As Ed Sullivan would say, "It's a Mercury Montclair, the Big M with dream car styling and power"

an MT Research Report
by Paul Sorber

FOR THE FIRST TIME since 1940, the "Big M" has its own body shell, shared by neither Lincoln nor Ford (but to be used by the E Division in the construction of its higher-priced model; see Feb. MT). This separate basic body unit allowed the stylists more freedom in creating an automobile of definite and exciting identity. They have certainly succeeded in producing a singularly different appearance for this gadget-lover's paradise.

The test Mercury was a '57 Montclair four-door hardtop with the standard 312-cubic-inch engine producing 255 horsepower, and with every imaginable power accessory. It was equipped with Mercomatic, a radio, heater, complete air conditioning, windshield washers, safety belts, and power-operated brakes, steering, four-way seat, windows and radio antenna.

We also tested another similarly equipped Mercury. This second car, however, had the optional 290-horsepower engine (a modified Lincoln block), and it did not have air conditioning. We had this car for a much shorter time, and in fact barely completed the testing in time for this issue. The considerable difference between these cars was astonishing, particularly in our tests of brake fade, fuel economy, and acceleration.

A Unique Driver's Compartment

Practical black and white vinyl-covered seats fitted in custom tuck-and-roll fashion were nicely complemented by the black rug and white, pierced-fiber headlining (also practical). Entering through any of the spacious doorways was accomplished without difficulty, though we did bump our knees on the corners where the wrap-around projects rearwards. Drivers near the six-foot mark should remember to duck slightly getting in or out, even though there is plenty of headroom inside. Since the steering wheel clears the seat by a narrow margin (5.5 inches), a plump man or, surely, a woman in a full skirt would have some difficulty sliding in behind the wheel.

You get an extra dividend from those handsome seats when you discover how comfortable they are. Don't complain if you sit on a safety belt buckle. You're supposed to wear them, and you may well be surprised how much they add to your riding comfort. Next, as you look around the cockpit, you are struck by the complex dashboard. Everywhere there are buttons, knobs, levers, lights, switches, and a strange gauge leers from just above the steering column, plainly and cryptically labeled "Power Booster, Off—On." Across the top of the dash are three pairs of individually adjustable louvers which, when aimed upwards, function as defrosters.

Starting up is like checking out in a small plane. You insert the ignition key with your right hand, then you push the NEUTRAL shift button (marked N/S) with your left hand. This starts the engine. Next, you push the LOW or DRIVE button and the BRAKE RELEASE bar, press the accelerator, and away we go!

Simultaneously, as you turn the ignition on, the seat automatically moves to a pre-set position as selected on the Seat-O-Matic dial on the dash. There are five letters determining seat height and seven numerals to locate it fore and aft. When the ignition is turned off, the seat moves back and down to allow exit and re-entry with maximum ease.

Some of these controls seem to have been designed with forethought but little follow-through. The sliding door locks are an ingenious idea, but several broken fingernails resulted from them and from the heater, air conditioning, and defroster levers. The blower switch is machined from soft aluminum, with a chrome-tipped plastic knob threaded on. Several cars in a local showroom had suffered the same fate as ours: the threads had stripped and the knob fallen off somewhere along the line.

Last year, Mercury was one of the few cars to retain a full complement of gauges. The '57 has unfortunately hopped on the warning-light bandwagon. Gone are the oil pressure gauge and ammeter, now replaced by a pair of sinister, blinking red eyes. If this was an economy move, why the "Power Booster" gauge, which serves no useful purpose? (This gauge was only on the smaller-engined car. On the other, the space was filled with a small Mercury nameplate.) However, the fuel and temperature

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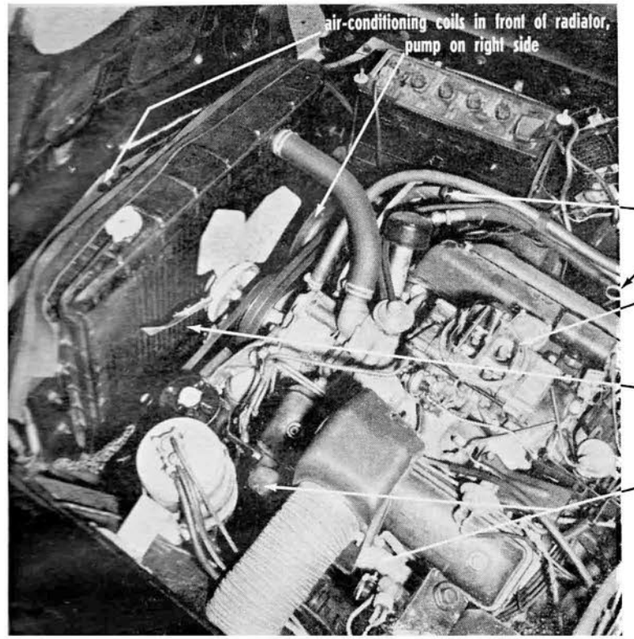
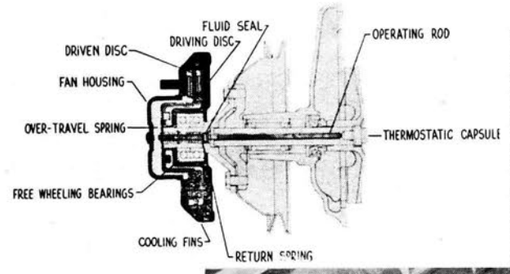
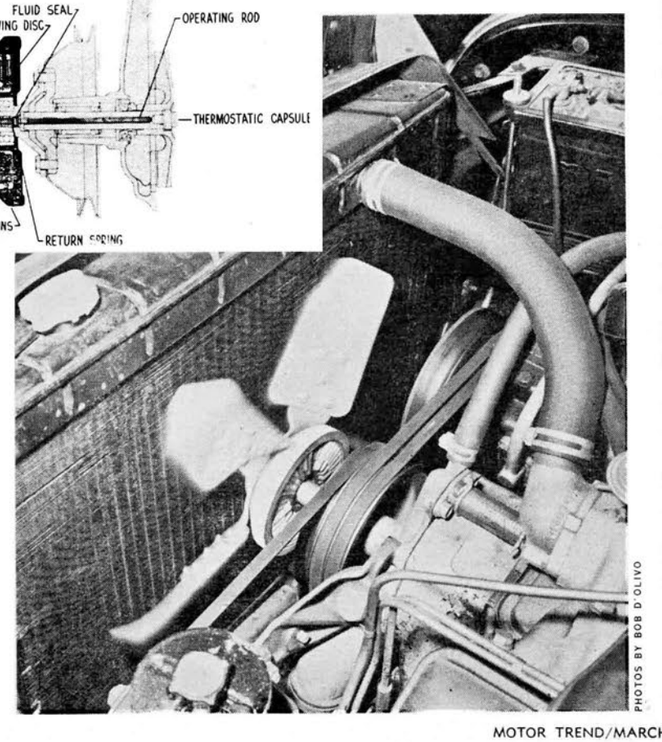


ENGINE COMPARTMENT is packed with accessories; some adjustments and repairs would be difficult even with air cleaner removed as shown. Though plugs are hard to reach, there is plenty of room for wrenches. Left-side duct warms carburetor air.





"POWER BOOSTER FAN," centered between pumps for power steering (left) and air conditioning (right), has thermostatic control which disengages fan when engine is warm. Fan speed then does not exceed 2600 rpm, and there is no noise below 1800 rpm. This saves 17 bhp at 3800 engine rpm, under normal conditions.

PHOTOS BY BOB D'OLIVO

ROAD TEST

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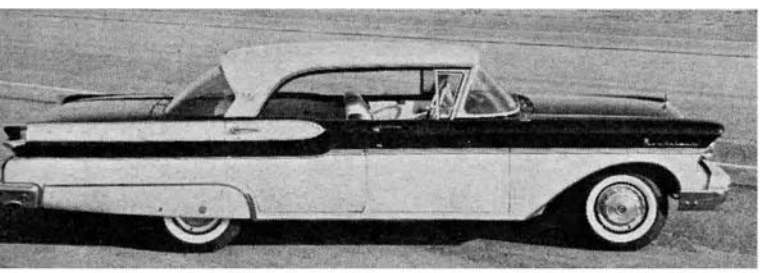
gauges have been retained on the latest series, along with the speedometer which is the new thermometer type. As your speed increases, a red strip creeps from left to right, displacing the normal green color and indicating the speed with unusual accuracy, using the red-green division as the "pointer." And now let's try the car out.

That "Floating" Ride

These are two of the smoothest- and quietest-riding cars we have ever tested. The highly touted pneumatic doughnuts, intended to improve rear springing by replacing the front shackles on the semi-elliptical leaf springs, are available only on the six Mercury wagons and on cars with the optional 368-cubic-inch engine, with the exception of convertibles. The other Mercurys have conventional rubber-bushed shackles. We therefore had the opportunity to test and compare both systems. There was no



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perceptible difference in riding qualities between the cars and no spring wrap-up during acceleration, which is surprising when you note the larger engine develops 405 pounds-feet of torque: 65 pounds-feet more than the 312-cubic-inch engine. The test cars seldom bottomed hard, and then only on bad dips at fairly high speeds. Even then, there was little perceptible shock and the cars recovered quickly, with only slight pitching considering the softness of the shocks.

On rare occasions you might be made aware of the road surface, but just audibly as a drumming sound which could be detected faintly with all the windows rolled up, the radio and other accessories off. One fault was apparent, and this was the excessive nose dive during braking, difficult to eliminate without doing away with the pillowy ride in the process.

Roadability and Handling: An Improvement?

Though the ride is much softer, even cushiony, the answer to the question is no. The key here is the word "improvement." Last year, Mercury was one of the best cars tested in these departments. This year, it's different and in some ways not so good.

Whipping the wheel a quarter turn to each side and back again caused the front end to bob and sway, and finally edge slowly toward the side of the road. With rare exceptions, a ride gets softer only at the expense of handling characteristics. In this case, there has been a definite loss in steering crispness, understeer has been replaced by a slight amount of oversteer, and there was some wallowing in a gusty side wind or when a semi-trailer passed in the opposite direction. Also, the power steering necessitated careful attention to the road, since it was quite sensitive to crowned roads and required frequent manipulation to keep the cars on the straight and narrow.

Cornering also suffered a bit. The cars would go into a moderately fast corner showing some oversteer, and would then wallow around as the springs unwound when we straightened out. The 17-inch steering wheel was a comfortable size, and the power steering took most of the effort out of aiming, but five turns lock to lock are too many. The lack of horsepower and engine braking in the smaller-engined car made itself felt when cornering, and it's doubtful that there was a sufficient margin to help either of the heavy test cars out of an inadvertent slip.

Considerable windshield distortion made distance judgment through the corners difficult, and particularly annoying on twisting mountain roads.

Complaint Department: Brakes

Stopping more than two tons of machinery is a big job, and the brakes on the one car found it a bit too big. Test weight of the smaller-engined car was 4450 pounds, and the larger-engined car (without air conditioning) weighed but 10 pounds more.

In our standard 12-stop brake fade test, we decelerate repeatedly from 60 to 20 miles per hour at a rate of 15 feet per second per second. The air-conditioned car with the 312-cubic-inch engine was tested first. Surprisingly, fade was perceptible even on the second stop; the pedal was harder and there was a pull to left on No. 3. The pedal was floorboarded for No. 4 but it was not possible to hold the 15 feet per second per second rate under 35 mph, and an odor of burning linings became evident. No. 5 duplicated the previous test, and the next two were characterized by a bad pull to the left, an odor which verged on being a stench, clouds of smoke, but (amazingly) a renewed ability to meet the deceleration rate with the pedal on the floor. No. 8 was a straight slow-down with no pull, but smoke and odor of course, and no braking effect whatsoever below 30 mph.

After a short rest at this point, the left front brake grabbed, smoke poured from all of the drums, but the 15 feet per second rate was again barely attainable. The remaining three test decelerations duplicated No. 9, and smoke was produced in such quantities that the car appeared to be on fire.

In sharp contrast, the other car had exceptionally good brakes. The first five stops were uneventful, and there was no fade until the sixth. At this point, there was a slight increase in pedal resistance, but no smoke or odor and the 15 feet per second per second deceleration rate was attained without difficulty. No. 7 duplicated No. 6, and succeeding decelerations showed slightly increasing fade until the 12th slow-down when it was no longer possible to attain the standard deceleration rate; 12 feet per second per second was the best we could do. Odor appeared first at No. 8, and gradually increased.

Though the first car's brakes were poor, the second's were unusually good, especially when you note that the larger engine allowed quicker acceleration, giving the brakes less time to cool between stops.

In mountain driving it would be possible to avoid fade problems by locking the Mercomatic in intermediate range and utilizing engine compression to take some of the strain off the brakes. This is done by pressing the LOW button just after the transmission shifts to intermediate.

A Look Under the Hood

Mechanics will forever revere the man responsible for the front-hinged hood. This eminently sensible idea allows easy access to the top of the entire engine without fear of bumped heads, strained eyes and/or muscles. Closing it can be difficult. Spark plug attention is about the most unpleasant simple chore, since the plugs are just a few inches below the exhaust manifold. The access space problem is more acute with the big engine. We are frankly at a loss to explain how the plugs can be changed on this car without an extra wrist or special wrenches.

From experience, we suggest that you restrain your impatience and wait for the engine to cool before working on such things.

The smaller engine was the standard 312-cubic-inch, overhead-valve V8, producing 255 horsepower. The only great change since '56 is a 16 pound-foot gain in maximum torque

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'57 (255-bhp engine, air conditioning)

REAR-WHEEL HORSEPOWER
Clayton chassis dynamometer showed:
72 road hp @ 2000 rpm
84 road hp @ 2500 rm
92 road hp @ 3000 rpm

SPEEDOMETER ERROR
Read 31 at true 30, 47 at 45, 52 at 50, 62 at 60, 77 at 75, 81 at 80

ACCELERATION
From Standing Start
0-45 mph 8.3 0-60 mph 13.0
Quarter-mile 19.6 and 76 mph
Passing Speeds
30-50 mph 5.5 45-60 mph 5.0
50-80 mph 13.7

FUEL CONSUMPTION
Using Mobilgas S
Steady Speeds
19.8 mpg @ 30 18.7 mpg @ 45
14.6 mpg @ 60 9.7 mpg @ 75
Stop-and-Go Driving
12.1 mpg tank average for 740 miles

OIL CONSUMPTION
One quart added in 1072 miles

'57 (290 bhp engine, no air conditioning)

Clayton chassis dynamometer showed:
88 road hp @ 2000 rpm and 28 mph
108 road hp @ 2500 rpm and 50 mph
122 road hp @ 3000 rpm and 66 mph

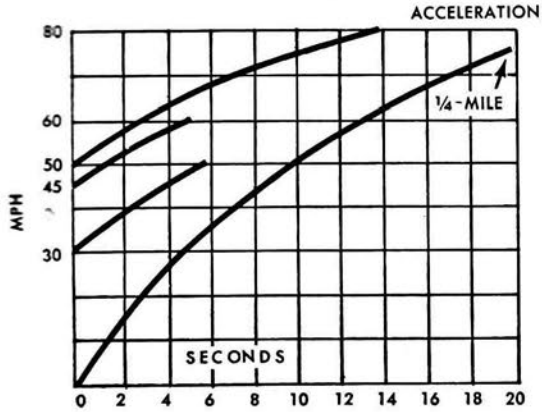
Read 33 at true 30, 49 at 45, 54 at 50, 65 at 60, 78 at 75, 82 at 80

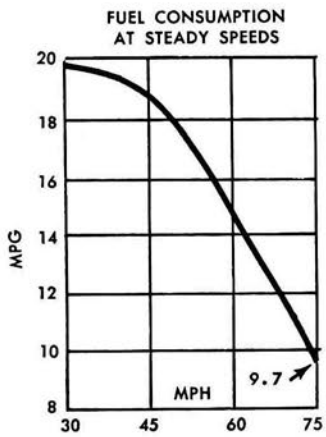
From Standing Start
0-45 mph 6.0 0-60 mph 9.8
Quarter-mile 17.2 and 80 mph
Passing Speeds
30-50 mph 4.1 45-60 mph 3.6
50-80 mph 10.1

Using Mobilgas S
Steady Speeds
17.7 mpg @ 30 16.3 mpg @ 45
14.5 mpg @ 60 11.6 mpg @ 75
Stop-and-Go Driving
14.2 mpg tank average for 439 miles

None added in 517 miles

GRAPHS REFER TO SMALLER-ENGINED CAR ONLY





Specifications

STANDARD ENGINE: Ohv V8. Bore 3.80 in. Stroke 3.44 in. Stroke/bore ratio 0.91:1. Compression ratio 9.75:1. Displacement 312 cu. in. Advertised bhp 255 @ 4600 rpm. Bhp per cu. in. 0.817. Piston travel @ max. bhp 2637 ft. per min. Max. bmep 164.3 psi. Max. torque 340 lbs.-ft. @ 2600 rpm.

OPTIONAL ENGINE: Ohv V8. Bore 4.00 in. Stroke 3.66 in. Stroke/bore ratio 0.92:1. Compression ratio 9.75:1. Displacement 368 cu. in. Advertised bhp 290 @ 4600 rpm. Bhp per cu. in. 0.788. Piston travel @ max. bhp 2806 ft. per min. Max. bmep 163.8 psi. Max. torque 405 lbs.-ft. @ 2800 rpm.

TRANSMISSION: Standard transmission is three-speed synchromesh with helical gears. Automatic transmission is Mercomatic, four-speed planetary gearbox with fluid coupling; ratios: 2.40:1, 1.46:1, 1.00:1. Overdrive transmission is standard shift with planetary gearset; ratio 0.78:1.

REAR-AXLE RATIOS: Synchromesh 3.70. Automatic 2.91:1. Overdrive 3.89:1.

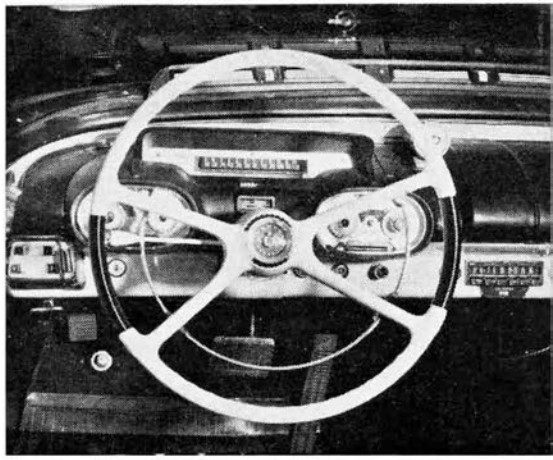
STEERING: Turning diameter 41.50 ft. Turns lock to lock 5.00. Overall ratios: Mechanical 27:1; power 24:1. Type: mechanical and power, recirculating ball and rack (Saginaw).

WEIGHT: Test car with gas, oil and water, 4450 lbs. (54% front, 46% rear). Test car weight/bhp ratio 19.8:1.

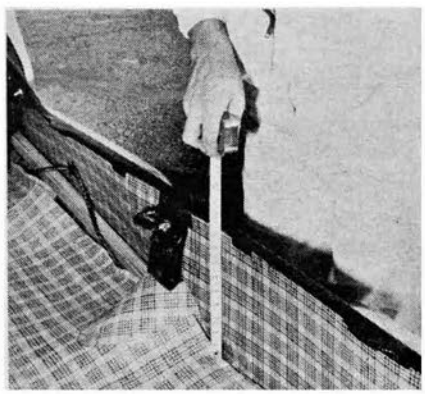
DIMENSIONS: Wheelbase 122 in., overall length 211.1 in., overall height 56.6 in., overall width 79.1 in., front tread 59.38 in., rear tread 59.0 in., rear overhang 57.4 in.

TIRES: 8.00x14 tubeless.

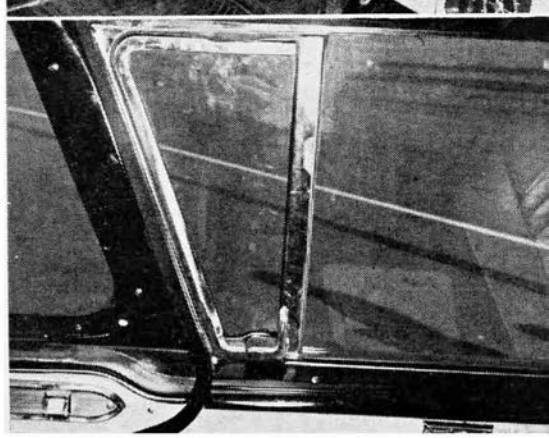
PRICES (including suggested retail price at main factory, federal tax, and delivery and handling charges, but not freight): MONTEREY two-door sedan $2536, four-door sedan $2605, two-door hardtop $2653, four-door hardtop $2723, convertible $2965. MONTCLAIR four-door sedan $3148, two-door hardtop $3196, four-door hardtop $3277, convertible $3390. TURNPIKE CRUISER two-door hardtop $3718, four-door hardtop $3809. STATION WAGONS: COMMUTER two-door, two-seat $2863, four-door, two-seat $2933, four-door, three-seat $3030. VOYAGER two-door, two-seat $3363, four-door, three-seat $3530. COLONY PARK four-door, three-seat $3637. (Mercomatic standard on Montclair, Turnpike Cruiser, Voyager and Colony Park. Power steering and power brakes standard on Turnpike Cruiser.)



SPEEDOMETER is easy to read through the steering wheel, but some controls and gauges are obscured. Shuttered vent and defroster openings line the base of the windshield.



SPACIOUS TRUNK has awkward sill nine inches high, making unloading more difficult than it should be. Glove compartment, below, is small but within easy reach of driver.



WEATHER SEALING on test car was not up to par. Note ¼-inch gap at top of vent window. Power window controls are at base of wrap-around.

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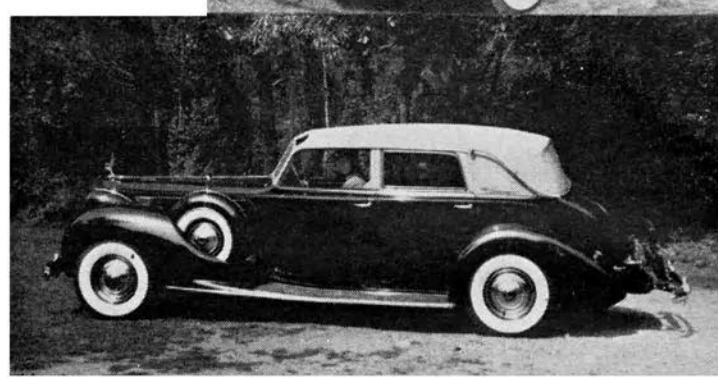
Mechanical operation is standard. All controls operate with ease. The car shifts easily and you feel a tremendous surge of power developed by the Cadillac engine. Steering is stiff—much stiffer than original, almost too hard for comfortable driving. On winding roads it comes into its own. No heel-over is evident in fast turns; the car is extremely roadable and compares favorably with a stock Jaguar roadster.

Braking is so easy it feels like a power brake system, but it is not. The car gets 16 miles to a gallon of gas and accelerates with all but the fastest contemporary American cars. No high-speed runs were attempted. Most noteworthy was the sports-car ride, authentic even to the slight choppiness. No American production car compares with its sports-car handling characteristics though it must be conceded that many rides are smoother and that additional work may be in order to ease the excessive amount of steering pressure.

Smartt and Hurst have succeeded in developing a fine product designed to perpetuate the Mark I and to be an example of their thinking along the lines of the Mark II. They had lots of fun working day and night on their project and their close association developed a long, lasting friendship. It is difficult, indeed impossible, to write anything derogatory about the car from a classic standpoint because it approaches perfection. From an experimental standpoint much was learned. Dr. Smartt also learned something: under the guidance of others he became an expert body and fender man while working on his Continental! —R.J.G.



MAJESTIC 1938 Packard Twelve was forerunner of later cars with tinted glass. Coachbuilder Brunn inserted a dark green glass panel above each high, narrow half of V windshield. Car was called a cabriolet because of fabric top with convertible rear quarter. Interior hardware was silver over bronze; cushions were stuffed with eiderdown. Three-ton monster cost $9600 new, was basically a stock V-12 of 175 horsepower, 139-inch wheelbase, 220-inch overall length, 473-cubic-inch displacement. Lucky owner: Albert E. G. Sellers, Radnor, Pa.

Q. *LINCOLN 12 CUTS OUT. What would cause a 1937 Lincoln 12-cylinder engine to cut out at speeds above 50 miles an hour? What happens is that the car suddenly loses power, no cylinders fire for about a half a block, then the engine picks up for a few blocks, then the same thing happens again. Richard Lytle, Minneapolis, Minn.*

A. Replace the fuel pump or the fuel pump diaphragm. The carburetor is starving for gas. This is a common fault of your particular car, which results when the fuel pump loses efficiency. I am sure that if you check your fuel pump *output* pressure you will find it considerably below that recommended by the factory.

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ROAD TEST

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due to carburetion and camshaft modifications plus a higher compression ratio: 9.75 to 1. Complete data on both engines are on page 25. The optional "Turnpike Cruiser" engine with 368 cubic inches is also available (at extra cost) with two four-barrel carburetors and 335 horsepower (see page 17).

The engine compartment is pretty well stuffed with power accessory equipment and intriguing gimmicks. Some of these are big power consumers, especially the air-conditioning compressor. Aside from its weight (190 pounds), the complete A/C system was notable for its low efficiency. Turned on full blast, it took a good deal of time to make itself felt. With outside temperatures in the low 80s, inside temperatures rose several degrees higher due to solar radiation through the large window area, even with the A/C on and the vent windows open. It seems obvious that this particular installation was defective, for the design capacity is quite generous.

The fan has been a power waster for years, and Mercury is first to do something about it. The optional free-wheeler

operates only at low speeds once the engine warms, with a saving of approximately 17 horsepower at 3800 engine rpm! Curiously, it comes only on the smaller engine (as an optional accessory).

Performance Facts

Test results shown on page 25 pretty much tell the story. This year, Mercury is not a hot car, but it is lively enough for most drivers. Although horsepower has gone up from 225 bhp in '56, weight has also gone up considerably. It is interesting that the 290-bhp engine gave much better fuel economy as well as better performance. This is best explained by the fact that this engine doesn't work as hard as the smaller one. Even considering that the smaller-engined car had air conditioning, the fuel economy was not good. The figures in the performance table were taken with all accessories turned off. You should subtract about 1.4 mpg when all the gadgets are operating.

Workmanship in Assembly

Body panel and trim fit was about average, but the finish left something to be desired. The left front and right rear quarter-panels had a series of gently undulating ripples in them, and the paint had a grapefruit-peel texture. File and grinder marks were visible on closer scrutiny. As in past years, assembly is not what it might be at Mercury. But Mercury's reputation for reliability is hard to beat.

Early production bodies are frequently not as well assembled as those built after the production line really starts rolling.

The trunk compartment is large and attractively lined, but here, too, is room for improvement. A nine-inch sill makes loading and unloading more of a chore than

Q. *HISPANO-SUIZA. Have located a (circa) 1930 Hispano-Suiza chassis, in good condition. There is no body on the car. Have you any information on where a good body could be obtained? Ronald A. Rasband, Columbus, Ohio.*

A. Unless you are the luckiest man alive, I doubt if you will ever find a body for a Hisso. The Hispano-Suiza is one of the rarest classics in existence. Very few were imported into the country. They were so expensive and dependable that most of the cars that were brought in are still in good condition and in the hands of collectors.

Try advertising for a body. But again, your chances of finding one are practically nil. Many collectors have built bodies by hand for a particular chassis but this is a time-consuming and expensive project and the cars seldom look original. Your best bet is to build up a raceabout equipped with bucket seats and other accessories sold during the early Thirties. A well-built raceabout is often worth almost as much as an original car.

Q. *CLASSIC FOR $200? Can a good classic be purchased for approximately $200? Walter Reed, Macon, Ga.*

A. Not unless the seller doesn't know what he has. By use of the word "good," I assume you mean a true classic in operating condition. A true classic in very bad condition might be found for $200. A semi-classic or special interest car in good condition can usually be found in this price range. By "true" classic I refer to Cord, Duesenberg, Marmon 16, Mercedes, etc. Any car in the true classic category would probably be worth $200 as a parts car, regardless of condition. Unless you have a collection of cars, you are better off with a special interest car in good condition than with a classic in bad condition.

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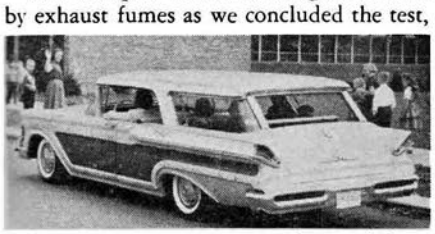
it need be, and the low position of the open deck lid doesn't help. The spare is in a fairly good location for the average and larger driver, but a small man or a woman would have some difficuty getting it out.

Doors of these particular cars (including the trunk lids) were hard to shut, requiring hefty slamming. Weather sealing was not very good, there being gaps of ¼-inch between the windows and rubber strips.

The bumpers were becoming discolored by exhaust fumes as we concluded the test,



and the exhaust pipes themselves had bent while we were backing out of a driveway. We could have expected that with 57.4 inches of rear overhang. That's a lot of space going to waste except for occasional use.

For the buyer who desires a comfortable, soft-riding and adequately quick automobile, the Mercury fits the bill. —**P.S.**