

The Michigan Strong Boy



A super rare 63-1/2 Galaxie gets the guts, and the glory.

Text by John Rotella • Photography by Colin Date

Strong boy...in pink? Well not exactly. For sure this Ford is a stellar example of The Michigan Strong Boy (although it was actually built in Chicago). But the color... that color... is called Rose Beige. Let's get it understood right up front, it is not pink, but a highly metallic combination of rose and beige - available only on some of the more expensive Ford/L-M models in 1963. Rose Beige. And boy does it look great on 209+ inches of styled steel called "Galaxie".

This particular big hunk of Ford is full of all kinds of wonder,

but the top two have got to be (1) it's got the 427 8-barrel "R" code and (2) it has belonged to only one person since new.

The popular name for this Ford can take on some variations: 1963-1/2 Hardtop, 1963 Fastback, 1963-1/2 Galaxie, and more. Actually, it is called the Galaxie 500/XL Sports Hardtop. This was to differentiate it from the "boxtop" 2-door Hardtop; both body styles were also available in the slightly "less glamorous" Galaxie 500 series.

So what makes it an XL? Well for starters, the XLs came

with the 289 V8 and Cruise-O-Matic. Then there were the bucket seats, console, door mounted courtesy lights, knock-off hub wheel covers, and shiny rich XL trim everywhere you look; inside and out. Speaking of the seats, they were at their all-time cushiest, 100% foam padding front and back (unlike the competition). The typical XL cost \$594 more than a 500, \$463 of which was directly attributable to the V8, C-O-M, buckets, and console.

And the engine situation... did you know that in the first

part of the model year, the 260 was standard in the XLs, then shortly upgraded to the 289? Yet, the 260 was still available as

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If you wouldn't mind having a sports car that doesn't look like a European sports car, that carries four or six passengers in every gear at every speed that holds its own as a disabled but still has a silk-cushion ride - consider the large, sleek object above.

strong - and strong in about every other way you can imagine. Heavy-duty springs, shocks, brakes, nylon tires and 15-inch wheels are mandatory. The four-speed four-box could cope with a slanted truck, and the way this vehicle goes would raise you a question about the word "raise". Is this for you? Not unless you want a car with muscle all over it. Not unless you own a strong boy who can put down any

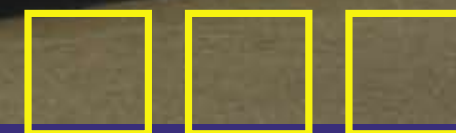
other full-size car in the world. Our motto: do, and mean it. The great sports car. But it's not a sports car. You'll never be the same.

If it's Ford, it's built for performance.

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a “downsize” if the buyer requested it.

But here we have no 260, we have no 289, we bypass the 352 completely, forget about the 390, and just linger a bit when we think of the 427 4V. Keep going, we choose the brawniest of all... the 427 8V/425 horsepower Thunderbird Special V8, as Ford called it. Does it get any “more” than that? No, it does not.

The 427 is.... well, legendary. Ford says it quite bluntly: “...a strong boy who can put down any other full-size car in the world”. It packs a wallop... 425 horsepower at 6,000 rpm. 480 ft.lbs. of torque at 3,700 rpm. 11.5:1 compression. Extra-heavy duty rear axle, heavy duty brakes and shocks, and 15-inch wheels. Engine dress-up kit. The engine and package

items cost an extra \$570.60 on an XL.

Little-known fact department: In 1963, if you ordered a 427, what you got with it was a three-speed on the column, even on an XL. If you wanted 4-speed (like this car has) it was an extra-cost option. Overdrive was also a choice with the 427s, but not on the XL.

Everybody always wants to know “how many” 427s were produced. I don’t think a reliable answer exists. Charlie Morris tells me that he knows of a document that states that Ford ordered 211 of the special aluminum bell housings from RC industries that were used for the 427 cars. Charlie and I agree that roughly speaking, 200 cars does seem to be an accurate figure.

Even with cavernous room under the hood, you couldn’t get power brakes, power steering, or air conditioning on a 427 car. But that doesn’t mean the XL is not luxurious. Have you ever seen a more inviting interior?

And the exterior... Just look at the word GALAXIE spelled out in individual letters on the trunk and the very stylish script just ahead of the doors. That is style, and style with class. And for real one-year-only unique flair, how about the way you release the hood... pull forward on the grille’s Ford crest.

The Super Torque brochure says that XL means “extra lively....extra lovely... extra luxury”. Whatever it means to you, there is no disputing the fact that

XL stands for one of the most wanted of all Fords. Of the over 93,000 XLs built in 1963, fully 35% of them were Sports Hardtops. Second in popularity was the “boxtop” 2-door, followed by the 4-door hardtop, and the convertible.

It’s no secret I am particularly fond of the ‘63s, they have a really intense, wide and low Ford look. I drove many back in the day, but never any in Rose Beige and certainly never a 427. This one has had the same owner (almost, read on) for over 45 years. I think it is probably because he is satisfied with 425 horses being surrounded by Rose Beige, or maybe it’s Rose Beige being catapulted ahead by 425 horses.

Our car’s owners are Gary and Kae Wise of Molalla, Oregon. Gary acquired

his love of Fords at 20 years of age, when he started working for the Holman-Williams Ford Dealership in Molalla, OR. In 1960, Gary and his wife Kae bought their first Ford, a 1960 Red Starliner, 352 three-speed car. In November of 1962, the 1963-1/2, Sports Hardtop with the 427/425 engine became available. The couple just had to have one. Kae’s color choice was Rose Beige metallic, with a black interior. This made the Ford 500/XL the prettiest car in town. Gary chose the R-code 427 engine, four-speed transmission, 4:11 rear end gears, alternator, and transistorized ignition to round out the powertrain.

The car arrived in March of 1963, and was driven daily until 78,000 miles

later - when the engine was used up. That engine was replaced with a 390 and an automatic tranny and it was sold in 1971. The 427 engine was kept by Gary.

The next few years were occupied with starting Wise Auto Supply. In 1977, Gary was on his way to an automotive golf tournament in Portland and spotted the Galaxie on a car lot. On the way home he stopped and purchased his old car back.

Gary tells us: “It was always our dream to restore it like new, but time didn’t allow us to do it. In 1998, the frame off restoration began. It was a bigger undertaking than we expected. With due diligence and much labor, the project was accomplished. With the expert help

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of John White Restoration and Dearborn Classics, always there for all of the items that we needed, we finished up in July of 2008."

The maiden voyage in the Galaxie was to Gary's 1958 Molalla High School class reunion. The car was never professionally raced on the race track, but... it was the fastest car in town. The engine was built back to factory specifications. The four-speed was replaced with a TKO 600 five-speed.

A special thanks to Terry Nail for his factory correct parts that he obtained for this project. Terry was a kid on the street that watched this car as he grew up and never got to ride in it. He will now get to take that ride.

It is a rare feat that you get to own the same car, brand new, twice. In August 2008, the Galaxie won Best Classic Car in a 450 car show in Canby, Oregon.

'63 Galaxie 500/XL The Specs:

Engine: 427cid 8-cylinder, cast iron block, cast iron headers, aluminum intake
Carburetor: 2 780 cfm Holley 4-barrels
Horsepower: 425 @ 6000 rpm
Torque: 480 @ 3,700 rpm
Transmission: four-speed
Rear axle: 4.11:1 non-locking

The Times: 15.20 @ 99 Four-Speed

-Todays Motor Sports July 1963

The car in the article is an exact match for our feature car. We were, quite frankly surprised at the high et. But Hot Rod ran a 12.29 @ 117 with the A/FX in the same month. Hot Rods ride was positively dietary as it weighed 590 lbs. less than its tubby brother who tipped the scale at 4100 lbs.

3 - 1963

G - Chicago, Illinois assembly plant

68 - Ford Galaxie 500/XL Sports Hardtop

R - 427 cubic inch 2-4V V-8 engine

63C - Ford Galaxie 500/XL Sports Hardtop body style code

W - Rose Beige (Ditzler Mix Code 71322)

86 - Black vinyl XL bucket seat interior

25B - scheduled for production on February 25, 1963

74 - Seattle, Washington ordering district

9 - 4.11 to 1 rear axle ratio

5 - 4-speed manual transmission

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Didja Know?

- Ford had over 30 years of V8 experience in 1963 (Chevrolet only eight years)
- Of the over 93,000 XLs built in 1963, fully 35% were Sports Hardtops - this body style not introduced until winter of 1963.
- Over 213,000 full-sized Ford 2-door hardtops built in 1963
- Eight interior colors (Red, Turquoise, Chestnut, Black, Rose Beige, Gold, Blue, and White). For some reason, White was not available on the "box-top" 2-door hardtop - just the other three models
- Big Fords' vinyl-roof era began, exclusive to the two Sports Hardtops in '63

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