

## 64-66 Thunderbird Spotlight

Following the previous three generations, the 64 Thunderbird was due for a restyle for the next three years. The personal luxury coupe was solely Ford's market until the 63 Buick Riviera was introduced, other pretenders, the Buick Wildcat, Old's Starfire, Pontiac Grand Prix, and to a lesser degree the Chevrolet Impala SS. Ford also had the Galaxy 500 XL introduced midyear 62. Chrysler did not have a real personal luxury coupe until the 64 Imperial Crown Coupe, a luxurious car that was far more expensive than the previously mentioned automobiles. As a result the 61-63 T-Bird never sold as well as the 58-60 addition, and are scarcer then the Square Bird or Flare Bird.

The 64 restyle went back to the more square look of the 58-60 Tbird with flares on the quarter panels, a beautiful front end restyle, and elimination of round tail lights. Unitized construction was still used and three body styles were available; the hard top, the Landau, and the convertible. The sports roadster was no more, although wire wheels (\$415.00) and a new tonneau cover (\$269.00)

were available. The tire size was 15" unless wire wheels were used, the tire size was 14". Standard equipment included: cruise-o-matic, power steering, power brakes, bonded mirror, hydraulic wipers, a radio, and swing away steering wheel. Welcome addition, was a full set of gauges, and a silent-flow ventilation system on hardtops. All 1964 Fords were awarded the motor trend "Car of the Year Award". Based prices were a \$4486.00 for the hardtop, \$4599.00 for the Landau, and \$4953.00 for the convertible. The one and only power plant for 1964 was a 390 with 300 horsepower. Owning a 64 convertible with the 390, I can attest that there is more than adequate power, especially with some port and valve work on the cylinder heads. There were 60,522 hardtops, 22,715 Landaus, and 9198 convertibles produced, for a total of 92,465 cars. This almost equaled banner year 1960, only short 378 cars. It is clear that this 1964-66 restyle was a winner regardless of competition. 1965 was a year of refinement with few alterations to the 64 restyle. The one year front fenders are a favorite of mine. Power plants and standard equipment were the same as 1964. A few noteworthy features for 1965 were sequential turn signals, these were slated for 1964, but were not approved by the federal highway administration until 1965. Another welcome addition was disc brakes, these four piston Kelsey-Hayes disc brakes greatly improved the braking

of thunderbirds. Coming back from a car show a few years ago, I was following club

President Roger Noll in his 66 convertible. He came upon a sudden red light, I thought he would go through, however, he braked and came to a quick, smooth straight stop. Disc brakes were a welcome and safe addition from 1965 onward. Model lineup was the same as 1964, except in late March the Limited Edition Special Landau made its appearance. The exterior paint was a color called Ember-glow which was the carpet color and interior trim. Special wheel disc had Ember-glow trim on them. The vinyl roof, steering wheel, and vinyl interior were parchment. The owners name was engraved on the limited edition numbered name plate on the console. All of this for less than \$50.00 over the cost of a Landau. A few of these special editions were made in Wimbledon White. Our club treasurer, Rick Eichler, has an excellent example of this model. Two options deleted this year, were the wire wheels, which would not clear the rear disc brakes and the tonneau cover, although they would fit the 65-66 convertibles. One new option was power vent windows, I found a master control power winder master switch with these intact, and they will interchange with my 64 Thunderbird. There were 74,972 Thunderbirds produced for 1965, down from the 64 total of 92,465.

The 1966 thunderbird was very similar to the previous two years with the addition of two models; the Town Hardtop and Town Landau. The 66 model had a more wedge shaped look and a redesigned hood scoop that made this a one year only hood. The tail light was full width with the backup lights in the center t-bird emblem. In my opinion these were the nicest looking tail lights of the three years. The 390 saw a boost in horsepower to 315 this year, along with the first power option since the first m-code 390 of 62-63. For (\$64.00) the optional 428 could be had. A FE engine similar to the 390, the 428 produced 345 horsepower. Another new option was a stereo tape deck (\$128.00), giving up to 80 minutes of music per cartridge. Four speakers were used in this setup. This was the last year for convertibles, until 2002, fender skirts, and vent windows.

A miracle occurred for 66 thunderbirds, prices actually went down from 64-65. Hardtop (\$4395), town hardtop (\$4452), town Landau (\$4552), and the convertible (\$4845). Production was 69,176 for the year. There were 13,389 hardtops, rare 15,633 town hardtops, 35,105 town landaus, and 5049 convertibles, about half of the production of my 64 convertible at 9, 111. It seems quite a

few of the 66 convertibles have survived, as I have seen many over the years. All and all, this series is more refined than the previous series with better ride, handling, and braking. I have driven my 64 T-bird many miles and attest to this fact.

Happy new year to all and we will be awaking our thunderbirds soon!

Respectively submitted,

Larry Sneary

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