



R E B I R T H

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“Seldom in automotive history has a car created as much emotional attachment as the Ford Thunderbird has. The car spans generations and decades – and, in many ways, chronicles the modern history of America itself. The all-new Thunderbird is designed to point to the future while recapturing the magic of an American icon. The magic begins with a special Neiman Marcus Edition Thunderbird, which goes on sale later this year.”

*– J Mays, Ford Motor Company
Vice President of Design*

The 2002 Ford Thunderbird Neiman Marcus Edition debuts at the 50th annual Concours d'Elegance at Pebble Beach.



A Q U I E T B E G I N N I N G

Shortly after the 1997 announcement that production of the world renowned Ford Thunderbird would halt – at least temporarily – the wheels of reinvention were set in motion inside Ford Motor Company. Leading the charge was a small staff assembled to create a new Thunderbird concept, one that would recapture the magic of the original American icon.

The designers quickly made themselves aficionados of the classics – car classics. Magazines were perused, movies watched and Web sites surfed to initiate the younger and acquaint the more mature members with the era of the '50s.

The energy level was ratcheted up when the team purchased a classic Thunderbird for inspiration. A pristine 1957 Thunderbird was secured from a local car broker. In a modern car design studio the middle-aged, white two-door with more than 100,000 miles and a chronic belt-squeak caused more commotion than the building's occupants had seen in years.

Once the design team had finished its initial walk around, the car was pulled outside into the sunlight, where a hose, several sponges and buckets of soapy water were waiting. It's not that the car needed a wash.

"You can best understand a car when you wash it or wax it," says Doug Gaffka, Thunderbird chief designer. "On one classic Thunderbird, there's a very subtle crease line in the back of the deck lid, ever so slight. You don't realize it's there until your hand passes over it."

The design team took note of the crease and put it on the new car. Other classic design cues followed – all created to be unmistakably modern yet harkening back to the classic design.



M O D E R N D E S I G N

The team went through painstaking efforts to define what the car was intended to be. A “sporty” modern roadster was the label – but even that definition needed further development.

The team envisioned a Thunderbird that was “sporty” but not like an exotic sports car. It had to be a car that was true to its roots.

The original Thunderbird was born during the late 1950s, so the new model needed to reflect the optimistic feeling of that post-World War II era. The car needed to have relaxed, top-down, boulevard cruising emotion – not a fire-breathing, rubber-burning drag-strip attitude.

With such a strong heritage to work with, it would be easy to go too far and create a replica of the original.

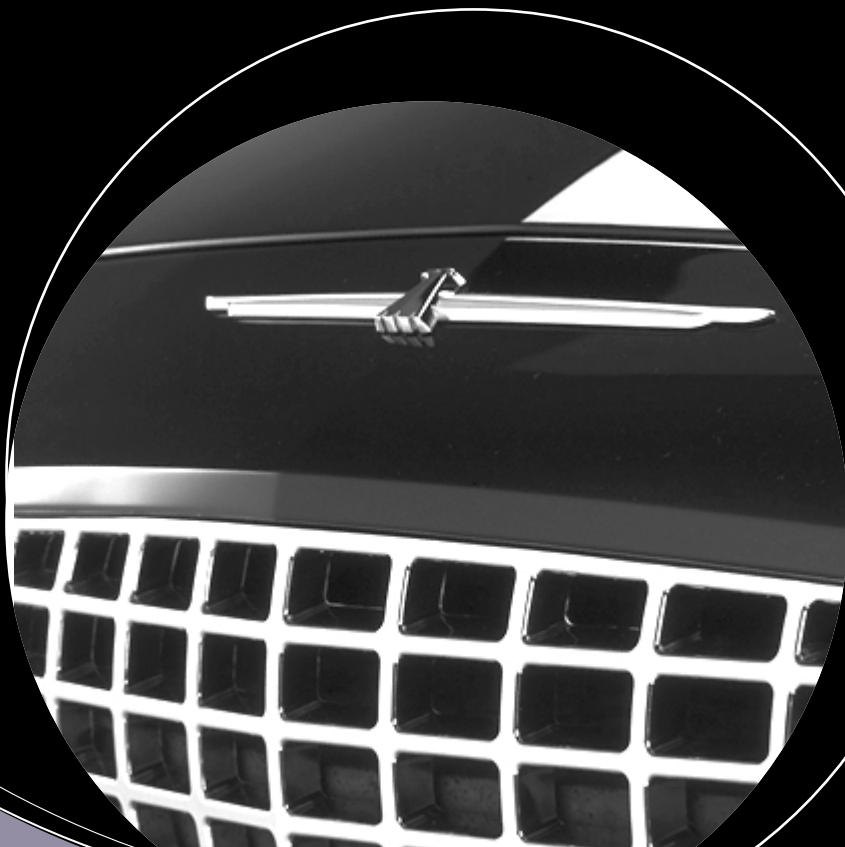


Enter J Mays, then a consultant to Ford and now Ford Motor Company's Vice President of Design. He liked the initial work being explored in the four different design iterations that had been created – but he also encouraged the group to stretch their ideas further. Mays guarded passionately against anything that could be painted as “old” or even “retro” in the pure sense of the word.

“The first designs were a good start. The further we went, the closer we came to getting a clear definition of what the car ought to be – modern in every sense of the word,” says Mays. “If you do it right, you don't really redesign a nameplate like Thunderbird. You become a curator of a legendary heritage and an interpreter of a new, modern design language.”

Early discussions by designers were aimed at coming up with words and ideas that would describe the feelings and mood evoked by the car. These verbal cues then could be translated into how the Thunderbird should look.

“American, bold, confident, free and relaxed” were the words that helped create visual cues unlocking the “DNA,” which designers would translate into a new Thunderbird.



One of the most significant design elements in the creation of the new car was the direction given to the team to translate “confident and relaxed” into a “reverse wedge” stance – giving the car substantial front-end appearance that seems to “lean-back” and taper toward the rear.

“It’s almost ‘easy’ to add in a lot of edge to make an aggressive car,” says Gaffka. “But, when you look at a car from the 1950s and it’s sort of leaning back, it looks really relaxed. There’s something warm and sensible and friendly about that. It makes you think freedom.”

" EDITING " A C A R

Mays and Gaffka looked at early sketches and clay models for the new Thunderbird. The team then began the job of editing the models into the desired car.

"Although there were four models there when I arrived – some with varying degrees of modernity and a balance of slight retrospective design cues on them – what we were looking for from front to back on the vehicle was a consistency of message. We didn't want to find some elements on the vehicle being modern, some retro, some Italian, some German," recalls Mays.

“We picked out a palette of shapes, colors, materials and textures that had ‘friends’ you would find throughout the other parts of the vehicle,” he said. “By doing that, we were essentially paring down, or editing, the information.”

“Trying to edit out the noise in the design was really as important a job as finding the design to start with.”

Designers were bold and modern with a hint of heritage.



“ I G E T I T ! ”

The paring began by taking a very retro-looking chrome chevron on the sides of the concept and reducing it by about four times. Edges were trimmed back and extra scallops were removed from the lower portion of the car.

A return to the roundness of the classic Thunderbird was sought by rounding out the wheelhouses and making the headlamps and taillamps round. In shape and integration with the design, the headlamps are very true to the original theme. They are modern, precise-looking complex reflector designs that leave no doubt they are state-of-the-art.

The taillamps were modeled after the early 1960s Thunderbirds, yet – like the headlamps – they exude modernity in execution. The famous porthole windows were incorporated into the new car’s removable top because of all the other visual cues, none more clearly communicates “Thunderbird.”



Chevrons, which adorned the original, communicate a technical modern image when updated on the new car.

The front end was further modernized with a body-color bumper and integrated auxiliary lamps. The grille is a satin-aluminum “egg-crate” design. The stately Thunderbird logo is displayed proudly on the front fascia. An updated hood scoop – an addition needed on the original to accommodate the engine air cleaner housing – was added to the new car, again as a cue to its heritage.

All edges and corners were cut back to give the car a tailored look.



The trimming and angling helped achieve a slight taper
from front to rear – the “relaxed, reverse-wedge” which
Mays encouraged designers to pursue.

“People don’t have a lot of time to digest the design of a car. You
have to catch their imaginations in the first 15 or 20 seconds,”
Gaffka says. “The goal we had was to simplify this vehicle so you
say in your first breath, ‘I get it!’”



LET THE PARTY BEGIN

Cars of the '50s were loaded with colors, textures and materials.

The same was true for just about everything from the '50s.

The furniture was bold, like a diner-stool emblazoned with chrome and wrapped in vibrant, red metal-flake vinyl cushions. Fashions ranged from black leather and blue jeans to pastel poodle-skirts.

"If you look at anything from the 1950s and in particular automobiles, part of what made them exciting had nothing to do with the shape," Mays says. "It had to do with the variety of colors, materials and textures."

The cabin area wraps the driver in modern materials.



Thus, the next challenge for the team was to bring that excitement to the new Thunderbird – but with contemporary comfort and ergonomics. The team not only looked at old Thunderbirds, but visited shows where other old cars were displayed to achieve a better feel for the past.

Originality is what Thunderbird is all about. The design team wanted the interior to be modern, because the exterior is definitively modern. But the team members also wanted some elements of the past to live on.

“One of the great things about the old car is that you sit in there, and there’s so much metal and chrome everywhere,” says Mark Conforzi, Thunderbird design manager. “We wanted to get that feeling into the new car.”

As a result, the new Thunderbird's instrument panel has a two-tone scheme – with black vinyl on top, body color vinyl on the bottom. An aluminum trim panel mimics the classic Thunderbird's interior aluminum trim. Similarly, door trim panels are two-tone, with a black base with molded-in horizontal rolls to echo the style of the original Thunderbird.

The console contains a leather-covered shift knob for Thunderbird's automatic transmission along with cup holders and a storage compartment with a leather wrapped armrest between the seats.

Smooth leather covers the side bolster faces of the seats, while perforated leather serves for the tuck-and-roll seating surfaces.

“We wanted to keep the interior comfortable and romantic,” said Conforzi. “You don’t want to feel like you’re strapped into the cockpit of an F-16. When you sit in the Thunderbird, you want the great feeling that comes from the blend of rich heritage and modern materials.”



B R I N G I N G I T B A C K

The world's first official introduction to the design team's handiwork would come at the January 1999 North American International Auto Show in Detroit. International news media gathered to see Ford Motor Company Chief Executive Officer Jacques Nasser drive a yellow Thunderbird concept car from the rafters of the local convention center to center-stage, where he simply and appropriately announced: "Thunderbird is back."

The reaction to the car was overwhelming. Finally, in May 2000, Ford officially announced that the Thunderbird was, indeed, coming back soon as a 2002 model.



The Thunderbird concept car sets the stage for a dramatic comeback.

From the day the concept car was unveiled, there was no real doubt that the production car would be very similar to the concept. The only questions were: "How similar?" and "When?"

"We decided early on that we weren't kidding anyone with camouflage on the test-cars," says Nancy Gioia, Thunderbird chief program engineer. "Rather than see a bunch of bad spy photos of taped-up and black-vinyl covered cars with spray-painted wheels, we felt having uncamouflaged vehicles would add to the consumer excitement and anticipation for the car."

To take that a step further and tie the new car with its heritage, Ford sent three vintage 1950s Thunderbirds on a 144-city "America Dream Car Tour" during the summer of 2000. The cars turned heads and generated more than 100,000 visitors to its Web site, where registrants were able to sign up to win one of the classic cars.

NEIMAN MARCUS SPECIAL EDITION

A car packed with so much emotion also deserved a special,
limited-edition model – a Neiman Marcus limited-edition model.

Certain to be a collector's prize, only 200 of the special Thunderbirds
will be produced and can be ordered only through the famous
Christmas Book of specialty retailer Neiman Marcus.

Like the porthole window and the hood scoop, Thunderbird's presence
in the prestigious catalog harkens back to the past. Thunderbird also
was featured in the Neiman Marcus catalog in 1970.

Customers could order “his and hers” 1971 Neiman Marcus Thunderbirds, with such extras as custom interior and exterior styling, a shaver and an 8-track tape player.

“For the new car, we knew we needed to develop a vehicle that was instantly recognizable and associated with the Neiman Marcus name,” says Conforzi. “We began by visiting several Neiman Marcus stores, where we found a strong black and silver theme. This vehicle carries those cues throughout the exterior and interior, creating an exclusive package fitting for Neiman Marcus customers.”

Thunderbird again graces the pages of the 2000 Neiman Marcus Christmas Book, as it did in 1970.



U N I Q U E D E S I G N

The Neiman Marcus Edition Thunderbird has several one-of-a-kind design elements to set it apart from other Thunderbirds. Most obvious is the polished-black body finish with silver metallic removable top – creating a striking, elegant style for the modern dream car. The removable top is highlighted with the Thunderbird insignia etched into the porthole glass.

Chrome wheels match the A-pillar and trim accents, and a chrome bezel adorns the hood scoop.

Inside the car, the black-and-silver theme continues. The steering wheel and shift knob are painted silver to match the exterior roof and accent colors. The vinyl lower door panel is silver to match the aluminum molding and inserts on the padded instrument panel. The seats contain a perforated silver insert surrounded by black leather.

Understated Neiman Marcus badges are found on the instrument panel and floor mats, while the Thunderbird insignias located on the seat backs. Side-by-side Neiman Marcus and Thunderbird badges appear on the interior aluminum appliqué.



2002 Thunderbird Neiman Marcus Edition

T H U N D E R B I R D A R C H I T E C T U R E

The Neiman Marcus Edition is built on the same solid architecture as the production car. The two-seat, convertible roadster is designed and engineered with Ford's newest rear-wheel-drive car technologies.

With a 107.2-inch wheelbase and wide, 72.0-inch stance, the car is engineered from the outset to be a convertible. Thus, the chassis was specially designed for increased rigidity to give the driver a responsive and balanced ride, handling and steering. It also has a nearly perfect, 50/50 front-to-rear weight distribution.

In addition to the black convertible top, the car features a removable top with a porthole window. The removable top comes with a special rolling rack for ease of storage in the customer's garage.

Thunderbird is powered by a 3.9-liter V-8 engine and automatic transmission.

2002 Thunderbird Neiman Marcus Edition



ORDERING INFORMATION

Orders for the Neiman Marcus Edition Thunderbirds will be available exclusively through the Neiman Marcus Christmas book at a manufacturer's suggested retail price of \$41,995.

To order, customers call a special toll-free catalog number to make a reservation.

Only 200 Neiman Marcus Edition Thunderbirds will be made. Because the content for the special Thunderbird is packaged together, the portion of the vehicle identification number that identifies its series code will be unique for the Neiman Marcus Edition Thunderbird.

Ford Dealers will deliver the Neiman Marcus cars to customers in the summer of 2001.