

*Improved
is the Word for Mercury
It could be the Surprise Car of the Year*

1955

MERCURY

ROAD TEST

MOTOR Life Test Staff Report



“COMING off the high turn into the straight-away on our first test run, the 1955 Mercury felt as if it were charged with new power. My toe tentatively tested the foot throttle, then I floorboarded it. The car responded immediately with a surge of power which I'd formerly associated with more expensive cars. The Mercury could be the surprise car of the year.”

These were the first words of MOTOR Life's test staff notes in the road test of the new 1955 Mercury. If the 1954 Mercury was deficient in any department that deficiency has been more than eliminated this year. With two V-8 engines to choose from, today's Mercury owner should be up to his ears in horsepower. The engines, one a 188 hp ohv V-8, the other a 198 hp ohv V-8, are slated for different uses.

The 188 hp engine will be supplied stock in the Monterey and Custom series cars. Its bigger brother, with 198 hp, will be offered as stock only on the Montclair series but will be available as optional equipment on all Mercurys equipped with Mercomatic transmissions.

MOTOR Life put the 198 hp engine through its paces at the Dearborn Proving Grounds near Detroit, Michigan. The figures quoted in this article will pertain to the 198 hp engine: the fleetest power plant in the Mercury stable.

From a standing start the new ohv V-8 pushed our test car to 60 mph in 11.2 seconds: one of the fastest times recorded thus far in MOTOR Life's continuing series of

1955 road tests. Later, we took the car on a high-speed run and clocked the car at 104.1 mph top speed. By combining acceleration which would make a jack rabbit blush with the top speed of a gazelle, the Mercury plainly exhibits Ford Motor Company's intention to stay on top of the "hot" car field.

Handling, too, has been improved this year. Testing the car on the circuitous "cornering course," a series of progressively tighter turns, the test staff made runs at increased speeds to test the Monterey's ability to corner with satisfactory stability. First, runs were made at a cautious 40 mph, later at a braver 65 mph. At 65 mph there was body sway, enough to throw our testers off balance in the cockpit, but considering the tightness of the corners this was normal. There was no noticeable tendency toward slippage and the rear wheels continued to have good bite.

One interesting sidelight of the cornering tests was simply silence. Because of Mercury's switch to tubeless tires with a modified diamond tread, plus a new frame and shock absorber changes, tire squeal, an often-voiced complaint of '54 car owners, seems to have been eliminated.

The improved handling also was noticed on the straight roads. At all speeds, even over 95 mph, there was no tendency toward rear-end whip or bounce. The various forces which act upon a car in motion; gravity, centrifugal force etc., set up a tendency toward whip which can only be eliminated through a well designed suspension system which keeps the car on track. The Mercury handled well in this respect. Our test driver guided the Monterey down the straight at 95 with one hand for there was no need for constant "steering-wheel fight" to counteract rear-end movements. There was no rear end movement.

Throughout the testing, MOTOR Life's drivers were impressed by the quiet power which had been engineered into the Mercury plant. Most of this improvement, our staff was told, was the result of "minor improvements" to the '54 engine, but, as one driver remarked, "No '54 Merc could ever scat like that!"

One of the changes which brought about this pickup in torque, is a more pronounced wedge design for the combustion chamber and our test engine seemed capable of a smooth power flow through the entire rpm range.

Atop the engine we noticed a shiny new 4-throat carburetor designed to provide better breathing for the '55



Mercury back view features an entirely new "horseshoe-type" tail light treatment. Heavy emphasis is placed on duals, note exhausts.

model. It has a larger venturi to provide better flow and the choke plates have been enlarged for the same reason.

All this has paid off handsomely for Mercury. This year, the car has enough power to rear up on its wheels and jump forward at a touch of the throttle. It throws the driver back into the soft upholstery: a comfortable feeling when you know there is plenty of power available.

Our test car ran through the rugged test period without overheating and the ignition was extremely reliable. A portion of this was undoubtedly due to Mercury's switch to .18 mm. plugs. This type of plug does not utilize a gasket above the thread line for a seal. Instead, it seats at the base of the plug, directly against the head metal. There are several advantages to this design but foremost is the ability to transfer more heat from the electrode end to the block. With a cooler operating firing end, more critical ignition cycles are possible.

Our test staff was extremely interested in the two new exhaust systems which Mercury is offering this year. One is a standard dual system long advocated by specialty shops. The other is a new "Y" design single exhaust system.

Duals are offered stock on the Montclair and can be obtained, at a nominal price, as optional equipment on all other

MERCURY MONTEREY

Performance and Specifications

ACCELERATION

0-30 mph..... 4.4 seconds
0-60 mph..... 11.2 seconds

TOP SPEED

Fastest one-way..... 104.1 mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION

Constant 30 mph..... 20.3 mpg

ENGINE—Overhead valve V-8, 3.75 x 3.30 inch bore and stroke. Compression ratios 7.6:1 and 8.5:1. Displacement, 292 cubic inches. Advertised horsepower 188 hp @ 4400 rpm and 198 hp @ 4400 rpm. Maximum torque, 274 lbs. @ 2500 rpm for 188 hp engine and 286 lbs. @ 2500 rpm for 198 hp engine.

REAR AXLE RATIOS

Conventional transmission, 3.73. Overdrive, 4.09. Mercomatic, 3.15.



DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase 119 inches
Tread 58 inches front; 59 inches rear
Height 61.2 inches, Monterey sedan
60.3 inches, Monterey coupe
Steering ratio..... 25.4 to 1
Turning radius..... 41.62 feet
Steering turns lock to lock..... 5.5 turns

SPEEDOMETER ERROR

At 60 mph..... actual speed, 57.8 mph



Monterey profile shows new headlight shade rake, new grille-bumper assembly, wrap-around windshield and higher rear fender treatment.

models. The single system has been designed to retain as many advantages of the dual system as possible.

To do this, two exhaust manifolds are used. They are similar in design to the manifolds on a dual exhaust system. The familiar crossover pipe, which carried exhaust gases from the left cylinder bank across the front of the engine to the manifold on the right bank, has been eliminated and with this comes the removal of much of the back pressure attributed to the single exhaust system.

The car which the *MOTOR Life* test staff used in its tests was fitted with the 198 hp engine. On all cars so equipped the big power plant is tied to the new Mercomatic transmission; an improved version of the '54 design. It has been reworked to handle the considerably higher torque of the two '55 power plants. A combination hydraulic torque converter and planetary gearing, the new transmission has a larger torque converter than previous models.

On our tests the transmission was capable of very quick acceleration and engineers stated that fast getaways were possible because the transmission allows a start in low gear (with throttle wide-open) through use of a specially designed kick-down when the selector is in Drive position.

Sedan model has higher roof line but is still gracefully proportioned. Note width of Lincoln-looking grille-bumper group.



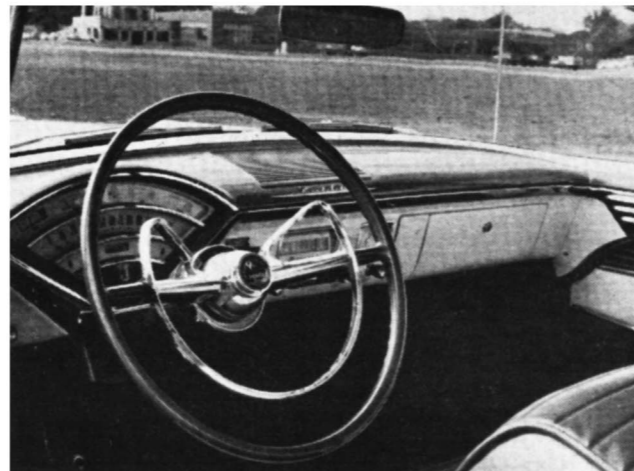
It works just that way. Several test drivers placed the selector in Drive, kicked the throttle to the floorboards and felt the strong hand of inertia drag them back into the seat cushions as the tires gripped the concrete and the engine propelled the car forward like an ever-accelerating missile.

While running fuel checks, *MOTOR Life's* test staff noticed an increase in mileage over the '54. After talking with factory engineers the reason became apparent: rear end axle ratios are different this year. The gear is now 3.15 as opposed to the 3.54 of last year, on all cars with Mercomatic. The change was made for fuel economy reasons but because of the increased torque multiplication in the new transmission, there is no sacrifice in acceleration.

The increased comfort which the test staff noted in the '55 models was built in through such changes as a new drive line designed to improve ride and lessen shaft vibrations. Further improvement in ride stems from the use of angled shock absorbers which help stabilize any side sway.

Our test staff gave the Mercury brakes a stiff workout late in the first afternoon of testing. "Braking the '55 Mercury is a breeze," they reported. They were doubtful about the stopping qualities of the car since brake diameter had not

Interior is uncluttered. V-shaped instrument cluster includes speedo, odometer, gas, oil, temperature and ammeter gauges.



been increased over 1954. However, this doubt was not necessary since Mercury drum diameter is equal to any in the field: 11 inches. To play it safe, however, Mercury widened its drums to provide more brake area. The car now has 190 square inches of brake surface as compared to 159 square inches last year. The front drums are now 11 inches by 2 1/2 inches. The rear drums, also 11 inches in diameter, are 2 inches wide.

During our stopping tests there was no noticeable tendency toward brake fade and stopping distances were well within the SAE code requirements. The car continued to stop with a quick, sure feel. The test car had a slight unevenness in brake pressures. The right rear drum had a slight tendency to grab, throwing the car off balance, but Mercury engineers checked the drums carefully and found that during a previous factory test foreign material from the Belgian block road had become lodged in the lining. Once this was removed the brakes were as nearly perfect as hydraulic brakes could be.

The new body, which has been designed to go around these engineering features, is impressive. The bold lines of the 1955 Mercury styling represent an evolution of the basic Mercury design which began in 1952. This year the wrap-around windshield is in full evidence. It looks like a wrap-around from the outside and is edged with nearly vertical corner posts which are very good looking. From the inside, visibility has been improved measurably over last year. Our test staff had a clear view of the highway and wide expanses on each side: nearly 180 degrees of vision from the driver's seat. One staffer reported, "My neck got tired from looking at too much outside."

Mercury's instrument cluster this year is a strong departure from the "Astro-dial" school of '54. The dial is fan-shaped with three semi-circular bands which contain all necessary instruments. At the top, across the sweep of the band, are generator, fuel, oil and temperature gauges. The center spread contains the speedometer which has an indicated top speed of 120 mph. At the bottom is the odometer.

From the driver's position all instruments are easy to read with the exception of the odometer. The instrument cluster light does not illuminate the odometer and even in daylight it was necessary for staffers to crane their necks to read the odometer. Granted, a driver seldom has need to check his odometer, the work necessary to check mileages makes it virtually essential to stop the car before performing the task.

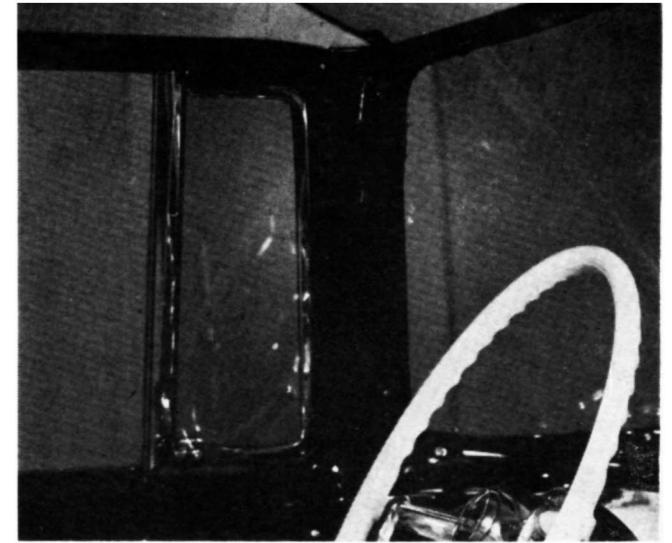
As an entity, however, the instrument panel and dash design is a honey. It is simple. The instruments are clustered in one easy-to-see spot. The rest of the dash is tastefully utilized for the radio, clock and glove compartment.

The smooth flowing lines of the instrument panel are repeated outside. Up front, the canted headlights give a forward rake to the lower, wider front end. The same treatment is carried along the side to a more massive rear quarter panel. Tail lights this year are new, different from anything Mercury has tried in the past. The familiar "lens in the fender" treatment, which has characterized past designs, is now *passe* and has been replaced by a smaller vertical lens surrounded by a modified horseshoe grid.

This year's tail light design is one you'll either like or hate. There will be no inbetween. *MOTOR Life's* test staff, with one exception, was in unanimous agreement: it's good! But each reader will have to make his own decision.

Mercury for 1955 includes 10 body styles in three series: the Monterey, Custom and Montclair. The Monterey and Custom are standard models carried over from '54 but the Montclair represents a new styling concept in luxury design. It is the expensive Mercury and is lower and more powerful. To borrow from the customizer's jargon, the Montclair is a sectioned Mercury. But this is not a true description for though the Montclair is lower it has so many extras you can't count them without a specification sheet.

Where the stock Mercury is 61.2 inches high, the Montclair is but 58.6 inches tall. The Montclair will have the 198 hp,



Mercury wrap-around windshield, like Ford's, has vertical rear posts which reduce the size of vent windows to a minimum.

8.5:1 V-8 engine as a stock item. Dual exhausts are another extra which will be offered stock on the Montclair.

Another feature, which will be offered as optional equipment on all Mercury models this year, is a push-button lubrication system. Called the Multi-Luber, it can be either factory or dealer installed. It permits the driver to keep chassis bearings under constant lubrication by merely pressing a button. The Monterey which *MOTOR Life's* staff tested did not have a Multi-Luber on it and the staff can not give a report on its operation and reliability at this time.

Startling interior trims have been created by the styling departments to complement the body design. They include many interesting contemporary fabrics. The test car seats were covered in a soft pink nylon tapestry with pure white leather trim. Other fabrics include a woven plastic, leather and vinyl plastic. All are color-keyed to the body colors which include 15 solid body colors and 30 two-tone combinations.

It all adds up to this: Mercury, with less horsepower than some of the big cars, still manages to drain a lot of power and speed out of its cubic inches. With the new styling and color combinations the Mercury looks as good as it goes. It is bound to make a lot of new car owners very happy. •

Close-up of front section shows how bumper parts combine to actually create two protective units, one for higher objects.

