

TM

WINTER 2022



LINCOLN-MERCURY
SPORTS





CONAN TIGARD
REDMOND, OR
CCOA #9870

Big Blue Bill



Along, long time ago at a dealership far, far away, a Mercury Cougar sat. This Cougar, a 1979 XR-7 in Medium Blue metallic with a Midnight Blue Valino landau vinyl top, and waited for its first owner. The car was built at Lorain with a 5.8L 351-2V Windsor on April 5, 1979. With its blue cloth twin comfort lounge seats, air conditioner, and AM/FM/cassette stereo radio, it was delivered to Kelleher Motor Company in Ellensburg, Washington. It had other cool features like a power antenna, luxury sound package, HR78x15 white sidewall radial tires, speed control, power seat, bumper protection group, electric rear window defroster, air conditioning, XR-7 Décor Group, tinted glass, power side windows, power lock group, Midnight Blue Bodyside Moldings, and more. Still, for some strange reason, this car didn't sell. It sat and sat and sat, waiting to go to a new home.

Time passed, and the next generation of Mercury Cougars emerged from the shadows. The smaller and boxier 1980 Cougar had arrived in showrooms across America and on dealership lots. More time passed for the big blue Cougar. As the sun rose and fell over 365 times, this car waited and soon witnessed the arrival of the 1981 Cougar. More time

passed, with little change for this lonely Cougar. Midway through October 1980, something new was in the air, and life for this Cougar was about to change. A man finally appeared at Kelleher Motor Company who seriously looked over this Cougar. His name was Bill Linse, a resident of Yakima, Washington. He plopped some money down on the counter, grabbed the keys, and drove the big blue Cougar home on October 18, 1980.

Everything went great until April 1988. Bill and his trusty Cougar got into an accident. The front left fender was crumpled, so the repairs began at Cahoon Lincoln-Mercury in Yakima. The car was repainted in its original Medium Blue metallic.

The 1990s flew by and, in April 1997, Bill stopped driving the Cougar. It had 154,885 miles on it at its last fill-up. It wasn't driven in 1998 and had one fill-up in 1999 at 154,933 miles. Again, it wasn't driven in 2000 and was only started once in 2001. In 2007, the car was driven briefly around town.

Sometime between 2001 and 2021, the Cougar found its

way to Bill's honorary grandson in Prineville, Oregon, where the car sat in an open horse stall. Sure, it had a cover over its head, but the stall was open to the weather. Leaves and other debris gathered on the car as it huddled under the pitiful protection it had from the elements.

Then, in November 2021, Conan Tigard, who had seen this car listed for a couple of weeks, decided to go and take a look at it, just to take some pictures of it for his Facebook group, High Desert Cougar Club of Oregon. When he took the car for a spin, the right rear brake locked up with the slightest touch of the brake pedal. The mufflers were noisy but the engine ran decently. The steering wheel was very loose with at least four inches of play. It was kind of a scary drive. Matt, the owner, said that the only other person that was interested in the car wanted to use it in a destruction derby. Conan was appalled. He knew he had to save it, but realized there was no way to drive it home the 30 miles to Redmond. He bought the car with 155,105 miles on it and had Matt deliver it to him. Unfortunately, when Matt and his buddy were strapping down the car to the car hauler using chains, they tore the drain plug right out of the bottom of the radiator.

Conan took the radiator out of the Cougar and cleaned it up. Then he had it rebuilt at Mac's Radiator in Bend, Oregon. He tried to buy new radiator hoses, but they weren't correct, so he ended up putting the old ones back on and filling the radiator. After the radiator fluid was sprayed all over the manifold, he tightened the clamps down even more and solved that issue, then cleared all the smoke out of his shop from both the exhaust and burning off of the radiator fluid.

Then, the Cougar sat in his shop. Winter eventually turned into summer. After taking his 1970 houndstooth Cougar to both the CCOA Cascade Cougar Club Prowl in Tacoma and the CCOA Mercury Stray Cats Western Regional Event in Oakley, California, he decided it was time to work on Big Blue Bill, as he has named it. He knew he had a local car show coming up and decided that rather than take 1970, he would take the 1979 Cougar for its first outing. Thus, the detailing began.

Realizing the paint needed some serious attention, he started with Presta Ultra Cutting Crème Light and a buffer. One time around was not enough for the whole car—the hood, roof, and trunk needed a second application. The hood then needed a third, but the paint sparkled in the sun, showing the metal flake. Next, Conan started attacking the chrome bumpers with Flitz with a wool spindle on his electric drill. Then he moved on to all of the chrome on the car, removing the bezel around the headlights and then the grill, which took seven hours to clean using Flitz and a toothbrush. Eventually, all of the chrome on the exterior was done. Then he moved on to the plastic and vinyl, treating it with Maguire's Mirror Glaze Vinyl and Rubber Cleaner and Conditioner. Finally, he scrubbed the tires with Black Magic Bleche-Wite Tire Cleaner.

During the cleaning, Conan crawled under the car and saw



the mufflers for the first time. He had been told by the tire guys who fixed the locking right rear brake that they were bad. He had assumed that they had holes in them, but he was shocked when he laid down at the rear of the Cougar and shined a flashlight at the back of the mufflers. He could see



inside both of them—they had both been totally blown out. The rear ends of the mufflers weren't even attached to the mufflers themselves. Well, that wasn't going to be okay. He contacted Khaos Kustoms in Redmond, Oregon, and took the Cougar in



for new 2½-inch pipes, increasing the diameter by ½ inch and put two new Dynomax Super Turbos on the car. Now, the car sounded pretty sweet, like a luxury Cougar should: not too loud, but with a little bit of a rumble.

Conan took the 1979 Cougar XR-7 to the 2022 Cascade Car



Show in Redmond, Oregon, on August 20th. Although he didn't win a prize, he enjoyed talking to the people who came by to admire a Cougar that had the most sales of any model of the Mercury Cougar within a three-year period. From 1977 to 1979, over 580k luxury Mercury Cougars were sold, whereas only approximately 335k 1967-1970 Cougars were sold.

Lastly, Conan knew that the car needed a serious tune-up. Looking through Bill's meticulous notes, he noticed that the last oil change was on January 2, 1997. The oil in the Cougar was over 25 years old. Conan took the car to Sampson and Sons in Redmond for a tune-up. They also ended up rebuilding the carburetor. Now, the Cougar starts right up and purrs like a kitten.

There is still more work to be done, and Conan looks forward to the challenges ahead. Next up, drop the gas tank and see what is wrong with the sending unit (and remove the old, stinky gas), fix the steering box, and paint the wheels. The more he works on it, the more he grows to love it. Now, if only the cassette player worked, then he could jam to some proper 1980s New Wave music as he cruises down the road in style in his big, blue luxury Mercury Cougar. Oh, and talk about comfort—those lounge chairs, man, are they ever comfortable. It is like sitting on a feather bed.

Conan is the CCOA Luxury Cougar Registrar for the 1974-1979 Mercury Cougars (all because of this car). You can learn more at: <https://cougarclub2.org/registry/luxury>.







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