

NOT ALL K-CODES ARE 271-HORSEPOWER HIPOS.

# MYSTERY MERCURY

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MENTION "K-CODE" TO A FORD ENTHUSIAST AND THE FIRST THING THAT COMES TO MIND ARE THE 271-HORSEPOWER 289CI V-8S IN MANY '60S FOMOCO CARS AT THE HEIGHT OF FORD'S TOTAL PERFORMANCE HEYDAY.

This 1964 Mercury Comet Cyclone may challenge your definition of exactly what a K-Code represents.

Mercury has long been considered the red-headed stepchild in the Ford family of brands. Often thought as a gussied-up

Ford, Mercury's original intent was to be a junior-priced Lincoln, not a premium-priced Ford. In the '60s, Mercury managed a clearer identity with cars that were distinctive, and not carbon copies of their Ford platform mates.

The Comet was its own car, especially in 1964 and 1965. It benefited from a unique position in the marketplace as a





senior compact with sedans, hardtops and convertibles sharing a wheelbase of 114 inches (Falcon and Comet station wagons shared a common 109.5-inch wheelbase). In addition, Mercury put a great deal of marketing effort into the Comet line, heavily promoting a record-breaking 100,000-mile durability run at Daytona in the fall of 1963 where the cars averaged 105 mph.



There is one thing the 1964 Comet didn't share with its Ford counterparts, at least officially in 1964, and that was the availability of the mid-year 271-horsepower K-Code option that was available on the Mustang and Fairlane.

Yet Matt and Dee Dee Mathews' 210-horsepower 1964 Comet Cyclone is clearly a K-Code. How can that be?

Matt gave us the background. "My interest in classic cars dates back to my high school years in 1964 and 1965," he explained. "I went into the Army in 1967, served in Germany until my battalion got sent back to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and then waited for orders to go to Vietnam. No orders came immediately, so I asked my dad to find me a muscle car to drive while I waited. He found me a 1964½ Comet Cyclone with

the 210-horsepower Super Cyclone 289 four-barrel V-8. It was burgundy, with white bucket seats, console, and a four-speed manual. Unfortunately my Dad had to sell it after I got sent to Vietnam.

"Fast forward to 1985 when I bought my first classic car, a California original 1964 Chevy Chevelle two-door hardtop. That

got me hooked, but it wasn't until 1999 that I started to look for another Cyclone. I looked everywhere, put ads online but I couldn't find one so I settled for a 1964 Falcon hardtop. In the meantime, I gathered a lot of info about the Cyclone. How many



were made, why the half year model, things like that. One day, about five years later, I get this e-mail from a guy in Idaho telling me he has a factory-original Cyclone, red exterior, white interior, bucket seats and a four-speed. He sent me pictures, with documentation. I had the car checked out and inspected and all the important numbers matched, including 96,000 miles. It's now in my garage and used only for car shows. The trophies I receive usually come from judges who know just how rare my Cyclone is. Only 7,400 were produced of which, according to National Mercury archives, only 200 are still around.

"There weren't many options available on the Cyclone. The only thing you could upgrade on the Cyclone were a radio and the T10 four-speed. The standard transmission on the Cyclone was a three-speed stick. The big thing I found out through all my research, which I also believed, was that the 'K' in the VIN meant that the car was equipped with the HiPo 271-horsepower 289 V-8. This is not true. All Cyclones and even some late year 1964 Callente's had a K in the VIN. The K in the Cyclone refers to the 100,000-mile endurance run using a 289 V-8/225hp Super Cyclone Engine. (The stock 289 V-8 had



210 horsepower.) However, the production model Cyclone wasn't ready yet so Mercury put it in the Callente to do the run.

"Now the good news. I have proof to back up this assertion. In May 1964, Mercury made a total of 25 special order Cyclones with the 289 271-horsepower engine available to dealers only. Racing modifications were made to the frame, suspension, nine-inch rearend, bigger



brakes, closed emissions, and a manual 650cfm Autolite 4100 four-barrel carb. The warranty engine plate code used was 'D' on the VIN, not 'K' as you would expect. The confusion lies in the fact that Ford used the K VIN in the 1964 Fairlane and the 1964½



## IDENTIFYING A 1964½ MERCURY COMET CYCLONE

If you encounter a two-door Comet hardtop rusting away in some junkyard or hidden away in a barn, here are the elements to determine if it is one of the 7,400 Comet Cyclones built in the last half of 1964.

- 210-horsepower, 4-barrel 289 V-8 with an Autolite 4100 carburetor.
- Chrome engine dress-up kit that includes chromed rocker arm covers, air cleaner cover, oil filter cap, oil dipstick, and radiator cap.
- Unique exterior ornamentation with bright-finish wheel-cut and rocker panel moldings.
- Cyclone checkered flag and plaque on the front fenders
- Exclusive-design chrome-plated wheel covers with bright lug nuts
- Bucket seat interior with standard center console.
- 1.5-inch vertical-pleat sew-style, all-vinyl interior.
- Camera black vinyl instrument panel appliques.
- Rally-type, 3-spoke steering wheel with 3-spoke horn bar and brush-finish stainless steel "Cyclone" ornament.
- Instrument panel-mounted standard tachometer.

Mustang, which both came with the 289 271-horsepower engine."

(In doing further research on the subject, the only way to confirm the identity of a 1964 Comet with a 271-horsepower 289 is with the build sheet which will have a notation "SUBSTITUTE 271/289 ENGINE PACKAGE" or something to that effect.)



Besides his Comet Cyclone, Matt and Dee own a companion 1964 Ford Falcon Futura, a stock, original California black plate car. They are members of the Past Pleasures Car Club based in Yucaipa, California, east of Los Angeles. Their Comet Cyclone has won

many awards. Yet, out of all the car shows they've attended, they've never seen another 1964½ Cyclone. "Most people, with the exception of Mercury car collectors, don't know my car or how rare it is," says Matt. "I kind of like it that way!" **A/E**

