

# CAPRI— GOOD NEWS FOR 1979



**CAR and DRIVER**

AUGUST 1978  
**HOT ROD**  
WORLD'S LARGEST AUTOMOTIVE MAGAZINE

THE COMPLETE AUTOMOTIVE MAGAZINE • AUGUST 1978  
**MOTOR  
TREND**

**ROAD & TRACK**

LINCOLN-MERCURY

THE COMPLETE AUTOMOTIVE MAGAZINE • AUGUST 1978

# MOTOR TREND

FIRST  
AMERICAN-BUILT  
CAPRI

## '79 CAPRI

by John Ethridge

After enjoying phenomenal success as a European-built captive import of the Lincoln-Mercury Division, the Capri nameplate will now grace a car built in the U.S. Like the new Mustang; it's derived from Ford Motor Company's successful "Fox" program, the corporate code name for the Fairmont/Zephyr. It will still have a 3-door body style, but other than that there will be little resemblance to the car it replaces.

Compared to the old Capri, the new car is larger and much roomier.

There's also a greater variety of power team options, ranging from the 2.3-liter four and 2.8-liter V-6 that were offered before, to a 2.3-liter Turbo four and a 5-liter V-8. The Turbo engine comes with a manual

transmission only. There's a choice of either transmission with the other engines.

The model lineup, in ascending order, consists of the standard Capri, the Ghia, the RS and the Turbo RS. With the Ghia model you get 14-inch radial tires in place of the standard 13-inch bias tires plus a deluxe sound package and internal and external trim items. The RS projects a performance image with raised white letter tires, styled steel wheels and a handling suspension system. But the Real McCoy is the Turbo RS, which includes Michelin TRX tires and 3-spoke aluminum TRX wheels plus a handling suspension system specifically designed for those tires and wheels.

The 2.3 liter Turbo engine, which produces 127 net horsepower, as well as inertial front seatback latching are also part of the Turbo RS package. The Turbo RS is the best handling and accelerating version of the Capri available.

The Capri suspension is based on the strut front, 4-link rear system introduced on the 1978 Zephyr. In standard form it uses a 1.00-inch-diameter stabilizer in front and none in the rear unless the V-8 engine is ordered, in which case a .50-inch rear stabilizer is added. Thirteen-inch bias tires are standard with this suspension, but any of the available Capri tires can be ordered with it, except the TRX. This suspension, by the way, like that of the parent

Zephyr, works quite well and is devoid of the flabbiness that we've come to expect in standard suspensions.

The next rung up the ladder is the handling suspension that is offered with the RS, which comes only with 14-inch radials. It has a 1.06-inch-diameter stabilizer up front and a .50-inch one at the rear with either the plain 2.3 engine or 2.3 Turbo. With other engines, a .56-inch bar is fitted at the rear. Also, compared to the standard suspension, this one has different spring rates and shock valving plus stiffer front suspension bushings and rear suspension upper arm bushings.

The TRX suspension, which can be had with any Capri engine, is tuned for, and available with, the Michelin 190/65HR390 tires mated to special 390-mm forged aluminum wheels. These tires were originally introduced on the European Ford Granada (an entirely different car from the one sold here). They are of low-profile, wide-aspect, high-pressure design and provide good ride and handling characteristics with exceptionally low rolling resistance. The tire and rim designs were patented as a package by Michelin.

The TRX suspension itself has special shock valving, increased rear spring rates, 1.12-inch front stabilizer bar and a rear bar of .50-inch diameter with the standard 2.3-liter engine and 2.8 liter engine, and .56 inch with the Turbo and the V-8.

The Capri that is the subject of this test was equipped pretty much the way anyone preferring luxurious appointments and a quiet, good ride might order one. The 2.8 liter V-6 gives performance and economy that falls midway between the 2.3-liter four and the 5-liter V-8. The V-6, incidentally, gives a more balanced feel to the car than does the V-8, because it is considerably lighter. Also, even though the car was "loaded" with a full complement of optional equipment, it weighed less than 2900 pounds. The performance given by this power team in the Capri is roughly equivalent to that obtained from a 5-liter engine in a mid-size car or a 5.7-liter engine in a full-size car. But when it comes to fuel consumption, the Capri is the hands-down winner by a substantial margin. (Time did not permit a

mileage check on the test car, but a 20-25% improvement wouldn't be far off.)

When we tested the Capri, we thought the instruments were some sort of an option, but it turned out they are standard. Instrumentation is very complete, and this adds still another touch of class to the car. A tachometer and speedometer/odometer/resetable trip odometer occupy two large dials, and four smaller gauges monitor coolant temperature, oil pressure, amperage and fuel level. There is also an optional console with graphic display for those wishing additional monitoring of vehicle systems. This shows a silhouette of the car with five appropriately located light-emitting diodes (LEDs) to warn of low fuel, low washer fluid level and failure of low beam headlamp, tail-lamp or brake lamp. A test feature is incorporated to verify that the display is functioning properly.

New on the Capri for the first time is a tilt steering wheel. Positioning of the release lever at 4 o'clock, 1.5 inches below the wheel rim, allows one-handed adjustment. Also making its debut on the Capri, or any Ford Motor Company product in conjunction with floorshift automatic and manual transmissions, is a speed control. This one has the "resume" feature that has been used on Ford's speed controls for years.

The new "fluidic" windshield washer system represents what appears to be the first basic improvement on washers since they were introduced. Instead of the usual fixed spray nozzle, it uses an oscillating jet stream that disperses droplets over the entire windshield. The droplets, being larger and heavier than those produced by normal washers, are less affected by the wind at highway speeds. The frequency of oscillation of the jet is so high that the spray appears as a solid fan-like pattern.

The climate control system of the new Capri has been upgraded compared to that previously used. Four dash-mounted registers are shared by the heater and air conditioner and provide more air flow than before. The control allows selection of maximum air conditioner recirculation or fresh air in two separate

functions, thus giving temperature modulation while in the recirculation mode. Also, the temperature control allows smaller deviations from the set temperature before making corrections.

A number of serviceability features have been incorporated into the new Capri which fleet owners will readily appreciate, but which should equally benefit private owners, especially those who put on lots of miles or keep their cars for longer periods of time. Access to a trouble spot often costs more money than the fix itself, and such things as windshield wiper motors and linkages, steering column-mounted switches and controls, and the fuse box are placed where they can be reached without having to remove a lot of panels or the steering wheel, column, etc.

The air conditioner and heater blowers, the parts of those systems most likely to fail, can be serviced without removing the evaporator assembly or the heater core. In fact, the heating and air conditioning systems can generally be worked on independent of one another, and the condenser can be removed without draining the radiator.

Up front, the suspension struts, unlike most, can be replaced without disturbing the springs, eliminating the need of a spring compressor. The front disc brake pads are equipped with audible wear indicators, and the suspension ball joints have visual wear indicators to eliminate guesswork about need of replacement. The engine compartment is roomier than usual for easy engine and accessory service, and the single drive belt on the V-8 engine is easily replaced and requires no adjustment, the tension being taken care of by a spring-loaded pulley.

To sum up, the new Capri is a very modern car that presents style and flair to the eye of the beholder, enjoyment and satisfaction to the driver and value to the owner. It can be equipped either to suit the tastes of those who have bought previous Capris or those who appreciate the traditional American car. A lot of intelligent thought and planning went into the making of this car, and it doesn't take long behind the wheel to fully appreciate its attributes.

# CAR and DRIVER

AUGUST 1978 • ONE DOLLAR

'79 CAPRI DEARBORN MADE, TURBO 4 OR V-8



Dearborn's performance penance is hereby over.

by Don Sherman

• It's time to clear your memory bank on the Ford Motor Company. It's changed. Road-hugging weight, the classically elegant formal look, marshmallow suspensions, and park-bench bumpers don't live here anymore. It's only the new Fords that matter now—the Fiesta, the Zephyr/Fairmont, and this new Capri/Mustang. The thinking behind them is as fresh as tomorrow.

Even the gray-flannel guys in Dearborn are talking performance again. And when they use such a word—cullied from the Ford archives, dusted off, and sent out through excitable journalists like us—it is always preceded by an active verb like "maximize" or "optimize."

The whole company is on the car-enthusiast case again. After a long stay of execution for fun-to-drive Fords, they're back. Product planners are boasting about zero-to-sixty acceleration, 120-mph top speeds, slalom-course results, and turbo motors. And there's a whole lot more than idle conversation. The hardware is right here for you to judge for yourself—Fords like you've never imagined before.

The new Mustang and its Lincoln-Mercury sister ship, the Capri, are twin bolts of automotive lightning out of an uncharted corner of the car-building cosmos. The new Capri's floorpan and several steering and suspension pieces come from the Zephyr, and this is the best clue to what a blockbuster this new car is.

If you liked the Zephyr you'll do cartwheels over the Capri. We know you did and will. While one responsible editor right here at *C/D* was pronouncing the Zephyr the best American-made sedan ever, you readers were busy voting it the most significant new domestic car for 1978. Add a four-speed, your choice of a rumbly V-8 or turbocharging, sticky tires, and a body with aerodynamics good enough for Le Mans, and you've got the Capri. It's a piece of Detroit iron ready and able to over-rev your pulse rate. Maybe, just maybe, Ford's performance penance is over at last.

It should go without saying that this car is a lightweight, shrewdly engineered defender of the environment and saver of natural resources. Oddly enough, it's *not*

downsized in sheer physical dimensions. The wheelbase is about the same as the German Capri's but there are 4.3 extra inches in length and 2.6 more in width. Almost all roominess dimensions are up, with the biggest gains made in interior width and cargo space.

Even so, weight has been saved. 68 pounds of the old Capri have been left on the cutting-room floor.

The car works because every one of the thousands who participated in the project had his thoughts focused like a laser beam on one clear goal: to build a performance car that could burn a fresh trail through classic hot-car hang-ups clear into the Eighties. It had to look, go, and feel fun-to-drive, and, by sheer willpower as much as anything else, it does.

In our introduction to the new Capri the styling message came first. It's the first time aerodynamics has played such a role in a Ford non-racing product, and perhaps the most dedicated search for low drag ever undertaken for any American-made car.

Sheetmetal has been wrapped tightly around the track and wheel-

base to give a wide-stance-lean-body look. The bumpers are integrated not only in appearance but also in function as they blend in with full 360-degree rub-strip protection. Glass is expansive, doors are big, and the total look is one of Tomorrowland utility. The aerodynamic payoff is substantial. It takes only 7.2 horsepower to move the fastback body through the air at 50 mph.

Once the guiding principles behind the skin were explained, we moved directly into the inner workings, which meant a few laps around Ford's Dearborn test track.

Make no mistake. This Capri is a shocker. Just when you think you understand Ford's new direction, this 1979 lightweight contender does something very un-Ford-like, and you're reminded that clocks really have ticked into the Eighties in Dearborn.

The dashboard is largely carried over from the Zephyr, but a complete array of gauges has been added in the classic two-large-dial-four-small-dial format. It's all very convenient: the seat keeps you up high (what Ford calls command position), all the readouts are visible through the steering wheel, and the hood slopes smoothly and sharply away so you can see the road just a few feet ahead of the front bumper.

Once the starter rumbled the 302 V-8 to life, my head reflexively jerked around. I expected to see a Pantera, or at least a Boss 302, on my back bumper.

It has a muffler that doesn't hiss, and a pair of pipes splitting off the single exhaust into CHROME TIPS! Instant 1968. Images I hadn't called up in years. These Ford guys had OD'd on the-way-it-used-to-be. Could it be? Total Performance really was back?

Shock number two came at first handshake with the black shifter, which felt for all the world better than a pro-stock Hurst. Ford's Mexican-made overdrive four-speed has been redesigned for 1979 with all the shift linkage packed inside. It's a thing of beauty. The stick moves deftly through the gears like stainless steel sliding over Teflon. It may well go down as the best-shifting four-speed ever built in America.

How long has it been since you had to feather a gas pedal to limit wheelspin off the line? Well, friends, this new Capri is a tire burner, and

anything over 2000 rpm on the clock from a standing start is enough to light a fire under the right rear corner. A smooth launch, just the right amount of first-gear wheelspin. Second gear snapped the tires loose again, and third delivered the end of the quarter-mile. There's no redline on the tach and the engine pulls well to 5500 rpm, but the horsepower curve says there's not much point in going beyond 5000.

This much quarter-mile speed usually generates an ET quicker by a second, but such are the realities of the fuel-economy era. Slide the big stick into the O.D. position (fourth) and you can idle down the road at 55 mph with the engine ticking over lazily at 1600 rpm. This is obviously in your favor for gas mileage (projected EPA city/highway combined rating is 21 mpg), as well as top speed. Unfortunately, the Dearborn oval track was too short to allow speeds over 117 mph, which were easily attainable in both third and fourth gears.

Wide gear ratios and tall axles will take a little getting used to, but there are compensations. The new Capri offers the first chance to buy the serious handler from the Ford Motor Company.

Underneath it's all Zephyr pieces that tie the Capri to the ground. This means a modified MacPherson strut in front and four angled trailing links in back. There's a coil spring at each corner with new rates for the Capri and specific shock valving as well. Various anti-sway bars are used with three different suspension calibrations, but a rear bar is used in all cars with the 302 V-8 engine. Thirteen-inch bias-ply tires are base equipment. There's also a handling suspension package that comes with fourteen-inch radials, bigger anti-sway bars at both ends, stiffer springs, tighter shocks, and firmer suspension bushings. This is a fine step up, but there's still more. What you really want to spend your hard-earned car cash on is the TRX suspension. It won't be cheap—Ford says at least \$400—but a Capri without TRX is a hot dog without relish.

The name comes from a special tire made by Michelin, which is only the start of the Capri's super suspension. It's built around unique 190/65R-390 rubber and a special wheel rim, both of which are carefully protected by Michelin design

patents. The profile is purposely squat, and the rim is a totally new shape with a diameter of 15.4 inches (390mm) and a width of 5.9 inches (150mm).

The rest of the Capri TRX suspension is tuned to the needs of the wheel and the tire with special shock valving, higher rear spring rates, and larger anti-sway bars. Other alterations from Zephyr designs include a steering effort increased by 20 percent and a lower rear roll center.

What all this does is stick you to the pavement. We smoked around Ford's 300-foot-diameter skidpad at 0.73 g, which is right up there in Z28 territory. On the eight-turn Dearborn road course, the TRX was more fun than one of those dollar-a-lap mini-Grand Prix racers. It does what you tell it to do. Drive it smooth and it sticks and sticks, and then starts to drift a little wide. There's understeer that builds when you push the Michelins to their limit, but not so much that you can't step down on the throttle or the brakes to nudge the back end out a bit. And if you'd rather manhandle this lightweight like an old ground-pounder Mustang, the TRX suspension will follow your every move. It will swing sideways as wide as you care to go with no nervous twitching on recovery.

A few other bits of technology have surfaced with the new Capri. A single flat belt drives all accessories on the 302 V-8 engine. This saves both weight and engine length, and it's easier to service since there's a spring-loaded tensioner to take up the slack. Windshield washers are also more sophisticated: a single oscillating jet now sprays the whole front glass. The new Capri will offer a glut of options. Additions to the long list of extra-cost items include leather upholstery, a tilt steering column, advanced automatic speed control, and a premium sound system with a power amplifier.

As great as all of this sounds, the best is yet to come. Ford is saving the Capri Turbo RS as the high-calorie dessert of this technological feast. It will be the mind-bender Capri, with all the goodies combined into one synergistic supercar: TRX suspension, a turbocharged 2.3-liter engine, good weight distribution, good power, and even good gas mileage.

The lightweight revolution has arrived in performance land. Rejoice.

AUGUST 1978

# HOT ROD

WORLD'S LARGEST AUTOMOTIVE MAGAZINE

## Driving the 1979 CAPRI

Though no longer a "sexy European" in actual origin, this new Capri is certainly true to that tradition—especially when equipped with Ford's revolutionary TRX wheel, tire and suspension package.

*by Dave Wallace*

Henry Ford II attracted extraordinary attention last summer by suggesting, in a widely quoted speech, that upcoming American cars would drive the imports from our shores by 1981.

After half a day at his Dearborn proving grounds with a trio of his company's all-new, made-in-Michigan Mustang and Capri automobiles, we can better appreciate

Mr. Ford's optimism.

We're told that Ford Motor Company collected, evaluated, disassembled and reevaluated no fewer than 40 popular imports—from the exotic 450-SL Mercedes, to the lowest-priced Japanese subcompact—back in 1976, even sponsoring a day-long driving session for top-level execs. Having personally driven the best of the rest,

Ford's brass subsequently elected to fight fire with fire. The happy result is the 1979 Capri: a curious combination of European styling, Japanese efficiency and all-American high performance.

You still can't buy a V6 BMW or V8 Datsun, but beginning this fall, your friendly neighborhood Lincoln-Mercury dealers will be offering an all-new, 2900-pound ponycar with

302 cubic inches, a four-speed gearbox and 139 (net) horsepower aboard. Capri's 2.8-liter V6 and 2.3-liter four-banger are also back for '79. A fourth option, the wild turbo-charged 2.3L (see July '78 HOT ROD), will also be available.

Beyond the carryover engine choices, this new car bears little resemblance to last year's Capri II. The unitized body shell is obviously brand-new and exceptionally slippery: Capri was also designed to accept the same suspension used for the feisty Zephyr, which means modified MacPherson hydraulic struts up front, four trailing arms out back and a coil spring at every corner.

Besides being lighter, simpler and cheaper to manufacture, MacPherson-type suspension (patented back in 1953 by Earle S. MacPherson, Ford's chief engineer) requires a lot less space than conventional U.S. control-arm systems, leaving more frontal space for engines and passengers. In conjunction with well-designed vehicles like the Zephyr and Capri the strut/four-link combination also contributes to positive handling, cruising and loads of trunk space.

Unlike the German-made Capris I and II, which combined to serve nine seasons as Lincoln-Mercury's captive import, the American Mustang has always been known for option sheets as long as the buyer's arm. That list gets even longer for '79, and for once the Capri gets full benefit of Yankee-style luxury and performance: Capri's new option sheet is nearly 400 percent of its year-ago size.

Though no longer a "sexy European" in actual origin, this new Capri

is certainly true to that tradition—especially when equipped with Ford's revolutionary TRX wheel, tire and suspension package.

Capri will offer three handling outfits: Standard, Handling and TRX. Thirteen-inch, bias-ply rubber is standard with the base suspension, which duplicates the Zephyr setup exactly except for two things: the diameter of the front stabilizer bar and the addition of a rear bar for all 302 V8 applications.

With the next-step Handling setup, which requires 14-inch radial rubber, the Capri buyer gets stiffer spring rates, shock valving and bushings, plus sway bars front and rear. Unfortunately, no such animal was available during our sneak-preview test session.

The trick TRX suspension is available for any 1979 Capri, and at this point the newest Ford becomes a serious contender for some backroads glory. In the handling department at least, the TRX option does for Capri what the Trans Am option does for Firebird.

What shows on the outside is the most unusual wheel/tire combination in domestic new-car history, and quite possibly the best ever offered. Developed overseas for the much-acclaimed European Granada, the 15.3-inch, forged-aluminum wheels and tall, but short-sidewalled (190/65R390), TRX elliptical radials were developed by Michelin and patented as a package. Ford Motor Company took things from there, building shock absorbers, coil springs, stabilizer bars and bushings, and the job was well done.

Capri dropped about 70 pounds in the transition to U.S. production,

picking up length, height, width and front-seat body space in the process. An extra 1.1 gallons of fuel capacity will also be appreciated, and the latest Capri's 32.4-cubic-foot trunk is a 43-percent improvement over last year's model.

Since its introduction almost 15 years ago, the original American ponycar has always offered the buyer an attractive selection of creature comforts and other accessories. Individual options for '79 include an electronic console with digital clock, stop-start timer and Japanese-style monitoring system, with light-emitting diodes (LEDs) to warn drivers of low fluid levels and burned-out bulbs. Power door locks, the tilt steering column, speed control (offered for the first time with four-speed Ford products) and power-booster stereo are a few of the features not often found on imports of comparable price and size.

In fact, everyone we met in Dearborn who had seen and driven these cars seemed to hold distinctly different ideas for his or her ideal Capri, and Lincoln-Mercury provides the ordering flexibility to make most of their dream cars come true. My own thoughts keep racing back to that bright-red hatchback with the throaty exhaust, four-speed box and all-American small-block. (If this was the car that Henry Ford saw last summer, no wonder he got so excited!)

While the Zephyr and new Capri won't exactly drive them all away, the imports are clearly in for a battle for these American shores. And with Ford Motor Company in the lead, the home team is bound to recoup lots of lost ground in the very, very near future.

### HOT ROD MAGAZINE'S ROAD TEST SPECIFICATIONS 1979 Mercury Capri 3-Door

Engine Type .....V6  
Displacement,  
Cubic Inches/Liters .....171/2.8  
Carburetion/Injection .....Single 2-barrel  
Bore & Stroke  
Inches/Millimeters ...3.66x2.70/93.0x70.1  
Compression Ratio .....8.7:1  
Transmission .....3-speed automatic  
Gear Ratios .....2.47, 1.45, 1.00:1  
Final-Drive Ratio .....3.08:1  
Brakes, Front/Rear .....Disc/Drum  
Wheel Size .....14x5 inches  
Tires, Make & Size .....Goodyear CR78x14

Curb Weight .....2887 pounds  
Weight Distribution,  
Front/Rear .....1690/1197  
Performance, ¼-mile .....NA  
Base Price .....NA  
Optional Equipment .....2.8L V6, C-3  
transmission, power steering, power brakes,  
air conditioning, rear window wiper/washer,  
flip-up moonroof, intermittent wipers,  
AM/FM-stereo, Premium Sound System,  
Styled Wheel Covers, Light Group  
Price As Tested .....NA

# ROAD & TRACK

AUGUST 1982

## NEW CAPRI-MUSTANG:

*European Bred,  
American Built*



*Driving Impressions,  
Technical &  
Styling Analyses*

I found the new Capri a pleasant shape from any angle. It's a crisp, clean design, and trim too, lacking the excessive lateral overhang—characterized by the body floating way out over the wheels that's a feature of many American cars.

There's no doubt the new Capri has the potential to be the best sporty coupe Ford has ever built. It's one of the most logical and efficient designs ever to come out of Ford and a match for the European Capri in many respects.

To put the Capri into perspective it's necessary to compare it to the current Capri II and some of its domestic and import competition. The new Capri weighs about 70 lb. less than the Capri II. In interior roominess the Capri also comes out looking good. It's got 0.5 in. more rear leg room than the Capri II. It has an impressively larger luggage compartment than its predecessor and by MVMA (Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association) measurements, the Capri has 4.0 inches more rear hip and shoulder room than the Capri II. Those are significant improvements. The Capri also stacks up well against its domestic and import competition.

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Within limitations the TRX suspension is nothing short of phenomenal. The Michelin radials are as far above normal radials as radials are above bias tires. These tires noticeably quicken the steering on initial inputs; there's no waiting for the tires to catch up with the steering wheel. There's understeer at the limit but the cornering limits are impressively higher than the other two cars I drove.