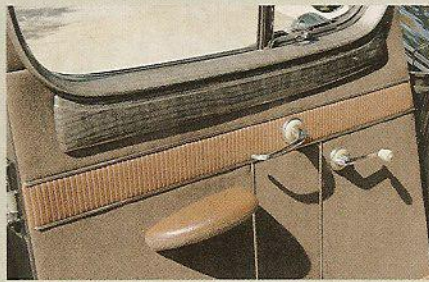
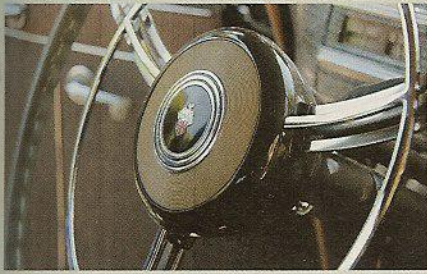




Air conditioning discharge duct is behind the back seat. Vent window is for milder days



Though car is a 120, interior is deluxe. Fabrics are rich and understated



Banjo steering wheel was an option and absorbed the shocks of marginal roads



Packard did not offer full wheel covers in 1940. Beauty rings, whitewalls were extra

The 120's center-point steering is very light—all the more surprising when you consider the car's hefty 3,800-pound weight. In fact the 120's steering is so effortless and well balanced that the British publication *Motor*, referring to its road test of a 1936 model, stated: "The steering, altogether rather low geared, is so exceedingly easy to operate that one can spin the wheel by engaging a forefinger with one of the spokes. Nevertheless, the steering remains quite steady at speed, has a nice self-centering action, and does not convey road shocks back to the hands." No doubt their example was equipped with the optional shock-absorbing banjo steering wheel, as is our 1940 model 120 feature car.

Braking is good with very little nose-dive, and cornering is surprisingly flat for a car of the era, thanks to Packard's patented Saf-T-Flex independent front suspension, later copied by Roll-Royce and used on the Ford Bronco. The old touring sedan is quiet and sure of itself even at freeway speeds of 60 to 70 mph. The long, tall aristocratic hood, crowned with Packard's optional cormorant ornament, gives a feeling of majestic elegance as we motor along in living room-sofa comfort.

The car is tall by today's standards, with no transmission hump in the floor, front or rear. As a result, you look down on most modern traffic and are eye-to-eye only with the SUV crowd. But even with your eyes fixed firmly on the road, you are aware of the admiring stares of

those around you. After all, these cars were styled to make the less fortunate feel, well, less fortunate.

The factory-installed air conditioning—an industry first in 1940—is quiet and effective, though it might be a little drafty for those in the back seat: The cool air outlet is right behind the passengers' necks, which was standard practice on most cars for many years. Our feature car is one of only five 120 models known to have been so equipped. At first, in late 1939, the Weather Conditioner, as Packard called it, was offered on all models,

but by the spring of 1940, installations were restricted to the Senior cars.

And yes, air conditioning was available as an aftermarket add-on as far back as 1934, in the form of a large box that hung off the rear of the car on a luggage rack; Packard was the first to integrate it into the design of the automobile. Cars destined to be equipped with a Weather Conditioner were sent to the Bishop and Babcock Manufacturing Company in Cleveland, Ohio, to have the unit installed. Needless to say, at \$310, it was not a particularly popular option, especially in the company's less expensive models.

Even though it works well, the Weather Conditioner is not like a modern system. The compressor runs all the time because there is no clutch, so the faster you go, the cooler the car's interior becomes. But the system works as a heater just by actuating a lever inside the car. In fact, it is essentially the mother of all automotive climate control systems; Cadillac followed suit with their own air-conditioning system in 1941, but such systems did not come into general use in most cars until the 1950s.

In the winter, the belt for the air-conditioning compressor could be removed to save fuel and increase power, and the car's conventional heater could then be employed as required. But in my experience, unless the weather is quite cold, the English wool broadcloth interior and the well-designed body will keep you pretty cozy.

While it couldn't quite match Oldsmobile's—and later, Cadillac's—completely automatic Hydra-Matic trans-

