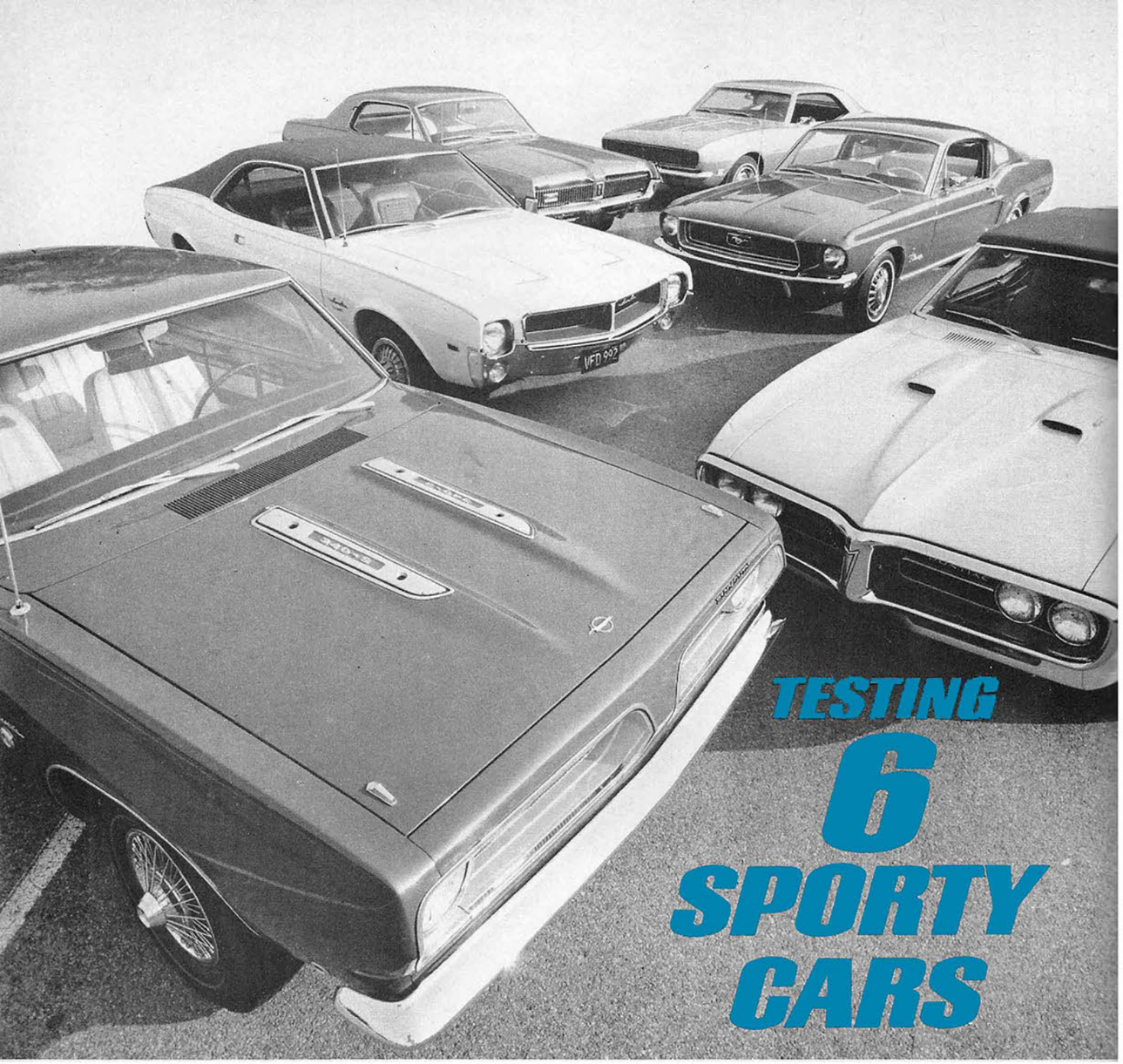



REGARDLESS OF WHEN it started — '54 or '64 — the sports/personal market has finally resolved itself, and at this moment, as impressive as its growth has been, the peak is still nowhere in sight. While the rest of the world is strung out on "unification" and "standardization," the sports/personal cars offer a greater palliate to human nature by "growing" in the other direction, much to the satisfaction of everyone's ego and identity.

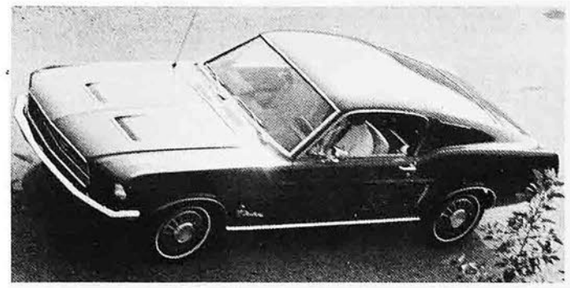
Although many came before, Mustang must be credited with establishing a well-defined configuration for the sports/personal car — a Mittymobile, a comfortable compromise for wishful thinkers — that was tailor made for followers who were safe in assuming that the more different sports/personal cars there are, the more "personal" each will become.

That we have collected six distinct representatives of this market for comparison, means that this premise is a valid one. First, all six are successful and worthy of comparison by virtue of their singular purpose and design. Second, they have all happened within four years — a veritable phenomenon. Because of the "personal" characteristic of the class, the cars all differ, though all differences are vague or subtle. Two emphasize luxury, one economy, and all six offer performance and a specific kind of comfort, each of which can be rendered in the owner's own unique manner from manifold options and accessories.

By assessing all of the cars on a comparative basis, we hoped to reveal the inherent weakness in a market apparently overcrowded with identical products. We discovered quite the contrary.



# MUSTANG



"Ponycar" means Mustang. It's the original, and the one all other contenders to the throne are out to beat. It made the whole scene happen, and like it or not, you can't drive home in a new Cougar, Camaro, Javelin, Barracuda or Firebird, without the neighborhood gang comparing it to a Mustang.

## Powertrain & Performance

The variety of options in the powertrain department is widespread. You can have an economy Mustang or a stormer. Our prime test car was a 390-cu.-in. GT V-8 fastback. This 4-bbl. carbed engine contains 335 "ponies," and gets performance jobs done without strain. The 390 GT engine is second only to the 427-cu.-in., 390-hp 4-bbl. carbureted V-8, which is a lot of engine for a small car. It can only be hooked to a 3-speed automatic, while the 390 V-8 offers a choice of standard 3-speed manual, optional 4-speed manual, or extra-cost automatic. Our 390 had the automatic, and we couldn't find fault with it. The Cruise-O-Matic shifted crisply, always at the same rpm when the accelerator was buried in the carpet, and was the greatest for in-town cruising.

We prefer the 390 GT V-8 for performance tasks, mostly because it's doubtful the average user would ever realize full potential from the 427, and probably be frustrated with the 302 4-bbl. V-8. Getting full potential from a 427 dictates serious efforts on a closed course. Any other site might endanger both driver and bystanders.

Standard in all Mustangs is a 200-cu.-in., 115-hp in-line 6-cylinder. This is an ideal powerplant for those who need good economical transportation, but hate to suffer from pure lack of power. The majority of early Mustangs were 6-banger equipped, and a large percentage still roll off the line this way. Automatic transmission is offered in addition to the standard all-synchro 3-speed.

Ford's reliable 289-cu.-in. 2-bbl. V-8 is the standard 8-cylinder Mustang engine, with a 200-hp rating. Only a 4-bbl., 302-cu.-in. V-8 is offered optionally in the small block configuration, bringing with it 230 hp. A fully synchronized 3-speed floor shifted transmission is standard for both, and either 4-speed manual or 3-speed automatic is optional. The 2-bbl. 289 is a regular fuel user, while the 302 4-bbl. V-8 has an expensive premium diet.

The performance-minded 390 GT V-8 is good for anywhere from 11 to 15 mpg, and 16 might be squeezed from it on a long trip. This isn't bad for an engine with almost constant power reserve, though far from what Dad might consider good. It's extremely mild mannered around town and doesn't act up in traffic or when the temperature climbs.

We made a long trip in the 390 Mustang, discovering that unless prompted by a heavy foot, it's hard to detect the powerhouse lurking under the flat-black painted louvered hood.

All the V-8s will accept power equipment without severe power loss, but we'd definitely advise against adding more than power steering to the 6-banger. It just doesn't pump out that many horses to provide push for the car and a gob of accessories. Low mileage and excessive maintenance will be the result.

## Handling, Steering & Stopping

The first Mustang buyers were probably impressed more by the handling traits of the car than anything else. This isn't so much the case now, as all "ponycar" makers stress handling in their design and their sales pitch. In stock form, with GT equipment, the car hangs on indefinitely, and all Mustangs have "handling." The average, sane (hopefully) driver won't find himself overstretched in a situation caused by roll-under, front end wash-out, or the rear end greeting the road before the front. Springs don't react as stiffly as on the Firebird, but nevertheless, the Mustang suspension delivers straightforward reliability in hard use. It has provided a good starting point for Shelby-American's Group II Sedan Racers, which proved themselves on road courses all over the country this past year.

Steering on the Mustang didn't impress us all that much either way. It steers like a car should. It has a fairly tight turning diameter, and there's no lag between steering wheel and front wheel movement. Power steering was in all the Mustangs we drove, but we tooled a '67 with manual gearing and found it not objectionable. It's not the super-stiff variety we've endured in other makes, but don't go by this recommendation if you're thinking of wide-pattern tires. They hang-on to the pavement too well to make manual steering an easy chore. Wide tires demand power assist for any kind of driving pleasure at all.

Stopping has never taken much effort in a Mustang, and this year's floating drum front power disc brake is even better. More braking effort results from the same amount of foot pressure, and the simplified "floating" caliper should give longer life due to fewer parts. In all our tests, the car(s) never varied from a straight line, and the brakes never gave up. We had only disc front/drum rear types for our use, and the gas tank was always full, which may have added to rear end stability and absence of spring wind-up.

No matter though because the front disc/rear drum power brakes provide a tremendous edge over normal non-power 4-wheel drum binders (power drums aren't available). Consider also that the extra weight of a 390 or 427 detracts from braking effectiveness, and for that reason, these engines can't be had in a car without front power discs.

## Comfort, Convenience & Ride

We're big on safe cars, but sometimes safety items detract from comfort. Take the new heavily padded steering wheel, for instance. It protrudes farther toward the driver than the '67 issue, causing him to "kink" his elbows in order to sit within range of the foot pedals. Then, while turning, the bent elbows are prone to strike the thickly padded armrest. We learned to avoid the armrest, but never liked having to do so.

Sit-down comfort is okay. We'd hate to go so far as to say "perfect," because a few aches can occur after a long time in the driver's saddle. Generally, we find no complaint in the well padded buckets for normal use, meaning trips of one hour or less.

Back seat comfort could be improved with more legroom and armrests, and the rear seat headroom in the fastback is cramped. But judging by sales of ponycars, Mustang in particular, the rear seat space has little to do with influencing purchases, and if it were larger, then it wouldn't be sports/personal. And there you are!

Driver position is excellent. All instruments can be easily read, and most controls are quickly reached. The ash tray lies almost flat with very shallow

sides, so periodic emptying is a necessity. Reaching the key takes some stretching, but the driver has cause to go for it only when getting in and out, so that's no major objection. Putting it down low where it is could also mean less chance of banging it with your knee either when entering or leaving.

Somehow, we never got used to the optional Tilt-Swing steering wheel. We really enjoyed being able to get the wheel out of our lap when exiting, and having a choice of nine different driving positions. Our objection, however, is that after it swings away when the door is opened, it doesn't lock in place. It just moves up and to the right and then is as sloppy as a wet mop. We would prefer it to lock, giving us something to grasp when exiting.

We found no great difficulty entering or exiting the car, with or without the tilt wheel. Door opening and clearance is adequate: seat-to-wheel clearance isn't a problem.

The Mustang ride has been improved every year since its introduction, and this is the best yet. A "hockey-stick" curved front lower control arm helps bump and shock absorption by the front wheels, greatly reducing feedback through the steering control. A carryover from last year is the use of rubber bushings at all attachment points of the suspension members to the body, which neatly voids harsh vibrations and dampens noise to a large extent.

"Plain-Jane" Mustangs without heavy-duty suspension feel good for '68, and offer about what buyers could expect from "handling packages" as far back as five years ago. Ford engineers have evidently become aware of the fact that there's more value in control than in a cushiony ride, and it can be included in all cars without arousing owner complaint.

The convenience of the large bin in the front of the optional console was repeatedly brought out to us. It seems capable of accepting an entire picnic lunch—though it won't keep it cold—and is within arm's reach of driver or passenger. The roll-top hatch and large size combine to make it one of the best console compartments we've seen.

## Plus & Minus Features

We've already "black marked" the Tilt-Swing wheel for its non-locking swing; but since it's optional, if you don't like it, don't buy it.

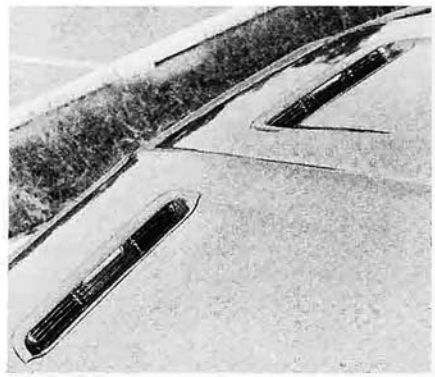
The close positioning of the manual windshield washer pump pedal and light dimmer switch make it likely that you'll wash your windows and/or brighten your lights when only one of these functions is desired. Moving the pedal or equipping all Mustangs with electric pumps would be a solution.

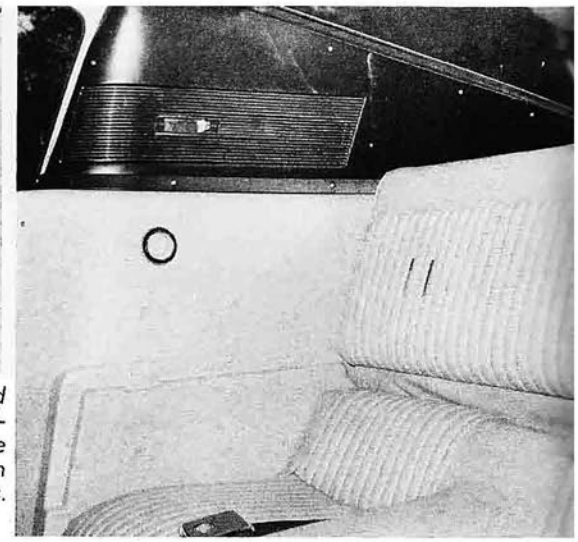
Dash layout is great, and the revamping of the heater/air conditioning controls will surely result in more owner satisfaction.

The 2+2 rear air vents don't do much to pull air in and through the car, but are about equal to what competitors have to offer, making it a sort of standoff.

Moving the directional signal indicators to the driver-facing part of the louvered hood is a groovy idea, and makes them a lot easier to spot while trying to drive. They also give a hint to drivers on each side as to what your next move may be.

No car is perfect. The Mustang has some rough edges built in, but not enough to take away any of the glamour. The other ponycar makers realize that only too well.



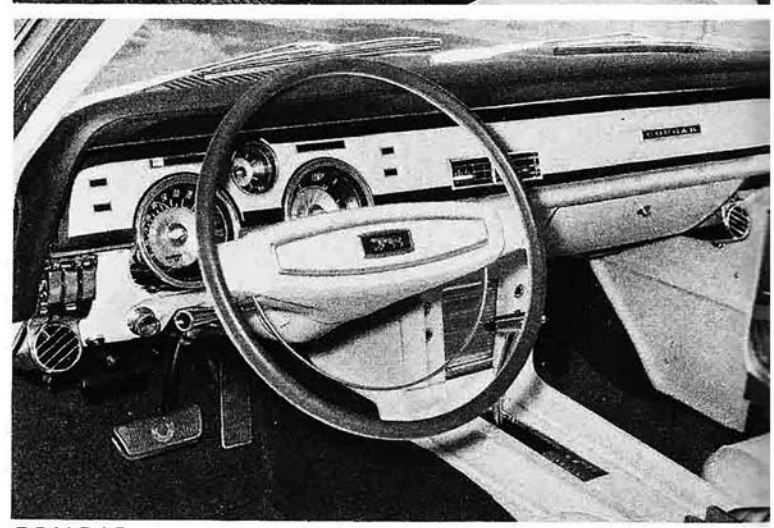


*Mustang turn indicator lamps are nestled in "functional" hood scoops. Simply operated fastback air vent pulls only moderate amount of trapped air. Versatile fold down seat is uncomfortable for extended trips.*

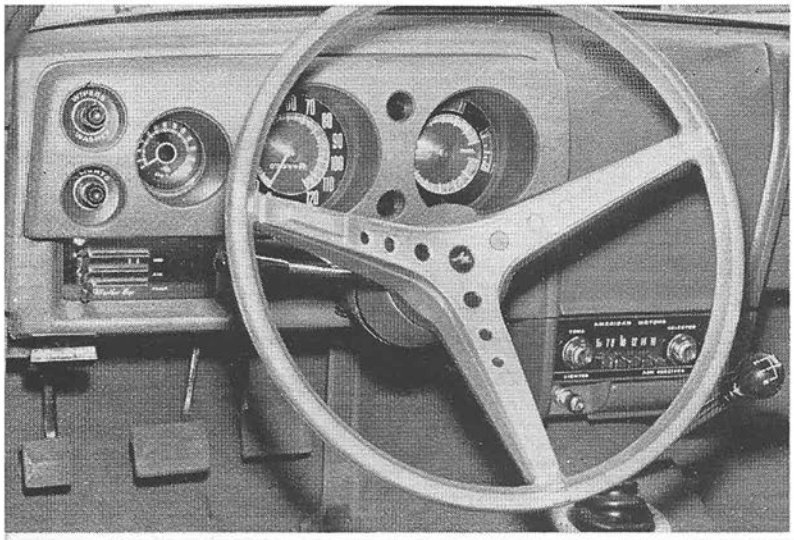
MUSTANG

*MUSTANG interior (top) is neatly laid out and well finished. Front leg room is marginal by comparison to Javelin and Barracuda. Optional tach is huge and not hard to spot. (Below) COUGAR panel is similar to Mustang though somewhat simpler in appearance. Padding extends the width, with a foam edged lip shading gauges. Parking brake handle on both Mustang and Cougar are pull-out hand grip type, archaic by comparison to foot-pedal design.*

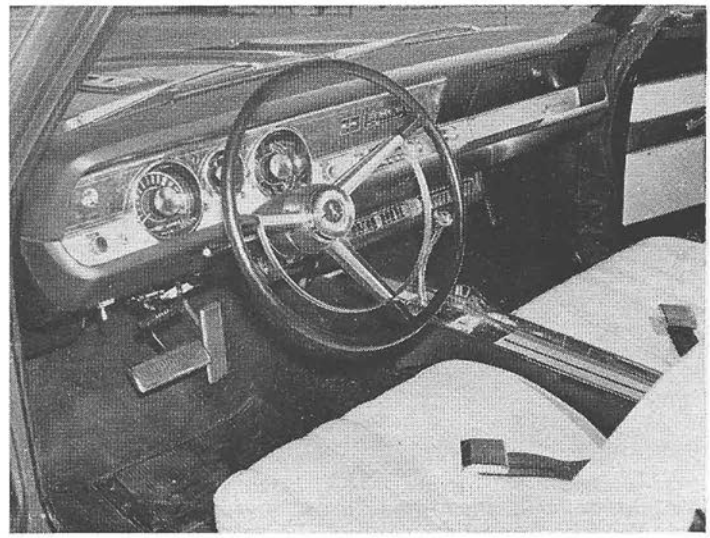
COUGAR



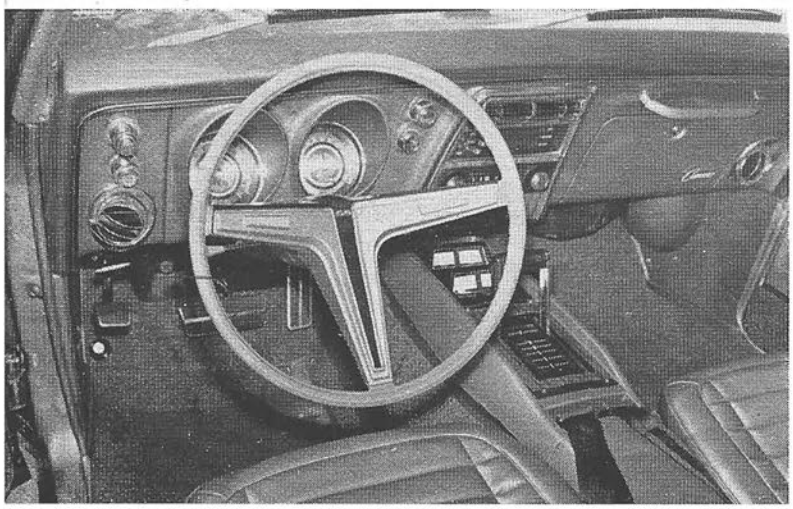
JAVELIN



BARRACUDA



CAMARO



FIREBIRD

*Molded ABS plastic JAVELIN dash is simplified for driver convenience. Foot pedals are logically placed, and there's legroom enough for a centipede. (Top right) BARRACUDA interior is spacious, with high utility value from see-thru trunk and fold-down rear seat. Generous headroom could allow higher seating, which might remedy high steering wheel position. Uncluttered dash is ribbed with foam lip. Lower rib serves dual duty as "catch all" tray. (Left) CAMARO dash is upgraded with bright work behind instrument faces. Light and wiper knobs are difficult to find in dark. Radio and temperature controls are well lit and located. Optional console gauges are poor compromise. Steering wheel is egg-shaped for easy exit. (Below left) FIREBIRD dash is identical to Camaro with exception of some trim.*

# CAMARO

It all got started back in '64 . . . by someone else. And, it wasn't until several years later, in '67, that Chevrolet finally fielded an entry in the sporty car sweepstakes. The wait was worth it. The smooth, flowing lines and classic simplicity of the Camaro reflected, from every angle, consummate years of continental styling innovations. For '68 the major changes and improvements are inside and underneath . . .

Hopefully, the designers won't get a whack at the outside for a number of years. The only body change of any consequence that is immediately evident is the addition of full door windows without ventipanes. Luckily, that bit of engineering prestidigitation actually enhanced the looks.

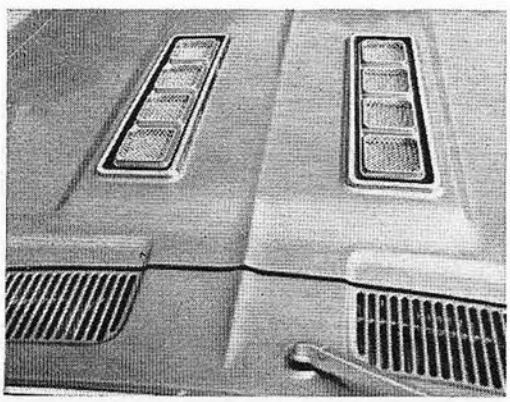
For a car that wasn't immediately accepted in the appearance department, Camaro has certainly taken off now. Perhaps, as is the case with most artistic creations, it takes a while to be understood. The only advice we have for Camaro engineers is: tune up, turn on, but never, never drop out.

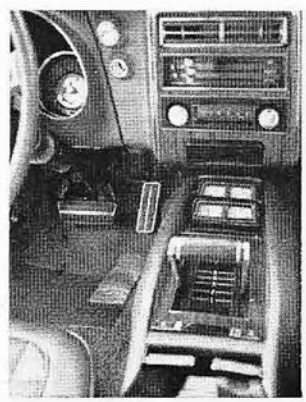
## Powertrain & Performance

If the number of engines available for the Camaro increases every year as it did this year, a buyer will require a computer to do his choosing for him. Last year there were three engine options; a 6 and two V-8s. This year the choice has increased 100%. Now there are six powerplants ready and waiting for the Camaro Connoisseur. A 230-cu.-in., 140-hp 6 and a 327-cu.-in., 210-hp V-8 are standard. Optional choices include a 250-cu.-in., 155-hp 6 and a 327-cu.-in., 275-hp V-8. Available for the Camaro SS are a 350-cu.-in., 295-hp V-8, and the top of the line, a 396-cu.-in., 325-hp V-8. Rear axle ratios are as plentiful as engine options and range all the way from a 2.56:1 economy package with Powerglide, to a 4.88:1 special used with the 4-speed and 350-cu.-in. V-8. Positraction is required with the high ratio rear ends from 4.10 to 4.88 and is available optionally for all other ratios.

Our test car was equipped with the 396-cu.-in., 325-hp V-8, tied into a Turbo Hydra-Matic and a 3.07 rear axle. The Turbo is available only with the big engine in the SS series. The 396 puts out a torque rating of 410 lbs.-ft. at a leisurely 3200 rpm, which is

*(Above) Camaro body styling remains basically unchanged from 1967. Major modification is the removal of vent windows. Headlight doors on our test car failed to operate properly, and they often stuck open or closed. (Below left) hood louvers are strictly decorative, although they would be useful for cooling if they were functional. (Below center) optional, console mounted instrument cluster is difficult to see from driver's seat and glass facings pick up reflections. Checking gauges requires unsafe diversion from road. (Below right) front disc brakes stop car fast and remain fade-resistant after repetitive use.*







quite sufficient for this 3680-pound, short wheelbase stormer. This big engine truly represents brute force in a car this size. Unfortunately, progress is something we must live with as modern technology continues to shower us with aids that make driving easier, but at the same time forces us to relinquish the fun and feeling of driving a magnificent automobile. The engine of our test Camaro, besides driving the car, also furnished the horses for: power steering, power brakes, air conditioning, and a smog device. Even with all these contingencies, the car was able to do a respectable 0 to 60 in 7.8 seconds, and turned a quarter-mile at 92 mph. The three big V-8s all have 4-bbl. carbs and the 396 has 10.25:1 compression. The 325-hp is rated at 4800 rpm. Our car had a tach, which is mighty handy to have, and indicated the shift points at 5500 rpm. There is also a profusion of transmission options to tie in with the engines and rear ends. These include a standard 3-speed, a heavy-duty 3-speed, a 4-speed, Powerglide and the Turbo. With the correct, carefully considered powertrain combination, the Camaro can be a highly enjoyable, going machine.

## Handling, Steering & Stopping

Handling this car is a joy, one of the outstanding features. Its wide-stance, low-profile chassis offers exceptional riding comfort with good handling and outstanding roadability. Around town, on washboard or chuckholed roads, the ride is a little stiff with the beefed up SS springing, but freeway cruising is a different story. The Camaro SS handles like a car twice its size and weight. Besides the spread stance chassis, the riding qualities can also be attributed to the wide tread, F70 x 14 tires fitted on 6-inch wheels. A new development for '68 that adds to the handling and riding characteristics are bias-mounted rear shock absorbers for improved suspension control. The curb side unit is mounted ahead of the axle; the driver side shock is mounted behind. The SS and models with optional 275-hp V-8 and 4-speed gearbox also feature special multiple-leaf rear springs. All others have single leaf rear springing.

Front suspension is independent with coils and concentric shocks. The road test car was equipped with Positraction and we highly recommend this option with the big engine. It is invaluable for cornering, or even when leaving a parking lot. With big power under the hood, the rear end could break loose without much provocation, but Positraction negates the fishtail urge before it starts. Put your foot into it coming out of a corner. The feeling when the rear end digs in and puts you in a straight line is pure security blanket. Power steering really saves the arms, especially with the wide treads all around, but makes for some touchy handling when cornering at speed. Many more wheel corrections are necessary than would be required if the steering were unassisted. Again, this is a sacrifice to ease and convenience. Power steering ratio is 20.6:1.

Stopping is also a Camaro good point, especially if you have the front disc brake option, which our test car had. Front discs are 11 inches and rear drums are 9.5 inches. Stopping from 60 mph took 141 feet and from 30 to 31 feet, both respectable distances, and the car didn't vary from a straight line either time. The brake pedal is adjusted to ride close to the floor for heel and toe operation. This is a good feature for rallying and racing. Front discs are remarkably fade-resistant after re-

peated high-speed stops. The power-assist operates easily without any grab.

### Comfort, Convenience & Ride

Inside comfort is good unless you suffer from claustrophobia. Spaciousness isn't a Camaro strong point, but then, one doesn't buy a sporty car if he expects a wagon interior. Bucket seats are comfortable — even after a lengthy trip — and well proportioned. The custom interior option with all vinyl seat covers is attractive and easy to clean. All accessory knobs and switches are conveniently located and speedometer and tach are easy to read. Rear seats are comfortable, but head and leg room are lacking — also to be expected with a small, sporty car. The same comment can be made about luggage space. It is practically impossible to get anything but the smallest cases into the trunk, but one can't expect a cavernous storage area either with this type car. The center-mounted console is the right height and length for easy shifting and easy access to the console glove compartment. A console-mounted seat belt receptacle is also convenient and eliminates the need to search under the seats for a missing belt each time you enter the car. The coupe offers slightly more room in the luggage compartment and inside than the convertible. As mentioned earlier, ride is exceptional, especially when wide treads are chosen. Continuous driving is seldom tiring. Air conditioning, although it draws heavily on the engine, is an asset that can't be overlooked. It cools the car quickly, which isn't as often the case with bigger cars and larger interiors and, with the windows up, the noise factor is held to a minimum, also an asset on a long trip.

### Plus & Minus Features

A lack of preplanning, the high cost of changes, or the sacrifice of perfection for expediency, are anomalies we live with today. Unfortunately, many minor inconveniences on the Camaro could have been corrected with a little more experimentation and testing. The special, console-mounted instrumentation package — that includes fuel, ammeter, temperature, and oil pressure gauges — is placed so that it is almost impossible to see from the driver's seat. To check the gauges, especially fuel, the eyes must be away from the road for a number of seconds, a dangerous requirement in any driving situation. With the use of so many power options fitted into a small engine compartment, routine service operations such as adding oil or checking spark plugs, become major mechanical achievements. An adjustable steering wheel would be a valuable accessory, not only to facilitate entry and exit, but to relieve driving monotony on long trips. Windows are also difficult to roll up. On the plus side, the increased interior padding and safety features score many points, as do the new side lights.

There is a lot of room for improvement, mechanically, but if you like 'em small and fast, Camaro comes on like a champ.

# BARRACUDA

There are no moments of emotional or physical ecstasy with the Barracuda, but at least it doesn't present phony impressions of fulfillment. It's almost too large for a true sports-personal car, yet we had the guilty sensation that it deliberately displayed this impression as a put-down for the whole sports-personal fad . . . just as though it's telling us what we all know, but are afraid to admit; namely, that sports-personals are a questionable compromise between the honesty of purism and a dehumanizing surrender to materialistic creature comforts.

### Powertrain & Performance

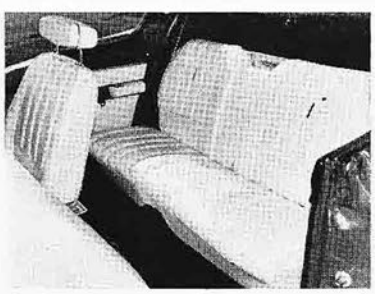
Unquestionably one of the more exciting engines tested this year was the new 340-cu.-in., 4-bbl. Formula "S" Barracuda powerplant in our car. And, one of the most frustrating experiences

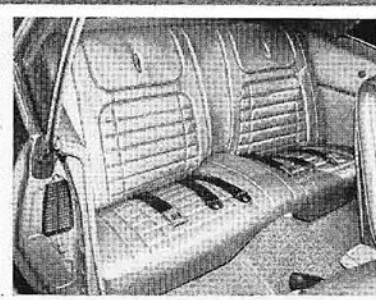
in testing this year was running this engine under the onus of its smog control constrictor, air conditioner and power steering. It has an almost antiphonal sound when working at limits, as though it has finally found its destiny — yet you can also hear its muffled cries as it strains against numerous, ridiculous accessories.

There are few praises in the latest generation of cars, and this engine is one of them. The short stroke of 3.31 inches and the high compression ratio of 10.5:1, are immediately detectable by its agile response. Potential is apparent upon examining the intake manifold, a system designed to partially compensate for smog modifications. Heads have large valves and ports, and the engine used with our TorqueFlite has four degrees more advance than the one with manual transmissions. Intake valve lift is .430 and exhaust is .445. This is also the smallest engine Chrysler Corp. offers with air valve secondaries and a low-restriction, unsilenced air cleaner.

Its best contribution to potential is its weight — only 25 pounds more than the old 273. Designed for street use, it is light and flexible, and it wants to wind well past 6000 rpm without any eerie noises. Torque peaks at 340 lbs.-ft. at a surprisingly low 3200 rpm, but hp is just the opposite — 275 at 5000, rather than a mean of 4500 or 4800 for

*Barracuda style is a carryover from '67. Side marker lights and tail lamps set off new model.*





*(Left two) Barracuda rear seat really offers comfortable proportions, but is sparsely finished. Utility value of fold-down feature is a super-advantage. (Center right) Camaro, Firebird share same mini back-seat which offers small amount of room, especially when compared to Javelin. Armrests and ash trays are included here, but not in Mustang. (Far right) Cougar back seat capacity is still in the "plus 2" realm, but genuinely comfortable. Rich upholstery and adequate padding along with armrests go well on moderate distance rides. Legroom can become an annoying factor for large bodies during extended journey.*

we achieved 92 mph in that distance. The 40 to 60 passing range was covered in 3.3 seconds after beginning with some high revs in low, and 50 to 70 is an impressive 4.1 seconds. The 340 being as willing to work as it is, and appealing primarily to the street nut, it is more reasonable for Plymouth to recommend it with a higher axle ratio and Sure-Grip differential as standard equipment in order to enable it to realize its proper worth in standard form. As it is, there is an excessive 22.8 mph for every 1000 rpm. Air conditioning, an embarrassing option for the Formula "S" set-up — and usually the one feature solely capable of devastating performance completely — only cut .7 second off the quarter-mile time and 3 mph off the terminal speed while operating, which attests either to the engine's strength or the air conditioner's weakness.

## Handling, Steering & Stopping

the rest of the industry. Nevertheless, with all this working room available, we still received our best acceleration times by shifting at 5500 rather than 6000 rpm. Weight and accessories make a big difference, and this is where torque manifests its value.

Both the TorqueFlite and low-ratio axle of 3.23:1 negated acceleration times even further, so the best we could achieve were 8.1 seconds from 0 to 60 and 11.8 from 0 to 75. Its best delivery is, naturally, in the speed ranges where it all counts — namely, passing speeds and terminals at the quarter-mile. Although the quarter was covered in a somewhat leisurely 15.2,

The only advantage the Barracuda Formula "S" version has in handling over a super-suspended sedan is less weight. Inherent limitations of an old design are obvious on either rough roads or under duress on smooth ones. Excessive unsprung weight is severe enough in a stock design, but then throw 6 leaves on the springs, along with a web of torsion bars, add wider, 5.5J wheels, all of which gathers up the usually high polar moment of inertia of domestic bodies, and all you have is a smaller big car that doesn't sway as much as the family sedan. Our test car could be considered a much more docile and controllable package than most Barracudas — primarily because of two features: the wide, E70 x 14 tires, and the relatively light weight of that fine 340-cu.-in. engine. Even at that, there was excessive body lean, and an easy drift did not occur until it was too late to be completely trusted.

As in all cases with 108-inch wheelbase cars that weigh 3500 pounds and over, tires are the most valuable suspension feature. The disadvantage of this is the tracking sacrifice that must be made with the wide treads, because of their proclivity to follow the most subtle directional deviations of cracks in the road or tracks in the street. There were definitely times when the Barracuda had a mind of its own.

Too often, power steering is an absolute necessity with domestic V-8s, but the Barracuda equipped with the lightweight 340 engine is an exception to the rule that would have been interesting to experience with the optional low-ratio manual steering that has an overall ratio of 19.15:1, compared with the 28.7:1 standard ratio. Related further to the 18.79:1 power ratio, the response differential is so small that it's not even significant, while the low manual ratio would provide the ever important "feel" that's so lamentably absent with power units. For those who do like to thrash about with ease, Barracuda's power unit is well modulated and not at all dangerously effortless. Somehow, they've managed to retain a commendable amount of control in the system.

Hopefully, we will all see the day, and very soon, when the domestic automobile will be designed as an inte-

gral unit combining good taste, good sense, personality and function, instead of unbalanced expressions of isolated passions. But, until that day comes, we will continue to produce overpowered, front-heavy lumbering megamobiles with bad brakes. Barracuda has a good headstart in sensible engine design with their latest powerplant but performance of the drum brakes almost struck us with apoplexy when we realized that we hadn't hesitated to wring out the car under less than ideal conditions with a pompous disdain for safety — trusting completely in our own mortal talents. In a panic stop from 60 mph, we finally came to rest in 159 feet — and that, folks was the end of that. Our trip back to the office was an exemplary display of consideration for the other driver.

### Comfort, Convenience & Ride

Every Barracuda we've tested has been virtually peerless in comfort and ride. Its size and suspension are difficult to excel for these combinations. Rear springs, even in the Formula "S" version, are rated at only 130 pounds per inch and with only 6 leaves, they are not quite harsh enough to affront tender sensitivities. Loaded with accessories, and topped up with fuel, the Barracuda fastback weighs 3500 pounds — more than enough substance to give the impression of a soft ride.

Certainly an advantage, and not at all "square," is the available choice of bench or bucket seats in Barracuda's hardtop and fastback models. In fact, the bucket seats were obviously designed for appearance and softness. They provided almost no lateral support on either the seatback or bottom. While they develop no fatigue in the driver and do convey some feel, the benches would have served these demands adequately. Arm and leg room is most impressive. The seat could be moved back to easily accommodate a 6-footer with his limbs fully extended.

New this year are the handsome map pockets in the doors, attesting tastefully to a luxury-sporty image. Unfortunately, incongruous slabs of simulated, contrasting wood here and there, deteriorate what would otherwise be smooth, simple elegance.

### Plus & Minus Features

The Barracuda lacks much of the sporty appeal of its competitors in the passenger compartment, in handling and in brakes. Because of these qualities, it is stuck in a marginal position for satisfying those for whom it is obviously intended. However, it excels impressively in three very important aspects: the new 340-cu.-in. engine will no doubt emerge as "The Powerplant" of the year, both in design and performance; Barracuda's styling lead is still a fact; and roominess and comfort will unsell the deficiencies mentioned above.


# JAVELIN

American Motors is very sincere in their flattery. They've copied the other makers' basic sports-personal idea, but that's where the imitation ends. Their Javelin is a world apart from the other ponycars in styling, comfort, space and features.

It also differs in the fact that never has one car meant so much to the corporate life of a company. For AM's sake, Javelin has to be a success. We feel it has to be a success because it is a good product. The car is a good representative for any company's name tag.

### Powertrain & Performance

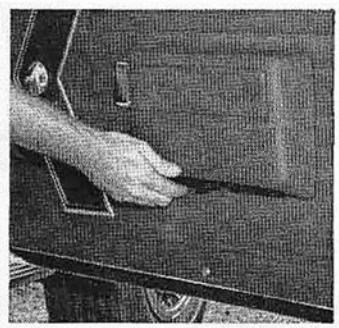
Javelin's standard 232-cu.-in. 6-cylinder engine is the second largest 6-banger in the field, giving way only to the 250-cu.-in. Firebird OHC-6. Rated at 145 hp, it is of a recent design, and delivers surprisingly good performance and at least 22 mpg on regular fuel. Power accessories can be hung on the 6 without shattering performance, and there's even a handling kit optional for 6-cylinder propelled cars. A 3-speed column shifted manual gearbox is standard, and a column controlled Shift-Command 3-speed automatic is optional. Rear axle ratios range from 3.08:1 to 3.31:1, and an "economy" 2.73:1 ratio may be ordered.

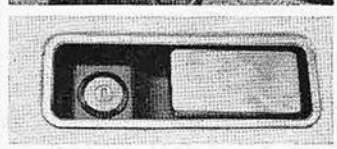
Mildest of three optional V-8s is a 290-cu.-in., 200-hp version. It performs economically on regular fuel, having a mild compression ratio of 9.0:1 and a 2-bbl. carb. Addition of power accessories won't overburden the motor, and either console or column shifted automatic transmission is optional. Standard gearbox is an all-synchro 3-speed unit, while a 4-speed floor shifted box can be extra-cost ordered.

A high-performance 4-bbl. carbed 290 V-8 is optional, and is rated at 225 hp. Premium fuel is needed, and the difference between this and the 200-hp V-8 seems significantly more

than 25 horses. Only a 4-speed transmission can be mated to the 225 V-8, at extra cost of course.

Largest engine available is AM's 343-cu.-in., 280-hp V-8. Quad carbureted and delivering 10.2:1 compression ratio, its external dimensions are identical to 290s, so takes up no more room under the long hood. Our test car came equipped with this engine and we never found it objectionable for use in any task. It performed smoothly, quietly, yet "got with the program" when pushed. Our test machine had the optional 4-speed gearbox, and this engine can be hooked to a floor or column-shifted automatic. There's no standard transmission for this V-8.



*Javelin plastic grille means less chance of rust in this vulnerable area, and is lightweight. Wraparound bumper protects sheetmetal and lights, but costs more to replace. Flow-through vent exit point is beneath large armrest. Good looking flush outside door release brightens looks, and is a snap to operate.*

Gear ratios for V-8s begin at 3.15:1 for all, and 2.87:1 (economy) or 3.54:1 (performance) may be ordered. Sets of 4.10:1 or 4.44:1 can be had over the dealer parts counter.

Also offered from the dealer's parts bin is a high-performance hydraulic camshaft and kit which ups performance and usable rpm range without adding horsepower. One further step can be taken by adding the dealer-available "cold-air" intake manifold gasket, blocking off the exhaust cooker to the carburetor, a well known hot-rod trick. Neither step reduces the car's usefulness to any degree.

Performance of our test car was just short of surprising. Our best elapsed time for the quarter-mile was 15.12 seconds, and this resulted in a speed of 93.26 mph, according to the Chrondeks at Irwindale Raceway.

## Handling, Steering & Stopping

A rude awakening waited for us in the handling test. In SST form with the 343 V-8 which includes a stout handling package, the car turned and cornered as if it were nailed to the road. Photos reveal lean and slight tire roll, but no one behind the wheel ever caught a hint of this. The fat E70x14 tires included in the package heartily contribute to lateral stability, while lending a big car feel and handling trait during straight-line tooling. If auto racing were relegated to *strictly* stock cars, we'd put our bet here.

No wheel hop was encountered during acceleration or deceleration. Credit goes to a pair of dealer-installed rear traction bars.

Steering in our test vehicle was AM's optional "Quick Ratio" manual, with a 16.0 gearbox ratio, taking only four turns of the wheel to go from lock-to-lock. It's far from the easiest we've twisted, but perfectly suited for road and rallye conditions. We'd advise against it for in-town use as its on-the-road virtues don't help parallel parking chores. The regular manual steering with 5.1 turns lock-to-lock is smooth and easy, though a bit slow. The optional power assist strikes a happy medium with a 17.1 overall ratio and 3.6 turns needed for lock-to-lock action.

Too few cars have brakes equal to the optional front disc/rear drum power units on the Javelin. We made many passes up and down mountain roads and "through the eyes" on the drag strip, never once suffering deterioration of stopping power. The car pulled to a halt a scant 150 feet from 60 mph in a nearly perfect straight line, and repeated this test several times in the same distance. The drum brakes work admirably, but are prone to fade after repeated use. We strongly recommend the front disc binders for all, especially those cars with performance equipment.

## Comfort, Convenience & Ride

You need only a moment inside a Javelin to discover the abundance of space. Nearly every interior dimension is larger than its competitors, and three in the full-width back seat is a reality. Outboard rear passengers get plenty of knee and leg room even when the front seats are pushed fully to the rear.

Seating is really comfortable. Even the basic seats are excellent – the only real difference between them and the SST is color. We logged several thousand miles in our test car, and never grew uncomfortable in the saddle. Driver position is nice and high, though this doesn't solve the problem of rear vision being somewhat blocked by the large rear quarter.

Contortions aren't needed to enter front or rear, and the out-of-the-way door release is handy to find. Flush mounted outside door handle approaches the convenience of sliced bread.

We found a reduction in wind draft inside the car from the absence of vent windows. Rear passengers voiced the same comment. The heavy pane is stiff to roll up, but a strong assist spring or better gearing would reduce the effort needed.

Dash layout has everything where the driver can see and reach it easily, though the glovebox reach is a bit of a chore. It's not bad by comparison to all other cars, and is a tilt-down drawer rather than a door with space behind.

Instruments are deeply recessed into the ABS plastic panel, and the center-mounted radio is set low, almost on the floor tunnel. Cigar lighter and ash tray are under it, and the ash tray has a holder for cigarettes *and* cigars.

Air conditioning outlets occupy the mid-section of the flat center panel, and soon-to-be-released optional gauges will fit in the same area.

The 10.2-cubic-foot trunk compartment will undoubtedly hold that amount, but getting it in is a problem. The fastback deck lid presents an access problem for sizeable objects, but hordes of small packages will stow nicely.

Our "handling package" test car rode stiffly, but without damaging our tender torsos. Control is near perfect, and passenger bounce and rebound is negative. Of course severe bumps will separate rider from full seat contact, but the same holds true for all H.-D. suspended domestic cars. We like the standard Javelin suspension for its firmness and stability, and as in the "package" car, vibration and driveline noise are non-existent inside the car.

## Plus & Minus Features

The standard flow-through ventilation really falls down on the job. The under-armrest and door-jam outlet points need reworking

An added advantage to recessing the instruments is the reduction of

glare from the glass covers. Another item we favor is the optional headlight buzzer which comes alive when the light switch is out and the key is off.

The 4-speed linkage is one of the better production units we've encountered, but we'd like to see the reverse lockout handle moved lower down the stick. It interferes with knuckles during quick shifts, and moving it would have no adverse effect on engaging reverse.

There's a look of success about the Javelin, even though it's entering the game late. The final gun hasn't sounded yet so there's still time to score touchdowns. We met only a few people who didn't dig the car, and none of these were from other automakers. Maybe next year, AM will be flattered by imitation.

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*Cougar insides are distinctive in design, with minimum amount of confusion. Detailing is good. Classic front end is enhanced by flip-up/down light doors, which tend to get stuck in either position.*

# COUGAR

Lincoln-Mercury's theory of a small sporty car appealing to luxury-minded buyers when equipped somewhat better than the majority of "ponycars" was well proved in '67. Cougar sales ran higher than expected and a large number of trade-ins were big cars. The price is higher, naturally, but only a reflection of what's included by comparison to the other cars in this marketplace.

## Powertrain & Performance

There are no 6-cylinder Cougars. The base V-8 is a 302-cu.-in. 2-bbl. engine, rated at 210 hp and easily run on regular fuel. A 3-speed manual, floor shifted gearbox is standard, and either a 3-speed automatic or 4-speed manual may be had at extra cost. Standard rear axle is 2.79:1, and a 3.00:1, comes with the optional transmissions.

A 230-hp version of the 302 V-8 is optional, using a 4-bbl. carb and needing premium fuel for its 10.0:1 compression. The additional 20 hp over the standard engine are quite noticeable and make a better accessory-laden powerplant. Transmission availability is the same as the 210-hp motor. All rear gearing is 3.00:1, with 2.79:1 optional. The added-cost limited-slip differential carries a 3.00:1 gear.

Two versions of 390-cu.-in. V-8s can be had, one in 2-bbl. form, and the other in 4-bbl. dress. The 2-throat has a 280-hp rating with 10.5:1 compression, dictating premium fuel, though less is used than on the 4-bbl. 390.

It seems large, but this isn't an outlandishly sized engine and it will perform economically and smoothly, especially at high cruising speeds. With many options on the order blank, the 2.bbl. 390 is a good choice, though tire-burning performance is minimum.

The larger 390 GT V-8 with 4-bbl. carburetion has the same 10.5:1 compression, but 325 hp vs. 280. Torque is 39 lbs.-ft. greater at 320. Dual exhausts are standard, and the GT V-8 may be ordered alone or in conjunction with the GT Performance Group option which includes wide tires and H-D suspension pieces. Our test Cougar had the big 390, impressing us with smooth performance at low speeds, yet a ready reserve of power when needed.

Only a 3-speed automatic is available with the 2-bbl. 390, and rear gears of 2.75, 3.00 or 3.25:1 are offered. Standard with the 4-bbl. 390 is a H-D floor shifted 3-speed stick, while either a 4-speed manual or 3-gear automatic are optional. Axle ratio availability is the same as the 2-bbl. 390.

Largest engine option is a 427-cu.-in. "race-bred" 4-bbl. V-8. Developing 390 hp, it's quite a bit tamer than Ford's race car 427s, but still a "runner." A hydraulic lifter camshaft is used, and the 427 can only be mated to a 3-speed automatic. Rear axle ratio is static at 3.25:1. Getting one of these in a Cougar is still a case for "Mission Impossible," but cost is slightly lower.

Because of its healthy potential, the 427 is sold only with GT or GT-E packages, giving owners heavy-duty suspension and fat tires for their performance workouts.

We drove several Cougars, all with different engines. All worked well, and we found no engine noise penetrating the sheetmetal nor harsh temperaments from "performance" combinations. Some lower gearing would benefit quarter-mile times, but none are presently available from the assembly line.

## Handling, Steering & Stopping

Since it is touted as a comfort car, finding it a good driving machine may come as a shock to first-time pilots. We were already aware of this, but each session reminds us of how well L-M engineers have incorporated stability and firmness with a smooth ride.

In any form, Cougars are taut handlers. They react quickly to driver demands, and weight transfer lean doesn't induce tire-roll-under. The tail-end is extremely accurate in following the front. Bud Moore has done much with Cougar suspension in Group II sedans, but L-M provided him with a good starting point.

Bump and dip reaction over rough roads doesn't bring out "bottoming," even on stock underpinnings. Overall feeling is one of solidness and constant control.

Steering action is positive. Front wheel reaction to steering wheel movement is instantaneous. All our test Cougars had power assist. We've driven '67s with manual steering and found them light on the arm muscles. Lock-to-lock is more, but other than being slow, there's little disadvantage to non-power steering. Wide-pattern tires and big engines though, will be a lot easier to live with if power steering is ordered.

Vibration and shock transfer from suspension components is zero. After driving various cars throughout the testing year, this virtue really reveals itself by its absence.

Cougar brakes are nearly identical to Mustang in their stopping power and design. The new "floating" caliper front discs are all that's offered with power assist, and they operate so well, we feel they should be standard. The non-power drum brakes stop basically-equipped models without excessive effort or yardage, but the addition of weight-adding options or engines definitely calls for front disc/rear drum stoppers.

### Comfort, Convenience & Ride

This heading is what Cougar's all about. Comfort is the big point. Only subtle refinements in cushioning and sound deadening set the car apart from its lower-priced competitors, but that's all it takes to make a big difference. Crank the windows up tight (sorry, still no power window option) to the weather stripping and you'll not be bothered by outside noise. Small road irritations do little to disturb the "inner sanctum," and miles of driving won't remind you of the last time you were horseback riding. Driving comfort is so groovy, owners might want to move 15 or 20 miles farther from work just for the pleasure of the ride back and forth each day. Would you believe five?

Dashboard layout and design is a variation of the Mustang, but just as accessible and legible. Air conditioning outlets are plentiful, and it doesn't take long for the ice machine to get the interior good and cooled down.

The pair of rear seat passengers (three are not too keen) have armrests and an ash tray fits in the rear of the optional console. They won't need this if they read the side of the pack.

Headroom in all four positions is fairly good, but don't try wearing a hat. Leg room leaves nothing to be desired up front, and only slightly more would put the rear seat in the intermediate-car category. A pair of 6-footers graced out test car back seat, and only minor unfolding was required at trip's end.

Ride is equivalent to that in other sporty cars, but is taken in more comfort thanks to the plushier seat padding. Road "chop" is not in evidence, and there's only minor dip and/or squat upon braking and acceleration. It's not the bed spring ride of a luxury car, which we find an advantage.

### Plus & Minus Features

It's difficult to imagine how people are expected to keep items in Cougar and Mustang glove compartments. Two road maps and a pair of glasses gave us fits, and anything more would spill out when the door-bin was dropped. The tilt-out drawer sides are about the same as on the ash tray (which suffers from the same problem) — letting contents spill out.

You don't need to be overweight to appreciate the Tilt Wheel. We don't dig the sloppy "tilted-a-way" position, but the option of nine different driving positions and easy getting in-and-out make up the disadvantage.

Our complaint on Mustang steering-wheel padding holds true for the Cougar, except that we didn't have trouble hitting our elbow against the armrest in the Cougar. The wheel is still too close to the driver for comfortable reach.

Front and rear vision are better in this car than all the others in this month's lineup. This can be credited to "no fastback," and a relatively high driver position. There's no reason why a fella should have to hit his nose on the door window sill, and it'll never happen here.

Air conditioning and heating controls have been redesigned and simplified from the '67 setup, all to the driver's benefit. A correspondence course is no longer needed to get the right temperature. Now if they'd put lights on them. . . .

Our most recent visit with Cougar was no less pleasureable than the first. Comfort and quiet abound, both mixed quite naturally with sporty flavor and performance. All add up to higher monthly payments, but for those who want the dash of a small car and aren't willing to sacrifice big-car comfort, the Cougar appears to be their "hot setup." *continued*



*Worthwhile road behavior of Cougar is exceptional, especially in view of the fact it's not lined up to compete on handling virtues alone. Near-perfect driver position is an attribute worth copying. It's always quiet inside too. Large engines add front end weight but are barely noticeable from behind the wheel. Power steering is a necessity with 390 and 427 V-8s. (Right) Chrysler suspension is always good and '68 Barracuda rates high. Torsion bar front and leaf spring rear is taut, with good load and passenger carrying ability. Power steering has too much assist, sometimes removing true feel of road and front wheels. But drivers adjust to this in short time. Manual gear steering is too slow for any "fun" driving, and too heavy with big powerplants.*

*Mustangs handle, but need GT suspensions for hard work. Light rear end can be unhandy, so full gas tank is recommended. "Fat" tires and power steering aid driver chores, both on the road and in town. Car has very little tendency to become skittish at high speed. All-around vision leaves much to be desired in fastback, but is fine in coupe. All cars in class need front discs with any but standard V-8. (Right) Javelin came on as biggest surprise of any sports-personal car. Handling ability is just short of perfect, but rear spring anti-wind-up bars and H-D suspension are needed for this. Slight tire roll evident in photo came as a result of taking this corner faster than any of the other five tested. Forward sight is great, but rear shot is hampered by roof quarter pillar.*

*Compared in any form, Firebirds are the stiffest handling machines, but this is attained at loss to overall ride. Stiff rear workings transfer some abuse to pilot's kidneys. Car brakes, turns and drives in highly predictable manner and has potential of quickest straight-line runner in class. All except Barracuda throw rocks and mud on lower fenders due to "turned under" panel. Mud guards control this but detract from looks. (Right) Road qualities of Camaro show at speed, either on freeway or twisting road. 396 V-8 puts weight up front, but isn't a hardship on handling. Power steering wants to oversteer until driver realizes how little wheel motion is needed. Wind and powertrain noise is almost nil inside, but seating position could be improved. View to side-rear is marginal.*


# FIREBIRD

In America's sporty-car land, all but Firebird have a home. Javelin, Camaro, Barracuda and Mustang are the "pocketbook" specials, while the Cougar relies on "class" to elicit more money from the buyer. Firebird has 'em all covered, offering an economical 6 and a wailin' 400-cu.-in. top V-8 option.

## Powertrain & Performance

It just wouldn't do for Pontiac to make a sporty car that didn't offer "neat" powerplants all the way through. No Siree! That's why the base engine is their ohc 6-cylinder. It fires out 175 hp at 4800 rpm, and torque of 240 lbs.-ft. at 2600 rpm. Regular fuel is all that's needed through the single barrel carb, and there's absolutely no simpler engine for accessibility. Engine compartment room is great, and getting to prime parts is usually a 5-minute chore.

A 3-speed manual, all synchro gearbox is standard, and either a 4-speed manual or 2-speed automatic is optional. Rear gears range from 2.41 to 3.55:1.

A groovy package for any enthusiast is the Sprint option. This pumps the little 6-banger up to 215 hp, and boosts torque up to 255 lbs.-ft. at 3800 rpm. Of course the 4-bbl. carb and 10.5:1 compression mean premium fuel, but even then mileage range is 15-20 mpg. Front end weight is light, and performance is excellent, shutting down many V-8s without strain. Potential is fantastic, and many equipment makers are already producing speed products.

Transmission availability is the same as with the base ohc-6, and rear axle ratios start at 2.78:1 and top off at 3.55:1. Air conditioning dictates its own ratio on all models.

Littlest V-8 option is a 350-cu.-in., 265-hp design, using regular fuel in its 9.2:1 compression chambers. The 2-bbl. V-8 won't cause premature rear tire replacement, but it performs smoothly and economically, driving gobs of accessories without distressing power.

Gearbox options are the 2-speed automatic and 4-speed floor shift manual. The all synchro 3-speed stick is standard. Rear axle gears go from 2.56:1 up to 3.23:1.

There's a high output 350-inch V-8 offered with a 4-bbl. Rochester and 320 hp. With 10.5:1 compression, it produces 380 lbs.-ft. of torque at 3200 rpm. A belt-in-the-back performer, this small sized stormer is quite a surprise. Same transmissions are offered here as with the 265-hp V-8, but axle gears are restricted to 3.36:1, 3.23:1, and 2.78:1 with refrigeration.

Tamest 400-cu.-in. V-8 option is the 330-hp (tame?) model, putting out a mere 430 lbs.-ft. torque at 3300 rpm. It uses 10.75:1 compression to effectively burn premium fuel sent through the 4-throat carb. GM's good automatic — the 3-speed Turbo Hydra-Matic is optional — as is either a close- or wide-ratio 4-speed. A 3-speed manual is standard. Gear ratios are relatively low (high numerically) starting at 3.08:1 and working up to 3.55:1. A 2.56:1 is sent with air conditioning.

The most popular performance-plant is the 400 H.O. Only five more hp are listed over the 400, but this comes at 5000 rpm, and the identical torque reading is at 3400 rpm. Outside appearance is the same, but changes show up internally: camshaft and valving. Gearbox availability and rear gear numbers are the very same as the plain 400, but performance sure isn't.

Our test car had the 400 H.O. and we heartily recommend it for all-around use. Not at all hard to manage in ordinary duty, it really comes on at the track.

Very few Ram-Air 400s pass through dealer's hands, mostly because of limited building schedules as well as high cost. The external fresh air feed via the opened hood scoops doesn't present too big a problem, but there just aren't

a lot of buyers who need — or can use — this kind of performance.

Horsepower rating of the Ram-Air option is still 335, but registered at 5300 rpm. The 430 lbs.-ft. torque is read at 3600 rpm. The Ram-Air engine will easily buzz to 6-grand, thanks to a stronger valve train. It can only be had with optional 4-speed or Turbo Hydra-Matic, and the only rear cog offered is a 3.90:1. Air conditioning can't be had.

## Handling, Steering & Stopping

Complaints creeped up in '67 about the stiff ride characteristics of Firebirds with H-D suspension. Nothing was said about handling, though, which evidently was why they rode stiff. The '68 edition has both good handling and moderately smooth ride. A Firebird — any model — with H-D components will execute a mountain road or tight corner like a young Curtis Turner on a moonlight run. If that doesn't mean much, check it out with any veteran Virginia highway trooper.

Steering action is comparable to handling — it's good. The power assist makes every kind of driving easier, and we found no oversteer or loss of feel during quick maneuvers. Many times the steering assist does too much even in ordinary traffic, but we had no such difficulty. The manual steering box isn't all that hard to crank, but it takes over one turn more to go from lock-to-lock and is quite a bit slower in gearing.

All models receive drum brakes in standard form, meaning that 6s and V-8s are equal. The drums work well with 6s, but adding the weight of the V-8 makes it necessary to add front dics to even stay with the 6s in a panic stop. The least amount of weight difference between 6 and V-8 is 100 pounds, and the most is 300. Pontiac's 9.5-inch drums work fine, but front-end weight can sure play havoc. We like the dependability of disc brakes too, being able to perform repeated stops without fade. One thing we enjoyed was the straight line stopping of all the cars, no matter which system was employed.

## Comfort, Convenience & Ride

Camaro and Firebird use the same seats — basically, but Pontiac sure does a lot more with them. Seating comfort is particularly good, and the seat travel is greater, giving tall drivers a chance to find some legroom.

Thank goodness the "T" bar automatic console shift has been retained. It could be moved farther rearward — closer to the driver — but we've no serious complaint.

Hopefully, Pontiac can talk Fisher Body into letting them get their own dash design. Currently, it is identical to Camaro's, and while not objectionable, it doesn't exhibit the "class" associated with the rest of the car. Finding a spot to put all the needed instruments is also a problem.

The only tachometer available is the hood-mounted one, and you sure can't miss seeing the gem. Just look forward.

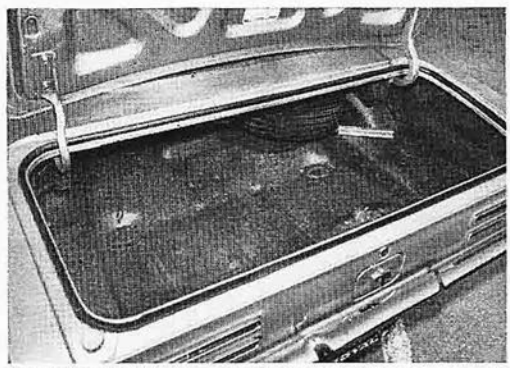
Rear seat legroom is not great, but no worse than other pony-cars.

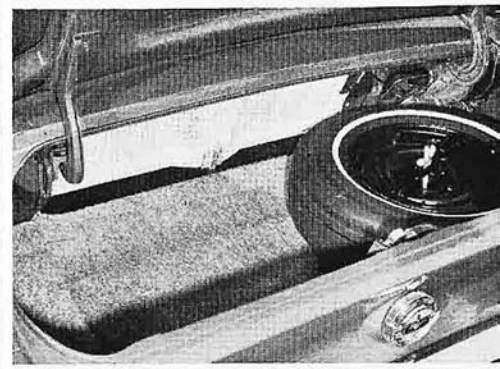
Getting in and out is simpler now thanks to vent window eradication. We've put our chin down on the top of a vent frame often enough to know how dangerous they are, especially when the adjoining car is trying for a paint sample.

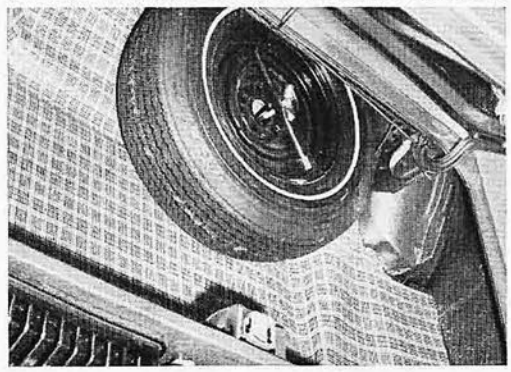
The biggest convenience item is the no-cost optional Space-Saver spare tire. Its small size really makes the trunk compartment look like it'll hold something — and it will. There's a gain of 2.8 cubic feet of space with the collapsible unit over the standard configuration.

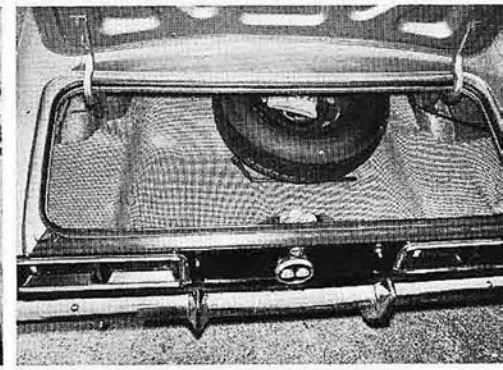
While engineers have cushioned the ride somewhat, the H-D-equipped cars still take jolts and bumps harder than normal. We accustomed ourselves to this, but can't say the ride is softer than any other car. Rear seat riders get the brunt of the action. Rear wheels have good rebound over ruts. There's very little chance of them leaving the road, even momentarily.

Ride in the standard models is excellent. It's possible that enthusiasts will find H-D suspension unnecessary because of the good stability in the standard outfitting.









*(Top left) Collapsible Firebird spare on "kick up" gives good sized square floor bin. (Top right) Fastback Mustang trunk is hard to load and small in size. Coupe is equal to others in category. (Lower left) Cougar compartment benefits greatly from collapsible tire, though full size is standard. (Lower right) Large spare interrupts small-, hard-to-load Camaro trunk. Javelin (not shown) suffers from small opening, but has good sized compartment.*

## Plus & Minus Features

A big plus — at least for us — was getting a production-assembly car for our early-in-the-season test schedule. Our normal source couldn't supply a car, and when George Neutill of Royal Pontiac in North Hollywood, Calif. (no association with Royal Pontiac in Royal Oak, Mich.) heard of our dilemma, he invited us over to pick from five he had on his lot. Wow! We couldnt' believe it, but we asked for-and got — the car we needed. We really appreciate his efforts, and sincerely thank him.

A minus feature we found was locating and deciphering windshield wiper and headlight controls at night.

The flow-through ventilation worked adequately on our test Firebird. We found the opposite on competitors', but this design provides reasonable comfort in warm weather, and also allows directing fresh air towards the driver's face.

Upon reflection, we find very few flaws which are peculiar to Firebirds. The forward vision is slightly deceiving while parking because of the long hood, but that's the price of style. Side vision is blocked by the quarter "C" pillar, and sitting low to the ground has its drawbacks.

Maybe running the gamut of price and power is the answer in this field. The Firebird does, and just now reaching its first birthday, should be able to tell a revealing story.

**See next page for specifications.**

# '68 SPORTS-PERSONAL CARS — HOW THEY COMPARE

| | Barracuda | Camaro | Cougar | Firebird | Javelin | Mustang |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Performance** | | | | | | |
| Acceleration (2 aboard) | | | | | | |
| 0-30 mph | 3.2 secs. | 3.2 secs. | 3.2 secs. | 2.8 secs. | 3.2 secs. | 3.0 secs. |
| 0-45 mph | 5.3 secs. | 5.0 secs. | 5.1 secs. | 5.0 secs. | 5.0 secs. | 5.1 secs. |
| 0-60 mph | 8.1 secs. | 7.8 secs. | 8.0 secs. | 7.6 secs. | 7.6 secs. | 7.8 secs. |
| 0-75 mph | 11.8 secs. | 10.8 secs. | 11.0 secs. | 11.1 secs. | 10.8 secs. | 10.6 secs. |
| Passing Speeds | | | | | | |
| 40-60 mph | 3.3 secs. | 3.7 secs. | 4.0 secs. | 3.8 secs. | 3.5 secs. | 3.2 secs. |
| | 241 ft. | 270 ft. | 292 ft. | 278 ft. | 256 ft. | 234 ft. |
| 50-70 mph | 4.1 secs. | 4.3 secs. | 4.5 secs. | 4.4 secs. | 3.7 secs. | 3.8 secs. |
| | 360.8 ft. | 378 ft. | 396 ft. | 387 ft. | 325 ft. | 334 ft. |
| Standing Start 1/4-Mile | 15.2 secs. | 15.6 secs. | 15.4 secs. | 15.4 secs. | 15.1 secs. | 15.2 secs. |
| | 92 mph | 92 mph | 91 mph | 93 mph | 93 mph | 94 mph |
| Speeds in Gears | | | | | | |
| 1st..... MPH @ RPM | 49 @ 5500 | 55 @ 5500 | 48 @ 5000 | 55 @ 5500 | 39 @ 5000 | 48 @ 5000 |
| 2nd.... | 84 @ 5500 | 91 @ 5500 | 84 @ 5000 | 91 @ 5500 | 49 @ 5000 | 84 @ 5000 |
| 3rd.... | 125 @ 5500 | 135 @ 5500 | 125 @ 5000 | 137 @ 5500 | 71 @ 5000 | 125 @ 5000 |
| 4th.... | | | | | 105 @ 5000 | |
| MPH Per 1000 RPM | 22.8 mph | 24.7 mph | 25.0 mph | 25.0 mph | 21 mph | 25.0 mph |
| Stopping Distances | | | | | | |
| From 30 MPH | 39 ft. | 31 ft. | 40 ft. | 38 ft. | 36 ft. | 40 ft. |
| From 60 MPH | 159 ft. | 141 ft. | 160 ft. | 151 ft. | 150 ft. | 145 ft. |
| Mileage Range | 10.9-14.1 | 8.9-13.1 | 10.7-15.5 | 11.0-14.9 | 11.5-15.8 | 12.0-15.9 |
| **Specifications** | | | | | | |
| Bore & Stroke | 4.04 x 3.31 ins. | 4.094 x 3.76 ins. | 4.05 x 3.78 ins. | 4.12 x 3.75 ins. | 4.08 x 3.28 | 4.05 x 3.78 |
| Displacement — Cu. In. | 340 | 396 | 390 | 400 | 343 | 390 |
| HP @ RPM | 275 @ 5000 | 325 @ 4800 | 335 @ 4800 | 335 @ 5000 | 280 @ 4800 | 335 @ 4800 |
| Torque: lbs-ft. @ RPM | 340 @ 3200 | 410 @ 3200 | 427 @ 3200 | 430 @ 3400 | 365 @ 3000 | 427 @ 3200 |
| Compression Ratio | 10.5:1 | 10.25:1 | 10.5:1 | 10.75:1 | 10.2:1 | 10.5:1 |
| Carburetion | 1 4-bbl Carter | 1 4-bbl Rochester | 1 4-bbl Holley | 1 4-bbl Rochester | 1 4-bbl Carter | 1 4-bbl Holley |
| Transmission Type — Std. | 4-spd manual | H.D. 3-speed | 3-spd manual | 3-spd manual | none | 3-spd manual |
| Final Drive Ratio — Std. | 3.23:1 | 3.07 | 3.25:1 | 3.36:1 | 2.87:1 w/auto<br>3.15:1 w/ 4-spd | 3.25:1 |
| Steering Type — Std. | manual | manual | manual | manual | manual | manual |
| Steering Gear Ratio | 24.0:1 | 24.0:1 | 19.88:1 | 28:1 | 20.0:1 | 19.88:1 |
| Turning Dia. — Curb to Curb | 38.0 ft. | 37.0 ft. | 38.87 ft. | 38.5 ft. | 36.9 ft. | 37.16 ft. |
| Wheel Turns — Lock-to-Lock | 5.3 | 4.0 | 4.64 | 4.7 | 5.1 | 4.64 |
| Tire Size — Std. | E70 x 14 | F70 x 14 | F70 x 14 | F70 x 14 | 7.35 x 14 | F70 x 14 |
| Brake Type — Std. | drum | drum | drum | drum | drum | drum |
| Brakes — Optional | front disc & power | power drum, metallic & front disc | power front disc/rear drum | power drum; power front disc/rear drum | power drum; power front disc/rear drum | power front disc/rear drum |
| Fuel Capacity — Gals. | 18 | 18 | 17 | 18.5 | 19 | 16 |
| Curb Weight — Lbs. | 3500 | 3680 | 3882 | 3740 | 3461 | 3623 |
| Body/Frame Construction | Unit | Combination body/frame | Unitized | Integral body | Single unit | Unitized |
| Wheelbase — Ins. | 108 | 108 | 111.1 | 108.1 | 109.0 | 108.0 |
| Front Track — Ins. | 57.4 | 59.0 | 58.5 | 60 | 58.36 | 58.5 |
| Rear Track — Ins. | 55.6 | 58.9 | 58.5 | 60 | 57.0 | 58.5 |
| Overall Length — Ins. | 192.8 | 184.7 | 190.3 | 188.8 | 189.22 | 183.6 |
| Width — Ins. | 71.6 | 72.6 | 71.3 | 72.8 | 71.89 | 70.9 |
| Height — Ins. | 52.8 | 51.5* | 51.7 | 50.0* | 51.81 | 51.6* |

*2-door coupe

| **Options & Prices** | Barracuda | Camaro | Cougar | Firebird | Javelin | Mustang |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mfg's Suggested Retail Price | 2736.00 (225 — 6 cyl.)<br>2842.00 (318 — V-8) | 2565.00 (230 — 6 cyl.)<br>2670.00 (327 — V-8) | 2910.42 base<br>3208.91 (XR-7)<br>4221.42 (GT-E) | 2758.00 (250 — 6 cyl.) | 2287.00 (232 — 6 cyl.)<br>2385.00 (290 — V-8)<br>2385.00 (6-cyl. SST)<br>2484.00 (V-8 SST) | 2578.60 (200 — 6 cyl.) |
| Engine Options | 186.30 — Formula S340<br>221.65 — Formula S383 | 92.70 (275 hp, 327 V-8)<br>210.65 (295 hp, 350 V-8)*<br>263.30 (325 hp, 396 V-8)* | 79.00 (230 hp, 302 V-8)<br>77.80 (280 hp, 390 V-8)<br>158.00 (335 hp, 390 V-8) | 105.60 (265 hp, 350 V-8)<br>180.58 (320 hp, 350 V-8)<br>273.83 (330 hp, 400 V-8)<br>350.72 (335 hp, 400 V-8)<br>616.12 (Ram-Air 400) | 45.35 (225 hp, 290 V-8)<br>90.70 (280 hp, 343-V-8) | 105.63 (195 hp, 289 V-8)<br>66.14 (230 hp, 302 V-8)*<br>158.08 (335 hp, 390 V-8)*<br>622.97 (390 hp, 427 V-8)* |
| Automatic Transmission | 216.20 | 194.85 Powerglide<br>237.00 Turbo Hydro | 226.10 | 194.84 2-speed<br>236.97 Turbo Hydro | 269.35 | 233.17 |
| 4-speed Transmission | 179.15 | 184.35 | 184.02 | 184.31 | 184.25 | 233.18** |
| H.D. 3-speed Transmission | not offered | 79.00 | 79.00 | 84.26 | not offered | 79.20 |
| Limited-Slip Differential | 42.35 | 42.15 | 41.60 | 42.13 | 42.10 | 41.60 |
| High-Performance Tires | 69.60 | 64.75* | 36.35 E70 x 14<br>73.40 F70 x 14 | 46.34 | 62.75 | 64.43 W/390 GT<br>78.53 other V-8 models |
| Special Instrumentation | 6.10 (trip odometer & 150 mph speedo) | 94.80 | 39.50 (check panel) | 31.60 | not offered | 15.59 (clock) |
| Tachometer | 48.70 | incl. w/above | avail. only with XR-7 | 63.19 hood mounted | 48.05 | 54.45 (incl. odometer) |
| AM Radio | 61.55 | 61.10 | 61.40 | 61.09 | 61.20 | 61.40 |
| AM/FM Radio | not offered | 133.80 | 184.95 (stereo) | 133.76 | 133.80 | 181.36 (stereo) |
| Custom Wheels | not offered | 31.10 (only w/disc brakes) | 117.65 | 84.26 | 80.00 approx. | 160.27 incl. E70 x 14 tire<br>174.38 incl. F70 x 14 tire |
| Power Brakes | 41.75 | 42.15 | not offered | 42.13 | 42.15 | not offered |
| Power Front Disc Brakes | 114.70 | 100.10 | 64.85 | 105.23 | 97.15 | 64.77 |
| Center Console | 53.35 | 50.60 | 57.00 | 50.55 | incl. w/floor automatic | 53.71 |
| Power Steering | 80.35 | 84.30 | 95.00 | 94.79 | 84.40 | 84.47 |
| Special Steering Ratio | not offered | 15.80 | not offered | not offered | 15.90 | not offered |
| Adjustable Steering Wheel | not offered | 42.15 | 66.05 | 42.13 | 42.15 | 66.14 |
| Power Windows | not offered | 100.10 | not offered | 100.05 | not offered | not offered |
| Air Conditioning | 334.60 | 360.20 | 360.40 | 360.20 | 360.25 | 360.30 |
| | | *incl. w/SS package | | | | *above base V-8 cost<br>**incl. tach & trip odometer with V-8 |
| **Comments** | | | | | | |
| We Like | High utility value in sports minded car.... Excellent performance from medium sized V-8, without great thirst for gas. Optional air-conditioning could serve well as a deep-freeze. | Good handling, coupled with good braking. Absence of vent windows ... fairly good quality detailing ... wide range of powerplants ... good selection of comfort options. | Luxury motif blended with sporty car virtues ... good firm steering and ride ... excellent styling ... high quality finishing ... good view from driver's seat, and high seat location ... optional console has huge storage capacity. | Styling ... good creature comfort in front seat ... performance oriented engines throughout line ... firm ride which offers same handling abilities as '67, but with smoother ride ... collapsible spare ... well outfitted interior compares favorably with Cougar. | Low base prices ... styling ... overall design that isn't a compromise ... ventless side glass ... great driving comfort ... generous rear seat room ... really startling performance from smallest engine of all cars tested in category. | Body styles and their availability ... usefulness of fastback ... option range ... hood mounted "blinkers" ... handling and stopping capability ... more than average trunk space due to accessibility ... neat dash design. |
| We Don't Like: | High steering wheel ... hidden seatback latches ... inside door releases that can pinch hands ... cluttered door panel upholstery ... lack of sporty appeal to interior. | Limited room around driver: foot, hip and head room ... extremely poor engine compartment access ... bad view of optional gauges ... "horseshoe" console shifter. | Glove compartment ... unlighted temperature controls ... headlight doors that won't open — or shut, on occasion. padded steering wheel that protrudes too far toward driver. | Too close similarity to Camaro in car that sells for more ... absence of 3-speed Turbo Hydro throughout line ... small rear seat room. | Poor flow-through ventilation ... poor trunk access and spare tire position ... hard cranking side windows ... near-blind rear quarter. | Unhandy placement of assist strap on door which also interferes with arm movement ... padded steering wheel ... unbaffled gas tank. |