

By Jerry Heasley

"To me, the Eliminator was to the Cougar what the Mach 1 package was to the Mustang."

Rick Parker, owner of Signature Auto Classics in Columbus, Ohio, has a good point. Both pony cars are Fords. Both the Mach 1 and the Eliminator came out in the '69 model year. Both were hot performance packages showcased with a unique name.

The Mach 1 and Eliminator shared many of the performance features that were the rage in 1969. Both came with hood-lock pins, reflective side stripes with the car's logo, fancy instrumentation inside, high-backed bucket seats, hood scoop, and handling upgrades with heavier-duty shocks and springs, and a larger-diameter front stabilizer bar.

The Cougar was a more expensive version of a Ford pony car, so when Mercury made a muscle version, the extra money went into performance items. Every Eliminator, for exam-

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A One-of-Five '69 Cougar Eliminator



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ple, came with a rear wing spoiler. This popular extra was optional on the Mach 1, but standard on the more-expensive Boss 302 in the Ford lineup. Thus, the Eliminator fit its own unique niche—more radical than a Mach 1, but not really a match to the Boss 302 Mustang.

Oddly enough, Mercury did insert the Boss 302 engine into the Eliminator lineup, even though the short run of Boss 302 Mustangs had homologated the special big-valve small-block for Trans-Am racing. With the Eliminator graphics and optional Boss 302, the Mercury looked ready for the Trans-Am racing series.

The name Eliminator, however, did not fit the road-racing theme. The name spells performance in the language of the drag strip. So the engine that fit the eliminator theme best in a '69 or '70 Eliminator was the 335-horsepower 428 Cobra Jet, seen here with the optional ram-air system. The base engine available in an Eliminator was the four-barrel 351 with 290 horsepower. Mercury would not allow the base Cougar engine—the two-barrel 351—in its Eliminator. The 390-4V, a 320-horsepower big-block, was another Eliminator option worthy of dragstrip duty and the car's name.

Cougars often get a bad rap for the fact that their original owners ordered luxury items, even in musclecar trim. According to information supplied by Rick Parker, there were 510 Cobra Jet Cougars built for 1969. Of the 2,250 Eliminators built in 1969, 243 were Cobra Jets. Of these 243, 162 were automatics, leaving 81 as four-speeds. That's a 2-to-1 ratio of automatic to manual. However, automatics are usually faster-shifting on the strip and more dependable to run the same e.t. from one run to the next. This Eliminator is one

of the automatics. However, a mere five of the automatics came with air conditioning, this car being one of those rare, cool cats. Rick found this Eliminator in Georgia. Maybe this hot southern locale explains the cold factory air.

Rick garaged the Bright Blue Metallic Eliminator, which was "just a nice looking car, not rusted, complete, but needing a restoration," in his Signature Auto Classics building, a mile or so from the airport in Columbus, Ohio. One day Mike Stickney walked through the doors and was smitten with the rare and exotic Mercury musclecar.

Growing up in Columbus in the musclecar era, Mike hung out with Rick and Steve Germain. Their dad owned Germain Lincoln-Mercury on East Main Street. Mike spent many of his high school days at the Germain Lincoln-Mercury dealership. There, he developed a passion for Cougars more than Mustangs, especially muscle-bound Cougars like the winged Eliminator.

Signature sold the air-conditioned Cool Cat Cobra Jet to Mike and, at the same time, came up with a game plan for a restoration. Rick said, "We did all the work on the car to make it gorgeous."

We opened the hood to look over the engine compartment—concours right down to the Thermactor smog system with the readily visible silver canister. I couldn't help wondering out loud why Mercury hadn't gone with the rocking and rolling shaker hood for ram air. Instead, it went with a more sedate and conventional ram-air system that was the same one used on the '68-1/2 Cobra Jet Mustangs. In this system, the hood scoop shields a hole cut out in the hood for ram air. This opening rams fresh air to the top of the engine. A flapper

The Eliminator came with a fiberglass, matte-black front spoiler that the dealership installed before delivery. Owner Mike Stickney prefers to leave this very small spoiler off for driving use, as it is easy to scrape, especially coming on and off trailers.



COOL CAT COBRA JET

assembly opens with a drop in engine vacuum to allow fresh air into the engine when the throttle is floored.

When I quizzed Rick on why Mercury didn't option the shaker on the '69 Eliminator, Rick answered in a cautious tone, "I don't know how that would have looked on the Cougar."

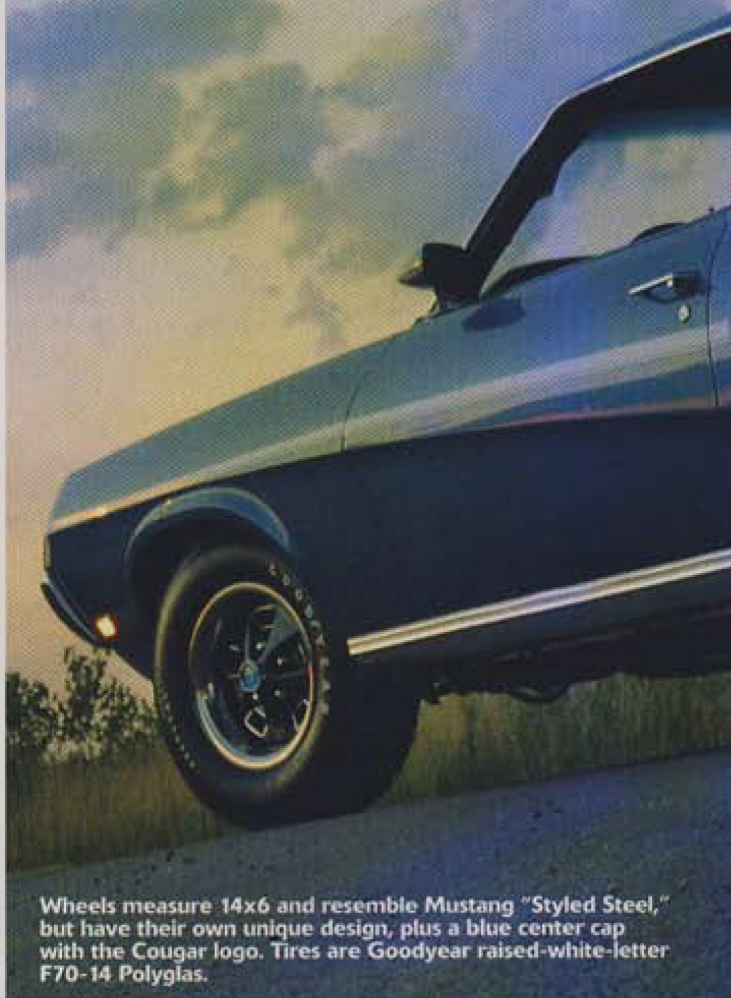
Even in musclecar Eliminator garb, with extras like front and rear spoilers, and raised-white-letter Goodyear Polyglas tires, would the shaker have been out of place? Would Cougar buyers have accepted it?

I'm positive the shaker would have helped the performance looks and image of the Eliminator. Collectors today, I am positive, would "kill" to have one. We'll never know the answer to this question, but it's a good one to contemplate because the Eliminator, like other Mercury muscle sub-models, never sold in high numbers. Meanwhile, the Mach 1 became so popular that it was the reason for the demise of the Mustang GT, the most popular Mustang performance model from '65-1/2 through '68. Prior to the Eliminator, Mercury had the Cougar GT and GT-E. The GT returned for '71; the Eliminator did not. It was gone, and within a couple years, the classic musclecar era was up in smoke, too. **MCR**



Hood scoops were painted body color on the '69 Eliminator, but were a contrasting matte black on the '70 model. They were not functional except with the ram air 428 CJ. Also, note that the Eliminator came with one racing mirror, remotely operated, on the driver's side. There was no side mirror on the passenger side.

Though Ford made the rear spoiler optional on the Mach 1 Mustang, it was standard equipment on Cougar Eliminators.



Wheels measure 14x6 and resemble Mustang "Styled Steel," but have their own unique design, plus a blue center cap with the Cougar logo. Tires are Goodyear raised-white-letter F70-14 Polyglas.

AT A GLANCE

1969 MERCURY COUGAR ELIMINATOR

Owned by: Mike Stickney, Columbus, OH

Restored by: Signature Auto Classics, Columbus, OH

Engine: 428 Cobra Jet ram air, 335 horsepower

Transmission: C6 automatic

Rearend: Ford 9-inch with 3.00:1 gears and Traction-Lok

Interior: High-backed blue bucket seats, black crackle finish dash with round gauges

Wheels: 14x6 front and rear

Tires: F70-14 raised-white-letter Goodyear Polyglas

Special Parts: Cougar Eliminator reflective side stripes, functional hood scoop for ram air, rear wing spoiler, matte black front fiberglass air dam.





HOT COLORS FOR '69 AND '70 ELIMINATORS

Mercury specified four hot colors for its Eliminator in 1969. The customer had to order Competition Orange, Bright Blue Metallic, Yellow or White. The factory would become even stricter in 1970, when every color except for showy Pastel Blue was named "Competition": Competition Blue, Competition Gold, Competition Green, Competition Orange and Competition Yellow.

The Eliminator was equipped with a muscled-up interior. Bucket seats are called "Hi-back" in Mercury vernacular, utilizing "Comfort-Weave" material, same as those of the Mustang Mach 1. Whereas regular Cougars came with a wood-grain dash appliqué, the Eliminator had a "black crackle" finish to the dashboard. Other Eliminator muscle features included the 6,000-rpm tachometer (or 8,000 rpm with the Boss 302) and other round gauges, rim-blow steering wheel, an elapsed-time clock and a Visual Check Panel with warning lights.

There were several engine options available in the Eliminator, but none of them represents the drag-race nature of the car's name better than the 428 Cobra Jet. Mike's cool Cougar is fitted with the ram-air option.

