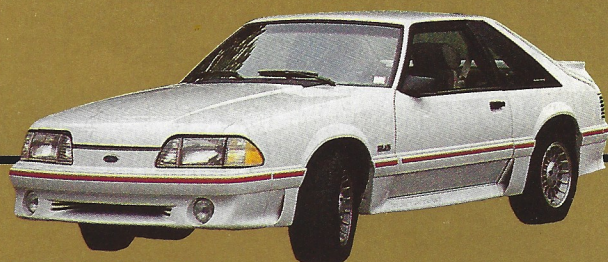


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The GT stands for *gran turismo*, Italian for high style, speed, and comfort. Ford of Europe reserves the "XR" prefix for its really hot stuff—Escort XR3, Sierra XR4.

Most Americans refer to luxury sport machines as "GT" cars—more refined and more comfortable than "sports" cars, yet plenty fast, agile, and enjoyable to drive. We associate the term with Ferraris, Porsches, modern Corvettes, and the like. American makers, right or wrong, often use it to indicate pure muscle and macho, as in Ford's hot Mustang GTs of recent times.

But an Escort "GT"? A Mercury Lynx "XR3"?

Three years ago, Ford matched a new port-injected version of the Escort's 1.6-liter CVH (Compound Valve Hemispherical) overhead cam four with a 5-speed manual box and added black trim, fog lamps, spoilers, sport seats, TRX tires and wheels, and a stiffer "TR" suspension. The Ford marketers called the combination—you guessed it—"GT." The Mer-

cury counterpart was Lynx "RS."

Sure, these looked sportier, went a little quicker, and handled better than the run-of-the-mill econobox Escort/Lynx. But refined? Hardly. Fast? With just 84 hp, 15 more than the standard 1.6, not very. "GT"? No way.

For '84 the Escort got a nice new soft-feel instrument panel and inte-

rior trim. An optional 120-hp turbo 1.6 was promised but none were built, since all the turbo engines went into 2-seater Ford EXPs instead.

The next evolution came in mid-'85 when the Escort/Lynx got a Eurolook facelift (flush headlamps, lower and more rounded hood and front fenders, more integrated bumpers, less chrome), upgraded seats, and an up-

# 1986 Ford Escort GT/ Mercury Lynx XR3

Finally worthy of their names?

by Gary Witzenburg

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB D'OLIVO AND DAVID FRANKLIN





## Substantial chassis improvements keep all four Eagle GTs on the road, gripping their hearts out

sized 1.9-liter engine. The suspension was also improved, with new strut mounts for better response, plus more precise steering with better feel and feedback.

The '85½s come in base, L and GL (Escort) or GS (Lynx) variations, all powered by a 2-bbl version of the 1.9, making a respectable 86 hp at 4800 rpm and 100 lb-ft of torque at 3000 (compared to 70 hp and 88 lb-ft for the standard '85 1.6). The GT and RS models were dropped, but replacements were promised for '86.

And, sure enough, here they are.

The first thing you'll notice about the '86 GT and XR3 is that they look like no American-made Escort or Lynx yet offered. The body-color bumpers are nicely integrated into a slick aero package with fender spats connected by functional-looking rocker extensions. A body-color grille panel with twin off-center slats, a "GT" or "XR3" decal, and a bottom-breather intake/airdam with flushed-in fogs set off the front, while black taillamp trim (body-color on the XR3) and a handsome hatch-mounted spoiler (containing the mandatory high-center brake lamp) finish off the rear. Very nice.

The engine is a new port-injected 1.9-liter generating 108 hp at 5200 and a healthy 114 lb-ft of twist at 4000. Suspension rates are higher relative to ordinary Escort/Lynxes. Strut location and layout have received serious attention at both ends, the front anti-foll bar is bigger, and a new rear bar is added to tame these cars' well-known understeering tendencies. Beefy P195/60HR15 Goodyear Eagle GTs on specific alloy wheels (eight-spokes on the Escort, a

"four-flag" design on the Lynx) complete the package.

Inside the redesigned cabin are a pair of very good "sport/performance" buckets and a nice new 4-spoke sport wheel wrapped in soft-feel vinyl. Materials, color coordination, and fit (if our test example was representative) are better than we've seen in any previous Escort or Lynx. Interior storage is ample, and control ergonomics (user-friendliness) are generally good, though not quite up to the standards of some competing imports or for that matter, of newer-design Ford product.

Only the incomplete and somewhat cheap-looking instrument package spoils the effect just a little. The speedo, tach, fuel, and temperature gauges are round and readable enough, but the look is econobox, not

"GT" or "XR3," and no oil pressure or voltage dials are available. VW's rival GTI has auxiliary gauges in the vertical center of the console, under the radio, but the Escort/Lynx interior designers have used that space for a graphic warning display instead.

Functionally, the GT/XR3 comes close, but just misses, as an American GTI. And the shortfall is mostly subjective. It's actually quicker than the VW in 0-60 and quarter-mile acceleration, according to Ford, and has good mid-range punch, but it *feels* less lively due to wider-ratio gearing and slower throttle response. We clocked a 5-speed XR3 prototype at 10.36 sec 0-60 and 17.61 sec at 79.7 mph in the quarter, compared to 10.20 and 17.55 at 76.8 mph for our 1985 Car of the Year GTI. Of course, the conditions and surface were different.

Around the flat handling course at Ford's Dearborn proving ground, the XR3 (and a counterpart Escort GT

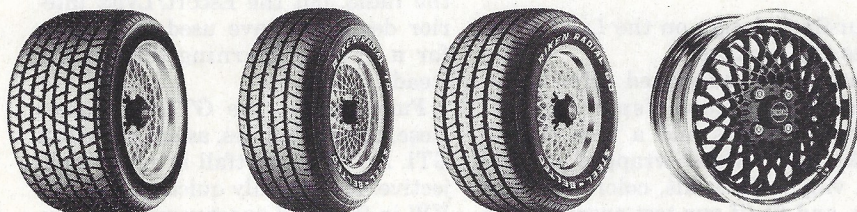


Part of the XR3 package includes power remote outside mirrors, tachometer, trip odometer, engine temp gauge, split folding rear seats, color-keyed interior trim and seat upholstery, roof grab-handles, and fully adjustable sports seats with see-through head restraints. The performance aspect of the package includes a 108-hp 1.9-liter OHC four-banger, giant tires and wheels, and spoilers front and back.





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225HR60-14	\$90
195HR60-15	\$87
205HR60-15	\$90
215HR60-15	\$92

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205HR60-13	\$90
185HR60-14	\$82
195HR60-14	\$87
205HR60-14	\$96
215HR60-14	\$98
195HR60-15	\$96
205HR60-15	\$99
215HR60-15	\$102

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
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## Ford Escort GT/ Mercury Lynx XR3

equipped with the available 3-speed automatic) felt surprisingly fast, agile, and stable. The steering was good, body roll well controlled, and the improved chassis generally kept all four Eagle GTs on the road gripping their little hearts out. Only at the very limit of traction under hard full-throttle cornering did the front suspension lose some composure and get wallowy over surface irregularities. Still, there was little of the dreaded front-drive torque steer, and trailing-throttle oversteer (from lifting in mid-corner) was gentle and controllable enough to use as a handling aid.

Better than VW's rival GTI? Subjectively, no. In cornering, as in straight-line performance, the new GT/XR3 may generate similar or better numbers, but it doesn't *feel* as good in steering response, feedback through the seat and steering wheel, or overall suspension suppleness. Our Dearborn test example also lost to the VW in 60-0 braking—153 feet versus the '85 GTI's outstanding 125—but beat it (and a lot of other front-drivers) in shift quality thanks to its very precise and positive manual linkage. More meaningful direct comparisons will have to await a future side-by-side test.

Worthy of the "GT" and "XR3" labels? Well, let's say getting perilously close. These new Ford and Mercury econo-performers are good. But they could be even better: new instruments, a little more suspension refinement, better gearing, a few more horses, maybe a new turbo motor...

Ask us again next year. 

## DATA

### Mercury Lynx XR3

#### POWERTRAIN

Vehicle configuration	Front engine, front drive
Engine configuration	L-4, OHC
Displacement	1860 cc (113 cu in.)
Max. power (SAE net)	108 hp @ 5200 rpm
Max. torque (SAE net)	114 lb-ft @ 4000 rpm
Transmission	5-sp. man.
Final drive ratio	3.73:1

#### CHASSIS

Suspension, f/r	Independent/independent
Brakes, f/r	Disc/drum
Steering	Rack and pinion
Wheels	15 x 6.0 in., cast alloy
Tires	P195/60HR15 radials

#### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase	2393 mm (94.2 in.)
Overall length	4239 mm (166.9 in.)
Curb weight	979 kg (2158 lb)
Fuel capacity	49.2 l (13.0 gal)

#### PERFORMANCE

0-60 mph	10.36 sec
Standing quarter mile	17.61 sec/79.7 mph
Braking, 60-0	153 ft

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