



Photos by Pat Brollier

"This car has only two speeds, fast and stop," said Don Long. And he should know. We're out on Western Ave. in Gardena nearing escape velocity and the C6 automatic has just walloped into second to the accompaniment of this solid "chirp" from the tires and Don Long, the guy who builds 220-mph dragsters for other guys like Don Prudhomme doesn't believe that the Montego Cyclone GT he's driving is actually putting away the entire world in one run. He stops and tries it again and it is the same—it is always the same. You mash the accelerator pedal and the Merc leaps away from the mark like you had backed into a big coil spring. Wham! Chirp! That beautifully positive transmission socks you right between the shoulder blades and the wide F-70x14 Goodyear Polyglas tires let out a yell. Wham! Chirp! There it goes again and the speedometer looks like it's spring loaded as it sweeps past 100 mph. Up ahead you just know there's got to be a couple of pairs of eyes wondering what the hell happened to their radar outfit.

This isn't an automobile, it's a club Mercury is going to use to beat into oblivion the idea that their cars were ever considered "stones." Like it was a big paradox, brother. Here was a division of the Total Performance company that was getting cut down on the street by everything but VWs. Not on the track, mind you. "Dyno Don" Nicholson and Eddie Schartman were having a field day at the nation's drag strips in Comets—the division's cars almost never lost. At the same time, Comet sales sank to new lows. Obviously, said the central accounting department, racing doesn't sell cars. But, of course, we know better. Mercury's trouble, as well as Ford's, was that their production cars were about as inspiring as 9-day-old porridge. It wasn't that they lacked the hardware or knowhow, just the will to get all the right stuff into a single package.

The Cobra Jet Cyclone GT is one of the packages. When you first lay eyes on the car, the Cyclone seems as if it just drove out of Wide World of

Sports' Daytona coverage—or maybe it was Victory Lane at Atlanta. It's that wild—Calypso Coral paint, stripes, Cragar mags, fat rubber and slight forward rake, man. Someone has finally made his street product look almost like his NASCAR Grand National product. Put on number 21 and you turn into Cale Yarborough. Zoomie styling or whatever, this wouldn't work very well if the machine weren't the hottest thing since the Chicago fire. But it is, so it's okay.

Other things have changed at Mercury, too. For years, about the only car you could count on being properly prepared for a performance test—any test—was a Pontiac and the competition screamed foul. Mercury finally saw that this was the plan so the Cyclone we received was right on. The sole item in the GT that could be faulted for sloppy detail was the driver-side door lock which rattled occasionally. Everything worked properly, the body panels fit well and the door latches sounded as secure as the vault at the Bank of America. Even the speedometer was calibrated correctly at all speeds, a first of some kind or other. Although it really isn't a part of the detailing, this was the only intermediate-sized Detroit car we tested in which the front seats went back further than our 6-foot 3-inch frame required. Unfortunately, we couldn't say much for the rear bench, which, though comfortable, didn't provide what could be called generous knee room.

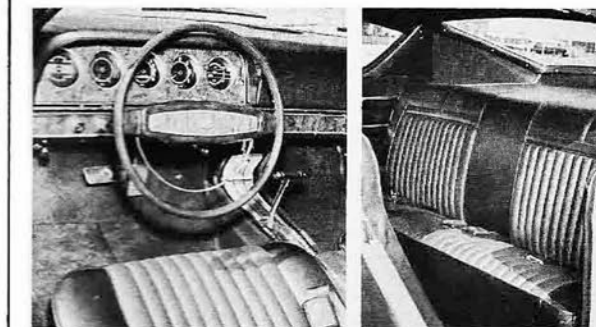
Driving the 428 Cyclone GT will warm the hearts of the combined drag-and road-race fraternity and probably others as well. The machine is so nimble in any traffic situation it's in a class by itself. The power reserve on tap is in the proportion of the Grand Coulee Dam, and if you're worried about stopping, forget it. The great disc/drum combinations will halt the car on a plumb-line from 60 mph in an abbreviated 124 feet.

As far as handling goes, this is one of the best Mercs to ever come down the road, making it around all the

corners at speed along the way. It's like the first well-balanced sports car you ever drove, only probably better. That 428 up there is not aluminum, which means there is a natural understeer but the gobs of horsepower can turn this to oversteer by pressing down on the throttle. It's all so neat. You set up in a gentle, controlled drift—and suddenly you're Dan Gurney at Riverside winning the Motor Trend 500. Heavy-duty springs, shocks and a robust stabilizer bar truly work wonders.

Mind blowing, brute acceleration is the 428 Cyclone's long suit. Right off the street it ran 14.39 at 98 mph through Orange County Raceway clocks. A few more passes to shoot out the carbon and it was pinching 14.12s at 99 and change. Removing the power steering belt improved this to 13.95 at 100.5 and a set of BF-32 spark plugs were good for 13.86/101.69, a clean half-second fleeter than the best of the intermediate supercars. How about a string of 0-60s like this: 6.1, 6.2, 6.0, 6.2, 6.2 seconds? Or the 0-40 mph in 3.3 seconds or 50-70 in 3.5? Out of sight.

The generating station producing such phenomenal performance turns out to be nothing more exotic than a garden variety 428-cu.-in. engine with 1963 1/2-type cylinder heads (2.06-inch intake valves and 1.625-inch exhausts), 390-type hydraulic-lifter cam, Police Interceptor manifold, Holley 735 dual-feed carburetor and free-flowing cast iron exhaust headers. To make sure



Cyclone dash was nice but lacked gauges. Rear seat room is limited.

To stop a 3880-pound car from 60 mph in just 124 feet takes a lot of moxie in the anchor department—like 214-sq.-in. of swept brake area. But you'd expect that from a car Cale Yarborough would drive, right? And bags of horsepower and neat styling too, right? Lucky for you, the C.J. Cyclone's got it all. C.J.? That's short for Cobra Jet which is street eliminator abbreviated.



Cyclone Cobra Jet

Test by Eric Dahlquist

"Here come the jets like a bat out of hell, someone gets in their way someone don't feel too well."*

*Jet song from West Side Story



Puff, the magic draggin' Mercury stops arrow-straight on every pass.

Cyclone continued

the 4.13 bore x 3.98-inch stroke engine lives past the first 435 Corvette encounter, a high-volume oil pump is part of the deal. The engine will not rev much beyond 5500 rpm and it doesn't need to because its 445 lbs.-ft. of torque comes way before that at 3400. If this were two years ago, the advertising gang would have come busting into the scene and demanded one of those awe-inspiring 500 hp numbers but sliding scale insurance rates penalizing high-powered machines has caused a complete about face. So the Cobra Jet is rated at an ultra-conservative 335 ponies, sufficiently low to cause the National Hot Rod Asso. to factor this figure up some for stock classing.

As hard as Mercury tried, which was plenty hard, there are a few rather obvious hangups in the Cyclone GT. The price of pure fastback styling is a pronounced blind-spot in the rear quarters big enough to conceal a Mayflower Van, or a couple of imports, depending on your luck. Cale (Yarborough) uses a Wink wide-angle rear-view mirror and we can see why. The interior was finished very tastefully in black vinyl but a low roofline precludes stovepipe hats or even styled hair. One of these years someone will

come along with a better instrument layout than the Pontiac GTO; we're still waiting. Idiot lights in a supercar don't make it, baby. Especially when you've got a temperature gauge that indicates red when it's cold and red when it's hot. It wasn't supposed to work that way but it did occasionally. Mercury probably thought they were being very clever and very different by using an imitation wood-grain dash panel resembling a walnut-patterned plastic rifle stock and that's just what it looks like—a plastic rifle stock.

One thing supercars never are is cheap. By the time you get everything you want, the window sticker has a little "continued on opposite door" on the bottom. Four grand is about the going tab these days, except for the Road Runner. In this respect the Montego Cyclone GT doesn't look all that bad, pricing out at a measly \$3700 f.o.b. Detroit, less the Cragar mags. Gas mileage is a rather dismal 11.5 mpg on the highway and 8.5 to 10 in town, but that's the penalty for never being beaten on the street and a 4.11 final gear ratio. Mercury dealers aren't really going to have to sell this car. One run through the gears will do that. Wham! Chirp! Next. /MT

CYCLONE COBRA JET

PERFORMANCE

Acceleration: (2 aboard)

0-30 mph	2.7 secs.
0-45 mph	4.2 secs.
0-60 mph	6.1 secs.
0-75 mph	8.5 secs.

Standing Start ¼-mile:

101.69 mph	13.86 secs
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Passing Speeds:

40-60 mph	3.3 secs. 241.5 ft.
50-70 mph	3.5 secs. 308 ft.

Speeds in Gears:

1st	42 mph @ 5500 rpm
2nd	72 mph @ 5500 rpm
3rd	105 mph @ 5500 rpm

MPH per 1000 RPM: 20 mph

Stopping Distances:

from 30 mph	30.1 ft.
from 60 mph	124 ft.

Mileage:

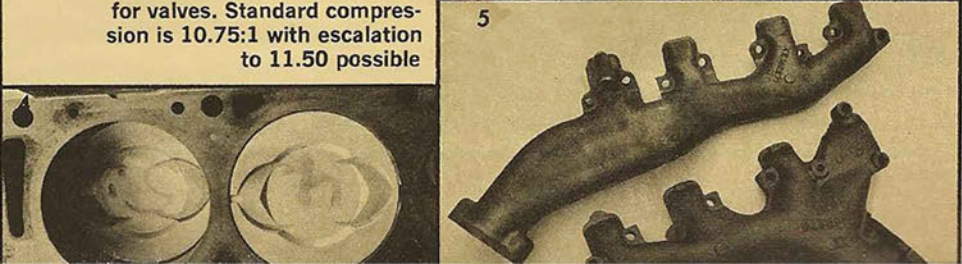
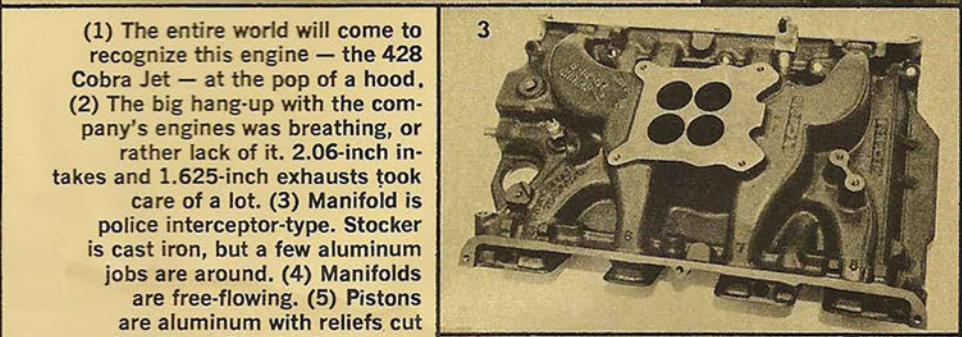
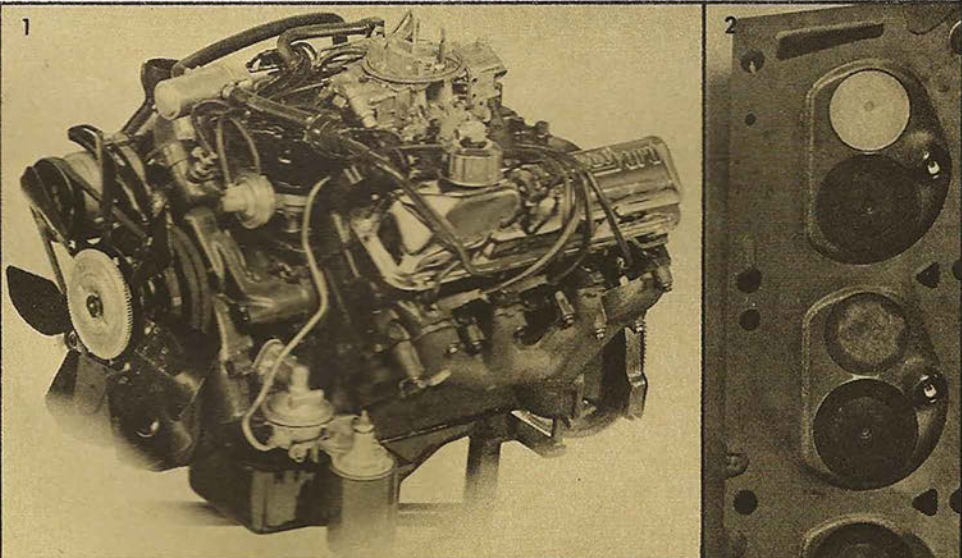
Range: 8.5-11.5 mpg
Average: 10.5 mpg

SPECIFICATIONS

Engine: 8 cyl. V-8 ohv. Bore & Stroke: 4.13 x 3.98 in. Displacement: 428 cu. in. Horsepower: 335 @ 5600 rpm. Torque: 445 lbs.-ft. @ 3400 rpm. Compression Ratio: 10.7:1. Carburetion: 1-735 Holley 4-bbl. Transmission: 3-speed automatic. Final Drive Ratio: 4.11:1. Steering Type: Recirculating ball & nut, power-assisted. Turning Diameter: 41.45 ft. curb-to-curb, 3.5 turns, lock-to-lock. Tires: F-70 x 15 Goodyear Polyglas. Brakes: Disc front, drum rear. Swept area 214 sq. in. Suspension: Front: Independent coil. Rear: Parallel leaf. Body/Frame Construction: Partially unitized frame. Dimensions, Weights, Capacities: Overall Length: 206.1 ins. Overall Width: 74.1 ins. Overall Height: 53.5 ins. Wheelbase: 116 ins. Front Track: 58.53 ins. Rear Track: 58.53 ins. Curb Weight: 3880 lbs. Fuel Capacity: 20 gals. Oil Capacity 5 qts. with filter.

OPTIONS & PRICES

Manufacturer's suggested retail price, f.o.b. Detroit \$3703. Factory-installed options: Disc brakes, \$64.85; Power Steering, \$95.00; GT Package (upper body stripe, lower body stripe, GT insignia, heavy-duty springs, shocks, front stabilizer, bucket seats), \$168.40; Cobra Jet engine, \$287.60; Automatic Transmission, \$226.10; Traction-Lok Differential, \$63.50; 4.11:1 axle ratio, \$6.55; Goodyear Polyglas tires, \$45.40.



(1) The entire world will come to recognize this engine — the 428 Cobra Jet — at the pop of a hood, (2) The big hang-up with the company's engines was breathing, or rather lack of it. 2.06-inch intakes and 1.625-inch exhausts took care of a lot. (3) Manifold is police interceptor-type. Stocker is cast iron, but a few aluminum jobs are around. (4) Manifolds are free-flowing. (5) Pistons are aluminum with reliefs cut for valves. Standard compression is 10.75:1 with escalation to 11.50 possible