

THE EXTENDED ROAD TEST



SOME THREE MONTHS ago, when *Car Life* undertook to submit three domestic sedans to extensive testing of up to 10,000 miles, there was no thought of attempting to "prove" anything. Since tests of this duration had not been tried before, there were neither guidelines to follow nor clearcut ideas about what the results might show.

The three test cars, in fact, were not necessarily representative of what the serious driver, or the automotive enthusiast, would secretly admire. They were, quite frankly, average cars, representative of three predominant categories of pleasure car purchased in the largest quantities in the United States today. All were 4-door sedans, designed to perform the widest possible family service within given price ranges and engineering parameters. Only one could be truly characterized as "new," although the other two displayed some new sheet metal.

Rolling up more than 5000-10,000 carefully documented and conscientious miles on each of the three cars was hardly an assignment to gladden the hearts (or posteriors) of a somewhat small staff, faced as it was with an overwhelming array of other new—and oftentimes more exciting—1964 models awaiting the usual painstaking tests. But with a determination born of the conviction that the reader could—and must—be served, the extended tests were started.

The first object in the plan was to

subject the cars to normal test procedure. The cars—a Rambler American 440 with Twin-Stick overdrive transmission, a Ford Custom 500 with 3-speed Cruise-O-Matic and a Dodge Polara hardtop sedan with pushbutton automatic—were all assembly-line new. This required that 500-plus miles be driven before they could be put through the performance evaluations. This much accomplished, the test trio was then put to service covering the required mileage with all costs and comments carefully recorded before once again being subjected to a full scale CL road test to see what, if any, differences had developed.

During the final performance evaluation, however, probably the most disconcerting fact of the entire series came to light. The original tests of two of the three—the Rambler and the Ford—which had been conducted at Riverside Raceway, turned out to have invalid sections. The quarter-mile measured out on the back straight at the course, it developed, had been too long. Under the disastrous assumption that "it must be okay because others use it," the test crews foolishly accepted the measured distance as a true quarter-mile and consequently recorded inaccurate test data.

To rectify this blunder, which was published in good faith in data panels in the January issue, performance figures have been re-computed and recalculated from original work sheets and subsequent tests. It is presented,

where applicable, in parentheses in the accompanying data panels, although obviously the originally-recorded ¼-mile times cannot be so retrieved.

What else did the extended tests demonstrate? More than anything else, in the unanimous opinion of participating staff members, was the need for better brakes. This is a continual note in almost every road test, that the brakes of the car under discussion are only adequate, in need of improvement. It is a rare domestic automobile about which it can be said that the brakes are excellent—or even good. Each of the three cars exhibited faults of one sort or another with its brakes. And the situation did not particularly improve with usage.

The three tests also pointed up the fact that American cars have come a long way in the past decade, have evolved into spacious, decent-handling automobiles that even an enthusiast can appreciate. Performance, measured both by acceleration and pulling power (Tapley Meter) is at an extremely acceptable level and at not too great a cost in fuel consumption.

But, at 10,000 miles (only 5000 in the Ford, as FoMoCo didn't allow us a full 10,000 miles of testing), the cars seemed to be just entering the most useful portion of their vehicular life. Their health was so good at the end of that period that the CL staff was tempted to take on a 50,000-mile trial. Only the press of testing an ever-growing variety of cars prevented it. ▶

25,000 Miles in 3 Months!