

CAR LIFE  
EXTENDED  
ROAD TEST

# 1964 FORD Custom 500 Sedan



*Capacious and Reasonable, this Big Ford is Aimed  
At the Mass Market—a Niche it Admirably Fills*

IN SUMMARIZING OUR initial test of the 1964 Ford Custom 500, there was the feeling that this car represented a vehicle for the fleet user, or family man, who desired roominess and relative economy more than performance or prestige. Nothing during the intervening 5000 miles altered that opinion.

During the extended evaluation, the car was used for a trip from Los Angeles to Phoenix and two runs to San Francisco. It is in such day-long drives that a car's idiosyncrasies reveal themselves—either to be lived with or else. In the case of the Ford, there was little which couldn't be lived with despite those few things which the car would best be without. Unlike some of the competitors over at Corporation X, however, FoMoCo vehicles with which *Car Life* editors have lived during recent years could never be called bland.

To generalize just a bit more, there has been a feeling—only a vague awareness, perhaps, that is almost less than conscious—that the driver's operation of a Dearborn-built product is neither an automatic procedure nor an unconscious action. To state it another way, the Ford driver is never quite able to forget that he is, in fact, driving. In the case of family-type passenger cars as they have evolved over the past few years, the minute presence of such a built-in but non-irritating reminder, if a deliberately-instilled quality, borders on sheer genius. The more interesting automobiles from the enthusiast's standpoint, of course, have this quality to a far grander degree and indeed, the necessity of firmly controlling the hurtling beast is one of the primeval joys of motoring. But where the designer has had to tame the mount for milady, and the husband has had to accept less than his just due for her sake, the ever-so-slight touch of temperament is a virtue and (dare we say?) an aid to traffic safety. But enough for philosophical dialogue, even though it is a natural product of such extensive familiarity.

The test car was powered by Ford's ubiquitous 289-cu. in. lightweight V-8, in its mildest form of 195 bhp and breathing through a single 2-barrel Holley carburetor. This worked out to a 21.2 lb./bhp figure from the car's 4135 lb. test weight, which certainly doesn't favor exhilarating acceleration. But it is an adequate amount of power to handle most driving situations.

The automatic transmission doing the commendable job of transforming this into useful power at the road was the 3-speed Cruise-O-Matic, Ford's smaller unit for engines up to 289 cu. in. Depending upon the ne-



FORD CUSTOM 500 received new trimmings for '64, along with remainder of big Ford line. Sloping front fenders drew some criticism for lack of positioning landmarks.

cessity of the moment, this transmission has a remarkable capacity of responding to the driver's demands with precision and dispatch. It can be held in the lower gears (2.40 first, 1.47 second) with a bit of lever juggling and, although discouraged by the manufacturer, this was done to secure the best performance figures.

With the standard rear axle ratio (3.25:1), the car moved off the starting line without fuss and also without particularly startling velocity. However, acceleration was relatively brisk and the figures recorded indicate that the car was capable of maintaining its position amidst the expressway's roaring ranks. It is there, in fact, that this Ford finds its home; on the modern American highway system, with its limited access and non-stop nature, its well-engineered, gradual and banked curves, and its billiard table-like road surfaces.

Consistently high-speed travel for lengthy periods might be uncomfortable for the car, but outside of the state of Nevada, where prudence rather than politics dictates the maxima, there are no legal limits which it could fail to reach. The car continually displayed on the highway, as we observed, "adequate performance."

Improvement in acceleration between the two tests was to be expected, with full break-in, proper ring and bearing bedding, loosening of clearances, etc., and such was the case. A progressive shaving of acceleration times is evident in the data panel, with the result that the graph presents less of a hunchback picture.

In another area of performance, the car's pulling power showed easily measurable improvement at higher speeds in Low gear and throughout the full speed ranges in the upper gears.

One area where improvement could

well have been desired but wasn't forthcoming was in the braking. The spongy pedal mentioned in the original test remained throughout the 5000 miles. In our final series of brake tests, effectiveness showed a decline from 23 ft./sec./sec. to 17, although one stop did produce that first figure (which had been consistent during the original tests). Happily, however, there was no increased tendency to fade, nor did any evidence of lock-up present itself, indicating a set of well-bedded linings. The brakes were not power-boostered and the sponginess of pedal may have been caused by air in the lines, but we did not find out. Brake adjustments are outside the provisions of Ford's pace-setting 24 month-24,000 mile warranty, so our test crew played the role of typical owner. After all, the car would stop . . . eventually.

The twice-a-year maintenance schedule which Ford insists upon to keep the warranty valid requires an oil and oil filter change at 6000 miles or 6 months, whichever is sooner. This would have added about \$5 to the total cost of operation, had that point been reached. As it was, the running costs were limited to 359.8 gal. of gasoline and 2 qt. of oil (added) over a total mileage of 5560.8. Ford recommends Regular gasoline for this engine, despite the 9.0:1 compression, but the incidence of audible detonation which we experienced with that grade prompted the use of Premium grade. At an average 34.9¢ per gallon, (plus \$1.40 for the oil), this amounted to \$125.57, which broke down to \$0.0228 per mile and an overall 15.45 mpg average.

Such mileage is not appreciably better nor worse than any average owner will get with competitive cars. The best tankful, on an over-the-road stretch at moderate speeds, returned 17.8 mpg, while the worst—after severe thrashing



# FORD

about—was 12.0. The 289 engine in this form is slightly less economical than might be expected, largely because of the extra work required to motivate that much bulk sheet metal. Different drivers were involved, of course, often on the same tankful; yet, while 20 mpg may be possible, it is doubtful if many owners could consistently record it.

An item which the staff seldom has either the time or the necessity to evaluate is a car's heating/ventilating arrangement, and on this score the Ford ranked well indeed. Fresh air vents, controlled by knobs on the instrument panel beside the steering column, and the heater-defroster, operated from a mid-dash control panel, provided every imaginable combination desired short of dehumidification and refrigeration. The trend toward air-conditioned cars apparently has resulted in short shrift for proper ventilation provisions in some makes, but this is not the case with Ford. In addition, windows which were opened slightly to aid ventilation produced noticeably less wind noise than is often the case.

Front hood styling and seat design formed the basis of the only staff controversy over the Ford. The hood line humps up in the center, making it difficult to see the front or side edges and giving rise to apprehensions about just where the vehicle is situated in a traffic lane or how to sight the car along its proper line through a curve. The

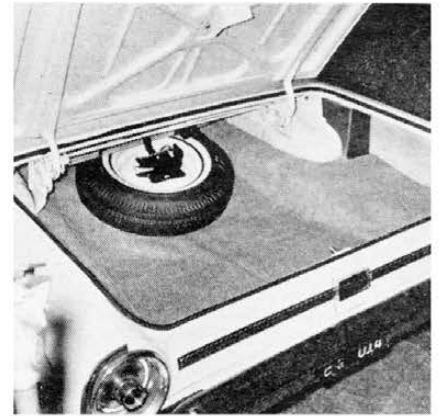


**INTERIOR** proved durable, if plain. Seat cushion lacked support for most drivers.

front bench seat is positioned low and with a definite tilt toward the rear, an attitude that promotes hat room by lowering the eyes to steering wheel rim level. Commented one adamant staffer: "The seating position is all wrong and, when coupled with the line of the hood, I got the impression that the whole thing was sinking, stern first."

On the other hand, another driver who drove many of the long haul miles insisted that the seating was comfortable and less fatiguing than some bucket-type seats he had warmed in the past. All agreed, however, that the downward slope of the bench at either end made the use of a seat belt mandatory for lateral support.

There is one further observation that should be made on the car. If the driver can overlook the scarcity of excess power, there is a rather voluminous capacity designed into the Ford for the tourist and his household. As enormous as trunks have become on late



**GIGANTIC TRUNK** is typical of current, modern cars. It takes a big family to fill it.

model cars, Ford gives the customer the benefit of the most possible air space within which to cram luggage. The spare tire is firmly locked up over the rear axle hump, freeing a fantastic amount of trunk space for stowage. With a fully packed trunk further hiding the spare, however, one had better have great faith in the durability and reliability of the four tires rolling along the pavement—and those marginal brakes.

After 5000 miles the Ford represented the solid, dependable transportation which fits nicely into the pattern of a large proportion of modern day driving practices. There was a reasonableness—in operating economy, in power output, in ride and roadability—which has an obvious appeal to thousands of buyers. For the man who demands more than this, however, that same friendly Ford dealer around the corner has a lengthy list of options which he'll be only too happy to tell you about. ■

## CAR LIFE EXTENDED ROAD TEST 1964 Ford Custom 500 4-door Sedan

### SPECIFICATIONS & DATA

Price, as tested.....	\$2767
Test weight, lb.....	4135
distribution, % f/r.....	52.7/47.3
lb./bhp.....	21.2
Tire size.....	7.50-14
Brake swept area, sq. in.....	346.5
Wheelbase, in.....	119.0
Tread, f/r in.....	61/60
Overall length, in.....	209.8
width.....	80.0
height.....	56.5
Fuel tank capacity, gal.....	20.0
Engine type.....	V-8, ohv
displacement, cu. in.....	289
bhp @ rpm.....	195 @ 4400
torque, lb.-ft. @ rpm.....	282 @ 2400
Mph/1000 rpm.....	23.8
Car Life Wear Index.....	30.4

### 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

### PERFORMANCE

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

### ACCELERATION

	1000 miles	(corr.)	5000
0-30 mph, sec.....	4.8	(4.7)	4.3
0-40.....	7.2	(7.2)	6.7
0-50.....	10.7	(10.3)	9.5
0-60.....	15.2	(14.1)	13.1
0-70.....	21.3	(17.7)	17.6
0-80.....	29.2	(24.2)	23.3
0-90.....	37.9	(34.5)	30.7
Standing ¼-mile, sec.....	20.1	—	17.0
speed at end, mph.....	69	—	16.9

### PULLING POWER

70 mph (3rd), max. gradient, %.....	6.5	9.5
50..... (2nd).....	14.0	17.6
30..... (1st).....	26.3	29.4

### FUEL CONSUMPTION

359.8 gal. for 5560 miles.....	15.45 mpg
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