

CAR and DRIVER ROAD TEST

# Ford Cortina 1600 GT

It's surely one of the superest things English Ford has ever hatched—but a "micro-Super Car"?



PHOTOGRAPHY: GENE BUTERA

Is there such a thing as a Super Car from a disadvantaged home? Is the Cortina GT a Super Car? Is England disadvantaged? Normally when we think of super cars, we think of fat-tired, intermediate-sized American sedans with enough torque to yank the Washington Monument out by the roots. Ford of England disagrees and from every orifice of its works in Dagenham has come spewing a hopped-up little saloon which it insists is a micro-Super Car and surely one of the superest things English Ford has ever hatched.

Perhaps we should establish a Super Saloon category.

The car is based on the Cortina 1600 and is known to the world quite simply and totally without guile as the Cortina 1600 GT. Cortinas have been salamander-like in recent years; they've been the Model C to Model A and T lovers, Lotus Cortinas to followers of USRRRC and Trans-Am racing—put a Cortina down somewhere and you will see it take on protective coloration. All right, what's the GT all about? Our first meeting with the test car was a howling disappointment. It looked like anything but a super GT car. It just sat over in the cor-

ner of the garage wearing a used tomato juice red paint job—Dragoon Red says the Cortina color chart but it must have been a dragoon with a very serious blood problem. Anyway, the thing was perched on a set of Goodyear 165 SR 13 radial ply tires, the kind that have a tread pattern like motorcycle scrambler tires, not looking as though it had even the ambition to move. GT? Well, it did have a GT sign embroidered on one buttock so, most likely, we weren't involved in a case of mistaken identity.

Our impression changed the very moment we set eyes on the instrument panel. It's magnificent—better than most real sports cars. Right in front of the driver is a large, round speedometer and tachometer. Over toward the center of the panel are four more round gauges, fuel, oil, temp, and amps—just like an instrument panel should be. Each gauge has white numbers on a black background. No trick stuff. Just straight-forward information sources.

The normal sequence of our road test procedure indicated some kind of real involvement about this time. Like get in the car and point it toward the horizon—great

idea, but we had our shoes on. What's that got to do with anything? The Cortina has the same number of foot pedals as any other manual transmission car—clutch, brake and accelerator; moreover it's a roomy little sedan, so there's plenty of space for pedals. Why is it, then, that the brake pedal is so close to the transmission hump that a size 10½D wing-tip can't slip past? Super Cars, even micro-Super Cars don't make the program if you can't get your foot on the gas pedal. All this begins to say what's bad—and what's good—about the Cortina.

There are times we're convinced that British automotive designers have less imagination than an anvil, and the Cortina is a case in point. A decidedly British flavor surrounds the Cortina—even the heater speaks with a British accent, the same pulsating whir we've heard from British blowers for the past dozen years; and the drivetrain broadcasts the same gravelly whine that characterized English sports cars after World War II. Ford might just as well have painted the Union Jack on its bonnet, because the Cortina's origin couldn't be more obvious. This is not to say a foreign car has to be Swedish or German or Italian or (lately) Japanese to be worthwhile—but 12 years? Can't we expect some awareness of even little problems like heater noise after 12 years? Please?

The big news about the Cortina and the deciding factor in arousing our interest enough to do a road test was the car's redesigned engine. From the name, Cortina 1600 GT, you may have suspected the displacement is now 1600cc, up 100cc from past Cortinas. Your suspicion is well founded. What Ford is really crowing about, though, is the new crossflow cylinder head for the in-line Four. It's still of the pushrod operated, overhead valve type but now the intake ports are on one side of the head and the exhaust ports on the other. "No corners for the gases to turn—they go straight in and out," says Ford, celebrating the whole philosophy of crossflow and the wonders it does for breathing. Of at least equal interest are the combustion chambers, now dish-shaped cavities in the tops of the pistons with a flat surface on the head, just the reverse of the conventional system. A similar idea was used on the 348-409 series Chev-



The Cortina GT feels tough, like a midget super stocker, so we treated it accordingly. It didn't even flinch—it just kept coming back for more.

rolet V-8 starting in 1958 and is frequently seen in Diesels.

Like most foreign manufacturers that sell cars in the United States, Ford controls exhaust emission in the Cortina with an air pump. Blowing fresh air into the exhaust port causes the unburned hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide to burn in the exhaust manifold rather than be exhaled out the tailpipe like bad breath. This process results in abnormally high exhaust manifold temperatures which may shorten the life of the exhaust header tubing.

All this has been carping to some degree, because it's annoying to see someone set out to build a car rather than a module and lapse into diverse idiocies. But the GT is a car and there are certain microsplendors about it as a result. While the basic engine is shared between the standard Cortina and the Cortina GT, the GT version gets some help in the form of a twin-choke Weber carburetor, higher compression ratio, and an impressive looking tri-style exhaust header of steel tubing. Ford advertises the output of its high-potency GT engine as 89 hp at 5500 rpm, and we believe it. With less than 200 miles on the odometer when we made our timed runs, the GT would do a standing quarter mile in 18.6 seconds at 73.2 mph. The scrambler tires weren't much for bite on the asphalt which made the ET a tenth or two worse than it could have been. It's surprising to note how close the factory performance figures correspond to those of the test car. Ford claims 0-60 mph in 12 seconds and a top speed of 95 mph. The test car did 0-60 mph in 12.2 seconds and was still accelerating at 92 mph when we shut off to avoid driving off the end of our test strip. Given more room it would have made 95 mph and when fully broken in 97 mph is quite likely—maybe even 100. Our confidence in the words of auto manufacturers is somewhat restored now—they don't all speak with forked tongues after all.

As vile as the Formula Vee racers tell us drag racing is, we have to admit we enjoyed the drag strip part of the Cortina test. The car feels tough, like a midget super stocker, so we treated it accordingly. What a gas. Rev it up. Pop the clutch. The rear tires buzz a little bit, just like the real drag racers, and the Cortina is off. Then it's time to play Dick Landy with the shift lever. OK. Accelerator to the wood, stab the clutch and pull the lever to the next gear—all in a micro-second; true communion between man and machine. Again and again for third and fourth, each time at 6000 rpm. The Cortina

doesn't even flinch—just comes back for more. Its shifting mechanism is very precise. Never any confusion about what the hidden portion of the shift lever is doing or the feeling that it might even come off in your hand. There aren't many imported sedans in which we would even try this rude behavior because it's embarrassing to bring back a test car in a basket, but the Cortina just invites floggers like us to do our damndest. Even though the transmission is super noisy its virtues outweigh its faults by a whole lot.

The Cortina contains no outstanding surprises in the suspension department. A garden variety MacPherson strut is used in front with the assistance of an anti-sway bar. Semi-elliptic leaf springs hold up the rear. Unhappily, the wheels are only four inches wide. That's the going width in the econo car business, but the GT is supposed to be a notch above plebian transportation and wider wheels (as well as hop-up equipment) are available for the car. English Ford doesn't maintain a full time competitions director in the U.S. any more, but specialty firms like Northern California's WinkSpeed offer bolt-ons to make the little car into a genuine pocket terror.

It's a good thing. When it comes to handling, the Cortina needs help. It's predictable enough to suit even long-range planners, but its cornering speeds are not what we expect of a car with sporting flavor. The inside rear wheel unloads, even in large radius turns, allowing that wheel to spin uselessly. How can you get around a corner in a hurry when you can't put the power to the ground? All the while it's trying to hang its tail out but it takes a real effort to get it going fast enough to do the job.

The Cortina isn't too sure-footed during quick lane changes either. Although not dangerous, it tends to wag its tail like a station wagon. Ford could well spend more development time on the Cortina's suspension—and more roll stiffness in the front would be a good place to start.

The Cortina is bigger than you would expect. Not a whole lot, mind you, but enough to be noticeable. After checking out the dimensions we found the Cortina's 98-inch wheelbase is about three inches longer than its Opel, Datsun and Toyota competitors and that its 168-inch overall length is 3.3 inches longer than an Opel and almost six inches longer than a Datsun or Toyota. The Cortina has plenty of room for four even though it could never be called spacious by American standards.

Room or no room, the same guy who's

been darting around the British motor industry sneaking in dividers in interior design whenever possible has struck again. In the Cortina his pack-rat complex has gone too far. He's got storage compartments in his storage compartments—or so it seems. The GT has a conventional glovebox in the dash. Everybody has those, right? That act is followed by a parcel tray under the dash on the right side. Not really too surprising because parcel trays have become a European tradition. Now, since the Cortina GT is a sporty-type car, and sporty cars are recognized by chrome proclamations on the outside and consoles between the front bucket seats on the inside, the Cortina had to have a console, right? Motivated by a desire to build a truly good sporty sedan, the Ford people did a fantastic job on the console. Obviously any console worth its space has a storage compartment, so the Cortina has a total of three bins for its occupants to fill. But the bin in the console is a masterpiece. It has a padded lid which serves as a center armrest for the front seat passengers, the opening is surrounded with bright metal trim and there is even a friction apparatus which holds the lid open in an infinite number of positions. To give a console an official appearance it probably should contain at least one instrument—and the more important the instrument the better. You're not going to catch Ford napping there, either. Ford followed the prescription by putting a clock in the Cortina GT's console—and next year, who knows, it may be joined by an anemometer.

In the unlikely instance that you've been dazzled by the clock, the tachometer brings you back to reality—British reality. Right there on the face of the tach in white letters appear the words *negative earth*. One way or another, there will always be an England.

When it comes to schemes and devices to actuate the horn, the Cortina ranks with the best of them. Would you believe the turn signal lever telescopes and just as the lever reaches its shortest length the horn goes off? The end of the turn signal lever makes a middling small target when you're frantically trying to honk the horn but we've seen worse systems.

Ford has chosen a shotgun approach to interior ventilation—flow-through system and vent windows too. That's taking no chances, like wearing suspenders and a belt. It works, though, and it works well and that's where the points get counted.

Now that the safety regulations are in effect  
(Text continued on page 117;  
Specifications overleaf)

LOCATION: KNOTTS BERRY FARM, BUENA VISTA, CALIFORNIA





## FORD CORTINA 1600 GT

**Importer:** English Ford Line Operation  
3000 Schaefer Road  
Dearborn, Michigan

**Number of dealers in U.S.:** 830

**Vehicle type:** Front-engine, rear-wheel-drive,  
4-passenger

**Price as tested:** \$2337.17

(Manufacturer's suggested retail price, including all options listed below, Federal excise tax, dealer preparation and delivery charges; does not include state and local taxes, license or freight charges)

### Options on test car:

Interior decor group (\$17.42), exterior decor group (\$13.62), radial ply tires (\$43.19)

### ENGINE

Type: water-cooled 4-in-line, cast iron block and head, 5 main bearings  
Bore x stroke 3.189 x 3.056 in, 81.0 x 77.5 mm  
Displacement..... 97.6 cu in, 1600cc  
Compression ratio..... 9.6 to one  
Carburetion..... 1 x 2-bbl Weber  
Valve gear..... Pushrod-operated overhead valves, mechanical lifters  
Power (SAE)..... 89 bhp @ 5500 rpm  
Torque (SAE)..... 102.5 lbs/ft @ 4000 rpm  
Specific power output..... 0.91 bhp/cu in, 55.6 bhp/liter  
Max. recommended engine speed... 6000 rpm

### DRIVE TRAIN

Transmission..... 4-speed manual, all-synchro  
Clutch diameter..... 7.54 in  
Final drive ratio..... 3.90 to one

Gear	Ratio	Mph/1000 rpm	Max. test speed
I	2.97	5.8	35 mph (6000 rpm)
II	2.01	8.6	52 mph (6000 rpm)
III	1.40	12.3	74 mph (6000 rpm)
IV	1.00	17.3	93 mph (5400 rpm)

### DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase..... 98.0 in  
Track..... F: 52.5 in, R: 51.0 in  
Length..... 168.0 in  
Width..... 64.9 in  
Height..... 55.0 in  
Ground clearance..... 5.2 in  
Curb weight..... 2020 lbs  
Test weight..... 2170 lbs  
Weight distribution, F/R..... 54.3/45.7%  
Lbs/bhp (test weight)..... 24.4  
Battery capacity..... 12 volts, 58 amp/hr  
Generator capacity..... 264 watts  
Fuel capacity..... 12.0 gal  
Oil capacity..... 3.1 qts  
Water capacity..... 6.7 qts

### SUSPENSION

F: Ind., MacPherson strut, coil springs, anti-sway bar  
R: Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs

### STEERING

Type..... Recirculating ball  
Turns lock-to-lock..... 4.5  
Turning circle..... 30.8 ft

### BRAKES

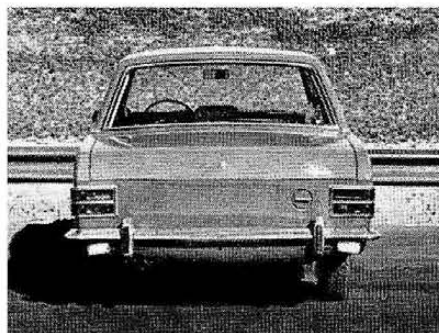
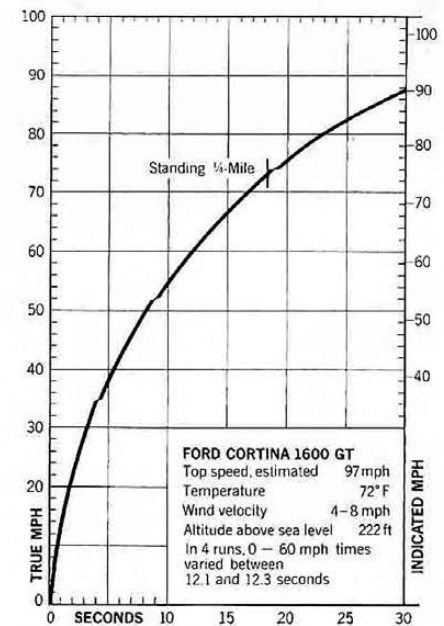
F:..... 9.63-in. solid discs  
R:..... 9.0 x 1.75 cast iron drums  
Swept area..... 285.6 sq in

### WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size and type..... 13 x 4.0-in, stamped steel, 4 bolt  
Tire make, size and type..... Goodyear 165 SR 13 radial ply, tubeless  
Test inflation pressures..... F: 24 psi, R: 24 psi  
Tire load rating..... 760 lbs per tire @ 24 psi

### PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
30 mph.....	3.3
40 mph.....	5.6
50 mph.....	8.3
60 mph.....	12.2
70 mph.....	16.7
80 mph.....	23.3
Standing 1/4-mile.....	18.6 sec @ 73.2 mph
80-0 mph panic stop.....	264 ft (.81 G)
Fuel mileage.....	19-23 mpg on premium fuel
Cruising range.....	228-276 mi



## CHECK LIST

### ENGINE

Starting..... Fair  
Response..... Fair  
Vibration..... Fair  
Noise..... Fair

### DRIVE TRAIN

Shift linkage..... Very Good  
Synchro action..... Very Good  
Clutch smoothness..... Good  
Drive train noise..... Poor

### STEERING

Effort..... Good  
Response..... Very Good  
Road feel..... Very Good  
Kickback..... Very Good

### SUSPENSION

Ride comfort..... Fair  
Roll resistance..... Good  
Brake dive..... Good  
Harshness control..... Fair

### HANDLING

Directional control..... Good  
Predictability..... Very Good  
Evasive maneuverability..... Very Good  
Resistance to sidewinds..... Fair

### BRAKES

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

### CONTROLS

Wheel position..... Fair  
Pedal position..... Poor  
Gearshift position..... Very Good  
Relationship..... Good  
Small controls..... Very Good

### INTERIOR

Ease of entry/exit..... Very Good  
Noise level (cruising)..... Fair  
Front seating comfort..... Good  
Front leg room..... Good  
Front head room..... Good  
Front hip/shoulder room..... Good  
Rear seating comfort..... Fair  
Rear leg room..... Fair  
Rear head room..... Good  
Rear hip/shoulder room..... Very Good  
Instrument comprehensiveness..... Excellent  
Instrument legibility..... Excellent

### VISION

Forward..... Very Good  
Front quarter..... Good  
Side..... Good  
Rear quarter..... Good  
Rear..... Excellent

### WEATHER PROTECTION

Heater/defroster..... Good  
Ventilation..... Good  
Weather sealing..... Very Good

### CONSTRUCTION QUALITY

Sheet metal..... Good  
Paint..... Good  
Chrome..... Fair  
Upholstery..... Good  
Padding..... Very Good  
Hardware..... Fair

### GENERAL

Parking and signal lights..... Very Good  
Wiper effectiveness..... Fair  
Service accessibility..... Fair  
Trunk space..... Excellent  
Interior storage space..... Excellent  
Bumper protection..... Good

## FORD CORTINA 1600 GT

(Continued from page 72)

we see interesting variations in safety belt design. Most American cars use two separate belts—one for lap and one for shoulder. The Japanese favor a detachable shoulder belt. The Cortina uses just one strap with a sliding buckle to equalize tension between the lap and shoulder sections. The disadvantage with this system is that it puts the wearer in an all-or-none situation rather than allowing him an option of choosing the lap belt only.

Have we managed to say yet that the Cortina is a British car? Whenever we try to describe it we come back to that statement. It has some endearing characteristics, we loved to flog it because it feels strong and responsive although it never gives the impression of being a precision machine. The engine and drive train are very noisy contributing to a high background noise level at cruising speeds, the ride is quite harsh, particularly when we discovered that ride comfort hasn't been traded for good handling. Light cars normally have poor resistance to crosswinds and the Cortina is light and substandard for its weight.

Most of all, though, we were impressed with the GT's performance. The car is quick for a sedan of its displacement and price, almost as good as a BMW 1600 with a \$350 less imposing list price. We're left with the conclusion that the Cortina GT is a hard-nosed little flogger car, and to hell with everything else. That's no bad thing to be. ●

## PREVIEW TEST: MG-C

(Continued from page 93)

at least on straight, smooth roads. Unfortunately, when it comes time to get the C around a corner, you discover that it is all flabby and soggy. On fast curves, it feels like the B—with a great deal more body roll—while on slow bends the understeer really sets in and you have to haul on the wheel like the helmsman on the Cutty Sark in a hurricane.

Wheel rim size has gone up from 14 to 15 inches, and fatter radial ply tires are fitted. All this in conjunction with the extra weight of the engine makes steering ultra heavy.

In order to overcome some of the problem the steering ratio has been lowered. It now takes 3.5 turns, lock-to-lock, instead of three, which may help steering effort somewhat but definitely worsens controllability. Also in order to combat the extra weight up front, power-assisted 11-inch disc brakes replace the 10.7-inch MG-B discs and wider drums are used at the rear.

All in all the MG-C isn't an improvement of the B and it will very likely be a disappointment to MG fans who were expecting an all-new chassis and powerplant. Instead it's an evolutionary model that should point out once and for all the dangers of inbreeding.

On the other hand, somewhere deep within the MG works is a B with the 2.5-liter Coventry-Climax V-8. . . . —Mike Twite

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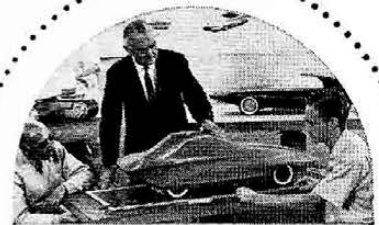


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