

JAGUAR'S **NEW** SPORTS CAR—FIRST REPORT

MOTOR TREND

MAY 1961 35¢

**ROAD
TESTS**

8 Compact Cars

Falcon • Comet
Corvair • Tempest
Lancer • Valiant
American • Lark

PLUS
THUNDERBIRD TEST
5 Cutaway Drawings

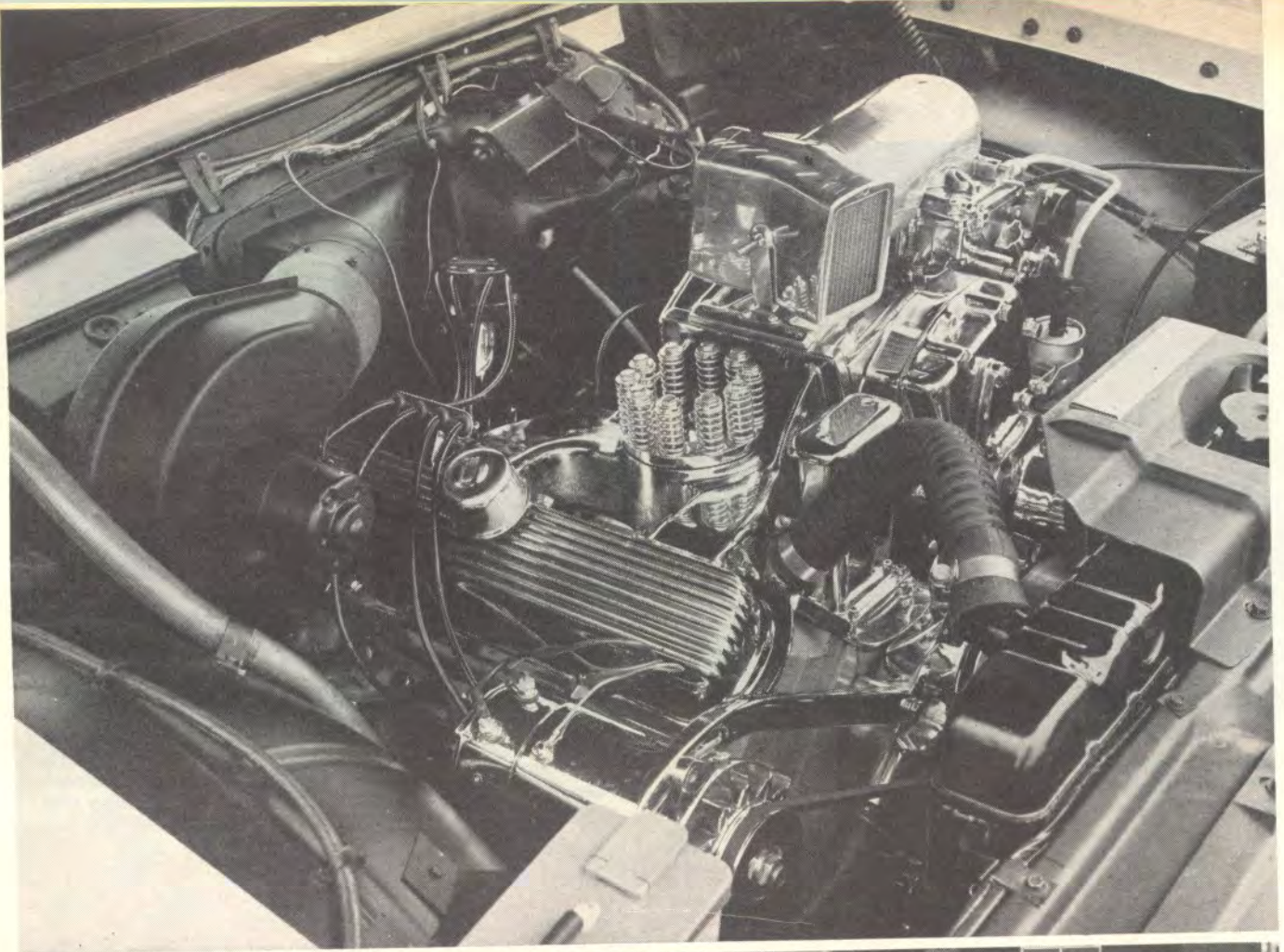
**WHAT'S THE BEST
CARBURETOR?**

Two-Barrel? Four-Barrel?

Triple Two-Barrel?

Dual Four-Barrel?





THE SUPERCHARGED PONTIAC LE MANS

a show car that houses a surprisingly modified engine

SHOW CARS are seldom "go" cars, but the Le Mans Coupe, a special version of Pontiac's Tempest built for the International Auto Show at New York, is an exceptional exception. Under the hood was an experimental supercharged Slant Four, and if Pontiac ever produced it in quantity, the Le Mans would probably be the hottest Detroit car in the country.

People at Pontiac are quick to affirm that the Le Mans in supercharged form will never be anything but a sporty show car. There is little reason to doubt them either, since Detroit's experience with supercharged cars has always been disappointing. But the rest of the Le Mans, or parts of it, may have a good chance for ultimate production.

There are a few cars that seem to have just the right amount of chrome in just the right places. The Le Mans is one of them, and has unquestionable appeal with its combination of trim and sheet metal.

The chrome-plated wire wheels with knock-off hubs are the *piece de resistance* that sets off a striking exterior. For many persons wire wheels with their sharply defined narrow-band whitewalls will make the coupe. This is a Le Mans styling feature that Pontiac undoubtedly never will offer with a stock Tempest, since these wheels are expensive, hard to keep clean and easy to damage.

Inside the Le Mans, the overall design is equally excellent. Like the exterior, the passenger compartment is little different from a standard Tempest. However, the choice of trim and the location of chrome seem to be exactly right.

There is one interesting and peculiar piece of trim in the interior. Earlier this year Pontiac expounded the virtues of a near-flat front floor. In the Le Mans, the transmission hump is entirely chromed with small vertical strips, making the hump, to the eye at least, the most obvious feature of the passenger compartment.

The semi-bucket seats make it virtually impossible to seat a third person in front. But the floor-mounted transmission shift lever makes it even more so. Directly ahead of the transmission lever on the transmission hump is a tachometer.

The instrumentation and driver controls are stock, except for one item. On the right is a button labelled "Push to Stop Engine." Actually this isn't a panic button but turns off the magneto, the only way to get the supercharged Tempest powerplant to quit.

The engine is undoubtedly the most interesting feature of the Le Mans. Since they have announced the firm intention of

doing nothing with the car but showing it, Pontiac engineers have released very little information, except that it is a stock Tempest Four with a GMC blower.

Ordinarily, this would make it exceptionally difficult to pin down any reliable performance figures. But last December a well-known West Coast hot rodder did the same thing with a Tempest engine. The hop-up artist who modified the Slant Four was Mickey Thompson, who is as familiar with Pontiac's engines as he is with ultra-high speeds.

Thompson's supercharged Tempest was a rail job, and the engine was not exactly stock. The bore and stroke were normal, but special pistons, connecting rods and camshaft were installed, along with a Scintilla Vertex magneto and a 4-71 GMC blower.

The first run with the Tempest four-cylinder engine turned in a fantastic record. The top speed was 151.54 mph, and the e.t. 9.94 seconds for the quarter-mile. While the rail job did far better than the same setup would get in a stock Tempest sedan, the increase in acceleration could be incredible.

All of this leaves the two important points unanswered. The first has to do with the exterior and interior of the Le Mans. Overall, and without being basically different from a stock Tempest, the Le Mans is a magnificently finished automobile. Since the car is definitely a show car without any plans for production, there must have been a reason to exhibit it in New York.

The most logical reason seems to be that Pontiac wanted to get firsthand public reaction to a compact that went all the way on quality, both in materials and trim. The reaction was overwhelmingly enthusiastic, and this may mean a sharp upturn in the detail quality on compacts. There is good evidence that this is already happening, with the mid-year announcement of sports coupes for almost every compact line. The difference between a low-priced compact and an expensive one may well be the difference between a stock Tempest and the Le Mans — simply one of overall quality.

The second point is obvious and concerns the supercharged engine. The reason for this is a little harder to pin down. Of course, Pontiac may have just wanted something spectacular to call attention to the Le Mans at the show. On the other hand, the design is so complete that even the hood has a row of air louvers on the left side. Moreover, it is a well-known, but little publicized, fact that the Le Mans, sans exterior chrome and wire wheels, has made some fantastic acceleration tests on Detroit test tracks.

Pontiacs have always been outstanding performers at the drag strips with their big engines, and it seems only logical that the Tempest should follow this line. But regardless of the reason for the supercharged Le Mans, one thing is certain — Mickey Thompson proved that a supercharged Tempest engine was practical, and Pontiac engineers proved that it will fit in a stock Tempest.

The Tempest owner who is performance minded and has the mechanical talent to install a GMC blower can give a tremendous surprise to any stock-car owner who challenges him at the drag strip.

/MT

The pictures at left point out many of the eye-catching features of the Tempest-based Le Mans. Most viewers are understandably awed by the GMC supercharger that rides high on the four-cylinder engine. A small button on the dash (picture at lower, left corner) must be pushed to turn off the magneto and stop the engine. Note the location of a tachometer on the chromed transmission hump — quite novel for a Tempest.