

COBRA JET TRUTH SQUAD

THE 428 COBRA JET WAS ARGUABLY THE MOST UNDERRATED MUSCLECAR ENGINE FROM THE FACTORY; WE FIND THE TRUE NUMBERS IN OUR DYNO TEST

BY DAN JENSEN

IF YOU ARE A FAN OF OLDER MUSCLECARS, YOU PROBABLY KNOW THE STORY ABOUT HOW THE 428 COBRA JET ENGINE CAME ABOUT. IN VERY SIMPLE TERMS, IT GOES SOMEWHAT LIKE THIS:

When the 1964 GTO was released to the power-hungry public in late 1963, within two years all the other car companies were in with both feet. Mopar already had its 383/426 street wedge engines, but then one-upped everybody with the new street Hemi in '66. Pontiac's sister divisions fought back too with the 401-powered GS from Buick, 396 Chevelles, 427 Corvettes, and 327 Chevy IIs from Chevrolet, and 442s with triple-carbed 400s from Oldsmobile.

Over at Ford, the Mustang's engine compartment was only big enough for straight sixes and the small-block Windsor engines. To meet the competition head on in 1966, they relied on the bigger Fairlanes and Comets, which could be equipped with the larger FE engines, in either 390 or 427 displacements. The 390-equipped Fairlane GT/GTAs and Comet Cyclones were decent runners, but didn't garner much of a street reputation. However, the 427-powered Fairlanes and Comets in 1966 and 1967 had nothing to be ashamed about, other than they were a pretty rare sighting on the streets.

Things were looking up when the new, larger 1967 Mustang (and its Mercury Cougar cousin) could be ordered with the 390 engine, making it an even match for the 383-powered Barracuda. However,



it was no match to the new big-block Camaros and Ram Air Firebirds over at GM, introduced the same year.

The redesigned 1968 Ford intermediate musclecars (Fairlane GT and Mercury Cyclone) lost their 427 option, making the 390 the biggest engine offered. These larger, heavier cars paled when matched to any of the musclecars from GM or Chrysler.

With the horsepower race in full swing, and records being set by its rivals at tracks across the country, Ford had to make up for lost ground quickly. The brass at Ford had been watching and listening to what Bob Tasca Ford in Rhode Island had been doing, and that was installing the big-car 428 engine, combined with some 427 and 390GT

parts, in Mustangs. Long story short, Ford took Tasca's advice and introduced the 428 Cobra Jet engine in both the ponycar line (Mustang and Cougar) and intermediates (Torino GT and Cyclone) as a mid-year option.

In search of more favorable racing classifications, not to mention less grief from insurance companies and government, Ford rated the 428 CJ at a paltry 335 hp at 5,400, and 440 lb-ft of torque at 3,400. However, when the '68½ 428 Mustang was tested by *Hot Rod*, it was the claimed to be the fastest musclecar to date. Soon 428 CJ-powered Mustangs, Cougars, Torino GTs, Cobras, and Cyclones were holding their own both on the streets and at the tracks across the country.

Since Dan's Eliminator is currently undergoing a complete restoration, he chose to have the engine rebuilt to the maximum specs that the Pure Stock Drags allow. In other words, the engine was built using NHRA stock class specs as a guideline.