

not an ideal balance for either steering or traction.

Nor is such location of power train components especially necessary in a car with an interior layout like the Thunderbird. There is no need to worry about center seating of passengers, since there simply is no provision for them. Driver and passengers sit alongside the transmission hump and driveline and never have the occasion to straddle them.

The passenger compartment arrangement has been a virtual exclusive with the Thunderbird, at least domestically, until 1960 when the idea was borrowed by Chrysler for its 300 series. Although the seats are individual and contoured, they are not the true bucket type. Yet they are comfortable and well backed. The center console houses power window controls, heater and other minor accessory items.

Despite sizable production, the car has never been anything other than a two-door, although Ford at times certainly must have been tempted to add a four-door version. The current doors are wider than standard for easier rear seat entry and exit, which is a commendable effort, but this same width is sometimes a handicap when parking between other vehicles that prevent the door being swung fully open.

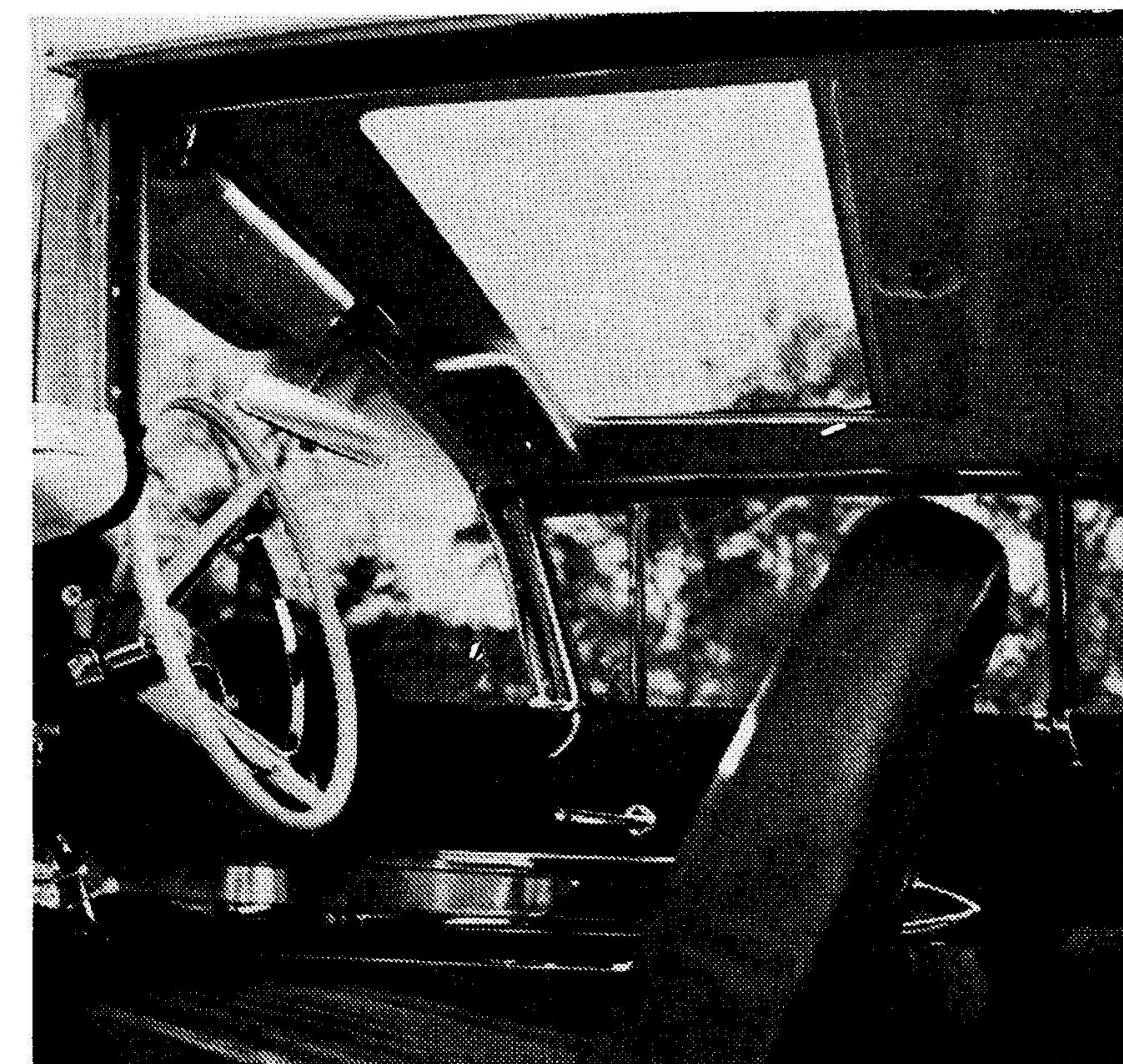
The Thunderbird, of course, has a unit construction body, and was one of the first of the Ford Motor Company cars to switch to the technique in recent years. And the benefits are quite apparent, with a degree of solidity and quietness higher than, say, standard Fords and Mercurys.

Trunk capacity, however, is one of the lowest of any sedan in its class. Long-range travel in a Thunderbird would have to be accomplished with less than the normal quota of luggage.

It is obvious that the appeal of the Thunderbird design is more than enough to offset any such shortcomings. The car's resale value is well above the standard of production sedans, a pace set by the two-seater and continued by the four.

There are many cars which will outperform the T-Bird, cost less, deliver more miles per gallon of gas, carry more passengers, even ride and handle better. But somehow the T-Bird has never been measured by these standards by the majority of the car buyers and drivers. It is a car apart and, like royalty, rarely required to account for ordinary deficiencies. Undoubtedly it is because these other qualities are, after all, rather commonplace. The Thunderbird is different and that is all it has ever had to be.

Sliding sun-roof in the hardtop gives the front passengers a new view. It's a practical option but has not been seen on many cars. Word is that it will be cancelled in '61.



Test Car

TEST CAR: Ford Thunderbird
BODY TYPE: Sedan
BASE PRICE: \$4225

Maneuverability Factors

OVERALL LENGTH: 205.3 inches
OVERALL WIDTH: 77 inches
OVERALL HEIGHT: 53 inches
WHEELBASE: 113 inches
TREAD, FRONT/REAR: 60 and 57 inches
TEST WEIGHT: 4410 lbs.
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION: 55 per cent on front wheels
STEERING: 4 turns lock-to-lock
TURNING CIRCLE: 40 feet
GROUND CLEARANCE: 6 inches

Interior Room

SEATING CAPACITY: Four
FRONT SEAT—
HEADROOM: 35.3 inches
LEGROOM: 43.3 inches

Engine and Drive Train

TYPE: Ohv V-8
DISPLACEMENT: 430 cubic inches
COMPRESSION RATIO: 10.1
CARBURETION: Single four-barrel
HORSEPOWER: 350 @ 4600 rpm
TORQUE: 490 lbs.-ft. @ 2800 rpm
TRANSMISSION: Cruiseomatic
REAR AXLE RATIO: 3.10

Performance

GAS MILEAGE: 12 mpg
ACCELERATION: 0-30 mph in 3.5 seconds, 0-45 mph in 6 seconds, 0-60 mph in 8.9 seconds
SPEEDOMETER ERROR: Indicated 30, 45 and 60 mph are actual 30, 44 and 58 mph, respectively
POWER-WEIGHT RATIO: 12.6 lbs. per horsepower
HORSEPOWER PER CUBIC INCH: .81