

'56



MERCURY



ROAD TEST

AN MT RESEARCH REPORT



Ever drive a car and have it remind you of another? That's what happened

AFTER A FULL-SCALE ROAD TEST on the new Mercury Montclair, one can't help wondering if the "Big M" so prominent in this year's advertising campaign couldn't just as easily have stood for Mexico. Had the Pan-American race been run this time, there isn't much doubt that Mercury would have been a strong contender while the Lincolns stayed home. As one MT tester remarked, "If you could drive this car blindfolded, you'd swear it was a pre-'56 Lincoln [perennial Pan-Am winner]—it feels just the same." There was no Mexican road race, but, happily, there's still a new Mercury. So in addition to the features that have attracted Merc buyers in the past (including MT's '55 top styling award among 4-door sedans), '56 buyers get what may well have been a true race-bred automobile. Practically all Mercury rooters should be happy about it.

Test car: Montclair 2-door hardtop with Mercomatic, Multi-Luber, radio, and heater along with power-operated brakes, steering, seat, and windows.

Engine: Bore and stroke (3.75 x 3.30 in '55) have been increased to 3.80 x 3.44 to up Mercury's displacement to 312 cubic inches this year. Test-car horsepower (standard on all Montereys and Montclairs with Mercomatic) rated at 225 (198 maximum in '55) with 9.1 compression ratio. Changes in displacement and compression ratio are only major ones over '55's go-getting engine.

Other options: Test car lacked only air conditioning and the up-and-comingest "new" innovation, seatbelts. A 3-speed transmission is standard, and overdrive optional, on all Montereys and Montclairs

in 210-horsepower form, with 8.1 compression ratio. Customs with Mercomatic also use this engine. In general, Mercury can satisfy you all along the line from Medalist austerity (available in 2-door form only) thru bright Custom and Monterey models to the plush, loaded Montclair, which includes the only convertible and 4-door hardtop in the line.

WHAT THE CAR IS LIKE TO DRIVE

Exit and entry: Just fair on MT's test car—you pay for Montclair's good-looking lower roof line (about 2 inches less at doorsill than other Mercs) with a little less ease in sliding into the front seat. On the good side of the ledger are generally roomy driver's compartment, lots of leg-room around the standard, dished, safety steering wheel, and lack of under-dash knee obstructions. Wide door opening and 2-position stops seem to halt the feud between knees and wraparound cornerposts.

Driving position: Low, moderately soft seats with very comfortable backs make for no noticeable body strain, even after long drives. If you go for the 4-way seat, you name your own position among the nearly infinite variations. Spaciousness around the wheel along with excellent head- and shoulder room give added control and confidence to the driver—no cramped feeling for those who like to sit close to the wheel; worlds of room if you like to sit well away from it. Large brake pedal sits close to floor—equally good for advocates of right- or left-foot braking.

Vision: Good vision is the main attribute of a wraparound windshield, and you get it in the Merc, altho a lower hood line would make it much better for view of

road immediately ahead. Right front fender and rear fenders are visible from driver's seat. Still some distortion in corners of windshield and in top of the large rear window. Distortion is a matter of quality control and Mercury is stiffening its standards in an attempt to eliminate it. Windshield wipers operate efficiently, sweep as well as most on wraparound windshields but without completely solving problem of cleaning wider expanse. Mercury is presently experimenting with 3 wiper blades and overlapping blades—among other systems—trying to improve this growing complaint. Double ball-joint mirror can be moved out of the line-of-sight, generally eliminating a blind spot here for most drivers, adapts to any stature.

Instrument panel: Basically same as in '55, large fan-shaped panel is still one of the best for readability, lack of glare and highlights. Catering to the man who likes to know just where he stands, Mercury retains gauges which are fast vanishing in favor of warning lights on many cars, and "old-fashioned" MT testers still like them. Hooded panel (and all of dash top) of test car was padded and covered (optional) to prevent glare, ease crash danger. Glove box is on right, as are ashtray and lighter—all a little too far from driver for top convenience. This is an economy carryover from '55, will likely be changed next year.

Operation of controls: Major controls are all convenient for driver, easy to operate. Aircraft-type heat and vent controls are to right of driver, rate high for simplicity, ease of operation. T-handled parking brake remains on left, has warning light to combat forgetfulness. Multi-Luber con-

to us with this one

trols consist of 2 elements (button and signal light) which flank center-mounted radio dial.

Ease of handling: With power steering the Mercury has 5 turns from lock to lock (25.4 to 1 overall ratio) and requires quite a lot of cranking in city driving. For a largish car it has just a light-enough touch and parks without strain. Out on the road, you get the feel that you should have from any steering unit—positive and firm. You'll like the general accuracy in steering at speed, and won't be bothered with constant corrections. General stability of car, and flat cornering characteristics, make the whole driving operation simpler still.

Acceleration: Despite added cubic inches and the resulting increase in horsepower,

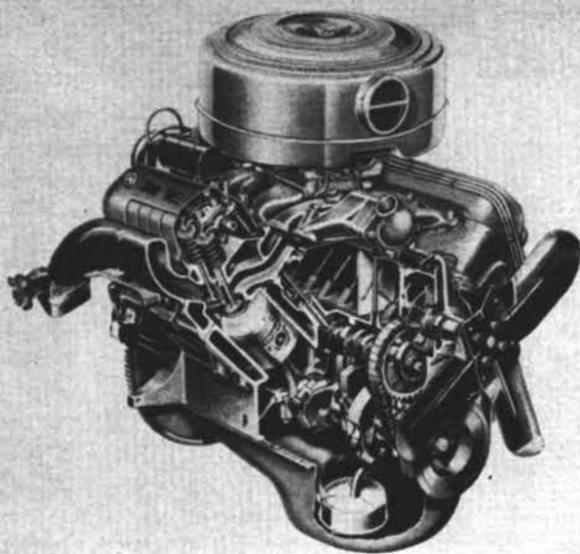
the '56 Merc test car is only slightly improved in some phases of acceleration over the '55 model. It is just possible that all the power equipment on this year's car, as versus last year's almost "naked" one, may account for the lack of great improvement. Best gain is in passing range—the Montclair clipped a full second off the 50-80 time made by MT's '55 test car. Mercomatic is just about as smart as the best driver, and doing your own shifting from LOW range takeoffs results in only slight improvement over straight DRIVE, full-throttle accelerations. Mercomatic automatically shifts out of low gear at about 40 mph (indicated 45), and from intermediate to high at about 67 (indicated 74). We got our best times by holding it in LOW range to about 48 mph, but the resulting difference scarcely warrants the

extra manipulation of the selector.

Braking: In MT's 12-normal-stop fade test, Merc's new fixed-anchor-type brakes fared slightly better than average. The 1st 5 stops at a deceleration rate of 15 feet per second per second from 60 mph showed no fade at all. The 6th and 7th stops required more pedal pressure, and slight fade began to set in. On 8th stop, with full pedal pressure, car just did come to a stop. After that car would not stop where driver wanted it to, even with pedal all the way to floor. After a short rest (about 5 minutes), brakes made a good enough recovery to stop car adequately. Thruout test, as fade set in, so did slight pull to one side or another and this continued after brakes had made almost a full recovery. Fast deceleration did not result

photos by Al Kidd





JIM LODGE

The engine modifications include a 1.54 to 1 rocker arm ratio and high-lift cam, improved distributor spark control and sparkplugs, a new 4-barrel carburetor with an integral thermostatic choke, larger passages and ports for better breathing, and a maximum compression ratio of 9.0 to 1. The result is a more responsive and easily started powerplant developing up to 225 hp

in excessive nose-down, to our pleasure.

Roadability: No matter what car you drive, and what you know it will do, don't argue with a Mercury owner when it comes to roadability. In '55, MT rated Mercury as one of the 2 best road cars on the market, and the new Merc easily equals previous models. This, above all, is the best foot that Mercury would have put forward had there been a '55 Mexican race. On very high-speed curves, the Mercury—to borrow a phrase from sports car advocates—feels as tho it's on rails. The car sits very flat in turns and, if you push it a little harder than normal, the worst you'll get is a 4-wheel drift that sets in very slowly and seems like it belongs. Excellent steering (with some built-in understeer) aids here too, because the Merc goes just where you point it, degree of drift notwithstanding. One enthused MT tester felt that the car would simply slide off the road before it would ever consider rolling. Mercury likes varied road surfaces and straight fast roads just as well as curves. There is no apparent wind wander or airborne feeling at any time. Washboard roads (straight or curving) don't cause wheel hop or any noticeable pitch or wander. In short—we haven't found a better road car in '56.

Ride: Superlative roadability considered, one might expect ride to suffer to the uncomfortable stage. Not so. Mercury engineers have actually softened the ride slightly this year without any loss of handling qualities. But don't expect the softest ride in the market. You will feel bumps and obstructions right down to tar strips along the road, but this won't result in any marked discomfort unless you're real finicky. Actually you *hear* the irregularities in the road as much as feel them, and this fact might detract somewhat from Mercury's better-than-average ride.

WHAT THE CAR IS LIKE TO LIVE WITH

Riding in the front seat: From a sheer

seating standpoint, the front-seat Mercury passenger will be as comfortable as any. He'll enjoy plenty of room in all directions for stretching out and general relaxation. Mercury's heat and vent system is fine for providing good comfort for passenger as well as driver. Our test car did show these discomforts, tho: Front wind vent was apparently inadequately sealed, which resulted in drafts and more-than-average wind noise when it was closed. Since our '55 test car (with no difference in basic design of the vent) didn't have this trouble, it's safe to assume that it isn't chronic. In addition, Mercomatic transmission in our test car was not the smoothest, and some undue lurch was present in normal upshifts.

Riding in the rear seat: Buyers of 2-door hardtops shouldn't expect rear-seat roominess, but Mercury is surprisingly good in this respect. Much more than "emergency" passenger space, the rear seat is fairly comfortable despite a modest amount of legroom. In addition, rear-seat passengers will enjoy courtesy light mounted above armrest in the seatback. Armrest itself, aside from its normal comfort function, also aids in keeping rear-seat passengers from sliding when cornering gets hot and heavy.

ECONOMY AND EASE OF MAINTENANCE

Fuel economy: Even with their increased power, Mercury owners will enjoy just about the same fuel economy that they had last year, thanks to higher compression ratio and improved carburetion. At slower, steady speeds there's slight improvement. (See chart for comparison, and remember that the '55 test car didn't have Mercury's most powerful engine.) Altho not primarily intended as an economy car, the new Merc won't give you headaches when you tote up the fuel bill.

Is the car put together well? Exterior-wise, Mercury will easily match up to other cars in its class on panel and trim fits and

quality. Paint showed only slight "orange peel" (small ripples caused by—according to Mercury manufacturing—spray too dry, not enough paint in spray, cold paint and or thickness or viscosity of paint). We didn't find any obvious file marks or indications of poor workmanship. Inside the car, workmanship was excellent. Upholstery, headlining, and trim seemed to indicate that Mercury had outdone itself for such an early-production model. Women and men alike will appreciate the appearance and quality of Merc interiors if all are like this. By the way, Mercury quality hasn't always been up to its present standard. Whether or not MT is responsible, we're glad to see this real improvement over the last few years.

How did it hold up? Very well, with no serious malfunctions even after an unusually hard test, much of it in very bad weather. Some minor rattles developed. The only item to go bad was the warning light for the emergency brake, which apparently lost its memory and continued to shine after the brake was released. This was made less bearable by the fact that the red glass cap over it came loose and the white light from the bulb shone in the driver's eyes.

Servicing: No problems that aren't true of other large V8s. Merc's engine compartment is fairly roomy and major components are accessible enough. Exhaust manifolds are higher than most and when they're hot you'll have to be alert even in everyday servicing. If you go for the power options plan on working around their components. Biggest boon to the do-it-yourselfers is the optional Multi-Luber. One push a day on the button takes care of all front end chassis lubrication, and even after it pays for itself you should still be saving money on lube jobs circumvented in this handy way. Maintenance costs on the Mercury will easily be in keeping with its initial middle-of-the-road price.

—Al Kidd

'56

(225-bhp engine)

ACCELERATION From Standing Start
0-30 mph 4.0 0-60 mph 11.0
Quarter-mile 18.2 and 78 mph

Passing Speeds
30-50 mph 4.9 50-80 mph 12.8

TOP SPEED Fastest run 104.7 Slowest 100.6
Average of 4 runs 102.6

FUEL CONSUMPTION Used Mobilgas Special
Steady Speeds
20.3 mpg @ 30 19.0 mpg @ 45
16.4 mpg @ 60 13.8 mpg @ 75

Stop-and-Go Driving
12.4 mpg over measured course
14.3 mpg tank average for 599 miles

STOPPING DISTANCE 150 feet from 60 mph

BRAKE FADE Slight on 6th and 7th stops from 60
Complete after 8th stop
Partial recovery 5 minutes

SPEEDOMETER ERROR Read 32 at true 30, 50 at 45
66 at 60, and 81 at 75

REAR-WHEEL HORSEPOWER Clayton chassis dynamometer showed:
67 road hp @ 2000 rpm and 33 mph
86 road hp @ 2500 rpm and 60 mph
100 road hp (max.) @ 3000 rpm, 96 mph

'55

(188-bhp engine)

From Standing Start
0-30 mph 4.2 0-60 mph 11.4
Quarter-mile 18.0 and 78 mph

Passing Speeds
30-50 mph 5.3 50-80 mph 13.8

Fastest run 107.9 Slowest 103.8
Average of 4 runs 105.3

Used Mobilgas Regular
Steady Speeds
20.6 mpg @ 30 19.9 mpg @ 45
16.2 mpg @ 60 13.4 mpg @ 75

Stop-and-Go Driving
12.7 mpg over measured course
14.7 mpg tank average for 1090 miles

153 feet from 60 mph

Read 32 at true 30, 49 at 45,
65 at 60, and 81 at 75

70 road hp @ 1700 rpm and 27 mph
95 road hp @ 2500 rpm and 64 mph
100 road hp (max.) @ 3100 rpm, 82 mph

S P E C I F I C A T I O N S

ENGINE: Ohv V8. Bore 3.80 in. Stroke 3.44 in. Stroke bore ratio .905:1. Compression ratio 9.1:1. Displacement 312 cu. in. Advertised bhp 225 @ 4600 rpm. Bhp per cu. in. 0.721. Piston travel @ max. bhp 2637 ft. per min. Max. bmep 156.6 psi. Max. torque 324 lbs.-ft. @ 2600 rpm.

TRANSMISSION: Standard transmission is 3-speed synchromesh with helical gears. Automatic transmission in Mercomatic, 3 element torque converter with planetary gears. Overdrive transmission is standard shift with planetary gearset.

RATIOS: Drive 1.47 x converter ratio and torque converter only (2.40 at full throttle thru detent, x torque converter); Low 2.40 x converter ratio; Reverse 2.00 x converter ratio. Maximum converter ratio at stall 2.1:1 @ 1610-1810 rpm.

REAR-AXLE RATIOS: Conventional 3.71, optional 4.09; Mercomatic 3.15, optional 3.54; Overdrive 4.09, optional 3.73.

STEERING: Turning diameter 43.2 ft. Number

DIMENSIONS

- A FRONT OVERHANG 34.4
- B WHEELBASE 119
- C REAR OVERHANG 53
- D OVERALL HEIGHT 60.5
- E MINIMUM GROUND CLEARANCE 6.8 (at frame siderail)
- F FRONT LEGROOM 43.7

of turns lock to lock 5.0. Overall ratio: 25.4 to 1. TYPE: Mechanical, worm and 2-tooth roller with needle bearing. Power, Bendix linkage booster.

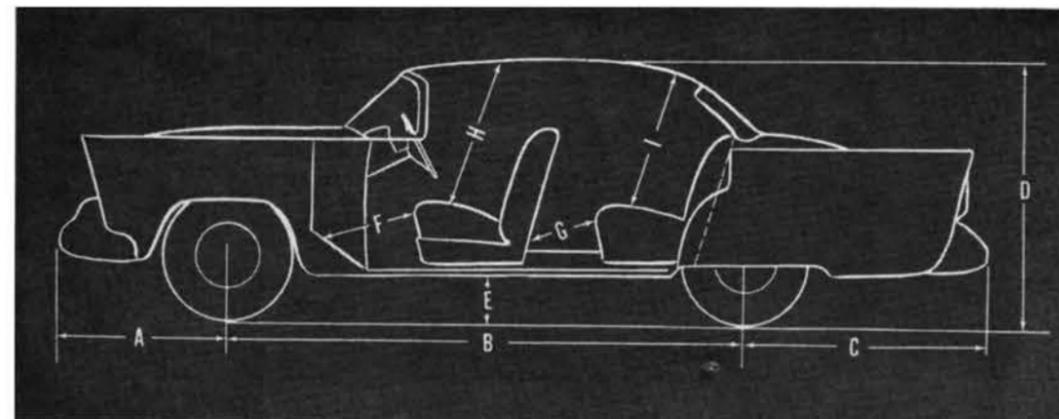
WEIGHT: Test car weight (with gas, oil, and water) 4110 lbs. Test car weight/bhp ratio 18.3:1.

TIRES: 7.10 x 15 tubeless.

PRICES: (Including suggested retail price at main factory, federal tax, and delivery and handling charges, but not freight.) CUSTOM 2-door sedans \$2214 and \$2311, 4-door sedan \$2370, 2-door hardtop \$2445, 4-door station wagon \$2682. MONTEREY 4-door sedans \$2515 and \$2612, 2-door hardtop \$2590, 4-door, 3-seat station wagon \$2937. MONCLAIR 2-door hardtop \$2725, 4-door hardtop \$2746, convertible \$2860.

ACCESSORIES: Mercomatic \$175, overdrive \$102, power brakes \$35, power steering \$75, power windows \$90, power seat \$60, radio \$90, heater \$75, air conditioning \$475, safety package (belts, padded dash, visors) \$28.

- G REAR LEGROOM 40.8
- H FRONT HEADROOM 33.8
- I REAR HEADROOM 32.5
- J OVERALL LENGTH 206.4
- K OVERALL WIDTH 76.4
- L FRONT SHOULDER ROOM 37.4
- M REAR SHOULDER ROOM 37.5
- N TRUNK CAPACITY N/A



'56 MERCURY Montclair 2-door hardtop with Mercomatic

