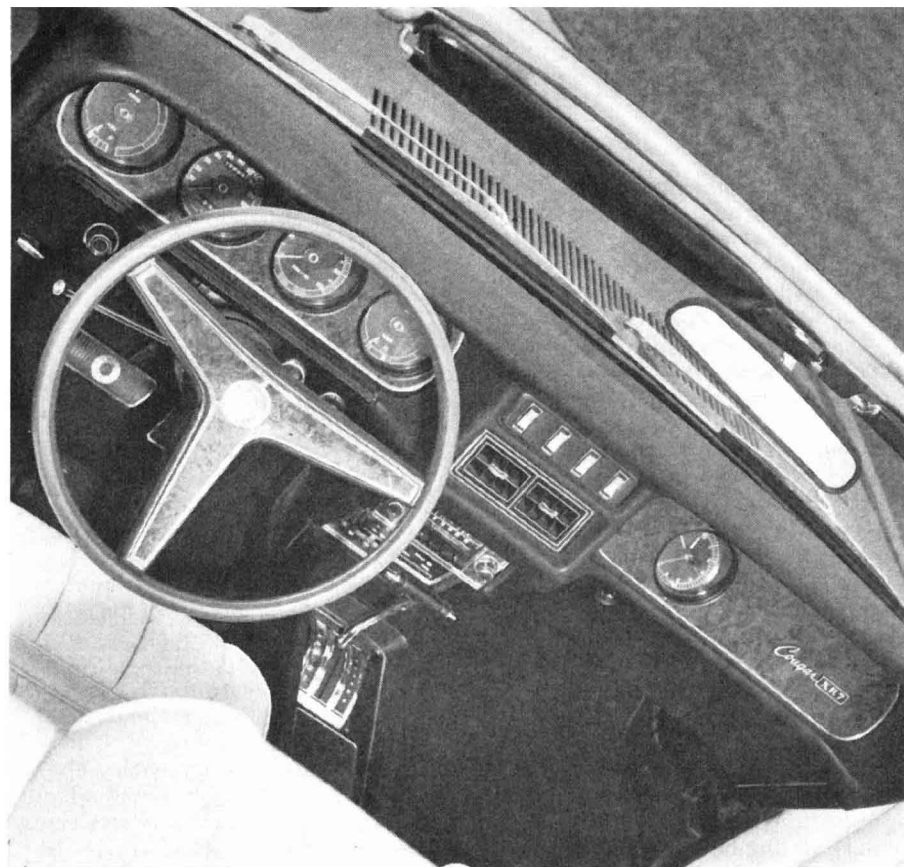


DRIVING THE HOT '69 Cougar

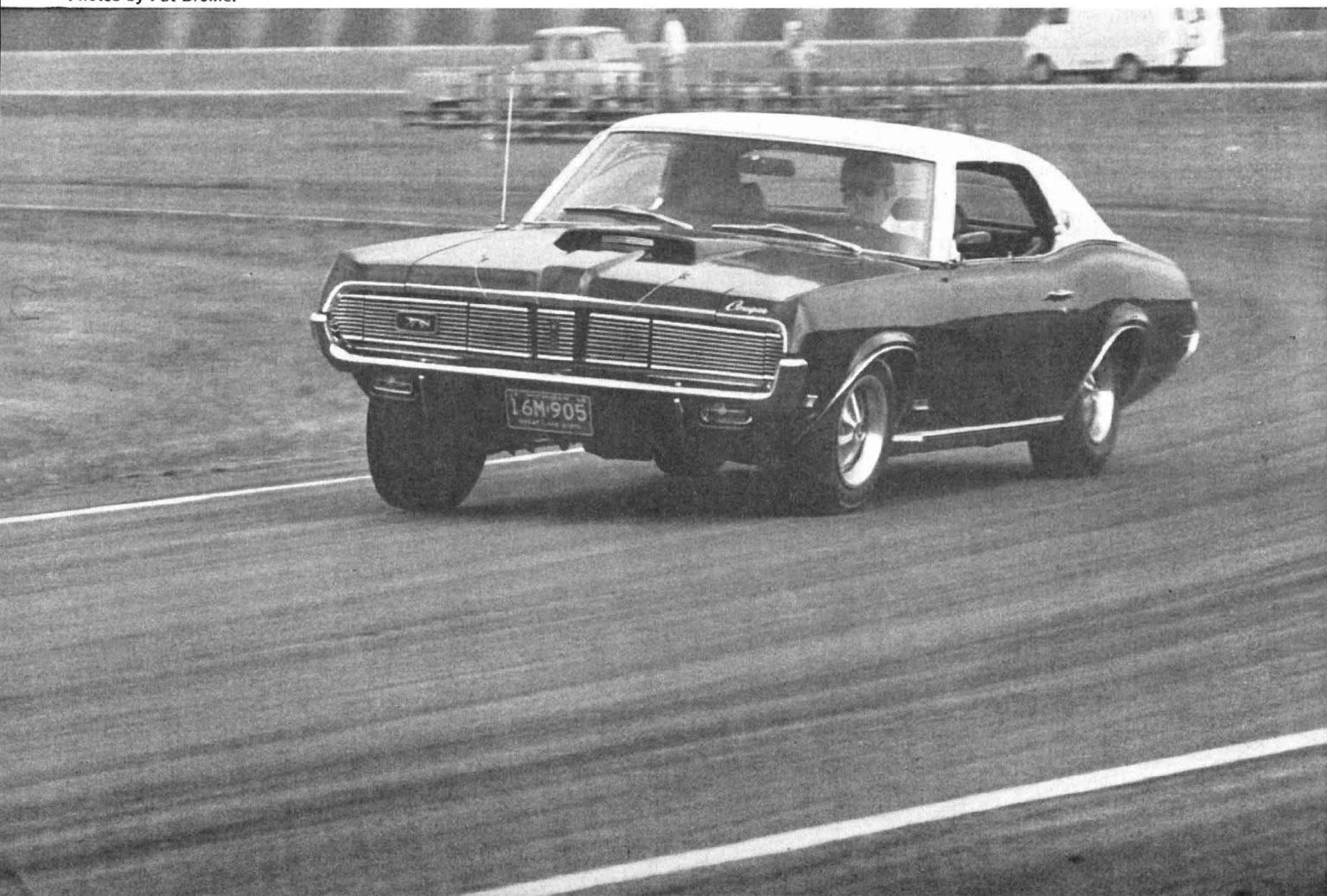
Test by Bill Sanders

It had to happen — 1969 sees the first major change in the Cougar since its introduction in 1967. Extensive styling changes have taken place, with all-new body sheetmetal, and a convertible has been added to the line. The 111-inch Cougar wheelbase has been carried over from '68, but overall length has been increased by 3½ inches to 193.8 inches, which makes it look like a much larger and entirely different car. It is almost three inches wider, although height has been reduced 4/10-inch. Interior dimensions are also enlarged, with front shoulder and hip room increased two inches and 2½ inches respectively. Grille and rear deck treatment are both new, and ventless

(Left) Cougar dash is well laid out, and with XR-7 appointments, has definite European sport appeal. Tendency to understeer in hard corners is evident below. Acceleration is out of sight with CJ engine.



Photos by Pat Brollier



side glass is standard. For the first time, an optional power ventilation system is available.

Big things have happened with Cougar powerplants, too. There is a new and bigger standard engine, the regular fuel 351-c.i.d. V-8 with 2-bbl. carburetor. With a 9.5:1 compression ratio, it packs more horses than last year's standard 289 V-8. The 351-c.i.d. mill is FoMoCo's latest entry in their lightweight engine family.

Step-up engine options include a 351 with 4-bbl. and the 390 with 4-bbl. But, if you want to go flat-out for performance, the Cobra Jet 428-c.i.d. engine is available for top power, turning out 335 hp. The CJ 428 can be ordered either with the conventional hot and cold dual inlet air cleaner or with Ram-Air induction that operates through the wide hoodcoop. With the CJ 428 and conventional induction system, you get a heavy-duty radiator, competition handling package and E70 fiberglass belted tires. With the functional Ram-Air hoodcoop, racing-type hood lock pins finish off the package.

A 3-speed synchronized manual transmission is standard with either 351 V-8. A heavy-duty version goes with the 390 V-8. SelectShift can be ordered with any engine, and, a 4-speed synchronized manual is available across the board. Rear axle ratios are even more plentiful, ranging from a 2.75:1 to a 4.30:1. Cougar's "Traction-Lok" differential, originally introduced

for use only with the mid-1968 CJ 428, is now available for use with any Cougar engine.

Standard manual steering has a ratio of 19.9:1, with 4½ turns from lock-to-lock. Power steering provides a ratio of 16:1, nearly 20% faster than the manual, with 3¾ turns lock-to-lock. For quick, competition handling, a manual gear with the same 16:1 ratio is available.

The basic rubber-isolated Cougar suspension design has been essentially retained in 1969. Optional competition handling packages for better handling include firmer front and rear springs, heavy-duty shocks calibrated to the higher spring rates, a stiffer stabilizer bar and wheels and 6-inch wide rims. The 1969 competition handling package has been beefed with a rear shock mounting set-up that's new for Cougar. Instead of mounting both rear shocks ahead of the axle, as in other Cougar suspensions, the left shock is attached behind the axle and connected to a special crossmember built into the floor pan. This staggered arrangement of rear shocks acts to resist spring wind-up and directly damp out pitching motions that cause wheel hop during full throttle starts.

Driving Impressions

Even though it may look like a much bigger car, driving the Cougar is still a gas. In the 428 CJ Ram-Air you know you really have a bomb under control. The handling package suspension

combined with F70 x 14 Polyglas tires feels extremely rugged and holds the road well. Only a mild understeer is evident at moderate speeds in gentle corners. Pushing the car harder through tighter turns causes a much more noticeable understeer and plowing effect, caused in part by the heavy mill up front. The shift lever is located rather far forward for ideal shift throws, and, with Mercury's new wraparound horn button integrated into the steering wheel, quite a few horn honks result in hard cornering situations. The 428 CJ cruises at 60 mph in 4th gear at about 2500 rpm. The 428 runs right up to 5000 rpm easily, with no hesitation, and has good power reserve in 4th.

Although it may not get the adrenalin working as fast as the 428, getting behind the wheel of a Cougar with the new 351, 4-bbl. equipped with a floor-mounted 3-speed is definitely a satisfying experience. The 3-speed seems ideally suited to this engine, and shift points coincide exactly with cornering timing. Handling is precise and light; the car can be put into an easily controlled drift, although oversteer is not excessive. The light weight of the 351 eliminates any tendency to plow, and the potency of the engine makes it easy to power out of a drift. Cougar's floor-mounted 3-speed seems to be better located than the 4-speed for throwing precise shifts. Seating and ride qualities both get good marks on the comfort list for a sporty type car.

New convertible model looks extremely long from rear. New tail light treatment blends with bumper.

