

The first full winter collection created by our fashion house will be launched early next month. Stay tuned for more updates. As most of us know, the early Bird was the brainstorm of Ford Division general manager Lewis D. Crusoe, who went to Paris one year for the auto show and left determined to have a Ford answer to the Picasso, the revival Bugatti, the XJ Jaguar, or anyway the General Motors Lesabre.

Crusoe was accompanied to Paris by designer George Walker. When Crusoe asked why Ford didn't have a swoopy two seater, Walker candidly replied an "Oh, but we do", grabbed the nearest phone and told his people back in Dearborn to "get on the stick". The rest is history.

The first two-seater came off the line on Sept. 9th, 1954, and received wide acclaim with Ford's new 292 CID, 193 bhp V8 and automatic, it had plenty of zip to go and good looks. The 292 was only available in 55 Thunderbirds and full sized Fords used for police work.

I wonder how many club members know who took delivery of the first Thunderbird ever sold. It was Tom Mc Cahill, the famous auto tester from Mechanic Illustrated. He paid full retail price for the little Bird in the late summer of 1954. His T-Bird became sports- car-speed-trial champion at Daytona Beach in February of 1955. In stock form, his T-Bird hit 60 in 9.5 seconds and hit 112 mph. Not satisfied with its performance, he had the engine balanced, ports polished, and a station wagon axle ratio of 3:54-1 installed according to my Hollander Exchange Manual. The transmission was a 3 speed with overdrive. Performance from 0-60 dropped to 6.1 seconds and top speed on the beach with ideal conditions went to 127 m.p.h... This was enough to sweep all the old XJ 120 Jags and Porsches to claim the win. The old Ford Y-Block produced from 1954-62 was no slouch, if set up right.

Another tip from my memory; whenever rebuilding an early Y-Block, use the camshaft from a 1957 312 engine. These cams have a machined groove around the circumference of the cam bearings for improved top end oil flow to the rockers and valves, an ailment on Y-Blocks that were not maintained with scheduled oil changes. Always check valve lift and piston clearance when swapping camshafts.

The baby birds of 55-57 were glamorous today as yesteryear. They were a personal car as described by Ford and drew people to the

showrooms to look at other Ford products. It was not a family car or practical car for 6 footers, such as myself. Club member, Bud Gibson, had a 57 T-Bird for a short time. With the top on, I had to stretch in an awkward way to enter the car. A problem, I don't have with my 58 T-Bird.

As with any new model, the 55 T-Bird presented the most problems. The six volt electrical system occasionally produced hard starting, especially in the colder climates, the early Holley 4 Barrel carburetor, nicknamed the Teapot, Flamethrower, etc. tended to flood or catch on fire. This was rectified with a Ford built 4100, 4 barrel carburetor for 1957. Door latches caused problems, and replacements are costly. This was rectified in 1956 with redesigned door latches, part of Ford's safety campaign. T-Birds of this series also tend to overheat, caused by a combination of high power, small radiator, and small water pumps. Owners often fit thicker radiator cores.

As a body repairman, this series of T-Bird are a nightmare to repair in a front end collision, all front fenders, and the front cowl are welded on and leaded. Clearances and fit must be checked and rechecked. After welding and leading, one's bodywork will be clearly seen.

All and all, this series of T-Bird has beautiful body lines thanks to stylist Frank Hershey. My personal favorite is the 57 with its beautiful lines, selection of engines, and interior appointments, and the most refined of the series. The 55 T-Bird would be my second choice because of the clean lines without the continental kit. The 56 had many refinements, including the 12 volt electrical system. However, the frame had to be strengthened to accommodate the continental kit. It doesn't handle as well as a 55 or 57.

Then is now the 55-57 T-Bird has become an instant collectible. It is not a practical car for families or 6'4" people. Ford's newly conservative general manager wanted a more practical T-Bird with more sales. This is our next article with the 58-60 T-Birds.

Happy holidays to all!

Respectively Submitted, Larry L. Sneary

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