



FORD FAIRLANE GTA

Genuine Imitation Joins the Supercar Spectrum

IMITATION IS the sincerest form of flattery, as the saying goes, and Pontiac undoubtedly is exceedingly praised in the excess of thinly disguised GTOs now on the road. This shouldn't be so novel to Pontiac, since its own Supercar's nameplate was borrowed from elsewhere. But the latest flatterer—indeed, perhaps the last possible one—fits the GTO long suit only barely; the Fairlane GTA from Ford is almost genuine imitation in that it doesn't quite match the mark set forth by the GTO.

Had Ford produced the first, rather than the final, Supercar (by present definition), there would have been less cause for disappointment. But the GTA must be judged in the light of 1966, not 1963, and the timing identifies the problem: The GTA adequately matches the first GTO, but the 2-year headstart puts Pontiac farther down this particular dragstrip. When Pontiac started tweaking Tigers, Ford was busy breeding a Mustang. The wisdom of Ford's course of action is perhaps the more enduring from a corporate balance sheet viewpoint, so this ultimate appearance of something seeming to protect that flank may be

all that is required. But it does point up the difficulty, not often overcome, in simply catching up.

The GTA's problem is, quite simply, not enough power. It just isn't competitive in output, which is the primary justification for the cars in its category. The test car was unhampered by any smog-limiting Thermactor—a point which will be touched upon later—and still it wouldn't go. As a high-performance strip-scorcher, this one had an inadequate torch. On the face of it, a displacement of 390 cu. in. would seem enough and a 335-bhp rating completely competitive.

Ford's 390-cu. in. engine is enough known to need no elucidation. Tuned for 300 bhp, it has been the mainstay of the Thunderbird for several years, an environment where its docile delivery of torque was most esteemed. High rev capabilities have been neither needed nor desired in that service, although such are basic in a GTA context, and this is the engine's Achilles heel. However you want to say it, it chokes up, flattens out, falls off so badly beyond 4400 rpm that real storming stripsmanship is out of the question. The contrast

between GTO and GTA, moreover, is immediately apparent to the senses. Whereas the former thunders away from the line in a ride like that of a runaway steam locomotive, the latter is hard-pressed to exhibit any brutality, much less sufficient force.

However, in checking back, we find that a showroom stock GTO is something CL has never formally tested. Tigers whose tails we've twisted have had the benefit of extra roar, coming from 3 x 2 Tri-Power carburetion and manifolding. In that light, then, perhaps the GTA doesn't fare too badly. A 1 x 4 GTO (335 bhp) may well be only as potent as the GTA. But the point is, hotter Pontiac engines are right there on the order blank ready for the asking. This is not so with the Fairlane GTA: It's 1 x 4 carburetion or nothing.

Ford engineers could learn something from their counterparts at Pontiac in relation to engine breathing. Particularly in valve train design are Pontiacs seldom afflicted with lethargy. Hydraulic lifters as a matter of course work at 6000 rpm. The standard 389 GTO engine's camshaft is only re-

motely warmer (273/289 duration, 54° overlap) than the GTA, but the 3 x 2 shaft is substantially thawed out (288/302 and 63°). The differences in valve sizes (1.92 in. intakes, 1.65 exhausts) also say something about Pontiac's approach to manifold and head design.

Any GTA buyer, of course, has recourse to the various and well-known means used by hot rodders to polish a rough diamond. Ford Parts Div. has marketed, in the past, a 3 x 2 manifold for this engine and the larger speed shops have had reworked cylinder heads and exhaust headers. By fitting drag slicks, good headers, and a 3.50:1 or higher axle, e.t.s in the 14s—possibly the high 13s—should be within reach of a good driver. One other thing that would definitely shave seconds would be a 4-speed manual transmission rather than the 3-speed automatic which adds the final A to the car's title.

The disenchantment we have experienced with the "Sportshift" automatic (CL, Dec. '65) has not abated with subsequent GTAs. It is an admirable, if overdue, feature to manually control an automatic's gear selection by placing the shifter at the desired dent. Borg-Warner automatics and

those from Chrysler, of course, have been capable of this for some years now. The Ford attempt, however, has two distressing characteristics: A prolonged pause during gear changing, either up or down, and all-but-unusable action in downshifting into low. In the latter case, a downshift from second to low results in free-wheeling until road speed drops below 25 mph, when the shift occurs with a suddenness not unlike going into reverse.

If the GTA isn't an earth-shaking Supercar, then, what can it be? Ironically, it comes closer to being a pretty fair utilitarian family sedan. Its major drawback for less than sporting service is fuel mileage. Even with careful driving, the test car was hard-pressed to return 12 mpg, and this on premium fuel only. An appetite of that nature is hardly one to mollify even a Walter Mitty, regardless of the dream-inspiring throatiness of the exhaust note. Realistic families would have cause to object to the fuel bill.

As family sedans go, performance is quite good. The Fairlane is, in our opinion, ideally sized for today's traffic conditions. Three youngsters are no problem in back and trunk space is of 2-weeks-with-pay adequacy. Moreover,

the GTA comes with a sturdier suspension which improves handling qualities without, we discovered, causing any deterioration in riding softness; at least we could detect no unpleasant harshness.

Special tires fitted as standard are Firestone Super Sports, rated for 125 mph and incorporating the latest in non-radial ply technology. The level of directional stability demonstrated by these tires make them one of the very few conventional-type high performance tires we could recommend. The test Fairlane also boasted the Mustang styled steel wheels, a \$95 option this year which adds certain distinctiveness to the car.

Many miles in various new Fairlanes indicate that the new body shell is a tight, solid structure quite capable of rough usage. The altered torque box arrangement at both toeboard corners does exactly what Ford's computers said it would: Reduce the noise and vibration in the passenger compartment. An unmistakable impression that the car is carved from a block of steel rather than bent into shape from sheet metal is achieved. The other side of that coin, however, is a heavier-than-desirable, for its size, vehicle. ▶



FORD FAIRLANE GTA



WHEELSPIN POSES something of a problem on acceleration runs. Super Sport tires are good, but drag slicks would be a vital improvement.



CHAN BUSH PHOTOS

MUSTANG WHEELS, rally stripes are among trim items identifying GTA.

No sign of the dreaded Thermactor exhaust emission control device was visible on our fully licensed test model, giving our test drivers some pause. Didn't California state law require all

1966 cars to be so equipped? Checking with Ford's legal department revealed that there were loopholes, indeed, large enough to drive thundering herds of GTAs through. Among ex-

emptions to the "all inclusive" law, it seems, are cars which can be called "high performance." The GTA, though it might not fit an enthusiast's definition of the term, qualifies because

1966 FORD FAIRLANE GTA HARDTOP



DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.....	116.0
Track, f/r, in.....	58.0
Overall length, in.....	197.0
width.....	74.1
height.....	55.0
Front seat hip room, in.....	2 x 25.5
shoulder room.....	58.0
head room.....	38.7
pedal-seatback, max.....	44.0
Rear seat hip room, in.....	59.5
shoulder room.....	58.0
leg room.....	36.1
head room.....	37.3
Door opening width, in.....	45.25
Floor to ground height, in.....	13.0
Ground clearance, in.....	6.5

PRICES

List, fob factory.....	\$2843
Equipped as tested.....	3499
Options included: Sportshift auto. trans., power brakes, power steering, tinted glass, smog valve, am radio, light group, styled steel wheels, deluxe seat belts, wood-grain steering wheel.	

CAPACITIES

No. of passengers.....	5
Luggage space, cu. ft.....	15.2
Fuel tank, gal.....	20.0
Crankcase, qt.....	4.0
Transmission/dif., pt.....	26/4.5
Radiator coolant, qt.....	20.5

CHASSIS/SUSPENSION

Frame type.....	unit
Front suspension type: Independent by short and long upper and lower arms with ball joints and coil springs; tubular shock absorbers. ride rate at wheel, lb./in.....	119
anti-roll bar dia., in.....	0.85
Rear suspension type: Hotchkiss drive with asymmetrical, semi-elliptic leaf springs; tubular shock absorbers. ride rate at wheel, lb./in.....	146
Steering system: Recirculating ball-nut with linkage booster; parallel-ogram linkage transverse tie rods. gear ratio.....	16.0
overall ratio.....	21.6
turns, lock to lock.....	4.2
turning circle, ft. curb-to-curb.....	41.45
Curb weight, lb.....	3500
Test weight.....	3880
Weight distribution, % f/r.....	56.8/43.2

BRAKES

Type: Single line hydraulic with self-adjusting duo-servo shoes in cast-iron front and composite rear 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

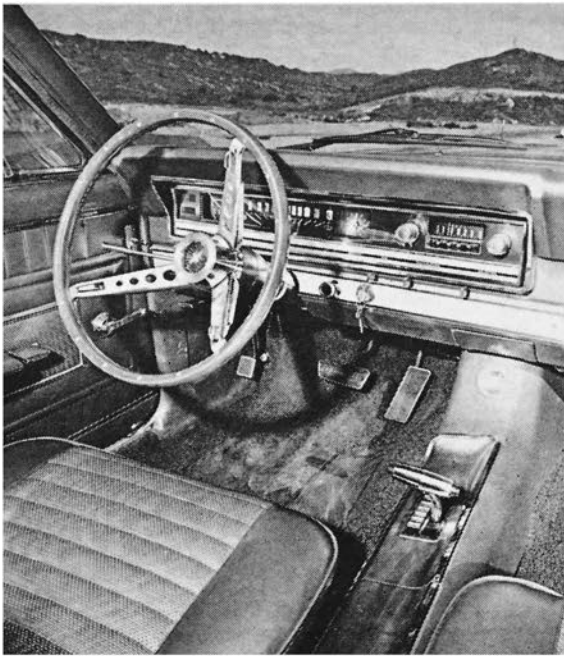
Wheel size.....	14 x 5.5J
optional size available.....	none
bolt no./circle dia., in.....	5/4.50
Tire make, brand... Firestone Super Sports	
size.....	7.75-14
recommended inflation, psi.	24/22
capacity rating, total lb.....	4480

ENGINE

Type, no. cyl.....	V-8, ohv
Bore x stroke, in.	4.05 x 3.78
Displacement, cu. in.....	390
Compression ratio.....	10.5
Rated bhp @ rpm.....	335 @ 4800
equivalent mph.....	110
Rated torque @ rpm.....	427 @ 3200
equivalent mph.....	74
Carburetion.....	1 x 4 barrel dia., pri./sec.
1.562	
Valve operation: Hydraulic lifters, pushrods and rocker arms. valve dia., int./exh.	2.03/1.553
lift, int./exh.....	0.4809
timing, deg.....	18-72, 68-22
duration, int./exh.....	270
opening overlap.....	40
Exhaust system: Dual, conventional mufflers. pipe dia., exh./tail.....	2.00
Lubrication pump type.....	rotor normal press. @ rpm
50 @ 2000	
Electrical supply.....	alternator
ampere rating.....	55
Battery, plates/amp. rating.	66/80

DRIVE-TRAIN

Clutch type.....	
dia., in.....	
Transmission type: Torque converter with 3-speed planetary gearbox. Gear ratio 4th () overall.	
3rd (1.00).....	3.25
2nd (1.46).....	4.74
1st (2.46).....	7.99
1st x t.c. stall (2.10).....	16.8
synchronous meshing.	planetary
Shift lever location.....	console
Differential type: Hypoid; straddle-mounted pinion. axle ratio.....	3.25



WOOD-RIMMED wheel and sturdy shift lever would seem to mean business.



THUNDERBIRD ENGINE turns out to be short on thunder when Fairlane buyer takes his GTA to the strip and paints C/SA on the flanks.

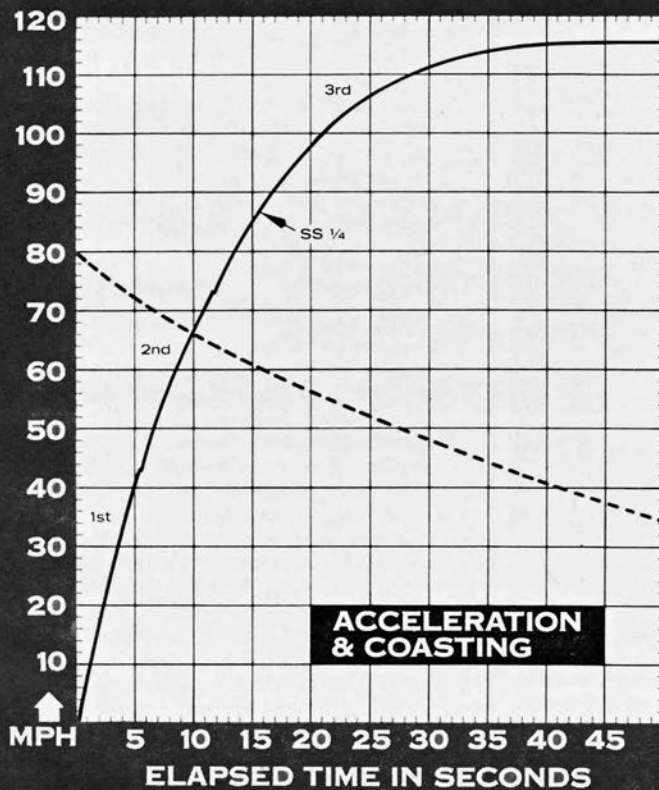
it is equipped with, among other things, a 4-barrel carburetor. Yet, the Galaxie 7-Litre tested last month doesn't qualify as such, for some unexplainable reason. It begins to look as if California's

much vaunted anti-smog law may be honored only in the breach.

Living with the GTA for several weeks was not all disheartening; the experience made us more than anxious

to try again in other Fairlanes with the 289-cu. in. engines. A little better balance, a little more honesty, and who knows? It may be quite an attractive package. ■

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test weight)	11.6
Cu. ft./ton mile	152
Mph/1000 rpm (high gear)	23.0
Engine revs/mile (60 mph)	2610
Piston travel, ft./mile	1640
Car Life wear index	42.8
Frontal area, sq. ft.	22.6
Box volume, cu. ft.	463

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	28.8
40 mph	38.2
50 mph	48.1
60 mph	57.7
70 mph	67.7
80 mph	78.3
90 mph	89.2

MAINTENANCE INTERVALS

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

TUNE-UP DATA

Spark plugs	Autolite BF-32
gap, in.	0.032-0.036
Spark setting, deg./idle rpm	0/740
cent. max. advance, deg./rpm	24.5/4000
vac. max. adv., deg./in. Hg.	25/20
Breaker gap, in.	0.014-0.016
cam dwell angle	26
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 (5000), mph	115
Shifts (rpm) @ mph	
3rd to 4th ()	
2nd to 3rd (4600)	73
1st to 2nd (4600)	43

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	3.6
0-40 mph	4.8
0-50 mph	6.5
0-60 mph	8.6
0-70 mph	10.8
0-80 mph	13.4
0-90 mph	16.7
0-100 mph	21.2
Standing 1/4-mile, sec.	15.4
speed at end, mph	87
Passing, 30-70 mph, sec.	7.2

BRAKING

(Maximum deceleration rate achieved from 80 mph)	
1st stop, ft./sec./sec.	24
fade evident?	no
2nd stop, ft./sec./sec.	22.5
fade evident?	slight

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Test conditions, mpg	9.1
Normal conditions, mpg	10-12
Cruising range, miles	200-240

GRADABILITY

4th, % grade @ mph	
3rd	16 @ 58
2nd	24 @ 44
1st	36 @ 33

DRAG FACTOR

Total drag @ 60 mph, lb.	155
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