

## Sync-ronicity

# Ford and Microsoft revolutionize in-car connectivity

By MICHAEL BANOVSKY

The downside to rapid progress in electronics means that automakers are constantly on the back foot when it comes to totally embracing new technology.

What devices should they support? What devices will people be using in their cars next year? What about six months from now?

Spending over \$30,000 on a car that doesn't know what an iPod is wouldn't be viewed by techno-savvy buyers as money well spent.

To combat and complement the constant crowd of new devices, Ford and Microsoft have teamed up to produce Sync, a new take on automotive connectivity. Both a hardware and software solution, it pairs steering wheel controls and an internal microphone with a sophisticated software platform mounted in the car.

The system can interface with most USB-based media players, including the incumbent (iPod) and challengers (Zune, Nomad Zen, etc.). By interface, I mean you can take direct control of the player from the car's controls. Your player will also charge through the USB port.

You can also slot in a USB thumb drive — a small, unpowered memory stick that can be loaded with any content from any computer, including thousands of MP3 files. Sync can access any music contained on a USB thumb drive, provided it isn't a protected format (iTunes store purchases won't work, but AAC and WMA files, among others, will.) It will play protected iTunes store purchases only if they're still on your iPod.

Also included is an 1/8-inch auxiliary input jack for devices that can't be, ahem, 'sync'd' through USB. As an added party trick, Sync will stream audio from any Bluetooth device.

If you're so inclined, music can be served up with voice commands. Simply touch the button on the steering wheel, wait for the prompt, and say: "USB," then, "play," music from your device will start to play. If you're dying to hear your just-downloaded Best Of Prince compilation, say: "play album, Best Of Prince," and turn on your wipers — you'll be in for some Purple Rain.

Commands that work are: album, artist, genre, track name, or play similar — which will shuffle and grab other similar artists and playlists. I'm a bit of a boffin, so part of my testing during the launch event centered on what it won't play with voice commands.

I'm sad to report I couldn't stump it.

If it's confused, Sync will read four close matches, and have you pick one of them. It all works very well, and can use one of three languages — American English, Canadian French, and North American Spanish.

If your phone has Bluetooth, you can access just about any aspect of your device from Sync. You can say a number aloud and it'll dial it, or just say the person's name. If they have more than one entry in your phonebook, Sync will ask which number you'd like. Sync can have multiple phones paired with the same vehicle, but will default to the main phone if more than one phone is detected.

Sync is a software platform designed for mobile use, called Windows Mobile for Automotive. It was built on Windows CE, the platform Microsoft uses for cell phones and other digital devices. It can be upgraded, and downloadable upgrades

can be handled through syncmyride.com, or through your Ford dealer.

Even if you're not in the mood to talk to your

car, Sync provides a very robust interface for accessing your cell phone and digital music. But, with anything, if you embrace Sync and utilize its

full range of voice commands, it will provide a complete experience not yet seen on this side of the ocean.

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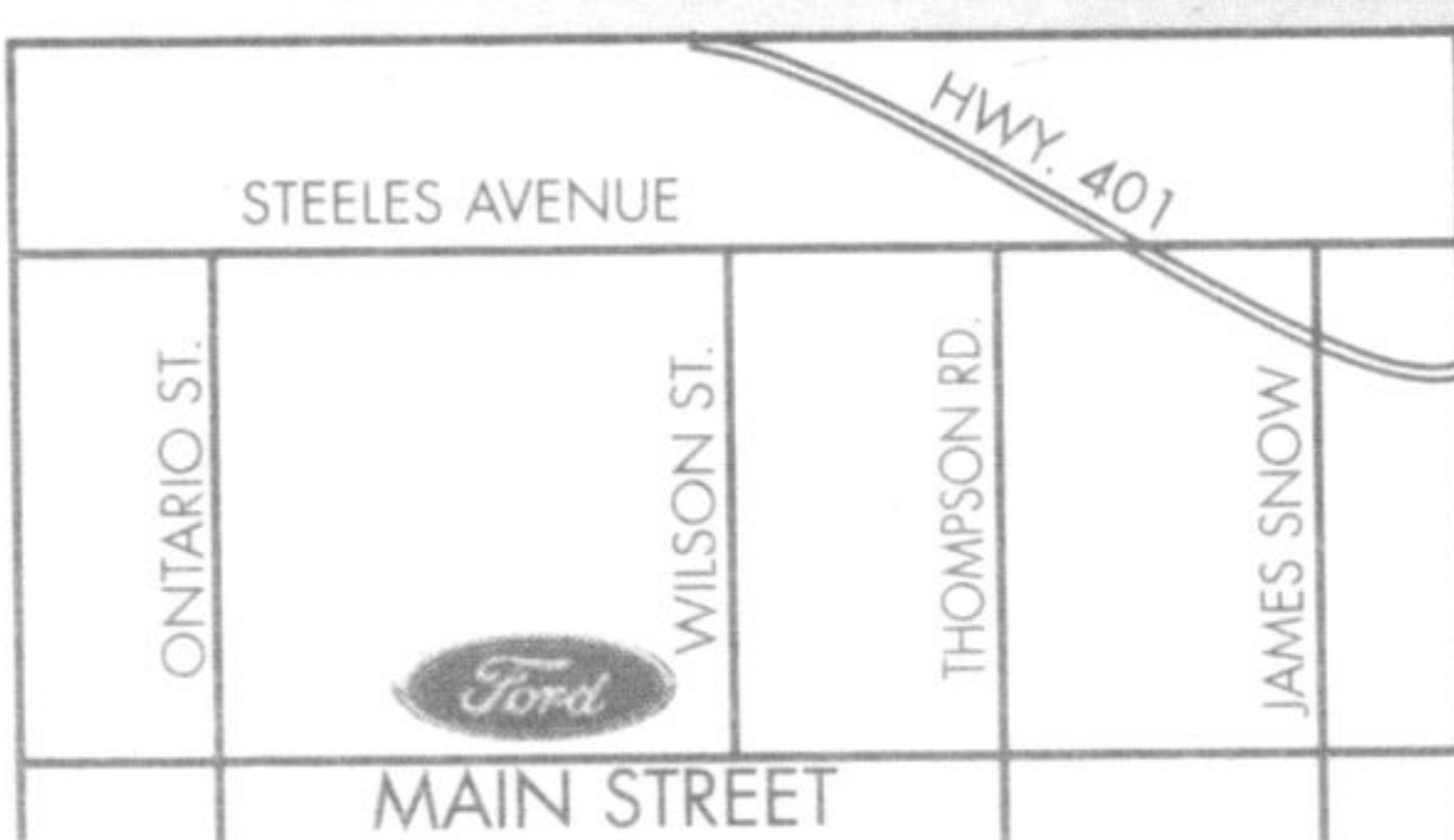


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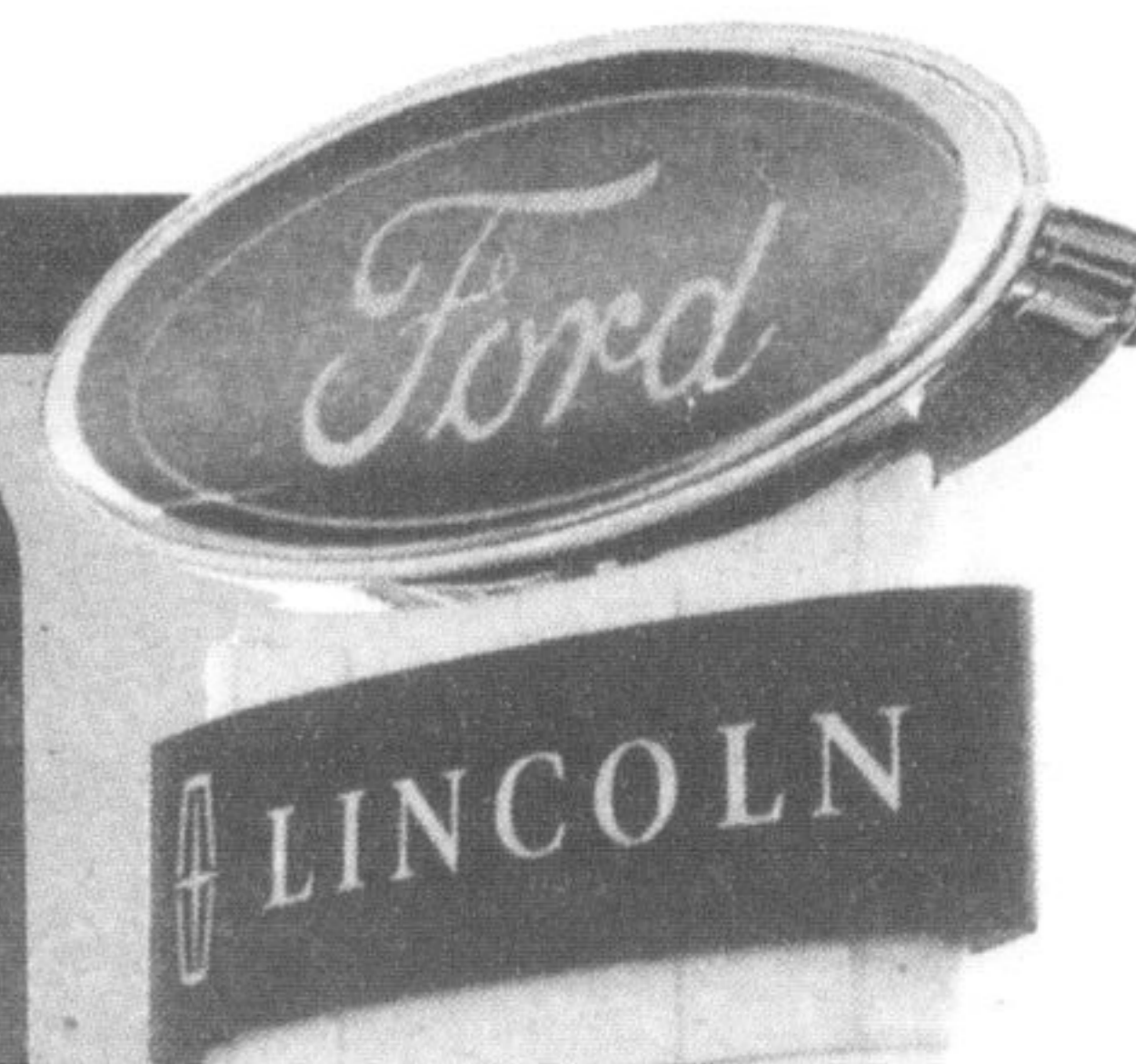
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