

USEFULNESS of Dodge Custom Sierra impressed test crew. The car proved easy to drive despite its big and roomy body.



cism the test crew made was in regard to the gaudiness of the trim. The upholstery, for example, was made of serviceable materials but had a boudoir design that seemed out of place.

In general, the Sierra looked rugged and practical, an excellent buy for anyone who can really use a wagon.

FORD

Elegance is the keynote of the Ford Country Squire, one of the best looking cars of its class. The generally boxy lines blend well with the station wagon body and it is one of two (the other is a Mercury) still using a semi-wood panelled exterior.

The general quality of the finish, inside and out, is in keeping with the expensive appearance, except for two jarring touches. The floor mat is a light rubber, loosely secured and rather sloppy looking, and the headliner seemed to be a cheap cardboard material.

In this age of ultra-low cars, Ford still provides comfortably high seating. The padding is firm and there is plenty of leg

and head room. Only the third seat comes in for any objections. It consists of two thin cushions that fit over a collapsible platform right above the rear axle. The result might be all right for children but adults won't like it.

The seating was so arranged that it can be quickly folded to form a huge cargo compartment. Here the third seat cushions show a bright advantage; they are small and light enough to stow under the platform, so nothing has to be removed to convert from a nine-passenger car to a cargo carrier.

The tail gate is conventional, with the transom-type window wider than the lower section, permitting good rearward visibility and making it easier to load bulky objects.

Performance was moderate, 0-to-60 taking 13.2 seconds, but besides the heavier wagon body, there was the added weight of power accessories and an air conditioning unit. Also, the rear axle ratio was only 2.69-to-1. Because of these disadvantages, any comparison with other Ford models would be unfair to the Squire.

Considering the weight, fuel consumption was quite low, 14.9 mpg during mostly highway driving.

Covering long distances was tiring but this seemed due to faults of the individual car rather than any basic engineering errors. The accelerator, for example, was stiff and required a deliberate pressure to maintain cruising speeds.

More serious problems showed up in hilly country. Neither the suspension nor the brakes were up to very vigorous driving. Handling was difficult and there was considerable sway in corners. Ford has softened the springs to get a smoother ride this year but at a noticeable sacrifice in roadability.

A car of the Country Squire's weight should really have heavier duty brakes. The regular Ford type faded quite quickly after several applications in succession.

The Squire is a more traditional, sedate station wagon than the Dodge Sierra—the kind of a car that looks "right" parked in front of the local country club. Its appeal is to the buyer seeking luxury at a moderate price rather than utility. •



FAST SWITCH from passengers to cargo is simplified on Ford wagon by collapsible seats; nothing has to be removed. Wide rear window opens transom-style.



WALL-TO-WALL carpeting covers Dodge cargo floor when second seat is folded. Section between tail gate and wheel wells conceals the luggage compartment.