

May

Wheels

With the Navigator luxury is standard, adventure is an option

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Metroland Staff Writer

SARATOGA, N.Y. — The test drive started just after dawn. We piloted our way through picturesque colonial villages, blurring past historic homes cloaked in morning gray. Eventually, the sun broke through the haze of low cloud to light the towns and touch the slopes of the Adirondack Mountains.

Perfect place to launch the '98 Navigator

For here, in one of the birthplaces of America, steeped in both history and revolution, Lincoln, Ford's most tradition-bound division, was breaking with its past to unveil a few revolutionary concepts of its own.

Lincoln is faced with the inevitable shift of customer demographics.

The previous generation is being slowly replaced by reluctantly aging baby boomers, a generation with very different automotive demands.

It's a generation unwilling to accept the big, plush luxury boats of the past. Customers who are looking for both style, individuality, performance and dependability.

The Lincoln Navigator is a full-size, luxurious sport utility vehicle that just might fit the bill.

Feel free to think of it as sort of a gold-plated Ford Expedition, since both SUVs share the same F-truck underpinnings, although the Lincoln spin-doctors will argue about its characteristics of elegance and how every body panel except for the roof is brand new or modified.

The Navigator is an enhancement of the Ford Expedition, but it

offers many features that you would find in a Lincoln," said Chris Smirlies, the general sales manager of Craig Rieley's Markville Lincoln Mercury Sales Inc.

The front end, unabashedly Lincoln with its signature grille attached to the hood, combines with unique moulding and rugged integral illuminated running boards to create an aggressive look that turns plenty of heads on the highway.

Inside, the Navigator is equally impressive, raising SUV luxury to an entirely new plateau. The wood and leather steering wheel (reminiscent of Jaguar) is a work of art, fronting an elegant and ergonomically designed soft-feel dashboard.

Standard seating consists of four captains' chairs separated by front and rear consoles. Or, if you prefer, you can select the second-row 60/40 bench as a no-charge option. Either way, the second row still provides a surprising amount of legroom and easy access.

"It has a third rear seat that can carry up to eight people comfortably. The Navigator also offers two rear bucket seats with a console that (seats) up to seven comfortably," said Smirlies.

Safety features include 4-wheel ABS disc brakes, the passive anti-theft system that requires a specially coded key to start the engine, remote illuminated entry, side impact door beams and child safety locks. And, in response to recent customer concerns, the '98 Navigator will be the first Ford product to feature a new generation of de-powered air bags.

Under the hood, the standard powerplant is the beefy 5.4 liter V8,

a 230-hp engine that outmuscles competitors like Range Rover and the Lexus LX450 and does so at a substantially lower price. Coupled with the four-speed automatic tranny and trailer package, the Navigator will haul up to 8,000 pounds of trailer weight while carrying a maximum payload of another 1,800 pounds.

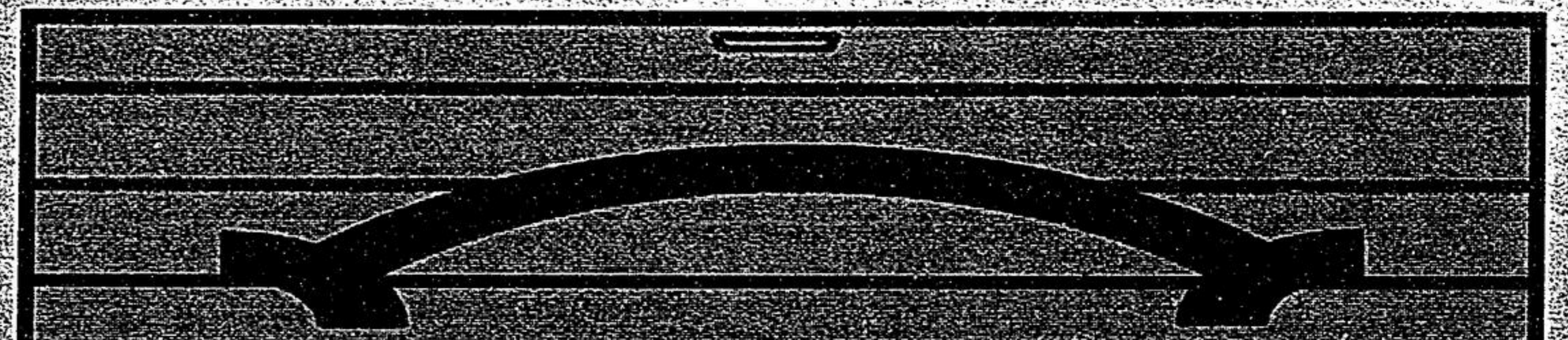
The Navigator is available in 2WD with

rear load-leveling suspension or in a multi-mode 4WD model with a very smooth air suspension system on all four corners. And although Navigator's 4X4 capabilities are as able as the Expedition's, the Lincoln's tire tread and suspension settings are optimized for quiet comfortable cruising. And cruise it

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The 1998 Navigator



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