

# COUGAR XR-7

A new car for the '80s that shares its existence with the T-bird



The Mercury marque has been around only half as long as some of the senior names in the automotive community. In a little over 40 years, there have been millions of Mercurys built, but only a handful were memorable. The original '39 was one. The '48 convertible, another. The '50 coupe, the customizer's dream, was one, as was the '57 Turnpike Cruiser. The '65 Comet factory drag-racing fleet, the 427 Comets that followed, and that first Cougar—the special performance package that was created as a stablemate for the Mustang during the hot years of the supercar wars in 1967—were all not-to-be-forgotten Mercs.

by Jim McCraw

The original Cougar grew larger and heavier right along with the Mustang, and then in 1973, when the Mustang stopped growing, the Cougar was lifted completely out of its category and aimed to run side-by-side with the Thunderbird as Lincoln-Mercury's entry in the personal luxury car market. With the advent of the 1980 model, both were downsized into exactly the same envelope with identical powertrains, suspensions and option lists. The Thunderbird celebrates its 25th birthday wearing the same suit as its 13-year-old cousin, and some of the people at the party are confused. The point to be made here is not how much like the

T-bird the Cougar XR-7 is, but rather how much better the '80 Cougar XR-7 is than the plain old '79 Cougar (formerly, XR-7 was a designation for only the sportiest of several Cougar models; from 1980 on, all will have the XR-7 tacked onto the name).

The '80 XR-7 is built in four levels of trim, including base, Decor, Sport and Luxury, and our test car was equipped with all the elements of the Luxury Group—a \$1987 package that adds 26 items to the car all at once. Seven of these are exterior trim items such as stripes, molding, padding, mirrors and a vinyl roof cap that covers the rear quarter windows with slanted slats. On the inside, the LG content included the electronic instrument cluster, diagnostic



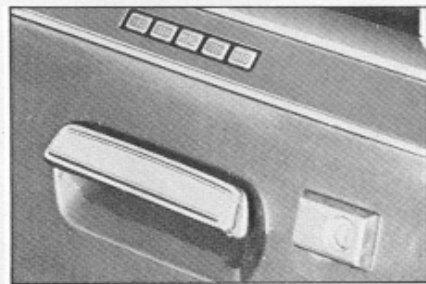
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warning light group, luxury steering wheel, electronic clock, top-line interior and trunk trim-out, and additional lights everywhere, even on the passenger visor vanity mirror. TR-type steel-belted radial tires, cast aluminum wheels, power windows and automatic headlight delay were also included. Mind you, the XR-7 was loaded way beyond the luxury package. Its base price of \$6569 was amplified by \$5304 worth of options, swelling the total cost to a staggering \$11,873. One Cougar, medium rare, smothered in options.

The new vehicle hiding under all these extras is an improved personal luxury car. Some 700 pounds lighter, 15 inches shorter, with larger interior and trunk volumes than the '79, the Cougar XR-7 now has variable-ratio rack-and-pinion steering with standard power assist and built-in near-zero scrub radius geometry. Front and rear suspensions are new to the Cougar, with modified MacPherson struts and stabilizer bar up front and a 4-link coil spring system and a stabilizer bar at the rear. The entire suspension system is isolated from the rest of the car with tuned rubber bushings and inserts to minimize noise, vibration and harshness. The engine and transmission are rubber-isolated as well for maximum performance as a personal luxury car.

In terms of pure function, the Cougar XR-7 steers, rides, turns and handles not at all like the vehicle it replaces. The optional aluminum wheels and TR-type steel-belt radial tires combine with the new steering system to yield a very positive feel on center, quick reaction to wheel inputs, equally quick recovery and very little lean and roll in the body. It's still a front-engine/rear-drive car, though; it's still nose heavy, and it does understeer when pushed around, but not like in the old days. The ride is firm, even without the optional handling suspension or heavy-duty suspension, neither of which is available on a Luxury version, and the car is ineffably quiet inside, even when the road surfaces are ineffably bad outside. Tires and brakes in concert pulled it down from 60 mph in 176 feet and from 30 in 49 feet in testing, with a trace of late lockup and no fade.

The engine in our loaded-up Cougar XR-7 was the optional 302, backed by the optional 4-speed automatic overdrive and the standard 3.08 axle ratio. Even strangled down to 130 horsepower by its 1980 California emissions calibrations, the combination was good enough for consistent 0-50 times of 7.8 seconds, with 0-60 in 11.1 seconds and the standing quarter in 18 seconds flat at a taste over 75 mph. Around town, it felt punchy, and it was, but it ran out of steam past 60 mph. In all, it was very responsive and quiet in normal driving situations. The merits of the overdrive don't show up at all in the EPA city



rating of 17 mpg but did on our mileage loop, where the Cougar XR-7 achieved 23.5 mpg—a figure heretofore unthinkable in this segment of the market but one that's getting more common all the time. As we mentioned earlier, the 1980 Cougar XR-7 functions like none of the twelve that have gone before it. There have been bigger, quicker and faster Cougars, but none has ever had this combination of ride, handling and economy.

The interior of our XR-7 test car was, if anything, overfunctional, containing leather seats with power actuation and reclining backs on both sides; electronic digital speedometer and fuel gauge with diagnostic warning light panel; digital electronic clock with date and elapsed time feature; 3-button wheel-mounted cruise control with resume memory; and AM/FM stereo electronic search-tune radio with cassette deck and Dolby noise reduction, plus premium sound system amplifier and six speakers. It also included tilt steering wheel, dual remote-control mirrors, automatic thermostatic air conditioning with electric rear defroster and four huge outlets, keyless entry system with illuminated entry and automatic headlamp-off delay, power windows, and the ever-popular power door locks.

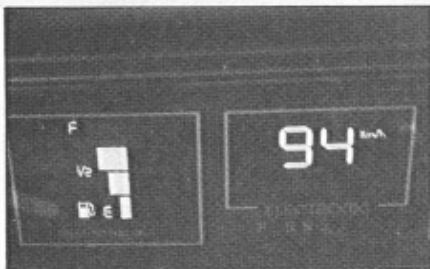
Altogether there were enough switches, buttons, wands, handles and visuals to stave off motoring boredom

for about 200 years. And, to our amazement, each and every one worked without a hitch or a millisecond of confusion. We did manage to have the keys locked in the car twice, once by a car wash employee who brushed the "lock" buttons with his towel, and once by a parking attendant who leaned carelessly on the row of buttons with his palm. And these two episodes with the keyless entry option told us that it wasn't worth the extra \$231. Even if it does open both doors and the trunk, turn on the interior lights, and relock the doors after the car is in motion, keyless entry is technoid overkill.

The Cougar XR-7 was quiet, comfortable, and very accommodating. The seats—leather-covered split benches with dual center armrests, reclining backs and 6-way adjustment—combined with the tilt steering wheel to provide comfortable seating for drivers and front passengers of every size and shape. The seats themselves were plush, wide and fairly supportive, with loose-pillow styling and structure, and though the rear bench seat had no adjustment at all, it was pretty good as back seats go these days. All of the myriad controls and switches were close at hand, and as we said, every one worked every time.

The thing we disliked most about the Cougar—the thing that didn't work at all for us—was the styling of the new package, inside and out. After a week

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with the car, we found night driving much preferable to daytime, because at night the blue-green digital instrumentation was all we had to look at. We didn't have to suffer the orange and black plastic, both shiny and matte, that was everywhere inside the car, and the horrendous windshield reflection off the top of the dash. And of course, being inside and in the dark, we didn't have to deal at all with the exterior styling.

Cougar styling, since the first one debuted in 1967, has always been a little strange; but the 1980 car, while perhaps aerodynamically sound, small on the outside and big on the inside, with a 17-cubic-foot deep-well trunk and lovely headroom front and rear, looks, in our estimation, out of proportion.

Of course, our opinion is an entirely subjective evaluation based on one car with one color combination. But while we gave the car very high marks for functionality and efficiency, we can't say we liked looking at it the way it was. The XR-7 was destined to be a derivative of the Thunderbird and has, therefore, been locked into a basic shape. The items used to differentiate it from the Ford—the cat's-head emblem and the decklid bustle—do little to set its own image. Perhaps, as the car evolves further into the '80s, it will reach out to become one of the memorable Mercurys, one that shares function with its cousin while maintaining its own personality.

## ROAD TEST DATA Cougar XR-7



### SPECIFICATIONS

#### GENERAL

Vehicle type	Front-engine, rear-drive, 5-pass., 2-door sedan
Base price	\$6509
Options on test car	5-liter 302cid V-8, leather trim, keyless entry system, automatic OD trans, speed control, pwr seat, absct rear defrost, A/C, absct AM/FM stereo w/cassette, luxury group option, premium sound system
Price as tested	\$11,873

#### ENGINE

Type	V-8, water cooled, cast iron head & block
Bore & stroke	4.0 x 3.0 in.
Displacement	302 cu. in.
Compression ratio	8.4:1
Fuel system	2-bbl. carburetor
Recommended fuel	91 RON, unleaded
Emission control	California
Valve gear	Overhead valves
Horsepower (SAE net)	131 at 3600 rpm
Torque (SAE net)	231 lb.-ft. at 1600 rpm
Power to weight ratio	N.A.

#### DRIVETRAIN

Transmission	4-speed automatic overdrive
Final drive ratio	3.08:1

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	108.4 in.
Track, F/R	58.4/57.2 in.
Length	200.4 in.
Width	74.1 in.
Height	53.0 in.
Ground clearance	6.0 in.
Curb weight	3270 lb.
Weight distribution, F/R	N.A.

#### CAPACITIES

Fuel capacity	17.5 gals.
Crankcase	5.0 qts.
Cooling system	14.3 qts.
Trunk capacity	17.7 cu. ft.

#### SUSPENSION

Front	Hybrid MacPherson strut, hydraulic shock absorbers, stabilizer bar
Rear	4-link coil springs, hydraulic shock absorbers, stabilizer bar

#### STEERING

Type	Rack and pinion, power assist
Turns lock-to-lock	3.4
Turning circle, curb-to-curb	40.1 ft.

#### BRAKES

Front	10.0-in. discs, power assisted
Rear	9.0-in. drums, power assisted

#### WHEELS AND TIRES

Wheel size	15.35 x 5.5 in.
Wheel type	Cast aluminum
Tire make and size	Michelin P220/55R390
Tire type	Steel-belted radial
Recommended pressure, F/R	32/32 psi

### TEST RESULTS

#### ACCELERATION

0-30 mph	3.5 secs.
0-40 mph	5.4 secs.
0-50 mph	7.8 secs.
0-60 mph	11.1 secs.
0-70 mph	15.1 secs.
0-80 mph	20.3 secs.
Top speed	18.0 secs./75.7 mph
Standing quarter mile	5.7 secs.
Passing times (40-60 mph)	7.3 secs.
(50-70 mph)	

#### BRAKING

30-0 mph	49 ft.
60-0 mph	176 ft.

#### FUEL CONSUMPTION

EPA city	17.0 mpg
MI 73-mile test loop	23.5 mpg

#### SPEEDOMETER

Indicated	30	40	50	60
Actual mph	30	40	50	60

# How to tell a Cougar XR-7



Look for Recaro seats from Europe. Other American automakers don't offer you these special optional seats.



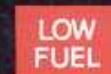
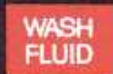
Look for split-second accuracy of optional electronic instrumentation.



Look for an available AM/FM stereo radio/cassette player with Dolby® Noise Reduction.



Look for a Warning Light Module. This sophisticated option can warn you of 9 different problems.



# from everybody else's car.



Look for the optional Keyless Entry System. And you can enter your car even if you've locked your keys inside.



Look for Quartz Halogen headlights that slice through the night.



**17**

EPA  
EST  
MPG

**29**

EST  
HWY  
MPG

Compare this estimate to the estimated MPG of other cars. You may get different mileage depending on how fast you drive, weather conditions and trip length. Actual highway mileage will probably be less. California estimates lower.

**P R N D 3 1**

Look for the ingenious Automatic Overdrive Transmission Option. And you'll find impressive fuel efficiency on the highway. (Requires optional 5.0 L engine.)



**COUGAR XR-7**

LINCOLN-MERCURY DIVISION

