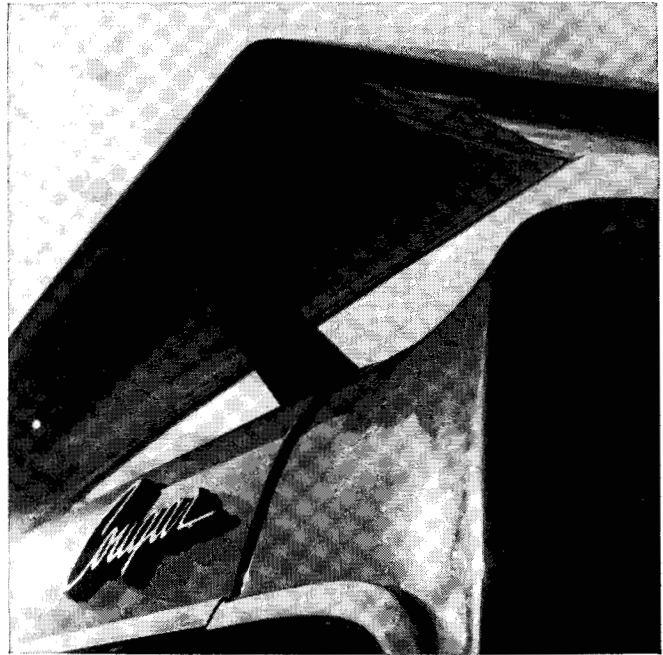


**Taken individually,  
the Cougar and the  
Boss 302 are excellent.**



**T**HE VILLAIN in this story is plural. The product planners, the dealers, even you and me, have something to answer for in this report on the Cougar 302 Eliminator.

Every car and component from Ford Motor Co. comes from the same place, Ford Motor Co. There are no divisional engines in the GM manner. There is *the* 302, or 351, or 429.

But Ford and Lincoln-Mercury are different, deliberately so. They are supposed to appeal to separate segments of the market. Ford dealers have the Thunderbird, Lincoln-Mercury dealers the Mark III.

But once the dealers have their little territories staked out, they begin to poach. The thought that the competing dealer has something they don't have keeps them awake at night. Buick had Riviera, so Olds had to have Toronado, so Pontiac couldn't live without a distinct Grand Prix, and Chevrolet needed Monte Carlo.

And Ford had the Boss 302 Mustang. The Cougar is supposed to be a fancier Ponycar. It is more ornate, and heavier, but nothing would do for Lincoln-Mercury but an equivalent performance car.

It's called the Cougar 302 Eliminator.

The test car wasn't even a routine Cougar 302 Eliminator. It was built for Lincoln-Mercury's performance day. Representatives from all the nut books were going to drive it, so it was equipped for the dragstrip, with a Super Drag Pak, which is a 4.30:1 rear axle ratio, a Detroit Locker differential and an engine oil cooler.

As part of the regular Cougar 302 Eliminator package (could we call it the plain ol' Eliminator from here on out?) the car had the Boss 302 engine, a four-speed manual transmission, and the competition suspension. Then there was the power-assisted steering, the boosted brakes with front discs, F70-14 tires and an assortment of options you'll find in the data panel.

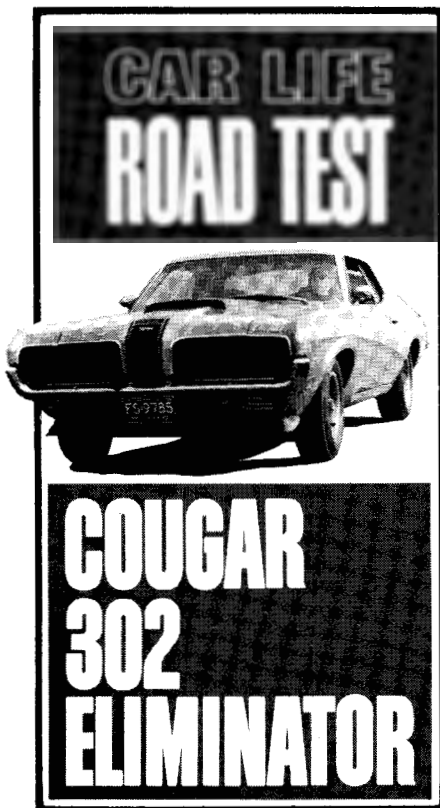
The Cougar rigged for that racing look is, um, well, striking. There's a front spoiler which probably works, a rear wing which probably doesn't and a hood scoop that is a guaranteed, certified decoration.

The separate parts are fine. The Boss 302 is the closest Trans-Am engine on the street, now that all the others have gone to increased displacements destroyed only for competition.

It is a good engine. There is power from idle on up to the 6000-rpm red-line imposed by the ignition limiter. It doesn't balk or stumble, and it was easier to drive in traffic than the Ram Air 400 GTO tested on page 28.

The engine has a high power-to-size ratio. The ports, both intake and exhaust, are larger than in the docile 302 (Ford has two of everything) and the head bolts are the big ones borrowed from the Cleveland 351. The crankshaft is forged with cross-drilling at the main journals for better oiling and three of the two-bolt mains are shucked off and replaced with sturdier four-bolt mains to glue the bottom end together more solidly. The forged extra-strong pistons have that volcano shaped dome that ups the compression ratio to 10.6:1. The high winding cam has a 0.500 in. lobe lift—both intake and exhaust.

What hurt us in traffic wasn't the engine. It was the 4.30 gearset. It set up more clatter than a Bahamas steel drum band. The mechanical lifters and dual exhaust joined in so you had a heck of a symphony of sound. A first gear cruise at 30 mph made more noise than you could get by tossing an oil



# COUGAR

continued

but readers of the owner's manual will learn that straight up is off, with the interval selection to the left and just plain wiping to the right.

That's a funny way to do it, but once the secret is known, the interval wipers are an answer to a driver's prayer. You don't know how good they are until you get into another car and return to the on—off—curse—on—off routine. The interval wipers aren't new, true. It just took this long for us to discover how to use them.

The emissions controls bring back a forgotten control: The choke. The engine is highly tuned, and it evidently has trouble getting through the cold-start test with an automatic choke. So you do it. We liked it. Sort of like discovering the principle of the sun dial, or a wind-up record player.

The family trait holds up on brak-

ing, which was very good. The pedal was easy to control, and the stopping distances were short. The first test went farther than expected, because of rear wheel hop, caused by a shock absorber that had been given a banzai start once too often, but when we had the fault worked out, and compensated for, the distance was less on the last stop than many test cars do on the first.

Prospective buyers may want to know that the regular warranty doesn't extend to the 302 Eliminator. The 90-day adjustment period, during which the dealer is supposed to fix everything you can think of, is provided. So is the regular 12-month warranty for drive line, etc. But the extended five year/50,000 miles given to ordinary cars if the buyer wants to pay for it, can't be had with the hot 302. Probably because of what the buyer will do with the car, not because of weakness, but it's worth knowing about.

The Cougar Eliminator's weight penalty, compared to the Boss 302 Mustang, kept it from realizing the potential of Ford's high-winding mill. But the Cougar is still a far cry from being a cowardly lion.

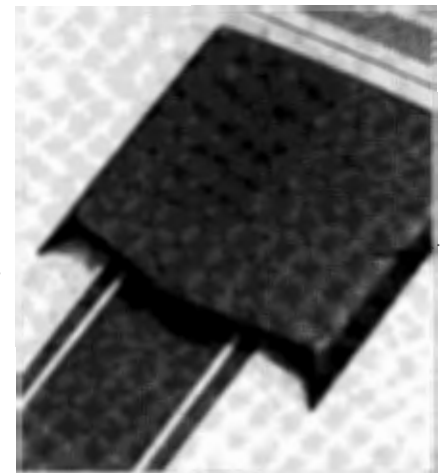
Like the GTOs we tested, the Cougar has grown too big and plush to be able to roll up its sleeves and scrap with the new, young tough stuff. It should abandon the competition field to the young lions. (Sure, you could order the monster mill 429 but all you will get is more weight than ever and enough tire spinning to have you on the wheel rims.)

We would recommend the 351. It's not that we don't like the Boss 302. We love the Boss 302. But not every car should have one. Better order the 351. The Cougar Eliminator. Leave off the last part of the name and think of it as a family car with guts and you'll be happy with it. ■

**FLAT CORNERING** and good control at the limit allow driving in a spirited manner. The competition suspension option gets the credit.



**SCOOP** isn't. It's a piece of fiberglass bolted to an air-tight hood, for looks.



**FRONT spoiler** probably does help keep the front from lifting at speed.



**STYLING** in this league is a success if the car gets looked at. With its shovels, wings, scoops, stripes, letters, etc., the Cougar did.



**SPINDLY** rear anti-roll bar, arrow, reduces the car's basic understeer to manageable proportions. A good buy.



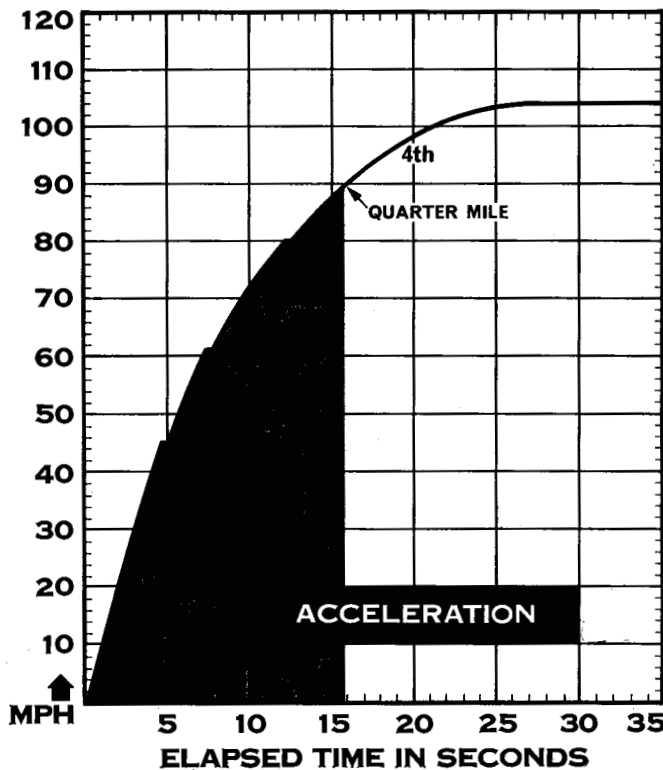
**EVEN WITH** collapsible spare tire, the trunk is not for those who travel in the style that requires luggage.

tory from selling what the buyers want. The controls, like switches, etc., are obviously from FoMoCo. You can't find them. The knobs are all tucked away at the lower edge of the dashboard, where a conscientious wearer of shoulder harness can't get at them. And even if you take your eyes off the

road to juggle the heater controls, you can't read the label because it's at such an angle. Even the ventilation system is hidden. There are vents for the footwells, but they have been concealed by the sculpture at the sides of the interior in front of the doors. Presumably that

area is sculptured to hide the knobs. But they do work, when deciphered. Experience finally paid off inside a Ford Co. product. The last time a test car had the intermittent windshield wiper, one tester found himself stranded along the road, trying to guess how to turn the thing off. It isn't marked,

## CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



### CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test weight)	13.9
Mph/1000 rpm (high gear)	17.3
Engine revs/mile (60 mph)	3470
Piston travel, ft./mile	1735
CAR LIFE wear index	60.2

### PERFORMANCE

Top speed (6000), mph	104
Test shift points (rpm) mph	
0-50 mph	6.0
3rd to 4th (6000)	8.0
2nd to 3rd (6000)	6.1
1st to 2nd (6000)	4.5

### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

Indicated	Actual
30 mph	25
40 mph	35
50 mph	44
60 mph	54
70 mph	64
80 mph	74
90 mph	84

### MAINTENANCE

Engine oil, miles/days... 6000/180  
 oil filter, miles/days... 6000/180  
 Chassis lubrication, miles... 36000  
 Antismog servicing: Clean up PCV valve/6,000; tune up/12,000.  
 Warranty period; adjustment period, 90 days. Running gear, 12 months. (See text.)  
 Spark plugs: Autolite AF-32.  
 gap, in... 0.034  
 Basic timing, deg./rpm... 6 BTC/800  
 max. cent. adv., deg./rpm... 11/2950  
 max. vac. adv., deg./in. Hg... 11/20  
 Ignition point gap, in... 0.017  
 cam dwell angle, deg... 28  
 arm tension, oz... N.A.  
 Tappet clearance, int./exh... 0.020/0.020  
 Fuel pressure at idle, psi... 5  
 Radiator cap relief press., psi... 14

### ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec	3.0
0-40 mph	4.3
0-50 mph	6.0
0-60 mph	7.6
0-70 mph	9.9
0-80 mph	12.5
0-90 mph	15.8
0-100 mph	21.1
Standing 1/4-mile, sec	15.8
speed at end, mph	90
Passing, 30-70 mph, sec	6.9

### BRAKING

Max. deceleration rate and stopping distance from 80 mph	
ft./sec./sec	29
distance, ft.	324
Rate and distance after eight 1/2-G stops from 80 mph	
rate, ft./sec./sec	27
distance, ft.	266
Control loss?	none
Overall brake performance	good

### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal cond., mpg	10.6
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