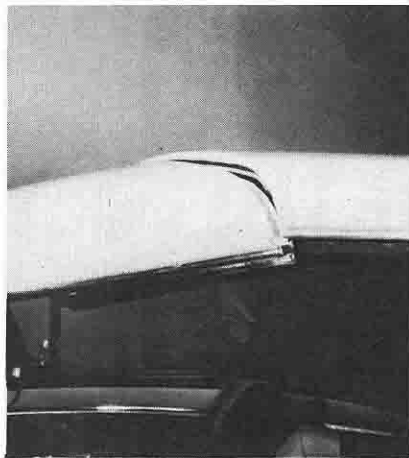
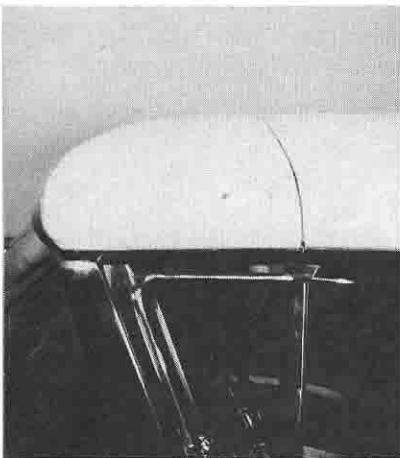


The 10-in. forward section of the top must fold to stow in trunk. Joint is neat and inconspicuous.

As forward section starts to fold under, it reveals concealed rain gutter which backstops the joint.

Power-operated screwdown clamps at the four corners give the "fliptop" solid, rattle-free fit.



Skyliner has chassis, hood, doors and windows of standard Fairlane 500 soft-top.



Trunk begins to "swallow" the top in a completely pushbutton operation.

CAR LIFE's Jim Whipple tests Ford's amazing new Skyliner

By JIM WHIPPLE

WE'VE JUST FINISHED a weekend workout in the Skyliner—we soon christened it "The Fliptop Ford"—and we're convinced that the U. S. car buyer will take to it like a kid to candy.

From where we sit, the Skyliner seems to be the convertible of the future. When this first real hardtop convertible establishes itself, it should shake up the whole market and make the standard convertibles—both hardtop and soft-top—look like pretty lame ducks.

Back in 1949, Buick welded a pillarless steel roof pan fitted with a glass rear window onto their stock convertible body, and started a new trend in motor car design.

They called their highly successful hybrid The Riviera, but the public soon coined the name "hardtop convertible"—a descriptive title that has become part of the language.

The new body type captured the imagination of the buying public almost immediately, and other makes were quick to swing on the "hardtop" bandwagon behind Buick.

Cadillac, Chevy, Pontiac and Olds followed with hardtops in 1950. Ford, and all four Chrysler Corp. cars joined

the parade. In the next two years Mercury, Studebaker, Packard, Rambler, Lincoln, Hudson and Nash retooled for the new body style. Even the spunky little Willys, before it faded from the automotive scene, introduced a hardtop.

Two drawbacks of the popular hardtops soon became as obvious as their many advantages: they only provided two doors for entrance and exit of their five or six passengers; and they were not truly convertible.

First problem was solved with the introduction of four-door hardtops by Olds and Buick in 1955—followed by most of the rest of the industry in 1956.

The second goal—making a hardtop really convert—has now been achieved by Ford, which recently began production of its Skyliner.

A pilot model of the Skyliner made its debut at the New York Auto Show last December. Instantly, it became the Coliseum's top attraction. By early spring, Skyliners began hitting the Ford dealerships to fill the "sold on sight" orders.

The Skyliner starts with the chassis, hood, fenders, doors and windows of a standard Fairlane 500 soft-top

convertible, complete with gold anodized aluminum trim strips on the sides. Parked at the curb, it attracts no extra attention.

The rear seat is identical to the one on the convertible; but from there on back, the car is an engineering wonderland. Rear of the body is 3 in. longer than the standard Fairlane; wheel base is the same 118 in.—and like some of the fancy new "sport pickup" trucks, it looks "squared off."

Roofpan is flatter than that on the regular hardtops, and the rear window is flat and pitched almost at the vertical. The lid opening into the luggage and top storage compartment is flat; it does not curve down into the area between the taillights, as in the standard Fords. The entire rear quarter area somehow reminds us of a Lincoln Continental with its "squared off" lines.

Operating the "fliptop" changes the car from a completely closed two-door sedan to a wide-open convertible in about 60 seconds. That's how long it takes for the trunk to "swallow" the top.

It's a completely pushbutton operation, requiring no other effort than working the switch. Here's how it works: (Continued on page 32)

"FLIPTOP"

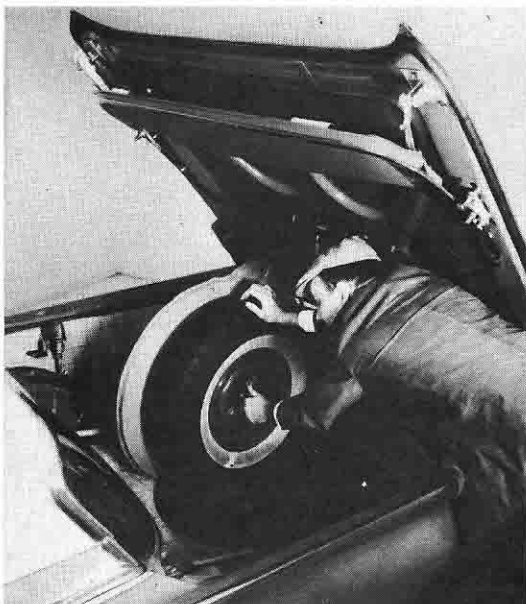
SHAKEDOWN



In 60 seconds, the Skyliner changes from closed two-door sedan to convertible.

"FLIPTOP" SHAKEDOWN

When top is retracted into rear compartment, metal bin provides only luggage space. Operating mechanism and top take the rest.



Getting out spare is a problem. It's stowed flat bolted to underside of hinged panel that forms center of rear compartment.

(Continued from page 30)

1) Turn on ignition key (factory advises running engine at fast idle to aid the battery).

2) Pull on spring-loaded top-operating button.

3) Two hold-down screws, driven by a single electric motor via cables, release the forward corners of the luggage compartment lid.

4) A pair of motor-driven screw-type actuating jacks raise the deck lid to a nearly vertical position.

5) Another small motor folds the jack-knifed filler panel that fits between the back of the rear seat and the deck.

6) Largest of the fractional horsepower motors lifts the roof panel from its resting place in the trunk by means of a large pair of cable-drive actuating jacks. The roof is guided accurately into position by four pivoted "legs" that work in parallel to keep it level throughout the converting cycle.

7) While the 80-in.-long main roof section is being raised into position, a 10-in. forward section, or "flipper"—which has to be doubled under to stow in the 84-in. rear compartment—is unfolded by another concealed motor and worm drive.

8) As the two sections of the roof mesh and the whole assembly drops onto the windshield frame at front and onto the body at rear, two additional motors spring into life. They operate four screw-down latches, one at each of the four corners of the roof. These latch motors keep driving to screw the roof tightly in place, until the screws will no longer turn. At this point the motors are permitted to override the stalled latch screws by means of spring-loaded clutches.

9) Final operation reverses the deck lid drive motors. The deck lowers into closed position and its screw latches lock it into place.

At the completion of either the up or down cycle, a red pilot light on the instrument panel goes out. This indicates that everything is securely locked in place.

The roof mechanism is designed to clear the heads of both front and rear seat passengers during the "conversion" process. No one need leave the car when the roof is raised.

"Flipping your lid" in a Ford Skyliner is never dull. It reminded me of riding a drawbridge or operating a steam shovel. My small daughter stared as though fascinated by some mechanical monster while half a dozen assorted micro-motors provided an accompanying symphony of buzzing, whirring and groaning sounds.

A ride in the Skyliner should sell

even the most doubtful Thomases. With everything snugly locked in either up or down position there were absolutely no rattles—come brick pavement, potholes or railroad tracks underwheel.

Only differences between riding in the "fliptop" and in most other hardtops were the gentle creaking noises, reminiscent of the sounds of an old wicker chair. These small noises are created by tiny movements at the rubber insulating blocks between the roof and the body when the car travels over very rough roads.

For those who will inevitably wonder about leakage between the main roof and the forward "flipper," let me set you at ease right now. The joint is back-stopped by a built-in gutter (half an inch wide and a quarter inch deep) which drains any water that seeps into the joint. I drove the car in a downpour and found no trace of seepage, either around the top or at the sponge-rubber sealed trunk lid.

Seating in the back seat is really close-coupled. There is less legroom than in the conventional Ford hardtop, but as much as in the conventional convertible. Happily, however, the seating position is good. All but the over-six-footers will have knee clearance without having to crouch in a jack-knife pose—all this with the front seat moved back as far as possible. Entrance and exit from the back seat are neither easier nor more difficult in the Skyliner than in any other of the new, lower two-door hardtops.

Headroom, front and rear, is adequate—but not generous. A tall man will be better off without a high-crowned felt hat.

The luggage compartment slopes gently from front to rear. It's about 12 in. deep at the front, 18 in. at the back. Power-operated jacks and massive, enclosed counter-balance springs lie flat on the sloping floor when the top is in the "up" position. Most of this space is occupied when the top is retracted into the compartment.

LUGGAGE IS A PROBLEM

Stowing luggage is something of a problem in the Skyliner. When the top is retracted into the rear compartment, the only luggage space is provided by a rectangular metal bin 24 in. wide, 30 in. long and 15 in. high. The top and the operating mechanism claim the rest of the large rear compartment.

Loading luggage into the center bin will be a tough job for a short person. You have to lift the bag way up to the level of the deck and then swing it over the 20-in. gap between the edge of the deck and the luggage bin. Bell-

(Continued on page 70)

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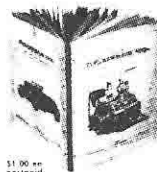
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"FLIPTOP" SHAKEDOWN

(Continued from page 32)

hops who load this one will really be earning their tips.

Seems to me that most owners will remove the luggage bin during the winter months, so that they can load the entire compartment more easily.

There's also a problem in figuring out how high you can load the luggage compartment. With the top intended to retract you can't load the bin over its top, which is barely 16 in. above the compartment floor.

We found that the luggage compartment bin held the following items: two-suitier folding Val-pak bag, on its side; one 22-in. ladies' overnight bag; and one briefcase. There was some waste space around these items, which might have accommodated a couple of books and several pairs of shoes.

When the hardtop is not retracted, the luggage compartment will hold as much as any trunk on any automobile built today.

One problem came up when we were loading the compartment—estimating the space taken by the folding rear shelf that is attached to the deck. This shelf fills in the space between the back of the rear seat and the rear deck when the car is in the converted position.

With the top retracted, the shelf folds down into the trunk and occupies about half of the space immediately back of the rear seat. We found that if we did not correctly estimate the space the shelf was going to fold into, the rear deck wouldn't fold down completely.

GETTING OUT THE SPARE

Getting the spare tire out is a bit of a chore. It's stowed flat, bolted to the underside of a hinged panel that forms the center floor of the rear compartment.

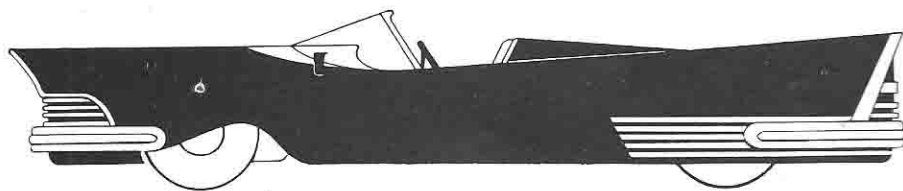
To get it out, you must first loosen two wing nuts and remove the luggage bin. Next, you swing up the tire and floor panel. Finally, you unscrew the holding screw that fastens the tire to the underside of the panel, and heave the spare up over the side of the compartment and out onto the road.

But aside from the luggage and spare tire problems, we found the Ford "fliptop" to be a wonderful car. With the top in place, it has all the advantages of a warm, comfortable sedan; yet in just about a minute, it becomes as sporty and breezy a vehicle as any soft-top convertible ever made. At approximately \$300 more than the conventional cloth-top Ford convertible, it's a real buy. We think it'll sell by the trainload.

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