



THE EDITOR'S REPORT

BY DON WERNER

EVERY report we publish on the subject of high-performance cars stirs up a hornet's nest of sharp and pointed reader opinion. The issue of performance superiority may very well be one that is incapable of settlement beyond all dispute, but we nonetheless intend to go on in relentless pursuit of such "answers" as can be found.

This month, as you will find on pages 20-30, our search for evidence has led us to the drag strips and the data to be derived from stock-car classes in competition. The job of collecting the facts was writer John Lawlor's (at left in photo), who talked endlessly with competitors and officials, gathered a cross-section of performance figures and then organized it all into easy comparative form.

A byproduct of this research was the discovery of the astonishing scope of stock-car competition in 1960. We were not entirely ignorant of the activity, of course, but the degree and intensity of the interest at the strips far surpassed our expectation. The crowds of spectators, jammed pit areas, and long lines of cars waiting a turn to run were nothing less than a revelation.

How valid drag strip results are in measuring stock performance is a point open to debate. Yet the figures unquestionably contribute to a better understanding of the factors involved. In anticipation of further aforementioned disagreement, however, for the July issue we have scheduled yet another study of high-performance cars. At this very moment, we have under special acceleration test four strictly stock cars—Chevrolet, Ford, Dart and Plymouth—each a very hot version equipped with factory options that are as nearly comparable to those of rival makes as possible. This is our ultimate effort in road testing. From it we may know more about the ultimate in car performance.

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It has been 11 months now since the last custom car appeared on our front cover, although during that time they have been a frequent, if not a regular, item on inside pages. The absence of cover customs has been especially unusual when you consider that in preceding years they were one of our most consistent cover subjects.

Next month, in the July issue, the customs return to the front cover as we conduct a major annual feature of *MOTOR LIFE*, the custom car contest in which readers vote on a large group of selected restyled cars in order to choose from it one as the "best of the year." The mention of this upcoming event offers an opportunity to say something about customs in general and our coverage of them in particular.

Custom cars need no defense, least of all from me, but there is in some quarters a condescending attitude toward them that is just plain irritating. It is most apparent, although not exclusive, among so-called car enthusiasts characterized by odd caps and bushy moustaches. They are loud in their worship of anything

from Turin, Italy, and through such parasitic attachment assemble a curious and pathetic sense of superiority.

Let it be noted, however, that these "experts of appreciation" exist only by association. Not one of them has ever, to my knowledge, demonstrated a fragment of creative ability in car styling or even restyling. It is not my intention to belittle European custom cars—but I do recognize them for what they are: the beautiful products of a very small group of highly skilled professional craftsmen. Our domestic custom cars, on the other hand, are genuine grassroot attempts at automotive art. And many of the best come from part-time restylists or pure amateurs, while the complete professionals, such as George Barris, are few and far between. Car customizing is an exceedingly difficult and costly operation and every effort cannot be expected to please or attain total success. Yet I regard it as one of the healthiest, most original, vigorous and inventive of all forms of interest in cars.

If we have allowed 11 months to pass without a custom on our front cover, it is only that we are not a custom car magazine. Our primary field is the Detroit production car, in all its many aspects, and 1960 has been a model year exceptionally demanding of our time and attention. Next month, as I mentioned earlier, we will make up for our neglect. •

