

**SPECIFICATIONS
1959 FORD THUNDERBIRD**

Engine

Type: ohv V-8
Bore x stroke: 4.00 x 3.50
Displacement: 352 cubic inches
Compression ratio: 9.6:1
Horsepower: 300 @ 4600rpm
Torque: 395 @ 2800rpm
Induction system: Carter 4-bbl. downdraft carburetor

Transmission

Type: Cruise-O-Matic 3-speed automatic with torque converter
Ratios: 1st 2.40, 2nd 1.47, 3rd 1.00, Rev 2.00 (:1)

Steering

Type: Link-type, recirculating ball nut, power assisted
Ratios: 20:1 gear, 25:1 over-all
Turning diameter: 40' 4" (curb to curb)

Front Suspension

Type: Independent short and long arm with ball joints and coil springs

Brakes

Type: four-wheel hydraulic drum-type, vacuum assist
Drum diameter: 11"

Weight and Measures

Wheelbase: 113"
Overall length: 205.3"
Overall width: 77"
Overall height: 54.2"
Front tread: 60"
Rear tread: 57"
Shipping weight: 3813 lbs.

Other Statistics

Weight per cid: 12.25 lbs.
Weight per bhp: 14.38 lbs.
Tires: 8.00 x 14
Production: 67,456 (57,195 hardtops, 10,261 convertibles)
Price when new: \$3696 fob factory, including federal excise tax, with standard equipment.

It was an impressive car. Still is, for that matter. Powered by an improved version of the "Thunderbird Special," a 352cid/300bhp, four-barrel, premium fuel V-8 that had premiered the year before, its power-to-weight ratio was bested within the Ford family only by the Lincoln-engined Mercury Park Lane. In that particular respect, at least, it even edged out the Corvette, a lively V-8 by that time — and most other cars as well.

The styling theme, introduced the year before, gave the car its nickname: "The Square Bird." It was so well received that for 1959 Ford applied the same roofline to a new, top-of-line series called the "Galaxie," a car that would, in turn, influence Ford styling for several years to come.

Our feature car, a 1959 Thunderbird hardtop, was a 48,000-mile "cherry" when Everett and Lillian Faulkner bought it from its original owner six years ago. With just a little cosmetic touch-up it was ready for the show circuit, and in both 1978 and 1979 it took the Best of Show award at the Fabulous Fifties Ford Club meet. The Faulkners view it as a car to be enjoyed, however, and in 1978 they drove it from their Southern California home to the Vintage T-Bird Club's national meet, held in Dearborn, Michigan, in connection with the Ford Motor Company's 75th Anniversary celebration. Against competition from all over the country, the Faulkner car placed third!

The Faulkners describe the Thunderbird as a marvelous traveling companion: fast (though nothing as wild as the 140 miles an hour to which the speedometer is calibrated!), comfortable, and more economical than one might expect. Traveling at 70 to 75 miles per hour the car delivers 17.5 miles to the gallon. With the speed reduced to 55, that figure rises to twenty.

The Faulkners' Bird is equipped with every conceivable extra, save one. Ford's excellent three-speed Cruise-O-Matic transmission is there, together with power steering, brakes, windows, and seats. Refrigerated air had still not come into its own in 1959 — relatively few cars were equipped with it. So in their cross-country travels the Faulkners have to depend upon what some wag has called "470" air-conditioning: roll four windows down and drive 70 miles per hour!

It seems a small enough sacrifice, if that's what it takes in order to get to drive such a car as this! ☺

'Bird ran more than one-third ahead of the year before.

But Ford did nothing of the kind. For 1958 the Thunderbird grew two feet in overall length, gained more than 500 pounds, acquired a back seat and was available in two configurations, a fixed-roof "hardtop" and a convertible. Purists blamed the "bean-counters" for screwing up a good thing, while apologists

applauded Ford for making it feasible for a family man to enjoy a T-Bird.

Clearly, however, the bean-counters — or whomever it was that handed down the decision to go for the bigger car — were bang-on. Although 1958 was a dismal year for the auto industry and a worse one for Ford, sales of the Thunderbird gained 77 percent over the record total of the year before! And this time Ford didn't mess with it: for 1959 the car was basically unchanged. Times, however, were better and sales of the T-Bird took off again — a 78 percent increase this time.

SQUARE BIRD PRODUCTION

	Hardtops	Convertibles	Total
1958	35,758	2,134	37,892
1959	57,195	10,261	67,456
1960	80,983*	11,860	92,843
TOTALS	173,936	24,255	198,191

*includes 2,536 "Gold Tops"

Source: *The Production Figure Book for US Cars* by Jerry Heasley.

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