

**THE MUSCLE  
SEDAN IS BACK!**

**'03 MERCURY  
MARAUDER**

# **HOT ROD**

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**HORSEPOWER TO GO:  
32 VALVES NO WAITING!**

**MARAUDER 40TH ANNIVERSARY:  
GOLDEN AGE OF MUSCLE RETURNS.**

**DOUBLE TROUBLE FOR BIG TORQUE:  
DUAL THROTTLE BODIES, DUAL EXHAUST.**



# '03 Mercury Marauder

BY JEFF KOCH

**L**adies and Gentlemen, this is the 2003 Mercury Marauder. It's a simple enough recipe: big engine, rear-drive platform, room for real human beings inside, doesn't break the bank. Chevy rediscovered this formula with the now-legendary Impala SS, only to snuff the flame after three brightly burning seasons. And now, Mercury introduces the car that everyone knew the Ford Motor Company could build and wondered why the hell it didn't.

Enough shoulda-woulda-coulda-did-or-didn't. What will you get for your Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price of \$29,500? Beneath that broad black hood, you have the same modular 4.6L, four-valve engine that's been around for about a decade now, seeing duty in everything from Lincoln Mk VIII to Mustang Cobra. It's tuned to produce more than 300 hp at 5,750 rpm, and 310-plus lb-ft at a rather high 4,250 rpm, with a 6,250 rpm redline. This mill will not, we are told, be available in the Crown Vic anytime soon—not even cop cars, as has long been rumored.

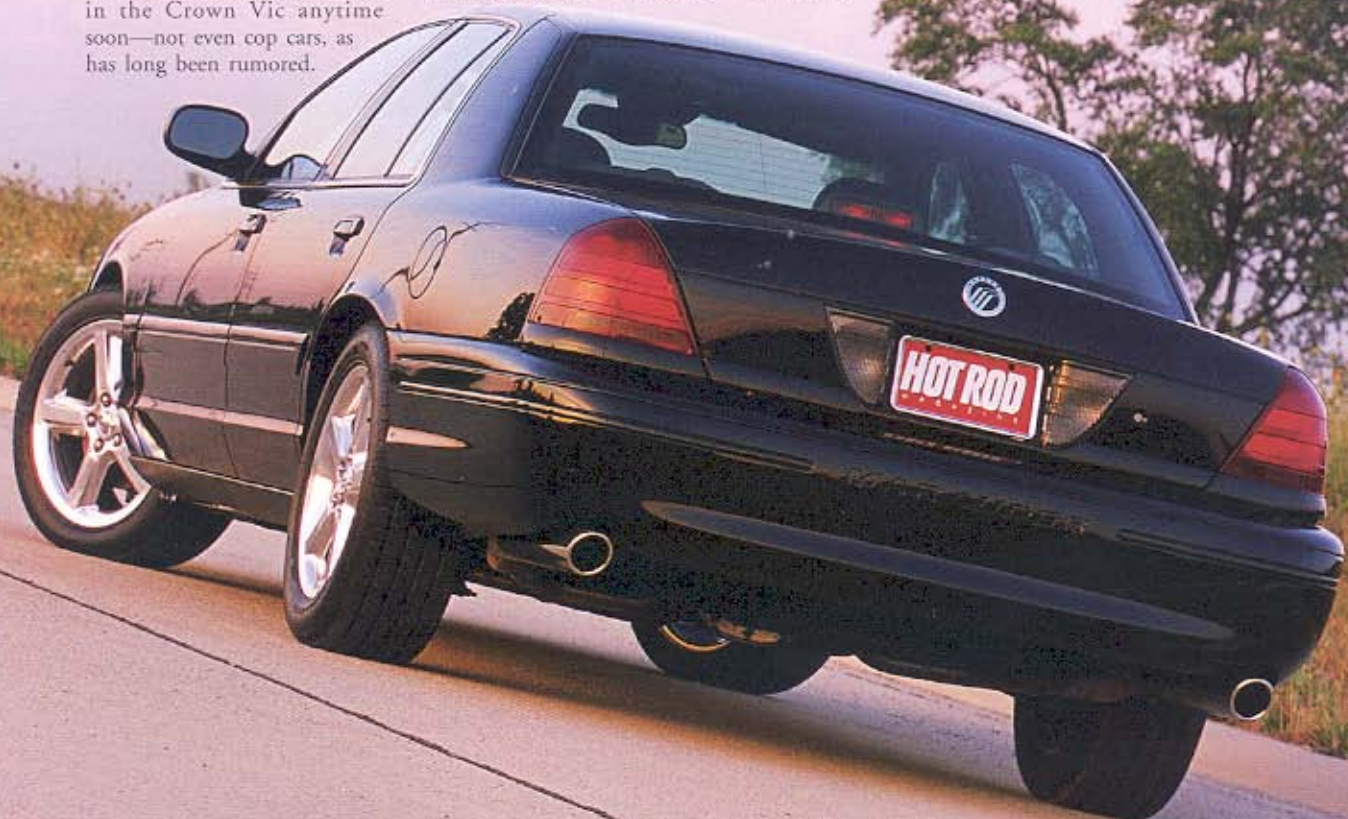
## THE V-8 REAR-DRIVE SEDAN IS BACK

Team Marauder reps are convinced that more emissions-legal grunt is available from the four-valve 4.6, but they can't justify dipping into gas-guzzler territory and paying the massive fines for violating CAFE just now. Final calibrations are still pending,

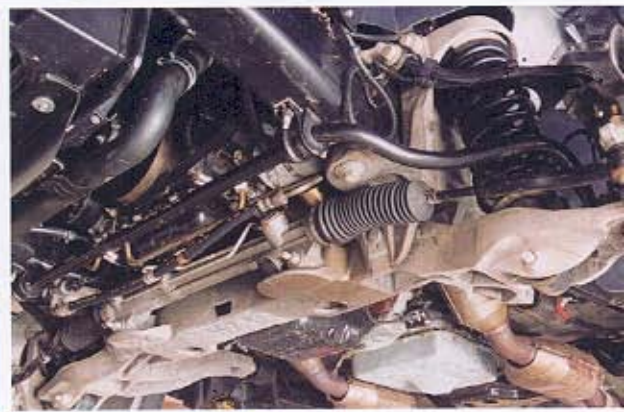
and the power and torque numbers we publish here are minimum figures. Team members say that since the '99 Cobra debacle, "We don't round power figures upwards anymore." So they're playing it cautious. The upper intake is a Marauder-specific piece, and the throttle bodies are the twin 57mm units cribbed from Lightning and Bullitt; we're told that Marauder has the lowest air intake restriction of anything Ford currently builds de-

spite not having the popular aftermarket-style low-restriction air filter you'd expect. Exhaust leaves via a 2½-inch Faurencia true-dual exhaust with 2½-inch tailpipes and polished 3½-inch Meg's tips. Under consideration is a modified Mark VIII beauty shield to hide some of the plumbing, but there are heat issues. We say engines should be visible, no matter how ugly.

A 5.4L was considered, incidentally, but the taller deck height made fitment impossible. Smoldering desires for a beefed-up pushrod 351 Windsor were doused long ago. And the Eaton-blown 4.6L two-valve that the '99 prototype had? Well, knowing what kind of car this would be, and the lead-foots who own them, Ford management at the time didn't want to be saddled with the warranty claims. Now that Ford has had a little more experience with the Eaton blower on the modular mills, and since the blown four-valve 4.6L will be in Mustangs soon enough anyway (oops, did we say that?),







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chances are greater that Marauder will receive Mustang's trickledown—or maybe it'll get those three-valve heads that Ford's been toying with for the past three years as an intermediate step. Ford has time: Another facelift is planned in 2006, and this rear-drive platform, including Marauder, is scheduled to remain in the lineup through the end of Ford's long-range plans in 2010.

The transmission is the 4RW70 four-speed with overdrive, though there are allegedly discussions with Roush to make the (currently Europe-only) ZF six-speed automatic an extra-cost option. A stick option was never seriously under consideration; the clutch pedal would interfere with a key behind-the-dash crossbracing that is essential to the big Merc passing crash regs. Power gets out to the tried-and-true 8.8-inch rear, this time with 3.55 cogs and a limited-slip diff. The seriously performance mad will want 4.10s or 4.30s to get the most out of their high-revving cammer, but then the seriously performance mad might want to start with something a little lighter, like a Mustang.

Suspension has been upgraded, too, and not just the obvious bits. Appropriately large if slightly fussy wheels are specific polished forged aluminum 18x8-inchers all around, featuring Greek god Mercury's own profile in each center, rolling on BFGoodrich g-force T/A<sup>kdws</sup> rubber—235/50s in front, 245/55s out back. They front completely stock discs on all four corners—every Crown Vic and Grand Marquis wear them these days. Also new across the board is an aluminum engine crossmember, and variable power steering that's dead numb while parallel-parking but firms up nicely as speed increases. Of course Marauder gets thicker sway bars (a 28mm hollow bar in the front; the rear is still in development), upgraded Tokico monotube shocks, and stiffer coils (325-pounders) up front; the Grand Marquis' optional airbag rear suspension is part of the Marauder package.

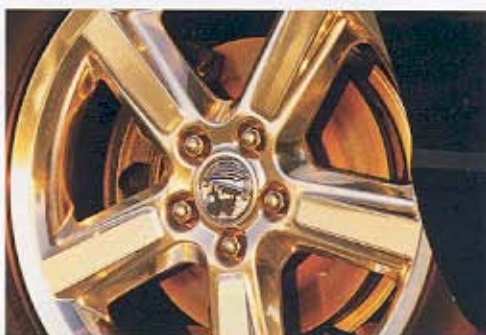
The rear shocks, by the way, have been moved from inboard to outboard of the rear framerails a la '69 Camaro. The good news is that track has increased by 50mm (about 2 inches), which makes for more stable handling; never have "Mercury Grand Marquis" and "flingable" been used together in a sentence until now. The bad

news is that tire room is severely limited back there; the team had to get the factory to roll the fender lips in order to clear the 245s they specified. Still, it's a tradeoff they felt was worthwhile.

Word from our sources is that once again the dual 57mm throttle bodies trick you into thinking there's more power down low than there might be with their excellent tip-in characteristics, and once in the revs, everything moves along at a satisfying and swift rate. The exhaust note, which we're told will be toned down a touch, is aftermarket-aggressive with none of the boomy characteristics that those systems often fight through. And the Marauder's heft is said to be well-planted despite the tires' seeming lack of girth.

Outside, Marauder is a hybrid: It wears '03 Grand Marquis front sheetmetal but has the rear details (triangular taillights, body-color trunk panel, et al) of the Crown Vic. Everything that is chromed on the Grand Marquis, from the grille to the door handles, is black; only the wheels and the Mercury "wave" badges on the grille and trunk escape. (There is still a movement to replace the wave with the "godhead" in the grille.) Even the non-reflective surfaces of





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the headlights have been blackened, and the taillights, turn signals, and back-up lights are smoked as dark as the DOT will allow. Marauder sports exclusive fascias: The front has a pair of Cibie (pronounced See-Bee-Eh) foglights, while the rear has "Marauder" lettering punched in and is cut to clear the exhaust tips. There is no other Marauder badging outside the car: very subtle, a message only to those in the know. Black will be the only hue available for the first four months of production. Later, Dark Blue Pearl and Dark Shadow Grey will appear on the (limited) color palette. A rear spoiler will be a dealer-only option.

The recently introduced Crown Victoria Sport, denoting an option package featuring bucket seats and a console with floor shifter, drew snickers when it was launched at last January's LA Auto Show, but it was a harbinger of what was to come in Marauder. Known internally as the Five-Pass (for five-passenger), bucket seats and that floor-shift console were the gist of it, but Marauder again goes beyond. The Grand Marquis' stuffy wood has been replaced with a

textured gunmetal grey plastic known as "dot-matrix"; additionally, Marauder gets specific gauges (140-mph speedo at center, gas gauge to the left, and that glorious 7,000-rpm tach to the right) with Auto Meter oil and volt gauges tucked neatly into the console. The dual eight-way-power reclining buckets are dressed in a specially picked leather that is stitched with elegant French seams, and are given a bit more thigh support to boot. Back seat residents get cupholders in their fold-down armrest. An AM/FM/CD/cassette stereo (with optional dealer-installed six-CD changer) with redundant steering wheel controls, overhead console, and Marauder-specific floor mats are all part of the package inside. Two different greys will be available for the interior: Light Flint and the darker shade seen here called Midnight Black. Cars built after the four-month mark will have traction control fitted as standard; all will feature adjustable pedals.

Think all this is cool? It's just the beginning. Later in '03 you will see a "feature car" program, probably called X-100, that will feature a variety of power and visual upgrades that may (or may not) include headers, an X-pipe exhaust, Baer brakes,

Edelbrock valve covers, 3.73 gears spinning newly styled 19-inch wheels, a moonroof, and specific paint (probably not yellow, for obvious reasons). Everything is up in the air right now, but the team will do *something*. The good news is that when the aftermarket gets involved in producing specific parts for the company, you just know they're going to leak into the catalog. From there, who knows? We've outlined some of the future plans above, and it just keeps looking better. Just one "feature car" style per year will be built, taking up no more than one-third of total Marauder production.

And those production numbers? Well, the Marauder business case was based on selling 15,000 units (making a first-year Marauder rarer than the '02 Thunderbird everyone's crowing about), and at \$29,500, you can go faster, carry more people, and have a rarer piece than Ford's squawker for less bread. Where's the downside? Oh, right, no folding top. Feh! A small price to pay. Do the right thing and get your money in now. Or wait, 'cause this Marauder thing is only going to get better, and there's no end in sight. They're making up for lost time. Lucky us. **HR**