



The strong draw of these first-gen T-birds are quaint and cute design touches, like the hood scoop, simulated fender vents, and rear quarter porthole window. Their charming palette of pastel paint colors also makes them attractive. This Stormist Blue example was sold new at Hale Young Ford, in Long Beach, Calif., for \$3,134.69.



Inside, new features for '57 included a revised, padded dash and a four-way powered 'Dial-O-Matic' memory seat, that was better contoured to fit passengers. The interior could be had in six colors and even in two-tone schemes.

## The 1957 Ford Thunderbird

THE LAST OF THE BABY BIRDS

SPORTY, SMALL CARS were becoming all the rage in the early 1950s and while Chevrolet was cooking up something called a Corvette, Ford's entry was their Thunderbird. The first-generation two-seater debuted in 1955 with a bent toward being a more elegant, comfy cruiser.

After two years of climbing sales (far outpacing the competition) in 1957 the model was tweaked even further. It received a redesigned body, five and a half inches longer, with a longer rear deck. While the '56 model had a bumper mounted spare tire, it was now relocated inside the cargo compartment, which offered 15 percent more space than the outgoing model. Both front and rear bumpers were larger and stronger, and integrated the turn signals up front and the exhaust ports in the rear. Another unique styling element was a larger grille, which was needed to aid in engine cooling.

The ride was improved, too, thanks to a lower center of gravity and a recalibrating of the springs and shocks. To help the car stop, the brakes were given more lining material and for better traction, the tires had wider tread. Several eight-cylinder engine options were available, with top dog being a supercharged variant, capable of 340-horsepower.

Inside the cabin, the instrument panel was all-new and the all-foam rubber seat was contoured to better fit passengers. Slick new options included a radio that automatically adjusted the volume depending on the car's speed and a powered, memory seat that when the car was turned off, would automatically move to the rearmost position to aid in exit and entry.

Ten exterior color options were available with the optional hardtop (with porthole window) being had in the same 10 shades. Customers could

custom mix and match the two for a unique two-tone combination.

Despite sales soaring to just over 21,000 units (a 25 percent bump from '56), Ford made a daring design departure and in 1958 made the little 'bird larger. It grew two feet longer, could carry four passengers, and had a one and a half times larger trunk. While it was a hit, it lacked the charm of the two-seater formula. Proving bigger isn't always better, in 2002 Ford brought it (and the porthole window) back for the car's 11th generation. U

### Collectible Insights

This first generation of Thunderbirds, often referred to as 'baby birds' in the car community, commands a strong appeal with collectors. Hagerty evaluates one in top Concours condition, with both hard and soft tops, to be worth around \$105,000.



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