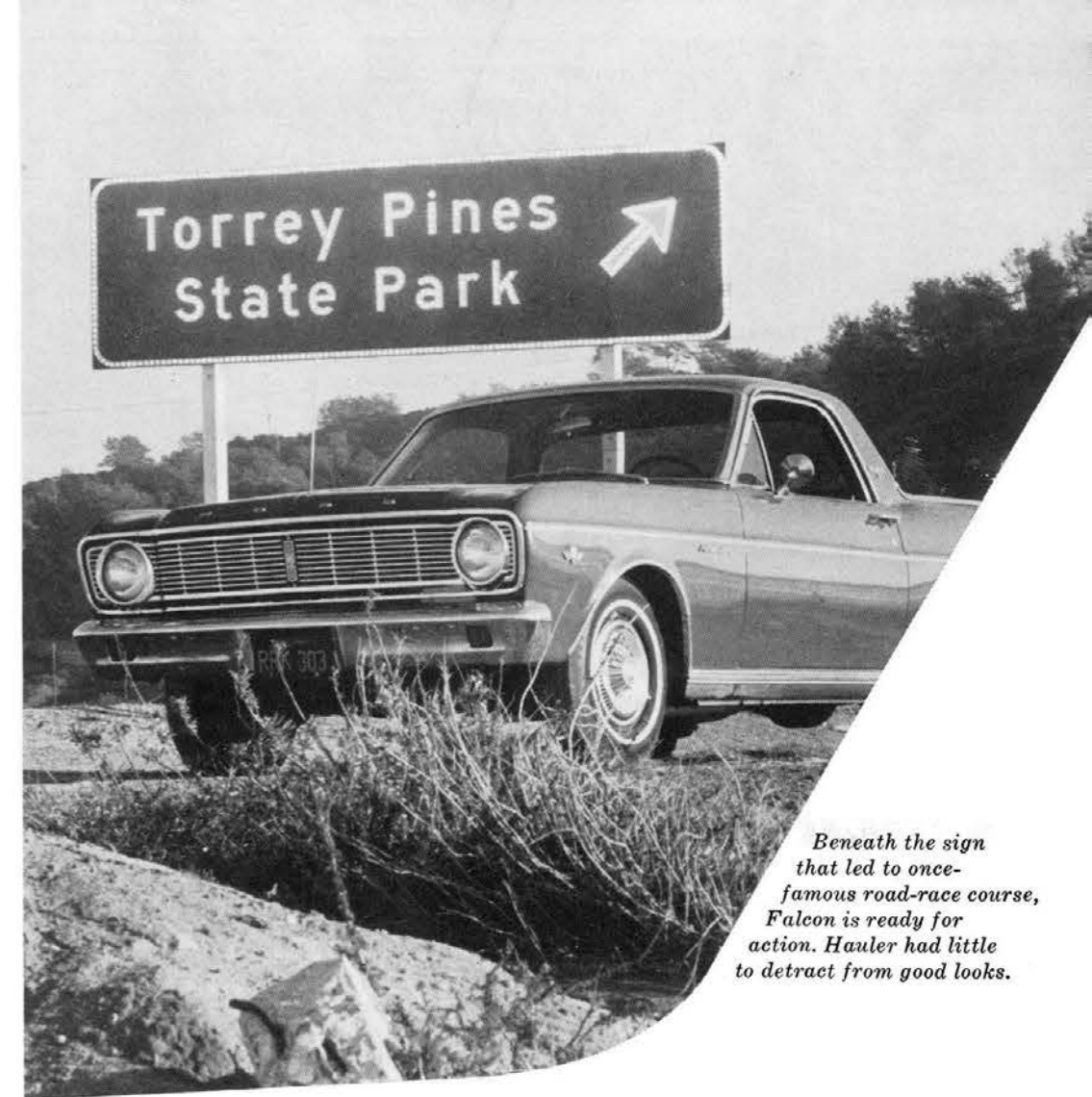




Back lit by the shimmering Pacific, Ranchero etches a stylish silhouette in lengthening shadows.



Beneath the sign that led to once-famous road-race course, Falcon is ready for action. Hauler had little to detract from good looks.



# Town & Country Hauler

**Longer, lower, more luxurious, more powerful and in short, just plain better — this year's Ranchero puts a lot of good things on the line**

by Eric Dahlquist/technical editor

photography: Eric Rickman

Worm  
ROAD  
TEST

Although it is contradictory to the actual fact of an ever more specialized American culture, there still seems a strong current of sentiment, as well as a ready market for the multi-purpose creation; things which combine the best of two or more worlds: lawnmowers that have alter egos as snow blowers, a winning drag machine that is satisfactory for everyday use, a Harvard education and a Yale degree (to note a famous quip).

Nowhere is this more true than in the automotive industry, and the most striking example is the passenger car pickup. The vehicle which, if you are to accept the validity of our advertising age, carries hay and fodder to the flock in the daylight and then at the curtain of night whisks you in magnificence to the front door of the country club without the slightest chance of being thought uncouth. So, how about it? Is it all ballyhoo? Do the Rancheros and El Caminos deliver the goods in both contexts or are they merely compromises that have limited passenger as well as cargo capacity?

It's been a number of years since we've tested one of these svelte beasts of burden, the Camino in '64 and the Ranchero 'way back when it first came out in 1957, but we've never really been too far away from the subject since our Photo Editor, E. Rickman, has a late Camino and Editor Bob Greene has probably the cherriest '58 Ranchero in captivity. Our idea: sample both current offerings and see how they stacked up against what they profess to be; the Ranchero this month and Camino next.



As with all American rolling stock of late, Ford has cleverly combined Thunderbird roofline with long-hooded Mustang flavor. Wheel cutouts are generous, tire changes easy. As with all American rolling stock of late, Ford has cleverly combined Thunderbird roofline with long-hooded Mustang flavor. Wheel cutouts are generous, tire changes easy.

was less expensive but also less practical, because the carrying capacity was diminished. It still is in the Falcon line, but since that group now shares a common unit structure with the Fairlane, it's big again, larger inside and out, in fact, bigger than the '57 dimensions — in some aspects. Looking at it another way, the bed space is about 2 inches wider and deeper, and about 5 inches longer than the original Ranchero.

From the outside, the Falcon Ranchero bears not so much resemblance to its forebearer as to the El Camino, which is just about in the same league as far as dimensions go but offers a mite more engine flexibility. In fact, one passenger thought he was actually in an El Camino prototype, a misapprehension which ought to be food for thought at either or both styling camps.

This business about sharing basic Fairlane body structure tacitly implies several more bonuses than just a larger size which, in the Ranchero, incidentally, was .5-inch longer overall at 197.5 inches than the GT/A we tested last month. Try this for size. Almost all the suspension parts under the Falcon 289-V8, our test machine, were identical to those of its bigger brother, the Fairlane. This means that the pieces aren't necessarily more sturdy in proportion (because the Falcon is not that much smaller), but that some of those good Fairlane GT things would fit the Ranchero

continued





*You may bring home many bushels of seashells in the new Ranchero but surfboards or motorcycles or even a small boat would be more likely prospects. Rear window is recessed, allowing more bed space and shading—and a bit of a blind spot.*

## Town & Country Hauler

even though they're not specifically listed as options. Like the bigger brakes, stiffer springs, fatter anti-sway bar and quicker steering, just to enumerate a few fleeting surface reflections. And, as the Fairlane's unit construction was a stable platform on which to build, the Ranchero is especially solid because of that extra passenger compartment bulkhead stiffening up the entire structure. This particular idio-

syncrasy, capitalized to its maximum, would have allowed a door closing sound closely akin to the vault at the Chase Manhattan Bank. But, for some reason, the few cents worth of necessary insulation was conspicuously absent, and while not quite in the same steel-drum department as the Baja Marimba Band, it was less a statement than an echo. Since Ford has taken particular pains to place themselves in the low-volume sound chamber, it is hard to fathom the reason why the Ranchero had such a hollow ring. One possible reason may be that the extra bulkhead could make the structure a little too solid, causing the doors to oil-can when slammed. Well, maybe.

Other than this, our brick-red Ranchero was uncommonly

*Test truck had stock suspension but heavy-duty kit is available for 1200-lb. loads. Five-leaf spring is wrapped in butyl rubber, completely isolating it from the rear axle. Engine was proven 289 cubic-incher that delivered good gas mileage but felt a little strangled on the upper end. Thermactor emission control was first we've come in contact with in tests.*



*Interior appointments were far above average in both balance and quality. Bucket seats were good compromise between adequate support and softness. Beneath fiberboard panel that finished bulkhead neatly, space was provided for tire, parcels.*



free from assembly-line faults. All the trim ended where it should have and was properly fastened and aligned. Even the thin, twin white stripes which ran down the midsection gave a sense of individual detailing.

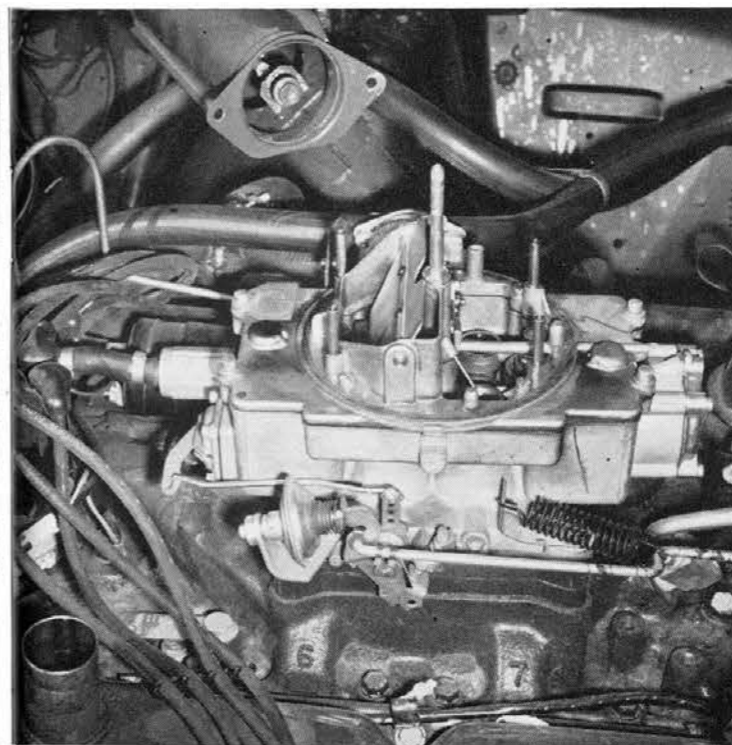
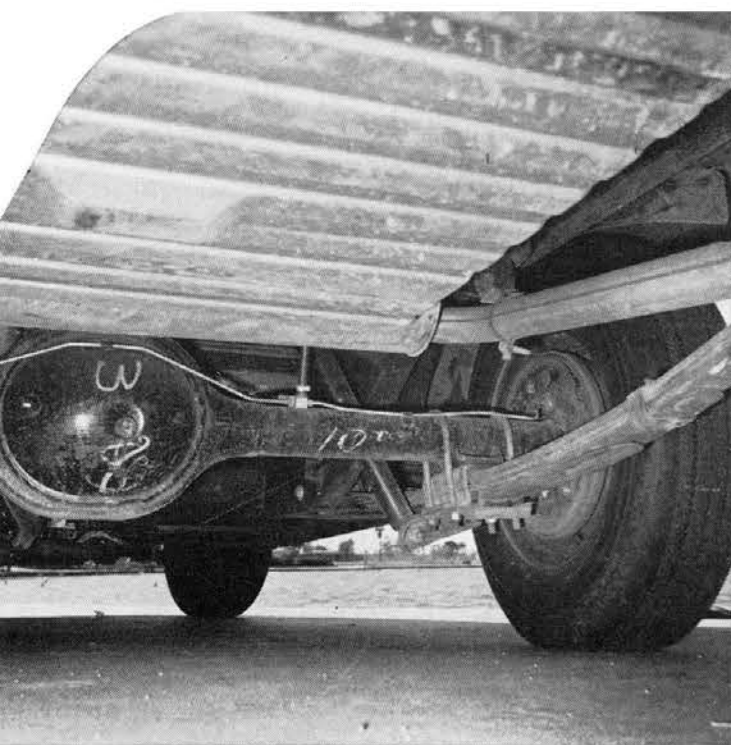
Once quartered in one of the bucket seats, the "in-group" is treated to the bosset of boss sights, an all-black interior that runs from the doors, paneled in vinyl, to waves of rolling deep-pile carpeting that just oozes luxury. Tasteful contrast is the gleaming instrument control group which consists totally of two round nacelles and, between the seats, the side-saddle Sports-Shift console. If you recall, last month our hackles were raised by the firmness of the buckets, and the radio which didn't bathe us in soft serenade. Now sup-

posedly, these items are similar from the Fairlane to the Falcon and vice versa. At least they look the same, but somehow the Ranchero's saddles were more enjoyable, as was the audio.

We didn't have the Ranchero nearly as long as we would have liked, especially after getting a taste of long stretches of open road. To say that the Falcon Engineering hawks have truly worked wonders in getting the car to float along at 60-70 mph without annoying chop or bounce or pitch fails in trying to relate how great the Ranchero's ride really is. Ford is anxious to have people get out and test drive their offerings and this is one of the prime reasons.

*(Continued on page 88)*

*Only bits of tuning performed on Ranchero engine were checks to see that: contacts had right gap, butterflies opened all the way and positioning of accelerator pump arm in highest throttle arm hole. These things helped slightly. Front suspension is typical FoMoCo coil over A-arm arrangement that was good for ride but less than great for cornering. Options would help.*







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**Town & Country Hauler**  
*continued from page 33*

Lying like a distant cloud on the horizon was the anticipation that the soft springing and shocking required for the cushioned-carpet effect would not augur well for superior handling on humpy, twisting back roads. And it didn't, at least not to the Fairlane GT's level of accomplishment. Oh, it will get around a turn safely enough for average conditions, but with a weight bias front to rear of 53.4-46.6 (percent), and recommended tire pressure of 24-30 pounds front to rear, it means that you dash about with care, especially when the movements are quick because the body tends to lift just a little as the chassis gets set up. It's a forgiving machine, though, for although we lost it for just an instant in the rain on one occasion, it recovered in marvelous fashion. It would demand only a few pieces to improve the situation, such as a bigger anti-roll bar (the stock is .065-inch) and higher rate springs. Interestingly enough, the Ranchero offers a heavy-duty load package, stated to up total carrying capacity from 850 pounds to 1250 and, although we didn't learn exactly of what the heartier things consisted, it probably isn't too unlike the Fairlane GT options.

The last Ford we tested didn't have discs and really didn't need them, but that was with 314 square inches of swept drum area on a machine weighing 3600 pounds or so. Reduce the swept area to 282.6 inches and the area-to-weight ratio, while adequate, is not outstanding. We made our usual number of hard stops from 60 mph and found that the molded organic linings get the job done but not without fade. For our dough, the minimum anchors for the Ranchero should be identical to the Fairlane GT.

The Rancheros in '66 can be had with three choices of powerplants: a 120 hp 200 cubic inch six; a 200 hp 289 cubic inch V8 with 2-barrel carburetor; and the 4.005 x 2.87-inch bore and stroke 225 hp 289 we had in the test car. Engineering on the mills hasn't been altered greatly from 289's of the past, and the same type carburetor and distributor are retained. There is one thing that is new, however, the Thermactor exhaust control device. California has led the nation in its continuing fight against smog and the exhaust hydrocarbons which allegedly produce it, and they are the first to require a piece of equipment that helps the engine to burn its fuel more efficiently, thereby reducing the number of hydrocarbons reaching the clean air.

In effect, there is a tiny air injector pump (another belt-driven accessory) which forces fresh oxygen into the exhaust manifold where it re-ignites and

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burns away most of those hydrocarbons which somehow get away scot-free from the chambers. Besides increasing exhaust manifold temperature (no more custom headers), it also requires some slight modifications to the carburetor and ignition, like leaning the mixture and retarding the spark about 6 degrees.

The 289 has always been fairly snappy but our Ranchero just seemed to run out of breath on top end. When first encountering this condition, we checked the point and plug gap (.015 and .032 inches respectively) and the carburetor to see if the barrels were opening to their maximum. Everything was fine.

While the air cleaner was off, we moved the accelerator pump arm to its highest position, a trick on a Ford-produced carburetor that is the hot-tip. Although this helped slightly, it didn't unleash any lightning, as 0-60's in the low 10's reflected. We didn't take the Ranchero to the drags, but similarly equipped machines are turning high 17-second runs in the mid 70's.

Our engineering qualifications do not permit us to state that the Thermactor decreased performance but we noted with interest that our Fairlane GT had somehow been delivered without one.

Transmission choice in this Ranchero was the 3-speed Cruise-O-Matic with ratios of 2.46, 1.46 and 1.00. It has a neat feature that will especially be appreciated where King Winter holds court. You see, the selector could be left in D (green) and the box would mesh on its appointed rounds or, by putting the indicator in D (red), (one notch forward), the trans would take off in second gear, just right when coupled with the 3.00 rear end ratio for quick get-away in slip and slide scenes.

Another thing that we liked, and will no doubt find favor with everyone, is that the Ranchero, equipped with 4-barrel and all, weaned out surprisingly good gas mileage. On a 300-mile jaunt to Bruce Crower's in Chula Vista, California, 5 miles from the American/Mexican border, the Ford recorded a laudable 17.1 mpg at sustained 65-70 mph speeds. And around town, in both normal and express thoroughfares, this figure elevated to about 18 mpg flat, quite high as current U.S. models go.

And the price wasn't bad, either, listing out at some \$3118.00 with power steering, brakes, radio, buckets and the other extra cost items. These two things, gas economy with reasonable performance and nonprohibitive sticker price, are two reasons why the new Falcon has a good year ahead. If it also incorporated bigger brakes and stiffer suspension, correcting those difficulties which dull the brilliance of its luster, who knows - there might be a Ford in almost everyone's future. ■■



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