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The opening pages of

1968 Oldsmobile 442 Restoration Guide

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Factory-Correct Restoration Reference

1968 Oldsmobile 442 Restoration Guide

Model Year 1968

Model	Oldsmobile 442 (Holiday coupe, Sports Coupe, conv.)
Platform	GM A-body
Engines	400 V8 (350/325 hp) / W-30 400 (360 hp) / H/O 455
Transmissions	Muncie 4-speed / Turbo Hydra-matic 400
Notable	First year as its own model; first Hurst/Olds

Every specification in this guide was checked against factory literature, marque references, period road tests, and documented survivor cars. Where sources disagree or the record is silent, this guide says so rather than guessing.

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Inside This Guide

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Chapter 1 — Oldsmobile and the 4-4-2 Idea

The digits arrived in 1964 — four-barrel carburetor, four-speed gearbox, dual exhausts — as an option package on the Cutlass. 1968 is the year the training wheels came off: the 4-4-2 became a model in its own right, on a completely redesigned A-body with the fastback profile the whole industry was chasing. Three cars wear the badge — Holiday coupe, Sports Coupe, and convertible — all of them on the 112-inch two-door wheelbase, all of them powered by some tune of the 400, and all of them sharing the year with a silver interloper that broke GM's own rules: the first Hurst/Olds, 515 cars carrying a 455 the factory wasn't allowed to install. Knowing which 1968 car you actually have is the whole game, and it is decided by the VIN, the cowl tag, and the casting numbers — in that order.

Chapter 2 — What Makes 1968 Different

Four facts frame the year. First, standalone status: a 1968 442 is a series, not an option — the VIN's 44 prefix is the model itself, where a 1964–67 car is a Cutlass with a package. Second, the engine is the new long-stroke 400 (3.87-inch bore, 4.25-inch stroke), offered in three factory states of tune from 290 to 360 horsepower (Chapter 4). Third, the styling details are one-year tells: horizontal taillights (1969 went vertical), no center tooth in the grille (that is a 1969 addition), parking lamps splitting each headlight pair, federally mandated side-marker lights in their first year, and the ignition switch still on the dash — the locking column is a 1969 change. Fourth, the W-30 breathes through scoops at the front of the car, not through the hood: the fiberglass hood belongs to 1970, and bolting one onto a '68 makes a tribute, not a restoration.



Chapter 3 — VIN and Cowl-Tag Decoding

The VIN sits at the base of the windshield, driver's side, and follows the family pattern: **3** (Oldsmobile), **44** (the 442 series itself — in 1968 the digits are the model, not an option on a Cutlass), body code **87** Holiday coupe / **67** convertible / **77** Sports Coupe, **8** for 1968, the assembly-plant letter (M Lansing, E Linden, Z Fremont; Oshawa-built cars come from Canada), and the sequential number. New for 1968, that sequential number is also stamped on the engine block and transmission case — the three stamps must agree on a matching-numbers car.

The cowl tag adds the Fisher Body story: ST68 and the body-style number (34487 on a Holiday coupe, 34477 Sports Coupe, 34467 convertible), the Fisher body sequence — assigned before the VIN and **not** expected to match it — trim code, paint codes, and the build date. A documented example from a real car: a Linden-built Sports Coupe tag reads ST 68 34477 BL 286, trim 947. Paint codes in 1968 are **letters**, not the numbers that begin in 1969 — code A is black, R is Scarlet, Y is Saffron, S is Jade Gold, N is Flambeau Burgundy — and the codes are year-specific, so a 1969 chart will mislead you on a '68 car. Read the tag as the car's birth certificate for color and trim, then verify performance options against the hardware and the paperwork — neither the VIN nor the tag alone proves a W-30.

Chapter 4 — The 400: One Engine, Three Tunes

Engine	Rating	Torque	Notes
400 4-barrel (manual)	350 hp	440 lb-ft	Standard engine, stick tune
400 4-barrel (automatic)	325 hp	440 lb-ft	Standard engine, automatic tune
400 Turnpike Cruising	290 hp	—	2-barrel, 9.0:1, regular fuel
400 W-30	360 hp	440 lb-ft	Chapter 5
455 Hurst/Olds (W-45/W-46)	390 hp @ 5,000	500 lb-ft @ 3,200	Chapter 6

The spread is the story. The standard car's rating splits by transmission — 350 horsepower with the manual, 325 with the Turbo Hydra-matic — a factory tune difference documented in period sources, not a misprint, and a standard car with an automatic should not be 'corrected' to the manual tune during a rebuild without documenting the change. At the other end of the showroom sat the Turnpike Cruising option: a two-barrel 400 at 290 horsepower, compression lowered to 9.0:1 so it would run on regular fuel — Oldsmobile's honest answer for the long-commute buyer, and a genuinely different engine specification to restore, not a defect to tune away. The small-block W-car of these years, the 350 Ram Rod/W-31, was a Cutlass-line package, not a 442 option; it belongs to the Cutlass guide, and a 'W-31 442' claim on a 1968 car is a badge story, not a build record.

Chapter 5 — The W-30 Package in Depth

The 1968 W-30 (1,911 built — the package's best year before 1970, and more than were sold in 1969) is a system, and a correct car shows all of it:

- **Force-Air induction** — scoops flanking the headlights feed air to a sealed air cleaner. This is the 1968 system; there is no factory W-30 hood for this year.
- **Special cylinder heads and a high-output camshaft** — the internal half of the package, worth ten rated horsepower over the standard 400 and a great deal more character.
- **Red plastic inner fender liners** — the lightweight W-car signature, the first thing a knowledgeable buyer looks for and the first thing to inspect for cracks at the mounting holes.