

MERC MAKES THE MUSCLECAR SCENE

with a striped and scooped Comet Cyclone GT that doubles in durability



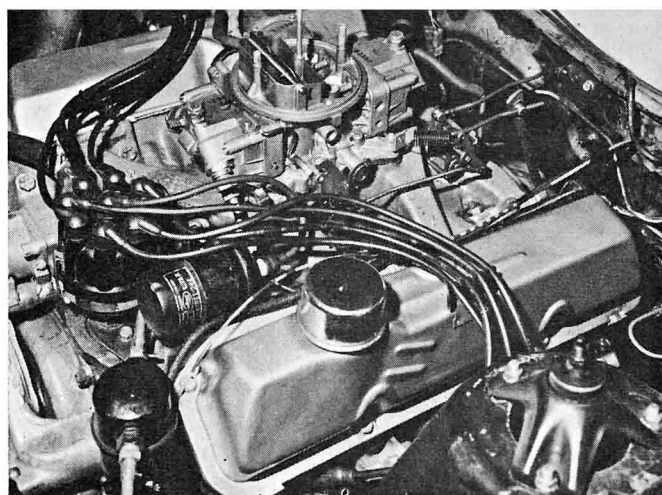
BY MARTYN L. SCHORR

IMAGE, IMAGE, who's got the image? That's the big question around the Motor City these days. Pontiac originated the image or supercar with its GTO and the other divisions and competitive manufacturers followed right behind. Pontiac has been a leader in this unpredictable market which started out as a haven for hot rodders who wanted to buy ready-built hot machinery and has expanded to encompass young and old alike who are just interested in a head-turning, super-jazzy stocker.

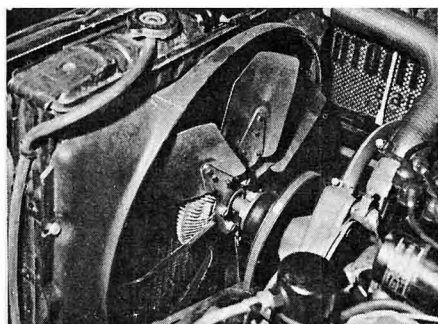
This year Pontiac's position is being threatened by Chevy with its Chevelle 396 and to a lesser degree by all the other manufacturers. Detroit has learned a lot since 1964 when Pontiac made the big plunge. They discovered that the average buyer of a car such as the GTO doesn't give a row of beans about the high rev hydraulic lifter cams or the tuned headers and excellent porting layout. They really dig the racing stripes, hood and side panel scoops and the image ornamentation. Of course, they also want

a respectable sounding and performing engine to back up the show features.

Lincoln-Mercury's entry in the image car sweepstakes is the super racy Comet Cyclone GT. In stock showroom trim it's every bit as showy as the accepted leaders in the field and has the potential to become a class winner at the strip. It's not as popular as the GTO or the Chevelle Super Sport, but that's mainly because Lincoln-Mercury up until now has not spent that much for image merchandising. They have been putting



Bold frontal styling and stacked quads give the sleek Cyclone that "big car" look. Fiberglass hood on test car was poorly fitted. Potent 335 hp mill boasts big Holley quad, reworked sparker and 5000 rpm cam. Auto trans engine is shown here.



Clutch-type slip fan cuts down on hp drain. Fiberglass radiator shroud is standard on GT. Beefy leaf-spring rear carries 3.90 limited slip gears, by axles. HD suspension and handling package is standard on 390 models. Hidden by the simulated chrome wheel-type covers are 10-inch finned brake drums. Test car was shod with high speed 7.75 x 14-inch Firestone 500's.

the emphasis on the bread and butter models such as the full-size Mercs and standard model Comets.

The product planning boys at Lincoln-Mercury have just finished an all-out campaign to put the Cyclone GT on the map, and it won't be long before C and D/Stock competition at strips all over the country feel the sting of special Cyclone models. As of this writing you can actually purchase a ready-to-race, 100-percent legal NHRA-AHRA stock Cyclone with either automatic or four-speed manual transmissions from any authorized dealer. This maneuver makes it that much easier for the average guy to go racing for the least amount of cash output.

Instead of testing a Cyclone as soon as one was available in New York, we decided to wait until the Press test model had been flogged by every *would be* performance buff before putting it through its paces. This is somewhat less than desirable as there is a better than average chance that by the time you recover one of these has-been test cars it's ready for the glue factory, not street or strip! Being gamblers at heart we waited until everyone from *Better Homes and Garages* to *Sandbaggers Illustrated* had finished their so-called testing before taking over.

Waiting for us at the Ford Motor Company garage in New York was a bright red, rallye-striped Cyclone GT with more than 8000 *rough* miles on its odometer. Except for spanking new Firestone 500 high speed shoes the GT was 8000 miles old. Before going on we should clarify the term "Press mileage." The 8000 miles on the Cyclone GT was equal to 15,000-plus miles registered by the average owner of a performance-type automobile. Press cars are passed from one driver to another and the cars receive a minimum of dealer servicing. It's not at all unusual to find these cars with badly worn clutches, an engine running on six cylinders or a front end that's ready to fall apart. Any Press car

1966 MERCURY COMET CYCLONE GT SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE

Type.....	OHV V-8
Displacement.....	390 cubic inches
Compression Ratio.....	10.50 to 1
Carburetion.....	Holley 600 CFM quad
Camshaft.....	5200 rpm Hydraulic,
Horsepower.....	335 @ 4800 rpm
Torque.....	427 foot/pounds @ 3200 rpm
Exhaust.....	Dual headers, dual pipes
Ignition.....	Dual points, special curve

TRANSMISSION

Make.....	Reverse lockout, floor mounted
Ratios.....	2.32, 1.69, 1.29, 1.00

REAR END

Type.....	Locking differential, 9-inch ring gear
Ratio.....	3.89-to-1

BRAKES

Type.....	10-inch finned drums, metallic linings
Area.....	282.6 square inches

SUSPENSION

Front.....	Independent high rate coil springs, HD shocks
Rear.....	High rate leaf springs, HD shocks
Steering.....	Power assisted
Overall Ratio.....	20-to-1

GENERAL

List Price.....	\$2890
Price As Tested.....	\$3490
Weight.....	3580 pounds
Wheelbase.....	116 inches
Overall Length.....	195 inches
Tire Size.....	7.75 x 14-inch Firestone 500

PERFORMANCE

0 to 30 mph.....	3.2 seconds
0 to 60 mph.....	7.0 seconds
Standing 1/4 mile.....	98 mph
Elapsed Time.....	14.95 seconds
Top Speed.....	118 mph
Fuel Consumption.....	13.6 mpg (Sunoco 260)

that reaches 8000 miles and is still in the pool is in our eyes a durability champion!

We were most impressed with our *slightly used* test car, as there was plenty of meat left on the clutch, the body and running gear were pretty tight and the engine proved to be quite responsive. As we tooled through rush hour traffic on our way out of

the city it was evident that the plugs were caked up, and although the engine was firing on all eight, it didn't have the pizzazz that we had expected. We were also quite amazed at the exhaust tone level, as it was only a shade bit noisier than the average V-8 dual setup. The suspension was obviously stiffer than stock, but not to the point where it was objectionable. And that's saying a lot considering the condition of New York City streets!

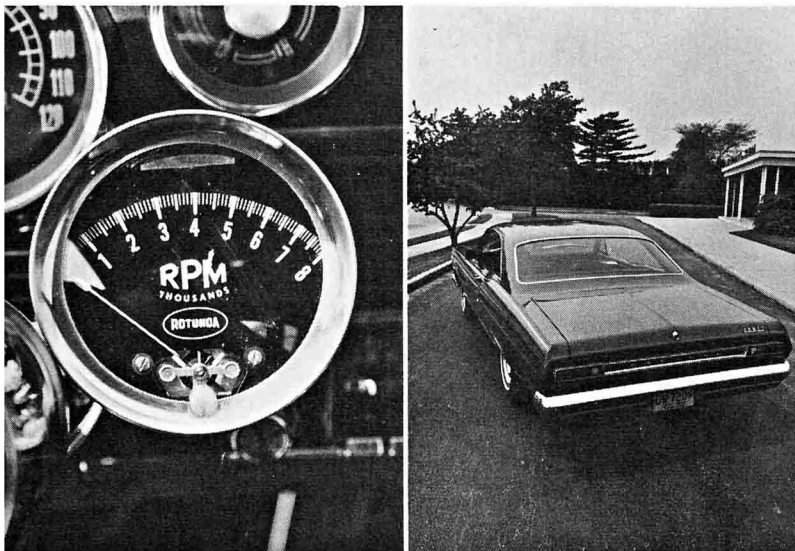
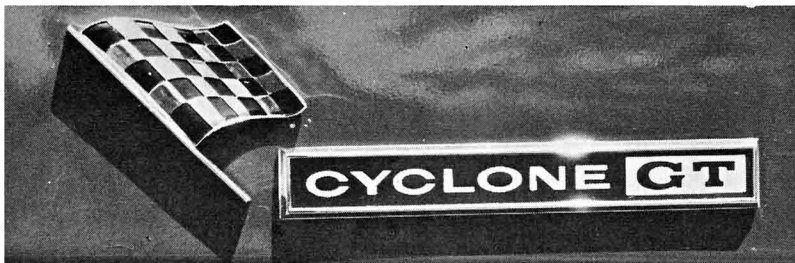
Before taking any more notes we turned our rallye-striped, Michigan-plated red Cyclone over to Charlie Dodge and George Snizek at Pacers Auto for a basic tune job. Since the engine was packed with hydraulic lifters there was no need to even remove the valve covers. A couple of hours later the car was ready and we packed our gear into the trunk for a 500 mile tour of the New England countryside.

For those of you not familiar with the Cyclone GT super street package, here's a rundown on our test car's nomenclature. With the exception of the steering post-mounted electric tach (car was also equipped with a strictly-for-effect Comet accessory tach high on the dash), chrome wheel-type covers and locking differential, our car was pretty much production stock. The factory GT package includes the 390 four-barrel engine, dual pipes, chrome engine goodies, high speed handling suspension, oversize tires, clutch fan and a twin-scoop fiberglass hood. The phoney scoops can be converted to functional operation, or the car can be ordered with the *special* scooped GT C/Stock competition hood from the factory.

The original GT option had as its top engine a 315 hp four-barrel that was just about useless against GTO, 442 and Chevelle musclecars. Lincoln-Mercury quietly amended the option list after the car had been introduced, upping the output of the top 390 to 335 hp. They accomplished this by adding a new hydraulic lifter cam and kit good for 5200 rpm, a 600 CFM Holley quad and a new dual point distributor with a quick advance curve. For those who purchased the 315 hp model here's the number and price of the hot cam setup: # C6AZ-6A25-A, \$59. The 335 hp engine is the one Mercury is running in its limited production C/Stock Cyclones. (Continued on page 72)

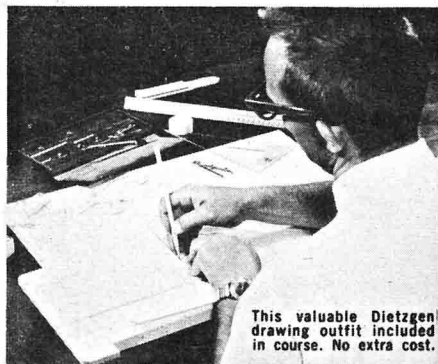
1966 COMET
Optional Axle Ratios—9" Ring Gear

	Part No.
4.33:1	C4AZ-4209-C
4.44:1	C3AZ-4209-F
4.57:1	C3UZ-4209-A
4.71:1	C4AZ-4209-E
4.86:1	C4AZ-4209-F
5.14:1	C4AZ-4209-G
5.43:1	C4AZ-4209-H
5.67:1	C4AZ-4209-J



Rotunda electric tach was installed on the steering post, as "Mickey Mouse" Comet tach is less than desirable for performance driving. Rear end styling is ultra-smooth with the tail blinkers integrated into the deck lid trim.

OPEN THE DOOR TO SUCCESS IN ANY INDUSTRY



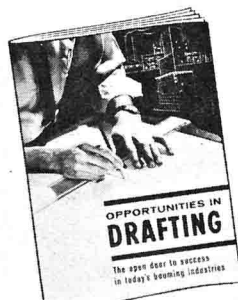
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lot. The difference will be probably at least \$200, but persevere. This is a big investment. Do it right. Another thing, don't trust the salesman to quote you all the available performance options. Chances are he doesn't know them all. Insist on seeing a complete order blank for all RPO and LPO (limited production option) equipment. There may be stuff there you never heard of which would enhance your package. And many times the cost is only a few dollars when installed on a new car being custom built at the factory. It's much cheaper than deciding you want the stuff after you get the car, and having the dealer install it. This is especially true of axle gears, heavy-duty brakes, and the like. Make sure you know what's available before you order.

Good hunting!

COMET TEST continued

Once underway on the open road we found the Cyclone to be a rather stable car even at speeds over 100 mph. The compromise suspension worked well and the tires, Firestone 500's, seemed to hold up even though we were averaging well over normal highway speeds. We felt that power steering was not really needed in this car, as we missed the normal feel of the road afforded by the manual setup. One thing that really impressed us, however, was the head-turning ability of our test car. The combination of bright red paint, rallye stripes, chrome wheel covers and the purr of the dual pipes, attracted young and old alike. The clean, sleek lines and the massive forward styling tie all the goodies into one neat image car package.

Equipped with 335 horses under the hood and a close ratio four-speed and 3.90-to-1 limited slip cogs between the rails, the GT proved to be an excellent performer. Even with the good gears it did not pack the punch of a tri-carbed GTO or a "semi-hemi" Chevelle. We were, however, able to walk away from most of the average stoplight drag racers. Shifting was exceptionally smooth except for the small uncomfortable-shaped shift knob. Running around town upshifts were made around 3000-3500 rpm, which coincidentally is when maximum torque comes in with the hot hydraulic lifter cam. Engine flexibility rates high, as no trouble was encountered lugging the engine down to 1000 rpm in top cog or winding past the 5500 rpm mark.

In the past we have had very few kind things to say about Detroit brakes in general and supercar brakes in particular. Most of the manufacturers use

one set of brakes for six, standard eight, and ultra quick supercars. Some list optional linings and drums, but dealers knew little or nothing about their whereabouts. Our test Comet was fitted with 10-inch finned drums and metallic linings to cope with the extra horses up front. Heat dissipation is good with the finned drums and the metallic linings help combat against fade during repeated panic stops. They are not as good as drums in the fade department, but discs will not be available on the Comet until 1967 so there is little choice. Five or six panic stops from 85 mph managed to fade the binders, but they would not fade under average or above average stopping conditions.

As far as all-out performance went we were a bit disappointed with the GT. The compromise suspension worked out just fine on the street and road, but left a lot to be desired for maximum strip performance. We were plagued with wheel hop and axle windup throughout our quarter mile testing, even though the car was factory fitted with the special suspension. Our best run through the eyes netted us with a 98 mph, 14.95-second time slip—and that was after 12 attempts. Most runs were well into the 15's. Performance could be improved by the simple addition of adjustable Air Lifts (C60Z-5A589-A, \$49.50) available through any FoMoCo dealer. With the air bags in place the chassis can be properly preloaded to compensate for track conditions, engine tune or various suspension settings. For more serious competition good lift or traction bars would be a wise investment.

After adding 500 miles to the already racked up 8000-plus miles we felt that the Cyclone GT is a very competitive package in the supercar sweepstakes. It may not be as quick as a good running tri-carb GTO or handle as well as an Olds 442, but it sure has a lot going for it. It has image written all over it, lots of performance packed under the hood and between the rails, and man, is it ever durable. And just think next year limited models will be available with the 427 wedge, disc brakes and a maximum performance suspension that allows you to use all of those 425 ponies.

LOWER STOCK continued

you're going to have an advantage over the guy with the same engine who weighs 100 pounds over his class minimum. Keep in mind also that it is legal in the stock classes to trim the weight of the particular model to the

(Continued on page 74)