



Chauffeur-driven ZIL III tools down freeway skirting Kremlin (left) and St. Basil's (right). ZIL seems a fairly accurate copy

of '56 Packard, while there's no mistaking ZIM (behind) for a '41. Both cars are reserved for high officials of the Communist party.

by Robert Katz

NO TIE-UPS on a Russian highway, no speed limits, no radar, no tolls — and if you're traveling long distances, you can stop off at a place on the side of the road for 50c a night. You can buy gas for 15c a gallon, easily talk your way out of a ticket (even if the cop were adamant, the fine would be only about \$1), and in town, you can

find a parking spot in front of any door you're headed for. There's only one catch to it all: Chances are that in the USSR, you wouldn't own a car.

In Moscow, a city with a population almost as large as New York's and about twice that of Chicago or Los Angeles, there are less than 100,000 privately owned automobiles — about one car for every 20 families.

However the Soviets may feel about private property, they have no grudge

at the moment against buying and selling cars. The government has steadily been increasing annual production (1964 output: 185,000 cars, 418,000 trucks and buses), but output remains far behind the U.S.

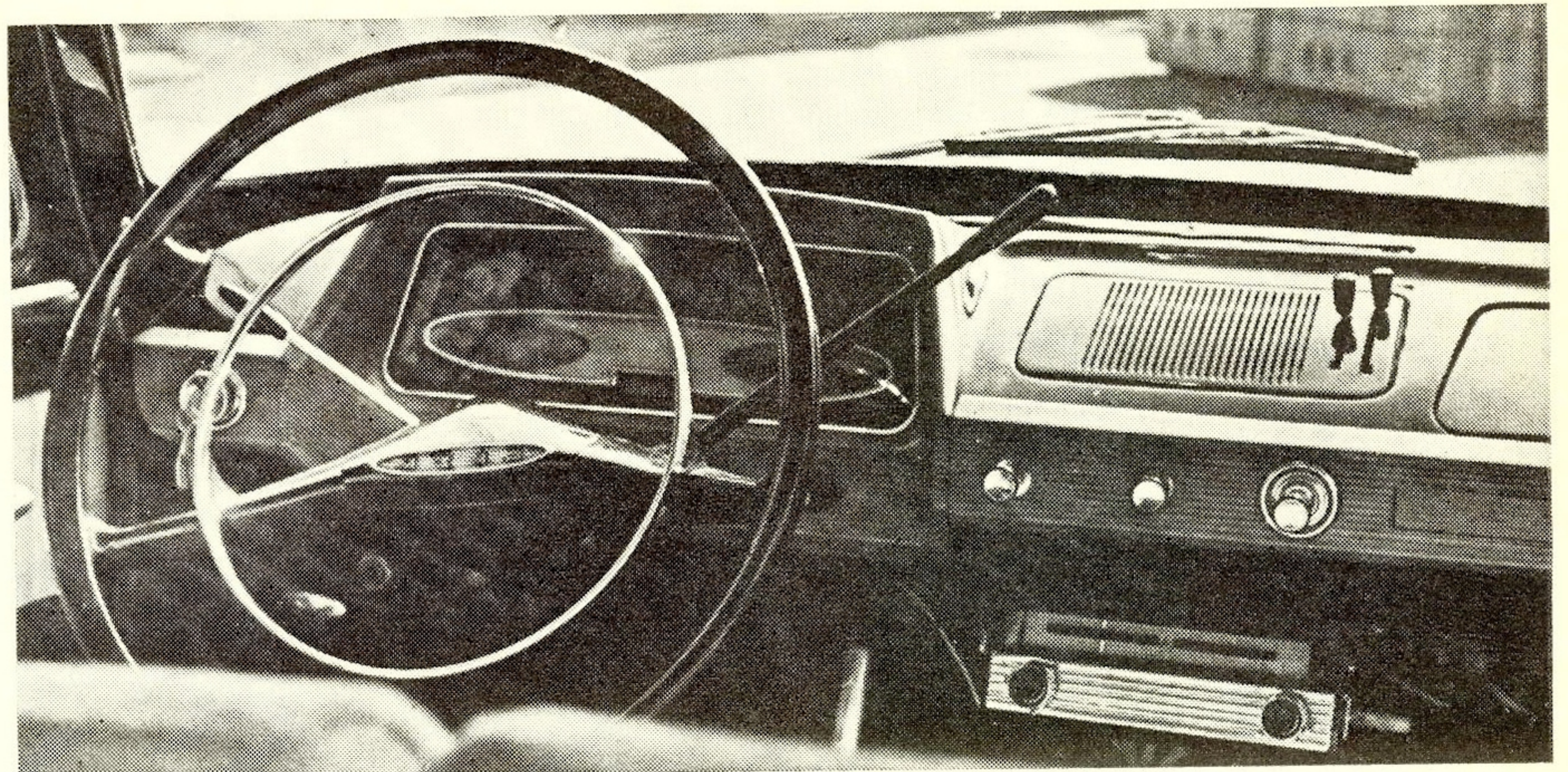
Soviet planners in the Khrushchev era frowned on individually owned cars, dreaming of a car-rental system integrated with expanded public transportation. But the Brezhnev-Kosygin leadership announced in April that they'd

RUSSIA'S CARS

★ ★ ★ ★ Ivan's Drivin's Limited by Iron Curtain Iron ★ ★ ★ ★



Moskvitch 408 claims wide popularity in Russia, turns out to be the country's most up-to-date styling sample. Moskvitches of the early '50s were copies of Opels of the late '30s.

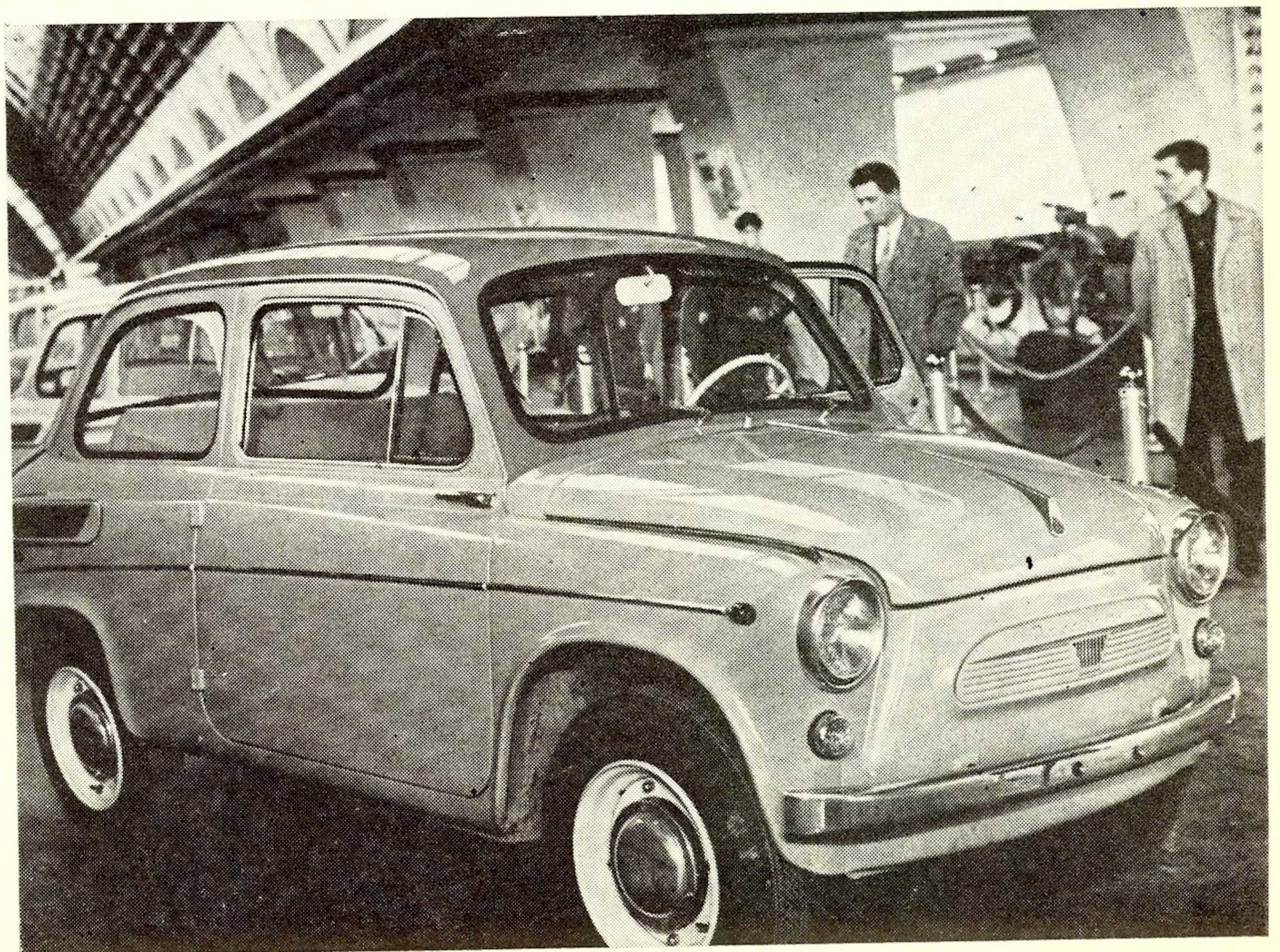


Moskvitch's interior hides no surprises. This car seats five, has an excellent heater and space for a radio. Simple engineering and sturdy construction make repairs easy.

scrap that scheme for a mass-production plan. Kosygin told the planners that many Russians had opposed Khrushchev's "obstinacy" to the ownership of private cars. "Everyone was expected to ride in buses," he said. "Was that a good idea? After all, it led to many executives being forced to use trucks for business trips."

Ordering stepped-up production, the Russians have two aims in mind: to meet the needs at home and to earn foreign exchange on the world market. As for the Russian man-in-the-subway, he's more and more turning an eager eye on a brand-new 1965 Zaporozhets or even the more expensive, VW-sized Moskvitch 408.

These are the two most popular cars in the Soviet Union. They sell in Moscow's lone showroom for about 2000 and 3000 rubles respectively. At the exchange rate of \$1.11 to the ruble, this would be \$2220 and \$3330. The standard model of the rear-engined Zaporozhets looks and rides like an Italian Fiat 600. The four-cylinder Moskvitch is a responsive little family car (seats



Fiat-like Zaporozhets uses air-cooled V-4 engine in the rear, four-wheel independent suspension. Most privately owned Russian cars are Zaporozhets — the smallest they make.

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continued

four) that handles well in the city and on the road.

But if you're an average Russian working man, at the moment you'd more likely be looking than buying. In the first place, you wouldn't need a car to get to work. Russian cities are fairly compact, with hardly any suburban spread. Also, public transportation is adequate. Secondly, while the cost isn't impossibly beyond the average worker's reach, he'd have a greater interest in acquiring the more essential and more useful consumer goods now becoming available in increasing quantities and at lower prices — items like furniture, refrigerator, TV, etc.

If you insist, though, on driving yourself, all you need to buy one of the low-priced two is the cash (not just a down payment but the full purchase price — in the USSR, it's pay now and drive later) and, with a waiting list of three to nine months, you'll have to practice a little bit of patience.

Let's say you're interested in the Moskvitch 408. You're probably mak-

ing about 50 rubles a week down at the plant — not enough to be thinking about a 3000-ruble car. But your wife — like many Russian women — is working, too, and earning another 30. With nothing taken out for taxes, pension, etc., your family take-home pay is 80 rubles a week. Your food bill is high — maybe 30 rubles a week — but your rent's way down at around 7% of your income, and there are no medical or educational expenses. In short, your rubles go a long way and, cutting corners, you might be able to bank 10 or 15 rubles a week. With interest and a couple of raises, you can have your Moskvitch in 3½ years or so.

If you yearn for the next-sized car, you'd turn to the Volga, a comfortable five-seater produced at the Gorky Auto Works. Priced at over 4000 rubles, the Volga line features a station wagon model, the Universal, that resembles the Rambler of the early '60s. The Volga is also widely used as taxis and at the car-rental outlets of Intourist, the state travel organization. Tourists pay about five rubles a day and five kopeks (100 kopeks to the ruble) a mile for a rented Volga.

One of the newer "medium-priced" cars is the Chaika (which means *Sea*

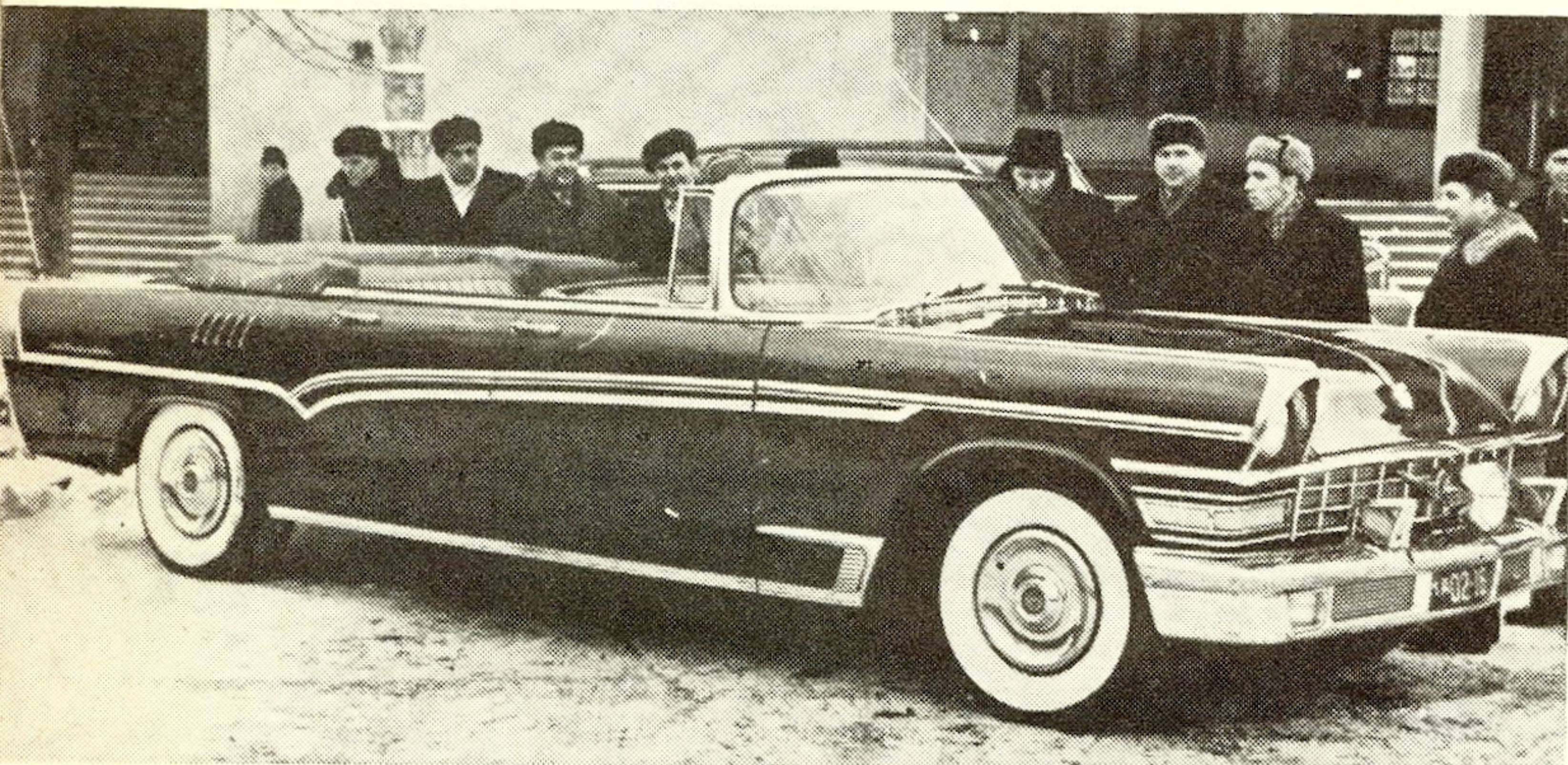
Gull). The Soviet big cars, provided by the state for the use of high diplomats and top executives, include the ZIM and the ZIL — named for the letters of the factories that produce them. Both cars are comfortable and luxurious, but the ZIL is the favorite of Kremlin leaders. The old ZIM was a direct copy of the 1941 Packard; the new ZIL looks much like the 1954 Packard.

As for Russian sports cars, they're in the experimental stage. A number of specialized automobiles are manufactured, such as those for handicapped people.

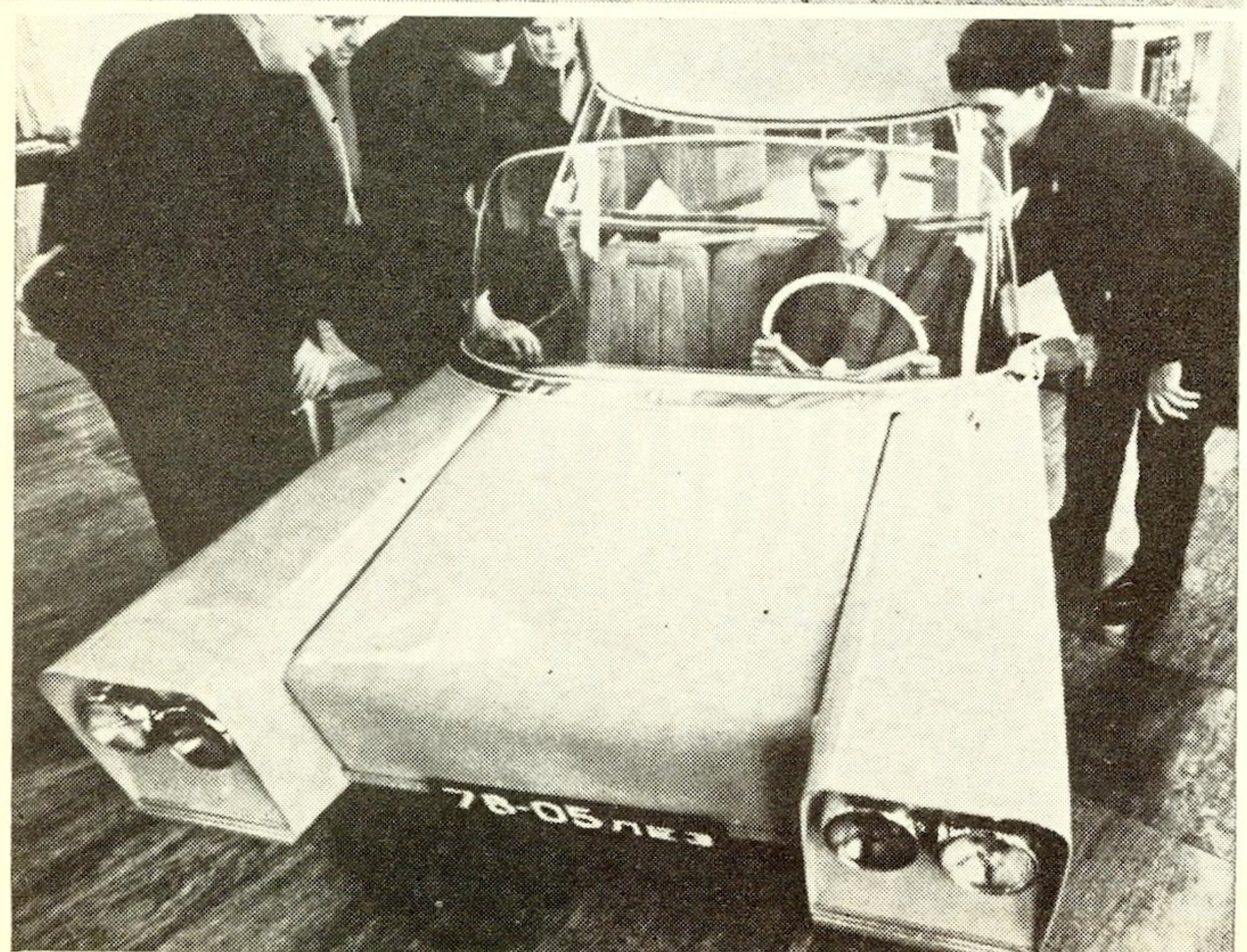
Soviet cars are available in a variety of colors, with the lighter paints gaining in popularity. Almost all have radios, and none (in this cold northern land) is without an efficient heater. Automatic transmissions, power steering, and power brakes are rare, and dashboards, depending on the car, offer the usual array of equipment, including cigarette lighters and electric clocks.

The spare parts shortage — especially for foreign cars — still exists, but it's slowly improving. Prices for auto parts are high (a tire for a Moskvitch may cost over 30 rubles). But somehow the cars keep moving, and with the demand for used cars greater than the supply,

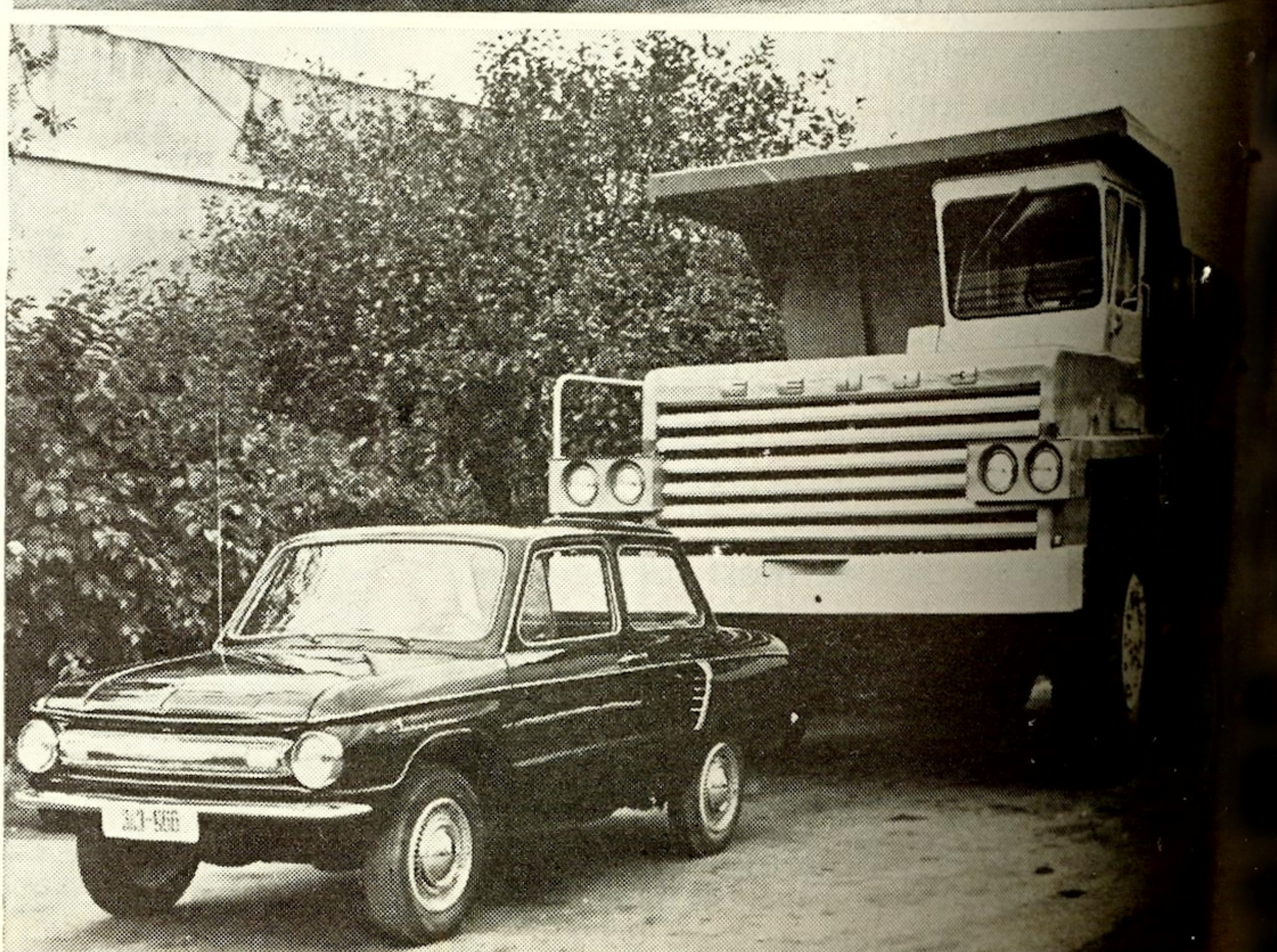
Luxurious ZIL attracts crowds everywhere. Convertible models grace parades. ZILs sport V-8 engines, automatic transmissions.



Volga makes Russia's only station wagon. It's also available as a four-door sedan, serves widely as a rental car and taxi.



An attraction at the Exhibition of Achievements, this Maliutka dream car was built of fiberglass and motorcycle components.



Custom-bodied Zaporozhets poses in front of huge Belaz dumper. Russians produce many more trucks and buses than automobiles.

Soviet drivers know they can always get rid of even a parts-deficient car. There are no used-car lots in the Soviet Union — at least, not any of the Honest Ernie variety. It's against the law to sell a car at a profit — although no one claims that all Russians obey all laws. Sales are arranged privately or through a state agency.

The principal roads in the Soviet Union range from fair to excellent, but everything seems so far away. Moscow to Leningrad on the four-lane concrete highway is a hard day's drive. There are organized motor tours, with stopovers in major cities, that take nearly a month of driving to complete. All the best roads lead to Moscow. Gas stations are spaced about 125 miles apart, and they carry high-grade fuels of various octanes.

Soviet driving rules are simple: keep right, obey signals and signs, drive at a safe speed, no horn-honking in cities, give pedestrians and emergency vehicles the right of way. Traffic lights at main intersections usually have two greens on

top (one meaning go, two indicating left turn permissible), yellow, and red at the bottom.

While many increasingly affluent Russians may dream of their own shiny new Moskvitch parked out by their doors, it isn't yet clear whether the country as a whole intends to compete with the United States in this field. Transportation in the Soviet-planned economy is viewed as an economic and social need consisting of many parts. The Russians say this means the development of rail and air networks linking up the vast distances of their country, plus expanding transport facilities to include not only cars but subways, buses, hydrofoil river transports, and monorails.

In 1961, when Nikita Khrushchev was still in the driver's seat, the Communist Party adopted a 20-year program that included stepped-up development of all transport facilities along these lines. The government viewed the use of private cars as a secondary, non-essential part of an overall transportation picture. The post-Khrushchev plan-

ners have new thoughts about two-car garages and cloverleaf highways.

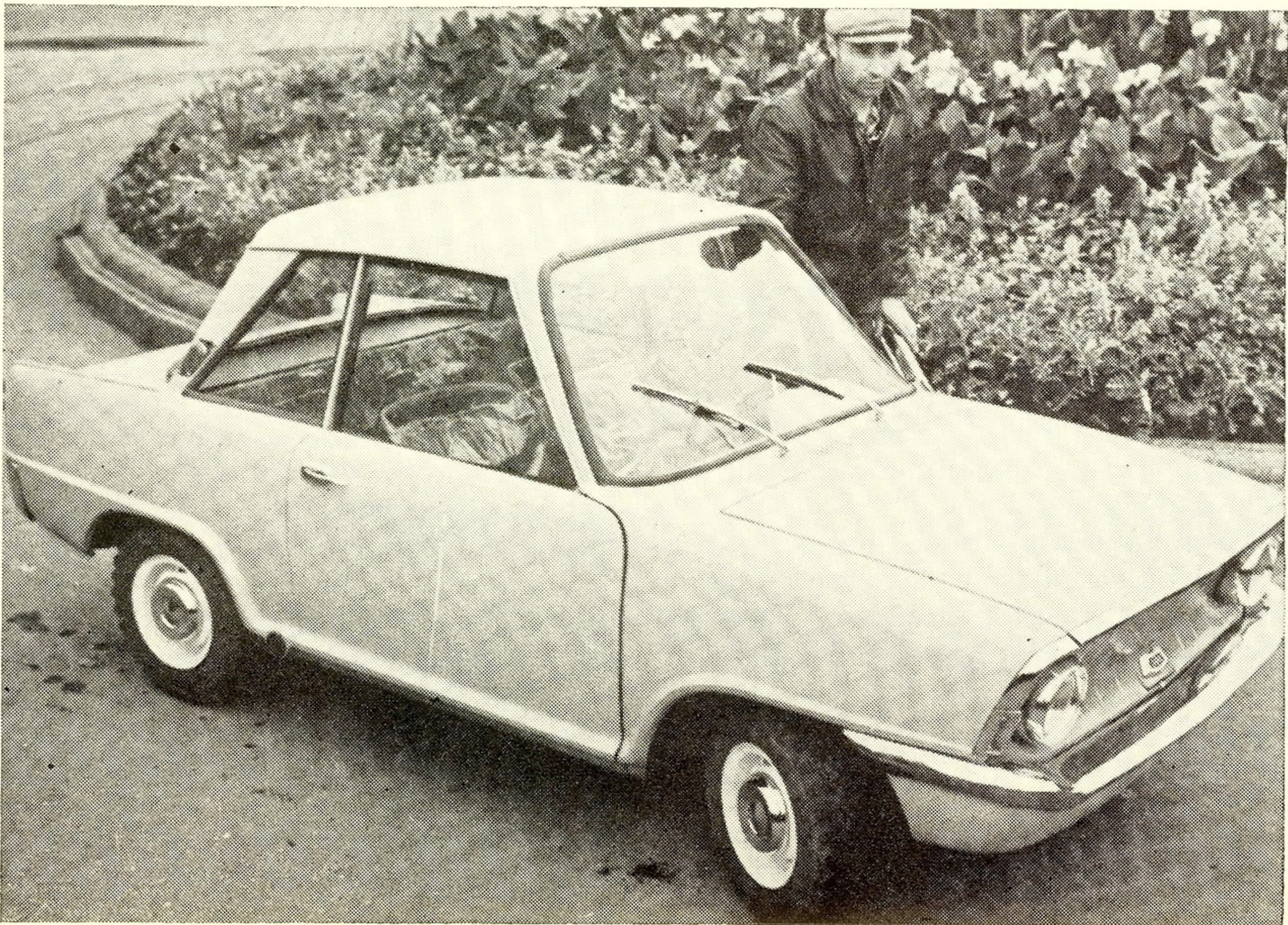
Car production meanwhile continues at a slow growth rate, helping bit by bit to satisfy the demand at home for automobiles and, through export, helping to earn valuable foreign exchange. The Soviet Union sells about a third of its annual car and truck output abroad. To attract foreign customers, the government has dropped car prices to considerably lower levels than the cost at home. Soviet vehicles are on the road in Eastern Europe, China, and in Western countries, too. Finland, for example, has long been using the obsolete Russian Pobeda (forerunner of the Volga) for taxis.

The new Soviet blueprint for a car in every driveway must certainly have high appeal to the bus-weary Russians. But to some Americans who've run out of parking spots, the old plan (which foresaw automobile driving a weekend lark) had a certain Khrushchevian flair that excited the imagination. Khrushchev never said what he would've done with Sunday traffic, but if cars for pleasure driving had become available through cheap rentals, private ownership of cars might have gone the way of the Model T.

The logical conclusion of the diminishing use of cars as an essential means of transportation would be a "return" to the days before Henry Ford started the whole thing. /MT



(LEFT) This is one version of the Chaika, looking very much like a blend of Rambler and Checker. Another model has a 1960 Cadillac grille. It uses some ZIL body parts.



(BELOW) Experimental Sputnik coupe isn't in production yet, uses 15-hp two-banger in rear. It's meant for family transport.

PHOTOS BY SOVFOTO, TASS, ANP



SPECIFICATIONS—Major Russian Models

name of car	whb. ins.	no. of cyls.	displ. ins.	hp max.	trans.
Zaporozhets	80	V-4	46	23	4-spd.
Moskvitch 408	93	IL-4	83	50	4-spd.
Volga	107	IL-4	150	80	3-spd.
Chaika	128	V-8	341	195	autom.
ZIL III	148	V-8	372	220	autom.