

1961 FORD Thunderbird- Richard

Written by Double Dragon

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Readers may wish to compare Richard's high miles 1961 Thunderbird to the pristine low mileage 1962 owned by Art which is filed just below this article. The effect of mileage and outside storage creates a vivid contrast to a garage stored car with low mileage.

In the Oct, 1967 MECHANIX ILLUSTRATED auto writer Thomas McCahill states that he owned the very first production Thunderbird. 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 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. Thunderbird competed 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 which subjected users to rain leaks and a six cylinder engine. Thunderbird started out with a V8, steel body and real glass windows that rolled up.

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

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Thunderbird had a lot of personality. 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. It was replete with space themed and jet age themed styling cues and seemed very modern and exciting.



From the pointed nose to the turbine or jet rocket afterburner styled rear tail lights the Thunderbird was stunning. The interior had wrap around lines that joined the doors and dash in one sweeping stroke. A console divided the interior into four separate bucket style seats. The Thunderbird was large and cars this size usually could haul 6 passengers in a pinch using the typical bench seats of the era, but the Thunderbird was about style and prestige not utilitarianism.

Richard is not the first owner of this Thunderbird but he has owned it the longest. Despite always being a California car the sheer time and mileage of ownership has taken its toll on this car. It is always parked outside and has suffered some bad luck. The front nose is a bit dinged up but it certainly could have been a lot worse. Richard was coming down the steeply angled roundabout from a high rise parkade when the brakes suddenly failed.

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