



# THE JET SET

**In one fell swoop, Ford has answered all your cards and letters. Their answer is called the Mustang "Cobra Jet"**

by Eric Dahlquist

photography: Eric Rickman and Bob Swaim

Everybody in Detroit is mad at us — except Ford. With the help of about two thousand of you out there in readerland who dutifully filled in the ballot in our November issue ("Ford's Ultimate Super Cars," Nov. '67 HRM), tore it out and mailed it to Dearborn, several key executives who doubted that Ford cars lacked competitive street performance reversed their opinion (under a write-in confrontation with the buyer) and — presto — a new marketing direction was embarked upon. This was not the greatest news to the rest of "Mo-Town's" super-car purveyors who were happily slicing up a big, trend-setting market while the Total Performance people got the leavings. It was their standard cocktail-hour joke, and we went and ruined the whole deal. The laughing stopped the hour the first 428 Cobra Jet "instant eliminator" rolled into the sunlight. The C.J. will be the utter delight of every Ford lover and the bane of all the rest because, quite frankly, it is probably the fastest regular production sedan ever built.

There is a real temptation on our part to accept the credit for the Cobra Jet's existence, but in truth the talented,

Yes, "Virginia," the Ford super-car program is alive and living on the streets. Advance billing forecast 13.30, 106 mph performance. Non-power assisted steering and sticky tires allow rapidly accelerated bicep development.

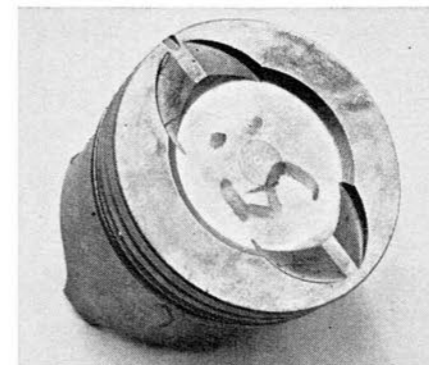
young, excited engineers in Ford's Special Vehicles Department (and Bob Tasca) are the ones who deserve the bows. Our function was to editorially point out an existing deficiency (that any kid on Woodward Avenue could have told them). Ford has had the good pieces right along, but getting them into a package was the problem.

Our package was a little late in getting here. First it was the strike, then shipping it out through all the bad weather, and one thing or another; even this issue's regular deadline came and went without a Cobra Jet in sight. These eleventh-hour deals tend to turn you off, yet the Mustang we picked up at Holman-Moody-Stroppe was worth the inconvenience. All the frustration was put out of mind the first time we let it happen — "waaah" — the secondaries came open and you realized most races would end right there, in low gear. The

would-be competitor cannot believe his eyes. No Mustang outside of Tasca's "Mystery 7" has ever moved this quickly before.

Of course our car was not quite representative. By special order, all the sound-deadening material was omitted during manufacture, so this Mustang was a light 3240 pounds. As a result, it was quite noisy inside — perhaps in the same decibel range as the Mark IV GT that Gurney and Foyt won Le Mans with last May. Motoring about the countryside in a 50-gallon steel echo chamber can have a tiring effect in doses of 300 miles, but we got used to it. We also adapted to the high-effort steering that a nose-heavy car like this has without power (it's a drag car, right?), and in the long run everybody ought to have biceps like Steve Reeves.

Out on the freeway, the Jet churns through traffic like a broken-field runner but the transition from one steady state to another (response), as in lane changing, took longer than it should. On moderately rough roads, the car's poor ride showed up immediately; a factor of a heavy-duty suspension package with high-rate springs. On very tight downhill curves there was noticeable understeer, recalling the 390-powered Mustang machine we had a year ago, and with a very light rear, F-70 Wide Ovals or not, you can get the whole thing drifting sideways at unique an-

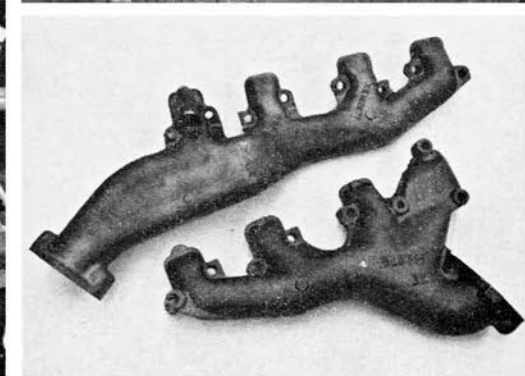


Actually, the Cobra Jet deal is an optional package on several lines of Ford cars. These are subdivided into high-performance and normal versions, consequently there are two of everything, except the basic block. Pistons come with 10.75:1 and 11.50:1 ratios, there are hydraulic and mechanical tappet cams, regular and deep-sump oil pans, 735 and 785 cfm Holley carbs, and like that. Of course, all the stuff shown here is the low- as opposed to the high-performance, what else? Ford's version of Pontiac's Ram-Air, which is really more cooled than rammed, is a very simple drop-on air-cleaner lid that seals to the hood and therefore ought not to be too expensive. On first machines, power thus generated demanded spring-clips to subdue wheel hop. This was remedied on the next line run.

gles quite easily. That's always been the hang-up with a heavy engine like the 428 in a small car like a Mustang, and it's a real challenge to get the machine to handle as well as this one does.

Whatever time is lost on turns, however, is immediately regained on the straightaway. The things that make this engine run are mostly the pieces we saw last summer at Tasca Ford in East Providence, Rhode Island, and at Bill Holbrook's portion of the Experimental Garage in Dearborn. The 2.06-inch-diameter intake valves and 1.625-inch exhausts in the old '63½ heads are the biggest factors and are items Ford has needed on the street for years. They even added a quickie (and cheapie) cold-air package that consists of a lay-on rubber-ringed steel insert designed to seal the top of the air filter to the hood. Tasca's unit, though probably more costly, looked better and was more effective since it picked up air directly from the grille and in a high-pressure area. The center of the hood is not the ultimate spot to catch the wind. An alternate plan would have been a NASCAR-type arrangement through the plenum chamber like the Z-28 Camaro, Buick Gran Sport or pilot Cobra Jet that was comprised mostly of an existing Holman-Moody unit.

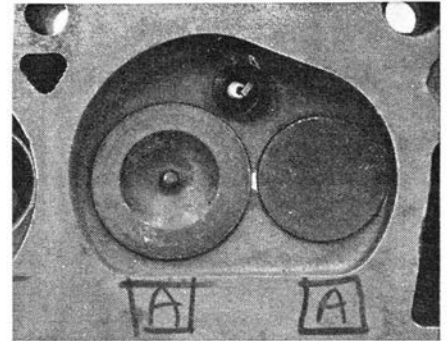
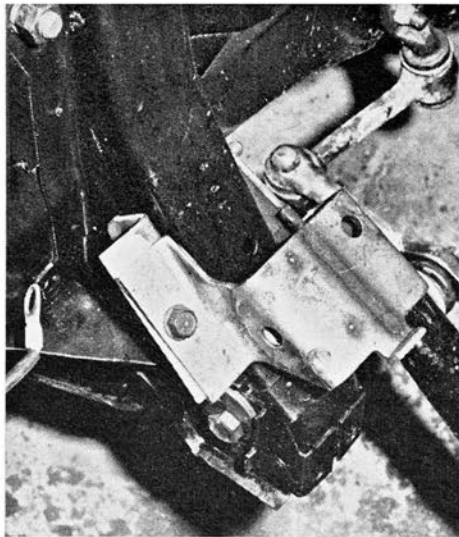
Not that the car really needs it, mind you, for it's already bred well into the  
(Continued on following page)



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**RIGHT** — Now, if you wanted to build your very own C. J., this is the motor mount that does the job. **FAR RIGHT** — Intake valve is 2.06-inch; exhaust, 1.625, or close to what others in the field have been using right along.

Hi-perf valves have same dimensions but are lighter in weight. Manifolds are aluminum.



state of overkill. First pass in the car at Irwindale was a 13.90, 103.96 with street tires and super wheel hop. Clamping the spring leaves and removing the accessory belts put us at 13.56, 106.64 — the fastest-running Pure Stock in the history of man. Ford did not foul up in the rating game footwork, either, slapping on an innocent 335 horsepower, and NHRA bought it lock, stock and barrel — sliding the Cobra Jet into C/S, C/SA or, with bigger tires, SS/E. For once, anyone can be competitive in a drag class, and with hardly an adjustment. Think of it, if you act fast and get one before a lot of them are floating around, you can go to the local strip and single-handedly make a complete shambles out of the class and the eliminator.

It didn't start out that way, but since we had just finished with a Firebird Ram-Air 400, a comparison between it and the Cobra Jet Mustang was inevitable. On ultimate, brute, mind-bending acceleration, the C.J. won hands down. But do not lose the fact that it has 28 more inches and 260 pounds less weight than a very nimble Firebird. Both machines were equipped with heavy-duty suspension, yet the Pontiac's ride was far less harsh, produced measurably better handling and excellent low speed maneuverability. Even without sound deadeners and the normal new car prep, the Mustang seemed a more solid platform and says a lot for Ford quality control, although the Pontiac's finish could not be faulted.

You get into the tacky area when you start talking price. The "sticker total" for the Cobra Jet Mustang was \$3643, or almost a grand more than a base 2-plus-2 Mustang fastback. Pontiac wanted \$3807 for the Firebird but it had custom wheels, adjustable steering wheel, deluxe interior plus an AM/FM radio. Ford officials were quick to point out that our particular Cobra Jet was one of the first batch intended exclusively for drag strip work.

"What you have is our low-line

## VEHICLE

Mustang Cobra Jet

## PRICE

As tested .....\$3643.40

## ENGINE

Cylinders ..... 8  
 Bore and stroke ..... 4.13 x 3.98  
 Displacement ..... 428 cu.in.  
 Compression ratio ..... 10.6 to 1  
 Maximum horsepower ..... 335 @ 5400 rpm  
 Maximum torque ..... 440 @ 3400 rpm  
 Valves: Intake ..... 2.06 in.  
           Exhaust ..... 1.625 in.  
 Camshaft:  
   Lift ..... .481 intake, .490 exhaust  
   Duration ..... 290°  
 Carburetion ..... Single four-barrel Holley  
 Exhaust system ..... N.A.

## TRANSMISSION

Type ..... 4-speed  
 Ratios: 1st ..... 2.32  
           2nd ..... 1.69  
           3rd ..... 1.29  
           4th ..... 1.00

## DIFFERENTIAL

Type ..... Nodular 31-spline  
 Ring gear diameter ..... 9 in.  
 Ratio ..... 3.89 to 1

## BRAKES

Type ..... Disc front, drum rear  
 Dimensions: Front ..... 11.38 in.  
                   Rear ..... 10.00 in.  
 Swept area ..... 330 in.

## SUSPENSION

Front ..... Independent, drag strut  
 Rear ..... Leaf spring  
 Stabilizer ..... .84 in. diameter  
 Tires ..... F-70 x 14  
 Rims ..... 6-in. wide  
 Steering gear:  
   Type ..... Manual  
   Ratio ..... 16 to 1

## PERFORMANCE

0-30 ..... 3.0 sec.  
 0-40 ..... 3.4 sec.  
 0-50 ..... 5.0 sec.  
 0-60 ..... 5.9 sec.  
 Standing quarter-mile ..... 106.64 mph in  
   13.56 sec.

## DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase ..... 108 in.  
 Front track ..... 58.0 in.  
 Rear track ..... 58.0 in.  
 Overall height ..... 51.6 in.  
 Overall width ..... 70.9 in.  
 Overall length ..... 183.6 in.  
 Curb weight ..... N.A.  
 Test weight ..... 3240  
 Crankcase capacity ..... 5 qt.  
 Cooling system ..... N.A.  
 Fuel tank ..... 17 gal.

stripped Mustang with a Cobra Jet package. You can order the package on any Fairlane, Montego (modern French for the now passé Comet), Cougar or Mustang and get the luxury options you want." But that's just the point. If a low-level Mustang brings \$3643, how dear would one be that was equipped to the level of the Firebird?

Another thing is the service gap. The way the 428 is jammed into the engine compartment, only brave souls with asbestos skin will attempt the time-honored ritual of replacing the spark plugs. This dreary aspect is reflected in a mechanic's standard flat rate of \$30 for the job. Admittedly, the street flogger doesn't do as much work on his car as a decade ago, but easily accessible plugs are basic requirements. That's one of the things that "did in" the street hemi's popularity.

Such is Ford's great leap forward — the Cobra Jet. The mere fact these Dearborn rocket sleds are coming off the production line deserves some kind of award or other. However, it is no cause for complacency, since competitors like Pontiac and Chevy are not far behind, if at all, and will surely meet this potential threat with further escalations of their own. A last fine point for consideration is that Ford's non-super-cars such as Country Squire wagons are in need of a little sauce too. They're reliable as a stone chisel but fall prey to beetles off the mark, and even on the way to the movies this doesn't show "mama" much class.

Fortunately for Ford, their supporters from the good old days are still legion, and if they weren't, the strength of a single Cobra Jet blast-off will put thousands into orbit for the nearest auto loan department. Demonstrating its new confidence in the whole project, Ford has scheduled a trial balloon of 5000 units (or about half the demand). It's so very close to what they've needed all these years that it can't miss. Funny only a few people realized it. ■ ■