How fast is a cheetah? 60 to 70 mph, and where that number comes from

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A cheetah runs 60 to 70 mph (96 to 112 km/h), says the Smithsonian's National Zoo. See it beside the pronghorn, ostrich and falcon, then race them.

A cheetah runs 60 to 70 miles an hour (96 to 112 kilometres an hour) at top speed, according to the Smithsonian's National Zoo. That's the figure on Peabody's cheetah page, and it's a range because the zoo's page gives a range. I'd rather show you a span from a named page than one tidy number I can't point to.

What "top speed" means

A top speed is the fastest an animal has been measured going, in a short sprint. It isn't how fast the animal moves all day. Peabody's cheetah page says it in kid words: a cheetah can only keep up its top speed for a short dash, and then it has to rest.

The number is also for running. Every speed on Peabody carries a word for how the animal moves (running, swimming, flying or diving), because "fast" means different things on land, in water and in the air. The guide How fast is fast? goes into it.

The cheetah beside other fast animals

These are the cheetah and four more animals Peabody has a checked top speed for. The last column says which page each number came from.

- Animal: Cheetah · Top speed: 60 to 70 mph (96 to 112 km/h) · How it moves: running · Where the number comes from: the Smithsonian's National Zoo
- Animal: Pronghorn · Top speed: 55 mph (88.5 km/h) · How it moves: running · Where the number comes from: National Park Service, Badlands
- Animal: Ostrich · Top speed: 43 mph (69 km/h) · How it moves: running · Where the number comes from: the Smithsonian's National Zoo
- Animal: Gray wolf · Top speed: 35 mph (56.3 km/h) · How it moves: running · Where the number comes from: National Park Service, Yellowstone
- Animal: Peregrine falcon · Top speed: 200 mph (322 km/h) · How it moves: diving · Where the number comes from: National Park Service, Denali and Yukon-Charley Rivers

Among the runners on Peabody, the pronghorn comes closest to the cheetah, and its page calls it the fastest land animal in North America. The falcon is the odd one out. Its 200 mph is a dive, and a dive is helped by falling, so it isn't a running number at all.

Cheetah against pronghorn

On the race page you pick two animals that have a checked top speed and race them over a short dash to a tree. The race is by speed only. For cheetah vs pronghorn, the card says the cheetah gets to the tree first and is a bit faster than the pronghorn.

Then the card adds a line, because the pronghorn page says a pronghorn can keep up a fast run for much longer than a cheetah. Both things are true. A top speed is a sprint number, so a longer race is a different question. That's why Peabody's race is always a short dash.

The two are close in other ways too. The zoo gives the cheetah 75 to 141 lb (34 to 64 kg), and the National Park Service's Yellowstone page gives the pronghorn 90 to 125 lb (40.8 to 56.7 kg), which Peabody calls about the same. The cheetah is the longer one, at 5.8 to 7.4 ft (1.78 to 2.26 m) from nose to tail tip against the pronghorn's 3.7 to 4.6 ft (1.14 to 1.4 m).

Peabody races animals by speed only and never shows fights. It also tells you when a race isn't fair. Put the cheetah against the peregrine falcon and the falcon wins easily, but the card reminds you that one is diving through the air and the other is running. Against the ostrich, the cheetah is about one and a half times as fast.

Try it tonight

Open the race page with your child and pick two animals. Before you press Race, ask for a guess and write it down. A wrong guess is half the fun, and the card always says why. Then open Compare Two and stand the same pair side by side, drawn at true size beside a child. You'll see the cheetah is longer than the child is tall.

Questions grown-ups ask

Is 70 mph the fastest a cheetah has ever run?

Peabody shows what its source says. The Smithsonian's National Zoo gives 96 to 112 km/h. I don't have a checked number for a single fastest run, and I won't guess one.

Is the cheetah the fastest animal?

On land, Peabody's page calls it the fastest runner. In the air, the peregrine falcon's dive is 200 mph (322 km/h) by the National Park Service's figure. The fastest animals list sorts them all, and the fastest animal in the world has its own post.

Why do other websites give a different number?

Pages measure different animals in different ways, and some give the fastest ever recorded while others give a typical top speed. When a page I trust gives a range, I show the range, with its note and its source. The guide Where do the numbers come from? explains how I choose.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up on the animal pages. When the racing is done, the library has stories to read next. Every figure here was read off its page and checked on 30 October 2026; the sources are the Smithsonian's National Zoo cheetah page and the National Park Service's pronghorn page.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/how-fast-is-a-cheetah