

"DYNO" DON DEBUTS HIS...

180-MPH MERCURY COUGAR

SUPER STOCK & DRAG ILLUSTRATED

drag tests

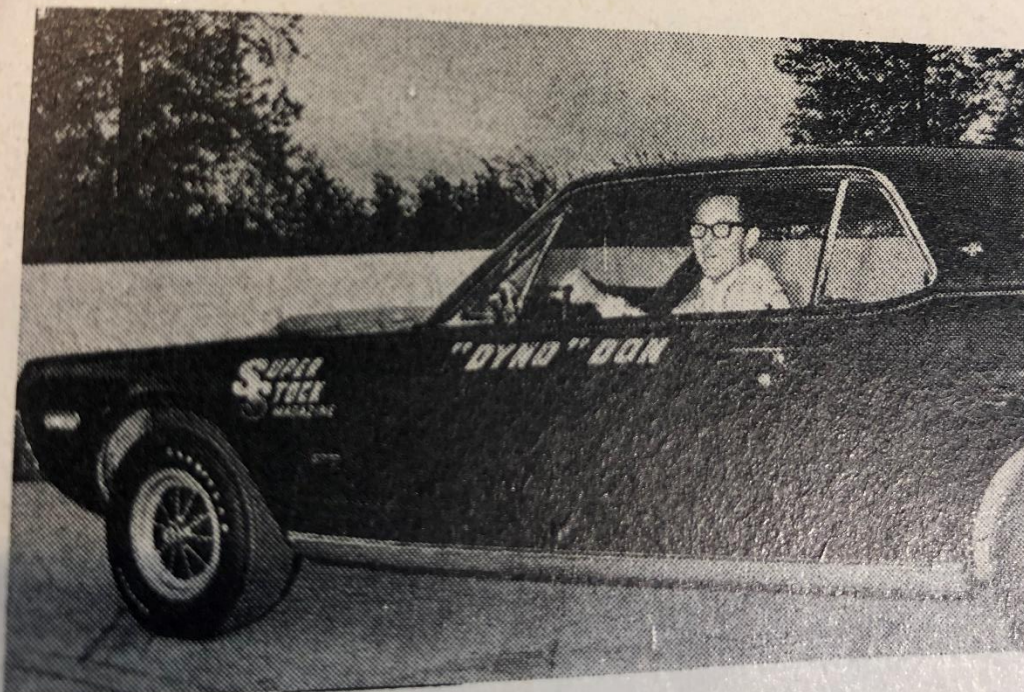
DODGE R/T
COUGAR XR7 GT
SHELBY GT 500
HURST OLDS 442



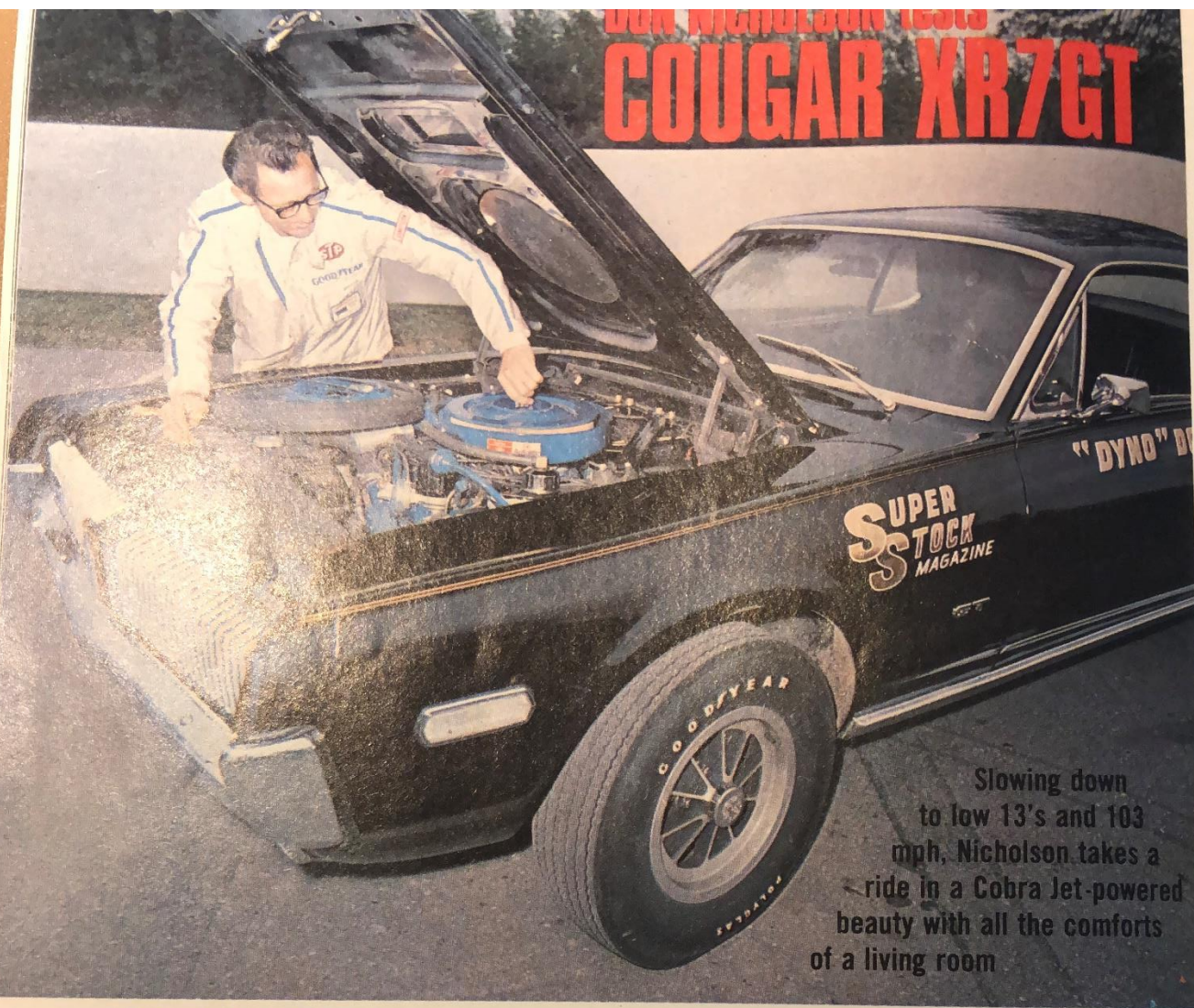
technical
**TUNING THE BIG
BLOCK CHEVY**
STICK TURBO-HYDRO



RIGHT — The Shelby GT 500 uses a 428 and C-6 transmission for good mid-range power and flexibility in tight situations.
BELOW — Dyno Don Nicholson used good driving and good tricks to get a stock Cobra Jet Cougar into the 13's



COUGAR XR7GT

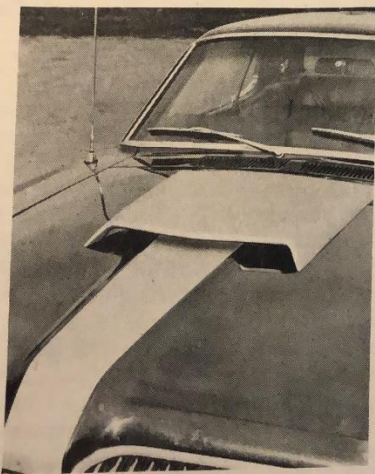


Slowing down to low 13's and 103 mph, Nicholson takes a ride in a Cobra Jet-powered beauty with all the comforts of a living room

DRAG TEST

by Jim McCraw

photography: Leslie Lovett



ABOVE—One of the few outward signs that this cat has big claws is the functional, contrasting hood scoop.

"SAY, DYNO, HOW'D you like to take some time off from driving your funny car to do us a favor?" we asked. "What kind of favor did you have in mind?" he asked. "Well, we'd like you to drag test a street Cougar for us," we said. "Okay," he said, "sounds like it might be fun." And thus began another chapter in the driving career of Dyno Don Nicholson.

What we had in mind at the time was a loaded XR-7 Cougar, replete with the new Cobra Jet engine option, to see what a luxury supercar could do at the drags. As it turned out, the car, the drag strip (Milan Dragway), and the driver (Dyno Don) would all be in the same neighborhood at the same time, so we put them all together.

The test car (full name Cougar XR-7 GT Cobra Jet) was really decked out. Aside from the space age cockpit styling, with its overhead control panel, walnut dash with toggle switches, and a close

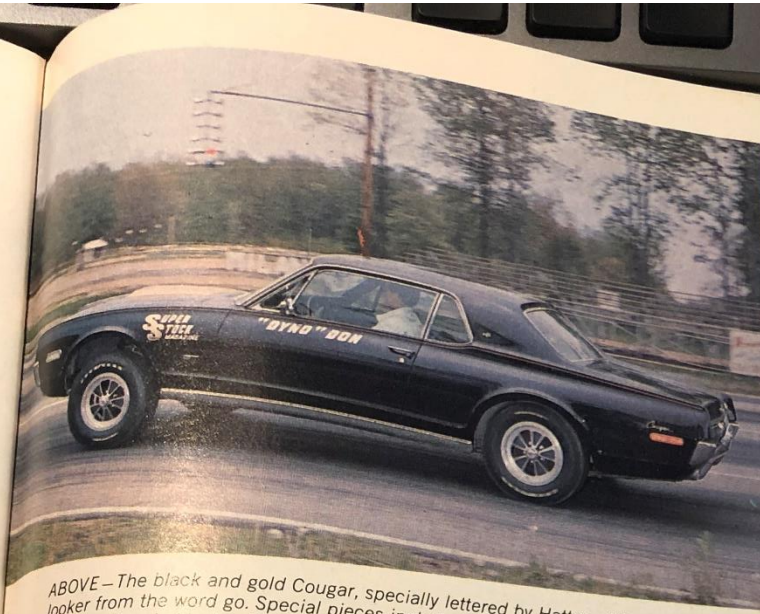
imitation of leather upholstery, it carried power disc brakes, power steering, push-button radio with rear speaker, and heavy duty suspension components (coils front, leaf springs rear). The tires on this car were Goodyear F70-14 Polyglas fiberglass belted tires, wrapped around four Cragar GT mags. The custom gold-leaf lettering was executed by Detroit's Paul Hatton, the same man who did the psychedelic striping on Nicholson's Cougar funny car.

Under the functionally scooped hood was the 335 (?) horsepower 428 Cobra Jet engine, running 10.5:1 compression, a single Holley 735 cfm carb with the trick air cleaner that goes for itself, and a strong hydraulic cam with 1.73:1 rocker arms. The transmission used was the consistomatic Ford C-6 snapshifter, driving through limited-slip 3.9 gears.

To sum the Cougar XR-7 up in a word or two isn't hard at all. There are plenty of reliable adjectives, such as sexy, sleek,

SUPER STOCK MAGAZINE





ABOVE—The black and gold Cougar, specially lettered by Hatton of Detroit, was a looker from the word go. Special pieces included Cragar GT mag wheels, Goodyear Polyglas tires in blackwall, and the complete CJ engine package. Don's tricks made it fly.

lithic, brutal, smooth, slick, and on and on, but we prefer "sexy" above all the rest. The sight of it, in black and gold, does things to you. You start thinking how neat it would be to pull up in front of a posh Manhattan club with your Cat and have the car-parker do a short wheelie with it on the way to the garage. The dash brings on dreams of Wendover, Utah, and Land Speed Records; as you accelerate to 600 mph, you check all the instruments, speaking to your crew by radio. Fade to black and cut to a wide overhead shot of the black banshee on the ocean highway, on the way to JR's in Malibu; fade to black. . .

"You turn off here onto 23 South," said Dyno, snapping us out of a dream/commercial we were hoping to finish before we got to the strip. We and he were on our way to Milan to wring the Cougar out. It had already been decided to test it the way it was, since earlier CJ ma-

chines had done so well in stock shape, and because the weather was something less than ideal for mechanical goings-on. If we could get off a dozen runs before it rained, we'd be happy.

While we set about the task of getting the clocks set up and accurized, Don Nicholson spun the Autolite BF 32 plugs out and replaced them, which wasn't the easiest job in the cramped engine compartment, especially when you're used to completely open engine rooms, as Don is. Don strapped in for his first ride, staged up, and brought back an uninspiring 14.08 et at 100.66 mph. It was obvious to all who watched that first gear had gone up in smoke.

Don told us he'd left the shift lever in D, torqued against the brakes to 1000 rpm, and stood on it almost immediately, which hadn't worked too well. He then backed the car well behind the line and burned out half a dozen times to heat

the Polyglas tires a tad. This tactic was worth about a tenth, as Don cranked out a 13.96-102.04. After two more 13.96 et's, at 101.80 and 100.44, we began to think we'd already hit bottom.

Dyno jumped out for a quick consultation, saying he thought the car was too light in the rear to really bite on the slick, damp track. A few minutes, a floor jack, and a toolbox later, the car weighed 3750 lb., 150 lb. over its empty weight. Don immediately tried coming out on the floorboard, but could only muster a 13.92-100.55. (Did we say *only*? Time was when 14.4 at 95 was sensational).

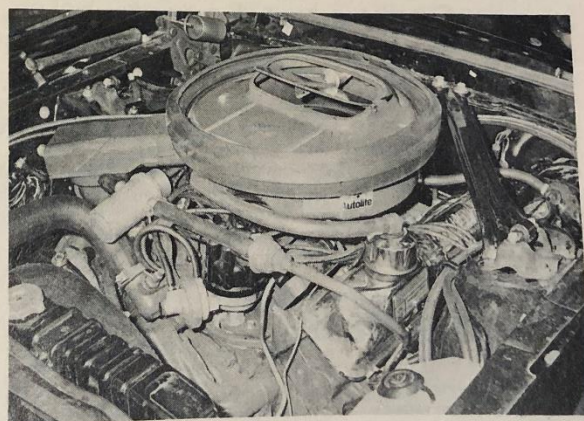
The track was beginning to warm up now, and the tires were finding traction far out in first gear. Dyno tried a run with manual shifting, moving the selector at 5400, getting the shift at about 5600. It was better, with a 13.87 at 101.46. At this point, Nicholson removed the weight, since he thought it more of a penalty than a help, now that the tires were grabbing the pavement.

Constant improvement is the name of the game, and the Cougar didn't stop at 13.87. The next pass down the quarter showed 13.81 on the new-style Chrondek readouts, at a speed of 101.91. And Dyno Don had still another idea (without new ideas, you don't last long in Nicholson's business). He wanted to put some timing in the distributor, so, without a timing with a hammer, a little at a time, and said "That looks like about 4 degrees."

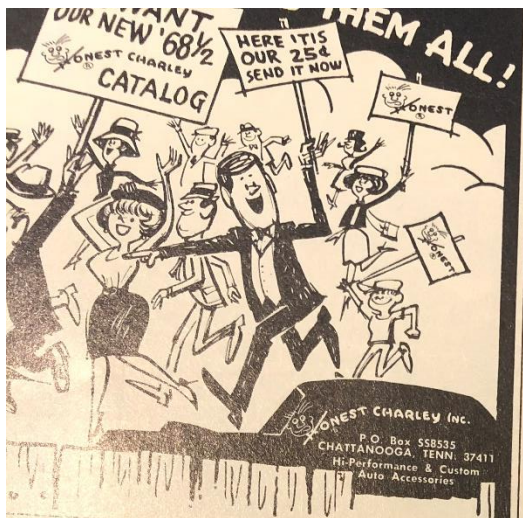
Whether it was four degrees or not, we'll never know, but the car did react. With hot tires and a new advance curve, it went 13.78 at 102.15 mph, the best speed of the day. Don admitted afterwards that the car hadn't been reacting to banzai starting tactics, and he'd just let it amble out of the gate on the run. Another new trick to try next time.

We reassembled the crew in the tower to read the clocks, and Dyno jumped into the Cougar. But, instead of pulling to the line, he whipped the car into an extremely tight turn in the staging area and held the wheel to the lock, going around and around, body arched over,

Continued on page 72



LEFT—Dyno Don jumped into his firesuit and helmet and then into the Cougar's posh driver's seat to get it on. Round dial faces, complete instrumentation, and fine vinyl upholstery make a luxurious surrounding for any kind of driving. Dyno dug the car.



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COUGAR XR7GT

tires squealing. Once he was set up, he didn't have to move the wheel at all. Then the Cougar slowed, and Nicholson went into the same maneuver in the opposite direction. When he pulled to the line, he was asked about it, said "If the tires aren't softened up now, they never will be." The Goodyears had gotten the heat treatment, and never once showed signs of rolling under the rim in the tight turn.

Well, of course, it worked. In the biggest jump of the day thus far, the Mercury lumbered out of the hole and was off like a shot to an et of 13.67 at a speed of 101.58. Don came right back, ran again to a 13.65-101.91.

"With the traction as good as it is now," he told us "I should be able to put it down all the way from now on." And so, he did, all the way down from a 1200 rpm line speed, letting the car make its own shifts. The time on the run was 13.42 with a speed of 101.12. After three consecutive runs in the 13.4 range, the dyno man let one more secret happen. He popped the hood and removed the top half of the air box, the half that has the valve in it. He said later that it should have been removed right at the start, but he wanted to see what could be done with the engine intact. Without the box, the 428 got all kinds of cool moist air and went 13.23 at 103.39 mph.

After repeated efforts to lower elapsed times just a little more, it was found that the Cougar, the way it was set up, was not for getting out of the 13.2 bracket. But the car had already dropped et's by .8 seconds in the hands of Dyno Don Nicholson, who hadn't even used a wrench on the car (a hammer, yes, but no wrenches). When a car is this sensitive to slight modifications, it's got to be a winner.

GO-GO

GOOD YEAR

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