

ROD TESTING the "STOCK" CORVETTE

HOT ROD

The Automotive "HOW-TO" Magazine

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JEPF

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EXCLUSIVE!

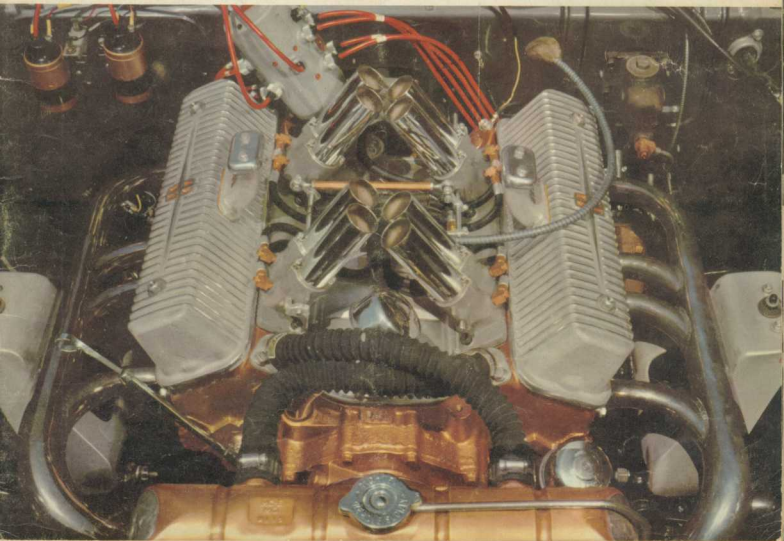
152 MPH

PROTOTYPE

MERCURY

OCTOBER 1956

25c



THE BIGGEST

THE BIG

OF THEM ALL



An engine borrowed from big brother Lincoln plus a few modifications makes this Mercury hardtop a fantastic performer

By Roy Brock

When the Mercury racing team left their Long Beach, California, shop last February for the long trip to Daytona Beach, Florida, and NASCAR's Speedweeks, they took along a strange assortment of parts which were to later make headlines. As we reported in June '56 HRM, beach conditions during the first week of the speed trials were bad and no high speed runs were possible. So Bill Stroppe, head of the Mercury team, and his crew started assembling their parts from home on a 1956 Mercury Custom two-door hardtop which they purchased from the Daytona Beach Lincoln-Mercury dealer.

Since the entry was made by the official factory race team of Mercury, the car was eligible to run in the Prototype class under NASCAR rules. No attempt was made to streamline the car in any way as Stroppe and crew wanted the car to look as much Mercury as possible. The grille was left open, no belly pan was used and no masking tape was used to streamline bumper ends, etc. The only manner in which the car differed from stock in exterior appearance was the Halibrand magnesium wheels which were used for extra strength and also to lend a bit of "speed" to the looks. The Halibrand kit used to fit the Merc will also fit T-Birds and Ford station wagons. It includes new rear axles and

front hubs which have knock-off wing nuts. Heavy duty shocks were added to the car and the rest of the chassis was left unchanged.

The big change was made in the engine compartment where a modified '56 Lincoln engine was installed and hooked to the Merc transmission through a Cook adaptor. The bore was enlarged $\frac{1}{8}$ inch to give a total displacement of 391 cubic inches and compression was raised to approximately ten to one by the extra bore and Forge True pistons. A Herbert roller tappet cam operated the special large valves in ported cast iron heads and the straight methanol fuel was supplied by a Hilborn injector. Lodge spark plugs and a Spalding Flamethrower provided the necessary spark.

After being assembled by Stroppe and his team of mechanics, the engine was broken in on an abandoned airfield near Daytona, then taken down to the beach straightaway where Vern Houle won the flip of the coin making him driver. Vern's first pass down the beach with the wind for the flying mile produced a time of 152.931 and his return speed was 142.012 for an average of 147.269. The time would have been better on the return run except that the glass mat insulation beneath the hood was sucked into the injectors while in the traps and the



Photos by Bob D'Olivo



Taking the green flag for the start of the flying mile at better than 152 mph, the "Thumper" is completely stock appearing.

mixture of alcohol, glass and air didn't burn too well for a few seconds. With a 3.31 rear axle ratio and 7.60x15 Firestone Bonneville type tires, engine speed was close to the 6000 rpm level through the traps. After the Speedweeks regular time trials, another run was made and a one-way speed of 153.649 was turned. No time was recorded for the return run.

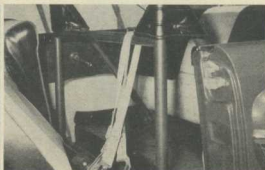
Because of the healthy sound echoing from open headers when the car is underway, it was nicknamed the "Thumper" by the crew. Since Daytona, "Thumper" has been used for showroom display purposes with an occasional exhibition at tracks where the Mercury team is competing. The people around Langhorne, Pennsylvania, still talk about how Billy Meyers demonstrated "Thumper" before a race last April and had so much power that the rear wheels threw dirt completely over the grandstand on the main stretch. If "Thumper" is a preview of things to come in Mercury's new cars, get in line . . . they'll go like hotcakes.



Halibrand magnesium wheels lend the '56 Merc hardtop a look of speed. JT450X was dreamed up to give identification.



Firestone "Bonneville" tires were used on Daytona Beach speed runs. Stock hubs have been replaced with Halibrand hubs.



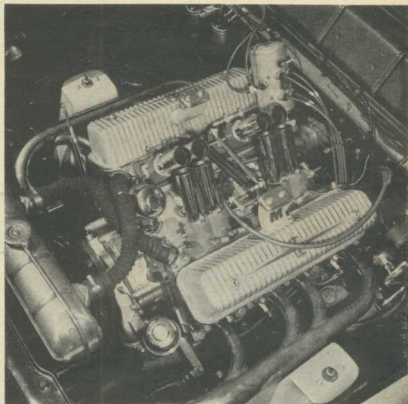
Well braced roll bar is leather padded above door line for improved looks. The shoulder straps hook to aircraft snubber.



Floor mounted Moon fuel controls meter fuel from tank in trunk. Tach and pressure gauge have been added beneath dash.



Bill Stroppe, left, had the original idea for building the prototype Merc. Vern Houle, right, and the rest of Stroppe's crew helped build the engine with Houle getting driver's job at Daytona.



Power is supplied by an enlarged '56 Lincoln engine fitted with ported stock heads, Hilborn injectors, Spalding ignition and straight alcohol. Special headers were made at Kurtis Kraft. Rocker covers are Continental with extra breather vents added.