

# 2 COMETS: HOT & COOL

by John Ethridge  
Technical Editor

**IT'S NOT OFTEN** that we get a chance to compare two cars that are so much alike (except for engine and gearbox) as this month's test Comets. Much of our reader mail comes from people who ask what differences in performance, gas mileage, etc., they can expect if they order manual gearboxes and hotter

engines in their new cars. Of course, the results we got with the Comets won't apply directly to *any* two cars, but they should at least make our readers better guessers.

When we say cars are alike, we mean they're alike in those respects that affect performance. As for role and purpose, the cars are quite different. The Caliente is Comet's top-line offering. It's available as a four-door sedan, two-door convertible, or as a two-door hardtop (our test car). Thus it can be anything from

a family sedan to a personal car. On the other hand, the Cyclone's available only as a two-door hardtop with bucket seats. This one's tailored for the performance-minded buyer.

Our test Caliente had a bench front seat, but it's also available with buckets. The Caliente's optional bucket seats, though, are somewhat different from those of the Cyclone.

One source of certain confusion is the names of Comet's engines. Our Caliente was equipped with the 200-hp V-8 with

two-barrel carb. This engine is referred to as the "Comet Cyclone 289 V-8." The only engine offered in the Cyclone is the 225-hp, four-barrel-carb powerplant called the "Comet Cyclone Super 289 V-8." But *this* engine's optional on the Caliente — so you see what we mean.

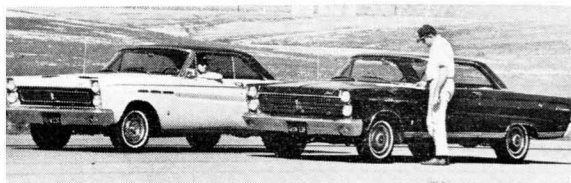
The Cyclone's 225-hp engine had what you'd consider a healthy feeling at any speed between idle and 3000 rpm. Then it felt like four more cylinders were suddenly added and came on *very* strongly. This exhilarating burst of

torque and power continued until 5000 rpm, when everything came to an untimely end due to valve float (this engine uses hydraulic lifters). It was within this short, happy rpm span that we got our acceleration times. They wouldn't have been possible without the test car's four-speed, close-ratio transmission.

Unfortunately for Comet, there's no engine option like the 271-hp "289" solid-lifter V-8 offered for the Mustang. We feel the Cyclone's 225-hp engine, with some changes in the valve gear to

let it rev to 6000 rpm, would result in a sizable performance improvement.

Another drawback to good acceleration times with the Cyclone was severe rear-axle hop, even with its optional performance handling kit. The Caliente didn't have this kit. Once we broke a rear wheel loose, the Cyclone would churn out huge clouds of tire smoke and wouldn't regain traction until we backed off completely. It took a good deal of experimenting to find the right combination of throttle and clutch to



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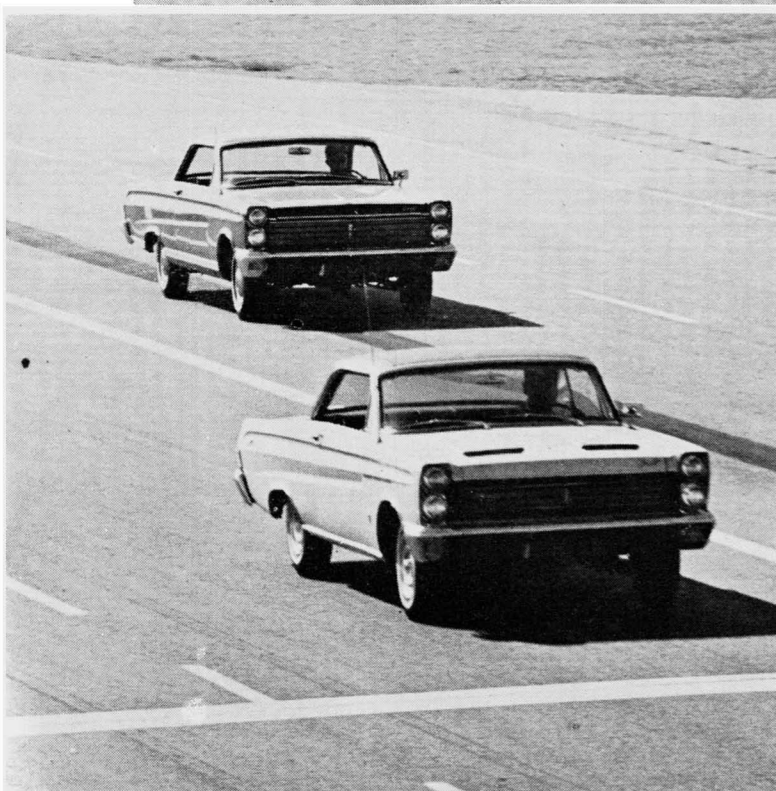
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avoid breaking the rear end loose or bogging down the engine. Here again is a place where correction of the defect would improve performance, even with the power the car now has.

Particularly noticeable was the exceptional tracking ability of both our test Comets. (Tracking ability means the ability of the car to maintain a given direction without steering correction.) We tried some hands-off driving over uneven ground. Here the steering wheel turned back and forth, but the car kept on in a straight line. This calls for a

generous amount of front wheel toe-in (specs call for  $\frac{5}{16}$ -inch) plus well designed suspension geometry.

The Caliente had optional power steering, which was quicker than the Cyclone's manual steering. But at all times except when parking, the Cyclone's steering felt as quick or quicker, because the handling kit gave a faster steering response. The Cyclone was more fun to drive for this reason. All things considered, both cars cornered pretty well and didn't need a lot of sawing on the wheel to keep control. But



*Cyclone wheelspin was hard to control getting off line. Automatic-transmissioned Caliente would often get jump on hot car.*

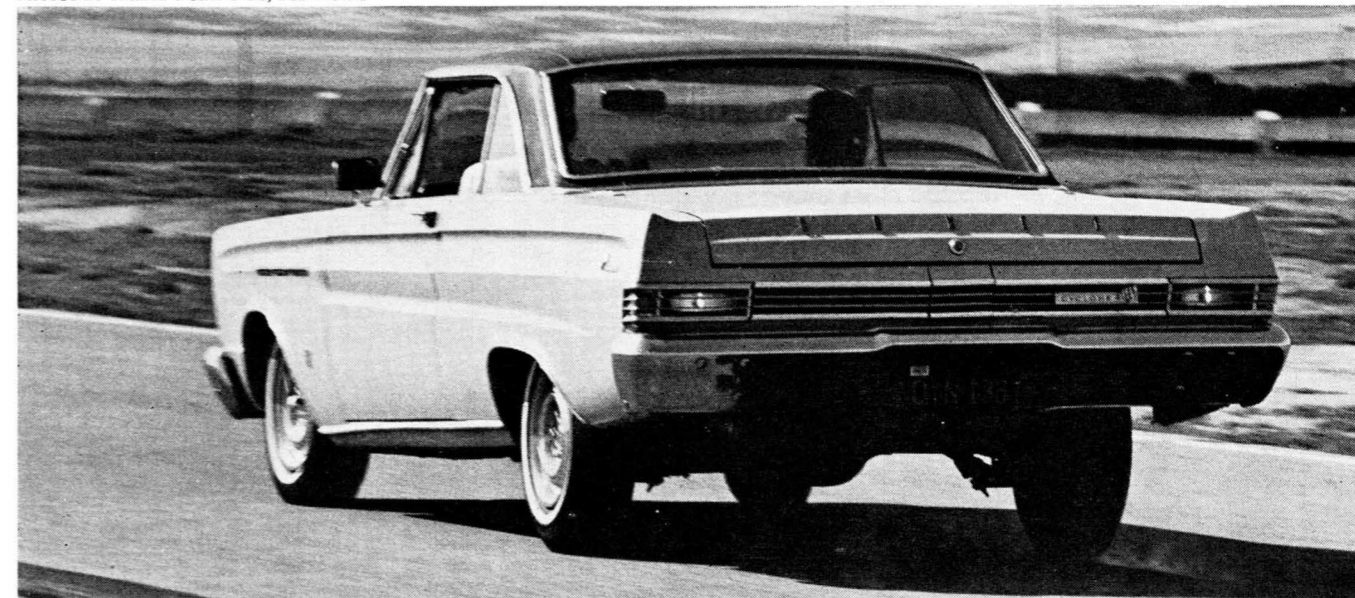
*Results were always same at end of quarter, though. Here Cyclone leads Caliente across line in one of the closer finishes.*

We check out a pair of the brightest Comets in a side-by-side, point-by-point evaluation of their merits



UNDER-HOOD APPEARANCES WERE SAME EXCEPT FOR AIR CLEANER MARKINGS, CARBS. CYCLONE (RIGHT) HAS ITS OWN DISTINCTIVE GRILLE.

PHOTOS BY DARRYL NOREBERG, BOB MCVAY



STOPPING DISTANCES WERE REASONABLY SHORT WHEN WE STARTED WITH COOL BRAKES. MUCH COAXING WITH STEERING KEPT COMETS STRAIGHT.

here again the Cyclone had a decided edge because of the handling kit.

You might expect the Cyclone to be quite a bit noisier inside than the Caliente, but it wasn't. Panel vibration and drive-line noises were about the same in both cars. The Cyclone's gearshift linkage was the source of a fair amount of noise.

Both test Comets had the optional "interval selector" windshield wipers. This features a basic improvement on wipers. You can adjust the wiper so it'll flick the moisture off the windshield at whatever interval you select, up to one sweep every 10-12 seconds. This

works fine in a drizzle or when following cars on a wet road after the rain has stopped.

There was something rather special about our test Cyclone. It had the prototype fiberglass hood with simulated air scoops — optional on a limited basis for the Cyclone. It borrows from the image of the experimental supercharged Cyclones that have been burning up the drag strips lately. The hood had an aluminum screen on the underside to prevent radio interference from the ignition system. This was only partially effective. When passing under bridges, etc., noise from our own ignition would

drown out the radio. Better electrical contact between the screen and the rest of the body will undoubtedly help the situation.

The new hood does what it's intended to do, though. It proved an eye-catcher and attention-getter wherever we went. With this ominous-looking accessory, only you and your mechanic know for sure whether something wild and powerful lurks underneath.

The two Comets gave nearly identical average gas mileages for the test. The Cyclone got 13.8 mpg, and the Caliente got slightly less, 13.2. The Cyclone's fuel consumption varied from 11.2 to 16.8



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mpg and was more sensitive to the way the car was driven. The spread for the Caliente was 10.7 to 15.2 mpg. The Caliente's still the more economical in spite of the lower miles-per-gallon figure, because its 200-hp engine takes regular while Cyclone's 225-hp V-8 requires premium gasoline.

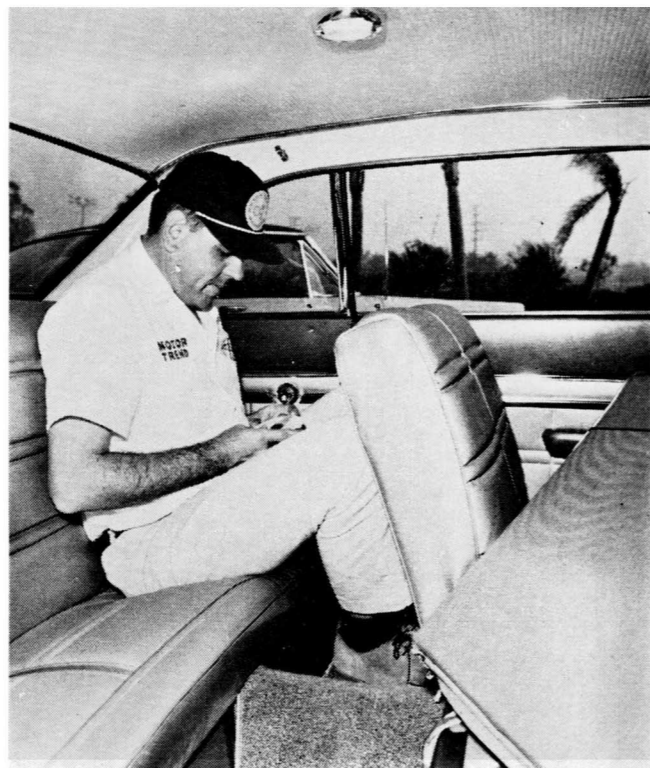
In the case of the Caliente, the speed we recorded for top gear was near the maximum — the engine felt wound out. This wasn't true of the Cyclone. Its speed was still creeping up when pre-

vious experience with the brakes told us to shut off in plenty of time for Riverside's Turn Nine. The brakes on both cars faded after a few stops at the end of acceleration runs. They required considerable time to cool before we could do our panic stopping tests.

Both Comets were good for general driving. Their excellent all-around visibility was a big help when driving on multi-lane freeways. The four fender corners are high and visible. They're as much help in parking as the compact



Cyclone's bucket seat backs fold well forward, allowing easy access to rear seat. Room's adequate for four adults on trips.



Caliente's bench seat with divided back was comfortable in a more forward position and gives rear occupants more knee room.



Remote trunk lid release can be reached from driver's seat. Tach, clock, and vacuum gauge atop dash are small but readable.



Caliente's air conditioner interfered with driver's right leg. Relocation toward passenger side would be a great improvement.



CYCLONE'S PERFORMANCE HANDLING KIT WAS EFFECTIVE AID TO CORNERING. CAR WAS STABLE, CONTROLLABLE, AND RAPID AROUND BENDS.

dimensions of the car. The Caliente's power steering had a good feel and no idiosyncrasies. The Cyclone's manual steering was commendably light, even when parking. In our opinion, power steering isn't an absolute necessity on either car.

The Caliente had power brakes, and the Cyclone didn't. The standard brakes seemed heavy when we first used them after driving a power-braked car, but we quickly got used to them. Comet's power brakes aren't over-powered as

some are, and they're therefore very controllable. It's hard to say, in the case of these cars, which of the braking systems is better. We've always felt that, provided the driver has enough leg power, standard brakes are less prone to lock up under panic conditions. On the other hand, when tendency to fade is a problem (as it is with these cars), power brakes are mighty handy for coping with the higher pedal pressure required.

Our test Comets, in car dealer's

language, were fully equipped, but the accessory lists were by no means exhausted. Three-speed manual transmissions are standard for both cars. The Merc-O-Matic and the four-speed manual (V-8s only) are optional. The Cyclone has no engine options, but the Caliente's available with any of the Comet engines, including the 120-hp Six.

Simulated chrome wheel covers with real chrome lug nuts are standard on the Cyclone, with simulated wire wheels (just as deceiving) optional. The Cyclone

CALIENTE DIDN'T HAVE KIT AND WAS FOUR TO FIVE MPH SLOWER FOR SAME DEGREE OF CONTROL IN TURNS LIKE THIS. LEAN WAS MODERATE.





COMET'S TIPTOE STANCE AND GOOD GROUND CLEARANCE MAKE IT MORE ADAPTABLE TO UNPAVED ROADS THAN MANY OF ITS CONTEMPORARIES.



COMETS WERE STABLE AT HIGH SPEEDS. ENGINE AND DRIVE-LINE NOISES DIDN'T INCREASE APPRECIABLY, BUT WIND NOISE WAS QUITE HIGH.

comes with a tachometer, but you can order one for the Caliente — or clocks for both cars. A long list of comfort and convenience items complete the bill.

Besides the inevitable horsepower escalation, Comet changes for 1965 include a 38-ampere alternator and low-silhouette tires. But the biggest change is a restyling of the front end, which in our personal opinion is an improvement.

Mercury emphasizes durability for their Comet. As far as major components are concerned, there's no reason to doubt this — all of them have been around several years and are thoroughly proven, both in customer use and factory durability runs. /MT



Trunk's unusually large for this size of car. Depth extends well past rear axle center line; width exceeds that of wheel wells.

### COMET CALIENTE

2-door, 5-passenger hardtop

**OPTIONS ON TEST CAR:** Merc-O-Matic transmission, air conditioner, power steering, AM-FM radio, tinted glass, whitewalls, misc. access.

**BASE PRICE:** \$2511  
**PRICE AS TESTED:** \$3559.90 (plus tax and license)  
**ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST:** 5029 miles  
**RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE:** 5200 rpm

### PERFORMANCE

**ACCELERATION (2 aboard)**  
 0-30 mph ..... 3.7 secs.  
 0-45 mph ..... 6.5  
 0-60 mph ..... 11.0

**PASSING TIMES AND DISTANCES**  
 40-60 mph ..... 6.8 secs., 498 ft.  
 50-70 mph ..... 6.3 secs., 557 ft.

Standing start 1/4-mile 18.1 secs. and 76 mph  
 Speeds in gears @ shift points  
 1st ..... 42 mph @ 4200 rpm      3rd ..... 96 mph @ 3700 rpm (observed)  
 2nd ..... 76 mph @ 4000 rpm  
 Speedometer Error on Test Car  
 Car's speedometer reading ..... 32   47   53   64   75   86  
 Weston electric speedometer ..... 30   45   50   60   70   80  
 Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear ..... 26 mph  
 Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 35 ft; from 60 mph, 158 ft.

### SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

**Engine**  
 Ohv V-8  
 Bore: 4.00 ins.  
 Stroke: 2.87 ins.  
 Displacement: 289 cu. ins.  
 Compression ratio: 9.3:1  
 Horsepower: 200 @ 4400 rpm  
 Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.69  
 Torque: 282 lbs.-ft. @ 2400 rpm  
 Carburetion: 1 2-bbl.  
 Ignition: 12-volt coil

**Steering**  
 Recirculating ball and nut, power assisted  
 Turning diameter: 41.2 ft.  
 Turns lock to lock: 3.5

**Wheels and Tires**  
 5-lug, steel disc wheels  
 7.35 x 14 2-ply whitewall tires

**Brakes**  
 Hydraulic, duo-servo, self-adjusting; cast-iron drums  
 Front: 10-in. dia. x 2.25 ins. wide  
 Rear: 10-in. dia. x 1.75 ins. wide  
 Effective lining area: 126.0 sq. ins.  
 Swept drum area: 251.3 sq. ins.

**Body and Frame**  
 Unitized  
 Wheelbase: 114.0 ins.  
 Track: front, 55.6 ins.; rear, 56.0 ins.  
 Overall length: 195.3 ins.  
 Overall width: 72.9 ins.  
 Overall height: 53.5 ins.  
 Curb weight: 3140 lbs.

**Gearbox**  
 3-speed automatic (Merc-O-Matic); column shift

**Driveshaft**  
 1-piece, open tube

**Differential**  
 Hypoid, semi-floating  
 Standard ratio: 3.00:1

**Suspension**  
 Front: Independent, single lower arm, with stabilizing strut, coil springs, direct-acting, tubular shocks, and anti-roll bar  
 Rear: Rigid axle, with semi-elliptic springs and tubular shocks

### COMET CYCLONE

2-door, 5-passenger hardtop

**OPTIONS ON TEST CAR:** 4-speed manual transmission, AM-FM radio, handling package, vinyl roof, special fiberglass hood, whitewalls, seat belts, tinted glass, misc. access.

**BASE PRICE:** \$2683  
**PRICE AS TESTED:** \$3544.40 (plus tax and license)  
**ODOMETER READING AT START OF TEST:** 5600 miles  
**RECOMMENDED ENGINE RED LINE:** 5200 rpm

### PERFORMANCE

**ACCELERATION (2 aboard)**  
 0-30 mph ..... 3.2 secs.  
 0-45 mph ..... 5.5  
 0-60 mph ..... 8.8

**PASSING TIMES AND DISTANCES**  
 40-60 mph ..... 3.9 secs., 286 ft.  
 50-70 mph ..... 5.4 secs., 475 ft.

Standing start 1/4-mile 17.1 secs. and 82 mph  
 Speeds in gears @ 5000 rpm  
 1st ..... 48 mph      3rd ..... 86 mph  
 2nd ..... 65 mph      4th ..... 108 mph @ 4200 rpm (observed)  
 Speedometer Error on Test Car  
 Car's speedometer reading ..... 33   46   53   64   75   86  
 Weston electric speedometer ..... 30   45   50   60   70   80  
 Observed miles per hour per 1000 rpm in top gear ..... 26 mph  
 Stopping Distances — from 30 mph, 34 ft.; from 60 mph, 161 ft.

### SPECIFICATIONS FROM MANUFACTURER

**Engine**  
 Ohv V-8  
 Bore: 4.00 ins.  
 Stroke: 2.87 ins.  
 Displacement: 289 cu. ins.  
 Compression ratio: 10.0:1  
 Horsepower: 225 @ 4800 rpm  
 Horsepower per cubic inch: 0.78  
 Torque: 305 lbs.-ft. @ 3200 rpm  
 Carburetion: 1 4-bbl.  
 Ignition: 12-volt coil

**Steering**  
 Recirculating ball and nut  
 Turning diameter: 41.2 ft.  
 Turns lock to lock: 4.6

**Wheels and Tires**  
 5-lug, steel disc wheels  
 7.35 x 14 2-ply whitewall tires

**Brakes**  
 Hydraulic, duo-servo, self-adjusting; cast-iron drums  
 Front: 10-in. dia. x 2.25 ins. wide  
 Rear: 10-in. dia. x 1.75 ins. wide  
 Effective lining area: 126.0 sq. ins.  
 Swept drum area: 251.3 sq. ins.

**Body and Frame**  
 Unitized  
 Wheelbase: 114.0 ins.  
 Track: front, 55.6 ins.; rear, 56.0 ins.  
 Overall length: 195.3 ins.  
 Overall width: 72.9 ins.  
 Overall height: 53.5 ins.  
 Curb weight: 3080 lbs.

**Gearbox**  
 4-speed manual, all-synchro; floorshift

**Driveshaft**  
 1-piece, open tube

**Differential**  
 Hypoid, semi-floating  
 Standard ratio: 3.00:1

**Suspension**  
 Front: Independent, single lower arm, with stabilizing strut, coil springs, direct-acting tubular shocks, and anti-roll bar  
 Rear: Rigid axle, with semi-elliptic springs, tubular shocks