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The opening pages of

1972 Mercury Cougar Restoration Guide

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Factory-Correct Restoration Reference

1972 Mercury Cougar Restoration Guide

Model Year 1972

Model	Mercury Cougar / Cougar XR-7 1972
Platform	Second-generation Cougar unibody, 112-in wheelbase
Engines	351C-2V (166 net hp); 351 CJ (262 net hp; 266 with Performance Package)
Transmissions	3-speed manual; 4-speed manual; SelectShift automatic
Notable	First all-net-ratings year; 429 big-blocks gone; 53,702 built (reported)

Every specification in this guide was checked against factory literature, marque references, period road tests, and documented survivor cars. Where sources disagree or the record is silent, this guide says so rather than guessing.

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Chapter 1 — The Cougar Grows Up: Mercury's Personal-Luxury Pony Car

The Cougar was Mercury's answer to the Mustang — but it was never a rebadged Mustang. Built on a 111-inch wheelbase (three inches longer than the Mustang), the 1967 Cougar was positioned as the thinking man's pony car: more refined, more luxurious, and more distinctive, with the two features that defined it from day one — vacuum-operated concealed headlamps and full-width sequential taillamps. Nearly 151,000 buyers agreed in the first year.

The XR-7 trim made the Cougar's luxury case with its woodgrain dash, toggle switches, and overhead console, while the GT package and specials like the 1968 XR-7G and GT-E made its performance case. For 1969 the Cougar added a convertible and the Eliminator performance package; for 1970 the 351 Cleveland and the 428 Cobra Jet carried the muscle formula to its peak.

For 1971 the Cougar was redesigned on a 112-inch wheelbase with exposed headlights — the hidden lamps were gone — and the Eliminator was dropped. The second-generation cars are bigger, heavier, and more luxurious, with the 429 Cobra Jet topping the 1971 lineup. The 1972 Cougar in this guide is the middle year of that three-year design: same basic car as the 1971, recast for the net-horsepower era.

Chapter 2 — What Makes 1972 Different

- The 429 Cobra Jet and Super Cobra Jet were dropped. For 1972 the Cougar's entire performance story is the 351 Cleveland, offered in three states of tune.
- Ford adopted SAE net horsepower ratings across the industry for 1972. Advertised output fell on paper even where the hardware barely changed — read every 1972 rating as a net figure, measured with accessories and full exhaust in place.
- The standard engine is the 351 Cleveland two-barrel at 166 net horsepower. The optional 351 Cobra Jet (VIN code Q) is rated 262 net horsepower, or 266 with the Cobra-Jet Performance Package.



- The Cobra-Jet Performance Package bundled a performance exhaust, thicker front sway bar, rear sway bar, and — on automatic cars — a higher-stall torque converter; four-speed cars received the package as standard equipment.
- Styling changes from 1971 are detail-level: grille and taillamp revisions and trim shuffles. The body shell, glass, and structure are the 1971 design.
- Production fell to 53,702 reported — the muscle market was cooling, insurance surcharges were biting, and buyers were drifting to personal-luxury cars. Mercury sold refinement, and the XR-7 outsold the standard car.

For the restorer, the 1972 Cougar's identity check is simple and strict: the fifth character of the VIN. H means the car left the factory with a 351 two-barrel; Q means a genuine 351 Cobra Jet. Everything else — Ram Air hardware, four-speeds, spoilers — is bolt-on until the VIN and a Marti Report say otherwise.

Chapter 3 — VIN and Door Data Plate Decoding

1972 Cougar VINs are eleven characters. Documented survivor VINs (for example, Hagerty's recorded 1972 XR-7 hardtop 2F93Q519626) read: 2 for 1972, F for the Dearborn assembly plant, 93 for the convertible body series, Q for the 351 Cobra Jet, followed by the sequential serial number. Read your VIN position by position:

Position	Meaning	1972 values
Position 1	Model year	2 = 1972
Position 2	Assembly plant	F = Dearborn, Michigan (documented on 1972 survivor VINs)
Positions 3-4	Body series	91 = standard hardtop, 92 = XR-7 hardtop, 93 = standard convertible, 94 = XR-7 convertible
Position 5	Engine code	H = 351 V8 two-barrel; Q = 351 Cobra Jet four-barrel
Positions 6-11	Sequential serial number	Production sequence

The door data plate (warranty plate) on the driver's door records the body, color, trim, axle, transmission, and DSO codes as the car was built. Decode it with 1972 Mercury literature, and reconcile it against the VIN: the VIN plate, the door data plate, and the hidden stampings must all agree. A Marti Report — built from Ford's production database — is the definitive build record for any 1972 Cougar and the cheapest authentication money in the hobby.

Chapter 4 — Engine Lineup: The 351 Cleveland Three Ways

Engine	VIN code	Bore x stroke	Comp.	HP (net)	TQ (lb-ft)	Carb	Notes
351 Cleveland V8 (2-bbl)	H	4.00 x 3.50	8.6:1	166*	—	2-bbl	Standard 1972 Cougar engine; some secondary sources quote 164 hp — see note below
351 Cobra Jet V8 (4-bbl)	Q	4.00 x 3.50	—	262	—	4-bbl	Top 1972 engine; fifth VIN character Q
351 CJ + Performance Package	Q	4.00 x 3.50	—	266	—	4-bbl	Performance exhaust, sway bars, high-stall converter (auto); standard on 4-speed cars