



CAR *Mercury* LIFE *Meteor* Road Test

Quality marks Mercury's entry in the 'tween-size sweepstakes; it may become the dealers' next star.

THE FIRST MERCURY back in 1939 was a resounding success because it offered the buyer "a little more" than he could get in a Ford. The wheelbase was an inch larger, the styling unique and the engine offered more power and performance.

Now, 23 years later, we find much the same pattern, even though Ford produces three distinct lines of cars, and soon will produce four (Cardinal, Falcon, Fairlane and Galaxie). The all-new car for 1962 is, of course, the Fairlane. And Lincoln-Mercury's version of the Fairlane is the Meteor. Again, it offers a 1-in.-longer wheelbase, unique styling, but uses the standard Ford Fairlane mechanical components.

We have already reported on the Fairlane (*Car Life*, November, 1961) and we elected to try Mercury's Meteor as a follow-up, particularly because there are some important differences in the suspension department, as compared (again) with the Fairlane.

Even before announcement time the Meteor-Fairlane duo was referred to as "in-between" cars, larger than the compacts, smaller than the full-size models. Since a compact is defined as a car with a wheelbase of no more than 110 in. (per George Romney of AMC), and since the big Mercury had a wheelbase of 120 in., the mid-

point would be 115 in. However, the new Meteor wheelbase is 116.5 in. and, make no mistake, this is a full-sized automobile in every way. In fact, as we shall explain, there really isn't much need to look at the big Mercury ►





Mercury Meteor continued

Monterey at all, unless you just happen to be one of those types who insist on a heavy automobile.

Just as we said in our November issue (re the Fairlane), the Mercury Meteor is "astutely engineered." The

Meteor package offers the roomy interior that most of us have come to expect, and get, in a full-sized car. In fact, the interior dimensions, item by item, are all within a fraction of an inch of being equal to the big Monterey. Yet, around this roomy package the engineers have designed a unit-construction frame-cum-body structure which is both more rigid and lighter than any previous design of this size.

Here, then, is the principal reason for our preference for the Meteor. Its curb weight is only 3200 lb. as compared with almost 4000 lb. for the full-size Monterey. In years past the public bought "weight." Even now we hear all too often the old and very mistaken notion that "I want a big, heavy car, one that I'll feel safe in, one that will stick to the road, ride comfortably, etc." There is no technical justification for this ridiculous notion. Accident statistics prove conclusively that the occupants of "light" cars are just as safe as they would be in a heavy vehicle. Feather-weight sports cars stick to their road-race courses much better than do the super-stocks (example: Elkhart Lake, Wis.). As for the ride, this characteristic is merely a design problem; the engineer can design the springs for as low a ride-rate (i.e., softer) as he wishes—without regard to the vehicle's weight.

For the consumer, the lighter car provides every advantage. Everyone wants economy and the relatively light Meteor gives it. Nearly everyone wants performance too, and here again 100 lb. of extra weight requires another 5 bhp to overcome it. While the standard engine for the Meteor is the 101-bhp 6-cyl. unit (actually the 170-cu. in. Falcon engine), we feel that it will prove inadequate for most buyers unless they are willing to accept gutless performance in return for compact-car economy.

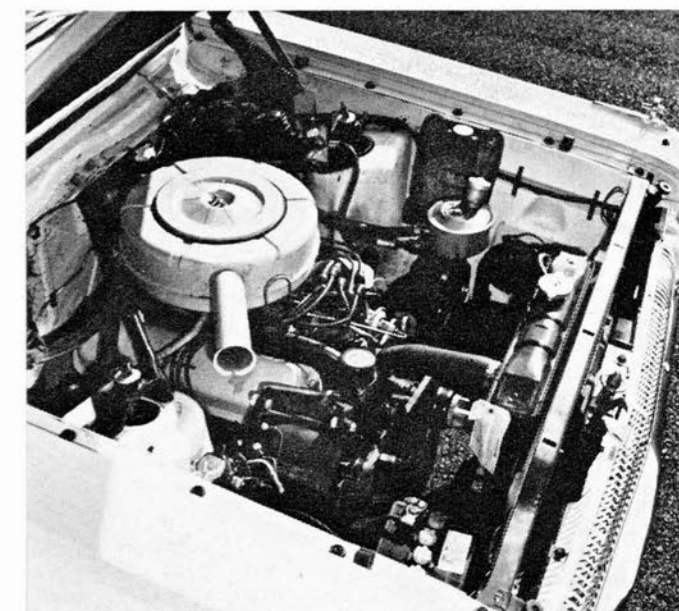
The 221-cu. in. V-8 engine in our test car is a perfect compromise. With 145 bhp and the automatic transmission it combines reasonably good performance with ade-

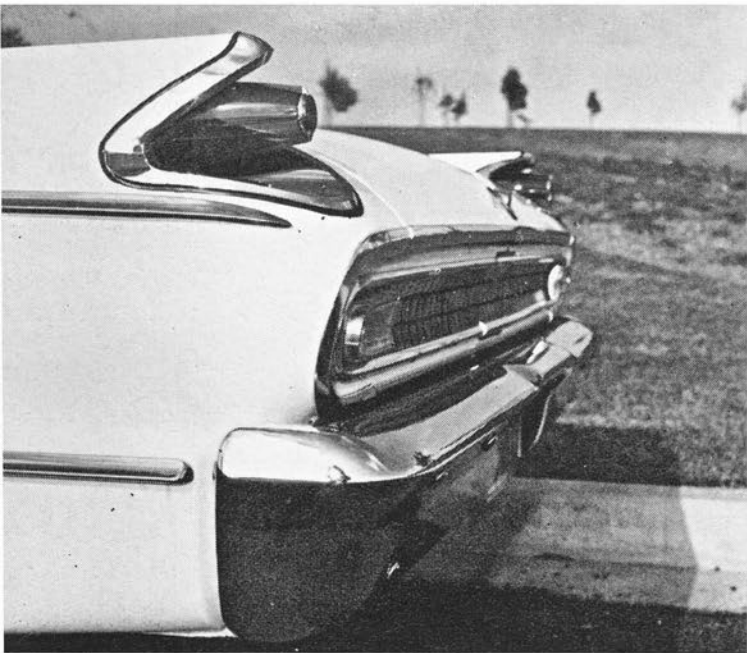
quate economy. To be critical, we must mention that the worst feature of this particular car is the 2-speed automatic transmission. It's perfectly adequate for normal driving, of course, but there is no doubt that both performance and economy would be enhanced if a more efficient 3-speed automatic was available. However, this would be more costly and perhaps the engineers have made the right compromise in this department. As it is, the V-8 engine costs \$103 extra and adds about 158 lb. The automatic transmission costs only \$180 extra and it adds a further 29 lb. to the car's weight. The V-8 is a good investment, in fact a necessity in our opinion. The automatic knocks a big chunk off the potential economy but this is the price one must pay for shift-less driving. (We estimate that a manual-shift Meteor V-8 should get up to 18 mpg, with 20 mpg possible with overdrive.) Our test car gave a consistent 15-17 mpg, driven in average fashion and under varied conditions. While this average is not brilliant it represents a saving over the larger cars of up to 25%, based on our tests and driving over the same routes.

The new engine, which weighs only 450 lb., is, of course, a wizard. It is smooth and quiet, though perhaps not quite so good in these respects as, say, one of the prestige automobiles. The automatic transmission can, if you wish, be "forced" and by using low-range the engine goes up to 4800 rpm (58 mph) with no sign of valve float. However, the 2-speed automatic's shift point is set for 52 mph (an actual 51) and this corresponds to 4200 rpm in 1st gear. The shift to high (2nd gear) at 51 mph puts the engine speed down to 2400 rpm, very close to the torque peak. At this lower rpm the torque converter still has a moderate degree of effectiveness—all of which means that acceleration from 55 to 70 mph, for example, is good even without the "passing" gear of certain other automatic transmissions. Incidentally, the all-

synchromesh 4-speed transmissions available on the Falcon and Galaxie will not be offered on the Fairlane or Meteor.

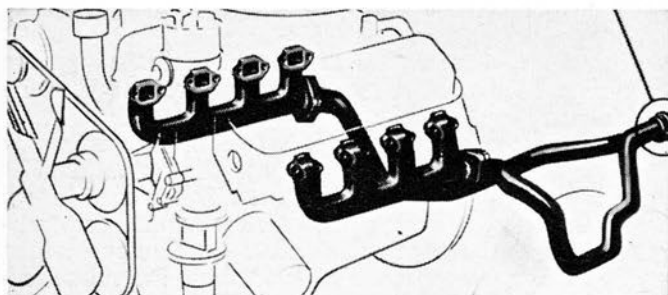
During the past few years it has been Mercury policy to give its customers a somewhat softer ride than is offered by comparable Ford products. This is done in two ways: the effective spring rates are lower and more rubber is used at the attachment points between suspension members and the chassis. However, these are subtle differences and while our staff can "feel" the slightly better



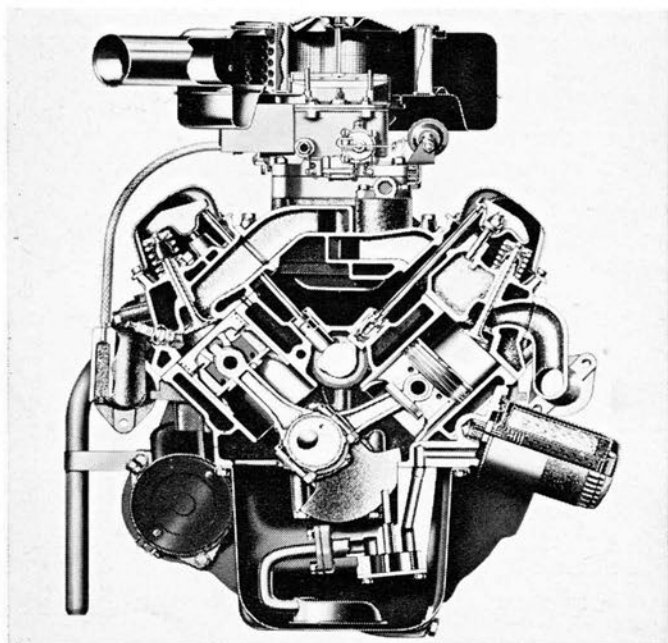


Mercury Meteor

continued



GOOD PORTING system in the 221-cu. in. engine includes cast iron headers but only a single muffler and exhaust.



ride of the Comet, as compared with the Falcon, we can't honestly say that the Meteor feels much different from the Fairlane. In general, the Meteor's ride is soft, though perhaps not as soft as some of its competitors. This gives the Meteor some advantage when cruising over rough roads, though we think a traveling salesman might appreciate a little stronger damping action from the shock absorbers.

The power steering option, as included in our test car, merits some praise. This is one of these marginal cases; the Meteor front end weighs 1860 lb. and the power-steering may be needed by those who do most of their driving in the city. On the highway it is quite unnecessary. However, the directional stability and general feel at high speed rate "better than average" in comparison with other power-steering.

The power brakes were another matter. These were much too sensitive and though a light pedal may have advantages we fail to see any need for a booster on a car of this weight and equipped with the already sensitive Bendix duo-servo type shoes. The Meteor barely passed our 80 mph emergency-stop test—one rear wheel suffered from "grabitis."

As for the overall level of finish, quality and attention to detail, the Meteor ranks among the best in its price class. Frankly, we had earlier doubts on this point for it is well-known in the industry that FoMoCo's "in-between" cars were on a crash program (note that though announced in October, no real quantities were delivered until December). But, to our surprise, the quality is there. The doors and hinged panels all fit nicely, trim detail is good and there is no evidence anywhere of the oft-encountered mis-matches of some early-off-the-line automobiles.

Ford, and the Lincoln-Mercury Division in particular, has done a good job on this all-new car and all indications are that this may be the "hot-line" for L-M dealers this year. ■

INTERESTING FEATURES abound in the engine. Note the stud-mounted rocker arms, which are thin-shell castings rather than steel stampings. Note also the overall compactness and weight-saving resulting from the new foundry technique and departure from traditional Y block. Bore center distance is 4.38 in., leaving room for future bore increases.



CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



MERCURY METEOR

SPECIFICATIONS

List price	.....\$2366
Price, as tested	.....2833
Curb weight, lb	.....3210
Test weight	.....3540
distribution, %	.....55.4/44.6
Tire size	.....7.00-14
Tire capacity, lb	.....3900
Brake swept area	.....252
Engine type	.....V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke	.....3.50 x 2.87
Displacement, cu in	.....221
Compression ratio	.....8.7
Bhp @ rpm	.....145 @ 4400
equivalent mph	.....93
Torque, lb-ft	.....216 @ 2200
equivalent mph	.....46.5

EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

Automatic transmission, wsw tires, windshield washer, tinted glass, power steering, power brakes, back-up lights, crankcase vent.

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in	.....116.5
Tread, f and r	.....57.0/56.0
Over-all length, in	.....203.8
width	.....71.3
height	.....55.8
equivalent vol, cu ft	.....470
Frontal area, sq ft	.....22.3
Ground clearance, in	.....6.0
Steering ratio, o/a	.....25.0
turns, lock to lock	.....4.3
turning circle, ft	.....40.5
Hip room, front	.....58.6
Hip room, rear	.....57.9
Pedal to seat back, max	.....41.0
Floor to ground	.....11.7
Luggage vol, cu ft	.....31.5
Fuel tank capacity, gal	.....16

GEAR RATIOS

2nd (1.00)	.....3.50
1st (1.75)	.....6.12
1st (1.75 x 2.40)	.....14.7

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (2nd), mph	.....93
best timed run	.....93.8
1st (4800)	.....58

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	.....29.6
60 mph	.....59.7
90 mph	.....88.0

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec	.....5.8
0-40	.....8.3
0-50	.....11.0
0-60	.....15.0
0-70	.....20.8
0-80	.....30.0
Standing ¼ mile	.....19.5
speed at end	.....68

CALCULATED DATA

Lb/hp (test wt)	.....24.4
Cu ft/ton mile	.....102.5
Mph/1000 rpm	.....21.2
Engine revs/mile	.....2840
Piston travel, ft/mile	.....1360
Car Life wear index	.....38.6

PULLING POWER

2nd	.....250 @ 42
1st	.....440 @ 28
Normal range, mpg	.....16/19
Total drag at 60 mph, lb	.....180

