

The attractive Taurus Limited interior with optional voice-activated DVD-based navigation system.



Ford brings back the Taurus name

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What's in a name? Lots, it seems, when it concerns the automotive world and the sales of new cars. For example, the Taurus was long considered the mainstay of the Ford fleet from the time it was first introduced in 1985. The very next year, in fact, it was named Motor Trend's Car of the Year and by 1992 it had become America's best-selling car for the fifth straight year. Then, in 2004, Ford brought out a new flagship sedan, the 2005 Five Hundred. A year later, the Taurus was dropped.

Fast-forward to 2007 and the Taurus name has suddenly re-emerged on Ford's 2008 full-size sedan as sluggish sales sent the Five Hundred name to a place in automotive history.

Name recognition obviously means a lot in the car business or we wouldn't see old names resurrected as we so often do. However, a name change is not all that's new with Ford's full-size sedan for 2008.

Ford boasts about more than 500 engineering changes on the new model, with the major one being a huge boost in horsepower thanks to a new 3.5-litre Duratec V6 that delivers 263 hp and 245 lb/ft of torque. That's an increase of nearly 30 per cent over the previous engine. It's mated with the same six-speed transmission found in the Ford Edge, and you have a combination ready to take on the best sedans in its class.

My recent tester was a top-of-the-line Taurus Limited, featuring all-wheel drive. Options included a power moonroof, navigation system and 18-inch seven-spoke chrome wheels.

All in, it priced out at \$45,129. However, a Taurus in SEL trim starts at a shade under the \$31K mark.

While full-size sedans are not normally my cup of tea, I am in the demographic that traditionally would have gravitated to a car like this. Being in the 50-something age group, we mature drivers often favour comfort over handling and sportiness unless we're entering that mid-life crisis stage and HAVE to own just one more sports car before we're done here on earth.

So if you fit in that first category and only remember the full-size cars your parents used to drive, things have changed, and quite dramatically. The Taurus is evidence of the evolution of the family sedan.

First off, it still has the roominess and quietness we associate with big sedans. But, what is surprising is the improved handling and performance, combined with decent fuel economy.

In fact, Ford claims the Taurus has a 10 per cent improvement in fuel economy despite a boost of 60 horsepower over last year's car. Styling wise, the Taurus has a Ford family look with a new signature three-bar chrome grille like the popular mid-size Fusion sedan. Other exterior changes include a sculpted hood with crisp accent lines and a new front fascia along with new tail lamps, rear fascia, chrome side vents and door handles.

All in all, it's a clean, simple and attractive look, but not the type of styling that makes it stand out from the crowd.

But where it does stand out is the quietness of the cabin. Ford has taken a big step forward here with the use of a new sound package to reduce wind noise. It involves a sound deadening material called Sonosorb, used in the doors, headliner and pillars. Meanwhile, engineers have reduced road noise by stiffening the area where the rear package shelf meets and floor pan and the new climate control system is 50 per cent quieter than before.

From my week behind the wheel, I can attest to the advances Ford has made in this regard. The cabin is simply a pleasant place to be when you don't have to contend with significant wind and road noise.

When it comes to ride, Ford has made improvements in this area as well including the way the engine is bolted to the body with hydraulic mounts to reduce engine vibration. By moving the engine weight off the sub frame, engineers were able to better tune the suspension for an improved ride.

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