



One of the more appealing designs of the Fabulous '50s, the 1955 and '56 Fords combined style and power to win over buyers

Then there was the addition of the sensational Ford Thunderbird, a two-seat personal luxury car with a big, throbbing V8 that seemed to add luster to the entire lineup.

Along with assembling the usual crop of two- and four-door coupe, sedan and wagon body styles plus the mandatory convertible, Ford had at least one styling gimmick up its sleeve. The top-of-the-line Fairlane Crown Victoria hardtop was not really a hardtop at all, at least in the traditional pillarless sense. Instead, a thick band of chrome swept up the side of the greenhouse directly behind the doors and flowed

Crown Victoria four-door hardtop was added to the mix and those inescapable two-tone paint schemes were in even greater abundance. Easy credit terms became the order of the day and the infamous Lee Iacocca, then one of Ford's district sales managers, developed the "56 For 56" (a new '56 Ford for \$56 a month) promotion that helped take his Philadelphia region to record sales heights.

These new Fords also offered significantly more thrust, thanks to an available 312 cubic-inch Thunderbird V8 that spit out up to 225 horsepower.

The only cloud in Ford's

FINE LINES

1955-'56 FULL-SIZE FORD CARS

across the width of the roof.

The feature was, to say the least, eye-catching and added more than a touch of glamour to the \$2,200 car. For less than \$100 more, buyers could add a tinted plexiglass roof, although most passed on this feature fearing they would unmercifully roast on hot sunny days. Hey, if you really wanted to check out the sky you could specify the ragtop for about the same price.

Bare-bones Mainline and Customline models were commonly equipped with the economy-oriented 120-horsepower 223 cubic-inch OHV six-cylinder engine. But checking the right box on the order form would take you straight to V8 Land, which included a 162-horsepower 272-cubic-inch motor and a 200-horse 292-cube mill — standard issue in the T-Bird — that made the big Ford fly.

In 1955 it was all too easy to up your time payments by tacking on a few ritzy extras such as whitewall tires, fender skirts, AM radio, tinted windows, automatic transmission or power windows. Crown Victoria owners could also add that quintessential '50s motif, a continental kit that included the spare tire hung out over the rear bumper.

At the conclusion of the 1955 model year, Ford had experienced its best sales performance since the heyday of the Model T. And, with the launch of the 1956 cars, the company would see more of the same. A sparkling new

otherwise clear blue sky was the manufacturer's attempt to promote safety. It's hard to imagine today, but back in the mid-'50s, pushing features such as a deep-dish safety steering wheel, padded dashboard, optional seat belts and other "Lifeguard" items not only turned prospective owners off, but probably shifted sales to brands that didn't employ such perceived scare tactics in their advertising.

Although both the '55 and '56 Fords are considered attractive, especially the Crown Victoria hardtops and convertibles, the '56 model is today regarded as having the styling edge. Credit for this goes to a cleaner, less toothy grille that, combined with the outward location of the signal lamps, makes the newer version appear wider and lower.

After '56, Ford's passenger cars began to bulk up and gain tailfins as well as some other unnecessary trim pieces — well into the 1960s — that only served to clutter up the designs.

However, for one all-too-brief period, these fashionable '50s Fords turned heads as they beautified driveways and highways across the land.

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By **MALCOLM GUNN**
WHEELBASE COMMUNICATIONS

The 1955 and 1956 full-size Ford cars were more than just fresh images on the automotive canvas. They also managed to strike just the right note of youthful fun and exuberance that typified the era.

For the North American automobile industry, the mid-1950s proved to be the decade's most prosperous period, especially for Ford. The company had enjoyed steady, if not spectacular, growth and profits since its first all-new post-Second-World-War model hit the streets in 1949. That sleekly shaped landmark car was a tremendous hit with buyers, which significantly boosted Ford's overall marketshare (although it still trailed General Motors). Three years later the automaker again hit one out of the park with the release of the completely redone 1952s, solidifying its second-place position within the General Motors/Ford/Chrysler triumvirate.

By the fall of 1954, Ford was poised for yet another grand slam. The 1955 models were longer, lower, wider and more chrome-laden than ever before. Two-tone pastel shades had replaced the previous year's darker and more conservative monotone hues.

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