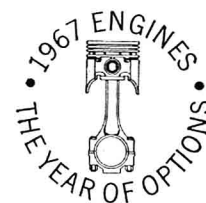




COUGAR

BY JOHN ETHRIDGE



One had the big 390, air, automatic, etc., for luxury and comfort; the other was lean and muscular with a highly tweaked "Group Two" dual 4-barrel 289, 4-speed, and special suspension for fast touring or road racing.

HERB ALPERT has an orchestra full of soloists and so too does Cougar. Each of the many car combinations has a personality and purpose of its own. They all may be from the same large litter but there is a cat there for every buyer except Yellow Cab, despite the one available body style.

We drove them all but instrumented only two at interesting but opposite ends of the usage spectrum. The first was equipped strictly for comfortable touring. It had the 320-hp 390 V-8, air conditioning, automatic transmission, radio, and numerous small accessories. Steering was powered, brakes were standard (drums) and so were the tires.

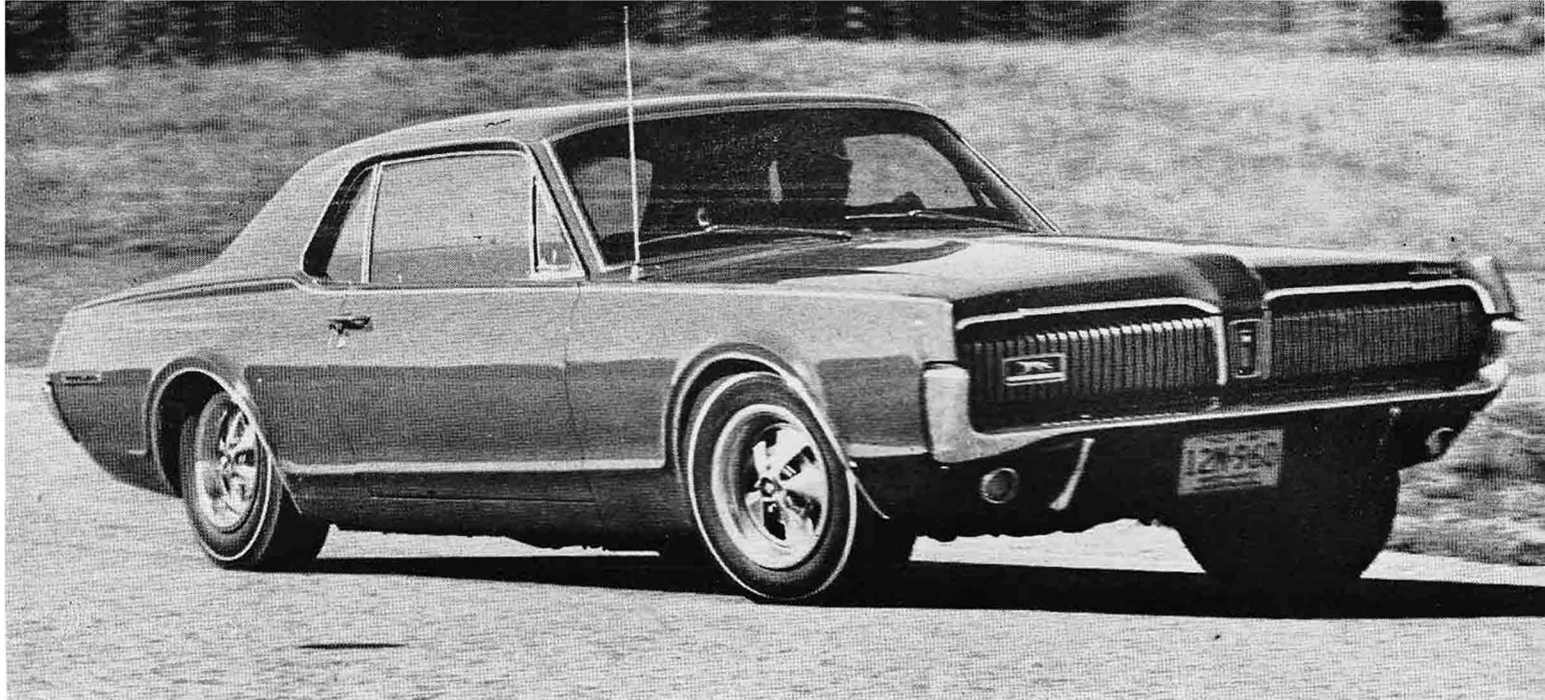
Our second Cougar was something else. We heard it coming long before it hove into clear sight. The rumbling engine quit soon as the driver turned

the key, but from the general demeanor of the beast, we wouldn't have been surprised to see him start beating it with a stick to make it stop. Then as we squatted down to see if we could tell just why it sat lower than the normal car, it cut loose with a stream of yellowish green liquid (somewhat like a startled squid). The latter turned out to be excess leak-detector coolant from an over-filled radiator; the first condition was due to a completely revised suspension geometry.

We had previously learned that this was the version of the Cougar with which Mercury is going racing, but we were somewhat surprised to find two 4-barrel Holley carbs feeding the 289 V-8 in place of the four dual Webers previously developed for this engine. The two Holleys, a hot cam and solid

lifters help produce the 340-hp package that finally was homologated for Group Two Sedan racing and is called just that—Group Two (see "Detroit Spotlight"). While most likely a matter of economics, the engine ran very well, as attested to in the performance chart (page 46). But before getting into the care and feeding of this beast, let's go riding in the street Cougar.

Getting in and out of the rather low Cougar isn't a particularly arduous chore for anyone. But for large drivers at least, it's greatly facilitated by the optional Tilt-Away steering wheel. Once settled down and buckled up, the first thing that impressed us was the length of the nose. It looks even longer from the inside than it does from the outside. We found it made a good aimer and pointer for general driving and also



COUGAR WITH GROUP TWO RACING PACKAGE NEGOTIATES BENDS WITH THE BEST MANNERS: PREDICTABLE UNDERSTEER, GOOD ADHESION.

COUGAR continued

gave an early warning when we were on the verge of over-cooking it during exuberant cornering. This long snout was the first thing we missed upon driving another car.

All driving controls are normally located and with the aid of the generous fore-and-aft seat travel provided, can be comfortably reached by drivers of various heights. The instruments are well designed, laid out, and lighted — and therefore easy to read.

The heater/air conditioning/blower control group is a marvel of compactness but is unlighted and on first glance is about as self-explanatory as the keys on a clarinet. We soon discovered it was of the normal 3-lever system — mode, temperature, and blower speed, and two days of living with the car perfected a touch system for day and night use.

Once the controls were mastered, we were always able to get precisely the windows-closed inside temperature that suited our fancy in ambients ranging from near-freezing to 80°F. Cranking each the heat and air full-on for short times convinced us the system can cope with far greater extremes. About the only improvement would be a full flow-through ventilation system, and we personally would like to see the Cougar have one.

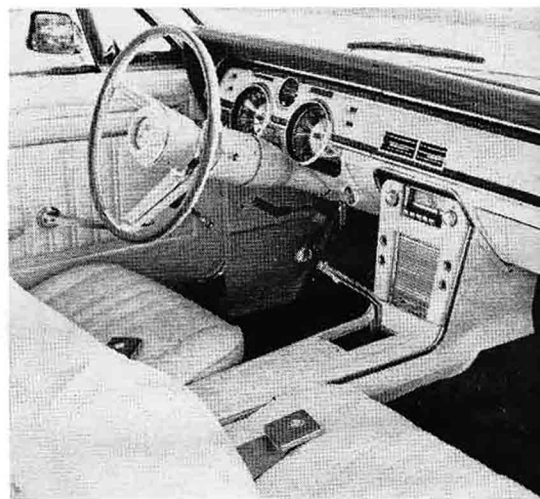
Visibility was about on a par with today's crop of cars, which is good. And, as in a number of others, the distant horizon is hidden by the top of the rear roof when viewed through the inside mirror. The outside mirror pretty much makes up for this shortcoming though, being vibrationless and located close to the driver's eyes with an excellent view to the left and rear.

Out of the half-dozen or so cars we drove, two had wind-noise problems caused by air leakage around one or the other window seals when driven at highway speeds, proving that the defect is a matter of assembly and adjustment rather than congenital. We mention this because it's all the more annoying on cars like the Cougar which is inherently as sneaky quiet as its namesake.

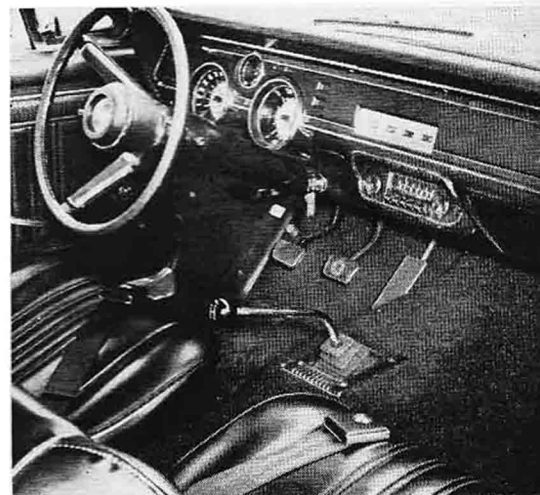
The standard Cougar suspension isn't the least bit what we would call mushy, and the articulated drag strut, voided bushings, and other chassis refinements do an almost totally effective job of keeping road noise out of the passenger compartment. We drove over a stretch of street where some 6-inch ridges had been laid to hold speeds below 10 mph. When driving over these, only tire thump was heard and virtually nothing felt. The most road noise we were able to raise came from a washboard gravel surface where it reached a crescendo in the form of a muffled roar as we approached certain critical speeds. We couldn't sense any crashing or bottoming-out of the snubbers.

The standard suspended and shod Cougar was able to cope with poorly paved surfaces up to approximately 70 mph. Above this directional stability suffered and control became difficult due to the wheels being in the air most of the time.

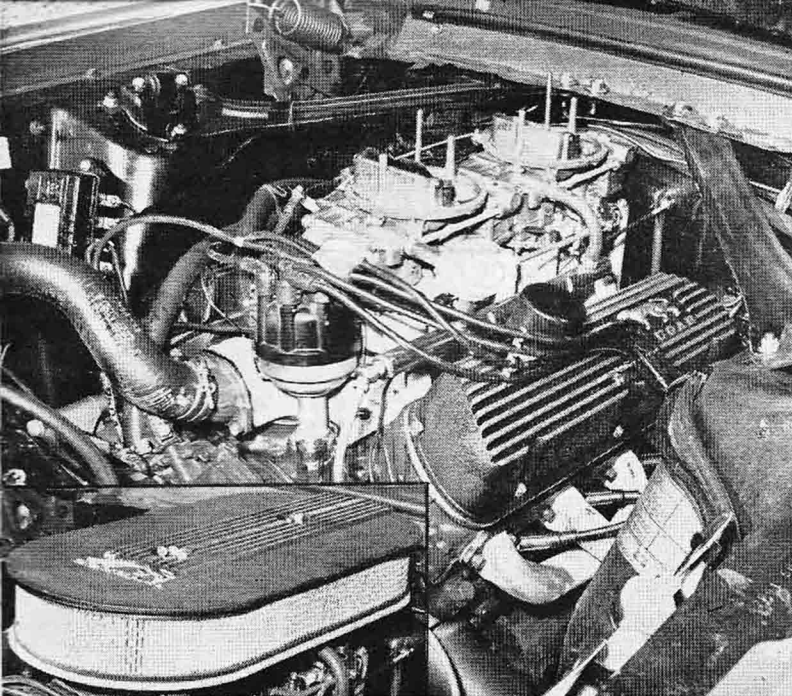
We traversed the same section of road, catching the same pot holes and frost ridges, in another Cougar with the handling package and Wide-Oval tires. As it turned out, we couldn't have found a better way to demonstrate just what you get and what you give up when you order this equipment. At high



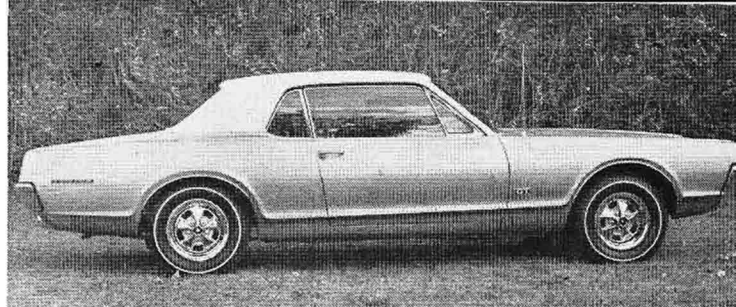
This Cougar sports 4-on-the-floor, console with cubby hole and warning lights.



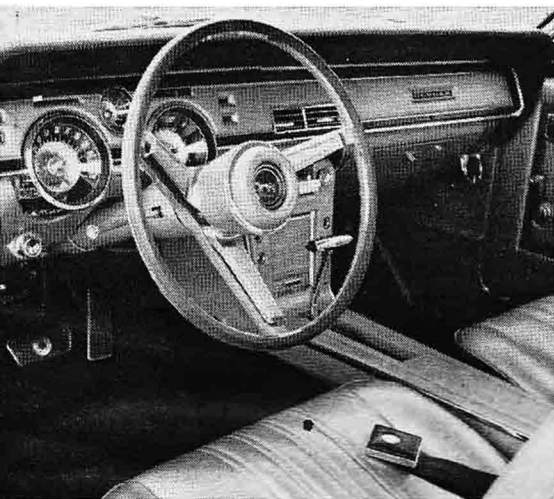
Performance-minded buyer might trade console for 3-speed H-D, front discs.



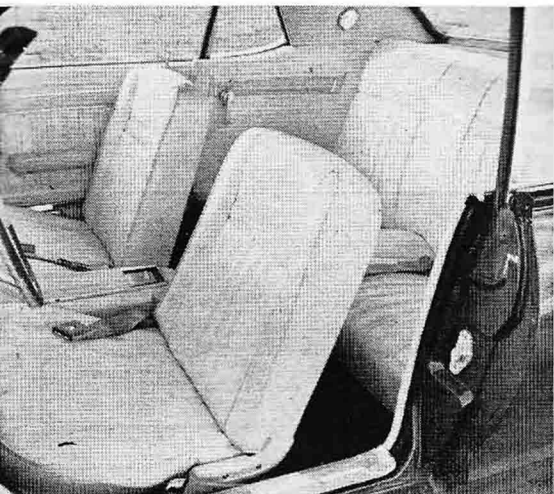
Two 4-barrel Holleys jockey for space atop 289. Setup proved smooth, progressive on street, didn't starve on hard corners.



Vinyl-roofed Cougar GT (upper) with styled perforated steel wheels contrasts with Black Beauty GT with standard wheels.



T-handled automatic, console, tape, air, discs look thus when you shoot the works.



Comfort of rear seats is augmented with hip room gained by absence of arm rests.

speeds not only did stability, cornering, and control improve to the point where the car again became fun to drive, but the car actually rode better. At low speeds it was another story, however. The packaged car became rather choppy, while the standard setup transmitted little of what the wheels were experiencing beyond a *thumpety-thump-thump* from the tires. On smooth surfaces we couldn't sense a great deal of difference between the two except for cornering ability where the packaged car exhibited less lean and understeer and greater overall traction.

We could and did drive the hot dual 4-barrel Cougar on the streets. While it was loads of fun, our joy was somewhat dimmed by apprehensiveness over exhaust noise, which was the kind that is music to the enthusiast but anathema to the gendarmes. The clutch on this car was of the in-or-out variety with little in-between. While this is great for up- or down-shifting, starts from rest were usually accompanied by a roar of the engine and a chirp of the tires — and the risk of that kind of official notice best avoided. However, with a better silenced exhaust system and a softer clutch this car would be an entirely practical street conveyance for the sports-minded enthusiast, which is likely the way Mercury will sell the car.

As our test car was equipped it felt more at home on the track. High-speed handling was of a high order, the characteristic understeer not being pronounced except on slow turns. We drove it with the Wide-Oval tires inflated at normal pressure which works amazingly well. The serious sedan racer would use racing tires, however, and play with

tire pressures to adjust the understeer-oversteer to suit his liking and the particular course. With a 4.44 limited-slip final drive, it was possible to induce oversteer with the throttle in any of the intermediate gears at lower speeds, which we found, with restrained application, highly useful for getting through tight bends. On 100-mph sweepers the car felt superbly stable, cranking the proper amount of lock and throttle setting being all there was to the technique required. Standing starts not being the forte of the particular type of clutch installed, we spent considerable time practicing starts before we recorded any decent acceleration times. Although 7000 screaming rpm were available, we got best times shifting at 62-6500 rpm.

In contrast to the hot car, the 390 Cougar with Select-Shift automatic had impeccable manners as far as smooth, quiet starts were concerned. Even with the standard tires, really brisk starts could be made on dry pavement with nothing more than a whisper from the tires. In fact, we found acceleration times suffered if more wheel slippage occurred. On wet surfaces with the standard tires, some wheel slippage was almost impossible to avoid, no matter how gentle a start we tried to make. With an otherwise identical car equipped with Wide-Oval tires we noticed a vast improvement on wet surfaces. With our previously accounted experience with these tires in the dry, we recommend them for all conditions.

We were, quite frankly, surprised at the performance of the drum brakes on the 390 test car. They are finned cast-iron with improved lining material and the same ones offered on V-8-engined

COUGAR COMPARED TO MUSTANG



generally roomier front and rear passenger compartments

weight slightly greater than Mustang hardtop

3-in. longer wheelbase, 6.7 ins. longer overall

somewhat smoother ride

concealed headlamps

cougar at a glance . . .

A new kind of specialty car that leans toward the luxurious, yet retains a youthful performance image... has the roomiest passenger compartment of the long-nose, short-tail crop... although probably not intended to do so, may lure some Mustang and T-bird buyers because it incorporates desirable features of both.

how the car performed . . .

ACCELERATION (2 aboard)		289 V-8		390 V-8 (Group Two)	
0-30 mph	.....	3.1 secs.	3.1		
0-45 mph	.....	5.2 secs.	5.1		
0-60 mph	.....	7.0 secs.	8.1		
0-75 mph	.....	11.1 secs.	11.7		
TIME AND DISTANCE TO ATTAIN PASSING SPEEDS:					
40-60 mph	.....	3.6 secs., 264 ft.	4.2 secs., 308 ft.		
50-70 mph	.....	4.3 secs., 378 ft.	4.5 secs., 396 ft.		
STANDING START QUARTER-MILE:					
		15.1 secs., 94 mph	16.0 secs., 89 mph		
SPEEDS IN GEARS @ SHIFT POINTS:					
	289 V-8	rpm	390 V-8	rpm	
1st	.....	41 mph @ 6500	1st	.....	48 mph @ 5000
2nd	.....	59 mph @ 6500	2nd	.....	84 mph @ 5000
3rd	.....	84 mph @ 6500	3rd	.....	80 mph @ 3200
4th	.....	117 mph @ 6500 (not max.)			(not max.)
SPEEDOMETER ERROR:					
Electric Speedometer	.....	30 45 50 60 70 80			
Car Speedometer	.....	32 47 54 62 72 81			
MPH PER 1000 RPM: (289 V-8) 17.75; (390 V-8) 25.0					
STOPPING DISTANCES:					
(289 V-8) from 30 mph, 42 ft.; from 60 mph, 143 ft.					
(390 V-8) from 30 mph, 28.5 ft.; from 60 mph, 158 ft.					

specifications . . .

ENGINE:	289 V-8	390 V-8
Bore and stroke (ins.):	4.005 x 2.87	4.05 x 3.78
Displacement (cu. ins.):	289	390
Horsepower:	341 @ 5800 rpm	320 @ 4800 rpm
Max. torque (lbs.-ft.):	NA	427 @ 3200 rpm
Compression ratio:	10.5:1	10.5:1
Carburetion:	2 4-bbl.	1 4-bbl.
TRANSMISSION:	4-spd manual all-synchro	3-spd auto
FINAL DRIVE RATIO:	4.44:1	3.00:1
SUSPENSION:	Independent front with articulated drag strut and coil springs, link-type stabilizer. Hotchkiss rear with leaf springs. Tubular shocks at all 4 wheels.	
STEERING:	Recirculating ball and nut. (289 V-8) Quick manual ratio. (390 V-8) Optional power 20.3:1 ratio. Turning diameter: 38.87 ft. curb-to-curb. Turns lock-to-lock: 3.5 manual, 3.73 power.	
WHEELS:	(289 V-8) 14 x 5.5 stamped styled steel. (390 V-8) 14 x 6J stamped steel.	
TIRES:	(289 V-8) F70-14 Wide-Oval nylon. (390 V-8) 7.35 x 14 rayon.	
BRAKES:	Dual-system hydraulic - 10-in.-dia. drums x 2.5 ins. front, 1.75 ins. rear (390 V-8). 11.38-in. dia. front discs (289 V-8).	
FUEL CAPACITY:	17 gals.	
MILEAGE RANGE:	12.4 - 14.1 mpg (390 V-8), NA 289 V-8.	
BODY & FRAME:	Unitized platform.	
DIMENSIONS:	Wheelbase 111 ins. Track 58.1 ins. front & rear. Overall length 190.3 ins., width 71.2 ins., height 51.8 ins. Usable trunk capacity 9.1 cu. ft.	
CURB WEIGHT:	(390 V-8) 3562 lbs. (289 V-8) 3174 lbs.	

prices and accessories . . .

MANUFACTURER'S SUGGESTED RETAIL: (excludes state and local taxes, license, options, accessories, and transportation) 2-door hardtop \$2851.22 (289-2V engine standard)

OPTIONS & ACCESSORIES:	
289-4V engine	\$ 52.95
390 GT-4V engine	158.00
H-D 3-speed manual transmission	79.00
4-speed manual transmission	184.02
3-speed automatic for 289 engines	206.65
3-speed automatic for 390 engines	215.99
Front disc brakes	84.25
Power steering	95.00
Air conditioner	355.95
GT package	323.85
Handling package	30.64
Speed control (with auto. trans. only)	71.30
Styled steel wheels (set of 5)	115.15
Tilt-Away Steering wheel	60.25
Shoulder belts	27.06

COUGAR continued

Mercury and Ford intermediates this year. They exhibited no fade during turn-arounds after acceleration runs and minimal side pull during panic stops. Stopping distances were well within what is considered acceptable for drums.

The discs on our hot 289 test car received somewhat more severe treatment than we normally give brakes during tests. Barricades and repairmen a short distance beyond the quarter-mile marker necessitated our getting on the brakes hard at top speed without first allowing any coast-down. There was quite a bit of phenolic odor and a slight increase in pedal pressure after six or eight runs but no real loss in braking efficiency. With the discs still piping hot, panic stopping tests were performed immediately afterward. While the 30-mph distance was six to eight feet longer than what may be expected from cool discs, the 60-mph stop produced no noticeable difference. The good performance of the drums notwithstanding, our vote will go for the discs, for we doubt if any set of drums would have survived under the same conditions.

As with a great many cars when the largest engine and all power accessories

are ordered, conditions were crowded under the hood of the 390 Cougar. Changing spark plugs, especially if there's also a Thermactor air injection system present, promises to be a bear. With the compact 289 there's comparatively lots of room and good accessibility to all components. Thankfully, the prospect of changing plugs won't occur more often than every 10,000 miles with either engine.

The Cougar attracted an unusual amount of attention for a car that had already been introduced to the public. The distinctive styling no doubt drew the majority of the curious, but quite a few seemed interested in performance judging by the number of challenges we received at traffic signals. If we had been so brash as to respond to half the gauntlets flung at us, we would have very likely collected a sheaf of traffic tickets the thickness of a telephone directory.

With all this interest on the part of the public, and the many different kinds of Cougars available via the option route to appeal to individual tastes, we're thinking quite a few of the twain are destined to meet. /MT