

W-SYNDROME

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Anybody who has ever attended a car show or read an article involving an Oldsmobile performance car most likely ran into the "W" Syndrome. The reason being is – most high performance Oldsmobiles, especially in the A-body styles, had a "W" code option of some sort. This article will accurately attempt to explain the various "W" packages and in what years they apply.

The first "W" option did not appear in 1964 or 1966 as many might naturally believe. Way back in 1957, Oldsmobile offered a couple of mid year performance options to the Golden Rocket 88, the Super 88 and the Starfire Ninety-Eight. Most remember them as the J2 three two-barrel carburetor options. The most popular and well known of these two was the 300 horsepower J2 - which included two Rochester 2G carburetors on each end of the three carb manifold and a 2GC as the center, primary carburetor. Thinner head gaskets provided a higher compression ratio with the J2, also. This resulted in a bump to 300 HP verses the four-barrel 277 horsepower. Torque was also raised with the J2; up from the standard 400 foot pounds to 415. This option was simply listed as "W" and cost a mere \$83 factory installed.

A second, more powerful J2 was offered to the serious racers of the day. The same three carburetor arrangement was there with the thinner head gaskets; but also included was a special "revised" camshaft, mechanical lifters, adjustable rocker arms, dimpled valve covers and other allied equipment as the December 31, 1956 release letter explained. Although no price was given, the option code was "W-1". This high performance J2 option would cost you \$385 in 1957 dollars. Later, in March of 1957, the W-1 J2 option could be dealer installed under part number 989113 for Synchronesh Transmission cars and 989114 for Hydramatic cars. This hot setup was rated at a conservative 312 hp. The J2 was offered again in 1958, but the "W" options would become dormant for about eight years.

The most popular "W" package was of course the W-29 package or option. Depending on the year you look at would determine this - as the 442 began as an option; became a series in 1968, and reverted back to option status in 1972.

The W-29 was the code given to the 442 performance package in 1968. The 442 was not an option in '68; but a series in its own right, with three different body styles. As mentioned earlier, it unfortunately regained

option status beginning with the 1972 model year.

When the 442 was introduced in 1964, you were required to check the B-09 option box on the order form if you wanted the most powerful version of the F-85 that Olds had to offer. By '65 the option was simply called the 442 Performance Package and would cost you \$156.02 in U.S. currency. Even though the first new "W" option appeared in 1966, the 442 had to be ordered as the L-78 442 Performance Package or later as the L-69 442 Performance Package - Tri-Carb; if you wanted to upgrade your 442 with multiple carburetors. The L-78 code applied in 1967, also.

The first high performance "W" option since 1958 was the respected W-30 Package of 1966. The factory only produced 54 of these rare Rocket ships. Others appeared as a dealer installed package often referred to as the Track-Pac setup. These tri-powered 442's were fitted with all kinds of race ready equipment. The list included distinct parts that were not seen since the early sixties; and then only on full size factory-backed race cars. A special long duration high lift camshaft with heavy duty valve springs began the list, along with the L-69 three two-barrel carb and manifold setup with heat riser block-offs cast in the intake on either side of the center carb. A one-of-a-kind chrome plated air shroud directed air to the three 2G Rochester carbs from four inch diameter hoses fitted to special scoops installed in the front bumper. (The front turn signals were relocated inboard of the scoops on the '66 ram air "W" cars.) The battery was relocated to the trunk for better weight transfer and became necessary because of the routing of the air induction hoses. Chrome valve covers rounded out the W-30 package of 1966, and all 54 of the factory units had their air shrouds stamped 1 through 54. They were all equipped with four-speeds.

The W-30 Package remained pretty much intact in 1967, minus the three two-barrel Rochesters. A single Quadrajets was used as on the normal 442's, and a special coded WOG turbo 400 transmission was offered. The '67 "W" car was the first to offer the famous red plastic inner fender liners which would grace the W-30's through the '71 model year. The 1968 Hurst/Olds received these also, as a gift from John Beltz; then Chief Engineer at Olds.

The next batch of "W" options arrived in 1968. They included options on the 350

cubic inch Cutlass and the 455 cid Toronados. The Toro received the W-34 Outside Air Induction Package which included a special camshaft that added 25 horses to the standard 375 hp 455; a modified turbo-Hydramatic transmission, a higher axle ratio and dual exhausts.

In January Olds introduced the second new "W" Package for '68, the W-31 Ram Rod 350. Called the Ram Rod in its first year only, the W-31 received the same type of hop-up tricks that gave the big brother W-30's their mean disposition at the dragstrips. All internal engine parts were critically balanced and selected for a looser (read shorter break-in) fit. "A" size pistons were used in "D" size bores which gave the 350's a three-thousandths of an inch clearance right out of the box. The '66-7 W-30 cam specs were chosen, enabling the small block to breathe through the larger two inch intake and inch and five eighths exhaust valves borrowed from the 88 and 98 455's. The Ram Rods required a special Q-Jet, with larger primary jets to fuel the hi-po Rocket engine; along with dual exhausts, which was a mandatory option. The dual snorkel air cleaner and under bumper scoops were taken from the W-30 parts bin. Manual transmissions were the only way you could go on the '68 W-31 with 3.91 or 4.33 gear sets supplied in the 12 bolt Olds rear ends.

Some reliable sources claim with authority that the W-31's produced up to 15 more horsepower than the advertised 325 hp listed. Both the W-31 and W-34 packages would be offered through the 1970 model year - not to return in 1971.

Another 1968 first was the W-36 Rallye stripe standard on the W-30 and obtainable on the normal 442's. This was a one year option not returning in '69. A W-37, Deluxe Interior Decor option was listed also in this year. In '71 this code stood for the Dual Disc Clutch.

Probably the most famous but least seen "W" Packages of 1968 were the W-45 and W-46 Hurst/Olds. The W-45 referred to the non air conditioned version that utilized the Ram Rod 350's 308 degree duration cam; and carburetor, 442 exhaust manifolds, W-30 heads, turbo 400 transmission, and distributor, plus the 3.91 posi differential. The W-46 offered air conditioning along with a milder 286 degree cam, 442 Q-Jet, heads, distributor, exhaust manifolds, W-30 turbo 400 transmission, and 3.08 posi gears. Both versions carried the W-30 red

fender liners, distinct Peruvian silver paint with black accents pinstriped in white, H/O emblems on the front fenders, deck lid and dashboard; and a Hurst Dual Gate shifter. Most of the '68 H/O's had real wood inserts on their dashboards along with factory wood rimmed steering wheels. Superstock II six inch wheels rounded out the package fitted with Goodyear G-70x14 white striped tires. Power front disc brakes and heavy duty cooling (V-01 on W-45, Y-72 on W-46) were mandatory options.

1969 brought a host of new "W" options to add to the expansive list. The 325 hp 350 W-31 was still obtainable, as was the 360 hp 400 cid W-30 and 400 hp W-34 455 Toronado. The W-46 Hurst/Olds brought 912 new units out to an eager public; boasting 380 hp with or without air conditioning. A new 350 hp 400 cid package was offered as the W-32 Engine Induction System for street use (The W-30 and W-31 were geared for off road use). The W-32 required a Turbo 400 as the only transmission and could not be had with air conditioning. The new W-42 dual striped hood was part of the package and heavy duty cooling (V-01 or V-02), limited slip differential with 3.91, 4.33, or 3.42 gears, and PK5 Goodyear G-70's were mandatory options. The Forced Air Induction System from the W-30/31 completed the W-32 package. Remember the standard '68 and '69 442's with Turbo 400's delivered 325 hp and the manual gearboxes got you 350 horses prior to the W-32 Package.

An unusual "W" option of '69 was the W-39 seatbelt option consisting of deluxe lap and shoulder belts costing \$12.11 with buckets and \$13.69 with a bench seat.

The "W" option list really grew in 1970 to a total of ten. The W-30 and W-31 were still high performance packages on the 442 and Cutlass cars respectively, with the W-32 becoming an option on the Cutlass Supremes. A 455 two-barrel (later becoming a four-barrel) carb with dual exhausts and highway gears was the basis of the W-32 in '70 with unique SX emblems affixed to the front fenders. It was sort of an upgraded version of the '67-8 Turnpike Cruiser option featuring a large engine with a two-barrel carburetor and low axle ratio for highway cruising.

The W-34 Toro package was still available, called the Toronado GT in its final year. A new engine package was the W-33 Police Package offered on the Olds 88 series only. This 390 hp option was basically the same as

the Toro GT engine-wise; using the normal 455 with a hotter cam, larger carburetor jetting and dual exhausts.

Other new "W" options for 1970 were the W-25 Ram Air Fiberglass Hood available on A-bodies with four-barrel V-8 engines and included with W-30 and W-31. It was a mandatory option on the W-45 Rallye 350. The W-26 Dual Gate Shifter, previously reserved for the Hurst/Olds, became available on all A-bodies with a center console. The W-27 Aluminum Axle Carrier became a one year option on the W-30, W-31 and W-32's only; and later on the Rallye 350 when it was introduced. Many were changed back to the standard cast iron units because they couldn't hold up under severe usage. The W-27 Axle Housing Cover became a dealer installed option through 1971, and is a popular reproduction item today.

Another interesting "W" option was introduced on the A-body coupes in 1970. The W-35 Rear Deck Spoiler first seen on the '69 Hurst/Olds was now obtainable on all coupes and mandatory with the Rallye 350; the factory literature suggests.

The old W-45 Hurst/Olds option number from 1968 was resurrected in '70 for the wild yellow Rallye 350 Package. This package was available on the F-85 and Cutlass models with a 310 hp Rocket 350 cid four-barrel engine. Special urethane covered bumpers in body color were featured along with special stripes and decals. Other mandatory options included N34 - Sport Steering Wheel, D35 - Outside Sport Mirrors, FE2 - Rallye Suspension, and N10 - Dual Exhausts.

An unrelated "W" option for 1970 was the WJ3 option of custom leather trim that was not an A-body option.

1971 saw a reduction in the performance market; and as a result the "W" option list was downsized. The fabulous W-31 was no longer offered, nor was the 400 hp Toronado W-34. The W-32 SX became the Y-79 Performance Package and it would be dropped in 1972. The W-27 became an axle cover only, boasting cooler rear axle temperatures. The W-30 and W-33 survived intact; but had to drop their compression ratio in order to do so. The W-25, W-26 and W-35 were also listed on the order blanks in '71, but the W-35 would not appear the following year.

A new entry in 1971 was the W-37 Dual Plate Clutch available with four-speed transmission only. This superb option, used previously on the L-88 Corvette, was

described by Olds engineers as "in a class by itself", and could not even be compared to the single plate units! It was that good. It would be offered again in '72 only with the 455 cid engine.

As the trend continued to decrease the high performance market, the "W" options again suffered losses. The W-29 number reappeared as an option on the Cutlass and Cutlass S hardtops and coupes, and on the Cutlass Supreme convertibles. Oldsmobile didn't even bother to include the 442 numerals on the glove box door as in the previous years. The W-30 was still on the list, but not if you lived in California; and only if you ordered W-29. W's 25, 26 and 37 also survived; and a new "W" was the W-39 - Hurst Three Speed Performance Shifter.

The W-45 and W-46 Hurst/Olds numbers became a reality again in 1972 with W-45 offering a G91 - 3.23 axle ratio, and W-46 equating to a posi 3.42 gear set. The W-30 was available with the Hurst Package. The final addition in '72 was the WM4 - Heavy Duty Battery which was not shown as offered with the A-body Oldses.

Sadly, 1973 brought only the W-29 - 442 Appearance And Handling Package, which was the same basic offering as in '72; and the W-45 Hurst/Olds with its 250 hp 455 V-8. The WM4 battery was a carryover from 1972.

The W-29 442 package would last a few more years based on the Cutlass S format and the 1974 - '75 H/O's would carry the W-30 and W-25 codes on their front fenders now designating either a 455 or 350 cid power plant. The 1979 Hurst/Olds boasted W-30 decals also, but the 350 was the biggest offering that year. Never would the heyday years of 1966 through '72 repeat themselves when the "W" machine was a respected entry in the Muscle Car arena.

