

Autofile



Ford Thunderbird, 1989-'97

HISTORY The Thunderbird first appeared in the fall of 1954 as Ford's answer to the Chevrolet Corvette. From 1955-'57 these two-seaters were among the best-looking cars on the road. In 1958, the first four-seater T-Bird made its debut. Available in coupe or convertible style, this basic platform remained constant through the next two styling changes in 1961 and 1964. In 1967, the first four-door Thunderbird arrived, complete with suicide doors and hidden headlights. The 1970s and early 1980s constituted the 'lost years' for the marque, with Ford relegating this once-proud brand to little more than a nameplate attached to various mid- and full-sized coupes. In 1983, an attractively-styled coupe arrived, with turbocharged four-cylinder as well as available V6 and V8 power. By 1989, a wider and heavier T-bird offered an optional supercharged V6 engine. This version remained until the brand's demise in 1997. A retro-styled two-seat Bird is back for 2002.

THE GOOD STUFF The 1989-'97 T-Birds are exceptionally comfortable and competent vehicles. There's a wide assortment of standard luxury equipment on board, as befits this luxury-oriented coupe. Front-seat passengers receive plenty of head, shoulder and knee room while perched on comfortable, supportive seats. The T-Bird has a long and fairly deep trunk that's sedan-like in size. In the power department, the base 3.8-litre V6 and 5.0- (later 4.6) litre V8 provide good performance. But it's the supercharged Super Coupe with 210 horsepower and 315 lb.-ft. of torque that really shines. According to Ford, a five-speed equipped Thunderbird SC could achieve a seven-second 0-100 km-h mph time, excellent considering the car's 1,730-kilogram (3,800-pound) curb weight.

HEAD'S UP! Thunderbirds ride and drive like big sedans as opposed to sports machines. They feel as wide as a Crown Victoria, but lack the big car's seating capacity. The T-Bird's heftiness works against it, particularly in terms of fuel economy. If a Super Coupe is what you seek, make sure the supercharger is in good working order. Since 1995 was the final year for the SC, you're on your own with this expensive out-of-warranty piece.

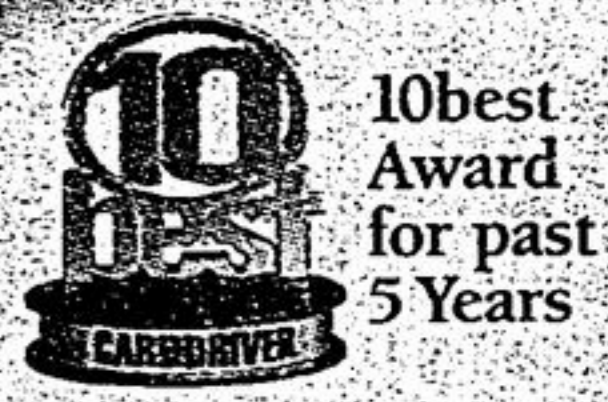
PRICES The 1989-'91 T-Birds are priced in the vicinity of \$3,000-\$4,000, while 1992-'94 copies range between \$3,500 and \$7,500. For 1995-'97 cars, expect to pay \$10,000-\$14,000. Super Coupes and V8-equipped Thunderbirds are preferred by most buyers and will garner higher prices than V6 models.

OVERALL Thunderbirds might not qualify as a true sports coupes, but they offer attractive styling that could make them desirable collectibles. The best combination of power and proven durability are the 5.0- or 4.6-V8-equipped versions. For comparison purposes, check out the more conservatively-styled Mercury Cougar, as well as any of the GM coupes such as the Pontiac Grand Prix, Olds Cutlass Supreme or Buick Regal.

VITALS Engines: 3.8-litre OHV V6 (140 hp); 3.8-litre OHV V6, supercharged (210 hp, SC, 1989-'95); 5.0-litre OHV V8 (200 hp, 1989-'93); 4.6-litre SOHC V8 (205 hp, 1994-'97).
Transmissions: Five-speed manual (SC only); four-speed automatic. **Layout:** Front-engine, rear-wheel drive. **Body:** Two-door coupe.

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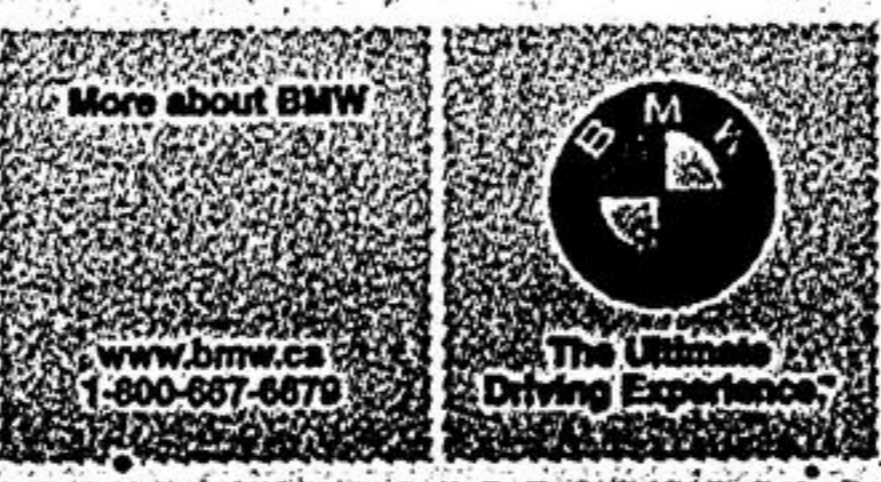
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