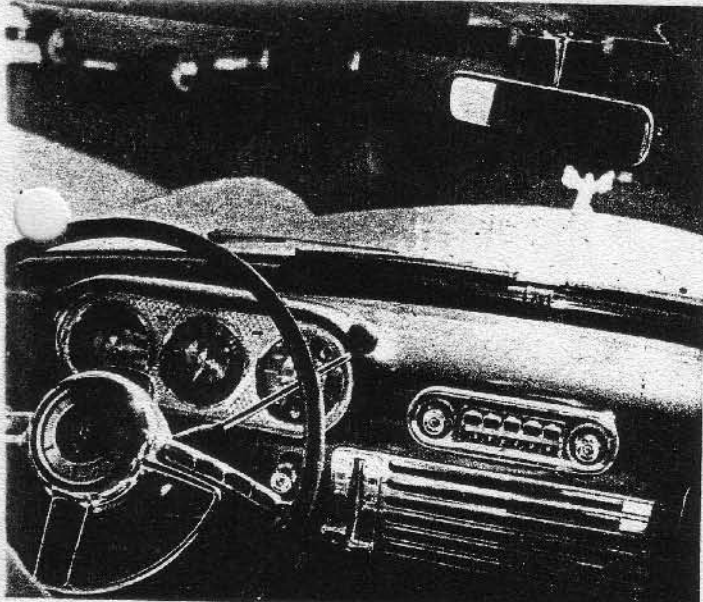
IF YOU'RE A YACHTSMAN and would like to transfer your seagoing proclivities to the highway, we've got just the car for you—the 1953 Packard Cavalier. With Ultramatic transmission, power brakes and power steering.

But before any Packard fans start hurling harpoons on the assumption we're calling their favorite a barge, let us explain: The seagoing simile comes naturally to mind after you've driven the Cavalier—with Packard's sweet power steering setup the wheel moves as easily as a rudder through water, with only that same slight feel of smooth resistance. The car is solid, but softly sprung, and almost as big as a cabin cruiser. And with Ultramatic it churns away from the stoplights with a very cruiser-like feel—and (alas) much the same acceleration.

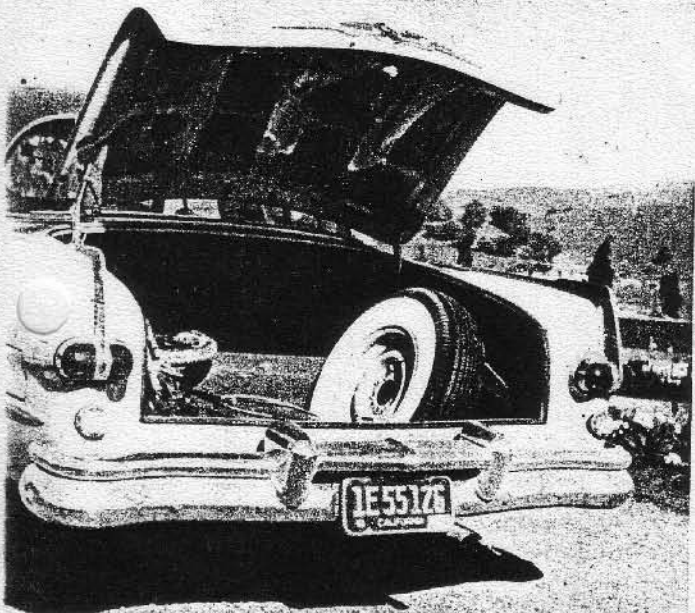
Frankly, the ASR road test crew didn't expect to be rendered breathless by the changes in this '53 Packard—and they weren't. But, equally frankly, they were considerably impressed by the ease of handling, the reduction in driver fatigue and the excellence of vision. Like most men who deal professionally with automobiles, the test crew is inclined to automatically dislike automatic devices, but the Cavalier made some reluctant converts.

The merits of automatic transmissions—particularly torque converter transmissions—are still up for debate. But, after some days spent with the Cavalier "300," ASR has concluded that well-engineered power steering and power braking like Packard's can make the big American car something more than just endurable. For example, 360 miles of back country and secondary roads were packed into one day's test, with the same driver behind the wheel all the way. On roads like this it could have been an exhausting chore, one that would leave the pilot pooped and arm-weary. Actually, it was refreshing: the Packard's easy ride and low noise level got in their good work without being counteracted by the strain of wrestling its bulk by muscle alone. Incidentally, Packard's low hood line, and the fact the driver can see both front fenders, is a considerable aid in placing the car on narrow roads.

PACKARD'S POWER steering is the best ASR has tested yet. It is a doubleacting power cylinder attached directly to the steering linkage connecting rod, is in constant operation, and cuts the steering effort about 80 per cent—without losing road "feel." The number of turns from lock to lock are reduced from 5½ to 4, which, while not as direct as sports car steering, seems to be a good compromise. Because of the direct connection, the power cylinder also serves to damp out road shock, but without deadening the driver's sense of contact. Cost of this item is \$195.



Dash is free of Space Patrol gadgetry but speedometer is hard to read at night and flasher lights replace oil gauge, ammeter.



Got any bodies you want to dispose of? Packard trunk has 30 cubic feet. Below—Brake, throttle are almost same level.



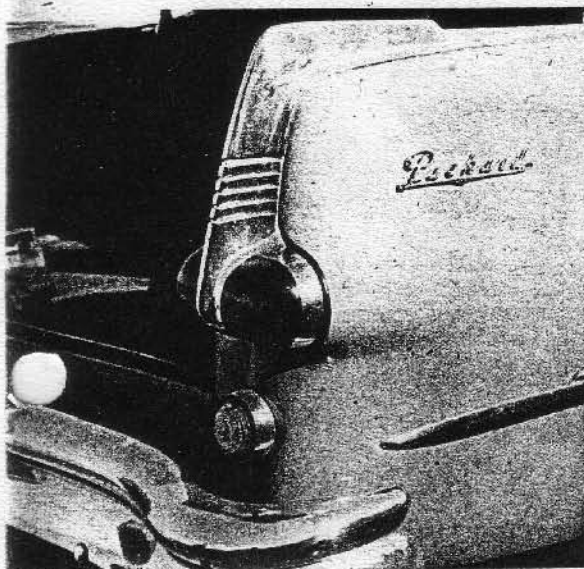
PACKARD
ULTRAMATIC
POWER BRAKE



Even country roads can be traveled at an amazingly rapid clip due to better, faster control given by power steering.

Power brakes are a bargain at \$39.45 and they do almost as much to ease the driver's task. Vacuum-operated and very light, they tend to batter passengers senseless until the driver gets used to just feathering them. Particularly good is Packard's arrangement of the broad pedal, which is almost at the level of the throttle. The company says this cuts application time 29 per cent and we'd be willing to go along with that, though the convenience of merely swiveling on your heel

Rear fender fins can be seen from driver's seat, simplify parking.



is the big thing. Even if the motor should conk out on a hill there are about three applications left in the reserve vacuum—and the brakes do work (though hard) without any vacuum.

The Ultramatic transmission is a pretty familiar story by now though Packard has added a new first turbine that supposedly increases the starting torque to 2.55-to-1. The operation is smooth enough, but in High range you don't exactly sprint away from the stoplights. More than most automatic transmissions Ultramatic benefits, performance-wise, from starting in Low range and then shifting full throttle to High at about 42 miles per hour. This really drinks up the gasoline, but the ASR crew found themselves resorting to it frequently under the pressure of city driving.

PERHAPS the best feature of Ultramatic is the direct drive clutch that locks out the torque converter down to about 11 m.p.h., eliminating that irritating revving up and down under varying load. Of course, you can get the torque converter any time you want it—up to about 60 m.p.h.—by kicking the throttle into the floor.

The foregoing concentration on gadgets may seem excessive, but that's the real news as far as the Cavalier is concerned. The basic de-

sign is an old story, though Packard has beefed the engine up to 180 horsepower with 8-to-1 compression and four-barrel carburetion and added such details as improved rubber bushings on the front suspension, a sturdier rear axle, and a new range of chrome spears, darts and lightning flashes along the body sides.

It would seem that Packard has squeezed just about as much out of its well-seasoned L-head straight-eight as can be obtained. But the engine is as smooth and quiet as anything you can get. The quiet motor, plus the Cavalier's substantial body and husky X-type frame, make 80-mile-an-hour conversations easy—providing you close the front vent windows firmly. Otherwise the wind roar is pretty obtrusive.

Interior furnishings of the test car—a pastel green four-door sedan from Earle C. Anthony, Inc., San Francisco—were substantial and quiet no Space Patrol gadgetry. Seats were chair height and the huge curved windshield was not too excessively tall. The rear view mirror did not interfere with normal forward vision and the windshield corner posts were moderately narrow. The chrome fins on the rear fenders do serve one functional purpose: the driver can see them

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PACKARD

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both and mark the rear corners of the car for parking.

The instrument group is simple: three dials in front of the driver that contain on the left, fuel and temperature gauges; oil and ammeter flasher lights; center, the speedometer, with trip recorder; and, right, the clock. The styling of these is tasteful but, at night it's damned hard to see the speedometer needle at a quick glance—it just seems to fade out.

There is a separate ashtray for both front seat passenger and driver, but Packard might just as well have saved the money on the driver's: you can't get to it without a real struggle. The glove compartment is the bin type, but placed high so that it's hard for the driver to get at its contents.

Packard claims the largest trunk in the industry (30 cubic feet) and you can believe it. Fact is, you could carry nine passengers if the last three didn't mind traveling horizontally.

PPRICE OF the Cavalier four-door F.O.B. is \$3204, with excise tax. But very few purchasers get out at this level. L. H. Johnson, sales manager for the Anthony firm, says 95 per cent of the "300" series are sold with power brakes, Ultramatic and, of course, radio and heater. And some 70 per cent of the customers take power steering.

Summing it up, Packard has made a pretty successful attempt to cope with the problems presented by the big land-going yacht that Americans seem to prefer. The steering has been made fast and light—and accurate—by power, and the work has been taken out of the brakes by the same method. The vision is excellent, with all four fenders visible, the ride is cushiony (but not too horribly cushiony) and the general feeling of the car is satisfyingly substantial.

Body roll on the corners is not marked (particularly if you run the 8.00 x 15 tires about five or six pounds over the recommended pressure) and traction is good. The Cavalier does not feel tail-light.

There appears to be very little play in the steering wheel by U.S. standards and high cruising speeds feel safe—and are certainly easy to attain and hold, despite the moderate acceleration.

It is, in fact, a real land yacht—but with more virtues and far fewer vices than were shown by equivalent cars only a couple of years back. ●●●

PACKARD CAVALIER "300" DATA

SPECIFICATIONS

TEST CAR: Packard Cavalier "300" four-door sedan, equipped with Ultramatic drive, power brakes, power steering. Furnished by Earle C. Anthony, Inc., San Francisco.

ENGINE: Type, L-head straight eight. Displacement, 327 cu. in. Compression ratio, 8-to-1. Bore and stroke, 3¼ x 4½ in. Brake horsepower, 180 at 4000 r.p.m.

CHASSIS: Frame, box-section X-type. Front suspension, independent coil spring. Rear suspension, semi-elliptic leaf spring.

TRANSMISSION: torque converter, with direct drive clutch. Rear axle ratio, 3.54 to 1.

DIMENSIONS: Wheelbase, 127 in. Weight, 4125 lb. Length, 218 5/32 in. Width, 78 in.

STEERING: Power steering, direct-acting hydraulic type with rotor pump, acting on worm and three-tooth roller. Over-all ratio, 22.5 to 1.

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration from stand start (Low-High column includes a full-throttle shift):

	Low-HI	HI-Range only
0-30 m.p.h.	6.3 sec.	8.1 sec.
0-50 m.p.h.	12.6 sec.	15.4 sec.
0-60 m.p.h.	18.2 sec.	20.3 sec.
0-70 m.p.h.	25.1 sec.	27.9 sec.
0-80 m.p.h.	33.6 sec.	33.8 sec.

Standing ¼-mile: 21 sec. flat.

Top gear acceleration (full-throttle from steady speeds, allowing car to down-shift):

10-30 m.p.h.—5.8 sec.; 30-50 m.p.h.—9.5 sec.; 50-70 m.p.h.—13.6 sec.

Speedometer correction:

Car speedometer, m.p.h.	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
Fifth wheel m.p.h.	10	18	27.5	37	46	55	63.5	73	81

AUSTIN CARE

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shocks from the chassis to perform this operation, manual to the contrary. The instructions in the manual refer only to the installation of replacement shocks, which must be filled before they are mounted on the car.

Another thing we used to worry about was the mileage expectancy of a set of spark plugs. The Champion N8's supplied as original equipment are expected to last from 8000 to 12,000 miles. Changing from the Champions to KLG FE-50 plugs will usually result in increased plug life. In the writer's car, for instance, plug life has jumped from the original 12,000 miles to 20,000 miles—with the end not yet in sight.

Incidentally, the solemn warning on the battery against overfilling is not put there just for decoration. If it is not strictly adhered to the pipes, wiring, rubber hoses, valve cover and air cleaner are all likely to be corroded by excess acid, messing up the engine compartment generally and perhaps forcing re-

placement of the corroded parts.

Trouble, of a mild but annoying nature, occasionally is reported with the windshield wipers. Normally they require no servicing but once in a while (usually during a cloud-burst) they automatically change their area of sweep so that a nice clear place appears on the cowl while the windshield remains unwiped. To cure, simply tighten the nut at the base of the wiper arm.

One maddening (and typically British) facet of the Austin's personality is the overflow pipe on the gas tank. Put there originally as an air escape when the tank is being filled, it will provide a veritable flood of gasoline—on the ground—if the service station attendant isn't right on the ball. The best solution for this is to pinch the end of the overflow pipe shut and punch a little air hole in the gas tank filler pipe. Chances are you'll obtain better mileage from your gas when it all goes into the tank and can only get out by going through the engine. ●●●