



## Some Predictions on the Mobil Economy Run

BY TOM SWAIN

**L**IMB VENTURING—that is, the prediction of things to come—is an honorable but risky journalistic sport. But risky or not, we are ready to give it a try. It is based on the theory that both the reader and editor (especially the editor) are prone to forget the writer's failures, while his successes (if any) will be recalled by the reader with in-

finite respect and all due admiration.

On that basis, let us speak briefly concerning the 1963 Mobil Economy Run. We will fearlessly select winners for the eight classes and try to approximate their mileage figures. Our selections will be based partly on scientific reasoning, partly on past performance, and partly on intuition. Which meth-

ods apply to which selections? This is a trade secret better left untold.

Selecting looks simple, doesn't it? Just take the 1962 winners and go from there, because the 1963 cars are mechanically very similar to the '62s. There are, sad to say, some very big jokers, because both route and class breakdowns are quite different this year.

This year's run, taking from March 30 through April 4, will use a northerly route as compared with past events. This may make it tough for cars and contestants, because the long-range weatherman says the route just might come up against nasty spring thaws as it crosses Wyoming, Nebraska and South Dakota. When we couple this with the fact that the last half of the run will consist of long driving days, requiring cars to be driven some of the time at maximum speed limits, or about 65 mph, to keep the required minimum average, we can expect the roughest driving test in the 27-year history of the event. And there will be some high mountain driving, above 8000 feet, that should help equalize the advantage the smaller-engined compacts have enjoyed over full-size cars.

In cases where the 1963 classes have been changed from last year, competition will be more even, making it more difficult to select potential winners.

The biggest single change has been the elimination of the manual-shift category. It isn't that manual-shift sales



have decreased drastically; the reason is that manual shifts are being sold largely as sporting accessories to motorists who like to shift. Four-speeds with floor control are the ones that sell while the popularity of the old three-speeds-on-the-column is on the wane. As a result, Mobil and the sanctioning United States Auto Club decided to require that all competitors use automatic transmissions this year. Their reasoning is that Economy Run cars should reflect a representative product as purchased by most motorists. With the enormous choice of models and options available one can see that it is no small task to decide which models best represent the bulk of sales for any given make. But a class breakdown has been made and it looks as though it will stimulate some rough competition.

Taking them from the top then, Class A is a category for small-engined compacts of 144 through 153 cu. in. displacement. This automatically limits the entries to Chevy II (4 cyl.), Corvair, Falcon and Mercury Comet. We'll pick the Chevy II in this class. It should deliver pretty close to the winning 27.02 mpg that lady driver Pat Sawyer squeezed out of a Corvair last year. However, the possibility of what may be a tougher course could work against some of the smaller-engined entries. We'll say not more than 26.5 mpg for the Corvair. It will be remembered that a 144-cu. in. Falcon got 30.49 mpg last year, but it was a manual-shift model. The automatic Falcon just can't seem to equal a manual-transmission version.

Next, we find a most unusual grouping: Class B, for compacts and intermediate size cars with engines of 169 through 170 cu. in. There are actually seven cars eligible, but they are derived

from three basic engines—the Valiant-Dart Slant Six, Falcon-Meteor-Comet-Fairlane Six, and Studebaker Lark's 169.6-cu. in. engine. Our choice is the Plymouth Valiant V-100, primarily due to its weight advantage in the class. We look for a fraction above 25 mpg from this one, with a Dodge Dart close behind.

Class C is a grouping for large-engine compact and intermediate-size cars, 4- and 6-cyl. engines from 194 to

225 cu. in. The eligibles here are Rambler American and Classic (195.6 cu. in.), Dart and Valiant at 225 cu. in., Chevy II with the 194-cu. in. Six, Pontiac Tempest Four (194.5 cu. in.) and the Buick Special V-6 (198 cu. in.). In spite of Rambler's reputation for economy, it looks to us as though the Tempest will win and it could very well set the best mileage mark of this year's run. Last year's Tempest, with Mickey Thompson at the wheel, turned in





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27.30 mpg; we think it will do better this year. We're guessing an even 28 mpg, with the American very close behind.

There is a big engine spread among those that can compete in Class D, for intermediate-size cars with V-8 engines, ranging all the way from the Buick Special's 215-cu. in. V-8 to Rambler Ambassador's 327-incher. It is not certain that all those eligible will try, but there could be the Ford Fairlane and Mercury Meteor with 221 and 260-cu. in. engines, a Lark V-8 at 259.2 or 289 cu. in., the Buick Special and Olds F-85, both at 215 in., the hot Tempest with the 326 V-8 and the big-engined Ambassador. We're going to go for a dark horse—the Fairlane 221 V-8—as the car that could do the job. Unfortunately, we have had to prepare our selections before the official entry list is complete, and we have no guarantee that there will be a Ford entry. But we have a hunch it would win. With a little luck, it should nudge past the 23.5 mpg mark, with the Buick Special V-6 close behind.

Class E has been set up for that vanishing American, the standard-size 6-

cyl. car. Interestingly enough, engine sizes are extremely close between the four makes that can enter. The Plymouth Savoy and the Dodge 330 both use the 225-in. engine, Ford has a 223-incher and Chevrolet has the new 230-cu. in. model that replaces the time-honored Six of years past. We must give this class to the Plymouth, due mostly to a weight advantage. The new Chevrolet engine, an unknown quantity, could surprise everyone, but we foresee the Plymouth crossing the finish line with a winning average somewhere between 24 and 24.5 mpg.

The title of Class F is "low-priced V-8s" and it includes those models of Plymouth, Dodge, Ford and Chevrolet that can still be considered low priced in relation to other makes. The engine-size spread is wide, the 283-in. Chev being the smallest engine eligible and the 390-in. Ford Galaxie the biggest. An entrant can, however, elect to use the 352-in. Ford engine and it seems unlikely that anyone would want to compete using the big 390. In this class, we lean toward the Plymouth Belvedere V-8 with the 318-cu. in. engine, although it should be very close to a dead heat with the 327-in. V-8 Chevrolet Impala. Our first thought

would be to pick the 283 Chevrolet, but it just doesn't seem to be as economical as its larger counterpart over the long haul. Look for 21 mpg to win this one.

Among the medium-priced V-8s in Class G, there are the Pontiac Catalina and Pontiac's Bonneville or Star Chief (not both), Chrysler Newport, Chrysler 300, Mercury Monterey or Monterey Custom, Dodge 880, Buick LeSabre or Wildcat and Oldsmobile Dynamic or Super 88. This one may be largely a case of driver skill. Last year, Judy Thompson won it in her Pontiac Star Chief at 19.48 mpg and this car could repeat. But, with a frugal driver, we have a hunch that the Chrysler Newport or the Dodge 880 will do the job, and we give the edge to the Newport at a very possible 19.5 to 20 mpg.

Finally, we have the luxury cars—with Chrysler New Yorker, Imperial Custom, Buick Electra, Olds 98, Cadillac 62 and Continental falling into this category. Last year there was no Cadillac, and we don't know if there will be one this time either. But it doesn't matter much. From an economy standpoint, it looks like Chrysler's New Yorker all the way, shading 18 mpg for the run between Los Angeles and Detroit.

That's the way they look in our crystal ball. Because the Mobil Economy Run is a great test of both driver and car, any of our favorites could be nosed out by a man (or woman) with a light foot and a little luck. Traffic conditions and slight variations within a specific car model can also influence the results. Come the afternoon of April 4, we'll know whether we have sawed clear through our limb, or can climb safely back to the ground with an unblemished (?) reputation as prognosticator first-class. ■

