

*A Comprehensive, First-hand Report  
of the Important Advances which  
Make the New Ford a "Luxury" Car*

# 1955 FORD ROAD TEST

MOTOR Life Test Staff Report

WATCH the Fords go by" started life as an adman's slogan but over the years it gained momentum, picked up partisans and was soon on the lips of millions of Americans. This year there will be many more Fords going by. The 1955 line is bigger, hotter and more exciting than ever before in their 50 year history. There will be 17 models to choose from this year instead of the 14 offered in 1954.

MOTOR Life's test staff road tested the '55 Ford cars in Detroit. Its impressions were accumulated after many miles of comprehensive testing with several cars, over the varied roadways of the Ford Proving Grounds at Dearborn, Michigan. These tests were conducted several weeks before public announcement of the new models and because of this it was necessary to observe factory security to keep the yet unknown models off public highways. Though testing was done on Ford's home field, the test staff operated as a private team and was not influenced by factory findings.

There were many cars to choose from at the Dearborn proving grounds. Our staff first chose the newest model in the Ford line . . . the sleek Fairlane Crown Victoria. That

phrase is a mouthful of words but even so, the Ford monicker barely does justice to the car.

The Fairlane, named after Henry Ford's mansion—"one of those small million-dollar show places near Dearborn"—is the highest priced and most luxurious car in the Ford line. It was designed to give Ford a luxury car with which to compete against other middle-price bracket products. The car can do just that for it has high-fashion styling plus acceleration and power . . . but all '55 Fords have plenty of punch and power.

At the completion of the standard road tests our staff had renewed admiration for the Ford and the new "goodies" they managed to pack into the '55. Acceleration and speed are better than '54. The car performed well: 0 to 30 in 4 seconds, 0 to 60 in 12.6 seconds and this year's ohv V-8 powered the dual-exhaust Fairlane to 98.7 mph top speed.

These figures sum up a whale of a car, one which promises to be hotter than a baker's oven. MOTOR Life predicts that this year's Ford owner is going to be hard to live with and for many reasons.

The "Y" block, ohv V-8 engine which Ford introduced in 1954 marked the first major engine change for Ford in 20 years. We were interested in giving this year's version a thorough checkout. Basically, the engine is the same as last year. It has many of the same features; valves, camshaft, crankshaft, and rocker arms are interchangeable. But an impressive power increase, nestling comfortably close to 165 hp, has been achieved by increased bore, better carburetion and modifications to the manifold.

Our first introduction to the car we selected came when P. H. Pretz, Chief Test Engineer for Ford, whipped up to the test track with a new cream and pink Fairlane. He braked to a race driver's stop and opened the door for us.

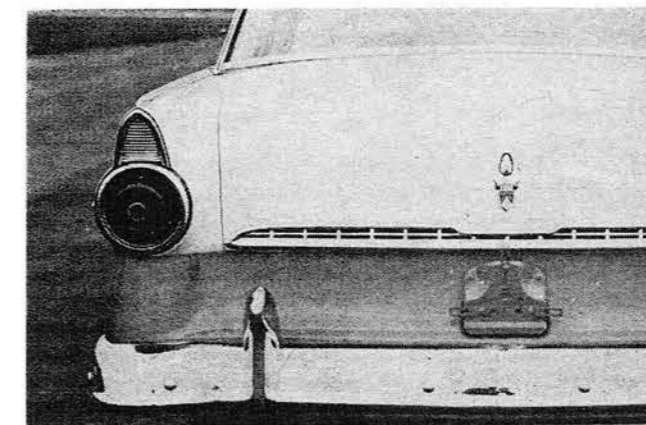
The profile of the '55 Ford is similar to that of past years in many ways but when you try to pinpoint the similarity the theory breaks down, for the body has new lines, more flowing roundness and different, more angular, front and rear back edges. The top, while being reminiscent of last year's lines, is more flowing and has a gentler slope to the rear window. Up front, the wrap-around windshield cuts off any similarity to the '54s.

Perhaps the most noticeable similarity is apparent in the



Fairlane is only model to sport chromed "Landau" bar at the center of roof area. Bar is not structural and is not roll bar.

Tail lights retain familiar Ford lenses but upper fender area contains chromed grid which can be replaced with backup light.



## Ford Fairlane Performance and Specifications

SPEEDOMETER ERROR	
Indicated 30 mph.....	29.1 mph actual
Indicated 40 mph.....	38.7 mph actual
Indicated 50 mph.....	47.9 mph actual
Indicated 60 mph.....	57.0 mph actual
Indicated 70 mph.....	65.2 mph actual
Indicated 80 mph.....	74.3 mph actual
Indicated 90 mph.....	83.6 mph actual
Indicated 100 mph.....	92.0 mph actual
Indicated 110 mph.....	98.7 mph actual

ACCELERATION	
0 to 30 mph.....	4 seconds
0 to 60 mph.....	12.6 seconds

TOP SPEED	
Fastest one-way.....	98.7 mph
Slowest one-way.....	95.2 mph

FUEL CONSUMPTION	
At steady 30 mph.....	21.4 mpg

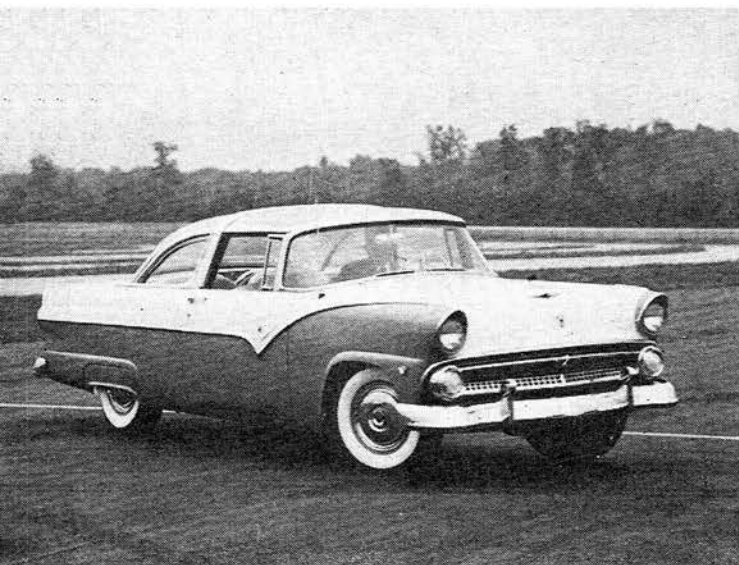
**ENGINE**—V-8 overhead valve. Bore and stroke, 3.62 x 3.30. Displacement, 272 cubic inches. Advertised horsepower, 164-170 (optional power package; dual exhausts, high compression heads, four throat carburetor, special radiator, manifold



and distributor should give 188-190 hp.) In-line 6 cylinder engine also available on certain models.

**REAR AXLE RATIOS**—Conventional, 3.78 or 3.89. Overdrive, 3.89 or 3.78. Fordomatic, 3.30 or 3.55.

DIMENSIONS	
Wheelbase .....	115.5"
Tread.....	58" Front; 56" Rear
Width, overall .....	76"
Height, overall .....	58.2"
Turning radius .....	41'
Steering, turns lock-to-lock.....	5.75



*Ford's suspension, a carry-over from '54, gives car good handling characteristics. Cornering at 45 mph showed little lean.*



*Cockpit and instrument panel are all new this year. Automatic transmission position indicator is lighted and placed on panel.*

*Full length chrome trim strip, which decorates side of Fairlane, is optional equipment originally slated for the Thunderbird.*



shape of the wheel cutouts. But there have been startling innovations introduced this year. Tail lights have gone modern . . . as up to date as the Mambo. Ford has retained the familiar "circle within a circle" lenses but they have been made larger than previous models and have been given a new setting. Above the lenses the fairing of the fender comes straight back to an inward slant at the edge of the fender and the tip has been flattened to accept a chromed grid. This grid is removable and can be replaced with the optional backup light.

The headlights are number-one star attractions in the front. Newly designed bezels, which gives a frenched look over the lenses, add a touch of the custom car. Chrome tips on the leading edges of the two bezels are optional equipment—standard only on the Fairlane. Just below the headlights, the over-size parking and turning lights lunge forward like eager rockets. These are set at the outer edges of Ford's new full-width grille which was adapted from the Thunderbird.

We replaced the test engineer in the front cockpit. Ford's Astro-dome speedometer housing, which made its introduction last year, remains but it has been flattened slightly. However, it is still an easy-to-see compendium speedometer, odometer and gauges. The upper section of the Astro-dome contains the speedometer and odometer, backlighted by a diffracting plastic dome. Directly below the half circle dome is a straight section on the instrument panel, which houses ampere, oil, fuel and temperature gauges. The oil and amperage gauges are red warning lights, introduced in '54. The glove compartment, which is on the passenger's side, is roomy, easy to reach and has a sturdy door which opens to flat position . . . a good place for coffee if the owner is a drive-in advocate.

The shift lever remains attached to the steering column, but the identifying selector plate, which last year was a plastic disc attached to the column, is now mounted in the instrument panel at the point where the steering column passes through the panel. There is now a light behind the selector plate to aid night driving. It is not necessary but does instill confidence.

Control knobs have been moved and rearranged in a pattern similar to that used on the '52. They stand in two vertical rows easily accessible from the driver's position. Dials, other than those contained in the Astro-dome, are now circular and placed along the front of the instrument panel. Among these are the radio and clock dials. The radio speaker is placed in the center of the instrument panel crown as it was on the '54.

It was noon of the first day before we completed arrangements for the test track. We attached our test equipment, fifth wheel, flow meters, etc., and started the engine. The new ohv idles with a complacency which belies its power. There is little sensation of vibration. The engine has been set back slightly more than last year and placed on heavier rubber mounts. These take up the vibrations, but as with most automatic transmissions, the engine must be set for a faster idle—about 500 rpm—and this is fast enough to produce a slight tendency toward creep.

Our first spin was strictly a "getting to know you" affair and the chief test engineer rode with us to explain the many new features which had been incorporated into the '55 version of the Fordomatic transmission. Among the improvements is a much revamped low-torque or low gear response. In previous models, down shifting was less effective. As the driver floorboarded the foot throttle the car would downshift into drive-low. Or, if the transmission selector was moved from drive into low while the car was moving at, say 30 mph, then decelerated, the transmission would fall into low at about 27 mph and do so with a definite jerk. These troubles have been eliminated.

The car now downshifts into low (rather than drive-low) when the throttle is floorboarded and when the transmission is placed in low while in motion, it downshifts at a slower speed. The car now decelerates to 18 mph before downshifting into low and the jerk has been virtually eliminated.

Next, we took the car over Ford's turning course, which ranges from a mild 15° to tight 45° corners. We brought the



*The longer Ford look is achieved through modern styling; frenched headlight hoods, swept back fender edge and chrome roof bar.*

car up to a steady 60 mph and headed into the first turn. From that point through to the end of the course, the turning was immediate and responsive. Turning, from lock to lock, was more than desirable for the speed (it's 5 turns lock to lock) but the car negotiated all turns without undue heel-over and without breaking loose or showing rear-end slippage. Tire squeal, it was noted, has also been diminished and even on the high speed turns, was barely noticeable. At lower speeds it has been eliminated altogether.

Much of this can be attributed to suspension changes. Part of these were made last year when Ford borrowed the ball-joint suspension from its big brother, Lincoln, where it had been proven in millions of miles of highway driving and in the gruelling Mexican road race. In addition to this, the front wheel spindles have been inclined 3° forward for better handling in addition to the longer rear springs.

Another important handling feature is the new frame which is responsible for Ford's lower look (actually 17/10 inches lower) and better roadability. This has been achieved through construction of a new frame with more kick-up area and a lower center section. The frames are box-type with "K" center stiffeners on all models except the convertible, Victoria and Thunderbird, which are supplied with "X" stiffeners.

We toured the high-speed oval three times to familiarize ourselves with its contours before attempting the top speed test. The course has a straight section about 3/4 mile long with two ovals, one at each end, for shut offs. These are highly banked for speeds up to 65 mph.

After circling the high-banked corners we aimed the Ford's nose down the straight section and took off. The engine began revving up fast as the car picked up speed. The concrete flowed under our wheels like molten lava and the speedometer needle jumped up, climbed like a bird in flight . . . 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 95, 97 . . . The end of the straightaway was looming ahead through the windshield. The car was handling well, no bounce and no side sway. There was still a bit more speed. It would be a race between the end of the course and the engine's peak rpm. The car won. "That's it" MOTOR *Life's* tester said, "peak power and speedometer reading of 98.7."

We eased the car down to 65 and negotiated the banked corner. We tried several runs, with and against the wind, to check this figure. It was the best we could get and it is an extremely fine figure for a production car of Ford's cost.

Then came the braking tests, which consisted of a series of panic stops . . . accelerating to differing speeds, 30, 40, 50, 60

*(Continued on page 60)*



*Increasing popularity of Ford Ranch Wagon should continue with 1955 model which combines lines of '54 with Fairlane styling.*

*Customline and Mainline Fords have same basic body lines as Fairlane but are more conservative, sporting much less chrome.*



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use of the optimum power which a completely clean carburetor can deliver. There are only two adjustments on most carburetors. Both affect idling only. To change any other function of the carburetor you must change integral parts of the carburetor, these alterations should not be done except by a competent carburetion expert.

The idle speed of your engine is controlled by the throttle screw in the linkage near the bottom of the carburetor. Turning it "in" speeds up engine idle. Turning it "out" slows engine idle.

The air-fuel mixture, controlled by an idle screw in the base of the carburetor is the other control. Turning it "in" reduces the amount of mixture going through the idle system. Backing it "out" increases the mixture. Some carburetors have more than one throat. Your carburetor may have two or four throats. The basic linkage may be the same as that described but instead of one throttle and idle screw there will be two, one for each of the two idle systems used.

To adjust your carburetor: start the engine and try adjusting the throttle screw "out." If the engine stalls turn the throttle screw "in" until the engine continues running without use of the foot pedal. Now, turn the idle screw "in" slowly until the engine sounds rough and as if it were about to stall. Turn the idle screw out one-half turn. If the engine now sounds good the carburetor idle system is properly adjusted. If the engine idles too fast, turn the throttle screw "out" slowly, until the engine speed comes down to the desired idle rate. Continue repeating the idle and throttle adjustments until the engine is set for proper-sounding idle.

You can judge proper engine idle in five ways. You can hear the evenness and smoothness. You can see the engine vibrate on its mounting; a little is o.k., a lot is bad. You can feel vibration by leaning against the fender. You can see the fan rotating steadily. A steady rotation is good idle. You can listen to the exhaust for a steady firing rhythm.

In addition, there are gauges and devices on the market which can aid in carburetion adjustment. Tachometers, exhaust analyzers and vacuum gauges can perform a valuable service. They are not absolutely necessary but are competent, time saving devices.

Obviously, you cannot adjust for proper engine idle unless other components are in top adjustment. Carburetion, compression and ignition are the three factors which influence engine operation. Adjusting the carburetor affects only one of these... carburetion. The other elements must also be correct.

Your car can only be as good as its carburetion system. If you keep the carburetor clean you will get better performance and mileage. •

## FORD ROAD TEST

(Continued from page 15)

mph, then quickly braking. The car snuggled closer to the highway than a piece of gum on the Pennsylvania Turn-Pike. During our braking distance test, weather interfered. Rain came up making it impossible to check detonation marks, but even on the wet pavement, the combination of tubeless tires and Ford's new brakes proved highly efficient.

Much of this is due to Ford's improved brakes. The design is identical to previous models, but drum size has been increased. 1954 size was 10 inches and this year, the brakes go to an 11-inch double-acting duoservo brake and drum. The lining is still riveted to the shoe.

Even smaller items have been studied and redesigned for '55. Our test staff had lodged a complaint about '53 & '54 ash trays. Their placement and design did not facilitate easy use. This has been rectified this year. The snubber plate has been moved to the front and it is now possible to snuff out a cigarette without striking the radio knobs directly above. But the tray remains directly beneath the radio and smoke from cigarettes rises around the knobs. In time it will tend to tarnish them.

Upholstery, too, is new and more lavish than in past years. Ford has never been especially noted for exciting upholstery but this year it comes in all colors and fabrics from conservative woollens to metallic and wool combinations, copper cloth and nylon. These fabrics, upholstered over Ford's new interwoven steel seat springs and foam rubber cushions, make a comfortable seat.

Because of the wrap-around windshield, wind wing area has been reduced. It is now a small rectangular plate about 3 inches in width. It does not pass as much air as previous models, but new intake ducts supply fresh air on demand. The intake duct openings are fitted on each side of the hood, just below the hood edge and carry air into the compartment on each side.

The Fairlane, which *MOTOR Life* road-tested, comes equipped with dual exhausts. Only two Ford cars come so equipped; the Fairlane and the Thunderbird, but duals are optional on all models this year.

One "goodie" for enthusiasts is Ford's new "power package"—a last-minute answer to the demand for increased performance. Ford's kit includes 8.5:1 heads, 4 throat carburetor, special manifold, dual exhausts and a "hot" distributor.

Other accessories available are: special chrome (as shown on the Fairlane) headlight trim and wheel skirts. But with or without accessories, the '55 Ford has many of the features—both power and design—of higher priced cars. It should make Ford owners a proud lot and having pride of ownership, Ford owners will be difficult to live with. •