



FORD CUSTOM 500 4-Door Sedan

though, we mastered a foot-flutter which supplied an enriched mixture when necessary.

Another item which indicated inadequate attention was the brakes. Though they registered a very high degree of retarding power during our crash stop, the brake pedal had a spongy feel which might have indicated either air in the lines or a lack of bedding-in of the linings. In either case, the sensation did little to breed confidence. Both of the above flaws, of course, would have been completely covered under the Ford guarantee.

The above-mentioned crash stop, from 80 mph to a full stop as rapidly as possible, was very smooth and completely devoid of alarms and excursions.

All four brakes took hold evenly, drew down evenly, and even faded evenly, with no tell-tale swerving black marks left behind to reveal lack of control. And to belie the ease of our stop, the decelerometer showed a reading of 23 ft./sec./sec., excellent retardation in the American league.

Most of the first 500 miles traveled by the Custom 500 were spent on the freeway, the natural habitat of this type of automobile, and it was exactly that to the Ford. Outside of the usual surges and buffets all vehicles experience when entering and leaving the slipstreams of buses, semis and other outsized freeway denizens, the 500 handled smoothly and easily at the normal 65-75 mph speeds, and always

seemed able to contribute a little bit of extra performance when it was needed. It is probable that we would have enjoyed the additional power of our original engine choice, the 220-bhp, 352-cu. in. Special, but there was no denying the adequate performance and especially the 15-16 mpg economy of the 289.

The around-town ride of the Custom 500 was not quite so excellent. We found that even relatively minor dips would set the car into a series of wallows, at least partially due to Ford's lowered spring rates for 1964. Also, corners had to be entered at a much-reduced speed to avoid mushing and heavy body roll. We would have much preferred a stiffer ride and consequent better control of the car.

Our opinions were divided regarding the instrument panel. On the one hand, we felt that the instruments could have been better arranged for easier and more immediate reading, but on the other, the panel did possess a few features of unusual value. One of these was the color and intensity of the instrument panel night-light—a subdued but highly revealing green that kept the dials and gauges legible, yet was completely non-irritating. Another minor

If Reasonable Touring Is Your Dish, Ford Serves It Up With Lots Of Lounge Space.

ORGANIZATIONS WITH the sheer skull-power of the Ford Motor Company seldom make serious mistakes. Occasionally, of course, an Edsel will thrust its comic snout into the model line-up, execute its ludicrous and ungainly performance for a brief while, then subside in wretched confusion—proving no more than that people, even the most executive people, can err. As a general rule, though, and especially when it comes to designing bread-and-butter transportation, the big manufacturers produce an almost boring succession of winners. The Ford Custom 500 is undoubtedly a winner—a good, sound, moderately priced unit of basic transportation which will do nothing to disgrace its designers.

Ford's continued grooming of its performance image has produced a catch-phrase, "Total Performance." In the case of the Custom 500, this refers mostly to what the publicity releases refer to as "the classic Ford straight-line styling, augmented this year by distinctive sheet metal sculpture and

ornamentation and the new, distinctive roofline . . ." In short, the new Fords are intended to look sporty.

To our eyes the lines are good, without too much sculpture and ornamentation, and outside of a certain bulkiness about the posterior make the car look considerably lighter and smaller than it really is. However, during our first tour down a crowded street we were made somewhat apprehensive by the slope-away styling of the outer front corners of the body, which left us in doubt as to the car's exact breadth. The hood looks very wide from the driver's seat and a little reassurance would have been welcome.

In company with the Dodge Polara tested in December CL and the Rambler American also examined in this issue, the Custom 500 has just begun an extended road test. Its peculiarities, superiorities, difficulties and excellences all will be recorded, weighed and the car will then be re-tested to determine the effects of age and service. The object, of course, is a more complete, objective and unhurried analysis than has been possible under our sometimes hurried test schedules.

Our selection of the Custom 500 was based on the near-certainty that it will be one of Ford's most popular 1964 models. Our original request also specified the optional 352-cu. in. Special V-8 engine. This 220-bhp powerplant seemed more capable of easily accel-

erating the near-2-ton avoirdupois of the car than the standard 223-cu. in., 138-bhp 6-cyl. engine. Also, we had already tested a Galaxie 500/XL (*Car Life*, June 1963) with the 289-cu. in., 195-bhp engine introduced in 1963 and, although we had found its acceleration, fuel economy and pulling power all acceptable, we wanted to try out the next larger model. However, when the test car arrived we found a 289 in the hold and, rather than delay testing, decided to increase our familiarity with that very popular and economical engine.

Our transmission was, as we had specified, the 3-speed-plus-converter Cruise-O-Matic manufactured by Borg-Warner for a number of different automobile builders, then presented by them under a variety of names (Merc-O-Matic, Flash-O-Matic and Flightomatic). As always, we found it to be extremely smooth and versatile, and in this case a most welcome replacement for the obsolescent 2-speed Fordomatic. The axle ratio was 3.25:1, standard with Cruise-O-Matic.

Preparation of the car could have been better. The most annoying fault was complete failure of the new-for-1964 automatic choke. Until the engine warmed up, this led to much pedal-pumping and restarting in the middle of the streets, often to the supercilious stares and raucous honks of a cast of thousands. Eventually,

SCOTT MALCOLM PHOTOS

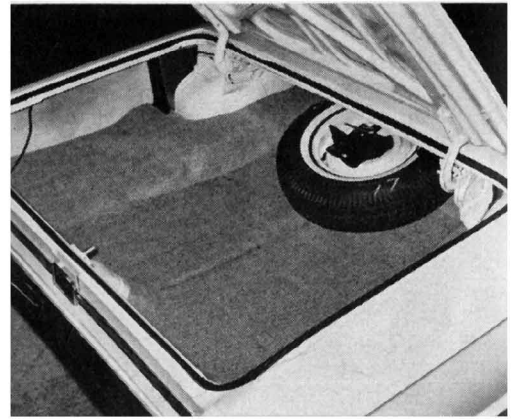


FORD CUSTOM

but extremely helpful detail was shine-through names over all the control knobs for lights, wipers, air, etc.

At first seat, we found our position to be somewhat strange—sliding down and under to the point where we felt the seat adjustment must be off. It was not, and we gradually became accustomed to the new angle, but never became enthusiastic. The upholstery plastic and fabric seemed tough and potentially child-proof, and yet was most inviting, as was the rest of the interior. The carpets, in particular, lent a look of warmth and elegance out of all proportion to their cost. The 1964 Ford Custom models include carpets, rear arm rests and ash trays as standard equipment.

The Custom 500 occupies a highly popular segment of the U.S. automotive market—its main economic competition being the Chevrolet Bel Air, Dodge 440 and, to some extent, the Pontiac Catalina. The image of this group, of course, is that of the relatively inexpensive, roomy and comfortable (and even a bit luxurious) “full-sized” automobile. The 500 is all of these things, gaining its economy title through 1) gas mileage of up to 17 mpg which, though ridiculous to Volkswagen owners, is highly respectable among today’s big highway cruisers, 2) a compression ratio of 9.0:1 which permits the use of regular gas, and 3) prices which have held the 1963 line (if the cost of the 1963 optional items

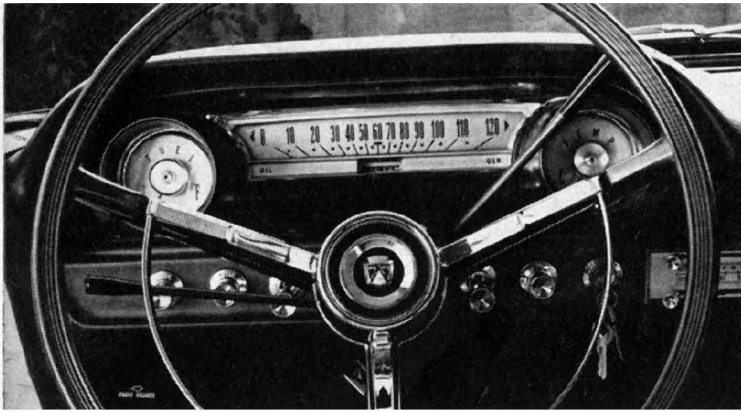


ALL THAT air space means lots of luggage can be lugged along across country.

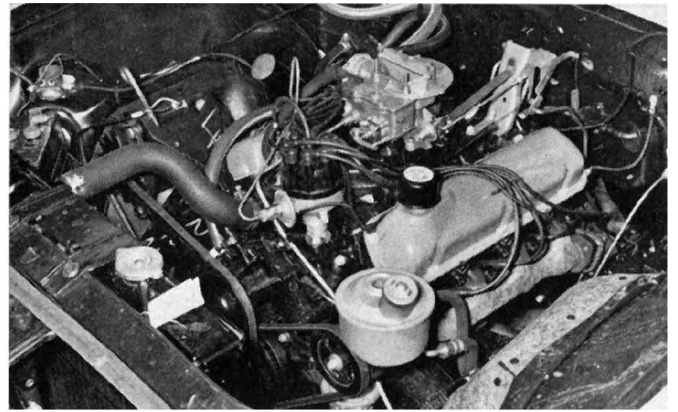
which are now standard is included).

Roominess and comfort, too, are hallmarks of the Custom 500. Its interior is over five feet wide, giving not only seating but elbow room to three adults on either the front or rear couch. The seats are quite firm, not providing that drowsy sensation of overwhelm-





SET DEEP under panel lip, speedometer is easily read. Driving position took some getting used to.



STANDARD 289 engine is surrounded by space in hole built to handle a 427 powerhouse.

ing luxury which comes from being enveloped in soft foam, but giving the much more important support needed for long-distance touring. And surely, over a long day's travel, roominess is next to luxuriousness.

In summary, the Ford Custom 500 begins its extended road test riding a

wave of acceptance, if not complete approbation. The dealer preparation could have been more thorough, but the faults we found are all covered by Ford's 24-month, 24,000-mile warranty. The 289-cu. in. engine cannot turn the 500 into a Super Stock, but has already demonstrated its ability to push

the big car along all day at freeway speeds, and at an acceptable level of fuel economy. And we anticipate that the mpg rate will become somewhat better as piston rings bed in and bearings begin to run more freely during the continuation of the 5000-mile durability test. ■

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



1964 FORD Custom 500 4-door Sedan

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	.....	\$2487
Price, as tested	.....	2767
Curb weight, lb.	.....	3805
Test weight	.....	4135
distribution, %	.....	52.7/47.3
Tire size	.....	7.50-14
Tire capacity, lb @ 24 psi	.....	4340
Brake swept area	.....	346.5
Engine type	.....	ohv, V-8
Bore & stroke	.....	4.00 x 2.87
Displacement, cu in.	.....	289
Compression ratio	.....	9.0
Carburetion	.....	1 x 2
Bhp @ rpm	.....	195 @ 4400
equivalent mph	.....	105
Torque, lb-ft	.....	282 @ 2400
equivalent mph	.....	57

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	.....	119.0
Tread, f & r	.....	61/60
Overall length, in.	.....	209.8
width	.....	80.0
height	.....	56.5
equivalent vol, cu ft	.....	547
Frontal area, sq ft	.....	25.1
Ground clearance, in.	.....	5.3
Steering ratio, o/a (power)	.....	23.1
turns, lock to lock	.....	3.9
turning circle, ft	.....	41.0
Hip room, front	.....	61.7
Hip room, rear	.....	63.5
Pedal to seat back, max.	.....	38.0
Floor to ground	.....	12.5
Luggage vol, cu ft	.....	17.1
Fuel tank capacity, gal.	.....	20.0

GEAR RATIOS

3rd (1.00) overall	.....	3.25
2nd (1.47)	.....	4.78
1st (2.40)	.....	8.80
1st (2.40 x 2.1)	.....	18.48

EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

Cruise-O-Matic, radio, wsw tires, seat belts, power steering.

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (4400), mph	.....	105
Shifts, @ mph (auto, forced)		
3rd ( )	.....
2nd (4200)	.....	68
1st (4200)	.....	42

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	.....	26.9
60 mph	.....	54.2
90 mph	.....	81.8

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	.....	4.8
0-40	.....	7.2
0-50	.....	10.7
0-60	.....	15.2
0-70	.....	21.3
0-80	.....	29.2
0-90	.....	37.9
Standing 1/4 mile, sec.	.....	20.1
speed at end, mph	.....	68.7

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	.....	21.2
Cu ft/ton mile	.....	102
Mph/1000 rpm	.....	23.8
Engine revs/mile	.....	2520
Piston travel, ft/mile	1205
Car Life wear index	30.4

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg	16-19
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PULLING POWER

70 mph, (3rd) max. gradient, %	6.5
50 (2nd)	14.0
30 (1st)	26.3
Total drag at 60 mph, lb	165

