



**M**  
**T** Road Test

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**WE HAD OUR FIRST RIDE** in a new Comet V-8 a few months ago at Ford's Pico Rivera, California, assembly plant, when we attended a preview of Mercury's 1963½ offerings along with most other automotive writers from Southern California. So popular was it that we had to stand in line to take the S-22 Comet hardtop out on Ford's banked test track (although there were 18 big Mercs and Lincolns on hand for testing).

The combination of the 260-cubic-inch V-8 and four-speed box gives this car a vast improvement in performance over the six-cylinder Comet we tested last year, so we asked for a similar model for our road test.

Our test S-22 turned out to be a bright red hardtop, with every extra except air conditioning and power brakes. No major changes have been made in styling except for the roof, and the V-8-

equipped car uses basically the same body shell with a greatly improved chassis under it. And herein lies a real story.

Since the Meteor was already using the same basic V-8 engine, Mercury engineers knew just which components would need beefing up when they put 65 more horses and about 200 more pounds into the Comet. And beef it up they did, stiffening 14 places in the integral body/chassis by increasing the thickness of existing members or by additional struts. Most of the stiffening is in front of the cowl. One example is

**Not only a new engine but a vastly improved chassis as well are all part of the new 1963½...**

**S-22**

**Comet**

**V-8**



*A 260-inch V-8 engine under the hood doesn't leave much room for routine maintenance. Additional struts from cowl to the fender-mounted spring housings increase rigidity.*

in the struts from the cowl to the front spring housings: an additional member increases stiffness 150 per cent.

All V-8 cars use five-bolt wheels, with a wider rim base and 7.00 x 13-inch tires (Sixes have four-bolt wheels and 6.00 x 13 tires), larger wheel bearings, tie-rod ends, and drag links. Comet front spindles are made from Meteor forgings ( Meteors weigh 430 pounds more model for model), and they use bigger brakes with 10-inch drums as compared with the nine-inch units on the Sixes.

Axle shafts are the same beefy items found on Econoline trucks. Shocks and springs are stiffer all around, with an additional leaf added in the rear, bringing the number to six. Of special interest is the rear axle. It's of the straddle-mounted pinion variety, styled after that of a heavy-duty truck. Owners pulling trailers or hauling heavy loads will appreciate this.

Both manual and power steering units have been suitably beefed up,



PHOTOS BY BOB D'OLIVO



(ABOVE) In slow or fast corners, Comet proved above average in handling. It understeers a little but was always safe and controllable at any speed.



(RIGHT) Comfortable bucket seats, man-sized gearshift, and a readable group of instruments make the Comet S-22 a luxury car. Wheel is too big, too close.

speed runs, the normal 2956-pound weight of the car was increased to over 3400 pounds with two men and test equipment on board.

Even though the Comet's brakes were used hard after each run, they always came back for more and proved better than average. Panic stops were made from 30 and 60 mph in 32 feet and 146 feet respectively. The combination of good weight distribution, big 10-inch drums, and good lining material gave us straight-line stops, with a minimum of wheel lockup and swerving. Our Comet hardtop offered a good all-around balance of performance in both the go and stop departments. Normal everyday use found the brakes up to every occasion. They weren't power-assisted, so pedal pressures were fairly high, but not objectionable.

Another big plus for Comet is its firm yet comfortable suspension system. The V-8's heavier shocks and springs make it a road car that can take sharp or sweeping curves at speeds that would find more softly sprung cars all over the road. With the smooth four-speed lever in the proper gear, our S-22 could be pushed through turns at a very rapid rate in perfect safety. There's very little body lean.

Mounted on the center transmission hump is the chrome-plated shift lever, topped with a man-sized plastic handle. Fast shifts are possible, and we could choose between blazing, wheel-spinning starts in low or slower starts in second. For normal traffic conditions, where top acceleration isn't necessary or desirable, only two gears are really necessary: first and fourth. Second, third, and fourth can be used quite easily, and even third-gear starts are possible — so flexible is the 260-inch engine. It puts out 258 pounds-feet of torque at a low 2200 rpm and proved a real lugger in any gear.

## COMET S-22 V-8 *continued*

along with the other components. So Mercury hasn't just dropped a bigger engine into an existing car — they've made the chassis strong enough to take the added strains and, in addition, they've come up with a very roadable car — one that offers a very good package of performance, handling, and braking.

The big news — that which can be seen and felt — lies under the hood. Our S-22 shares the 260-cubic-inch V-8 engine with the Falcon, Meteor, and the Cobra sports/racing car. In the Comet, the tuning is mild, stressing long life, economy and adequate rather than flashing performance. Rated at a modest 164 hp, the Cyclone engine has a bore and stroke of 3.80 and 2.87 inches respectively. Compression ratio is only 8.70 to 1, and it burns a modest amount of regular gasoline. The only thing available is the two-throat carburetor, which restricts engine breathing along with the single exhaust system.

Our S-22 Sportster was all wound out at 5000 rpm in any of the lower three gears. Top speed down Riverside Raceway's back straight was a strained 94 mph at 4200 rpm. With a longer run and a few more break-in miles, the car should come close to the century mark.

We enjoyed the smooth four-speed gearbox. Throws from second to third are a bit long, but after six runs we finally turned in acceleration figures of zero to 30, 45, and 60 in 3.7, 7.4, and 11.5 seconds respectively. On our best run, we whizzed through the quarter-mile traps at 75 mph, with the clocks stopped at 19 seconds flat. During our

Reverse can't be engaged until you pull a finger-operated lever on the gearshift.

Our V-8 gave us better mileage on the highway than last year's Six, with a top figure of 17 mpg at a steady 65 mph (the Six gave 16.3 mpg). Hard driving took the figure down to a low of 10 mpg, while traffic and freeway driving found the Comet giving 14.6. Our average for nearly 1000 miles figured out at 14.2 mpg.

Now that we've mentioned many of the car's good points, there's one glaring fault that everyone who drove the car noticed: The steering wheel's too big and too close to the driver. Even the Falcon Sprint uses a 16-inch wheel, but the Comet still has a 17-incher that's not only hard to see over but makes exit and entry a chore.

The bigger members of our staff didn't have enough seat travel for a comfortable driving position. Certainly with power steering, a 16-inch wheel would be big enough. And even without power assist, we'd appreciate more elbow room, because the 4.6 turns lock to lock do require a bit of wheel spinning during fast driving and quick maneuvering. One less turn would be a great advantage.

Driver vision's good from inside the S-22. We found the bucket seats to be among the most comfortable we've used (they're not nearly so hard as the big Ford's seats), but the back seat was too low for an adult to be comfortable for any length of time.

Definitely a luxury compact, the S-22 Sportster includes carpets, vinyl upholstery, and a padded dash. A center console's located between the seats and gives usable space for odds and ends. Gauges are used for gasoline level and engine temperature, while warning lights give oil pressure and generator warnings. The speedometer proved dead accurate at all speeds and is easy to read. A pull-out hand brake operates the rear brakes and is located just to the left of the wheel post. It's easy to pull out and release and proved handy for starts on steep hills.

Equipped as it was for our test, the Comet S-22 hardtop had a dealer-suggested price tag of \$3356 (including \$128 freight). With the addition of an air conditioner at \$231.70, the price would go up to \$3588 and change, and the shift lever would have to be bent a little to get the cooling unit in. The S-22 series is the top of the Comet line. Our hardtop had a base price of \$2594, including heater. Standard on Comets is the all-synchromesh three-speed column shift. The four-speed box for the V-8 costs an additional \$188. Ford's English-made four-speed box for the Six goes for \$90 — a bargain with the smaller engine.

The plain-Jane Comet series offers two- and four-door sedans and station wagons. The Comet Custom series has a deluxe version of these same models plus a two-door hardtop and a convertible. Next up the line is the S-22 series, with a two-door sedan, a convertible, and the two-door hardtop like the car we tested. Last is the Villager four-door station wagon. Only two engines are offered now: the 260-inch V-8 and a 170-cubic-inch Six. Any model can be ordered with,



COMET'S WIDE DOORS AFFORD EASY ENTRY AND EXIT. BACK SEAT, HOWEVER, LACKS LEG ROOM AND IS TOO LOW FOR COMFORT ON LONG HAULS.

either engine. All V-8 cars will have a 3.25 axle ratio, while six-cylinder cars can be ordered with either a 3.50 or a 3.20 ratio.

We liked the new 1963½ Comet and felt it was a real man's car — one a man will enjoy driving. It's not the hottest number in the Ford-Mercury garage by a long shot, but it does offer a good balance of performance, braking, and economy — and when it comes to handling, few other Detroit

sedans can match it. The real story is underneath where it's hard to see, but it can be felt.

With the 24-month/24,000-mile warranty and the quality built in at the factory, the Comet V-8 should provide its owner with reliable transportation, luxury, plus economy for quite a few years. It's a good, solid car, with emphasis on handling and safety rather than a soft ride. It's also a whale of an improvement over the Six. /MT



GOOD WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION GIVES COMET VERY SOLID TRACTION ON LOOSE DIRT. NEW V-8 SUPPLIES PLENTY OF WHEEL-SPINNING POWER.



Sportster's big 10-inch brake drums were always up to their job. They gave straight-line stops, always came back for more.



Hardtop trunk is large but has a high lip. Spare is easy to get at, yet takes up space that could be used for luggage.

## COMET S-22 SPORTSTER

2-door, 5-passenger hardtop

**OPTIONS ON CAR TESTED:** 4-speed gearbox, power steering, radio, heater, electric tachometer, console, tinted glass, padded dash and visors, seat belts, whitewalls

**BASIC PRICE:** \$2594

**PRICE AS TESTED:** \$3356.95 (plus tax and license)

**ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST:** 550 miles

**RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE:** 5200 rpm

### PERFORMANCE

#### ACCELERATION (2 aboard)

0-30 mph .....	3.7 secs.
0-45 mph .....	7.0
0-60 mph .....	11.5

Standing start ¼-mile 19.0 secs. and 75 mph  
Speeds in gears @ 5200 rpm

1st .....	40 mph	3rd .....	76 mph
2nd .....	56 mph	4th .....	94 mph
			(@ 4200 rpm)

#### Speedometer Error on Test Car

Car's speedometer reading	30	45	50	60	70	80
Weston electric speedometer	30	45	50	60	70	80

Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear .....22.0 mph  
Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 32 ft.; from 60 mph, 146 ft.

### SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

#### Engine

90-degree, ohv V-8  
Bore: 3.80 ins.  
Stroke: 2.87 ins.  
Displacement: 260 cu. ins.  
Compression ratio: 8.70:1  
Horsepower: 164 @ 4400 rpm  
Torque: 258 lbs.-ft. @ 2200 rpm  
Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.63  
Ignition: 12-volt coil

#### Steering

Recirculating ball and nut;  
power assist  
Turning diameter: 39.9 ft.  
Turns: 4.64 lock to lock

#### Wheels and Tires

5-lug, stamped steel disc wheels  
7.00 x 13 2-ply nylon tubeless  
tires

#### Gearbox

4-speed manual, all-synchro;  
floor shift

#### Brakes

Hydraulic, duo-servo; self-  
adjusting; cast-iron drums  
Front: 10-in. dia. x 2.25 ins. wide  
Rear: 10-in. dia. x 1.75 ins. wide  
Effective lining area: 127.8  
sq. ins.

#### Driveshaft

One-piece — open tube

#### Differential

Hypoid — semi-floating  
Standard ratio: 3.25:1 (3.50  
installed on test car)

#### Suspension

Front: Independent ball joint,  
with coil springs mounted on  
upper A-arm, direct-acting tubular  
shocks  
Rear: Rigid axle; rubber-mounted  
6-leaf semi-elliptic springs, direct-  
acting tubular shocks; torque  
taken through rear springs

#### Body and Frame

Unitized construction  
Wheelbase: 114.0 ins.  
Track: front, 55.0 ins.;  
rear, 54.5 ins.  
Overall length: 194.8 ins.  
Test weight: 2956 lbs. (with full  
tank of gas)