

CAR LIFE
ROAD TEST

Mercury Park Lane and Monterey

A Career Girl Emerges with
Manners and Taste

PAUL HANSEN PHOTOS

GENE GARFINKLE ILLUSTRATIONS

Even so, not since the days of the bulbously nondescript Mercs of the early '50s has there been such visual and sensual difference between the familial kinfolk.

The most immediate sensation for a Mercury, unlike any that has gone before, is one of quietness. Now, it has never occurred to us that Mercury was a particularly noisy automobile, but people who took their first ride in the '65 invariably remarked about its lack of noise. It isn't the eerie silence that deafens one with a ticking clock (which, being electric, whirrs rather than ticks) but is a vastly subdued formation of decibels that doesn't quite stretch to the threshold of consciousness. In typical fashion, Mercury engineers have labeled this peculiarity the "NVH factor" and have devoted a great deal of attention to achieving such a low level thereof.

The three initials stand for noise, vibration and harshness, and the three problems are quite naturally interrelated. To isolate and identify these things, the engineers in Dearborn have been as successful as any in putting to work an electronic computer. The high-speed brain, fed with measurements and statistics from engineering worksheets, rapidly pinpoints the probable cause for the various problems. That it works, and much better than the once-universal cut-and-try method, is attested to by most modern cars and by the '65 Mercury in particular.

It was the computer which revealed the need for rubber donut-stuffed driveshafts to damp out vibration frequencies. It was the computer which determined the location for the trio of body mounts on each frame siderail, spotting them at those points where vibration waves crossed and cancelled.

And it was the computer which dictated not only the location of but also specifications for those rubber bushings used at mounting points for suspension components and engines. Mercury engineers have seized upon the computer as a modern-day companion to slide rule and drafting board, and the results are there to feel.

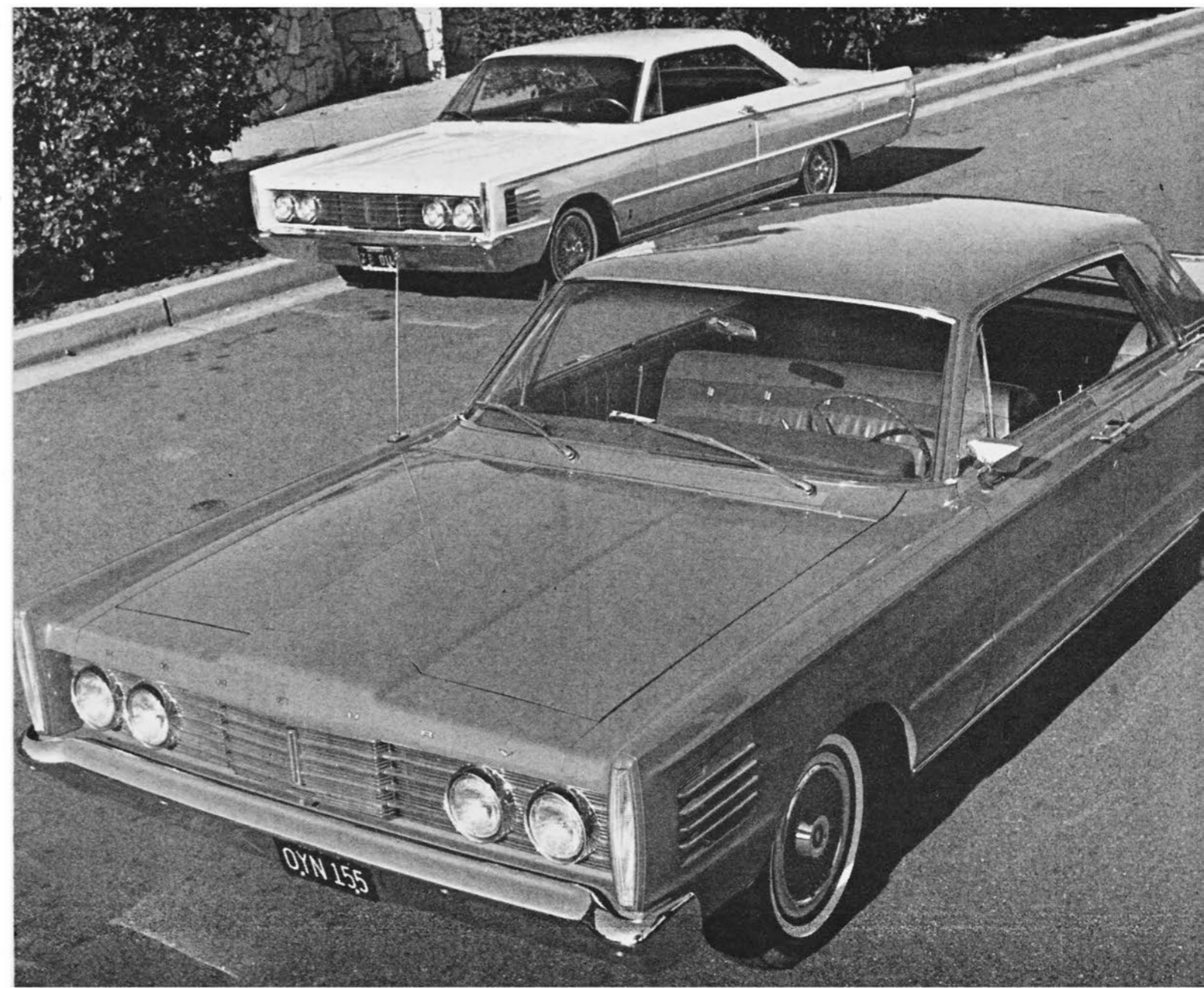
A more obvious method to achieve quietness is the use of sound-deadening pads and preparations throughout the car body, and this, too, Mercury engineers have pursued. The body itself is so tightly assembled that noise generation potential is reduced. When one company official remarked that heater and air conditioner blowers had to be moved to the engine compartment he was not stretching the truth; reduction of distracting motor noise was almost as important as cleaning out the under-dash accessory clutter. ▶

A COMPELLING CASE can be made for the selection of Mercury to receive *Car Life's* annual Award for Engineering Excellence. In a year of widespread engineering advances, Mercury has undergone the greatest change in its basic character. Whereas before it had seemed a Victorian dowager, now it is as competitive and contemporary in manner and mode as a marvelously efficient career girl.

Moreso than any other car, an Award car undergoes minute scrutiny. And that means mighty minute, since even *Car Life's* run-of-the-month road tests are, to the best of our knowledge, the most thorough conducted outside the automakers' own proving grounds. So, in order to be this thorough, CL sampled two Mercurys which reflected various aspects of the image which the L-M Division is now attempting to define for its cars.

One was, relatively speaking, a "cheapie"—a bottom-of-the-line Monterey in 4-door hardtop form and displaying a minimum of extra cost baubles. The second was a 2-door hardtop Park Lane, a top-series slantback with bucket seats and console, and jewel bedecked. Among the options specified for the Park Lane was heavy-duty suspension—stiffer springs and shock absorbers. Both cars, not incidentally, had Mercury's reliable 390-cu. in. engine and 3-speed automatic transmission.

Mercury would like nothing better than to have its cars known as "little Lincolns." That is the overall impression which has been quite successfully instilled into the car. Yet they remain, from a technical standpoint, "big Fords," still sharing basic body and chassis design with that car (see P. 14).





Mercury

Concomitant with the coefficient of quiet, there is a vast improvement in ride quality in the Mercury. This, of course, can be proved in a seat of the pants evaluation of passenger comfort and the Big M chalks up many points. The all-coil spring suspension naturally cannot in itself guarantee a good ride, nor can the torque-boxed perimeter frame, but they both help. Where the previously-used Hotchkiss rear drive forced leaf springs to handle other chores, the present 3-link layout requires that the coils do only one: Cushion and absorb the bumps in road irregularities.

A Hotchkiss suspension not only must cushion bumps but it also must locate the rear axle and absorb the brake and thrust reactions. It does

these things quite well. But in automobile manufacturing, it has been other criteria which have kept it around for so long: It has relatively high strength for its weight and, more important, low production cost. Mercury found itself, even before last year's sea-sickener sway-back (CL, June 1964), up against the Hotchkiss wall. As the ride rates of the springs were softened, and the car's weight increased, the leaf springs were less capable of adequately maintaining axle location. Harshness between spring leaves could never be reduced enough to eliminate the jolts to the frame (and its securely tied-down body). Pebble-sized bumps were transmitted, rather than absorbed. Shock absorber juggling could only disguise and help control this, but not to the

standards of smoothness required in today's medium-price market.

The absence, in coil springs, of inter-leaf friction, and the fact that they are continually in tension, overcomes this latter drawback. The trailing arms carry the springs ahead of the axle, which is located additionally by a trailing arm to a point beside the differential case and a lateral panhard rod from there to the left frame rail. It is these arms which perform the non-springing functions while the coils concern themselves only with sopping up the bumps. The result is a high degree of smoothness in the passenger compartment, providing a boulevard ride over most road surfaces down to that of a logging trail.

Spring stiffness, measured as ride rates in lb./in. at the wheel, obviously has a definite effect on the riding qualities. Interestingly, Mercury engineers specify somewhat higher than usual rates. But our test drivers failed to detect any unpleasantness which would cause second thoughts among the masses who concern themselves about such things. Even with the heavy-duty springs and shocks (see chart), the Park Lane would glide effortlessly over any road surface that hadn't been reduced to ragged chunks. The roughest surfaces, naturally, created jolts which reached the passengers as petty annoyances, but even Herculean working of the wheels couldn't cause the commotion of years gone by.

MERCURY SUSPENSIONS

	Standard	Heavy Duty
Ride rate at wheel, lb./in. front,	105	142
rear	110	140
Spring rate, front	375	475
rear	120	155
Roll rate, lb./ft./deg.	600	720
front	440	528
rear	160	192
Anti-roll bar, dia.	0.69	0.69
Shock absorbers, piston dia.	1.00	1.187

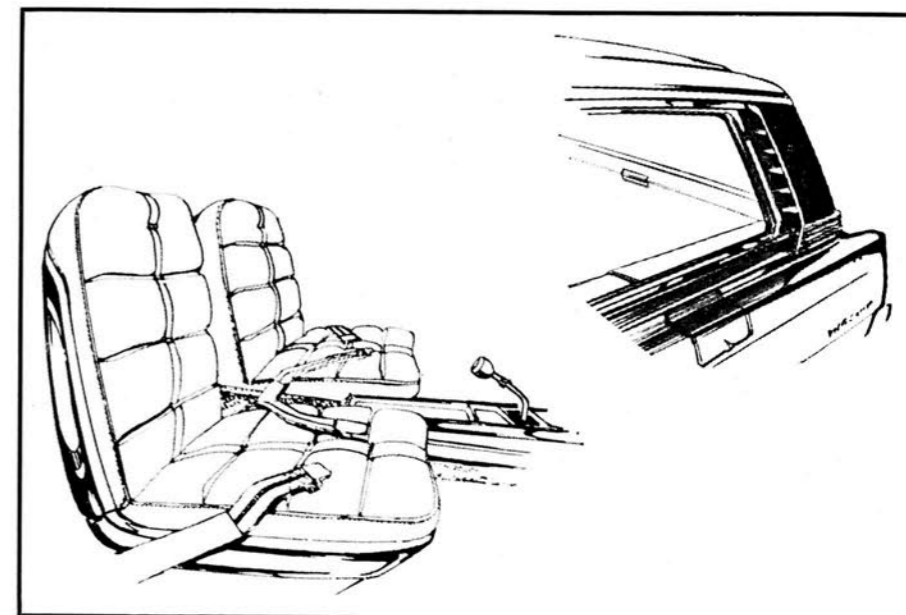
The flexible perimeter frame with its torque boxes played a role here. When road irregularities were of rather large magnitude, the twistability of the frame

was additional cushioning. Indeed, even on mild undulations it was possible to detect—with concentrated effort—frame workings as they sought to absorb twist before the "shock waves" reached the passengers' isolation booth.

A more important consideration, in our view, is the handling qualities with which the suspension geometry blesses a car. On both Mercurys, all-around handling (cornering and roadability) was on a high level. Even in standard form, the Mercury acquits itself well as the demands of the road toughen. It exhibits the expected understeering traits, but within normal limits. In the wet, there is comforting reassurance upon finding that the relatively light rear end is completely manageable, that it resists the great temptation to lose traction and skid outward on turns. It will do this, of course, when a great slug of power is applied. On dry pavement, however, the rear stays in line and rear axle hop has been drastically curtailed.

Body lean, which might be emphasized by the broad flat hood, is not out of line at all, though the extra resistance with heavy-duty springs reduces this aspect. Station wagons, it might be noted, carry a larger 0.81-in. anti-roll bar in front. An enthusiastic driver may want to substitute this to further eliminate leaning tendencies. Nevertheless, handling maneuvers are quite well controlled and a one-word summary of the Big M's traits would be "precise."

Steering makes its contribution in this area. The redesigned power steering was quite acceptable to our test drivers, who tend to be fairly critical of this detail. It was light enough at speed to be pleasant, while still retaining some road feel; in town, its quickness was sufficient to avoid a lot of wheel winding to round corners. There were, however, two not so desirable traits: The turning circle was about 4 ft. greater than average street



width and at very slow speed it was possible to run out of powered assist before a sharp turn was completed.

The Park Lane was equipped with the Saginaw tilt wheel option, a feature that does almost as much as anything to insure comfortable driving position. This supplied item, however, meant that the Saginaw steering gearbox was used instead of the new (and similar) Mercury integral unit with which the Monterey was fitted. Drivers were hard put, nonetheless, to detect significant difference between the two. A thicker rim on the deluxe steering wheel of the Park Lane and the wheel's adjustability for the best angle were of more merit than any distinction between steering gearboxes.

Both cars had the integral "wrap-around reservoir" power steering pump, which is notably quieter in operation than Mercury's previous pumps. It delivers 200 psi hydraulic pressure to the gearbox, an increase that is welcome in such a nose-heavy

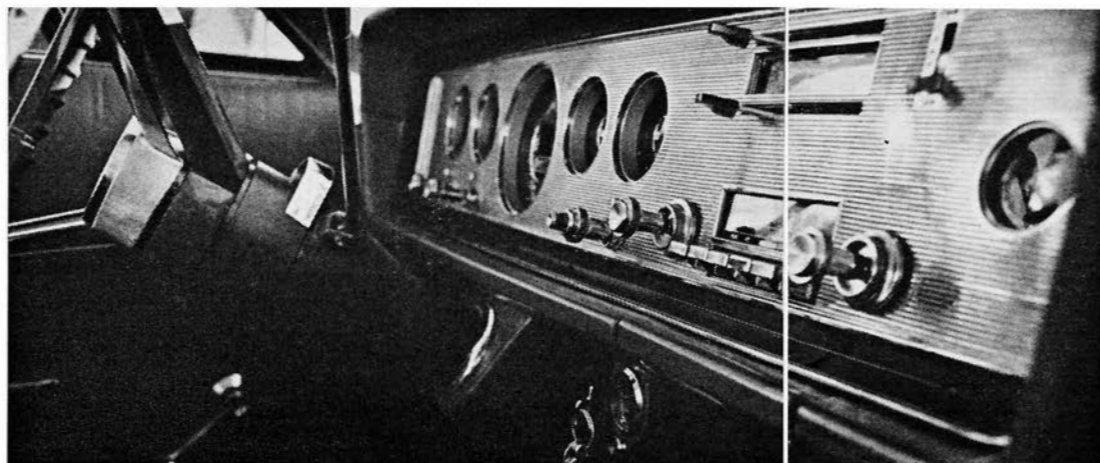
car. It might be noted that road feel in the integral power steering system is transmitted by a torsion bar in the stub shaft to the steering column. Hydraulic fluid completely immerses the gear assembly, providing cushioning against road shock and, via rotary valving, goes to work only when turning effort is applied. Overall steering ratio is reduced from last year's 23:1, as are the number of turns required to move the wheels lock-to-lock.

There is one rather dismaying aspect to the Mercury. Brake effectiveness has been reduced, in comparison to last year, rather than improved. And, unhappily, the Lincoln Continental's front wheel disc brakes, which would seem to be so handy, cannot be used because of the Mercury's differing spindles. Engineers obviously eyed the reduction in overall weight and compensated by paring off some of the brake area. Reducing the width of the rear shoes 0.25 in. each drops total swept area from last year's 346.5 to 330 sq. ►

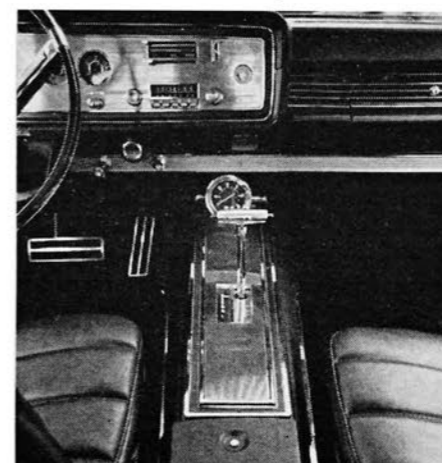
PARK LANE bucket seats are similar to Thunderbird's, complete to headrest sliding up on stalks.



INSTRUMENT PANEL is ribbed bright metal, less fussy than before. Column shift lever is standard.



CONSOLE with T-handle shifter and tachometer are extra-cost options.



GENTLE CURVES, broad panels and crisp creases highlight Mercury styling idiom, are most notable in this view.

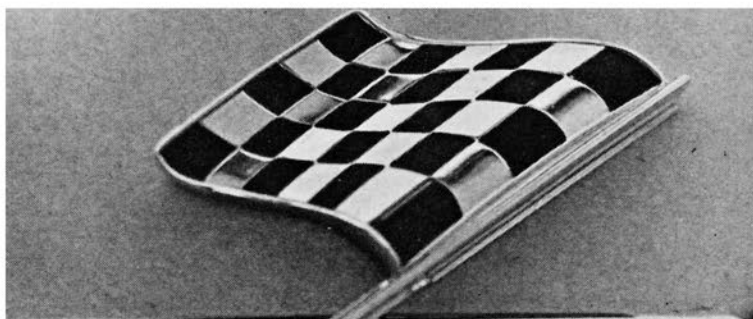




DETAIL work shows restraint, an atypical trait in Mercury styling.



INVITING INTERIOR only hints at increased comfort which passengers now have. Driver's command of Park Lane was aided by thick-rimmed, tilting wheel.



Mercury

in. The curb weight saving hardly justifies this; the '64 model's maximum deceleration rate of 25 ft./sec./sec. has dwindled to an average of 18 ft./sec./sec. and, while there was not quite the tendency towards fade and/or rear wheel grabbing of last year, the 3-in. wide rear shoes and drums from the station wagon (364 sq. in. swept area) seemed tantalizing.

Having said that, we can point to another oft-lacking area where improvement has been made. Tire capacity has been increased to a point where two persons aboard no longer overload them. The lower profile 8.15-15 tires, which plant a larger tread patch on the pavement, also made a slight contribution to the handling qualities, permitted the switch to larger 15-in. wheels for better air circulation (and cooling) around brake drums, and provided more cushioning which aided in the ride improvement.

In its underpinnings, however, Mercury makes available precisely engineered trailer-hauling options which many buyers may want to investigate.

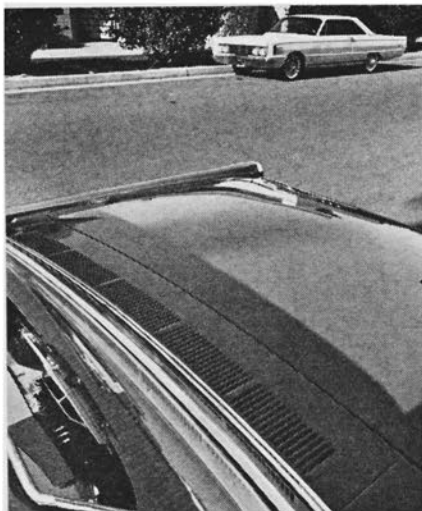
Eight-ply rated tires (\$63 extra) and heavy-duty wheels with 6-in. rims (\$7.60 each) are available. So too is "fade resistant" brake lining (\$9.30 extra). The heavy-duty springs and shock absorbers already mentioned would seem mandatory at the mere \$14.60 extra charge. And three alternate rear axle ratios—3:25, 3:89 and 4.11:1—are listed. Although these are not offered in a "package" as such, they are available on special order in any combination, and with anti-spin differentials, too.

Styling, as much as anything else, is responsible for the larger-than-life impression which one gets from the Mercury. The '65 is in fact smaller than the '64 in box volume (the amount of air space it occupies), but this is primarily because of reduced height. In terms of passenger volume, however, it shows some significant increases. Its expanded stance (3 in. longer wheelbase, up to 2 in. wider treads) has been effectively translated into usable interior room.

A bit of weight was saved, however,

in developing the new body. This reduction, up to 300 lb. in some models, was achieved primarily in the rear half of the car. It results, unhappily, in the greater lop-sidedness of front/rear distribution than the 54/46% recorded with last year's notchback sedan. The latter had an air conditioner, to be sure, but it also had the nominally heavier electric rear window assembly. Still, the weight distribution had little adverse effect on the 1965's handling, as we have seen.

Staff members went the whole route in reaction to Mercury's new appearance, from initial cynicism at seeing the first pre-production photographs to more charitable forbearance once we started living with the cars on the highways. The vague resemblance to Lincoln is lurking about, despite momentary distraction by the tall, thin parking lights in the front fender edge. Unlike last month's Ford, the Mercurys drew admiring glances wherever they were driven. As a general observation, Mercury stylists have managed to resist their urge to slaver bright metal



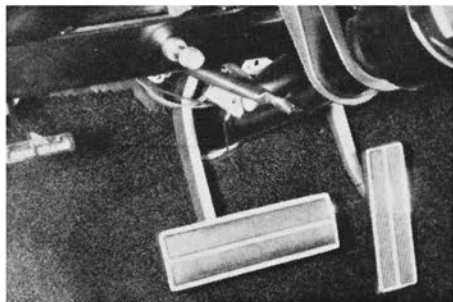
LOUVERS behind Monterey's rear window are outlets for stale air.

in the odd places; while there still remains too much to justify, the overall image is of a more quiet nature.

On 4-door hardtops, such as the test Monterey, there is a built-in air exhaust vent under the rear package shelf. With a vacuum-operated flap controlled by a button on the instrument panel, this outlet removes stale air from inside the car out through the rear deck. It is a worthy companion to the exclusive "notch-back" sedan, which, with its retracting rear window accomplishes much the same thing. By opening the new saddle-mounted cowl vents (a bonus in the new body), complete ventilation without draft or wind roar is accomplished though all side windows remain closed. While the 2-door Park Lane hardtop did not share the rear ventilation feature, it is one of the significant trends in modern automobiles which should appear more frequently in future model years.

There was a spookiness about the Monterey as it silently locked its rear doors when pulling away from the curb. An unusual automatic door lock was responsible for this, utilizing a vacuum cylinder to pull down the door lock plungers when car speed reaches 8 mph. A speed-sensitive vacuum valve is mounted on the transmission, in series with the speedometer cable. This opens when the car is accelerating past 8 mph, closes when decelerating

SUSPENDED accelerator is easy on ankles, highly responsive to use.



below it. The vacuum "pull" on the lock hampers anyone—most definitely children—from unlocking the door when the car is in motion. At rest, the lock plungers must be manually pulled up to unlock the door, a slightly bothersome price to pay (plus the \$26 option cost), but one which overall safety makes worthwhile. The 2-door also was fitted with vacuum door locks, a \$37 option controlled in that case by an instrument panel toggle switch.

The variable interval windshield wipers, a \$10 option on the Monterey but standard on the upper two series, proved extremely handy in foggy coastal weather encountered during the tests. An electro-pneumatic governor is coupled to the wiper system to vary the interval between wiper swipes—from constant down to 5 cycles per min. A concentric knob in the wiper control adjusts the interval, and the control itself, turned counterclockwise, sets the dwell control into action. (Clockwise operates the wipers normally and pulling out on the knob squirts the washers.) Though cycling only intermittently, the wipers automatically switch to full speed when the throttle is opened and the dwell control is bypassed—as in accelerating past a car throwing back road spray. The device, developed by Trico, may appear on other makes but for the moment is a Mercury exclusive. Wiper blades, incidentally, are 1 in. longer and sweep 12% more windshield area.

This utilization of one switch to control several functions is obvious in another place, too. The power antenna is raised electrically by pulling out on the volume control knob of the radio, lowered by pushing it in. While not an

exclusive Mercury touch, it does help set the car apart from its competitors.

Overall, we found little to criticize about the control panel. A recommendation to buyers would be to invest \$3.30 in the special order "flat finish" for the instrument panel. In stock form, it's a bright, finely ribbed panel which, while one of the least gaudy and most refined Mercury has ever had, tends to be more distracting than necessary. The use of a plastic simulating "engine-turned" aluminum for paneling the side doors in the Park Lane also seems a little overmuch.

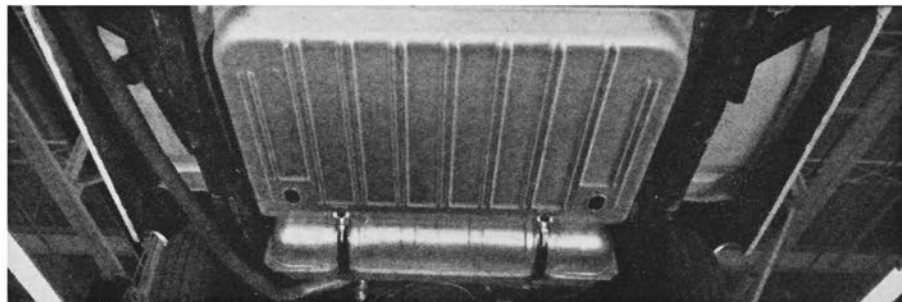
But the Park Lane, decked out with its "sports package" of bucket seats with console and console-mounted shift lever and tachometer, was an excellent choice for the pseudo-sporting driver. The seats were identical to Thunderbird's, complete to the tilt-down passenger seat with slide-up headrest, (\$45 extra). That means comfort for those in the front. The power-assisted 4-direction driver's seat, combined with the tilting steering wheel, guaranteed a near-ideal driving position for the man at the helm. Even the vastly less-expensive bench seat of the Monterey was as good as any of its type and a substantial improvement in riding comfort over that of last year's Big M. Upholstering was mostly vinyl in both cars, but the Park Lane can now be ordered with leather trim.

By moving everything except heater/air conditioner outlets into the engine compartment in the new body, Mercury is able to create the impression of additional passenger room. The dashboard is moved 5 in. farther away from the front seat passenger, reinforcing that illusion. Although over-

ENGINE COMPARTMENT actually is less crowded than it appears, despite relocation of heater blower and other items on cowl. Engine is forward a bit.



FUEL TANK is moved forward to near rear axle, allowing trunk floor to dip to lower level. Filler spout is relocated to the side because of shift.



Mercury

all height is less than the '64, head room does not suffer with the floor lowered (thanks to the wide perimeter frame rails). Limousine-like stretch-out room is available in the rear seat and the trunk is, in keeping with modern standards, cavernous. Moving the

fuel tank forward over the rear axle (filling at the left side now) provides for the latter feature.

The Mercury is, in short, a full-fledged medium price and size automobile now. Changes in it have been vast and its character has been tailored

to the market at which it is aimed. Most surprising has been the restraint which is evident in the car's finish, a factor we've not found often when appraising this division's cars. With exceptional riding qualities, adequate performance, a high order of roadability, and greater quietness in decibels as well as design, it stands as an excellent example of engineering for a discriminating market's demands. Initial reaction among the buyers (sales up 26% over last year's introductory period) would seem to bear out this assessment. ■

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST

1965 MERCURY Monterey & Park Lane

SPECIFICATIONS

	Monterey	Park Lane
List price	\$2970	\$3367
Price, as tested	3524	4137
Curb weight, lb.	4040	4190
Test weight	4380	4530
distribution, %	.58/42	57/43
Tire size	8.15-15	
Tire capacity, lb.	4720	
Brake swept area	.330	
Engine type	V-8, ohv	
Bore & stroke	4.054 x 3.78	
Displacement, cu. in.	390	
Compression ratio	9.4	10.0
Carburetion	1 x 2	1 x 4
Bhp @ rpm	250 @ 4400	300 @ 4600
equivalent mph	117	127
Torque, lb.-ft. 378 @ 2400	427 @ 2800	
equivalent mph	64	74
FUEL CONSUMPTION		
Normal range, mpg	12-15	

DIMENSIONS

	Monterey	Pk. Lane
Wheelbase, in.	123.0	
Tread, f & r	62.0	
Overall length, in.	218.4	
width	79.6	79.4
height	55.2	55.1
equivalent vol., cu. ft.	555	553
Frontal area, sq. ft.	24.4	24.3
Ground clearance, in.	5.9	22.0
Steering ratio, o/a	22.0	
turns, lock to lock	3.6	
turning circle, ft.	43.6	
Hip room, front	62.6	2 x 20.5
Hip room, rear	62.8	61.6
Pedal to seat back, max.	42.0	44.0
Floor to ground	12.0	
Luggage vol., cu. ft.	18.6	
Fuel tank capacity, gal.	21	

EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

Monterey—Auto. trans., radio, auto. locks, power brakes & steering, wsw tires, variable w.s. wiper & washer, wheel covers, outside mirror, seat belt retractors, padded panel.

Park Lane—300-bhp V-8, auto. trans., power steering & brakes, w.s. washer, elec. clock, auto. headlight dimmer, bucket seats & console, convenience group, remote deck release.



CALCULATED DATA

	Monterey	Pk. Lane
Lb./bhp (test wt)	17.5	15.1
Cu. ft./ton mile	117	116
Mph/1000 rpm	.265	
Engine revs./mile	2270	
Piston travel, ft./mile	1430	
Car Life wear index	32.3	

PERFORMANCE

	Monterey	Pk. Lane
Top speed (4000, 4300) mph		
	106	115
Shifts, @ mph (auto.)		
3rd ()		
2nd (4100, 4200)	74	76
1st (3700, 3900)	41	43
Total drag (60 mph) lb.	160	155

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

	Monterey	Pk. Lane
30 mph, actual	31.5	28.6
60 mph	61.2	59.6
90 mph	93.7	93.7

ACCELERATION

	Monterey	Pk. Lane
0-30 mph, sec.	3.2	3.1
0-40	5.7	5.0
0-50	8.8	7.2
0-60	12.2	9.5
0-70	16.0	12.4
0-80	21.3	16.0
0-100	39.6	29.1
Standing 1/4 mile, sec.	17.7	16.9
speed at end, mph	73	82

GEAR RATIOS

3rd (1.00) overall	3.00
2nd (1.47)	4.42
1st (2.40)	7.20
1st (2.40 x 2.10)	15.1

