

# ROAD TEST

## FORD'S Ranch Wagon

*One of the "surprise" cars of the year in speed and economy—and can't be beat in giving you the most for your money*

CAR TESTED: <u>FORD V-8</u> <u>RANCH WAGON</u>	
TEST CONDITIONS	
Altitude	<u>550</u> feet
Temperature	<u>88</u> degrees
Wind	<u>8</u> mph
Gasoline	<u>STANDARD PREMIUM</u>
ACCELERATION AND TOP SPEED	
MPH	0-30 0-45 0-60 30-50 40-60
Seconds	<u>5</u> <u>8.5</u> <u>14.4</u> <u>5.6</u> <u>7.8</u>
Standing 1/4 mile	<u>19.5</u> seconds
Fastest one-way run	<u>108</u> mph
Top speed avg. 4 runs	<u>104</u> mph
SPEEDOMETER CORRECTIONS	
Car Speedometer	Actual Speeds
20	<u>18</u>
30	<u>27</u>
40	<u>37</u>
50	<u>46</u>
60	<u>55</u>
70	<u>65</u>
80	<u>74</u>
90	<u>84</u>
100	<u>93</u>
BRAKING DISTANCE	
MPH	Stopping Distance
30	<u>50</u> feet
45	<u>98</u> feet
60	<u>176</u> feet
FUEL CONSUMPTION	
MPH	Average
30	<u>26</u> mpg
45	<u>21</u> mpg
60	<u>18</u> mpg

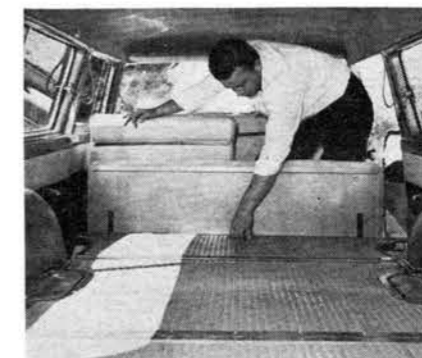
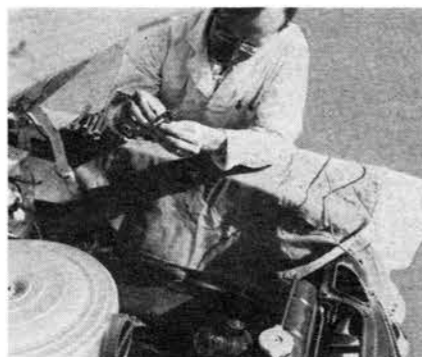


PERFORMANCE of the Ranch Wagon, quite literally, takes the car right out of its class, particularly in top speed and in fuel economy. As the road testers aimed the car at a seven-mile straightaway, someone said, "I'll bet it won't break a hundred." It did—and more.

With an electric fifth wheel measuring the road, the needle on the Weston speedometer edged up to 100 mph . . . then 103 . . . 105 . . . 107 . . . and, finally, 108 as a curve came rushing up.

Equally sensational was the 26 mpg at a steady 30 mph. Other mileage figures up to 60 mph were exceptional.

Some of the factors that contribute to the impressive showing appear in connection with the engine report on the opposite page. The results, however, indicate that driving a station wagon means no important sacrifice in performance in any department, although the acceleration figures are not quite as spectacular as top end and economy. Yet they compare quite favorably with those obtained by the better vehicles in the big-car classes. It's obvious that in 1955 performance knows no price barriers.



HANDLING, ride and braking qualities of the Custom Ranch Wagon are as good as the strictly passenger-bodied Fords. And, for 1955, that means they are hard to beat. The ball-joint front suspension has been refined each year and shows up to best advantage on wide, sweeping curves. Benefits of the power steering setup are appreciated most in city traffic and during parking maneuvers. Some tire rub was noticed when wheels were cramped sharply.

Riding comfort of station wagons has been questioned at times. While there are no standard items of test equipment to make a precision check on this feature, the personal reaction after many hundreds of miles behind the wheel is that such criticism is without foundation. The only exception to this may be found in the third or rear seat in the eight-passenger wagons (not a subject of this test report). Ford takes credit for introducing the four-way power seat into the low-priced field and it's an item that should be a must on anyone's list.

ENGINE of the Ranch Wagon was the ohv V-8, now in its second year. And it received more than ordinary attention during this road test. The reason was the remarkable top speed and economy figures which were obtained. In fact, following these runs, one of the crew (above photo) made a special check of plugs, compression and other factors to establish the fact that the engine was strictly stock. It was.

Much of the credit apparently belongs to the "power package," which is available (for \$35) as a factory-installed extra on Ford station wagons and Fairlane models. While the engine seemed a little flat at low rpm and stalled occasionally, it obviously is a bargain in horsepower. The extras include a bigger air cleaner, four-barrel carburetor, cylinder heads with .9 higher compression ratio, special spark and intake manifold. It increases the rating from the standard 162 to 182 hp at 4600 rpm, boosts torque by about four per cent. Improvement is greatest at high rpm. Dual exhausts are stock.

INTERIOR finish in the Ranch Wagon is illustrated by the door opened for inspection in the accompanying photo. It should be seen in color to be appreciated. Plastic and basket-weave vinyls are bright, but easy to clean with ordinary solvents. Floor of the load space is covered in special linoleum so that it can be swept and hosed when necessary. Quality control in the cars seems to be higher than it has been for years and the only imperfection noted during a careful inspection of the test car was a slightly wider-than-it-should-be gap at the leading edge of the right-hand door. It, however, admitted no drafts or water to the passenger compartment.

Ford, like practically all manufacturers, is deeply conscious of the feminine influence in car buying. For this reason, it obviously has been paying especial attention to the design and finish of interiors. As a result, the Ranch Wagon (which lists at a surprisingly low price) has a luxury touch that is difficult to surpass for any kind of money.

UTILITY is what people look for in a station wagon. How many actually take advantage of what they buy is an open question. But there's no question that Ford engineers have been ingenious in creating a new kind of popular "convertible" for those who want a passenger-type vehicle with the carrying capacity of a light truck.

As a passenger car, the Ranch Wagon has two bench seats, with the front seat having a divided back like any conventional two-door sedan. Entrance and exit, however, is not too good and compares, in this respect, with a two-door hardtop. (This is eliminated, of course, in the four-door Country Sedans and Country Squire.) With both seats up, the arrangement is highly satisfactory for carrying six passengers comfortably. Only other important difference—common in the two-doors—is the rear side windows which slide open, rather than crank down.

When converting to cargo space, the bottom of the rear seat tilts forward and rests in a vertical position next to the

back of the front seat. The rear seat back is then folded downward and becomes part of the floor. Thus, there are no seats to remove and carry outside the car or leave behind, as in the case of some other types of wagons. The spare tire and jack are located beneath a hinged lid in a recessed compartment next to the rear gate. With the rear counterbalanced, lift door up and the tail gate down, bulky objects up to eight feet long can be carried without extending beyond the car. If even this much load space is inadequate, a luggage rack is available as an accessory for mounting on the roof of the Ranch Wagon. It can be used to handle any gear that doesn't need protection from the weather.

SEE THE NEXT PAGE  
FOR COMPLETE DETAILS  
ON ALL FORD STATION WAGONS

STYLING may seem to be a secondary point with a utility vehicle, but nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to station wagons. As a matter of fact, the "ranchy" trend in living may have as much to do with the Ranch Wagon's present popularity as its all-purpose qualities. Furthermore, the car probably is the only one of purely American origin now in mass production. And its beginnings, as the estate car of wealthy families on Long Island, have enhanced its prestige.

However, it was Ford which first succeeded in wedding the station wagon layout to passenger car styling with results that were esthetically appealing. Functionalism is something often applied to sports car design, but it may have reached a more practical development in the Ranch Wagon than in any of the more exotic machinery found on either side of the Atlantic. It is safe to say that this is the "dream car" of Americans—and they are putting their money on the line to prove it.

## FIVE CHOICES in Ford's 1955 Station Wagon Line



Four doors are feature of both eight-passenger station wagons, but simulated wood is only on the Country Squire.



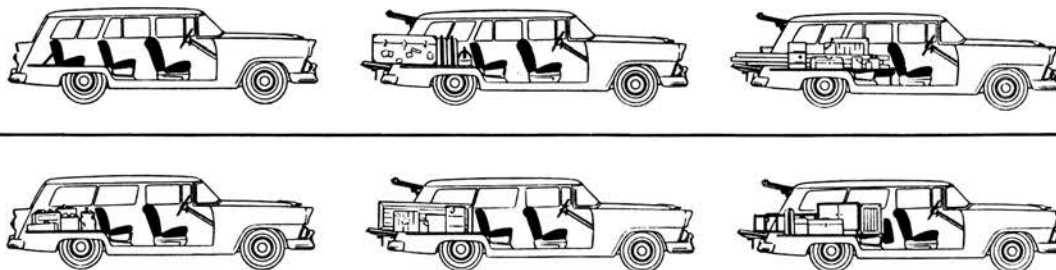
Converting interior of Country Squire and Country Sedan has many variations. Here middle seat folds down for cargo.



View from rear of Squire shows third seat removed. Note that only part of second seat can be folded down if so desired.

**THE EIGHT-PASSENGER** is one of two basic types of station wagons that Ford makes available. (The second type is the six-passenger unit described below.) All other important differences involve the number of doors or degree of custom trim—and the various arrangements add up to five choices in wagons. In the eight-passenger type, there are the Country Squire and the Country Sedan. The Squire costs approximately \$100 more (base price) than the Sedan and for this the buyer gets the simulated wood finish on the side body panels of mahogany-grain type, along with wood-grain glass fibre moldings. Interior arrangement of the Squire and Sedan are identical and some idea can be obtained from the three drawings that appear below, although they do not tell the whole story. The eight-passenger capacity, of course, is obtained by using the three bench-type seats. Advantages over the six-passenger

wagons are many. Not only may two more persons be carried comfortably, but when converted to carrying cargo, the load space is about one foot longer (because the second seat folds flush to the floor, while in the Ranch Wagons, bottom of the second seat only tilts to an upright position against the back of the front seat). However, the third seat in the eight-passenger models does not fold into the floor, but must be removed from the car or carried along with the cargo. An even greater advantage over the Ranch Wagons are the two extra doors, which contribute immensely to accessibility when carrying a cargo and during loading. In use, the variations are many. Space occupied by either or both the second and third seats may be converted to cargo space. And the second seat is divided off center so that either or both sections can be folded into the floor.



**THE SIX-PASSENGER** comes as three different models: Ranch Wagon, Custom Ranch Wagon, or six-passenger Country Sedan. The two Ranch Wagons are alike, except for trim. The Country Sedan has an exterior and four doors, like the eight-passenger Country Sedan described above, but carries an interior arrangement similar to the Ranch Wagons. In the two Ranch Wagons, both front and back seats are of the bench type, with the front divided at the center like any conventional two-door sedan so that the backs tilt forward to permit entry to the rear seat or, if the cargo space is being used, to allow access to the load area. The six-passenger Country Sedan, on the other hand, has the two extra doors to make entry, exit and loading easier. (Base price of the six-passenger Country Sedan is approximately \$50 more than the

Custom Ranch Wagon and \$100 more than the Ranch Wagon.) From this it can be seen that buyers of a station wagon in the Ford line not only have to decide between six- and eight-passenger types, but also between two and four doors, in the various combinations. (The V-8 or six-cylinder overhead-valve engines are optional, also.) It's worth noting, too, that in the two-door models, the side windows in the rear compartment are opened and closed horizontally by sliding, a system not as satisfactory as in the four-door types where conventional cranks raise and lower the windows. The two Ranch Wagons offer maximum utility at a remarkably low price. But when considering the much greater versatility of the eight-passenger types, the rather modest extra cost (especially of the three-seat Country Sedan) seems to make it a better buy.

### SPECIFICATIONS AND PRICES

**ENGINES**—V-8 ohv, bore 3.62, stroke 3.30, displacement 272 cubic inches, horsepower 162 @ 4400 rpm, compression ratio 7.6-to-1. Six-cylinder ohv, bore 3.62, stroke 3.60, displacement 224 cubic inches, horsepower 120 @ 4000 rpm, compression ratio 7.5-to-1. (Power package optional on V-8 includes special heads with 8.5-to-1 compression ratio, four-barrel carburetor, large air cleaner, special intake mani-

fold and spark advance to increase horsepower to 182.) Standard carburetor on V-8 is dual downdraft, on six is single downdraft. Electrical system, six volts. **DIMENSIONS** — Wheelbase 115 inches, tread 58 front and 56 rear, overall length 197, width 75, height 62. **TRANSMISSIONS** — (rear gear ratios indicated) Conventional 4.09 or 4.27 optional, Overdrive 4.27, Fordomatic 3.54. (Note: suspension same as standard Fords, except for rear springs which have two extra leaves.)

(Factory-suggested retail prices include federal taxes and suggested handling and delivery charges, but not transportation costs, state and local taxes, nor optional equipment.) Ranch Wagon, \$2043, Custom Ranch Wagon \$2108, six-passenger Country Sedan \$2156, eight-passenger Country Sedan \$2287, Country Squire \$2391, Fordomatic \$178, Overdrive \$109, radio \$87, heater \$71, power steering \$91, power brakes \$33, V-8 engine \$100 extra, power package \$35. •