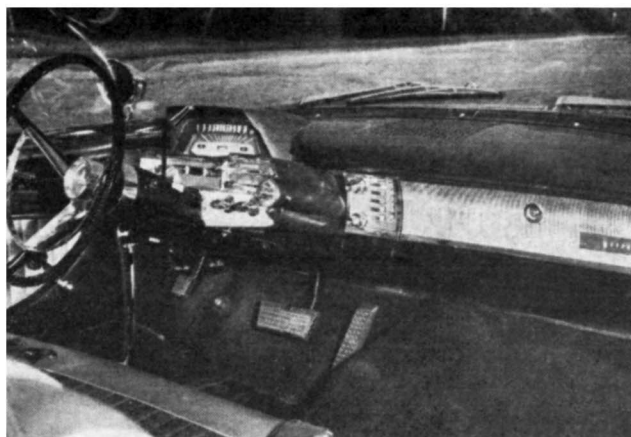




SOMETIMES STYLING REVEALS MORE THAN APPEARANCE AND MERCURY'S SUBDUED LINES HINT AT ITS PERSONALITY CHANGE.

MERCURY has been struggling many years for its own individuality. Once the car was equally at home on the race track or highway. Then came a long period of radical styling changes. Finally in the past few years a steady detuning of performance for better economy with adequate power. This year the Montclair emphasizes quality, ease of handling and smooth roadability. Whether this effect constitutes a better overall car is debatable. One thing is sure, however, the car handles far different than it did five years ago.

Quietness and smoothness keynote Mercury's overall design



MERCURY HAS LONG sought its own identification and resembled at times someone searching for a niche to call his own. Three separate personality changes have marked its recent history and the new model is far different from the Mercury of 1950.

and the car's ride is an excellent example of both. At high speeds the Montclair glides over the road with a minimum of swaying or undulating, yet at slow speeds or on uneven road conditions the suspension is not too stiff to maintain complete comfort.

Inside the passenger compartment at highway speeds the noise level is a subdued hush. In traffic this quietness is maintained and the windows seal tightly, virtually eliminating outside noises.

Much detail thought centered around making the passenger compartment silent this year. For instance the tiny electric motor for the windshield wiper and the heater motor are both located in the engine compartment even though this reduction of sound is seemingly insignificant. The Montclair is not absolutely soundproofed though and some engine noise is transmitted to the passenger compartment. Riders, however, find themselves listening for it and not to it.

The Montclair's weight is poorly distributed for easy steering with 59 per cent on the front wheels. Power steering overcomes this disadvantage and still retains a slight feel of the road. For slow speed maneuvers the Montclair takes full advantage of the power assist by reducing the steering to 3.5 turns lock-to-lock. The car is maneuverable and easy to handle even in parking situations.

The Mercury corners well and this is somewhat surprising considering the heavy front axle loading. This seems to be due to the fact that since the front wheels support more weight their spring rate must be higher, automatically producing a roll stiffness which causes less weight shift in the turn. Of course dashing into a sharp turn at top speeds might cause understeering but it is doubtful if this can be considered a handling drawback. Actually the car has far more latitude than most drivers will ever need.

The test car was equipped with the 310-hp V-8 powerplant which displaces 430 cubic inches, biggest in the Mercury line. This is the largest displacement engine in domestic cars, yet it has as standard equipment a two-barrel carburetor.

Although a bigger capacity carburetor might have improved the acceleration tests, the two-barrel in no way seriously limited the Montclair's power. Instead it seemed to be a sensible solution combining the most desirable features of performance with somewhat better economy.

Getting off the line at traffic lights was more than equal to normal driving situations and at all speeds the Montclair had enough power reserve for passing. The carburetor's restrictive effect on the engine seems to occur only at speeds over 3,000 rpm and is not an important disadvantage.

Coupled with the powerplant was Mercury's Multidrive transmission, a three-speed automatic with torque converter. Although

MERCURY

two driving ranges are choices, either starting in low or second, the best acceleration during the test resulted from using the D-1 range which shifts through all three gears. The shift point from low to intermediate and back is a good selection for traffic speeds and the Mercury does not lug its engine when speeding up after a traffic slowdown.

Comfort and smooth roadability are not exclusive characteristics of Mercury's suspension and almost vibration-free power train. The car's interior is a well developed design which has an efficient and honest adaptation of physical dimensions to passenger comfort.

Front seat entry and exit is not difficult although the Montclair still has a wraparound windshield with its bothersome dogleg. Hip space is often deceptive when three people crowd into a front seat since the middle rider seldom has much legroom. But Mercury's engine is placed far forward and the transmission housing is partly in the engine compartment. The transmission hump is smaller and middle passengers have more use of maximum legroom. Entry and exit in the back are excellent in the four-door model. Headroom, legroom and hip space are generous and the back seat is comfortable for long trips even with three people.

The Montclair's dash panel is curved and the right side is about six inches further forward than the driver's side. This system has the benefit of spacious knee room and added comfort for the passengers but it does have some marked disadvantages. The glove compartment is shallow and the driver has a long reach for the radio controls, lighter and ash tray.

The instrument cluster is near the driver and all controls are easy to reach. The design is functional, good visually and attractive although some people might feel the generous use of chrome overdoing a good thing. One indicator which is difficult to read is the gear selector. Placed in a plastic housing located on the steering column, the letters are distorted in daylight and poorly lighted at night. Another minor inconvenience was the relation of the door handles to the window cranks. They are too close to each other and when rolling down the window a person's hand is apt to hit the door handle.

Although the Montclair's trunk is a huge cavity, much of its usefulness is lost due to its shallow height. Nearly any suitcase would have to be laid flat to be carried.

Mercury has emerged this year with a personality that is definitely unlike Ford. The Montclair's major features are luxurious quietness and smooth roadability. Whether this is an improvement is largely a matter of individual taste in handling characteristics. •

MOTOR LIFE TEST DATA



1960 MERCURY

Test Car

TEST CAR: Mercury Montclair
BODY TYPE: four-door sedan
BASE PRICE: \$3,280

Maneuverability Factors

OVERALL LENGTH: 219.2 inches
OVERALL WIDTH: 81.5 inches
OVERALL HEIGHT: 56 inches
WHEELBASE: 126 inches
TREAD, FRONT/REAR: 60 inches
TEST WEIGHT: 4600 lbs.
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION: 59 per cent on front wheels
STEERING: 3.5 turns lock-to-lock
TURNING CIRCLE: 43.2 feet curb-to-curb
GROUND CLEARANCE: 6 inches

Interior Room

SEATING CAPACITY: six
FRONT SEAT—
HEADROOM: 33.2 inches
WIDTH: 62.5 inches
LEGROOM: 44.2 inches
TRUNK CAPACITY: 31.5 cubic feet

Engine & Drive Train

TYPE: ohv V-8
DISPLACEMENT: 430 cubic inches
BORE & STROKE: 4.30 x 3.70
COMPRESSION RATIO: 10-to-1
CARBURETION: two-barrel
HORSEPOWER: 310 @ 4100 rpm
TORQUE: 460 lb.-ft. @ 2200 rpm
TRANSMISSION: three-speed automatic
REAR AXLE RATIO: 2.71-to-1

Performance

GAS MILEAGE: 11 to 16 miles per gallon
ACCELERATION: 0-30 mph in 4.5 seconds, 0-45 mph in 7.2 and 0-60 mph, in 11.5 seconds
SPEEDOMETER ERROR: Indicated 30, 45 and 60 mph are actual 29, 42 and 56 mph, respectively
POWER-WEIGHT RATIO: 14.9 lbs. per horsepower
HORSEPOWER PER CUBIC INCH: .72