

It's All About the NUMBERS.....

By Judy Badgley

This article is dedicated to the evolution of "going topless"!!!! Have I got your attention? Please read on.

The auto industry had its start in the 1800's. Gasoline, steam and even electric cars were built using buggies (horse-drawn type) as the basis. It wasn't long before this new means of transportation soon caught on.

In 1897, R. E. Olds organized the first American automobile company known as the Olds Motor Works. Later the vehicle name was changed to Oldsmobile. The vehicle they built in the early years was known as the Curved Dash Olds. It was the vehicle that put Americans on the road and it started out "topless".

The popularity of the automobile grew quickly and so did the desire of the users for a more convenient,

weatherproof vehicle. The topless auto soon began to evolve into a user-friendly vehicle. A roof overhead was added, followed eventually by doors, a windshield and then side glass. This new invention was now sealed from the elements.

Customers can never be completely satisfied. Soon they realized how much they liked the feel of the open air when enjoying the freedom of traveling in this new machine. The answer to this request was the removable or collapsible top. The convertible was born and became very popular.

Going "topless" evolved. Years went by and auto manufacturers improved the convertibles. Manual tops became power tops. Plastic back windows became glass. These vehicles have been nicknamed "rag tops", "drop tops", "going topless" and I'm sure other names I have left out. Life was good!!!!

Over the years, insurance companies and safety commissions influenced the auto manufacturers into eliminating convertibles for the "good" of the public. Statistics proved topless cars were unsafe and as a result cost the insurance companies more. The desire of the public to go topless was still there so the

companies tried new ways to open the top and please their buyers and insurance companies. The answer came in the form of a sunroof, astrorooftop, moon roof and then finally, t-tops.

As you all know, the Hurst/Olds went into production in 1968. This was at a time when the canvas convertible top was very desirable, but the insurance companies were raising the rates to the owners. The H/O was promoted as a luxury hotrod but it was primarily intended to be used at the dragstrip. There were no production H/O's built with a convertible top. Convertibles are a much heavier vehicle and not a desirable car to run fast at the track. However, Hurst Performance did convert 4) Cutlass convertibles to look similar to the 68 H/O production cars. These cars were used at various tracks around the country to promote the Hurst shifters and other Hurst products.

The 68 H/O's were very successful in the sales department. The 2 companies decided to proceed with the same program in 1969. Again, these cars were intended to be used at the dragstrip, so the convertible was not offered as a production car. Hurst converted 4) Cutlass convertibles for promotional duties and these cars carried



the same appearance package as the 69 H/O production cars.

Then came 1972. The Hurst/Olds was selected to be the Official Pace Car at the Indy 500 race. The Indy program required convertibles to be used for parade duties during the festivities. 130) 1972 H/O convertibles were built. Of those, 68) were used at the track festivities.

In addition to the convertibles, 1972 H/O's were also available with a new open top option called a sunroof. This unique option allowed a section of the roof to slide to the rear section of the roof, between the headliner and the roof panel. This particular sunroof was powered and was activated with the push of a button. When the sunroof was open, the roof was open to the sky above. Hurst Performance had developed this product as an answer to the growing pressure from the insurance companies and safety commissions. The sunroof was a lower cost option to the buyer, both in the actual cost of the car and the cost of insurance (it was considered to be safer).

In 1973, the Hurst/Olds program was introduced on the all-new Cutlass body. GM had redesigned the midsize Cutlass and eliminated the building of a convertible on this body. A new style of sunroof had been designed for General Motors new car line-up. This sunroof offered on the '73 was a pop-up style. It was a single glass panel with a center latch. To open the

sunroof, you flipped the latch and popped the glass panel up about 4 inches. The advantage of this style was you could see the sky above, even in inclement weather. There are no figures as to how many of the 1973 H/O's had a sunroof installed.

Hurst and Olds worked together again in 1974. This was to be another Official Pace Car year for the Indy 500. Indy still wanted convertibles for the festivities and GM was still not building a convertible on the Cutlass body. GM did build convertibles on the full-size body. 42) Hurst/Olds Delta 88 convertibles were used for festival activities at Indy in 1974.

GM did agree to convert at least 3) Cutlass bodies into a special "topless" style for the Official Pace Car duties in 1974. These cars had the center roof section reinforced into a type of roll bar. The area between the windshield top and the roll bar removed. Also the area between the roll bar and the rear deck

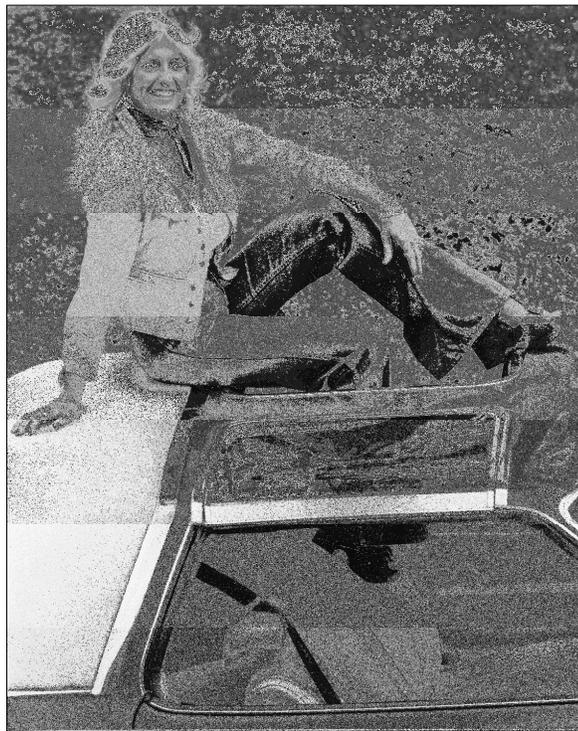
removed. With these panels removed, the car appeared nearly topless! The production cars all had simulated roll bars but no removable panels. These cars did not have a sunroof option available.

The 1975 model year brought about an all-new topless style. Hurst Performance had been working on a design called t-tops. T-tops are 2 glass panels supported in the center with a metal strip. The glass panels mounted over the front seats. GM introduced this innovation on the 1975 Hurst/Olds. In fact all 2535) 1975 H/O's had t-tops, and **only** H/O's had t-tops. No other GM model offered this option on the production cars.

Linda Vaughn perched above Hurst hatches

T-tops were an instant success. The car buying public loved the idea of removable glass panels. By the introduction of the 1976 Oldsmobiles, t-tops were an option on some model in all of the GM carlines. Also by the introduction of the 1976 models, several dealer bulletins had been sent out on how to adjust or replace the weatherstrips to compensate for air and water leaks! Although the public seemed to be entranced with this new design, the leaks plagued the dealerships and the mechanics that worked on them.

There were other complications with trying



to repair the t-top leaks. Hurst was making changes trying to improve the t-top design. They also made their own Hurst Hatches that were installed by themselves rather than at the factory. Nearly every change required a different weatherstrip.

Going topless with t-tops was a popular option on the rear-wheel drive Cutlass beginning in 1975 when they were introduced until 1988 when they quit making the rear-wheel drive Cutlass. This was the only way buyers could enjoy the "topless" Cutlass.

In 1978, Olds introduced an all new Cutlass design. This basic style would remain through the end of the rear wheel drive Cutlass in 1988. Although the body style had yearly changes, the frame and basics were the same. There were still no convertibles. Olds did offer a confusing number of new "topless" options.

1978 was the introduction of the astrorooftop. This was a glass panel that operated similar to the sunroof in 1972. It moved electronically to the rear of the roof, opening the roof to the sky. This was an option that was available from 1978-1988. The metal electronic slider panel was still offered from 1978 through 1980. Also available in those same years was the glass removable roof that was the same as the '73 style.

Now we have 4 roof options! There are no figures available as to how many of the 79, 83 or 84 H/O's came with any of these particular

options. GM and Oldsmobile were not interested in keeping track of these figures for collectors. They were only interested in selling cars.

As popular as the topless options are, they are a constant battle with trying to keep them sealed. The 75 H/O's had 2) different styles of t-tops. Some had a chrome edge around the glass and the others were just the glass edge. Each of these styles required a different weatherstrip. Over the years, at least 3) different styles of weatherstrips were used on the Olds factory cars, plus those used for the Hurst installed units.

Weather-strips for the sunroofs, astrorooftop, etc were not as complicated, but there are many different types. Hurst and many other aftermarket companies made sunroofs, etc. Each and everyone are different!

All of these changes have been a nightmare for owners trying to restore or maintain their car. Car owners in need of seals or glass panels can easily buy the wrong type for their car. GM quit making some of the earlier styles many years ago. Companies wanting to provide the market with the correct seal have had a difficult task. Many hours of research went into this project. Many people have been instrumental in helping to solve this problem including H/OCA member 924C, Steve Dalton. He and others have worked with the people at Steele Rubber (one of our advertisers) and devoted many research hours

to developing a quality product that will work for MOST applications.

Steele Rubber has created a description of their t-top seals that should help you decide which kit to order. Additionally, their staff is willing to help us solve the problem of which kit will work. PS.....they also offer weatherstrips for doors, trunk, etc. Check their ad elsewhere in our magazine for contact information.

Do you remember the mention of a moonroof? I can't find any reference to a moonroof in the Hurst/Olds or Oldsmobile literature. I contacted members Ken and Chris Arbic about this also. They have a lot of literature on these options in the 79-84 H/O era, as well as having owned cars with these options. They also could not find any "official" reference to a moonroof. Do any of you have proof? Let me know if you do, please. Perhaps it is just a slang term.

As you can see, although going topless is a great way to travel, it is not without problems. As the evolution of topless cars improved both in appearance and safety, they continue to be a frustration when we want to have them closed and sealed. I guess the only solution is to find the perfect climate so we don't ever have to worry about sealing our H/O's!

LET THE SUNSHINE IN!!!

Views below are an Astrorooftop.

