

CAR LIFE  
ROAD TEST



# Falcon Ranchero V-8

## ***Ford's Fancy Funabout Is More than Mere Utility***

**S**ELDOM DO WE receive for testing a car that is so pleasant, and seldom does our testing become so enjoyable. This was the case with the 1966 Falcon Ranchero, which was a pleasant surprise from the beginning. It was a car we hadn't expected to get—hadn't even requested, as a matter of fact—but there it was, one of the first '66s to show up in our parking lot. Moreover, it was ours to play with for a good long time, with no pressure to return it for some other assignment.

*Car Life* sampled a Falcon some time ago, before the Mustang onslaught. It was a 289-cu. in. Sprint V-8 convertible, likewise a "fun" car, extremely pleasant despite those few drawbacks dictated by cost considerations. The Falcon, in the final analysis, is and has been a minimal cost answer to the transportation needs of the American public. From that point of view, it is difficult to fault the Falcon with any great conviction.

For the first time since 1960, the

Falcon really is new this year. There was a major change in lower sheet metal in 1964, coinciding with the appearance of the Chevelle and B-O-P A-body intermediates, but the change then was only skin deep. Not only is there a full-blown new body this year, but a significant realignment of the full Falcon/Fairlane spectrum also occurred. The upshot of this change-about is a thoroughly upgraded Falcon of virtual Fairlane standards. As one product planner told a CL editor re-





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cently. "The level of quality which was sufficient for 1960 is no longer adequate in the mid-'60s."

Dimensional comparisons illustrate the change in Falcon/Fairlane relationships this year:

	'65 Fal- con	'66 Fal- con	'66 Ran- chero	'65 Fair- lane	'66 Fair- lane
Wheel- base	109.5	110.9	113.0	116.0	116.0
Overall length	181.6	184.3	197.5	198.8	197.0
Width	71.6	73.5	74.7	73.8	74.0
Height	54.5	54.6	56.2	55.8	54.3
Tread, f/r	55/56	58/58	58/58	57/56	58/58
Curb weight, base car, lb.	2510	2677	2615	2975	2922
Std. engine	170/105	170/105	200/120	200/120	200/120
Max. engine	289/225	289/200	289/225	289/271	390/335
Base tire, 6.60-13	6.50-13	7.35-14	6.95-14	6.95-14	6.95-14
V-8	6.45-14	6.95-14	7.75-14	7.35-14	7.75-14

To be completely accurate, another

column should be added to the chart for the Comet. It fits immediately after the Ranchero and before the Fairlane, completing the progressive range of dimensions from prior Falcons to present Fairlanes. The Ranchero column does, in fact, contain figures which are representative of all three brands, because all share the same station wagon body, basis of the Ranchero pickup.

Such close alignment among the "light cars," as company spokesmen characterize them, might be expected to lead to a great deal of internecine cannibalism. But, as the GM divisions have proven with their A-body cars, there's enough action in that market segment to satisfy everybody and, additionally, it is growing. From early sales results, the Ford realignment bears this out. The Falcon may not be doing spectacular things, but Ford marketers didn't expect it to until

spring. Other '66 cars were expected to take the early spotlight (which they did) and Mustang momentum was enough to initially obscure the arrival of the new Falcon. At introduction time, *Car Life* characterized the Falcon as the "sleeper" and it's just about time for awakening.

It seems almost odd, in view of the more utilitarian nature of the Ranchero, that it should so readily awaken attention wherever it is driven. It is, obviously, styled with restraint and a great deal of taste, but it really shouldn't attract all that attention. In fact, when passing an El Camino on the street, there's a little too much resemblance noticeable. Still, that's hardly unusual among light trucks, where often only huge tailgate nameplates serve to differentiate brands.

**C**LOSER COMPARISON to the El Camino reveals a mixed scorecard. Most obviously, the Chevrolet pickup can be ordered with a much larger engine—up to the 396 cu. in./360 bhp level. For another thing, it is minutely larger in most dimensions and a full 2 in. longer in wheelbase. The El Camino has had in the past the appearance, at least, of being somewhat more expensive than the Ranchero, though probably this no longer is true. Where the Ranchero chucks up points, however, is in being unitized. It is a much more solid vehicle on the road, without any particular sacrifice in riding comfort (unladen), and tips the scales at 300 lb. less in basic form.

The test Ranchero was the Custom model, identified initially by the twin-stripe paint highlight along the body midline and bright metal trim around wheel openings and along the rocker sill. Though equipped with the 4-barrel 225-bhp V-8 engine, it initially impressed our testers as having the 2-barrel, 200-bhp engine which tops the regular Falcon sedan option list. It was not until the engine was physically examined, once uncertainties cropped up in preparing the data panel, that the fact of the matter was discovered.

There were several explanations for this state of affairs. Most obvious was an extremely erroneous speedometer, which announced a more sluggish pace of performance than actually was the case. There was some hint of this when one driver, indicating 60 mph on the freeway, discovered he was moving faster than the rest of the traffic. Without the grim determination to continually rate and relate the Ranchero—which normally happens with a test car—this aspect was ignored until all the data were gathered.

Another item, psychologically at least, put a damper on performance: The Thermactor exhaust control device. Like a California Albatross strung

by a fan belt to the engine's neck, it emitted an incessant, continually audible inhaling of air. Its purpose is ostensibly to complete fuel combustion in the exhaust manifold, but visions of radically disorganized air flows within the engine beclouded that knowledge. The moan of air being ingested sounded like nothing so much as a sick engine, hence the vehicle just didn't *seem* healthy to our drivers. Perhaps it was; auto engineers say that engine performance isn't inhibited by the exhaust devices, though their smiles may seem a bit weak when they say it. Maybe the engine just sounds that way and there is another explanation for significantly better performance in a non-Thermactored '65 CL test car. That was a Mustang with an identical power train, but only 300 lb. lighter in weight (CL, April 1965), which achieved a 16.8 sec. quarter-mile with an 84 mph terminal velocity, an 8.5 sec. 0-60 and a 15.8 sec. 0-80. It, too, recorded a 15-18 mpg range in fuel consumption. Or there was the even closer parallel of the '65 Fairlane (CL, March '65) weighing 100 lb. more, but producing 25 bhp less with only a 2-barrel carburetor, which returned performance figures as good as the Ranchero's. But, perhaps there's some other explanation.

Be that as it may, the Ranchero was sprightly enough for the purposes to which it may be put. The overall pleasantness of the vehicle contributed greatly toward overcoming the Thermactor distraction. While it is difficult to pinpoint the reason for the car's appeal, we suspect a large part of it was due to the 2-passenger nature of the cabin. Ford, despite corporate objections to 2-passenger vehicles, has produced one in the Ranchero. It isn't a sports car by any stretch of the imagination, but the cabin gives the impression of one. There is something about having the rear window just behind one's shoulders which imparts a closer kinship between driver and machine. Even the utilitarian nature of the Ranchero couldn't destroy this cozy relationship.

Bucket seats and console added to this illusion, permitting occupants to forget about that trailing cargo space (which really isn't all that commodious). Custom trim adds \$136 to the cost of the vehicle and it is up to the individual buyer to determine whether such accommodations are worth the tariff. The buckets are quite flat, sitting somewhat higher than expected, and separated by the asymmetrically rounded console which is Ford fashion this year. The seats provide a minimum of lateral support although back support is adequate for long distance traveling.

**T**HE SEATING POSITION was what has come to be regarded as typically



SCOTT MALCOLM PHOTOS



Ford: the cushion is either a shade too low or the steering wheel a shade too high. It is always a bother to adjust to this foible with each new Ford, but in the Ranchero's case, it was quickly accommodated. Staff members agreed, however, that were any of them to buy a Ranchero they would immediately replace the deeply dished steering

wheel with one of the sportier, flatter, thicker-rimmed wheels that are available. This, in effect, would lower the wheel slightly as well as place it a trifle farther from the driver's chest—thereby exchanging whatever chest protecting value the deep-dish design may have for the accident-avoiding value of proper control.



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Even so, there were no problems in proper control of the Ranchero. Indeed, this too, was one of the factors which made the vehicle so pleasant. Somewhat surprisingly, the weight distribution of the unloaded Ranchero is a great deal better than the curbside glance would indicate. With the back end doing a fairer share of the work, handling and control do not suffer as might otherwise be expected. But more basic has been the change in front suspension geometry, raising the front roll center for the new chassis structure to improve the precision in handling and roadability. The newly designed steering linkage was quite good, exhibiting none of the full-lock kick that marred earlier power-assisted Falcons, although assistance is still via linkage booster instead of the more modern integral arrangement. Adequate effort and road feel are retained, so that the driver doesn't feel he's twisting the steering shaft in a pile of greased ball bearings.

Brakes are only average in effectiveness, though they exhibited a welcome ability to resist fade. It was possible to lock the rears in a panic stop, but this was more the fault of the power boost than the brakes themselves. Keeping in mind that the vehicle would undoubtedly be used hauling things in the back, the brakes are none too good. It's a pity that the Mustang discs aren't available on Fairlanes or Falcons, too.

One tangible benefit of last season's legislative harassment of Detroit has been the placarding of new cars with decals advising proper tire inflations and load limits. This, together with the fitting of larger tires on many cars, is a welcome move. In the Ranchero, the decal inside the glove box lid warns drivers to carry 24 psi front and 30 psi rear (cold) and to add 4 psi all around for fast driving. It also states that 850 lb. is maximum rated load with standard suspension (driver plus 700 lb. cargo) or 1250 with heavy-duty under-

pinnings. It may only be our imagination, but the owner's manual inside the glove box also seemed more thorough and informative than has heretofore been the case.

Larger cross-section tires make the Ranchero sit slightly higher than other Falcons, a factor easing entrance and exit from the sporty interior. And that interior, complete with wall-to-wall carpeting, vinyl door panel inserts and padded everything else, was impressive for its care in assembly. This was a utilitarian vehicle, in Ford's cheapest domestic line, but it illustrated the great strides in assembly quality which the corporation has taken in the past 24 months. There were no gaps, no rough edges, no slap-dash attachments, no dangling wires or doodads that didn't work. Everything was designed to fit and, when it was put together, it did just that. The only flaw we could find was a tiny corner of the seat covering poking out from beneath the chrome side molding; it was easily remedied with momentary application of a razor blade.

**O**NE THING worked too well: The light in the transmission lever's console quadrant was bright enough to cause distraction when driving at night.

## 1966 FORD FALCON CUSTOM RANCHERO



DIMENSIONS	
Wheelbase, in.....	113.0
Track, f/r, in.....	58/58
Overall length, in.....	197.5
width.....	74.7
height.....	56.2
Front seat hip room, in.....	2 x 25
shoulder room.....	58.0
headroom.....	38.2
pedal-seatback, max.....	46.5
Rear seat hip room, in.....	
shoulder room.....	
leg room.....	
head room.....	
Door opening width, in.....	45.5
Floor to ground height, in.....	12.5
Ground clearance, in.....	5.9

PRICES	
List, fob factory.....	\$2299
Equipped as tested.....	3118
Options included: 289/225 engine, auto. trans., power steering, power brakes, bucket seats and console, wheel covers, remote side mirror, exhaust control system, pushbutton am radio, deluxe seat belts, used tires.	

CAPACITIES	
No. of passengers.....	2
Luggage space, cu. ft.....	39.1
Fuel tank, gal.....	20.0
Crankcase, qt.....	5.0
Transmission/diff., pt.....	8.25/4
Radiator coolant, qt.....	15.0

### CHASSIS/SUSPENSION

Frame type.....	unitized
Front suspension type: Independent s.l.a. with lower drag strut, ball joints, coil springs over upper arm, concentric tubular shock absorber.	
ride rate at wheel, lb./in.....	192
anti-roll bar dia., in.....	0.65
Rear suspension type: Hotchkiss drive, with variable rate semi-elliptic leaf springs and angle-mounted tubular shock absorbers.	
ride rate at wheel, lb./in.....	100-160
Steering system: Recirculating ball and nut gearbox; parallelogram linkage, power assisted.	
gear ratio.....	16:1
overall ratio.....	21.4:1
turns, lock to lock.....	3.73
turning circle, ft. curb-curb.....	41.0
Curb weight, lb.....	2945
Test weight.....	3560
Weight distribution, %f/r.....	53.5/46.5

### BRAKES

Type: Single-line hydraulic, self-adjusting duo-servo shoes in cast-iron drums.	
Front drum, dia. x width, in.....	10 x 2.5
Rear drum, dia. x width.....	10 x 2.0
total swept area, sq. in.....	282.6
Power assist.....	integral, vac. booster
line psi @ 100 lb. pedal.....	760

### WHEELS/TIRES

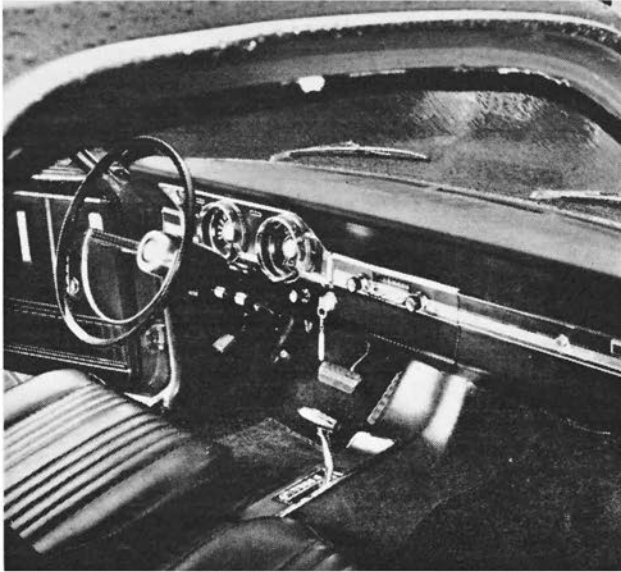
Wheel size.....	14x5J
optional size available.....	none
bolt no./circle dia., in.....	5/4.5
Tire make, brand: Goodyear Power Cushion	
size.....	7.35-14
recommended inflation, psi.....	24/30
capacity rating, total lb.....	4080

### ENGINE

Type, no. cyl.....	ohv, V-8
Bore x stroke, in.....	4.00 x 2.87
Displacement, cu. in.....	289
Compression ratio.....	10:1
Rated bhp @ rpm.....	225 @ 4800
equivalent mph.....	120
Rated torque @ rpm.....	305 @ 3200
equivalent mph.....	79
Carburetion.....	1x4
barrel dia., pri./sec.....	1.437
Valve operation: Hydraulic lifters pushrods and rockers	
valve dia., int./exh.....	1.78/1.45
lift, int./exh.....	0.36/0.38
timing, deg.....	16-70, 52-24
duration, int./exh.....	266/266
opening overlap.....	40
Exhaust system: Y type, single muffler	
pipe dia., exh./tail.....	2.0/1.75
Lubrication pump type.....	rotor
normal press. @ rpm.....	50-60@2000
Electrical supply.....	alternator
ampere rating.....	38
Battery, plates/amp. rating.....	54/45

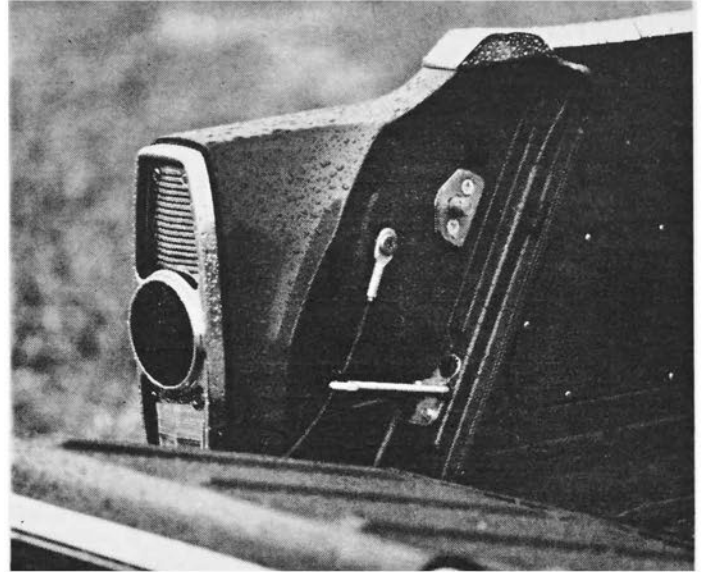
### DRIVE-TRAIN

Transmission type: Torque converter automatic, 3-speed with planetary gears.	
Gear ratio 4th ( ) overall.....	
3rd (1.00).....	3.00
2nd (1.46).....	4.38
1st (2.46).....	7.38
1st x t.c. stall (2.02).....	14.9
synchronous meshing.....	planetary
Shift lever location.....	console
Differential type: Hypoid; straddle-mounted pinion	
axle ratio.....	3.00:1



IT'S A pleasure to be picked up in this pickup fitted with bucket seats, console and carpeting.

Rough edges and runny paint were visible in one place—down behind the seats where a pair of compartments were cut under the cargo deck. One was filled with the spare tire, but the other made an excellent out-of-sight stowage area for valuables being carried in the car. There obviously is little need to finish off such inconspicuous places.

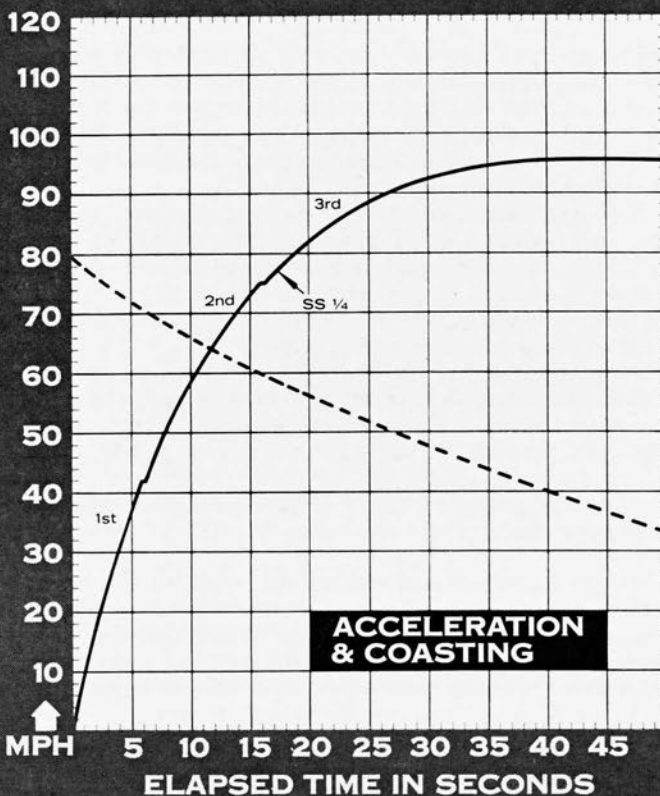


EVEN TAILGATE actuation can be fun with an assist from the Ranchero's counter-sprung lifting mechanism.

The Ranchero had enough charm about it to make one forget he was, after all, only riding in a pickup truck. It was quite sufficient, in appearance and in grace, for driving to the country club or to a doorman-attended hotel. We suspect that womenfolk wouldn't need much persuasion to be chaperoned to a fancy-dress ball in this car. But

more than that, it was fun to drive. There was an exhilaration about the Ranchero, not from a wind-in-the-face sportiness, but in a delightfully capable, nimble and responsive vehicle which performed its assigned tasks with aplomb. The most disappointing thing about it was that we had to return it. ■

## CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



### CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test weight)	15.8
Cu.ft./ton mile	114
Mph/1000rpm (top gear)	24.8
Engine revs/mile (60 mph)	2420
Piston travel, ft./mile	1160
Car Life wear Index	28.0
Frontal area, sq. ft.	23.4
Box volume, cu. ft.	431

### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	31.7
40 mph	42.8
50 mph	54.2
60 mph	65.0
70 mph	75.6
80 mph	86.0
90 mph	96.0

### MAINTENANCE INTERVALS

Oil change, engine, miles	6000
transmission/differential	as req.
Oil filter change	6000
Air cleaner service, mo.	12
Chassis lubrication	36,000
Wheelbearing re-packing	30,000
Universal joint service	30,000
Coolant change, mo.	24

### TUNE-UP DATA

Spark plugs	BF-42
gap, in.	0.032-0.036
Spark setting, deg./idle rpm	0/950
cent. max. advance, deg./rpm	26/4800
vac. max. adv., deg./in. Hg	15/11.5
Breaker gap, in.	0.014-0.016
cam dwell angle	26-28.5
arm tension, oz.	17-20
Tappet clearance, int./exh.	0/0
Fuel pump pressure, psi	4.5
Radiator cap relief press., psi	12-15

### PERFORMANCE

Top speed (3800), mph	95
Shifts (rpm) @ mph	
3rd to 4th ( )	10.3
2nd to 3rd (4400)	7.5
1st to 2nd (4200)	4.2

### ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	3.9
0-40 mph	5.6
0-50 mph	7.7
0-60 mph	10.3
0-70 mph	13.9
0-80 mph	18.8
0-90 mph	25.8
0-100 mph	34.0
Standing 1/4-mile, sec.	17.7
speed at end, mph	78
Passing, 30-70 mph, sec.	10.0

### BRAKING

(Maximum deceleration rate achieved from 80 mph)	
1st stop, ft./sec./sec.	22
fade evident?	some, rears lock
2nd stop, ft./sec./sec.	21.5
fade evident?	slight

### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Test conditions, mpg	16.8
Normal conditions, mpg	14-17
Cruising range, miles	280-340

### GRADABILITY

4th, % grade @ mph	10 @ 56
3rd	16 @ 43
2nd	21 @ 30
1st	30 @ 21

### DRAG FACTOR

Total drag @ 60 mph, lb.	214
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