

1962 FORD Thunderbird- Art

Written by Double Dragon

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Thomas McCahill was one of the most unique auto writers of all time and his opinion was highly valued. In the Mail to McCahill column in the Oct, 1967 MECHANIX ILLUSTRATED McCahill states that he owned the very first production Thunderbird. This fact was worth bragging about because first incarnation Thunderbirds are very special cars. Within a few years of being released they were being called classics. All Thunderbirds have since gained a strong collector following over the years.

Serial number P5FH100005 is the first Thunderbird built on the production line. It was produced in the Dearborn, Michigan factory on Sep 9, 1954 as a 1955 model. When it turned up years later in rough shape its significance was recognized by its new owner, George Watts of Santa

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Ana, California who restored it.

The Thunderbird name was chosen Feb 15, 1954 and derives from a Southwest Indian legendary bird. A few days later Thunderbird debuted Feb 20th at the Detroit Autoshow. The Thunderbird was meant to compete with foreign sports cars but with an added touch of luxury, creating the first 'personal car' as Ford dubbed it. Chevrolet had already tried to address the influx of foreign sports cars with an American made sports car called the Corvette. Ford learned from the Chevy's fiberglass bodied Corvette shortcomings. The steel bodied Thunderbird with wind up glass windows gave buyers the same size, style and performance as the Corvette without subjecting users to rain leaks and a six cylinder engine.

Corvette faithful appreciate the Thunderbird for its own merits, but the majority of the respect derives from the role Thunderbird played in rescuing the Corvette from cancellation. The sales threat created by the Thunderbird motivated Chevrolet to stay in the game when the Corvette was in danger of being killed off. The Thunderbird started out with a V8 and this also spurred the Corvette to grow up in a hurry with its own V8. Soon the Corvette had surpassed the Thunderbird and then the foreign cars to become a bona fide sports car leader.

Thunderbird soared through three model years as a two door personal car using a 102 inch wheelbase and weighing a mere 2,833 pounds.

Symbolic of wealth, daring and freedom, the Thunderbird had a lot of personality. So recognizable was the Thunderbird, it served as the signature vehicle for the sexually wild character portrayed by Dorothy Malone in the Douglas Sirk movie WRITTEN ON THE WIND. This grandiose soap opera in vivid Technicolor overtly used props and lighting to illustrate themes and characters. The Thunderbird was so distinctive that it is forever identified in people's minds with the Malone character.

Knowing that the four seat Bird was coming, Ford extended the 1957 production right until December 13, 1957 to milk the market for a two seat Tbird. In 1958 the fans of the original Thunderbird were horrified by the 'Squarebird' as it was dubbed. The Thunderbird became a four seat which carried forth some of the original styling themes as if seen through a distorted lens. 'Squarebirds' outsold the two seat Tbirds, leaving Ford indifferent to the screams of the purists. Time has healed the wound and now the second generation Thunderbirds from 1958-1960 are well regarded. The third generation was embraced right off the bat.

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