

# 1964 Mercury and Meteor

The Ford Files by James C. Mays

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Mid-priced Meteor disappeared at the end of the 1962 model year, its sales diminished by the insatiable demand for compacts and smaller imports as folks tightened their belts during bad years. But, good times returned in 1963. The economy was healthy again. The automakers reported a record 36,026 direct employees, drawing \$302 million in wages. The average Joe had money to burn. Big cars were back in demand—and with a vengeance.

The Dominion Bureau of Statistics released figures showing that 44,000 of the 94,000 householders in Newfoundland and Labrador owned at least one automobile and 5,000 householders on the island owned two or more cars. Quebeckers were least likely to own wheels. The same study revealed that 42,000 Albertans had two-car (or more!) garages and that the good citizens of Wild Rose Country led the Dominion with two-car families.

Consumers weren't just buying full-sized cars; they were passing by the low-bucks Fords and Chevs in favour of more pricy vehicles. Pontiac had become the consumers' number one choice in 1962. Oshawa's tri-shield was outselling full-sized bowties. Down the road in Oakville, Ford coveted a good portion of that market for itself.

The inexpensive, Canada-only Mercury 400 offered in 1963 had accounted for nearly one third of all Mercury sales that year. It was high time to revive the Meteor name and reposition Mercury in the higher end of the market.

The decision to return the Meteor to the corporate fold was made fairly late in the season and became urgent when the US parent suddenly deleted the intermediate-sized Mercury Meteor for 1964. A full-sized Meteor there would be, but there was not enough lead time to develop unique ornamentation. It would appear on showroom floors, for its first year—at least—as “a Mercury Product.”

The new Meteor wore a Mercury shell—not Ford—as in years past. Its target was Pontiac and to make sure it hit broadside, Meteor was priced at only \$50 more than Ford. Dealers were delighted to have a volume seller in the house, though they must have grown weary of changing signs—having added Frontenac in 1960, replaced it with Comet in 1961, removed Meteor at the end of 1962 and were now hanging it back up again.



Mercury boasted a sassy stand-up hood ornament while Meteor did without.

Advertising took great pains to educate the public. “To understand the difference between the '64 Meteor and all other cars in the low-price class—you must understand one thing! Meteor is a bigger car. Bigger in size—bigger in luxury—bigger in performance and bigger

in value. It is, in fact the very first car of medium-price size and stature ever to be sold in Canada as a really low-priced car.”

On showroom floors, the 1964 Mercury and Meteor were virtually indistinguishable from each other. Meteor carried its own nameplate on the hood and fenders though it wore “full, deep-dish, turbine-style wheel covers” with Mercury emblazoned at the centres. Meteor carried a little less brightwork. It was given a Ford instrument panel and interior trim different from its corporate kin.

While the a trio of V8s were available at extra cost, the Meteor’s standard power plant was the 223-cubic inch, one-barrel, six-cylinder engine. Shifting the six to Meteor permitted Mercury to firmly re-establish itself in the mid-price luxury market segment and boast that it had only V8s in its stable.



Unavailable on Meteors, bucket seats were optional on Mercurys. Canadians took home 1,093 Montclair two-door hardtops and 393 Park Lane convertibles with bucket seats.

Advertising noted that there were eight Meteors to choose from. The base Meteor included two and four-door sedans and a six or nine-passenger wagon. Standard equipment included dual sun

visors, a cigarette lighter, heater and defroster, padded arm rests, electric wipers, dome light and three colour choices for basic flooring.

The sales pitch underscored the fact that Meteor was priced “with the bottom-of-the-line models in the low-priced three.” It bragged, “Can you believe you’re looking at stark economy? These cars tell you you’re not—yet prices prove you are. The simple fact of the matter is that if you can afford any Canadian built car—you can afford these big, beautiful Meteor sedans. And what a wonderful way to live on a budget!”



Meteor and Mercury shared the unique Breezeway Window. A power-button option allowed the reverse-cant rear glass to open.

The Custom series offered all the same models included in the base lineup but added a bargain basement priced hardtop and a convertible. Customs were better dressed with deep-pile carpeting and colour-keyed schemes inside and out. Exterior colours included Guardsman Blue, Rangoon Red, Wimbledon White, Vintage Burgundy, Navaho Beige, Chantilly Beige and Raven Black.

Choosing the thunderous 390 V8 allowed one to opt for the four-on-the-floor “short throw” manual transmission. That combo was particularly appealing to those considering the convertible at \$3,481 or the \$3,151 hardtop. Other options included a retractable Breezeway window, a power tailgate, power windows, power brakes, four or six-way power seats, two-speed electric wipers, padding for the instrument panels, an AM radio, courtesy lights, a block heater, remote control mirror, an electric clock back-up lights and an interior car warmer.

There were also eight Mercury models to choose from. A Montclair four-door sedan and two-door hardtop started things out right for the Big M. Cabins were finished with Pleated Honeycomb cloth, trimmed in vinyl. They were further blessed with courtesy lights, long arm rests and “paddle-type” door releases” inside. Outside, there more mouldings. One could choose between a Breezeway roof and a more conventional sedan roof in this series.

A pair of Montclair Marauder hardtops were offered in two and four-door configurations. They did not carry the formal Breezeway windows. Billed as the car with “the impatient look,” Marauder claimed to be “more youthful,

more alive” than the competition. The optional bucket seats and four-on-the-floor were a natural with Marauder.

Park Lanes simply dripped with all the elegance that Mercury could muster. Two and four-door hardtops, a ritzy ragtop and the luxurious Colony Park station wagon rounded out the lineup. Park Lane interiors were trimmed in Biscuit Design Caspian Cloth upholstery and crush-grain vinyl. Walnut-toned inserts were set in the door panels. The instrument panel and sun visors were padded.

Not surprisingly, Mercury’s option list was as long as the Trans-Canada Highway. There were upgrades and power assists for virtually everything, including the side-view mirror.

The two-birds-with-one-stone routine worked extremely well for the Ford Motor Company of Canada, Limited. Meteor finished out the model year with production of 25,396 units. Mercury wrapped up the season with 12,160 full-sized models and another 20,400 compact Comets. Pontiac production dropped by nearly 15,000 units to 82,526 units in 1964. With Meteor on the loose, Pontiac would have to watch its back.