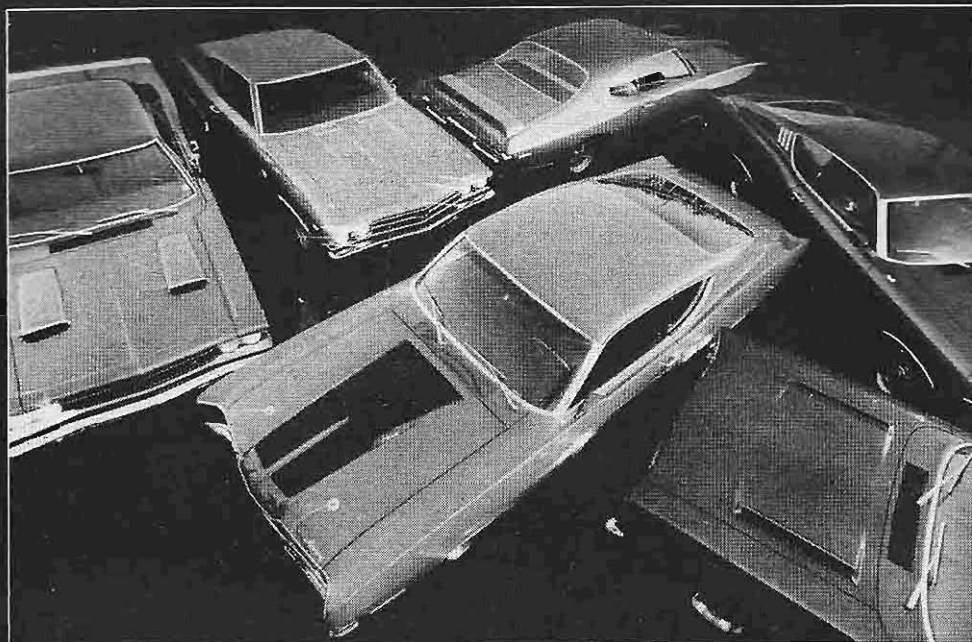


CAR AND DRIVER
COMPARISON ROAD TEST



SIX ECONO-RACERS

CHEVELLE SS396 • COBRA • CYCLONE CJ • HEMI ROAD RUNNER • SUPER BEE • THE JUDGE

If you like the taste of whiskey you drink it on the rocks, right? Disfilled. There's nothing very complicated about that. But what do you do if you really like the taste of automobiles? We'll tell you what. You pick one of Detroit's war-horses—the intermediates. The same machines that carry the corporate banners as Grand National stock cars and have traditionally filled out drag racing's super stock ranks. These are the Fairlanes and the Cyclones, the Belvederes and the Coronets and the Chevelles. You order your car with every go, stop, and turn part available, but nothing else. No candy

coating to kill the flavor because the flavor is the thing. And you haven't pushed the price out of sight with tack-ons (not to be confused with tach-ons) which only serve to confuse the issue anyway. You've got yourself an Econo-Racer and it's sano.

Plymouth pioneered the idea. The division realized it wasn't doing its big engines any favors by stuffing them into cars already overweight with gadgets and glitter and after much introspection it produced the Road Runner. Road Runner logic forthwith became impossible to argue with—as all of Detroit discovered—when, in the first year, 19.8% of the intermedi-

ate-size Plymouths were Road Runners. Dodge, which is always somewhere on the same lap with Plymouth, joined the movement with the Super Bee. A kind of inverse kinky name, but no less a real car.

With the introduction of its 1969 models, the Ford Motor Company admitted that Econo-Racers were the name of the game and laid its cards on the table—a Cobra for the Ford Division and a Cyclone CJ from Lincoln-Mercury. It wasn't bluffing either—no less than the 428 Cobra Jet engine as standard equipment in each.

All the elements of a genuine automotive battle. With a thunderhead like

this on the horizon and all of the enthusiasts crying for rain, we tend to get very solemn about duty and all and act as a catalyst. In this case that means a comparison test which happens to be one of our specialties.

We would definitely expect an entry from Plymouth, Dodge, Ford and Mercury since they had already declared themselves to be in the market. But what about GM, which almost never admits a competitive urge? Anyone with the ego to bill itself as the "Number 1 Team," as does Chevrolet, could reasonably be expected to have an Econo-Racer on its order form. As we suspected, Chevrolet offers its \$5396 package on the 300 Deluxe 2-door coupe—which fits the description regardless of what Chevrolet chooses to call it. Pontiac, too, was pushing The Judge over the horizon and suddenly Pontiac couldn't be overlooked either.

A moment here, if you will. It is vital to a meaningful comparison test that every



car have substantially equal equipment. To make things simple we asked for the base engine with the optional functional hood scoops on every car—with one exception, the Road Runner. Since the Super Bee and the Road Runner are mechanically identical it didn't make sense to have both of them with the standard 383, so we asked for the only other option—the 426 Hemi—in the Road Runner.

To keep everything even, each car was ordered with F70 tires, an axle ratio as close as possible to 3.50 with a limited-slip differential, disc brakes (which are available only with power-assist), and power steering. Automatic transmissions were selected simply because, with street tires, they're the fastest way to go. Nobody can deny the importance of a tachometer in a performance car, so that part was in, and we specified styled wheels so our Econo-Racers wouldn't be confused with taxi cabs. A radio made the list for obvious reasons. That's all. Each represented our idea of a perfect performance car at a

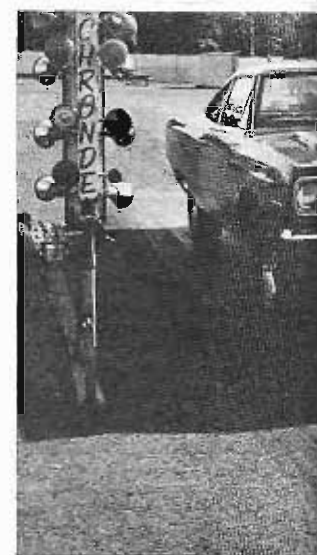
minimum price and would be judged accordingly. Oh, sure, we'd take a look at trunk space and bumper protection and rear seat hip room and all that stuff that regular cars are supposed to have, but these things would be of secondary importance. We are inclined to evaluate Econo-Racers like good whiskey—by the flavor and by the kick and who gives you the most for your money.

At this point everything seemed pretty straightforward. In our mind's eye, we could see each car in its purposeful nakedness. After all, do prize fighters wear business suits in the ring? Of course not. So, we were sure everyone would instantly tune in on these cars with perfect understanding. You can imagine our surprise when only the Road Runner and the Super Bee arrived in fighting trim. The others had bucket seats and consoles—three of them even had trick steering wheels and electric windows. The Cobra and the Cyclone CJ were wearing their 1969 Econo-Racer name tags but they also had the same gadgets and glitter that have festooned Detroit performance cars for years. And the Chevelle—a Malibu 2-door hardtop—came complete with all of the gee-whiz trim, flashing light monitors and buzzing warning devices, not to mention an absolutely flawless metallic blue paint job. It was a veteran show car Chevrolet had sprung from its duties. Each of the cars had every piece of optional equipment we had asked for, but the manufacturers didn't have the restraint to stop there. When we registered our dismay we were told we hadn't allowed enough time to build the right car. Nevertheless, since Plymouth and Dodge could do it in the six-week period we thought reasonable, we suspect some other answer is closer to the truth. We're left with the inescapable conclusion that the majority of influential executives in the Motor City can't understand that 44,599 people bought Road Runners last year because they are just plain stark. No, that straightforward explanation won't go at all.

The inevitable Detroit process of sweetening up the economy models with add-on trim has already begun.

The extra equipment on the Cobra, Cyclone CJ and Chevelle are detrimental to the results of an Econo-Racer comparison test only in that they raise the price. The added weight may marginally reduce the performance, but should in no way change the basic feel which is of prime importance in this type of car. Unless you happen to live somewhere on the Great Plains, these cars are so quick you can seldom use wide-open throttle for more than a few seconds, and even then you use it with great respect or suddenly you're in American Samoa. So most of the joy of driving one of these Econo-Racers has to

PHOTOGRAPHY: NOEL WERRETT



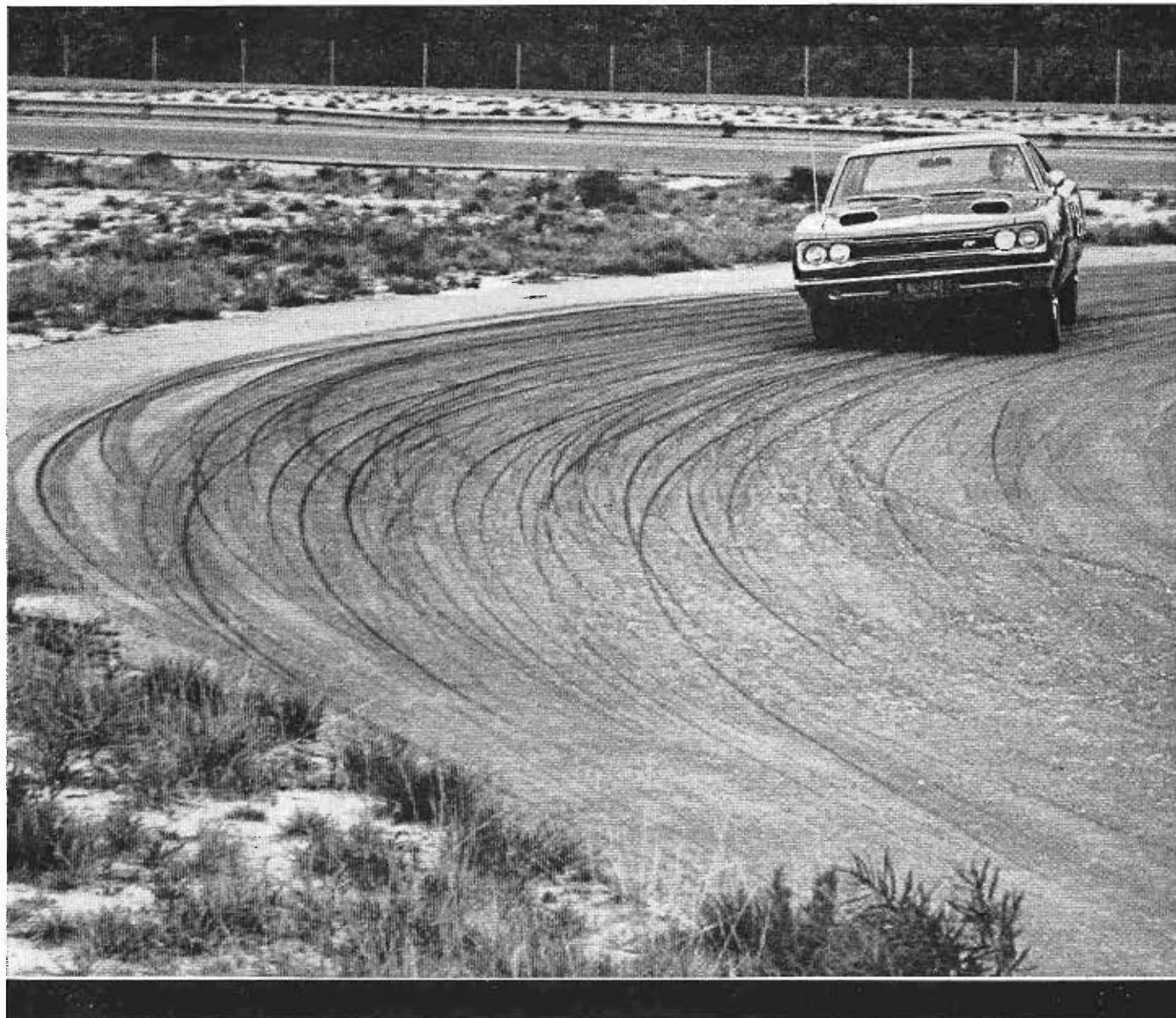
come from the potential they pump into the driver from the moment he starts the engine until he slips the key into his pocket at the end of the trip. Still, that's automotive excitement too.

You can imagine the enthusiasm with which the entire C/D staff responds when called upon to evaluate automotive excitement—we even let our resident Formula Vee racer take the Hemi Road Runner, which was easily the greatest thrill of his career—it was, after all, a car; and yes—he could indeed join us at New York National. The Speedway's amiable and efficient manager, Ed Eaton, tried not to worry when cars were going both ways at once on the drag strip or all hung out on the handling course, and in this case he had almost three days (track testing only) during which he could try not to worry.

When you have six cars and six drivers trying to compare every conceivable aspect of performance, the proceedings may look more like the Keystone Kops than scientific testing. But after two weeks, both on the track and on public roads, the staff knew which cars made the program, which didn't and why. Listed below—best first—are the Econo-Racers. And you'd better believe—this is definite.

HEMI ROAD RUNNER

The Hemi Road Runner was an easy first choice, not so much because of the Road Runner as the Hemi engine and everything that goes with it. To say the Road Runner scored heavily in the performance part of the test is Anglo Saxon understatement in the best tradition. It was the quickest in acceleration, stopped in the shortest distance and ranked second in



ECONO-RACER CHECK LIST						
(Cars rated numerically with 6 as maximum)	Chevelle SS396	Super Bee	Cobra	Cyclone CJ	The Judge	Road Runner
PRICE						
Price (basic econo-racer)	3409.10	3740.10	3792.78	3836.50	N/A	4239.45
Rating	6	5	4	3	2 est.	1
Price (as tested)	4048.25	3858.00	4043.23	4381.60	N/A	4362.05
Rating	4	6	5	1	3 est.	2
PERFORMANCE						
Acceleration	2	3	4	5	*	6
Braking	2	4	5	3	*	6
Handling	6	4	2	2	*	5
PERFORMANCE RATING	10	11	11	10	*	17
DRIVER CONTROLS						
Steering feel	6	4	2	2	5	4
Braking feel	1	5	4	2	3	6
Transmission shifter	1	3	4	4	6	3
Instrumentation	5	6	1	1	4	3
DRIVER CONTROLS RATING	13	18	11	9	18	16

*Not representative



handling. That is a pretty tough record.

All the while the Hemi was proving itself to be the toughest car of the test, it was also proving to be the most exciting. Where the Chevelle, Cobra and Cyclone CJ give the impression of being hot sedans, the Road Runner comes in from the other direction—a tamed race car. And that impression isn't entirely wrong. Chrysler's 426 cu. in. hemispherical combustion chamber V-8 was never intended to quietly propel Imperials down the freeway/expressway/throughway/parkway or allow you to carry an extra lawn chair in the back of your Plymouth Fury station wagon. It was designed as a race engine, pure and simple. The whole idea was to put the hurt on Ford at Daytona because Ford was too far ahead for conventional weapons. You probably wouldn't even be able to buy one in your Road Runner if Bill France hadn't decided, with some prompting by Ford, that it was hardly fair to race those big motors if Chrysler wasn't going to sell them to the folks. Forget about the reason, the Road Runner's Hemi (although detuned a couple hundred horsepower so that it can pass the federal exhaust emission standards) is still the same basic engine used in Grand National stock cars and super stock drag machines.

What is it like on the street? Breath-taking. The Hemi Road Runner has more pure mechanical presence than any other American automobile—even more than the Z/28 Camaro which is another thinly disguised race car we've grown to love. Of course the Hemi is noisy, although its not an excessive amount of mechanical noise. After it's warmed up, the impact-extruded pistons no longer clunk around in their bores and the solid-lifter valve gear is almost totally silent. In fact in actual engine noise, the Hemi was quieter than the Cobra Jet. It's the *power* noise that sets the Hemi apart from the others. It has an impatient, surging idle that causes the whole car to quiver, particularly when the automatic transmission is in gear and being held against the brake. And there is that lump in the throttle travel. Stay on the near side of the lump and you can drive at any speed you choose up to, say, 100 mph in relative calm. Go past the lump and you open everything in the two 4-bbl. Carters. The exhaust explodes like Krakatoa and the wailing howl of surprised air being sucked into the intakes turns heads for blocks. Baby, you know you're in *the presence*.

If you are on a drag strip, as we were, you discover that standing quarter-miles can be covered in the 13.5-second range at a terminal speed of just over 105 mph. That is making it for a car which weighs in at 3938 pounds.

Of course the Road Runner's race car complexion is reinforced by its suspension.

It is incredibly stiff—guaranteed to produce extreme discomfort for anyone but an enthusiast. All Hemi Road Runners are built with higher rate torsion bars and rear springs than their 383 counterparts. Obviously, it handles well. Not as good as the Chevelle because it has a strong understeering nature that requires a heavy throttle foot to get the tail out, but it does corner very predictably with very little body roll. Wherever you are, you are always reminded that the Road Runner is only a notch or two away from a true competition car just by the way your eyeballs rattle in the sockets whenever you hit a tar strip.

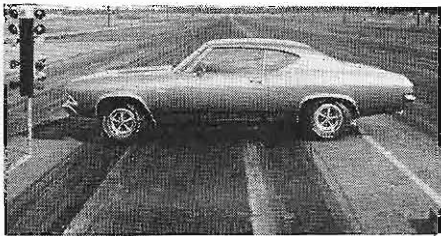
In a car as fast as the Hemi, you'd better have brakes equal to the task, and they were. The Road Runner stopped in a straight line from 80 mph in 245 feet (0.87 G)—shorter than any of the other cars. However, brake fade was noticeably greater than in the Ford or GM cars. We normally make three stops from 80 mph. Since it was almost impossible to obtain impending lockup on the third stop we tried a fourth, just to see what would happen. Even though the pedal did bottom out and the required pedal pressure was very high, the Road Runner stopped in less distance than the first two tries—and with no swerving. We would consider the brakes very satisfactory for street operations but fade could be a problem in very hard driving and needs improvement.

In the driver's compartment the Road Runner was—as expected—stark. That is what Econo-Racers are all about. The instruments are arranged in a horizontal line on the dash, white-on-black and very easy to read. No oil pressure gauge was present or available, which registers as a true felony considering the \$813 price of the Hemi. We weren't exactly turned on by the tachometer either—it had a circular face occupying a small rectangular spot in the instrument panel, half hidden by the steering wheel rim. The Woolworth's Five and Dime appearance combined with a 5000 rpm redline (about 800 rpm below where the transmission automatically upshifts) make you wonder whether that \$50.15 option is real or a decoration in bad taste.

The Road Runner's most conspicuous ornamentation change for 1969 is that the chicken decals are now in full color. No matter where you look—on the doors or the deck lid or the instrument panel or the steering wheel hub—there is that unfortunate beep-beep bird looking back at you. It's the only light touch on an otherwise totally serious car. That is if you can have a light touch with a heavy hand.

So that you will know we weren't completely distracted by the Hemi's thunder, we checked out some of the more mundane areas which add up to automotive virtue.

(Continued on page 40)



CHEVELLE SS 396

List price as tested: \$4,048.25

Options on test car: 325-hp engine with SS package including styled wheels, power disc brakes and F70 x 14 tires, \$347.60; automatic trans, \$221.80; 3.55 limited-slip differential, \$42.15; tachometer and instrumentation, \$94.80; power steering, \$105.35; AM/FM radio, \$133.80; H.D. suspension, \$5.30; rear window defroster, \$22.15; power windows, \$105.35; bucket seats and console, \$174.90; tinted glass, \$36.90; head restraints, \$16.90; light monitoring system, \$26.35; auxiliary lighting, \$16.35; rear speakers, \$13.20; all-vinyl interior, \$12.65.

ENGINE

Bore x stroke..... 4.09 x 3.76 in
 Displacement..... 396 cu in
 Compression ratio..... 10.25 to one
 Carburetion..... 1 x 4-bbl. Rochester
 Power (SAE)..... 325 bhp @ 4800 rpm
 Torque (SAE)..... 410 lbs/ft @ 3200 rpm

DRIVE TRAIN

Final drive ratio..... 3.55 to one

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase..... 112.0 in
 Track..... F: 59.0 in, R: 59.0 in
 Length..... 196.9 in
 Width..... 76.0 in
 Height..... 52.8 in
 Curb weight..... 3895 lbs
 Weight distribution, F/R..... 57.0/43.0%
 Fuel capacity..... 20.0 gal
 Oil capacity..... 4.0 qts
 Water capacity..... 23.0 qts

SUSPENSION

F: Ind., unequal length wishbones, coil springs, anti-sway bar.
 R: Rigid axle, trailing arms, coil springs, anti-sway bar.

STEERING

Type..... Recirculating ball, power-assisted
 Turns lock-to-lock..... 4.25
 Turning circle..... 39.0 ft

BRAKES

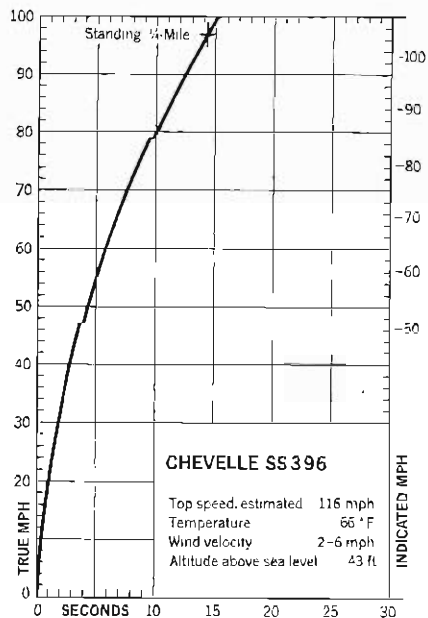
F..... 11.0-in vented disc, power-assisted
 R..... 9.5 x 2.0-in cast iron drum, power-assisted

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size..... 14 x 7.0-in
 Tire make and size..... F 70 x 14 Goodyear Polyester
 Test inflation pressures..... F: 26 psi, R: 26 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
40 mph.....	2.9
60 mph.....	5.8
80 mph.....	10.0
100 mph.....	15.2
Standing 1/4-mile.....	14.41 sec @ 97.35 mph
80-0 mph panic stop.....	304 ft (0.70 G)



SUPER BEE

List price as tested: \$3858.00

Options on test car: 3.55 limited-slip differential, \$102.15; power disc brakes, \$93.10; head restraints, \$26.50; foam seat, \$8.60; automatic trans., \$40.40; remote adjust mirror, \$9.65; 3-speed wipers, \$5.40; undercoating, \$15.60; rear quarter air scoops, \$35.80; rear bumper guards, \$16.00; tachometer and clock, \$50.15; cold air induction, \$73.30; AM radio, \$63.35; power steering, \$97.65; styled wheels, \$88.55; F70 x 14 belted tires, \$26.45.

ENGINE

Bore x stroke..... 4.25 x 3.38 in
 Displacement..... 383 cu in
 Compression ratio..... 10.0 to one
 Carburetion..... 1 x 4 bbl Carter AVS
 Power (SAE)..... 335 bhp @ 5200 rpm
 Torque (SAE)..... 425 lbs/ft @ 3400 rpm

DRIVE TRAIN

Final drive ratio..... 3.55 to one

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase..... 117.0 in
 Track..... F: 59.5 in, R: 59.2 in
 Length..... 206.6 in
 Width..... 76.7 in
 Height..... 54.1 in
 Curb weight..... 3765 lbs
 Weight distribution, F/R..... 55.7/44.3%
 Fuel capacity..... 19.0 gal
 Oil capacity..... 4.0 qts
 Water capacity..... 17.0 qts

SUSPENSION

F: Ind., upper wishbones, single lower arms with struts, torsion bars, anti-sway bar
 R: Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs

STEERING

Type..... Recirculating ball, power-assisted
 Turns lock-to-lock..... 3.4
 Turning circle..... 44.0 ft

BRAKES

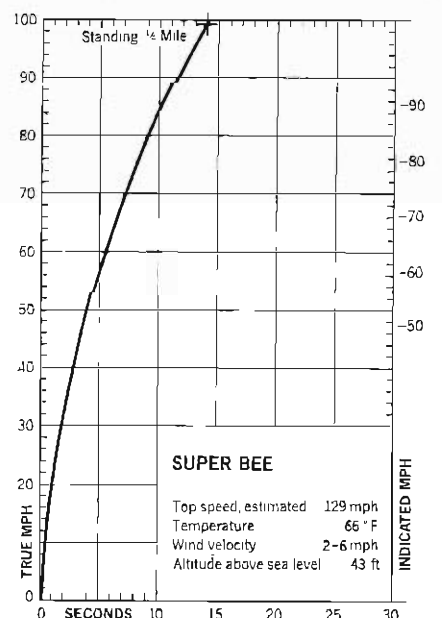
F..... 11.0-in vented disc, power-assisted
 R..... 10.0 x 2.5-in cast iron drum, power-assisted

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size..... 14 x 5.5-in
 Tire make and size..... F70 x 14, Goodyear Polyglas
 Test inflation pressures..... F: 26 psi, R: 26 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
40 mph.....	2.8
60 mph.....	5.6
80 mph.....	9.1
100 mph.....	14.1
Standing 1/4-mile.....	14.04 sec @ 99.55 mph
80-0 mph panic stop.....	250 ft (0.85 G)



COBRA

List price as tested: \$4043.23

Options on test car: Ram air engine, \$133.44; bucket seats with console, \$168.62; automatic transmission, \$37.06; limited slip differential, \$63.51; visibility group, \$11.06; F70-14 belted tires, \$77.73; rim-blow steering wheel, \$35.70; power steering, \$100.26; power disc brakes, \$64.77; AM radio, \$61.40; deluxe belt/warning light, \$15.59; racing mirrors, \$19.48; styled wheels, \$17.69; tachometer, \$47.92.

ENGINE

Bore x stroke..... 4.13 x 3.98 in
 Displacement..... 428 cu in
 Compression ratio..... 10.6 to one
 Carburetion..... 1 x 4 bbl Holley
 Power (SAE)..... 335 bhp @ 5200 rpm
 Torque (SAE)..... 440 lbs/ft @ 3400 rpm

DRIVE TRAIN

Final drive ratio..... 3.50 to one

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase..... 116.0 in
 Track..... F: 58.8 in, R: 58.5 in
 Length..... 201.1 in
 Width..... 74.6 in
 Height..... 52.6 in
 Curb weight..... 3890 lbs
 Weight distribution, F/R..... 57.7/42.3%
 Fuel capacity..... 20.0 gal
 Oil capacity..... 4.0 qts
 Water capacity..... 19.6 qts

SUSPENSION

F: Ind., upper wishbones, single lower arms with struts, coil springs, anti-sway bar
 R: Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs

STEERING

Type..... Recirculating ball, power-assisted
 Turns lock-to-lock..... 3.75
 Turning circle..... 41 ft

BRAKES

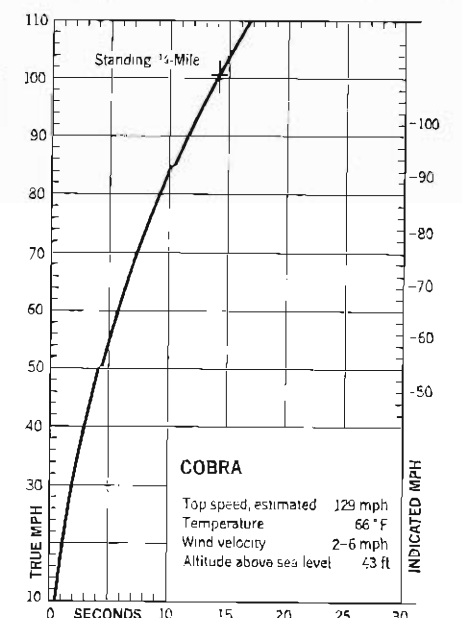
F..... 11.3-in vented disc, power-assisted
 R..... 10.0 x 2.0-in cast iron drum, power-assisted

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size..... 14 x 6.0-in
 Tire make and size..... F70 x 14, Goodyear Polyglas
 Test inflation pressures..... F: 28 psi, R: 28 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
40 mph.....	2.8
60 mph.....	5.6
80 mph.....	9.1
100 mph.....	14.0
Standing 1/4-mile.....	14.04 sec @ 100.61 mph
80-0 mph panic stop.....	248 ft (0.86 G)





CYCLONE CJ

List price as tested: \$4381.60

Options on test car: Ram air engine, \$138.60; bucket seats with console, \$165.80; automatic trans, \$42.00; 3.91 axle, \$6.50; limited-slip differential, \$63.50; light group, \$19.50; rim-blow steering wheel, \$35.00; power windows, \$104.90; power steering, \$94.60; power brakes, \$64.80; AM/FM stereo radio, \$185.30; rear speaker, \$25.90; tinted glass, \$35.00; deluxe seat belts, \$15.60; racing mirror, \$13.00; styled wheels, \$116.60; tachometer, \$48.00.

ENGINE

Bore x stroke..... 4.13 x 3.98 in
 Displacement..... 428 cu in
 Compression ratio..... 10.6 to one
 Carburetion..... 1 x 4 bbl Holley
 Power (SAE)..... 335 bhp @ 5200 rpm
 Torque (SAE)..... 440 lbs/ft @ 3400 rpm

DRIVE TRAIN

Final drive ratio..... 3.91 to one

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase..... 116.0 in
 Track..... F: 58.8 in, R: 58.5 in
 Length..... 203.2 in
 Width..... 76.0 in
 Height..... 53.9 in
 Curb weight..... 3860 lbs
 Weight distribution, F/R..... 56.7/43.3%
 Fuel capacity..... 20.0 gal
 Oil capacity..... 4.0 qts
 Water capacity..... 19.6 qts

SUSPENSION

F: Ind., upper wishbones, single lower arms with struts, coil springs, anti-sway bar
 R: Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs

STEERING

Type..... Recirculating ball, power-assisted
 Turns lock-to-lock..... 3.75
 Turning circle..... 42.0 ft

BRAKES

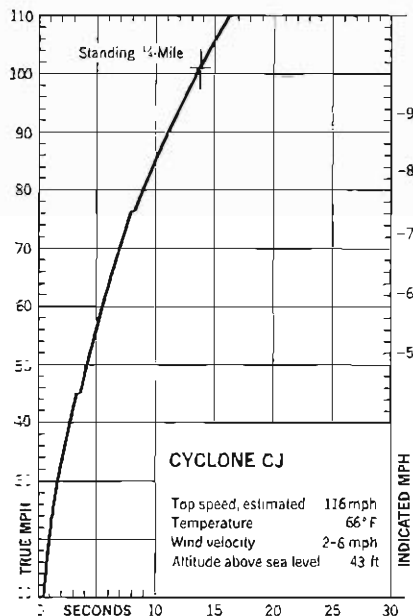
F..... 11.3 in vented disc, power-assisted
 R..... 10.0 x 2.0-in cast iron drum, power-assisted

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size..... 14 x 6.0-in
 Tire make and size..... F70 x 14, Goodyear Polyglas
 Test inflation pressures... F: 28 psi, R: 28 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
40 mph.....	2.7
60 mph.....	5.5
80 mph.....	9.0
100 mph.....	13.9
Standing 1/4-mile.....	13.94 sec @ 100.89 mph
80-0 mph panic stop.....	283 ft (0.76 G)



THE JUDGE

List price as tested: N.A.

Options on test car: Power disc brakes, \$64.25; automatic transmission, \$227.04; power steering, \$105.32; AM/FM radio, \$133.76; wood rim steering wheel, \$34.76; tachometer, \$63.19; instrument package, \$50.55; power windows, \$105.32; limited-slip differential, \$63.19; rear seat speaker, \$15.80; remote control mirror, \$10.53.

ENGINE

Bore x stroke..... 4.12 x 3.75 in
 Displacement..... 400 cu in
 Compression ratio..... 10.75 to one
 Carburetion..... 1 x 4-bbl Rochester
 Power (SAE)..... 366 bhp @ 5100 rpm
 Torque (SAE)..... 445 lbs/ft @ 3600 rpm

DRIVE TRAIN

Final drive ratio..... 3.55 to one

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase..... 112.0 in
 Track..... F: 60.0 in, R: 60.0 in
 Length..... 201.5 in
 Width..... 75.8 in
 Height..... 52.3 in
 Curb weight..... 3898 lbs
 Weight distribution, F/R..... 57.0/43.0%
 Fuel capacity..... 21.5 gal
 Oil capacity..... 5.0 qts
 Water capacity..... 17.8 qts

SUSPENSION

F: Ind., unequal length wishbones, coil springs, anti-sway bar
 R: Rigid axle, trailing arms, coil springs

STEERING

Type..... Recirculating ball, power-assisted
 Turns lock-to-lock..... 4.0
 Turning circle..... 38.0 ft

BRAKES

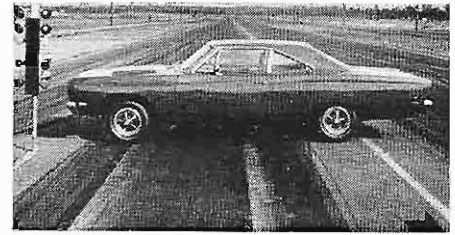
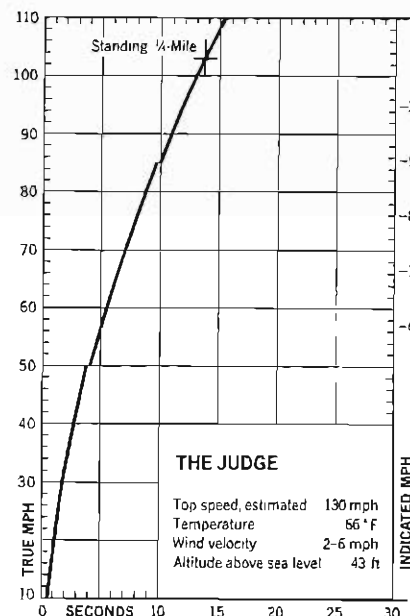
F..... 11.1 in vented disc, power-assisted
 R..... 9.5 x 2.0-in, cast iron drum, power-assisted

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size..... 14 x 6.0-in
 Tire make and size..... G70 x 14, Goodyear Polyglas
 Test inflation pressures... F: 28 psi, R: 28 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
40 mph.....	see text
60 mph.....	see text
80 mph.....	see text
100 mph.....	see text
Standing 1/4-mile.....	see text
80-0 mph panic stop.....	see text



ROAD RUNNER

List price as tested: \$4,362.05

Options on test car: 425-hp engine, \$813.45; automatic transmission, \$39.30; performance axle package with automatic transmission, \$64.40; decor package, \$81.50; remote control mirror, \$10.45; power steering, \$100.00; power disc brakes, \$91.65; AM radio, \$61.55; rear speaker, \$14.05; tachometer, \$50.15; undercoating, \$16.60; F70 x 15 belted tires, \$90.95.

ENGINE

Bore x stroke..... 4.25 x 3.75 in
 Displacement..... 426 cu in
 Compression ratio..... 10.25 to one
 Carburetion..... 2 x 4-bbl Carter
 Power (SAE)..... 425 bhp @ 5000 rpm
 Torque (SAE)..... 490 lbs/ft @ 4000 rpm

DRIVE TRAIN

Final drive ratio..... 3.54 to one

DIMENSIONS AND CAPACITIES

Wheelbase..... 116.0 in
 Track..... F: 59.5 in, R: 59.2 in
 Length..... 202.7 in
 Width..... 76.4 in
 Height..... 54.1 in
 Curb weight..... 3938 lbs
 Weight distribution, F/R..... 56.4/43.6%
 Fuel capacity..... 19.0 gal
 Oil capacity..... 5.0 qts
 Water capacity..... 18.0 qts

SUSPENSION

F: Ind., upper wishbones, single lower arms with struts, torsion bars, anti-sway bar.
 R: Rigid axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs

STEERING

Type..... Recirculating ball, power-assisted
 Turns lock-to-lock..... 3.5
 Turning circle..... 41.3 ft

BRAKES

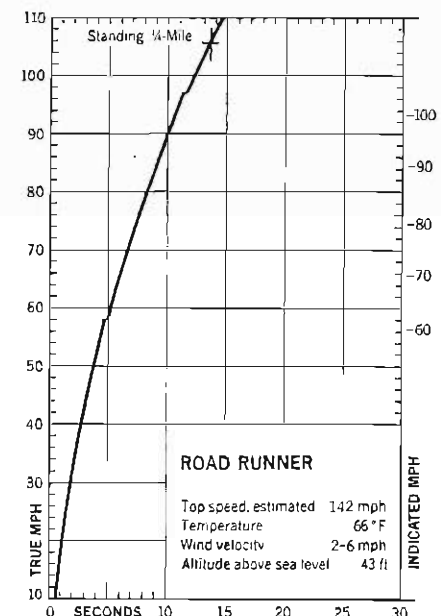
F..... 11.0-in vented disc, power-assisted
 R..... 10.0 x 2.5-in cast iron drum, power-assisted

WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size..... 15 x 6.0-in
 Tire make and size..... F70 x 15, Goodyear Polyglas
 Test inflation pressures... F: 26 psi, R: 26 psi

PERFORMANCE

Zero to	Seconds
40 mph.....	2.6
60 mph.....	5.1
80 mph.....	8.2
100 mph.....	12.3
Standing 1/4-mile.....	13.54 sec @ 105.14 mph
80-0 mph panic stop.....	245 ft (0.87 G)



SIX ECONO-RACERS

(Continued from page 27)

The rear seat room in both of the Chrysler entries was substantially better than the rest of the pack, particularly in leg room, and both had more spacious trunks. Ventilation, thanks to vent windows, was another of the Plymouth and Dodge strong points as was the efficiency with which the windshield wipers went about their task.

In case you came in late, the Hemi-powered Road Runner is one hell of an Econo-Racer. It goes about its intended purpose with a sort of well prepared confidence not found in the others. It probably has zero appeal to the faint-hearted but that is the least of our worries—and it should be the least of yours. The only area in which it falls wide of the Econo-Racer goal is price. At \$4,362.05, as tested, it wasn't the most expensive car of the group but it certainly would have been had they all been equipped as we suggested. With just the options we asked for, the Road Runner still would have listed at almost \$4240. All we can say is that this kind of excitement doesn't come cheap, no matter what your hang-up is.

SUPER BEE

The issue was not nearly so clear in choosing a second-place car but, after polling the staff, the Super Bee was selected to fill that slot—with strong sentiment in favor of the Cobra nonetheless. The Super Bee was fourth in acceleration and third in both braking and handling, which add up to the same performance rating achieved by the Cobra. It was the exceptionally well-coordinated feel of the Dodge, combined with really outstanding instrumentation, that made the difference.

The test car was powered by the standard 335-hp 383 cu. in. V-8 breathing through the optional cold-air induction system that feeds fresh air to the carburetor through two hood scoops. Cloudbursts and storms will never see the inside of your engine because a red knob under the instrument panel (labeled "carb air") has been provided so that the driver can manually close the scoops. Of course, this little feature makes it very easy for us to see if Dodge is really giving you your money's worth in performance or if the scoops just add up to expensive decoration. Dodge does not speak with forked tongue. In a standing quarter-mile the open scoops are worth exactly one mile per hour and slightly more than one-tenth of a second in elapsed time.

Even though the Super Bee was the lightest car of the test, with a curb weight of 3765 pounds, we were a little surprised when the average of our acceleration runs was 14.04 seconds at 99.55 mph. We know that a combination of the air scoops and the extra traction of the Polyglas tires is worth about 1.5 mph in the quarter but the car still seemed faster than other Super Bees we've driven. A careful scrutinizing session turned up two questionable pieces

of hardware; a dual-point distributor and a large diameter exhaust system similar to that used on the Coronet R/T. A quick check of the AMA specifications—gospel throughout the industry—indicated the parts were standard equipment. Just on a hunch, we checked further and discovered that the 383s coming off the assembly line, as we suspected, have single point distributors and smaller, 2.25-inch diameter exhaust pipes.

Knowing that, we can't consider our test car's performance to be representative of a 383 Super Bee you would buy. From our experience we would estimate a production car in good tune to run about 98.5 mph in the 14.20-second range.

In the braking tests, the Super Bee performed almost exactly like the Road Runner which is not too surprising since they both use identical braking systems. The Dodge required an additional five feet to stop from 80 mph which is well within production variation.

Since the 383-engined cars have lower rate torsion bars and rear springs than the Hemi models, it is not surprising that they also have more body roll when cornering. In fact, the Dodge had more body roll than any other car in the test. Even so, the car handles well with moderate understeer and good directional control. The relatively quick power steering is an aid in maneuvering despite its light effort.

Since both the Super Bee and the Road Runner are built on the same basic body things like trunk space, seating room and windshield wipers are identical, but the Super Bee takes a giant step forward with its instrument panel—shared with its more expensive sibling, the Charger. This panel contains a complete set of easily readable gauges mounted directly in front of the driver—all marked in a no-nonsense style. Dodge has everybody covered on this point. Not so good was the column-mounted (automatic, remember) transmission shifter—also shared with the Road Runner. It was completely average in its operation with Jello-like detents that may be satisfactory for the unenlightened millions but not for a performance advocate.

Like the Road Runner, a high degree of excitement is engendered when you are driving the Super Bee. Somehow, it just feels like a racer. The ride is taut. You are incredibly aware of the road. It is just exactly the opposite of what Detroit considers to be good manners in their bread-and-butter family sedans—but family sedans are no fun. The Super Bee is in second place because it's fun to drive.

COBRA

It's been a long time since we thought of a "Cobra" as a snake but we never expected to see the name attached to a car as big as Ford's new Fairlane-based Econo-Racer. Our test car was a fastback 2-door hardtop (there is also a formal roof hardtop available) with the standard 428

Cobra Jet (Ford is really hung up on the Cobra name) engine and optional Ram-Air package.

The Cobra grabs the third spot in the test primarily because of its strong performance in the acceleration and braking tests. The Cobra Jet is known to be a tough performer on the dragstrip so the 14.04 second performances of the test car at 100.61 mph are well within its reputation. The special white-lettered F70 x 14 Polyglas tires used on the Cobra have a unique tread compound developed for dry traction but even so, the torquey 428 could turn them with ease.

The hood scoop system, on both the Cobra and Cyclone CJ, has no manual control but, rather, is controlled by a vacuum motor that opens a trap door into the top of the air cleaner when the throttle approaches wide open. For that reason it was necessary to tape the door shut to simulate the non-Ram Air model. That little exercise paid off—we discovered the Cobra Jet has a definite appetite for fresh air because, without the scoop, it lost almost 0.2 seconds and 1.4 mph in the quarter. The Ram-Air package is expensive at \$133.44, but it is very effective.

When you are trying for maximum performance—which is what these cars are all about—you become acutely aware of any shortcomings in the controls and instrumentation. The very large Cobra tachometer is mounted relatively close to the driver and aimed at his chest so that it is difficult to read. The panel contains four large, round dials but somehow everything but fuel level is left to warning lights—just what you would expect in a Falcon. The console shifter, too, was vague and Falcony in its operation. During the street driving part of the test, we noticed that the accelerator pedal assumed a low frequency up-and-down motion whenever we hit a bump. Apparently soft engine mounts are used and engine motion is translated back through the throttle linkage.

We haven't been able to fall in love with the power steering, either, which is of the high effort type—not to be confused with road feel. If we could use only one word to describe it, that word would be *numb*. If you turn the wheel two inches either direction from center, it just stays there, which demonstrates a certain degree of insensitivity. What we are trying to say is that the Cobra doesn't have controls in keeping with its performance.

But my goodness, Betsy—the Cobra *does* have good brakes. It could be stopped from 80 mph in 248 feet (0.86G) and did so three consecutive times with no serious fade and exceptional directional stability.

When it comes to handling we can only say that the Cobra performs in the current Ford pattern—strong understeer. Anyone who spins one of these cars has to be trying because it is as resistant to changing ends as anything we can remember—at the expense of the front tire sidewalls.

(Continued on page 54)

SIX ECONO-RACERS

(Continued from page 40)

Both the Cobra and the Cyclone CJ have a very comfortable and silent ride—exceeded only by the Chevelle. The ride harshness is more than acceptable for this kind of car and the high roll stiffness contributes to the comfort level when you get off that straight road. We would prefer more shock absorber control to damp out the low frequency floating motion that is most noticeable at high speed.

Some of the more utilitarian aspects of the Cobra suffered because of the fastback body shape. The rear seat leg and head room are best described as marginal. In fact, leg room is almost zero when the front seat is in its rearmost position. We did find a good size cavern under the deck lid but most of it is up over the rear axle—out of reach due to the small lid opening. All of this is really academic. People turned on by Econo-Racers usually couldn't care less about space behind the driver's seat—but if they do, we would recommend the formal roof model. One problem that won't improve with the formal roof, however, is the effectiveness of the windshield wipers. On the test car they failed to clear a wide band along the driver's side-pillar—a fault we consider serious.

There were many very good qualities in the Cobra. Enough so that placing it third

instead of second has started a kind of *C/D* civil war. Everywhere we looked we saw evidence of quality assembly. The panels fit well, the upholstery was smooth and the body was exceptionally free of rattles. Some of this was obviously aided by good design. The instrument panel, for example, was completely covered from one side to the other with a single pad so there's no chance of misalignment.

When you stand back and look at the Cobra with its competition-style hoodpins, bulging scoop and white-lettered tires you know it's a real racer. But when you drive it, it feels more like a family sedan with a big engine.

CYCLONE CJ

Differences between Mercury's Cyclone CJ and the Cobra are largely a matter of styling since both are mechanically similar. We ranked the Mercury below the Ford primarily because of its poorer braking performance—surely the result of production variation.

We found the Mercury's styling more to our liking even though both cars are nearly identical in silhouette. The Mercury seems cleaner—at least the hood scoop is. Ford, with its Better Ideas, decorated the rear of the Cobra's scoop with the turn signal indicators while Mercury was content to simply spray on some flat black paint. To us, a functional hood scoop is its own

attraction so it doesn't have to light up like a Christmas tree to prove its worth.

The Cyclone's basic equipment list was identical to all of the other test cars with one exception—the 3.91 axle ratio. We had expected the standard 3.50 ratio but a few minutes on the expressway was convincing evidence to the contrary.

As you would calculate, the higher numerical axle ratio gave the Cyclone a slight edge in acceleration times. It was about a tenth of a second quicker in the standing start quarter; 13.94 seconds at 100.89 mph. A stretchable car that will run a quarter in under 14 seconds is very quick indeed but the increase in engine noise at cruising speeds with the tall gear is not worth the performance gain.

We are also a little curious about the remarkable traction of the Cyclone's tires. Both the Cobra and Cyclone had special traction tires as standard equipment, but the Mercury would take full throttle off the line which neither the Ford nor any of the other test cars could do.

The Cyclone's greatest shortcoming came to light in the braking tests. The rear brakes suffered from premature lock-up resulting in poor directional stability and greatly increased stopping distances. Stopping from 80 mph required 283 feet (0.76G). This can be attributed to poor proportioning of the braking effort which is a chronic problem with disc/drum combinations.

Everything said about the handling and

driver controls of the Cobra also pertains to the Cyclone. The Cyclone does have a slightly different instrument panel layout, however, which improves readability, particularly that of the tachometer.

The Cyclone CJ can best be described as a gentleman's muscle car. Its competition-oriented external appearance is certainly in keeping with its wide-open throttle performance but the car has been carefully developed for minimum intrusion on the occupants' senses. At \$40 more than the Cobra you can have a choice of styling.

CHEVELLE SS396

If a committee of Detroit executives tested this same group of cars, the Chevelle would have been the overall winner—by miles. We ranked it fifth. There is a very fine line between endearing mechanical excellence and an automatic, remote-control automobile. Driving the Chevelle on any expressway is an uncomfortable hint of the future: sitting in an insulated capsule moving on a conveyor. Perfect for the 4-door sedan set but hard for the enthusiast to love.

The Chevelle was easily the quietest car of the test. Engine noise, including intake and exhaust, was almost undetectable with the windows up. Road noise and ride harshness were at a minimum—partly a result of the polyester cord tires on the Chevelle instead of the fiberglass belted construction tires used on the other test cars.

We picked the Chevelle for our Econo-

Racer test because we knew it belonged there. Chevrolet, bound by the GM corporate tongue-in-cheek policy concerning competition, says very little about the high performance per-dollar value of the SS396 but we know that it exists—and so do you. Since Chevrolet doesn't package an Econo-Racer in the manner of Chrysler Corporation, it was up to *C/D* to build one from the option list. This is a task easily done by ordering the base 325-hp SS396 package (which also includes power front disc brakes, styled 7-inch wide wheels and F70 tires) on the 300 Deluxe 2-door coupe. With the other options which we specified on all of our Econo-Racers, the Chevelle comes across the counter at \$3409—more than \$300 under the Super Bee. That's an ECONO-racer.

As you can glean from the check list, the Chevelle was the slowest in acceleration, the most difficult to stop and the best in handling. That is quite a spread.

The Chevelle's acceleration potential was never fully realized because the polyester tires are far too slippery for dragstrip traction (fiberglass belted tires are not currently offered from the factory). An average of the two best runs gave us 14.41 seconds at 97.35 mph, but most of the test runs were clustered in the 14.60s at 96 mph.

Those familiar with the 325-hp 396 know it's not famous for rocket sled acceleration and may be surprised that the test car went as quickly as it did. So were we, consider-

ing that a similarly powered Camaro (March, '68) could not exceed 15.0 seconds at 93.9 mph. Some investigation indicates that the Chevelle exhaust system is far more efficient than that of Camaro and that the '69 exhaust emission control system, which does not use an air injection pump, improves output. The Chevelle also had the advantage of more break-in miles than any other car in the test.

The Chevelle's performance in the braking test is barely acceptable by our standards. Premature lock-up of the rear wheels caused poor directional stability and the required stopping distance from 80 mph was a very long 304 feet (0.70G.) If the Chevelle didn't fare at all well in the acceleration and braking portions of the test, it was unbeatable in handling—and good handling is a lovely thing to have around the house. The credit goes to the new heavy duty suspension package that uses a rear sway bar to reduce understeer. We liked it a lot. The car corners flat and allows good directional control right up to the limit of adhesion. All of this is complemented by Chevrolet's very accurate power steering—its only fault is a slow overall ratio of 4.25 turns lock-to-lock. An undesirable quirk of the Chevelle's rear suspension is a tendency for the axle to hop under acceleration when the tires are just barely slipping, and during hard cornering when there is some power application. No other car had this problem. (Continued on page 78)

When they invested \$140,000 to build this National Champion, they weren't about



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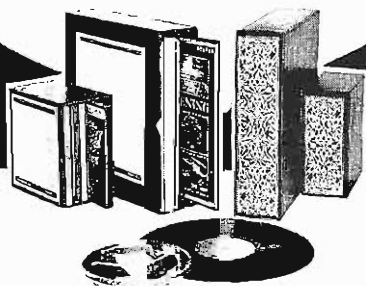
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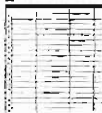


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SIX ECONO-RACERS

(Continued from page 55)

Since the test car actually turned out to be a Malibu 2-door hardtop with the optional bucket seat interior, it didn't really fit the Econo-Racer mold. We did find that the seat, which has a distinct rearward rake, offered a sinfully comfortable driving position. Along with the package comes a console, however, with the numbest shifter we've ever encountered. Upshifting to second gear was out of the question. You always got third. Chevrolet plans to offer a ratcheting shifter in the motorcycle tradition later in the year, and we consider that a must.

For an additional \$94.80 your Chevelle can be equipped with an optional instrumentation group which includes all of the expected gauges plus a tachometer. Even though they are all well located, they are also quite small, including the tach, and generally difficult to read because of the very fat calibration marks.

Our test Chevelle didn't do very well because it was neither econo nor racer. Don't lose heart, Chevy fans. It has the potential. We have already mentioned that the lower-priced coupe is a relative bargain—so if you throw in an extra \$252.80 for the 375-hp 396 you will end up with the real thing. And we have every reason to expect the real thing—Chevy Econo-Racer wise—is a good thing indeed.

THE JUDGE

We started the Econo Racer test with six cars and ended with five. The elusive sixth car was Pontiac's entry. The people at Pontiac in charge of supplying-cars-for-six-car-comparison-tests couldn't make up their minds whether our Pontiac was a prototype or a real car and the result was we couldn't get enough accurate test information about the car to put anywhere in the standings.

The Judge's purpose in life is to add some spice to Pontiac's GTO series. It's a variation of the GTO with the 366-hp 400 cu. in. Ram Air engine as standard equipment, along with G70 black wall fiberglass belted tires and styled wheels without the customary trim rings. The Judge stands out (leaps out, really) in a crowd because of its bright orange paint and a simulated aerodynamic wing attached to the deck lid. If there is any doubt, check for "The Judge" decals on the front fenders and deck lid.

A part of our normal road test procedure is a routine technical inspection. During this phase of the test we discovered that one of the vacuum hoses that controls ignition timing had been plugged internally so that the timing was no longer retarded at idle as is normally required to meet the exhaust emissions standards. We also noted that the coolant temperature was much lower than normal for a Pontiac since the change was made to a 190°F thermostat to aid emission control. Our suspicions were further aroused when The Judge wasn't

happy even with the best fuel Sunoco has to offer.

A check of the identification numbers stamped on the block indicated the engine was actually a 1968 manual transmission Ram Air unit—which differs from the 1969 366-hp automatic transmission engine in several important areas including camshaft. "It belongs in the test," agreed Pontiac, "but it's kind of a prototype at the same time," they said. That's more-or-less mutually exclusive and *our* conclusion is that performance of The Judge would probably not be representative of a car a customer could buy.

To satisfy our curiosity about exhaust emissions we retained an independent testing laboratory (which also has government contracts for the same purpose) to test The Judge for compliance to the federal exhaust emission standards. The Judge did not pass. Federal standards allow an average of 1.5% carbon monoxide and 275 parts-per-million unburned hydrocarbons in the exhaust while the car is being driven through a predetermined cycle. Figures for The Judge were 2.65% CO and 549 ppm hydrocarbons. Pretty far off the mark.

With this evidence in mind we are convinced that Pontiac would not knowingly sell this car to a customer and, therefore, it is not suitable for a road test. A true picture of the handling or braking characteristics of The Judge was hard to get in focus because it came with seven-inch wheels—wider than the six inches which seemed to be the maximum available on The Judge at press time.

We did find several worthwhile innovations in non-mechanical areas of the Pontiac. Illumination of the hood-mounted tach has been greatly improved so that instrument is now useful at night as well as in the day time. The console-mounted automatic transmission selector is also much to our liking. When pressured to the right, the lever moves in a series of saw-tooth ramps—one for each gear—so you can move only one position at a time without releasing the lever. This system is clearly the best of all the test cars.

Both the Pontiac and Chevelle 2-door hardtops are built on a short 112-inch wheelbase which gives these cars a more compact and maneuverable feeling. Rear seat leg room suffers accordingly.

The great virtue of a comparison test is that it clearly shows how each manufacturer chooses to solve the same problem. The Hemi Road Runner is an ECONO-RACER while the Chevelle is more of an ECONO-Racer. The Cobra and the Cyclone CJ fall directly in the middle. The Super Bee with its 383 goes about its task with great enthusiasm but falls just short of the middle in muscle.

Decide which one your driving record can stand. For the price of a Porsche 912 minus most of a VW, you can have your choice.