

a growing **ACCENT** on prestige

FEW CARS have ever captured the public imagination the way the Thunderbird has. From the time that the four-passenger version appeared two years ago, Ford has been hard pressed to keep up with the demand.

The car was tested for 1960 as a convertible and embodied two important engineering changes made since 1958, a bigger engine available as an option and a redesigned rear suspension system.

Adapted from the Lincoln-Mercury V-8, the 430-cubic-inch engine is modified for the Thunderbird to produce 350 hp at 4600 rpm and 490 lbs.-ft. of torque at 2800 rpm. It is an extra-cost alternative to the normal 352-cubic-inch Ford unit of 300 hp at 4600 rpm and 381 lbs.-ft. at 2800 rpm.

With the larger engine, the only transmission available is

Cruiseomatic, a torque converter with a three-speed planetary gear set, though manual and overdrive are also offered with the standard powerplant.

Cruiseomatic has three forward ranges, "L" engaging first gear, "D-1" first, second and third and "D-2" second and third. Because manually controlled shifts do not take place quickly, "D-1" provides the best acceleration. Even though it permits a shift from first to second sooner than the performance-minded driver might like, it allows the car to accelerate faster than with a start in "L," followed by a manual shift to "D-2" to engage second.

The whole power train is engineered more for smoothness and silence than exceptional performance. The transmission is not quick reacting and the axle ratio is a numerically low 2.91-



THUNDERBIRD road test

to-1. As a result, it takes careful technique to get good figures. Actual test results were 0-30 in 3.7 seconds, 0-45 in 6.1 and 0-60 in 9.1. These do not represent the maximum capability of the 350-hp Thunderbird because this particular car was loaded down with just about every luxury option in Ford's book.

The coil spring and trailing link suspension of the 1958 model was replaced last year with a conventional semi-elliptic arrangement.

Originally, the coils were used for easy interchangeability with air suspension units. These were never offered in the Thunderbird line, however, and were dropped eventually from the big Ford because of limited public demand.

With the coils, the Thunderbird's rear end stability was poor and the tendency to float quite pronounced at highway speeds. The semi-elliptics have reduced both of these problems considerably. Hard acceleration and sharp cornering still break the

rear end loose but its behavior is easier to anticipate and allow for. And the ride is much steadier.

Generally, the handling qualities have been improved by the new springs but some problems still remain. The power steering is not very precise and, at 4.1 turns lock-to-lock, rather slow. Combined with a low driving position behind a broad hood, it makes the car awkward to maneuver. This is an annoyance not only in parking but also on the highway. Drifting off an exact course, such as a lane of freeway traffic or an accurate line around a corner, happens more readily than it should in a relatively compact car.

With 54 per cent of its 4,440 lbs. on the front wheels, the Thunderbird is well balanced for its combination of a large engine and short wheelbase. Actually, the engine is mounted well forward and even part of the transmission is ahead of the cowl. This is difficult to understand in a car that is strictly a

four-seater and has no need of middle passenger footroom. There is plenty of room to move the engine back a few inches for still better weight distribution.

The interior, though not exceptionally spacious, is well designed for comfort. A console above the driveshaft tunnel divides both front and rear seats into individual units and allows them to be contour-shaped. Those in front are separately adjustable, with power operation an extra on the driver's side.

Power window controls are clustered together on the console, where they can be reached from all four seats. Other equipment in this location include heater/air conditioner controls at the very front, the radio speaker and ash tray/lighter combinations for both front and rear compartments.

Rear seat comfort is among the best to be found in a convertible of any size. The back rests are higher than those in front, providing even better support for occupants' backs and shoulders.

The reason this is possible is that the convertible has the same rear seat design as the hardtop. Normally, such a body style has a smaller rear passenger compartment to allow room for the folded top. The Thunderbird avoids this problem by storing its top in the trunk.

Unfortunately, this means virtually no useable luggage space when the top is down. The fabric does not fold so much as it just collapses, filling the whole area.

The deck lid is hinged at the rear and is opened and closed by the top control handle on the dash, which means that anything placed in the trunk has to be lifted over one of the rear fenders. This, of course, applies only to the convertible; the hardtop has a perfectly conventional deck lid.

Actual operation of the top is completely automatic, a new feature this year. It is unnecessary for the driver to get out and make sure the folds in the fabric are taut as he lowers it. All he has to do is release two latches at the top of the windshield and pull the control handle. The deck lid opens, the top lowers into the trunk, then the lid closes again and conceals the top. Mechanically, the arrangement resembles the collapsible hardtop of the defunct Ford Skyliner.

The Thunderbird is sometimes regarded as a blend of luxury car and compact, but it really lacks the refinement of the one and the convenience of the other. Still, it does combine performance, comfort and prestige with reasonable size and price. In that respect it is unique. Despite the increasing variety of cars available, there is still nothing quite like it. •



COMPLETE LUXURY of the T-Bird's interior is one of the most important factors in the car's current success. The soft leathers and comfortable bucket seats make up for little faults.

MOTOR LIFE TEST DATA



1960 THUNDERBIRD

Test Car

TEST CAR: Ford Thunderbird
BODY TYPE: Convertible
BASE PRICE: \$4222

Maneuverability Factors

OVERALL LENGTH: 205.3 inches
OVERALL WIDTH: 77 inches
OVERALL HEIGHT: 53 inches
WHEELBASE: 113 inches
TREAD, FRONT/REAR: 60 and 57 inches
TEST WEIGHT: 4440 lbs.
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION: 54 per cent on front wheels
STEERING: 4.1 turns lock-to-lock
TURNING CIRCLE: 40 feet curb-to-curb
GROUND CLEARANCE: 5.9 inches

Interior Room

SEATING CAPACITY: four
FRONT SEAT—
HEADROOM: 35.3 inches
WIDTH: 59.6 inches
LEGROOM: 43.3 inches
TRUNK CAPACITY: 20.5 cubic feet

Engine & Drive Train

TYPE: ohv V-8
DISPLACEMENT: 352 cubic inches
BORE & STROKE: 4.0 x 3.5
COMPRESSION RATIO: 9.6-to-1
CARBURETION: Single four-barrel
HORSEPOWER: 300 @ 4600 rpm
TORQUE: 381 lb.-ft. @ 2800 rpm
TRANSMISSION: Cruiseomatic (Torque converter with three-speed gearbox)
REAR AXLE RATIO: 3.10

Performance

GAS MILEAGE: 10 to 14 miles per gallon
ACCELERATION: 0-30 mph in 3.7 seconds, 0-45 mph in 6.1 seconds and 0-60 mph in 9.1 seconds
SPEEDOMETER ERROR: indicated 30, 45 and 60 mph are actual 29, 43 and 57 mph respectively
POWER-WEIGHT RATIO: 14.8 lbs. per horsepower
HORSEPOWER PER CUBIC INCH: .86