

## 67-71 Thunderbird Analysis

For many car enthusiasts and collectors, the last collectible thunderbird was the 66, me included. Many people could not get use to the styling of this new series and found it bulkier than the 66 model, in spite the 66-coupe weighing 130 pounds less than the 67 coupe. The only thing carried over from 1966 was the 390 and 428 engines.

Styling for the 67 T-bird was the work of veteran Ford designers, L. David Ash and Bill Boyer, both of whom played great roles in previous thunderbird styling. The last convertible was 1966 with engineering dated back to the 57 Skyliner. A thunderbird convertible would not be seen until 35 years later with the 2002 retro-bird. The 67 thunderbirds also offered a 4 door in place of the convertible for 66. With higher demand for air conditioning and federal regulations, a 67 4 door was a success with sales over 13,000 units. The last 66 convertible saw sales of slightly over 5,000. The 66-rag top is a very desirable car today. As a matter of fact, total 67 production was 12% higher over 66 at 77,976 versus

66 productions at 69,176. Apparently, people liked this new version of thunderbird.

New technical highlights included a full frame, the first since 57, and a return to coil springs, last seen in 58. Speaking of the new frame, this was first seen on all full size 65 fords and was extended length wise for use on the 67-71 thunderbirds. This frame was the foundation of many Nasar racers well into the

90's. These frames had a flaw, that affects all collector cars in the rust belt and that is extreme frame rust that causes structural damage. I have seen many 65-71 ford products with frames snapped, usually this occurs ahead of the right rear wheel and the differential slips rearward, thereby making the car suitable for parts only. These cars were notorious for rust under the vinyl tops and rear quarter panels. My 71 mark III had the rust under the vinyl top and every outside panel on the car, surprisingly the frame was as solid as a rock.

1968 had little change from 1967. New federal regulations included side marker lights, shoulder belts,

and a collapsible steering column. Perhaps the biggest change was the re-shuffling of the engine lineup. The Ford Edsel 390-428 engines were replaced by the 429 V8 of the 385 series, it was a thin wall casting based on the 289-small block V8. Production dropped for the 68 to 4,931.

In April of 1968, Lincoln received its Thunderbird the Mark III. This car was based on the 4 door Landau inter-structure. This provided a step up from the Thunderbird at around \$3,000. The Lincoln received the 460 engines from the 385 series, it replaced the Mercury Edsel Lincoln 430 and 462 engines that dated back to 58. I own a 71 Mark III with its share of electrical problems that plague all Thunderbirds of this series. With the early 429 and 460's expects 0-60 mph in around 9.0 seconds and gas mileage around 15 mpg driven conservatively.

1969 was basically the same as 1968, with sales of 49,272 total units, the lowest since 1958. Buicks Riviera outsold the t-bird this year with total sales of 52,700. New competition also came from the new Pontiac Grand Prix and Dodge Charger.

Bunkie Knudson from Pontiac fame came to Ford in early 68 and was gone from Ford in August of 69. Changes were needed with Knudson's beak seen on many Ford products from the 70-72 model years. There was no distinction from earlier Thunderbirds other than front end styling on the 70 and 71 Thunderbirds. Apparently, the styling had no effect on sales. Sales of the 70 models were the same as 69 at 50,000 units. New competition included the new Chevrolet Monte Carlo. A less expensive alternative to the T-bird and other General Motors offerings.

1971 sales dropped again to 36,055 units, only 9,000 more units were sold than the last year of the Mark III production at 27,000 units. Changes were minimal from 1970-71. Thunderbird and Lincoln would have new models for 72 with stronger sales. This series is the topic of our next discussion.

Happy Motoring!

Respectfully Submitted,

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