SCOTT MALCOLM PHOTOS

CAR LIFE
ROAD TEST

The Catcar Revisited
Displays Musclecar Power

Cougar GT

"FOR THE MAN on his way to a Thunderbird," is the oft repeated, glowing generality used by Lincoln-Mercury people prideful of their Cougar. L-M engineering and styling folk were given the task of redistributing Mustang sheetmetal to "create" a mid-range, mid-priced, mid-powered personal automobile. Mustang steel was stretched here, compressed there, raised, lowered and otherwise treated in tenths of inches. What emerged was an exquisite refinement of the Ponycar theme—a Catcar called Cougar.

CAR LIFE's announcement of the car (*CL*, Oct. '66) and a subsequent road test/product report on a 289-cu. in./200-bhp model (*CL*, Feb. 67) carried nought but praise for Cougar. The October writer called attention to Cougar's "gracefulness and shapeliness" and noted the automobile's "certain refinements of ride and handling." The February scribe dwelt heavily on the "finesse" with which Cougars are put together. October described Cougar as "Mustang . . . couched in more luxurious surroundings." February added the view that Cougar ". . . is a completely finished product, simply done with very subtle discernment."

Ol' October and February will be forced to eat some of those words if Lincoln-Mercury does not exercise refinement in manufacture, finesse in detailing, discernment in quality control.

Are Cougars selling and being built at such a rate as to warrant slap-dash treatment along the assembly line? That hardly seems likely with sportingly equipped Cougars priced at approximately $4000 the copy; not with Cougars gleaning only 1.68% of the total U.S. automobile market; and not with fewer than 40,000 units built.

The 390-cu. in./320-bhp Cougar GT delivered to *CAR LIFE* for road test clearly was not as well finished as those treated in earlier road test and driving impression reports. Why? Perhaps the earlier cars were "road show" units, put together with special care to make the best impression on auto exposition goers and members of the press. Whatever the reason, our test car appeared tatty by comparison to the cars previously encountered.

Item: The right front tire nipped the wheel cutout molding on hard right turns, bending said molding.

Item: The automatic transmission shift lever boot rumpled up as the lever was brought forward, sometimes blocking "Park" engagement, and thus preventing use of the ignition key switch to start the car.

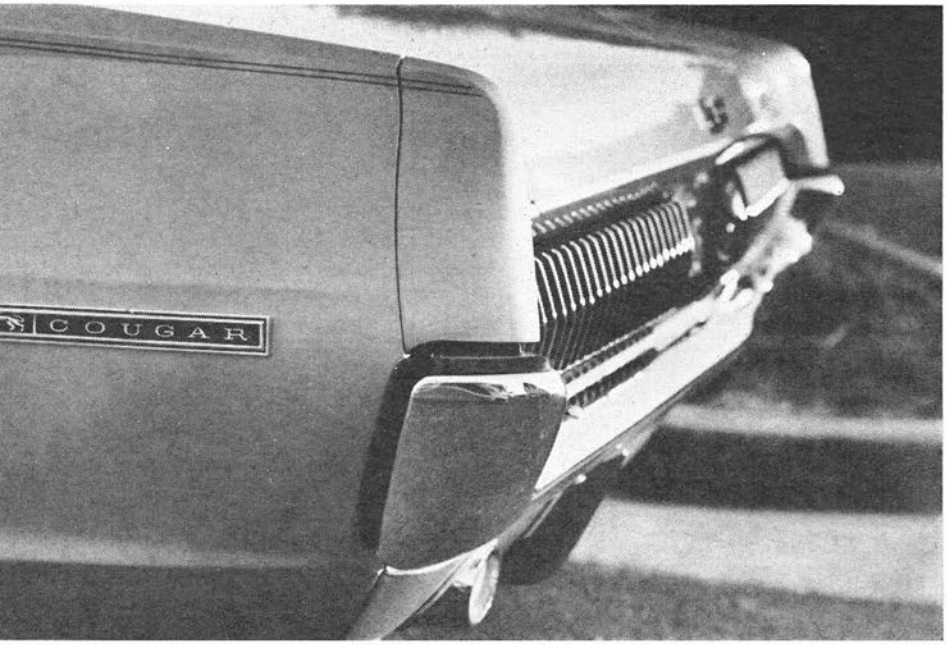
Item: The sequential turn signal system was intermittent, sometimes flashing, sometimes not.

Item: The cardboard cover over the left taillight circuitry in the cargo compartment had fallen off.

Item: Numerous wires, exposed, were dangling in driver and passenger foot wells.

Item: The dash panel rim molding showed unsightly misalignment in two planes and paint misapplied over one long section directly in front of the passenger seat.

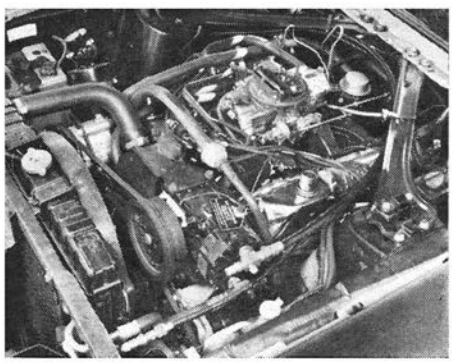
Item: An excessive wind tunnel ▶



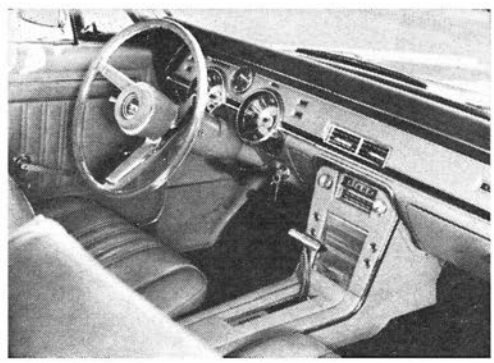
Cougar GT

The GT's engine was coupled to the 3-speed Merc-O-Matic transmission with torque converter and planetary gears. Transmission ratios were, first to top, 2.46:1, 1.46:1 and 1.00:1, for final drive ratios, with 3.25:1 ratio in the limited slip differential, of 7.99:1, 4.74:1 and 3.25:1.

The Cougar GT's engine drive train assembly had the capability to peg *CL*'s Tapley meter in first gear, indicating strong proclivities for climbing and acceleration. In the latter category, the 390 was able to accelerate 0-60 mph in just under 8 sec. and turn the quarter-mile in 15.9 sec., a creditable performance for a car loaded with accessory equipment, including air conditioning, and two crewmen, test equipment and a full fuel tank for a gross weight of 3920 lb. The Cougar GT achieved 0-110 mph, nearly absolute top speed, in 27.4 sec.



MUSCLE of 390-cu. in./320-bhp engine produces 15.9-sec. e.t.s.



SOFT HARMONY is reflected in vinyl upholstery and nylon carpeting. The articulated drag strut (below) aids in cushioning the Cougar GT ride.

roar, which prevented conversation or radio listening, was generated with air conditioning set at "Max-Cool-Hi."

Item: Upper shoulder harness mounting points allowed straps to press sharply into necks of driver and passenger.

Item: The glovebox door displayed an 0.25-in. gap at the top, an 0.357-in. gap at the left side.

Item: The accelerator stuck off idle on occasion.

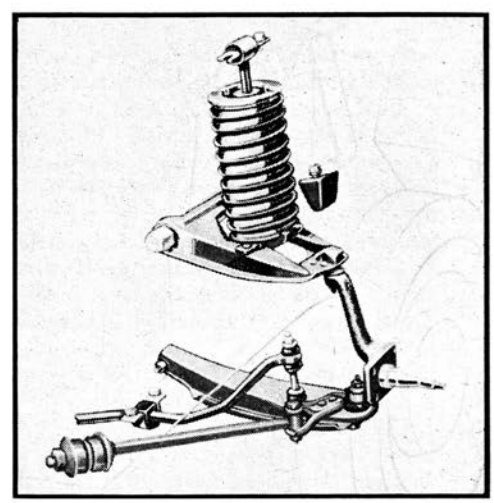
Surely most of these are conditions that could be corrected with ease—but a GT owner would be forced to make repeated trips to his dealer for such correction, a situation not to the liking of anyone who has just paid $4000 or more for an automobile.

Lest Cougar fanciers arise *en masse* to smite down impertinent detractors of their car, *CL* hastens to list those aspects of the car that were earlier discovered and remain outstanding.

Item: Body styling.
Item: Upholstery.
Item: Engine.
Item: Automatic transmission.
Item: Tilt-away wheel.
Item: Driver comfort.
Item: Brakes.
Item: Handling.
Item: Ride.
Item: Performance.

The latter ten items comprise the entire car and what it does. Thus it seems the first mentioned ten items become relatively unimportant. And so they do, but to a finicky owner, the minor irritants will likely bother him more than the good points will please him. And finicky owners are by far the most vocal of all owners.

The car's 390-cu. in. engine is from the family of workhorses that power full-sized Fords, Mustangs, Thunderbirds, Fairlanes and some trucks. The 390 is mass produced for duty in a wide variety of bhp ratings for a broad range of vehicles. It does its best work carrying loads—large cars and full complements of power-draining accessory equipment. For Cougars, the 390 is rated at 320 bhp at 4800 rpm, with torque delivery maximum of 427 lb.-ft. occurring at 3200 rpm, with Holley 4-barrel carburetion and 10.5:1 compression ratio.



Kelsey-Hayes 11.38-in. vented rotor disc brakes at the front and duo-servo shoes in 10-in. cast iron drums at the rear, the standard system with Cougar GT packages, in conjunction with Firestone Super Sports Wide Oval F70-14 tires, provided much better than average stopping capability with respect to the car's top speed.

On the first panic stop run from 80 mph, the Cougar's disc/drum system produced a phenomenal maximum deceleration rate of 31 ft./sec./sec. On the second stop from 80 mph, however, heat took a 30% toll of total braking efficiency. The deceleration maximum was reduced to 21 ft./sec./sec., a greater loss in deceleration rate than *CL* testers have come to expect from better disc brake systems, yet surpassing rates achieved by many U.S. cars on the first stop from 80 mph—drums, shoes and fluid at normal operating temperatures. The third stop, a *minute* later, produced only 15 ft./sec./sec., indicating a major degree of brake fade, and a 51% loss of total braking efficiency. *CL* observers have come to expect a great measure of stopping consistency over two, three and four successive panic stops. Loss of only a few percentage points of efficiency is more the rule than the exception. At no time during the Cougar's brake trials did wheels lock or did the car become uncontrollable as it was hauled rudely to a stop. The Cougar GT owner can be gratified in the thought that he may require a 31-ft./sec./sec. stop but once in a lifetime and when that need arises he has a set of brakes and tires capable of this accomplishment. Incredible stopping power, once rare among U.S. cars, now is commonplace with cars fitted with the more sophisticated disc/drum systems.

Under consideration of tires should be included equipment for changing tires. This aspect of a car's total performance usually is neglected unless the hapless road tester is forced, by lack of air within a tire, to make a perspiring evaluation. The Cougar is supplied with a top quality scissors-type jack, designed to be operated at four lift points, just behind the front fender, just ahead of the rear fender on either side of the car, *à la* Mercedes-Benz. The demise of the bumper jack can only be applauded. The Cougar's jack handle is another matter. It is a hexagonal socket attached to a U-section steel shaft, which has a slot-head screwdriver blade at the opposite end. The screwdriver blade digs painfully into the palm of the tire-changer's hand on every revolution of the socket handle as the car is raised and lowered. What one *CL* tester learned from a roofing nail is that in a very small, very apparent way, human engineering considerations were apparently overlooked.

COUGAR GT means suspension to match muscle of the 390 engine and ample retardation of disc brakes. The Cougar's ball-jointed short and long arms at the front, and live axle, longitudinal semi-elliptic leaf spring Hotchkiss drive at the rear are conventional Ford. All Cougars carry articulated, rubber bushed drag struts that connect the lower body crossmember to the lower A-arms. The struts and their rubber eye bushings provide compliance, or slight fore and aft movement of the front wheels, in the effort to minimize road shock. Special for the Cougar GT suspension system are 1.187-in. Gabriel heavy-duty shock absorbers all around; an 0.84-in. diameter antiroll bar, rather than the standard 0.72-in. bar; front coil springs with a stiff spring rate of 320 lb./in. and equally stiff rear leaf springs with a spring rate of 120 lb./in., compared with standard front and rear rates, respectively, of 245 and 85 lb./in. for 289-cu. in. engined Cougars; and solid, rather than voided (for softness), rear spring bushings.

The suspension combination produces a definitely firm ride, the sort of firmness that tells the knowledgeable driver where all four wheels are positioned at any given time. Ride firmness in no way affected good damping characteristics which obviated more than minor roadway irregularities. Roll stability in corner was excellent; body lean was held to a comfortable minimum during brisk activity through tight bends. Some suspension systems turn enthusiasts away from curving 2-laners; the Cougar GT's suspension system challenges the automotively inclined to seek the quick and the crooked road. ▶

The price of handling capability is high, but not so high as non-functional trim and convenience items. The so-called "Performance Group," which includes the 390 engine and suspension, was listed at $323 above the base Cougar price of $2851. The Merc-O-Matic transmission was listed at $215 extra. The F70-14s were standard on the test GT Cougar, hence included in the base price. That's a good deal for $538 above list. Courtesy lights, clock, "Safety Check Panel" warning lamps, console, tilt steering wheel, air conditioning, AM radio/stereo tape unit, tinted glass, power steering, shoulder harness and deluxe seatbelts, styled steel wheels, bumper guards, vinyl topping, door edge guards, exhaust emission controls, and power steering added $1163 to the base price. With federal taxes and shipping charges paid, the Cougar GT would go out the door at a price in excess of $4500.

Is the Cougar worth that sort of money? The performance package money seems well spent; the automatic transmission is a delight; and power steering is a necessity with the heavy 390-cu. in. engine up front. Some of the trim items and added gimmickery could be dismissed without harming either the Cougar's appearance or performance. *CL*'s earlier test Cougar, with 289 engine and 4-speed manual transmission, listed at $4100. In all probability, a very well equipped Cougar—without air conditioning or vinyl top—could be obtained for less than $3800 by a wise buyer. Next to the leather-and-wood trimmed, limited production Cougar XR-7, the Cougar GT is the top-of-the-line car and its price reflects this position.

THE COUGAR GT 390 is the least economical of the line with respect to fuel consumption. The test car delivered 11.2 mpg over the entire test period; this can be compared with 11.7 mpg recorded for a similarly equipped, 390-engined Mustang (*CL*, Jan. '67). The 0.5-mpg differential can be attributed to the 110-lb. weight difference between the lighter Mustang and

1967 MERCURY
COUGAR GT 2-DOOR HARDTOP

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.	111.0
Track, f/r, in.	58.1/58.1
Overall length, in.	190.3
width	71.2
height	51.8
Front seat hip room, in.	23.1x2
shoulder room	53.8
head room	37.5
pedal-seatback, max.	43.9
Rear seat hip room, in.	53.1
shoulder room	53.2
leg room	30.7
head room	35.9
Door opening width, in.	42.9
Ground clearance, in.	5.75
Trunk liftover height, in.	n.a.

PRICES

List, FOB factory	$2851
Equipped as tested	4568

Options included: GT Performance Group, air cond., auto. transmission, emission control, power steering, stereo tape/AM radio comb., visual safety check panel, sports console, styled steel wheels, swing-away tilt steering column, tinted glass.

CAPACITIES

No. of passengers	4
Luggage space, cu. ft.	9.1
Fuel tank, gal.	17.0
Crankcase, qt.	5.0
Transmission/dif., pt.	26/5
Radiator coolant, qt.	20.5

CHASSIS/SUSPENSION

Frame type: Unitized.

Front suspension type: Independent, s.l.a., coil springs, drag struts, telescopic shock aborbers.

ride rate at wheel, lb./in.	n.a.
antiroll bar dia., in.	0.84

Rear suspension type: Hotchkiss type; semi-elliptic multiple leaf springs, telescopic shock absorbers.

ride rate at wheel, lb./in.	n.a.

Steering system: Linkage assist, recirculating ball-nut gear, parallelogram linkage behind front wheels.

overall ratio	20.3:1
turns, lock to lock	3.73
turning circle, ft. curb-curb	39.2
Curb weight, lb.	3530
Test weight	3920
distribution (driver), % f/r	59.7/40.3

BRAKES

Type: Two-line hydraulic, disc front, cast iron drum rear.

Front rotor, dia. x width, in.	11.38 x 1.84
Rear drum, dia. x width	10.0 x 1.75
total swept area, sq. in.	330.0
Power assist	integral
line psi at 100 lb. pedal	1050

WHEELS/TIRES

Wheel rim size	14 x 5.5J
optional size	14 x 6J
bolt no./circle dia. in.	5/4.5

Tires: Firestone Wide Oval.

size	F70-14
normal inflation, psi f/r	28/28
Capacity @ psi	n.a.

ENGINE

Type, no. of cyl.	ohv 90° V-8
Bore x stroke, in.	4.05 x 3.78
Displacement, cu. in.	389.617
Compression ratio	10.5:1
Fuel required	premium
Rated bhp @ rpm	320 @ 4800
equivalent mph	115
Rated torque @ rpm	427 @ 3200
equivalent mph	77
Carburetion: Holley 1x4	
throttle dia., pri./sec.	1.56/1.56
Valve train: Hydraulic lifters, pushrods and overhead rocker arms.	
cam timing	
deg., int./exh.	20/70-66/24
duration, int./exh.	270/270

Exhaust system: Dual exhaust pipes, single transverse muffler, two resonators.

pipe dia., exh./tail	2.0/2.0
Normal oil press. @ rpm	50-60 @ 2000
Electrical supply, V./amp.	12/42
Battery, plates/amp. hr.	54/45

DRIVE TRAIN

Clutch type:	
dia., in.	

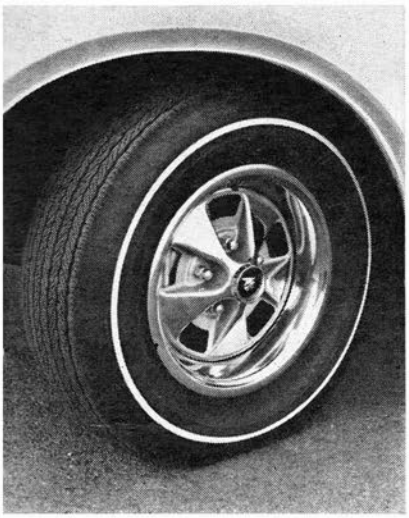
Transmission type: Three-speed planetary with torque converter.

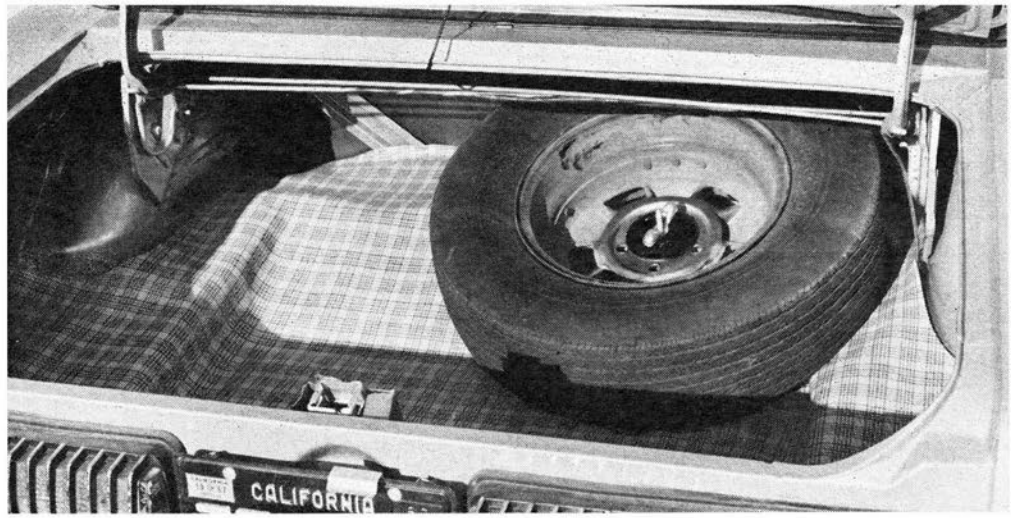
Gear ratio 4th ( ) overall	
3rd (1.00:1)	3.25:1
2nd (1.46:1)	4.75:1
1st (2.46:1)	7.99:1
1st x t.c. stall (2.10:1)	16.75:1

Shift lever location: Console.

Differential type: Hypoid, straddle-mounted pinions.

axle ratio	3.25:1





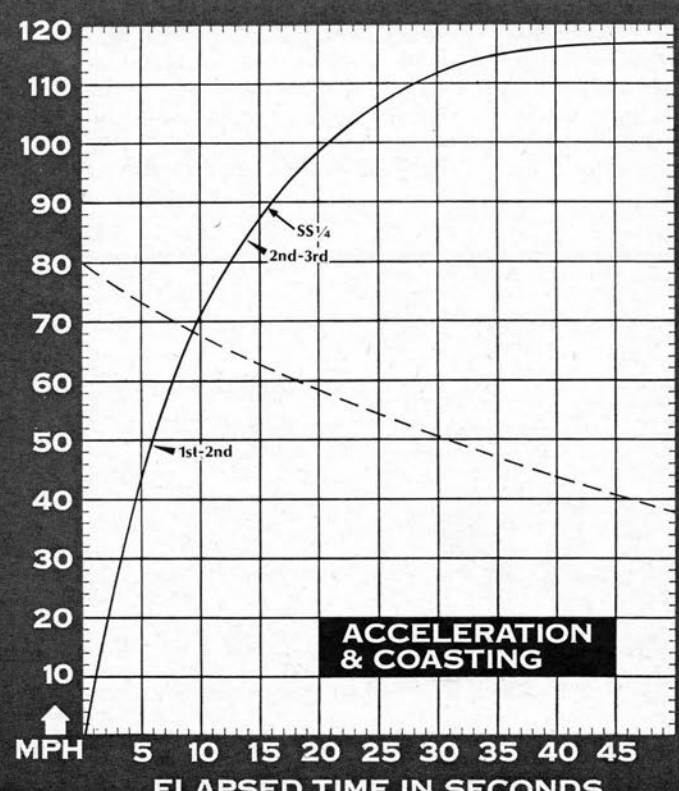
the Cougar GT.

The 289-equipped Cougar, then, is desirable from the point of view of fuel economy, if not all-out performance. *CL*'s 289 test Cougar logged 15.4 for the trial period. The individual who spends $4500 for a Cougar GT, however, will be little concerned that the lesser engine would provide a 4-mpg fuel consumption saving.

No matter which Cougar is chosen, the buyer receives for his $3800-$4500 a car of clean, distinctive lines, unusually attractive in its sporting mien. The buyer receives harmonious interiors, soft leatherlike vinyl upholstery and door panel padding, with matching dash paint and thick carpeting. The Cougar buyer receives ample headroom, leg room and hip room for driver and passenger, though minimal accommodation for two rear seat passengers. The Cougar buyer receives an automobile that is more roadable than most. The Cougar GT 390 buyer receives a Cougar that is simply stronger, faster and more nimble.

All Cougars, GTs included, couple a smartly pleasing appearance with brisk performance. Regrettably, the test Cougar GT's small irritations were a big detraction from what is essentially a fine, exciting automobile. ■

CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



CALCULATED DATA

Lb/bhp (test weight)	12.2
Cu. ft./ton mile	145
Mph/1000 rpm (high gear)	24.0
Engine revs/mile (60 mph)	2500
Piston travel, ft./mile	1575
CAR LIFE wear index	39.4
Frontal area, sq. ft.	20.5
NHRA-AHRA Class	B/SA-E/SA

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual	30.0
40 mph	40.7
50 mph	50.4
60 mph	60.2
70 mph	70.3
80 mph	80.4
90 mph	90.0

MAINTENANCE

Engine oil, miles/days	6000/180
oil filter, miles/days	6000/180
Chassis lubrication, miles	36,000
Anti-smog servicing, type/miles: Clean hoses, fittings, oil separator, carb. spacer, replace PCV valve/ 12,000.	
Air cleaner, miles: Replace element, paper at 36,000, plastic at 12,000	
Spark plugs: Autolite BF-42	
gap, (in.)	0.035
Basic timing, deg./rpm	10/575
max. cent. adv., deg./rpm	22/4000
max. vac. adv., deg./in. Hg.	22/20
Ignition point gap, in.	0.015
cam dwell angle, deg.	26
arm tension, oz.	17-20
Tappet clearance, int./exh.	0/0
Fuel pressure at idle, psi	4.5
Radiator cap relief press., psi.	12-15

PERFORMANCE

Top speed (4800), mph	115
Test shift points (rpm) @ mph	
3rd to 4th ( )	
2nd to 3rd (4700)	84
1st to 2nd (4900)	49

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.	3.3
0-40 mph	4.5
0-50 mph	5.8
0-60 mph	7.7
0-70 mph	9.8
0-80 mph	12.7
0-90 mph	16.3
0-100 mph	21.2
Standing ¼-mile, sec.	15.9
speed at end, mph	89.1
Passing, 30-70 mph, sec.	6.5

BRAKING

Max. deceleration rate from 80 mph ft./sec./sec.	31
No. of stops from 80 mph (60-sec. intervals) before 20% loss in deceleration rate	1
Control loss?	none
Overall brake performance	fair

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Test conditions, mpg	11.0
Normal cond., mpg	11-14
Cruising range, miles	185-240

GRADABILITY

4th % grade @ mph	
3rd	16 @ 64
2nd	25 @ 38
1st	off scale

DRAG FACTOR

Total drag @ 60 mph, lb.	147