



Ford is redesigned, yet every feature resembles previous models. Strong points are its improved styling, quicker acceleration.

FORD ROAD TEST

AN ALL-NEW Ford was due out of the company's sprawling engineering and styling center in Dearborn for 1957—and, as scheduled, the latest effort is now with us.

The new model is honestly all-new—but in a special way. There is a new body shell, a new frame, plus numerous other detail modifications in the power train and running gear. But the total result is more in the nature of careful development or refinement of the previous design, rather than the introduction of anything radical.

An examination of the car from bumper to bumper and from wheels to roof discloses few, if any, surprises. It would never be possible to mistake the 1957 Ford for anything but a new Ford. It is a better car, as could be expected, but improved instead of different.

There are, of course, good reasons for this. The policy with the Ford is one of evolution. Further, the popularity of the car is high, sales are good. The need for drastic change, therefore, does not exist.

If the new Ford is better, what is better and how much? The answers are not hard to find.

The car tested was a Fairlane 500 four-door sedan, the top series in the line, equipped with a Thunderbird Special 245-hp V-8 and Fordomatic, along with power steering, radio and other normal extras. It already had seen fairly severe use, had no subsequent tuning. So the results probably are a good index of what a driver can expect under normal conditions.

At the outset, it should be said that Ford probably has something like a sleeper in styling for 1957. The initial reaction to its appearance was not particularly sensational. Yet the evidence is growing that the looks of the car will be one of its strongest points. Such doubts as may have been expressed about the front end seem to be diminishing. Overall, however, and most certainly in profile and from any rear angle, the car's appeal is hard to dispute.

Ford, like many other makes, has followed the fin fashion. But in its case they seem to suit the car better and it is to

Ford's credit that a fresher treatment was devised. In brief, the car looks modern, up-to-date, as it unquestionably is. It will be very rough on some of its competition in this category.

It also is interesting to note that Fords now come in two sizes, something unusual for its price bracket. Further, there is an unorthodox arrangement of the series—only two (Fairlane and Custom), each of which are subdivided into two more. Where all this will lead in the years ahead is pretty hard to guess, but it is evident that something is in the works.

Performance is always a major factor in evaluating a car. Perhaps there is too much emphasis upon it. And it is strange that the attention is greater in the low-priced field than in any other. All this aside, however, the Ford for 1957 can really get up and go.

The quickest acceleration to a true 60 mph was obtained during the test by starting with the Fordomatic selector in low, holding it there until approximately 48 mph was reached, then manually shifting to the drive position. This reduced the time from .5 to a full second less than when starts were made using the drive gear selection alone. There was some wheel spin at the full-power start, but not too much.

The best 0-60 mph time was 10.4 seconds. When this is compared with the 11.6 achieved with a 1956 test Ford a year ago, the improvement is obvious. And similar healthy cuts were uncovered in the other acceleration checks: 0-30 mph in 3.6 seconds and 0-45 mph in 6.3; corresponding times on the 1956 Fairlane V-8 were 4.0 and 7.2 seconds, respectively. With some attention to the engine, under 10 seconds for 0-60 mph would be an easy step. A stick-shift version might break nine.

In gas mileage, the 1957 Ford hit about par for the course. An overall tank average of 15 mpg, combined city and highway driving.

The performance reflects the improved engine output. Although Ford has not listed any major modifications, the Thunderbird Special V-8 now yields 37 more rated horsepower and 33 additional torque units than did the engine of the 1956

Fairlane. The compression ratio, by the way, is up .7 over last year.

In the roadability department, the word refinements sums up just about everything. Ford has intensively engineered and re-engineered its steering and ride during the past two or three years. While there is no limit to progress, it seems that the point has now been reached where no major improvements in control or comfort (except total redistribution of weight) are possible with the big-bodied, heavy family sedan. Anything more and the sports cars will be dusted off on the corners, as they have been on the straightaways.

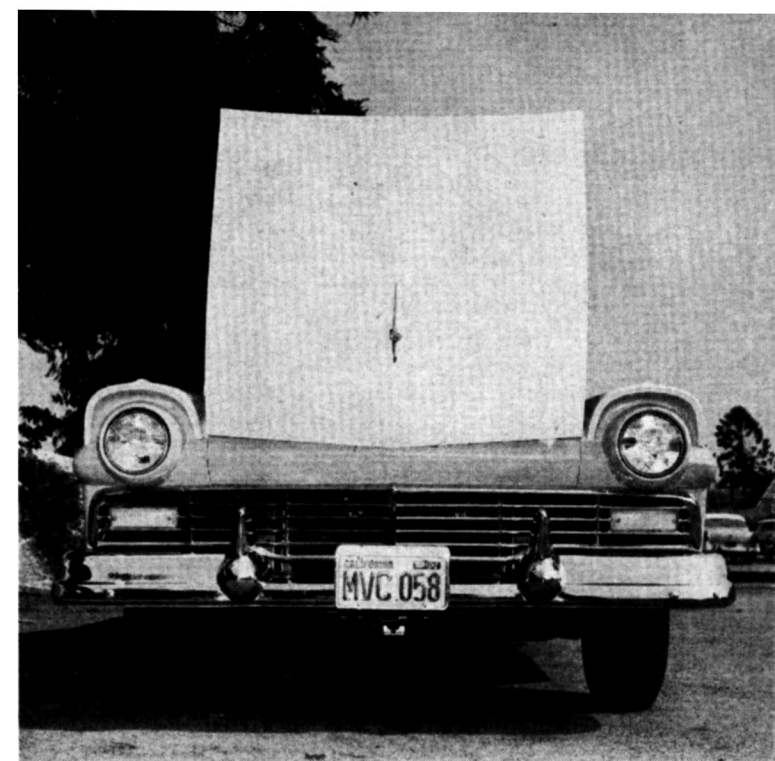
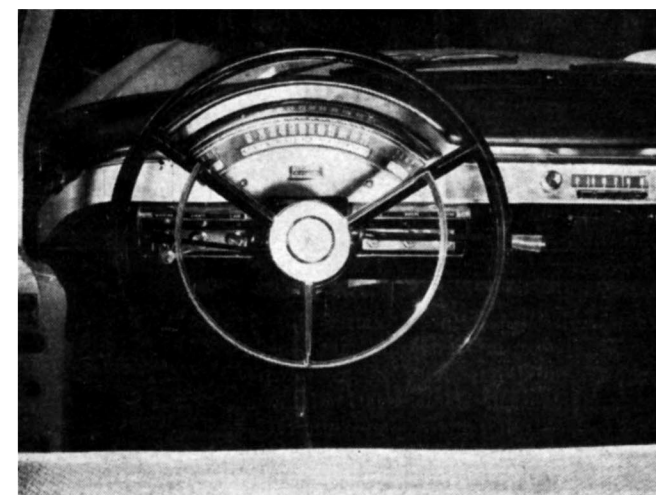
So the 1957 Ford holds very nicely on the turns, allows a little more body sway than the best. The tires still protest the more strenuous maneuvers, but there's no feeling of insecurity. Ride is about average in smoothness.

Since Ford has gone to a new body shell, the opportunity apparently was missed to provide a better behind-the-wheel position for the driver. As it now stands, the car is reminiscent of 1954-56; too large steering wheel, cowl and dash not brought down far enough to conform to the reduced body height. The same hold for the roof, which comes down more than it should into the windshield area, as if the top were chopped. The front



Trunk still is big enough and excellent centrally-located gas cap has been retained. At normal road eye level, however, too much of the chassis can be seen beneath the high rear bumper.

Good dash is new, with heater controls (not installed here) integrated into panel between radio and instrument cluster. Everything is clearly visible and within driver's easy reach.



Hinging of hood at front makes engine compartment more accessible, but easy closing requires standing at bumper and pressing down. Front-end styling is not as good as rest of car.

glass, incidentally, is about the most distortion-free wrap-around since the fashion was introduced.

The dash, naturally, is a new layout. Everything is where it should be, except the glove box—fully adequate, but on the far right. Safety padding is provided on the dash and visors. Perhaps most unusual is the discovery that Ford has not come up with more gimmicks—items which are clever and novel, yet useful. The item that comes closest to this is the very logical relocation of the door-lock buttons, helpfully shifted to the front of the sill adjacent to the ventilator windows. The radio dial also is marked for Conelrad (civil defense) emergency stations. Comforting idea.

People who drive 1957's lower cars can expect tunnel troubles, and Ford is no exception. But it is a penalty that is paid only when and if anyone rides in the middle of a seat, which presumably is not too often.

Quality of materials is similar to 1956. There were some assembly flaws in the test car, but these are normal in very early production. Rigid control systems will correct these.

Ford is a top candidate for anyone's garage in 1957. By present standards, its styling is excellent. The exterior changes in 1958 and 1959, judged by the past, will be minor. The new model is sure to add to the make's reputation which has been on the upgrade since 1949. Performance certainly is more than adequate. A lot of long and careful thinking has gone into this car. And it shows it.

FORD TEST DATA

Test Car: Fairlane 500 series four-door sedan
Basic Price: \$2300 (without extras)
Engine: 312-cubic-inch ohv V-8
Compression Ratio: 9.7-to-1
Horsepower: 245 @ 4600 rpm
Torque: 332 @ 2600
Dimensions: Length 208 inches, width 77, height 57, tread 59 front and 56.4 rear, wheelbase 118
Curb Weight: 3525 lbs.
Transmission: Three-speed Fordomatic torque converter
Acceleration: 0-30 mph 3.6 seconds, 0-45 mph 6.3, 0-60 mph 10.4
Gas Mileage: 15 mpg average
Speedometer Corrections: Indicated 30, 45 and 60 mph are actual 27, 41 and 54 mph, respectively