

## CAR LIFE ROAD TEST



# FORD FAIRLANE 500

*Pity the Belabored Fairlane,  
Starter of Trends and  
Standard for the Industry*

**T**HE PATH BLAZED by the Ford Motor Co. Fairlane has been almost as checkered as it has been brief. When it first appeared, it was a cheap, full-size Ford series. It then reappeared following the economizing trauma as a second-generation compact which was then called an "intermediate." In this state, it progressed slight-





ly to become, in 1964, a respectable if somewhat uninspiring piece of automotive transportation. It was a taut, well-mannered example of what should have been the automotive norm, and if it was not particularly chic it was, at least, easy to gaze upon.

Now for 1965 there is a new image. And while the change is primarily that—in image—it has been extensive enough to call for a re-evaluation of the car. Since it had been some time since CL had sampled the Fairlane anyway, we arranged to put the newest Sports Coupe through its paces.

Little inside the Fairlane will be unfamiliar to those who have grown accustomed to the car. The body shell, in fact, is unchanged though exterior sheet metal has undergone a substantial metamorphosis. Nor have those niggling little nuisances been changed, those unavoidable little out-of-context touches which seem so ill-suited to the Fairlane's overall pleasantness.

The car seems bulked-out, slab-sided and squared-off as it is, and this in turn has subtracted slightly from that prior pleasantness. Leastwise, that lean and lithe look of years past is gone. In so doing, however, it is placed in more obvious juxtaposition with its Chevelle-like competitors, against which it must carve its niche in the marketplace. Intermediates they are called, but standard size they are from the historic standpoint, and they comprise perhaps the most viciously fought sector in the dealers' guerrilla warfare.

The ironic thing about this is that Fairlane started it all. It was the appearance of the Fairlane which crystallized that "intermediate" measure in the market. Competitors from across town then rather rapidly introduced the A-body quadruplets and, with that bit more of bulk and polish that is invariably a GM trademark, proceeded to steal the play right away from the innovator. Then, of course, home-

grown insult was added to injury last year, when Ford brought out the Mustang, a whack from the rear that demanded something refreshing for the '65 round if our groggy gladiator was to continue the good fight.

The Fairlane comes highly recommended; an imposing list of credits must be coupled to its name. It launched the "Fairlane 260" engine (which grew to become the ubiquitous 289) while it was still a stripling in 221 cu. in. pants. It transfused, from the Continental to popular-priced cars, the drag strut front suspension design and since has been sincerely flattered at finding it imitated by GM. And, perhaps most notable, it reached a high state of the unitized body construction art with a structure of great strength and framelike sheet metal sills, connected via torque boxes to an independent front framework. Worthy contributions, then, also are Fairlane's legacy.

Nothing much has changed there. The fancy footwork devised to fend off its formidable challengers is instead to meet or beat them in appearance, in mannerisms, and in stealth. The redone styling is the obvious approach to the appearance problem, but it goes deeper than bends and folds in sheet metal. Ford is consciously making an effort to upgrade the finish of all its cars, trying to make bright metal trim pieces and upholstery patterns blend together as they should (and as GM has demonstrated that it should be done).

Mannerisms are determined largely in the suspension design, and since softness sells, Fairlane has been softened. This has not been a fatal alteration, but it is there in feelable quantity and quality. Front spring rates at the wheel have dropped to 75 lb./in., from last year's 89, and rear ride rates are 95, compared with the prior 117. In combination with the visual refer-

ence points of hood and fenders, such softening gives a Dipsey Doodle quality to the ride, somewhat similar to that experienced by youngsters on the flying elephant ride in a carnival's midway. It is, in a word, lurchy.

It is in the area of stealth (call it quietness or silence) where Ford engineers have lavished some extensive attention. This is primarily in muffling out road-harshness-induced drum and throb carried through the sheet metal, a particularly vexing situation with unitized construction. A total of 88 lb. of sound deadening blankets, pads, sprays and elixirs has been applied to the Fairlane structure to do the job, and the result is effective. There is a higher level of quietness about the car than before, which should in turn raise the level of demonstration-ride acceptance.

More stealth and quiet was assured for our test hardtop Sports Coupe since, as a vehicle approached as a "standard" for the industry, it came with the middle engine—a 289-cu. in. V-8 with 2-barrel carburetor and a 200-bhp rating. For a 3500 lb. test weight vehicle, this is really only average, and its performance was just that. The engine was forced to gasp for breath before the 4400 rpm power peak could be reached, but for non-storming operation, the combination of 2400 rpm torque peak and the excellent 3-speed automatic with its 2.02:1 torque multiplication cancelled out any lack-of-power problems.

Other engines are available in the Fairlane, though not quite to the former extent. For more steam, there's a 4-barrel version of the 289 with 10:1 compression that delivers 25 additional (rated) bhp. And there is the re-engineered 200-cu. in. Six, resplendent with 7-main bearing lower end, rated at 120 bhp with single-barrel downdraft carburetor and 9.2:1 compression. In the past, the now-discontinued 260-cu. in. ▶





ENGINE WITH 2-barrel carburetion imparts average performance to the Fairlane but 3-speed automatic transmission makes best use of power available.

# FORD FAIRLANE 500

V-8 and the 289 HP, with its solid-lifter 271 bhp, could be ordered. There was also the 427/Thunderbolt, but that's another story entirely. Truly, Mustang has stolen most of the thunder.

It would seem that, in self-defense against the proliferation of overpowered and overbearing cars in the GTO idiom, Fairlane will have to go the big bore route. This presumably would mean stuffing the 390-cu. in. Thunderbird engine, an overweight hunk of

iron though it may be, under the hood—and suffering all the additional unpleasantness that these other hybrid street/racers exhibit. Should Ford choose to go this route, however, its engineers may be able—hopefully—to solve the weight bias problem with as much alacrity as they demonstrated with the flexing perimeter frame puzzle on the big Fords and Mercurys.

One of those pestilential things plaguing the Fairlane (and us) is the untidy underdash area, specifically that

part which should be called the heater sprawl. This appliance hangs down into the passenger's foot space, creating not only a substantial encroachment, but a bothersome eyesore. Since it was poorly adaptable as a footrest, it served as an outlet for pent-up aggressions; it just had to be kicked every time one got into the car, merely because it was there.

Of course, aided by all that sound deadening material, the heater does a magnificent job of what it is intended to do. But, on the other hand, effective heaters are something of a pinnacle in domestic automotive design. It still would seem that, when and if Fairlane ever gets a new underbody, the cowl chamber and saddle vent arrangement for the front ventilation and heating system would be about the most welcome addition.

An improvement can be recorded for the power steering arrangement, with its new Galaxie-type fully immersed hydraulic pump. This feeds the former linkage boosted gearbox, which now has 16:1 gears for a 20:1 overall ratio and 3.5 turns between locks. In conjunction with the thicker-rimmed 16-in. steering wheel, there is a greater quickness (both psychological and actual) to the action.

Brakes were not overly sensitive on the test car and slightly above average in application. Decelerometer readings were 22 ft./sec./sec. for both stops from 80 mph, with only a slight tendency to grab at the right rear on the second try and no significant fade on either. A mite of this increased effectiveness may well result from the fatter tires. These were good gripping Good-years in the optional 7.35-14 size from the station wagons. Standard for the V-8 sedans and hardtops is 6.95-14. The larger low profiles, it might be noted, kept the car on the safer side

RESTYLED REAR has almost square taillights and an increased capacity in the luggage compartment. Central fuel filler continues.



HIGH LIP does little to ease baggage loading while forward location would hide spare with load.





when a full 4-passenger load was aboard. As for the brakes themselves, there has been no change from the 10 in. (by 1.75 in.) drums of previous years or the 251 sq. in. of swept area.

Even those who contend the Fairlane too closely resembles last year's Plymouth will have to admit the re-styled rump means more stowage space. Usable area inside the trunk increases 2.4 cu. ft. to 15. And for all the larger look, the greatest increase in dimensions actually is in width between door handles—an increase of 1.6 in. to 73.8 in. overall. Wheelbase, as is well

known, has increased 0.5 in. to 116 by repositioning the rear axle on its springs, a move inspired as much by marketers' dictates as by a potential racing classification.

If Fairlane sedans and hardtops are a norm of sorts, the wagon should certainly be. Here is a wagon of such moderate overall dimensions as to be manageable and maneuverable, but with interior capacity (91.9 cu. ft.) approaching the excessive.

There is much to recommend the Fairlane to the American public, in view of the fact that those changes which

disturb the enthusiast are the very ones adding general appeal to the car. Whereas we would like to see the heavy-duty suspension, with higher spring rates and stiffer shock absorbers, as the standard equipment—and the present standard suspension as the extra cost option—we must admit this would be out of step with the mass market. Yet, in the case of the Fairlane, this has been such an automotive norm to us that a tentative step backward is all the more disappointing. It could have done without that extra dash of blandness. ■

## CAR LIFE ROAD TEST

### 1965 FORD FAIRLANE 500 Sports Coupe

#### SPECIFICATIONS

List price.....	\$2538
Price, as tested.....	3283
Curb weight, lb.....	3290
Test weight.....	3620
distribution, %.....	56/44
Tire size.....	7.35-14
Tire capacity, lb. @ 24 psi.....	4080
Brake swept area.....	251.3
Engine type.....	V-8, ohv
Bore & stroke.....	4.00 x 2.87
Displacement, cu. in.....	289
Compression ratio.....	9.3
Carburetion.....	1 x 2
Bhp @ rpm.....	200 @ 4400
equivalent mph.....	111
Torque, lb.-ft.....	282 @ 2400
equivalent mph.....	60.5

#### EXTRA-COST OPTIONS

200-bhp V-8, auto. trans., power brakes, power steering, radio, wsw tires, padded dash, vinyl top, wire wheel covers, tinted windshield, w.s. washers, courtesy lights.

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in.....	116.0
Tread, f & r.....	57/56
Overall length, in.....	198.8
width.....	73.8
height.....	54.9
equivalent vol., cu. ft.....	467
Frontal area, sq. ft.....	22.5
Ground clearance, in.....	5.4
Steering ratio, o/a.....	20.0
turns, lock to lock.....	3.5
turning circle, ft.....	40.2
Hip room, front.....	2 x 21.5
Hip room, rear.....	57.9
Pedal to seat back, max.....	43.5
Floor to ground.....	11.3
Luggage vol., cu. ft.....	n.a.
Fuel tank capacity, gal.....	16

#### GEAR RATIOS

3rd (1.00) overall.....	3.00
2nd (1.46).....	4.38
1st (2.46).....	7.38
1st (2.46 x 2.02).....	14.8



#### CALCULATED DATA

Lb./bhp (test wt).....	18.1
Cu. ft./ton mile.....	110
Mph/1000 rpm.....	25.2
Engine revs/mile.....	2380
Piston travel, ft./mile.....	1140
Car Life wear Index.....	27.1

#### PERFORMANCE

Top speed (3800), mph.....	96
Shifts, @ mph (auto., forced)	
3rd ( ).....	
2nd (4050).....	70
1st (4000).....	41
Total drag at 60 mph, lb.....	162

#### SPEEDOMETER ERROR

30 mph, actual.....	29.8
60 mph.....	58.4
90 mph.....	86.5

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

Normal range, mpg.....	15-18
------------------------	-------

#### ACCELERATION

0-30 mph, sec.....	4.2
0-40.....	6.2
0-50.....	8.6
0-60.....	11.9
0-70.....	15.9
0-80.....	22.3
0-100.....	31.4
Standing 1/4 mile, sec.....	17.8
speed at end, mph.....	73

