

'56 FORD ROAD TEST

A further stage in the evolution of the classless car, this V8 will suit many differing drivers



PHOTOS BY AL KIDD

AN MT RESEARCH REPORT

FORD FOR '56 is potent, glamorous, and even comes close to being luxurious. The result of a rather extensive facelift both inside and out, it is all tied together with new safety innovations designed specifically to protect you in the area of greatest accident potential.

Short of a major tooling change, about everything that could be done has been done. Lots of midnight oil went into this '56 model, and the powers-that-be at Ford expect it to pay off in sales leadership for '56. They could be right.

Test car: Fairlane V8 4-door Town Sedan. Equipment included Fordomatic, power steering and brakes, radio, heater and "Lifeguard" safety features, both standard and optional.

Engine: Performance comes from the big 292-cubic-inch Thunderbird V8 engine

(standard in all Fairlane models), punching out 202 horses. A lot of the snap can also be attributed to a compression ratio of 8.4 to 1 (when coupled to Fordomatic), better breathing thru larger passages in the heads and intake manifolds, and use of a higher-lift camshaft. With a bore of 3.75 inches and a stroke of 3.30 inches, this over-square engine packs enough punch to make like a rabbit in practically any company.

Other options: If you really want to go all-out on optional equipment, the list is an enormous one. Ford offers power steering and brakes, power windows and seats, air conditioning, fresh-air heaters, tinted safety glass, windshield washers and "Lifeguard" equipment, consisting of safety belts and foam plastic padding for instrument panel and sun visors (see photos). Such "Lifeguard" equipment as doorlatches,

low-hub steering wheel, shatterproof rear-view mirror, and stronger seat anchoring is standard.

WHAT THE CAR IS LIKE TO DRIVE

Exit and entry: Characteristic of wrap-around windshield design, lower corner post presents a definite knee obstruction upon exit or entry. Like last year's model, however, adequate entrance space has been provided; one or 2 inadvertent contacts with this cornerpost, and you will subconsciously avoid challenging its squatter's rights. Steering wheel presents no problem, being positioned well above seat height (see photo).

Door sills are high enough to avoid, provided the usual care is exercised during exit and entry. It is interesting to note that tho the Fairlane has been reduced by one full inch in overall height, headroom at door sill has remained essentially the

same. This has been accomplished by reducing the curvature of the top and snug-gling the headliner against the curvature. Ford's 2-position door checks are again in evidence this year, and all doors open to unusual width for easy access to interior, either front or back. Rear seat leg and headroom provide adequate comfort for the average-size person (see photo).

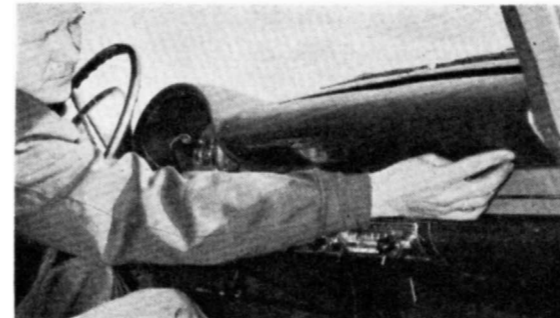
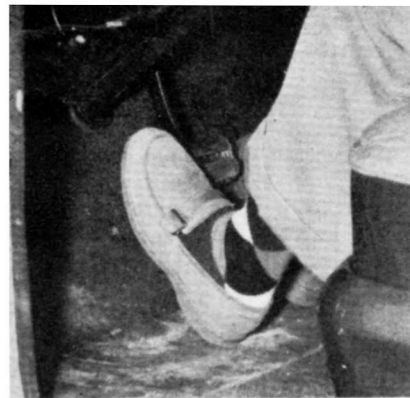
Driving position: From driver's point of view, the '56 Ford offers a very substantial feel of mastery over machine. Steering wheel position is comfortable and allows plenty of room for quick and positive maneuvering should an emergency arise. All fenders are visible (even to an under-size driver) with a slight amount of neck stretching. Forward vision is good over gently sloping hood. Deep, hooded instrumentation, something really new this year, is good but shows little improvement over last year's outstanding panel.

Unfortunately, Ford still retains the left-handed ignition switch which is awkward for most people (especially after unlocking the door with the right hand). Seat position gives you a balanced feeling which is probably the most important factor in a feeling of oneness with your car while driving. Seats are moderately firm, with easy fore-and-aft adjustment.

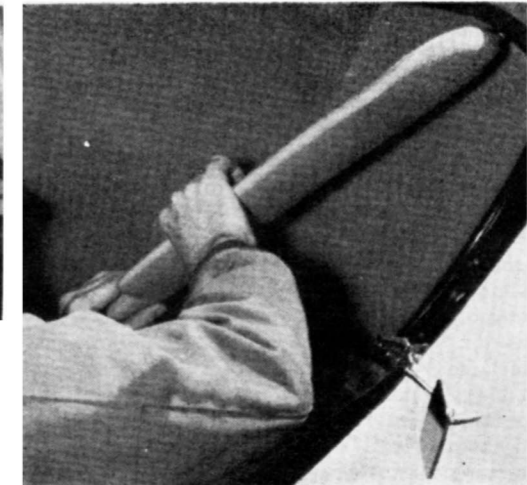
Vision: Abundant glass area assures good vision all around. Sharply curved areas of windshield produce usual distortion, and low-hung rear-view mirror creates a blind spot to right front. Other than that, '56 Ford offers plenty of eye-scanning area, and the rather high windshield puts the driver's eye-level substantially below the header sill. Rear window provides plenty of vision from side to side, but a rather tall person will have some trouble with



Above: MT's Engineering Editor, John Booth, demonstrates balanced feel of new Ford's driving position. Dished wheel contributes materially to driver confidence. Note optional belt in place. Top right: If you've become a proponent of left-foot braking, you'll like the new Ford with or without power assist. Right: Al Kidd finds adequate tho not luxurious room in rear. Ford retains 2-position door checks



Plastic foam crash padding along top edge of dash is without criticism except that glove compartment latch is hard to find. Sun visors, determined a prime danger spot in Ford's safety testing, have thick padded edge. Seatbelt is easy to fasten or to release



the roof line when using the rear-view mirror. Some improvement noticeable in wiper sweep (particularly to sides) but plenty of curved area is still barely translucent in bad weather.

Operation of accessories: Ford has discontinued use of round heater and radio faceplates this year, now mounting them on extreme bottom edge of dashboard, somewhat closer to driver. Heater controls are similar in operation to last year's model, therefore requiring a certain amount of attention. Heat, however, is generated very quickly and defrosters are excellent. Deluxe radio offers a signal-seeking device which automatically selects new stations.

Windshield wiper control has been moved to right side next to cigarette lighter, while light switch remains on left side directly above ignition switch. Operation of these controls remains the same: push-pull for lights, incorporating a twisting action for instrument light brilliance, and a twist (on or off) to set the windshield wipers into action.

Fordomatic's quadrant marker is positioned directly below speedometer, and is

correcting for crosswinds which continues to be necessary this year. Pendulum brake pedal is logically placed for natural foot movement and is wide enough for left-foot braking without leg or foot contortions (see photo on page 51).

Acceleration: With the big 202-hp engine under the hood, acceleration (while improved over last year) doesn't quite measure up to expectations. Response is instantaneous and the feel of real *go* is there, but the figures don't quite match this feel. For example, 0 to 60 mph averaged out at a conservative 12.2 seconds in DRIVE range, altho this is a good 2.9 seconds faster than the '55 Ford.

Fordomatic transmission retains its characteristic smoothness and seems to be set at optimum for general usage. For instance, when the transmission was held in LOW (intermediate gear) until the engine revs were 4100 (400 over normal shift point) only 0.6-second was lopped off the 0-60 time. In the quarter-mile it took an average of 19 seconds in DRIVE range, while the best we could consistently do by shifting manually from LOW to DRIVE was 18.6 seconds, an advantage usually useless.

'56 Ford has an inherent roadability that is a pleasure to experience. Essentially this year's chassis remains the same, except for slightly softer shock absorber valving, which doesn't detract from its former ability to really stick on washboard or rough surfaces. Very little body lean is apparent to the driver, even in violent cornering, and, altho the rear end can be made to break loose, a quick twist of the wheel puts it in the groove again. Directional stability is good except in a substantial crosswind, where quick and positive corrections are necessary. Top-speed runs produced no vibrations or chatter, but the front end got a little light when bucking a strong wind.

Ride: You will feel bumps, tar strips and pot holes, but ride is not objectionable at all. In fact, its firmness adds to overall feeling of stability. Recovery from dips and bumps is rapid with no tendency toward front- or rear-end oscillation. Noise level is moderate and vibration transfer is held to a minimum with effective use of rubber and other insulation.

WHAT THE CAR IS LIKE TO LIVE WITH

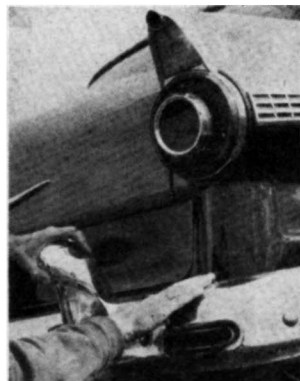
Riding in the front seat: Good leg and headroom, armrests, convenient ashtray, and accessible controls coupled with a comfortable seating position will add up to a sense of well-being for the passenger.

Riding in the rear seat: Good rear-seat visibility and adequate headroom. Leg-room satisfactory, but you will probably want to stretch after 2 or 3 hours on the highway. Seats are comfortable and reflect same firmness as those in front. Driveshaft tunnel is not abnormally high, but center passenger of a threesome will notice it's there. Hip and shoulder room assure a reasonable amount of comfort even with 3 passengers in the rear seat.

ECONOMY AND EASE OF MAINTENANCE

Fuel economy: Traffic checks on MT's simulated traffic course averaged nearly 13 miles per gallon—this represents an increase of about 2 mpg over the '55 test car. Normal driving speeds won't force you into the gas station any oftener than your neighbor (see table of performance).

Is the car well put together? Doors, hood, and trunk fit reasonably well, as do floor mats and trunk lining. Typical Ford orange peel was in evidence when we examined the red-and-cream paint. Headlining was wrinkled and sagged in several places, but no unfinished ends showed in either the header or upholstery. Seats were exceptionally well tailored, and quite luxurious looking. Rear bumper exhaust outlets (standard on the Fairlane) get really hot after a hard run, but are safe to touch after normal driving (see



Free breathing, a specialty of Fairlane's Thunderbird engine, starts with the monstrous air-cleaner and ends at the dual exhausts, whose design could be improved by insulation sufficient to prevent heating up.

very easy to read both day and night. Shift lever is conventionally placed for easy movement, and a definite feel is noticed when any quadrant position is engaged. Turn signal lever is mounted on right side and can be placed in turn position without bothering to remove your hands from the wheel.

Ease of handling: This year's Ford retains essentially the same ease of handling that was characteristic of last year's model (same basic chassis) but with considerably more snap. Power steering provides turning ease, but at same time retains a definite feel which enhances your overall feeling of mastery of the car. Ford's practice of using a 25.3 to 1 overall gear ratio for both mechanical and power steering requires approximately 4¾ turns from lock to lock. This could be advantageously reduced to not over 3¾ for power steering, increasing maneuverability appreciably, such as when

Braking: Here is a category that the new Ford owner can really crow about! After 12 consecutive hard stops (15 feet per second per second from 60 mph), which comprises our standard brake test, the '56 Ford with new fixed-anchor, one-adjustment shoes still had more than enough brake to lock all 4 wheels. Seven complete stops were made with no apparent fade or uneven pull. The 8th stop produced no fade, but a slight pull to the left was noticeable. The 9th thru 12th stops resulted in some erratic wheel pull, both right and left, with a definite increase in brake pedal pressure being required. At no time was wheel pull so violent as to become uncontrollable, and pedal travel increased so slightly that a measurement by hand was necessary to detect it. These brakes returned to normal after 7 minutes of 50 to 60 mph driving.

Roadability: Like last year's model, the

'56

'55

ACCELERATION From Standing Start
 0-30 mph 4.0 0-60 mph 11.6
 Quarter-mile 18.6 and 75 mph
 Passing Speeds
 30-50 mph 5.3 50-80 mph 13.3

TOP SPEED Fastest run 100.6 Slowest 99.5
 Average of 4 runs 100.2

FUEL CONSUMPTION Used Mobilgas Special
 Steady Speeds
 21.4 mpg @ 30 18.8 mpg @ 45
 16.1 mpg @ 60 13.5 mpg @ 75
 Stop-and-Go Driving
 12.9 mpg over measured course
 13.5 mpg tank average for 536 miles

STOPPING DISTANCE 174 feet from 60 mph

SPEEDOMETER ERROR Read 32 at true 30, 50 at 45, 64 at 60,
 80 at 75, and 106 at top speed

REAR-WHEEL HORSEPOWER Clayton chassis dynamometer showed:
 63 road hp @ 2000 rpm and 29 mph
 76 road hp @ 2500 rpm and 53 mph
 102 road hp (max.) @ 3600 rpm. 85 mph

From Standing Start
 0-30 mph 4.5 0-60 mph 14.5
 Quarter-mile 19.4 and 74 mph
 Passing Speeds
 30-50 mph 5.7 50-80 mph 19.8

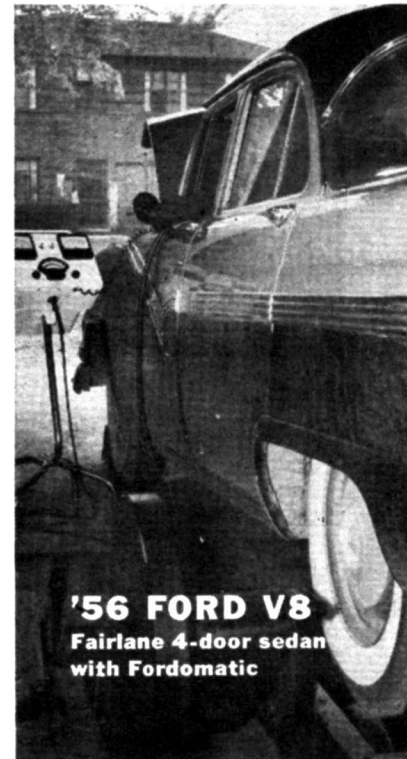
Fastest run 95.9 Slowest 94.8
 Average of 4 runs 95.2

Used Mobilgas Special
 Steady Speeds
 18.5 mpg @ 30 17.4 mpg @ 45
 14.0 mpg @ 60 10.9 mpg @ 75
 Stop-and-Go Driving
 11.9 mpg over measured course
 13.4 mpg tank average for 1386.1 miles

178 feet from 60 mph

Read 33 at true 30, 50 at 45, 66 at 60,
 81 at 75 and 102 at top speed

Clayton chassis dynamometer showed:
 57 road hp @ 2000 rpm and 38 mph
 68 road hp @ 2500 rpm and 52 mph
 75 road hp (max.) @ 2900 rpm, 61 mph



S P E C I F I C A T I O N S

ENGINE: Ohv V8. Bore 3.75 in. Stroke 3.30 in. Stroke/bore ratio .88:1. Compression ratio 8.4:1. Displacement 292 cu. in. Advertised bhp 202 with Fordomatic @ 4600 rpm. Bhp per cu. in. 0.695. Piston travel @ max. bhp 2300 ft. per min. Max. bmep 149.2 psi. Max. torque 289 lbs.-ft. @ 2600 rpm.

TRANSMISSION: Fordomatic, 3-element torque converter with planetary gears. **RATIOS:** Drive 1.47 x converter ratio and torque converter only (2.40 to 1 at full throttle thru detent-plus torque converter); Low 2.40 x torque converter ratio; Reverse 2.00 x converter ratio. Maximum converter ratio at stall 2.1 to 1 @ 1540-1740 rpm.

REAR-AXLE RATIOS: Conventional 3.78, Fordomatic 3.22, Overdrive 3.89.

STEERING: Turning diameter 41.18 ft. Number of turns lock to lock 4.75—standard and power steering. **TYPE:** worm and 2-tooth roller. Power, Bendix linkage booster.

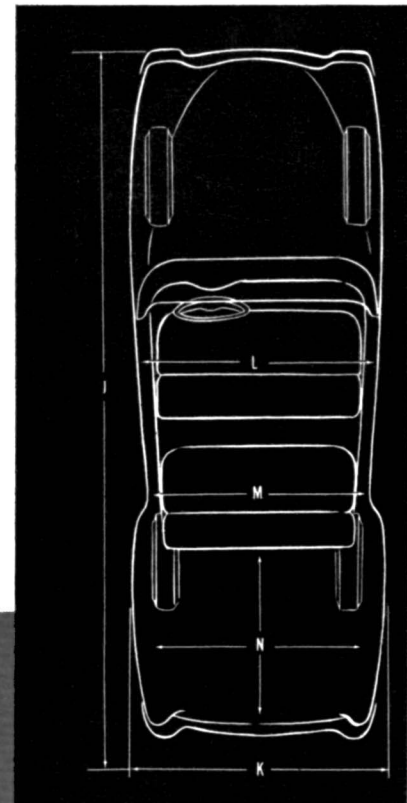
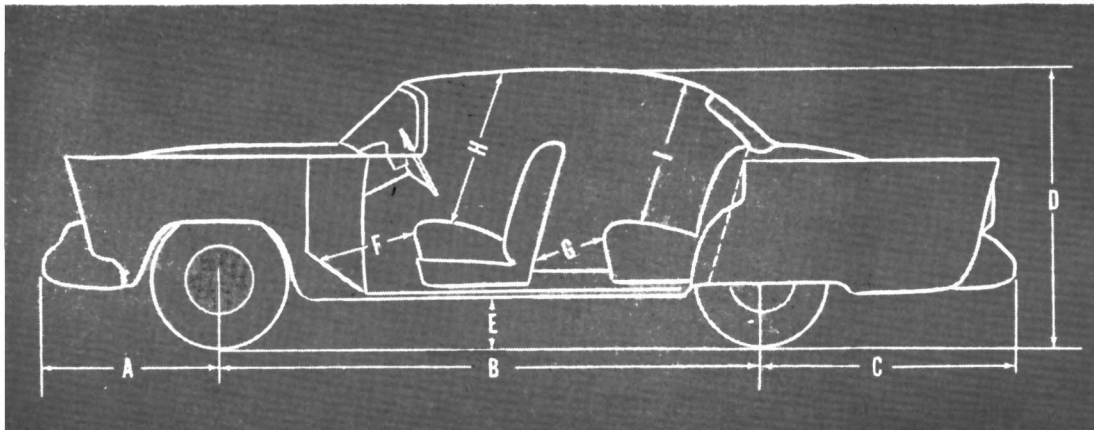
WEIGHT: Test car weight (with gas, oil, and water) 3700 lbs. Test car weight/bhp ratio 18.3:1.

PRICES: (Including suggested retail price at main factory, federal tax, and delivery handling charges but not freight. These prices are for 6-cylinder models; V8s are \$100 more.) **MAINLINE** business sedan \$1711, 2-door sedan \$1813, 4-door sedan \$1858. **CUSTOMLINE** 2-door sedan \$1906, 4-door sedan \$1951. **FAIR-LANE** 2-door sedan \$1998, 4-door sedan \$2044, 2-door hardtops \$2144 and \$2288, 4-door hardtop \$2216, convertible \$2310. **STATION WAGONS:** 2-doors \$2135, \$2200, and \$2379, 4-door 2-seat \$2247, 4-door 3-seats \$2379 and \$2483.

ACCESSORIES: Fordomatic \$165, overdrive \$102, power brakes \$39, power steering \$50, power windows \$95, power seat \$60, radios \$71 and \$99, heaters \$41 and \$66, air conditioning \$475.

DIMENSIONS

- A** FRONT OVERHANG 33.9
- B** WHEELBASE 115.5
- C** REAR OVERHANG 49.1
- D** OVERALL HEIGHT 62.1
- E** MINIMUM GROUND CLEARANCE 6.5
- F** FRONT LEGROOM 44.3
- G** REAR LEGROOM 41.9
- H** FRONT HEADROOM 34.9
- I** REAR HEADROOM 33.9
- J** OVERALL LENGTH 198.5
- K** OVERALL WIDTH 75.9
- L** FRONT SHOULDER ROOM 57.0
- M** REAR SHOULDER ROOM 56.8



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Address.....
City..... State.....

photo). Tendency to discolor noted after only few hundred miles.

Trunk lid, which opens by simply turning key in lock, has a built-in surprise; it opens with a vengeance akin to a jack-in-the-box! Unless you are aware of this, you can lose a tooth or 2. We tried 3 other deklids—all the same.

How did it hold up? In order to adequately test the performance of any car, it is necessary to push it far beyond normal driving limits. The '56 Ford was no exception; nothing came unbuttoned, and, except for a few rattles in door and hood, the car withstood the test without a murmur of protest.

Servicing: Servicing will certainly be no easier this year. Power equipment makes even a slight adjustment a major undertaking. Like the '55 model, the hood won't open wide enough to get out of the way. An additional 6 inches of opening would

alleviate some of the feeling of being crowded (see photo on page 52).

Summing up: Ford does not intend to stand by and let competition take over. This car is double-barreled presentation in that not only should it be a very saleable package, but Ford, more than any other manufacturer, has sparkplugged a safety program which is gaining national momentum. Their recessed steering wheel, safety belts, padded dash, and sun visors should go a long way toward reducing accident injury and fatalities in the speed range where most fatal accidents occur—under 45 mph. MT's test crew felt safer when using this equipment, and it was surprising how soon we got in the habit of fastening our safety belts every time we got in the car. We like 'em.

—John Booth

PRICES of various Ford models and accessories are listed on page 53, along with performance and specification data. This information will appear on such a single page in succeeding '56 road tests.



FEW WILL DENY the utility of the increasingly popular station wagon. Few will deny, also, that the price premium is a lot fatter than they would like it to be. Then there are those who need hauling space only rarely,

STATION SEDAN



and who prefer the cushioned comfort of a conventional sedan for their daily transportation. Peter Lim (1269 So. Windsor Blvd., Los Angeles) did something about the predicament of such people. Here it is, and it serves admirably as a truck or shortish camp bed. The Lim Pontiac remains outwardly its sleek self. If you're interested, Mr. Lim wants to sell his excellent (patented) invention.

JOE MOORE