

7-LITRE VS. CAPRICE 427

First the mass market got a luxury car in the form of the Ford LTD, now we have the next logical step; the mass market performance luxury car. The two earliest entries in this newest Detroit class are Ford's 7-Litre and Chevrolet's hot Caprice 427



If you have serious intentions of selling really large quantities of automobiles—say 250,000 a year—you must develop an uncanny sense for fathoming what the fickle public wants. This is at best a transient gift, arriving suddenly and mysteriously in the head of a top Detroit executive one year and departing the next. The man most under this spell of intuition at the present time is Ford's Lee Iacocca, who elbowed his way in among the industry's supermen by creating the Mustang at exactly the right moment.

Though Iacocca's crowning triumph has to be the Mustang, he also must be credited with the creation of a second FoMoCo sales bonanza, the LTD. Nowhere in the world is imitation a more sincere form of flattery than in Detroit, and his mass-market luxury car received unprecedented homage in the form of three barefaced copies from Ford's most serious competitors.

Months after the LTD debuted, Chevrolet had its Caprice on the market and now, in the 1966 model year, Plymouth has arrived with its VIP and American Motors with its DPL. These two latter vehicles will probably be successful, but they're playing catch-up with the big boys, because Ford and Chevrolet have added still another variation to the mass-market luxury car theme; the mass-market *performance* luxury car. Operating on the premise that the LTD and Caprice sales base might be expanded to include the purchaser looking for high performance, both companies introduced hotted-up versions of these cars for 1966. Ford changed the name to 7-Litre while Chevrolet stuck with Caprice, but the tactic was the same in both camps; keep all the razzle-dazzle on the inside while wedging the biggest engine available under the hood.

Ford bored and stroked its faithful old 390-cubic inch workhorse for

the job, boosting its displacement to 428 cubic inches. In case you haven't figured it out, that's 7 liters (spelled "litres" in Dearborn, Michigan) right on the button. This powerplant, which has rather restricted breathing but a terribly wide torque curve, should not be confused with Ford's hot 427, which serves as the Company's outright performance engine. The two blocks are different and there is no more than a superficial resemblance between them. The 7-Litre is rated at 345 hp, though a 360-hp version is available in a police interceptor package. In all, it's nothing more than an exceptionally large but docile V-8, similar in concept to Chrysler's new 440-cubic inch V-8.

While Ford went to a big, tame unit, Chevrolet turned to its new 396 for duty in the Caprice. The engine has been bored out to 427 cubic inches and is rated at a rather impressive 390 hp. This is considerably under the obtainable maximum

from that engine and therefore the Caprice's engine might be considered slightly "detuned."

While both the Caprice and the 7-Litre are aimed at the same buyer, each is making a rather distinctive sales pitch. The Ford has a decidedly stronger sporting flavor, while the Caprice relies on a straightforward brand of luxurious fittings and silence to make it attractive. Both are rather appealing from the outside, with a minimum of trim to mar their crisply-styled shapes. Ford comes on with the sportiness by means of sharp-looking louvered wheel covers and pin striping along the belt line. Conversely, the Caprice is completely subdued, without the slightest suggestion beyond fender medallions, that it is anything out of the ordinary.

Inside, the Ford is a combination of Mustang GT-inspired trimwork and Thunderbird gadgetry. The wheel is rimmed with that new

plastic that looks exactly like wood and isn't as slippery. Phony rivets dapple its surface and gee-whiz, continental-type holes are cut in the spokes of the dished wheel. If you can stand it, all of the Thunderbird flashing lights and buttons are available in the 7-Litre too, and that means blinking signals when a door is ajar, when gas is low, when seat belts are unfastened, etc. Aside from the hokey stuff, the interior of the 7-Litre is quite hospitable. The seats are thin-shell buckets that give excellent support, especially under the thighs, and are great for long trips. The steering wheel position is fine and there is plenty of foot and shoulder room for a driver and three passengers. Quite nice, on the whole.

The Caprice is unadulterated Cadillac. Dark vinyls and rich fabrics and murky, deep-grained veneers are spread over everything that isn't chromed. The overall effect is luxuriant in a tasteful way without

the gaudiness that has been associated with so many efforts to bring automotive grandeur to the masses. The optional "Strato-Back" seats are particularly nice, with adjustable headrests for long trips. Instrumentation is complete, but was put into the car more as a design element than as a service to the driver. The main cluster is placed at the point where the dash panel meets the shift console, and *that* isn't anywhere near anybody's line of vision, except possibly a child frolicking on the rear floor.

Both of these cars have particularly unsafe door handles. A number of European manufacturers, including Mercedes-Benz, and now Chrysler Corporation on these shores, have made their door handles practically impossible to grasp inadvertently in the course of an accident. By contrast, both the 7-Litre and Caprice have handles that are so conspicuous that a front seat passenger could hardly miss opening the door at the wrong moment. This should be corrected.

In essence, these cars are supposed to be super-big, super-sumptuous grand touring vehicles. Operating on that premise, one should expect sparkling over-the-road performance from both. Performance, viewed broadly, is a matter of balance between available power, suspension, brakes, etc. In this context, neither car is particularly impressive, though evaluations on more limited parameters, like acceleration and top speed make both the Caprice and the 7-Litre look rather outstanding.

Both cars were equipped with automatic transmissions; the three-speed Ford Cruise-O-Matic and the Chevrolet three-speed Turbo Hydra-Matic. Though the GM unit offers more flexibility than its Ford counterpart, we found our best acceleration times were obtained by using "drive" exclusively on both automobiles. Had the cars been equipped with tachometers to measure revs, and wider profile tires to absorb some of the wheel-spin, manually shifting through the ranges might have been more satisfactory, but under the circumstances significantly better times could not have been expected. The Caprice, thanks to its horsepower advantage, was slightly faster off the line. It got to 60 mph in 7.6 seconds and knocked off steady 90-mph quarter-miles in 15.7 seconds. The 7-Litre wasn't far off that mark, with an 8.1-second 0-60 time and a best quarter-mile time of 83 mph at 16.5 seconds.

The high-speed cruising capabili-

ties of both cars—in terms of sheer power and interior comfort—is tremendous.

We found that 110-mph speeds could be maintained with the Caprice in near silence. Air turbulence around the windows and general wind noise was as low as any domestic automobile C/D has run at such speeds. The 7-Litre wasn't quite as silent as the Chevy at 110 mph, but was perfectly satisfactory at the speeds—say 70 to 85 mph—that the average turnpike traveler might maintain for long periods of time.

Any vehicle capable of speeds of this nature should be expected to stop efficiently, and the 7-Litre, featuring disc brakes at the front, should in turn have been expected to have an advantage over the drum-braked Caprice. Surprisingly, it did not. In a series of 80-0 mph braking tests, the Caprice recorded a best time of 5.1 seconds, while the 7-Litre could do no better than 5.8 seconds. Both of these times are reasonably acceptable for cars of this size, though they certainly could be improved upon. The forward weight transfer on both cars was so excessive that one is led to wonder just what the rear brakes were doing while the front pair smoked and fumed through their agony. Aside from the Corvette, we are hard-pressed to think of any high-performance American car that is adequately equipped with brakes. This is truly unfortunate, because

we are discussing machinery with tremendous speed potential and they should most certainly be able to stop. When we recall the levathan Mercedes-Benz 600, weighing 5380 lbs., being hauled to a stop from 80 mph in 4.7 seconds, we feel that it's within reason to expect that automobiles weighing 800 lbs. less could at least do as well. They should do better, but we've all been carping about Detroit brakes for so many years...

So, these cars will accelerate to, and cruise at, three-digit speeds and they will stop with a certain amount of efficiency. But will they handle?

In a word, no.

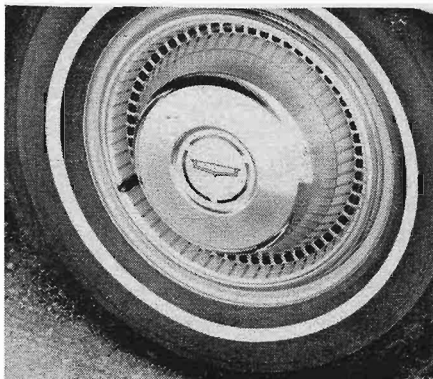
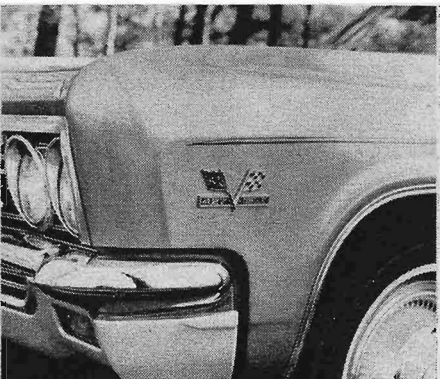
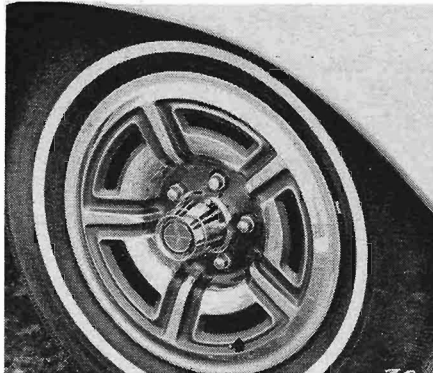
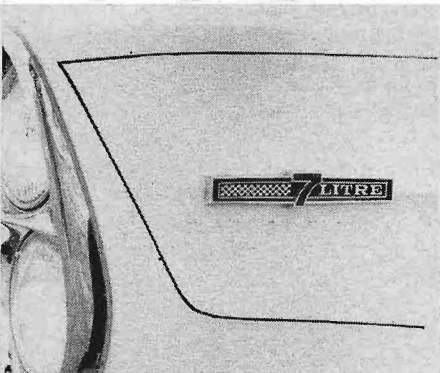
Luxury equals softness in Detroit (or so the purist litany goes) and these two cars stand in support of this charge. We know both Chevrolet and Ford can build properly located suspensions with reasonable roll stiffness and harshness control. But for some unfathomable reason, all of this knowledge seems to get shunted aside whenever the cry goes up for a soft ride. This remains a mystery, because soft ride and good handling are not incompatible, and nobody knows this better than the Detroit engineering community. The Caprice and 7-Litre (which, incidentally, the Company claims comes equipped with a heavy-duty suspension package) embody what Detroit critics have been fuming about for years—too much roll and too much understeer,

coupled with too much power.

Though the difference was negligible, the 7-Litre did handle slightly better than the Caprice. High-speed cornering created massive understeer in both automobiles, but the 7-Litre remained partially controllable by adding more steering lock and backing off the throttle. Conversely, the Caprice's understeer was as severe as any C/D has encountered in recent years. Getting into a corner too rapidly with a Caprice created the absurd situation where inertia overcame the steering. We found that the front wheels could be pointed at random without affecting the direction of the car and the only way we got the Caprice back under control was to radically decrease power and pray that the front wheels would regain their bite before we ran out of road. This really isn't the optimum way to suspend an automobile with 390 horsepower, is it?

Despite the mediocre handling of both the Caprice and the 7-Litre, we have a feeling that minimal changes like stiffer shocks, wider profile tires with higher pressures, etc., would make a radical difference. We would of course recommend that any purchaser specify these alterations before taking delivery, and we can be relatively sure that at least one 7-Litre will handle properly by the time it reaches its owner. A certain Scotsman named Jim Clark—who has driven several Ford-powered automobiles rather rapidly—is about to take delivery on a 7-Litre. There must be millions of people around the world who envisage Clark motoring across the Scottish moors in some effete British sports car, zapping neatly up and down through the gears, with the heeling and toeing and the ten-to-two hand position and the like. Should it ever be learned that their hero is making the trip in a 7-Litre Ford, the reaction will be much the same as if we all discovered that Mamie Van Doren is, in fact, a boy.

Both of these cars cost over four thousand dollars, and that is a substantial price tag indeed for products from automakers keyed to building cars for the masses. The Caprice was approximately \$400 more expensive than the 7-Litre in the form that we tested them, with a suggested retail price of \$4640.50 in Detroit. The 7-Litre was listed at \$4206.00, and the difference is largely traceable to Chevy's optional seats and air conditioning, which the Ford lacked. Had the 7-Litre



had air conditioning, the prices would have been practically equal. How can a Ford and Chevy sell in the \$4500 price bracket? Easy, apparently, because the LTD that started this entire genus of automobiles cost practically the same (the one C/D tested in February, 1965, cost \$4560) and it succeeded beyond anybody's expectations. Of course Plymouth, American Motors and Chevrolet are in the picture now and it's difficult to see how this relatively select group of buyers can be split four ways and remain mutually profitable for the builders. Nevertheless, the mere fact that the makers of so-called low priced cars would consider entering this market is a fair indication of our economy's vitality. Everything's coming up luxury.

Is any Ford or Chevrolet worth \$4500? In the sense that quality control and overall finish are supposed to be appreciably better on the Caprice and the 7-Litre than on the bread-and-butter Impala and Galaxie, such a price seems difficult to justify. We could find no evidence of any extra effort on either car to increase quality. The materials used on the interior were excellent, and there were no visible flaws in the overall products, but both automobiles *still* looked and felt like Chevrolets and Fords. In the final analysis, the Caprice is an ultra-loaded Impala and the 7-Litre is an ultra-loaded Galaxie and very little more. Assembly techniques are the same, the materials are the same and the options, save the engines and the interior trim, are practically the same. This is standard procedure among all major automakers, but we would like to think that the purchaser of a Ford or Chevy costing something like \$1500 more than the average model is getting something really unique. This is not the case, but the purchaser of a 7-Litre or a Caprice is still receiving a fairly sophisticated automobile for his money. The cars will travel in the sort of silent, high-speed manner that is becoming such an important part of the American driving scene and they will do it with reasonable operating costs and high levels of reliability. The cars will stop acceptably and they have enough power to pull over the Golden Gate Bridge. Now, if a little civility in the handling department can be added, these pioneers in the super-grand touring class may be around for a good many years. **C/D**

SPECIFICATIONS OVERLEAF



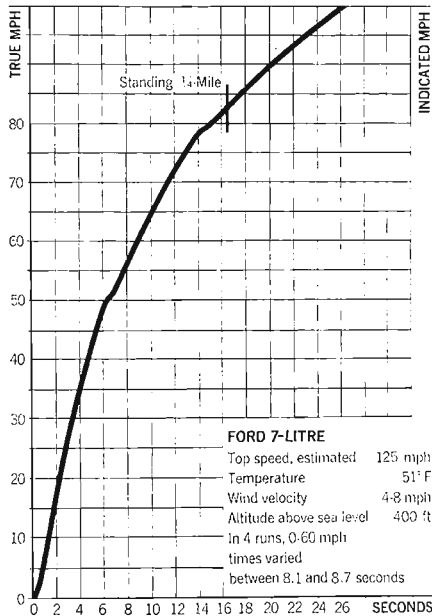
FORD 7-Litre

Manufacturer: Ford Division
Ford Motor Company
Dearborn, Michigan

Price as Tested: \$4206.00

ACCELERATION

Zero To	Seconds
30 mph	3.3
40 mph	4.6
50 mph	6.7
60 mph	8.1
70 mph	11.3
80 mph	15.2
90 mph	20.1
100 mph	26.6
Standing ¼-mile	83 mph in 16.5



ENGINE

Water-cooled V-8, cast iron block, 5 main bearings
Bore x stroke...4.13 x 3.98 in, 105 x 102 mm
Displacement...428 cu in, 7016 cc
Compression ratio...10.5 to one
Carburetion...Single 4-barrel
Valve gear: Pushrod-operated overhead valves, hydraulic lifters
Power (SAE)...345 bhp @ 4600 rpm
Torque...462 lbs-ft @ 2800 rpm
Specific power output...0.81 bhp per cu in, 49.3 bhp per liter
Usable range of engine speeds...800-4800 rpm
Electrical system...12-volt, 45 amp-hr battery, 500W generator
Fuel recommended...Premium
Mileage...14-18 mpg
Range on 25-gallon tank...350-450 miles

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission...3-speed automatic, plus torque converter

Gear	Ratio	Overall	mph/1000 rpm	Max mph
Rev	2.20	6.16	—12.68	—53
1st	2.46	6.88	11.36	50
2nd	1.46	4.09	19.10	79
3rd	1.00	2.80	27.90	125
Final drive ratio			2.80 to one	

CHASSIS

Wheelbase...119.0 in
Track...F 62.0, R 62.0 in
Length...210.0 in
Width...79.0 in
Height...54.7 in
Ground clearance...6.3 in
Curb weight...4147 lbs
Test weight...4554 lbs
Weight distribution front/rear...56/44%
Pounds per bhp (test weight)...13.2
Suspension F: Ind., upper wishbone, lower link and drag strut, coil springs, anti-sway bar
R: Rigid axle, locating links, coil springs
Brakes...11.9-in discs F, 11-in drums R, 234.5 sq in swept area
Steering...Recirculating ball, power assisted
Turns, lock to lock...4
Turning circle...41 ft
Tires and wheels...7.75 x 15 on 5½-in rim

CHECK LIST

ENGINE

Starting...Very Good
Response...Fair
Noise...Very Good
Vibration...Excellent

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch action...—
Transmission linkage...—
Synchromesh action...—
Power-to-ground transmission...Fair

BRAKES

Response...Fair
Pedal pressure...Fair
Fade resistance...Fair
Smoothness...Poor
Directional stability...Fair

STEERING

Response...Good
Accuracy...Good
Feedback...Fair
Road feel...Fair

SUSPENSION

Harshness control...Very Good
Roll stiffness...Poor
Tracking...Fair
Pitch control...Poor
Shock damping...Poor

CONTROLS

Location...Very Good
Relationship...Good
Small controls...Fair

INTERIOR

Visibility...Excellent
Instrumentation...Fair
Lighting...Very Good
Entry/exit...Very Good
Front seating comfort...Very Good
Front seating room...Very Good
Rear seating comfort...Good
Rear seating room...Very Good
Storage space...Good
Wind noise...Very Good
Road noise...Very Good

WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater...Excellent
Defroster...Very Good
Ventilation...Very Good
Weather sealing...Very Good
Windshield wiper action...Excellent

QUALITY CONTROL

Materials, exterior...Very Good
Materials, interior...Good
Exterior finish...Good
Interior finish...Good
Hardware and trim...Good

GENERAL

Service accessibility...Fair
Luggage space...Excellent
Bumper protection...Very Good
Exterior lighting...Excellent
Resistance to crosswinds...Very Good



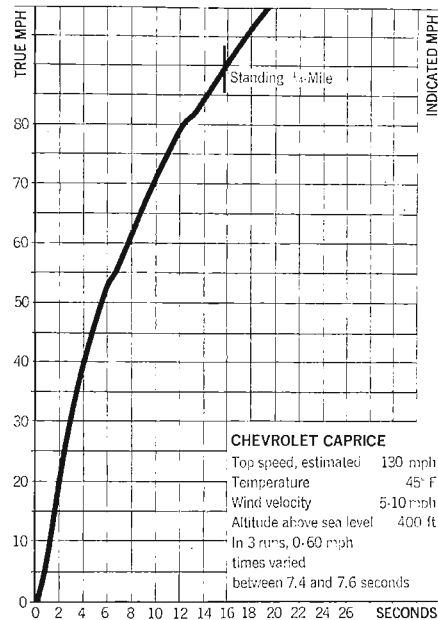
CHEVROLET CAPRICE 427

Manufacturer: Chevrolet Division
General Motors Corporation
Detroit 2, Michigan

Price as Tested: \$4640.50

ACCELERATION

Zero To	Seconds
30 mph	3.0
40 mph	4.1
50 mph	5.6
60 mph	7.6
70 mph	9.7
80 mph	12.4
90 mph	15.7
100 mph	19.4
Standing ¼ mile	90 mph in 15.7



ENGINE

Water-cooled V-8, cast iron block, 5 main bearings
Bore x stroke... 4.25 x 3.76 in, 109 x 96 mm
Displacement... 427 cu. in, 7000 cc
Compression ratio... 10.25 to one
Carburetion... Single 4-barrel
Valve gear... Pushrod-operated overhead valves, hydraulic lifters
Power (SAE)... 390 bhp @ 5200 rpm
Torque... 460 lbs.-ft @ 3600 rpm
Specific power output... 0.91 bhp per cu. in, 55.7 bhp per liter
Usable range of engine speeds 1000-5200 rpm
Electrical system... 12-volt, 21 amp-hr battery, 450W generator
Fuel recommended... Premium
Mileage... 12-16 mpg
Range on 20-gallon tank... 240-320 miles

DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission... 3-speed automatic, plus torque converter

Gear	Ratio	Overall	mph/1000 rpm	Max mph
Rev	2.08	5.68	—13.6	—57
1st	2.48	6.77	11.5	54
2nd	1.48	4.04	19.2	81
3rd	1.00	2.23	28.4	130
Final drive ratio	... 2.73 to one			

CHASSIS

Wheelbase... 119.0 in
Track... F 62.5; R 62.4 in
Length... 213.2 in
Width... 79.6 in
Height... 54.4 in
Ground clearance... 6.1 in
Curb weight... 4116 lbs
Test weight... 4553 lbs
Weight distribution front/rear... 56/44%
Pounds per bhp (test weight)... 11.7
Suspension F: Ind., upper wishbone, lower locating strut and drag strut, coil springs, anti-sway bar
R: Rigid axle, locating links, coil springs
Brakes... 11-in drums F and R, 328.3 sq in swept area
Steering... Recirculating ball, power assisted
Turns, lock to lock... 3.5
Turning circle... 41 ft.
Tires and wheels... 8.25 x 14 on 5.0-in rim

CHECK LIST

ENGINE

Starting... Very Good
Response... Good
Noise... Very Good
Vibration... Very Good

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch action... —
Transmission linkage... —
Synchromesh action... —
Power-to-ground transmission... Fair

BRAKES

Response... Good
Pedal pressure... Good
Fade resistance... Fair
Smoothness... Good
Directional stability... Good

STEERING

Response... Fair
Accuracy... Fair
Feedback... Poor
Road feel... Poor

SUSPENSION

Harshness control... Very Good
Roll stiffness... Poor
Tracking... Fair
Pitch control... Fair
Shock damping... Poor

CONTROLS

Location... Very Good
Relationship... Very Good
Small controls... Good

INTERIOR

Visibility... Excellent
Instrumentation... Good
Lighting... Very Good
Entry/exit... Very Good
Front seating comfort... Very Good
Front seating room... Very Good
Rear seating comfort... Good
Rear seating room... Good
Storage space... Good
Wind noise... Excellent
Road noise... Very Good

WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater... Excellent
Defroster... Excellent
Ventilation... Very Good
Weather sealing... Very Good
Windshield wiper action... Excellent

QUALITY CONTROL

Materials, exterior... Very Good
Materials, interior... Very Good
Exterior finish... Good
Interior finish... Good
Hardware and trim... Very Good

GENERAL

Service accessibility... Fair
Luggage space... Excellent
Bumper protection... Very Good
Exterior lighting... Excellent
Resistance to crosswinds... Excellent

