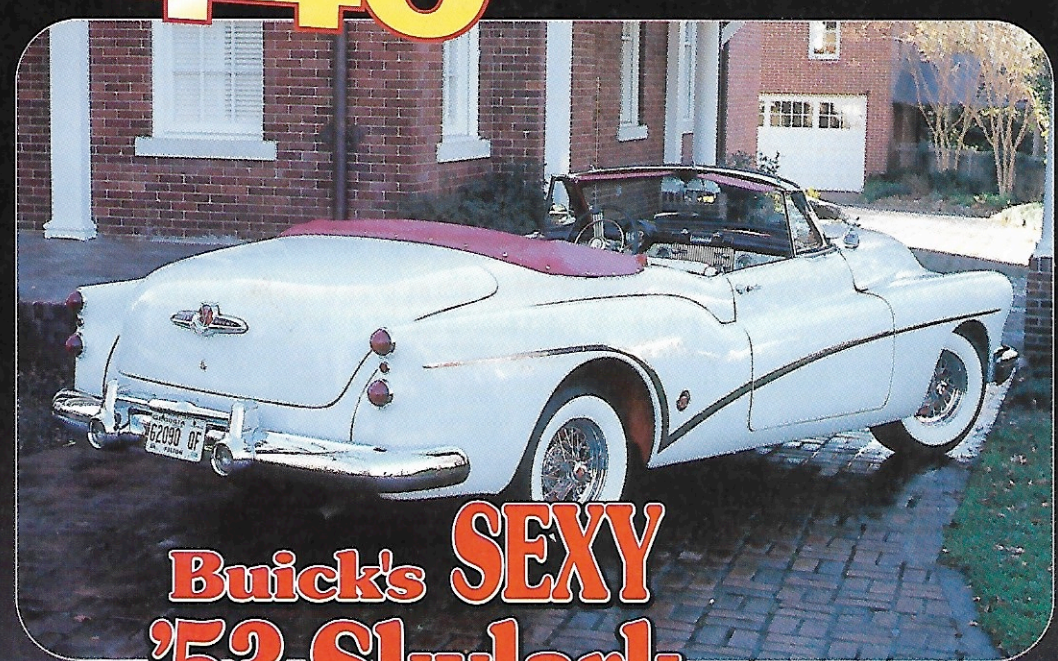


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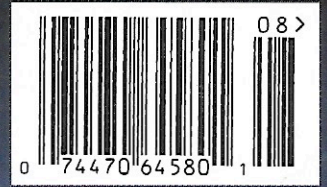
**Hookin' the big one!**  
*ferocious*  
**'69 Cuda 440**

- Pierce-Arrow History
- Camp Dearborn hosts 'Tin Can Tourists'
- Pontiac's 75th Ann. Show
- A gathering of orphans



**Buick's SEXY  
'53 Skylark**

COMPACT WORKHORSE **'61 FORD ECONOLINE**





# Forward Thinking Falcon



1

Photos by the author, except where noted.

1. Ken Hustvet, Chicog Township, Wis. (deep in the Wisconsin north woods), owns this extremely low-mileage 1961 Ford Falcon Econoline pickup. He purchased it from the third owner in 1992 and did a complete and authentic restoration.

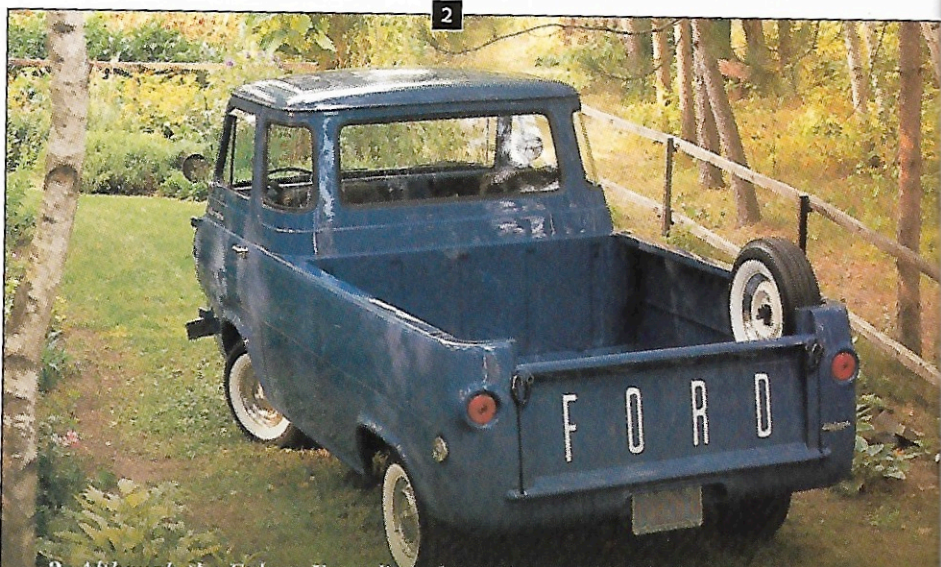
## 1961 FORD ECONOLINE CUSTOM CAB PICKUP

by Thomas Glatch

The 1950s have been called “the age of excess.” American cars throughout that decade reflected that excess, with each year bringing longer, lower, wider cars with more chrome and greater horsepower. The automakers can’t be blamed entirely, they were just delivering what car buyers wanted. Yet some buyers didn’t want the biggest and brightest car on the block, and the increasing sales of cars like the AMC Rambler and Volkswagen Beetle showed this group was being forgotten by the Big Three.

The company that built the first “World Car,” the Model T, was well aware of the growing popularity of the second “World Car,” the Volkswagen. During the 1940s Ford Motor Company experimented with small cars, building seven prototypes as part of its Light Car Project. Then, as early as 1952, when “Beetles” were just beginning to reach our shores, Ford began a market research study to investigate the VW

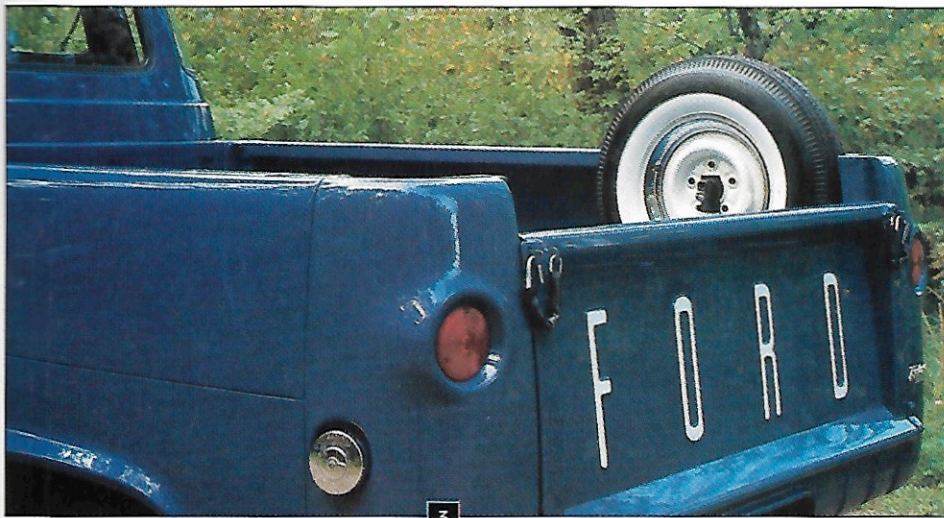
20 CARS & PARTS



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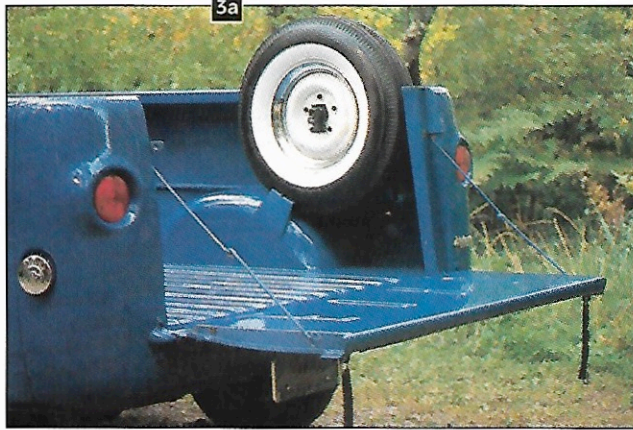
2. Although the Falcon Econoline shares its name with the sedan-based Ranchero and Sedan Delivery, there is virtually nothing else in common besides the engine block. It has been equipped with many accessories, including the Custom cab option, which features the rear quarter windows; chrome six-inch diameter rear view mirrors, white sidewall tires, chrome hubcaps, stainless trim rings, locking gas cap, spare wheel lock, and the low tailgate (n/c).



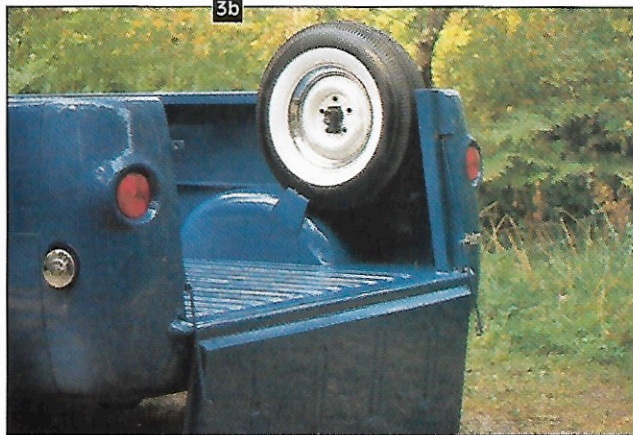


3

3. *Hustvet's Econoline pickup is equipped with the rare 3 5/8-inch lower "Grain Tight" tailgate. The spare tire (3a), although neatly fitted in an out of the way position, can easily be removed if the extra space is required. The three-position tailgate (3b) is not unlike most regular pickups in its versatility, but rather than the gate being removable, it collapses down instead.*



3a



3b

phenomenon in Europe. (Of course, this is all back peddling for Ford, since following World War II Henry Ford II – and the Allied investigation team – dismissed the Beetle as having no commercial future.) Ford's brilliant Assistant General Manager, Robert S. MacNamara, initiated the study, and by 1956 Ford management was convinced a compact car could be a successful product in the US market. By 1958 Ford had developed a small six-cylinder engine for its compact, and the clay models reached final approval of Ford management. *The New York Times* on May 21, 1959 announced the shocking news: Ford had registered the name of its compact car just 20 minutes ahead of Chrysler, which unknowingly chose the same name for its compact. On October 3, 1959, the Falcon took flight in Ford dealerships across the country.

Ford was not alone. One day earlier, on October 2, Chevrolet released the Corvair. And on October 29, the car that almost became the Falcon, the Plymouth Valiant, was introduced. These three new compacts joined the AMC Rambler and the Studebaker Lark already in pro-

duction, but now the vast resources of the Big Three were behind the phenomenon. "The greatest accomplishment of the Corvair, Falcon, and Valiant is not listed in their specifications," wrote *Motor Life* magazine in its December 1959 issue. "It is the greater choice they have given the America car buyer. No longer is he restricted to one kind of car, with variations in chrome or fins according to how much money he will pay."

On the surface the Falcon was seen as nothing special. While the VW may have been the inspiration, Ford chose a conventional front-engine/rear-drive layout. But the Falcon was more than just a scaled-down full-size car. Instead, the Falcon seemed to embrace the less-is-

#### FORD MODEL 87 ECONOLINE PICKUP PRODUCTION

1961	Standard Pickup	11,893
	Deluxe Pickup	3,000
1962	Standard Pickup	8,140
	Deluxe Pickup	1,022
1963	Standard Pickup	10,372
	Deluxe Pickup	1,022
1964	Standard Pickup	4,196
	Deluxe Pickup	988
1965	Standard Pickup	4,340
	Deluxe Pickup	3,065
1966	Standard Pickup	2,578
	Deluxe Pickup	512
1967	Standard Pickup	1,697
	Deluxe Pickup	318
Total Production		52,121



4

4. *This utility pickup is loaded with accessories, but there's nothing plush about it. Included in the long list of interior options are door armrests, fresh air heater/defroster with cowl insulation, horn ring, seat belts, cigar lighter, AM radio, dual cowl air vents and dual padded sunvisors. The instrument panel was adopted from Ford's school bus chassis.*

more philosophy of the Model T a generation before it: simple but tasteful styling, solid unit body construction, and an eye toward durability and economy, not technical breakthrough.

Ford brought the various Falcon models to market in a gradual way. The sedans came first, during the October 1959 introduction. The station wagon began appearing at dealers around Christmas that year, then a pair of wagon-based commercial vehicles: the Ranchero in the spring of 1960, and the Sedan Delivery as a 1961 model. Along with the introduction of the 1961 Falcon models on September 25, 1960, came the release of a whole line of Falcon-based trucks: the Ford Econoline.

Like the Falcon itself, Ford turned to Volkswagen as the model for the Econoline. In 1949, Volkswagen took the already popular Beetle, strengthened the



5. The "Forward Control" Econoline Pickup is the essence of compact. Cargo area is not much smaller than a full-sized pickup, yet the wheelbase is only 90 inches, compared to the 114-122 inches of the short- and long-bed F100.



6. The Econoline's engine tucks neatly between the seats but is not intrusive. When routine maintenance is required, the insulated cover flips up. During restoration, replacement of the drivetrain meant lifting the body off the chassis. The 144-cid six-cylinder engine (6a) produced 85 horsepower at 4,200 rpm. Top speed was around 75 mph. (Photo 6a by Bob Stevens)



engine, chassis, and drivetrain, and added a truck body of "forward-control" design. Forward-control meant pushing the driver and front passenger all the way to the front extremes of the vehicle, with the steering wheel located ahead of the front axle. The rest of the body was now available for cargo, and the revolutionary VW Type 2 was available in a pickup, a van, and a nine-passenger bus using variations of the same basic body.

In Ford's adaptation, the Econoline was also available in pickup, van, or bus versions. Engineered not by the Truck group but by the Automotive group, the Econoline displayed some unusual thinking. The Econolines were built on their own unique unit-body platform. Front suspension was also a departure from the Falcon: good old semi-elliptic springs and a beam axle. Unlike the VW Type 2, or the Corvair copies of the Type 2, Ford chose a more conventional layout, with the engine mounted between the front seats. While it was basically the same 85-hp 144.3-cid Falcon Six, it was modified for use in the Econolines with the 170 Special Six's carburetor and main bearings, and an oversized radiator. The transmission was a three-speed column-shifted manual with non-synchro low normally found in standard sized F-100

pickups, but with different ratios.

The unique Econoline rear axle had a 3.50:1 ratio, allowing a satisfactory combination of low-end torque and high-speed cruising, while a 4.00:1 ratio rear was for harder workers. The only readily apparent parts shared between the true Falcon-based commercial vehicles (Ranchero and Sedan Delivery) and the E-100 pickups were the clutch and brake pedal pads, dome light assemblies (Ranchero and Econoline pickups), exterior door handles, armrests, and chrome hubcaps or wheel cover trim. The 4.5-inch-wide, 13-inch-diameter wheels were not interchangeable. Also unique to the Econoline was virtually everything drivetrain related, aft of the engine block; even the paint color of the air cleaner housing and valve cover was solely the 1961 Econoline's.

Just how compact was the Econoline pickup? The wheelbase was just 90 inches, compared to the 122 inches for Ford's 1961 F-100 full-size pickup with the eight-foot box. Overall length was just 168.4 inches. Yet the Econoline's box was a full seven feet long (five-foot-wide

box). Standard GVW was 929 pounds with an optional GVW of 1,800 pounds. There was nothing compact about the working ability of these small trucks. A Deluxe model was available, which added quarter windows to the cab, "twill-stripe woven plastic seat upholstery," dual horns, dual cowl-ventilation vents, dual armrests, Safety Package A (dual padded visors and dash pad), exterior driver's door lock, chrome horn ring, chrome hubcaps, and cigarette lighter.

Bob Ames, writing in his "For Men Only" column in the September 1961 issue of *Motor Trend*, said "Ford's Econoline is actually a compact, but has an excellent cargo box with dimensions that make it as practical in many ways as a standard-size Ford pickup." He praised the pickup's handling, stating: "Driving the Econoline pickup is a natural experience for those familiar with forward-control trucks. The most singular distinction



that identifies the Econoline is its surprisingly deft maneuverability. The steering is light, considering the 60-40 weight distribution, and the turning circle is short, 34.5 feet curb-to-curb. These engineering features alone equal exceptional maneuverability, but a test drive is necessary to discover just how easy it is to jockey the Econoline around in heavy traffic or a parking lot."

Was the front engine location of the Econoline a problem? Bob Ames continued: "Inside the cab the finish and materials are a little austere compared to passenger sedans. However, overall quality is good for a pickup, where the primary purposes are durability and practicality. The seats are firm, although the padding is generous. The driver and passenger sit on the extreme outside, with the area between taken up by the engine compartment. The cover is fully insulated and gets hotter from the sun than it does from the engine beneath. This cover lifts up and leaves the engine clear for servicing. The instrument cluster is adapted from Ford's school bus and has good legibility although it seems more necessary that a truck be equipped with gauges instead of warning lights for temperature, oil pressure, and generator."

The Falcon automobile was a great success, and many of the Econoline truck models sold well too. The eight-passenger Econoline Station Bus sold 15,082 units the first year, obviously filling a void in the market that the typical station wagon left open. The Panel Van, the cargo version of the Station Bus, sold 31,160 units. But the Econoline Pickup sold just 11,893 copies, plus 3,000 Deluxe model 87As. Changes were minor for the 1962 model year, but the Station Bus, the most automobile-like of the Econoline series, was now part of the Falcon line. Minor changes continued for the duration of the Econoline's life, with automatic transmissions becoming an option in 1964.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then the automakers paid Ford a big compliment. When Dodge introduced the A-100 compact van and pickup in 1964, it copied the Econoline. Even Chevrolet was forced to admit the conventional layout of the Econoline was better than its rear-engine Corvair trucks, and introduced the front-engine compact G-12 Chevy Van, also in 1964, although Chevy passed on a pickup version. But while the compact Econoline bus and van (and the Chevy and Dodge copies) were a great success, and actually established a precedent for the minivan boom of the 1980s, the compact forward control pickups never took off. Ford was only able to sell a total of 52,121 Econoline pickups before production ended at the end of the 1967 model run. To put this in perspective, a total of 50,645 Econoline vans were sold in 1962 alone.

There is one person that is very devoted to this pioneering little truck: Ken Hustvet, living deep in the Wisconsin north woods. "I'd dreamed for many



*7. The vehicle that influenced the Econoline pickup was the Volkswagen Type 2. Because of its rear engine design (7a), the box sits considerably higher than the Ford's. Volkswagen designed fold-down sides and incorporated individual under-the-floor cargo compartments to utilize the remaining space to its full extent. Chevrolet's rear-engined Corvair Rampside retained the lower cargo deck, and raised only the area over the engine compartment. This nicely restored 1961 VW pickup is owned by Brian Holcomb, Watertown, Wis.*

years of how fine it would be to have an example of each of the three Falcon-based light duty commercial vehicles offered in my favorite year of 1961 residing in my garage: a model 66A Ranchero; a model 78A Sedan Delivery; and a model 87A Econoline pickup, especially a five-window version. In the late autumn of 1984, I determined to find, somewhere, a decent restorable 1961 Custom Cab Econoline pickup." Hustvet already owned a '61 Ranchero and a '61 Sedan Delivery, both restored to the kind of fanatical perfection only a Falcon-lover could possess. "A few frustrating long-distance wild goose chases ensued over the next few years until I was put in touch with a lady in Ann Arbor, Mich. who owned a low-mileage '61 Custom Cab five-window Econoline. She told me she was the third owner of the locally

sold and owned truck, and that she'd owned it since 1987. I was hooked. We became 'friends' and I stayed in contact with her (and, exclusively, this particular truck) until she sold it to me on Valentine's Day, 1992. My seven-year search and wait ended."

Hustvet's very early production truck (built approximately the first week of December 1960) was the first Econoline pickup to be sold by Palmer Ford, a Ford dealership in Chelsea, Mich. that had been in business since 1911, according to a September 1992 conversation Hustvet had with George Palmer, owner of the dealership. "Palmer immediately remembered my five-window and the time they had trying to sell it. He spoke warmly of the original owner, who was a friend, a gentleman who died at age 90 of hiccups," Hustvet told us. "This man and



his wife had used it to haul farm produce from their gardens to the two vegetable stands they operated near Interstate 94. The Econoline was stored each autumn in his barn while they wintered in Florida. The truck had been one of those 'Here. Sell it!' cases which manufacturers sometimes foist on their dealers. Palmer hadn't ordered it, but he had to sell it. So it sat on his truck lot for months and months, and his salesmen couldn't peddle it." That led Palmer to install some enticing options on the Econoline in an effort to expedite the sale of the Code V Academy Blue pickup.

Though it had low mileage when he bought it, Hustvet's Econoline was still treated to a necessary ground-up restoration. "Mating the freshly restored and painted body and drivetrain together again was a real nail biter, let me tell you," Ken recalled. "One has to lower the body down over the engine/clutch/trans assembly, with the body being first lifted way, way above the drivetrain assemblies for convenience of positioning ... but, on the whole, the restoration process was a gas, as such things are supposed to be."

The 60-40 weight distribution doesn't make for an "all-terrain" truck. "I even became stuck once going down a gentle, dew-covered, mowed-grass incline," Hustvet reports, although his overall impressions of the truck are very positive. "My wife and I drove to St. Ignace, Michigan's, fourth annual Antiques on the Bay event in June 2000 (where *Cars & Parts*' editor, Bob Stevens, first met them), averaging over 26 mpg for the entire trip, at comfortable highway cruising speeds. We enjoyed the wonderful experience of taking the old girl on the longest trip she had ever been on (almost 1,000 miles total) in its 40-year life. My low-mileage freighter turned over 30,000 miles only a few miles from home on our return. It has proven to be all - and very much more - that I had always hoped one would be."

It wasn't until the 1970s when the Japanese compact trucks proved there was a market for a vehicle like this, and they were basically scaled-down versions of traditional full-sized pickups. Perhaps the forward-control layout of the Econoline pickup turned off potential buyers. Maybe it just took a decade or more to convince buyers that compact trucks could handle the work. Or possibly the Econoline's timing was just not right, and it took the energy crunch of the 1970s to convince Americans to buy compact trucks. Ken Hustvet knows better. The Econoline pickup has plenty of cargo room, load capacity, and hauling power. It's also comfortable, reliable, and thrifty. And it's one of those rare vehicles that has had a song written about it. Singer Nanci Griffith, on her 1987 album "Lone Star State Of Mind" has a cut called "Ford Econoline." Much like Ken Hustvet:

"...she's got a Coupe De Ville but her heart rides still in that Ford Econ-O-Line..."



8. Owner Ken Hustvet proudly drives his Econoline to distant shows. This trip to a show in St. Ignace, Mich. put more than 1,000 miles on the truck, finally turning the odometer past the 30,000-mile point. (Photo by Bob Stevens)

#### SPECIFICATIONS 1961 FORD ECONOLINE CUSTOM CAB PICKUP MODEL 87A

##### GENERAL DATA

Body style: Pickup  
 Passenger capacity: 2  
 Base price: \$1,833  
 Price as equipped:  
 \$2,067.10  
 Options: Rear quarter windows, armrests, fresh air heater/defroster with cowl insulation, seat belts, cigar lighter, manual AM radio, dual cowl air vents, dual padded sunvisors, windshield washers, chrome front bumper, chrome 6" diameter rear view mirrors, 6.50 x 13" white sidewall tires, chrome hubcaps, stainless trim rings, locking gas cap, spare wheel lock, low tailgate (n/c)

##### BASIC SPECIFICATIONS

Wheelbase: 90"  
 Length: 163.3"  
 Width: 72.5"  
 Height: 76.2"  
 Weight: 2,389 lbs.  
 Front tread: 60"  
 Rear tread: 60"  
 Ground clearance: 7.4"

##### INTERIOR SPECIFICATIONS

Headroom: 40"  
 Legroom: 42.6"  
 Hip room: 45.2"  
 Cargo capacity: 900+ lbs. standard

##### ENGINE

Type: Inline 6, cast iron head and block  
 Displacement: 144.3 cu. in.  
 HP @ RPM: 85 @ 4,200  
 Torque @ RPM:  
 134 lbs.-ft. @ 2,000  
 Compression ratio: 8.7:1  
 Bore x stroke: 3.50 x 2.50"  
 Induction system:  
 One 1-bbl. Holley carburetor, Model 1908  
 Ignition system:  
 Breaker point/condenser  
 Fuel: Regular  
 Exhaust: Single  
 Valve configuration:  
 OHV, two per cylinder  
 Main bearings: 4

##### TRANSMISSION

Type: 3-spd. manual, synchromesh on 2nd and 3rd  
 Ratios:  
 1st - 3.27:1  
 2nd - 2.03:1  
 3rd - 1.0:1  
 Reverse - 3.89:1

##### DIFFERENTIAL

Type: Hypoid  
 Ratio: 3.50:1

##### SUSPENSION

Front: I-beam axle, 2 semi-elliptic springs, hydraulic shock absorbers  
 Rear: Beam axle, 2 semi-elliptic springs, hydraulic shock absorbers

##### FRAME

Type: Unibody

##### STEERING

Type: Worm and sector  
 Ratio: 20.0:1  
 Turning circle: 34.5'  
 Turns, lock to lock: 4.7

##### BRAKES

Front: Drum  
 Rear: Drum  
 Effective swept area:  
 144.4 sq. in.

##### TIRES

Size: 6.50 x 13"  
 Type: 4-ply

##### CAPACITIES

Cooling system: 10.25 qts.  
 Gasoline tank: 14 gals.  
 Engine oil: 4.5 qts. w/filter  
 Transmission: 3 pts.  
 Rear axle: 2.5-3 pts.

##### CALCULATED DATA

HP/CID: .85  
 LBS/HP: 28.1  
 LBS/CID: 16.5  
**PERFORMANCE\***  
 Acceleration:  
 0-30 ..... 6.5 sec.  
 0-40 ..... 9.8 sec.  
 0-50 ..... 16.2 sec.  
 0-60 ..... 25.8sec.  
 0-70 ..... 51.0 sec.  
 Standing 1/4 mile:  
 23.3 sec. @ 58.0 mph  
 Top speed: 75  
 Fuel mileage: 24-30 mpg

\*Source: *Car Life*, September 1961. Data is for Econoline Station Bus, since no data for the Econoline Pickup exists. Station Bus is 2,711 pounds; 322 pounds more than the Pickup.