

FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1973 Mercury Cougar Restoration Guide

Read these pages exactly as they appear in the full guide.
Nothing here is rewritten or summarised — it is the product itself,
so you can judge the depth before you spend a dollar.

The full guide: <https://restoreessentials.com/product/RE-GD-1973-MERCURY-COUGAR>

RestorationEssentials — instant PDF download after checkout.



RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

Factory-Correct Restoration Reference

1973 Mercury Cougar Restoration Guide

Model Year 1973

Model	Mercury Cougar / Cougar XR-7 1973
Platform	Second-generation Cougar unibody, 112-in wheelbase
Engines	351C-2V (168 net hp); 351 CJ (264 net hp)
Transmissions	3-speed manual; 4-speed manual; SelectShift automatic
Notable	Last Cougar convertible; last Mustang-based Cougar; 60,628 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.

Published by RestorationEssentials

Contents

- Chapter 1: The Last of the Mustang-Based Cougars
- Chapter 2: What Makes 1973 Different
- Chapter 3: VIN and Door Data Plate Decoding
- Chapter 4: Engine Lineup: Two 351 Cleveland, Both Net-Rated



- Chapter 5: Transmissions
- Chapter 6: Axles, Brakes, Suspension, and Wheels
- Chapter 7: Paint, Trim, and Factory Markings
- Chapter 8: Production Numbers and Rarity
- Chapter 9: Rust-Prone Areas and Inspection Guide
- Chapter 10: Restoration Sequence
- Chapter 11: Engine Specifications at a Glance
- Chapter 12: Paint and Trim Code Reference
- Chapter 13: Options, Accessories, and Factory Details
- Chapter 14: Buyer Inspection Checklist
- Chapter 15: Electrical System, Date Codes, and Factory Markings
- Chapter 16: Parts Interchange: What Fits and What Doesn't
- Chapter 17: Reproduction vs. Original: Tells That Matter
- Chapter 18: Critical Fastener Torque Specifications
- Chapter 19: Sources Consulted
- Thank You

Chapter 1 — The Last of the Mustang-Based Cougars

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 vacuum-operated concealed headlamps and full-width sequential taillamps defining it from day one. Nearly 151,000 buyers agreed in the first year.

The XR-7 trim made the luxury case; the GT package and specials like the 1968 XR-7G and GT-E made the performance case. For 1971 the Cougar was redesigned on a 112-inch wheelbase with exposed headlights, and the car grew into a personal-luxury coupe. The 1973 Cougar in this guide closes that chapter: it is the last of the Mustang-based Cougars and the last Cougar convertible — after 1973 the nameplate moved to the Thunderbird/Torino intermediate chassis and the convertible disappeared.

Chapter 2 — What Makes 1973 Different

- Last convertible. The 1973 Cougar convertible is the final open Cougar; Mercury dropped the body style with the 1974 redesign. Convertible production was a small share of the year's 60,628 reported total, which makes documented ragtops the collectible 1973s.
- Last Mustang-based Cougar. The 1974 car rode the intermediate Torino/Thunderbird chassis; nothing about the 1971-1973 unibody carries forward.
- Engine ratings, retuned again: the standard 351 Cleveland two-barrel is rated 168 net horsepower (up slightly from 1972's figure), and the 351 Cobra Jet is rated 264 net horsepower.
- The Cobra-Jet Performance Package — performance exhaust, thicker front bar, rear bar, and high-stall converter on automatic cars — became standard equipment on all four-barrel (CJ) cars for 1973.
- Federally mandated impact-absorbing bumpers arrived for 1973, adding the year's most visible change: a larger, protruding front bumper treatment.
- Grille and taillight details were revised; the body shell, glass, and structure are the 1971 design.



For the restorer, 1973 identity is the same discipline as 1972: the fifth character of the VIN. H means a factory 351 two-barrel car; Q means a genuine 351 Cobra Jet. Everything else is bolt-on until the VIN and a Marti Report say otherwise.

Chapter 3 — VIN and Door Data Plate Decoding

1973 Cougar VINs are eleven characters: 3 for 1973, the assembly-plant letter (F for Dearborn on documented cars of this era), the two-digit body series, the engine code, and the sequential serial number. Read your VIN position by position:

Position	Meaning	1973 values
Position 1	Model year	3 = 1973
Position 2	Assembly plant	Plant letter per the door data plate and Marti Report
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 records body, color, trim, axle, transmission, and DSO codes as the car was built. Decode it with 1973 Mercury literature and reconcile it against the VIN. A Marti Report — built from Ford's production database — is the definitive build record for any 1973 Cougar, and on a convertible it is close to mandatory before money changes hands.

Chapter 4 — Engine Lineup: Two 351 Clevelands, Both Net-Rated

Engine	VIN code	Bore x stroke	Comp.	HP (net)	Carb	Notes
351 Cleveland V8 (2-bbl)	H	4.00 x 3.50	8.6:1	168	2-bbl	Standard 1973 engine; retuned from the 1972 rating
351 Cobra Jet V8 (4-bbl)	Q	4.00 x 3.50	—	264	4-bbl	Top engine; Performance Package standard for 1973

A note on ratings. Every 1973 figure in this chapter is an SAE net rating — horsepower as installed, with accessories, air cleaner, and full exhaust. Net numbers are not comparable to the gross ratings quoted for 1971 and earlier, and the small year-to-year net changes (166 to 168; 262 to 264) reflect retuning and rating practice, not new hardware.

Both engines are 351 Clevelands — the canted-valve small-block Ford introduced for 1970. The Cobra Jet version uses the four-barrel heads and a higher-lift camshaft; with Ram Air, a functional hood scoop feeds a sealed air cleaner. For 1973 the Cobra-Jet Performance Package (performance exhaust, thicker front sway bar, rear sway bar, high-stall converter on automatics) is standard on CJ cars — so a 1973 Q-code should carry the package hardware, and its absence is a question to ask, not an excuse to accept.