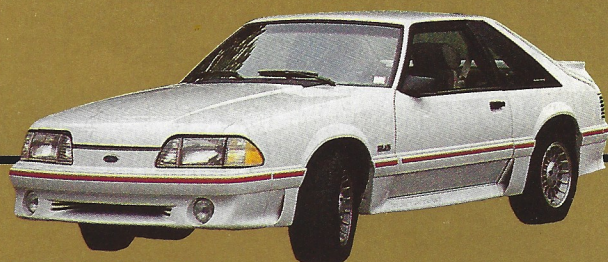


**1987'S NEWEST OF THE NEW**  
CHRYSLER LE BARON · DODGE SHADOW · FORD THUNDERBIRD · PONTIAC BONNEVILLE · PORSCHE 944S

# MOTOR TREND

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1987 MUSTANG  
TEACHING AN OLD PONY NEW TRICKS

OCTOBER 1986

## Countach Races Chopper!





**W**e've been fond of this honest American sports coupe ever since Ford Motor Company President (now Chairman) Donald E. Petersen showed us pictures of it nearly two years before its February 1983 introduction.

It was a typically muggy Michigan June day in 1981, a box-lunch break under a tent during a typical magazine preview of Ford's then typically boring new cars for 1982. Highly atypical, though, was the shirtsleeved and genuinely friendly top executive chewing his fat-fried chicken on the folding chair beside us.

Following lunch and a get-acquainted chat, he reached into his ample briefcase and extracted a big, black loose-leaf notebook. He cleared

# 1987 THUNDERBIRD Turbo Coupe

**Finer feathers for an old friend**

by Gary Witzenburg

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOB D'OLIVO





## Enthusiasts will love the '87 Turbo Coupe's SVO-developed engine

an area, placed the notebook flat on the table and began thumbing through it. Peering over Petersen's shoulder, we could see that it was full of large color photos.

Finding the ones he wanted, he opened the notebook wide and motioned us over to have a look. Pictured in full-size fiberglass model form was a handsome, aero-slick 2-door coupe with a bit of BMW in its profile. Only its chromed egg-crate grille gave it away as a Ford: the next-generation Thunderbird.

This was the first new car to be designed under the company's enlightened new management regime, which had ascended into power just the year before, and it represented the very beginning of what would become Ford's soft, aerodynamic look of the later '80s. Petersen asked what we thought of it. We told him we liked it, a lot. Clearly pleased and proud, he showed us a few more photos (among them, the '84 Tempo and Topaz), took his leave and headed

back toward the big blue-oval tower.

We drove the '83 Bird for the first time the following summer, and except for an initial lack of power (it was V-6/automatic-only at first) and sparse instrumentation in an otherwise nice interior, it turned out to be everything its swoopy looks suggested.

The new car's combination of shape, style, handling, and luxury, we enthused in our October 1982 cover story, "is more than enough to erase the humdrum record of the Bird it replaces." And, given the coming addition of both an optional V-8 engine and a hot Turbo Coupe model, we predicted, "the brave new Bird could well be the hottest domestic car on the market in terms of sheer sex appeal and performance."

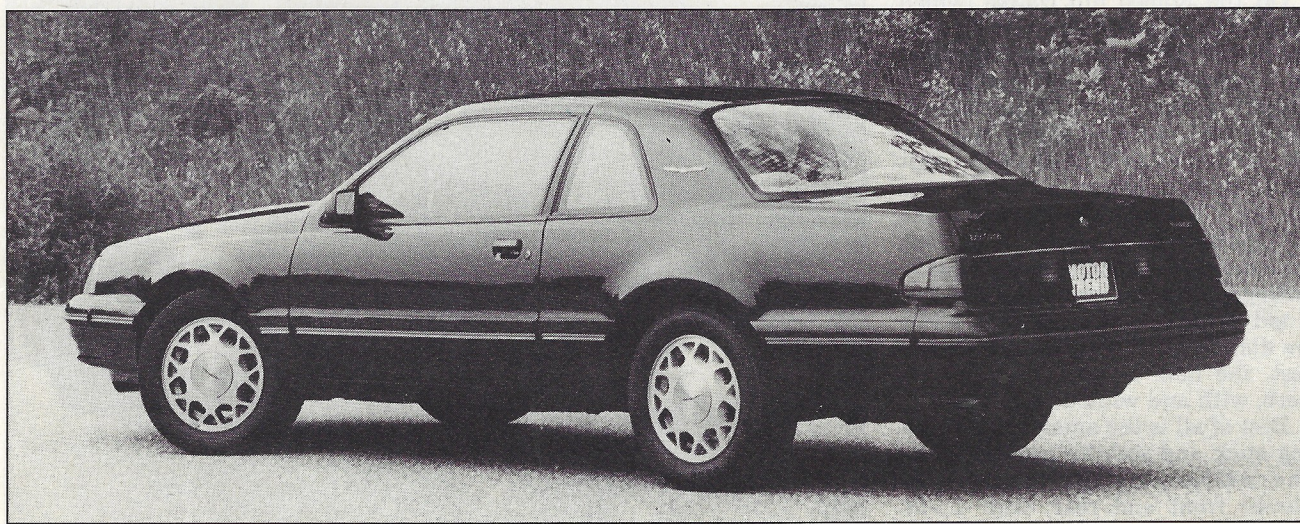
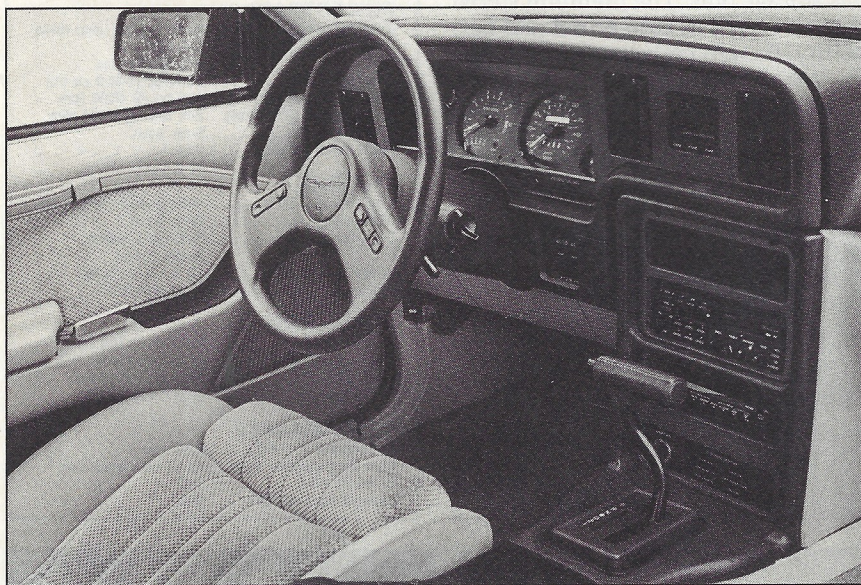
As the domestic pioneer of aerodynamic styling in a nation full of boringly boxy traditional U.S. iron,

Ford's brave new Bird got off to a ragged sales start when it finally hit dealer showrooms the following February. Meanwhile, sales of its more conservative, square-roofed Cougar cousin took off like a rocket. But the promised V-8 and the Turbo Coupe's April arrival soon added appeal, and the market began to swing in the T-Bird's favor. It's been a big hit ever since.

The standard 3.8-liter V-6 got throttle-body injection for 1984. For 1985, the 2.3-liter turbomotor was upgraded from 145 to 155 hp, a new instrument panel (with complete instruments) improved enthusiast appeal, and the Turbo's chromed grille gave way to a more contemporary body-colored version. The V-8 got EFI for 1986, and with it a boost in power and torque from 140 to 150 hp and from 250 to 270 lb-ft.

Now, for 1987, comes the most extensively upgraded T-Bird since that trendsetting '83. Besides evolutionary new styling front and rear, the hood, roof, rear deck, doors, and even rear quarter panels are new. All models sport fashionable flush headlamps and full-width taillamps, both wrapping around into side marker lights at the corners. The Turbo Coupe gets a grilleless (bottom breather) face with large functional hood scoops and a giant T-Bird emblem stretched across its nose, while lesser models sport a somewhat homely (we think) chrome grille. Side glass is nearly flush; bumpers, rubstrips, and trim all are redesigned.

Base-car buyers will be thrilled to find the standard V-6 newly available with automatic overdrive transmission. More important, enthusiasts will love the '87 Turbo Coupe's SVO-developed engine, not to mention its standard ABS brakes and improvements to an already excellent suspension. Essentially last year's SVO





## Beyond the go-power, there's stopping and cornering power

Mustang motor slightly detuned, the engine is intercooled (hence the scoops) for added power and has a new IHI turbocharger designed to optimize low- and mid-range response and minimize turbo lag. New manifolds give higher flow, new dual exhausts reduce backpressure, and an octane selector switch on the dash programs the EEC-IV engine computer for unleaded regular or premium fuel. The welcome result is a hefty 190 Clydesdales at 4600 rpm and 240 lb-ft of twist at 3400. Based on brief measured tests at Ford's Romeo, Michigan, proving grounds, that translates to 8.4-sec 0-60 and 16.13 sec at 81.8 mph for the quarter mile. (Automatic-equipped Turbos retain the previous single exhaust and are further detuned to 150 hp at 3400 and 200 lb-ft at 2000 rpm to ensure transmission durability.)

Beyond the go-power, there's stopping and cornering power as well. The '87 Turbo Coupe's new 4-wheel disc brakes come with ABS, a version of the same Bosch-based system introduced last year on high-buck Lincolns. Its new 16 x 7.0-in. alloy wheels are shod with beefy 225/60VR16 uni-directional tires, and its standard handling suspension is upgraded with variable-rate springs and—get this—electronic "Automatic Ride Control." Similar in concept to the computerized smart shocks found on some Japanese cars, this system uses inputs from speed, steering, acceleration, and brake application sensors to determine when an instant increase in damping rates might be useful. A mode switch on the dash lets the driver choose "Auto" (automatic) or "Firm" (full-time firm) control, a light indicates when the shocks are in their firm mode, and the transition happens fast enough to prevent brake dive and reduce cornering lean in transitional maneuvers.

On the Romeo hill course (which approximates a rolling, twisting two-lane), the '87 Turbo Bird impressed us as one of the finest driving and handling cars we've experienced. Power from the new engine was ample and response immediate in most speed ranges, more like a V-8 or a strong V-6 than a turbo four. The 15:1 power rack-and-pinion steering was just quick enough, not too quick, with good response and feedback but a tad too little on-center feel. While we didn't get an instrumented brake test, the new 4-wheel discs *felt* superb, with and without ABS assist.

Best of all is the amount of cornering stick and stability served up by the well-controlled chassis—gas shocks front and rear, with 1.3-in.


front and 0.79-in. rear bars, limited-slip rear axle, and Quadra-Shock axle dampers—and big Gatorback tires. We're talking "Firm" on the ride control here; you have to select "Auto" on the switch and stay below 0.3 g and 8.0 psi of boost to keep the thing softly shocked.

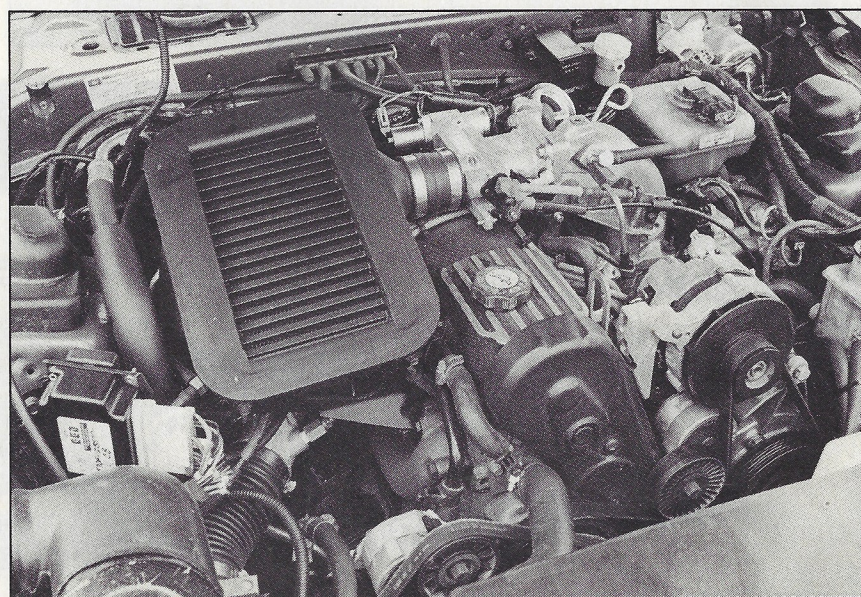
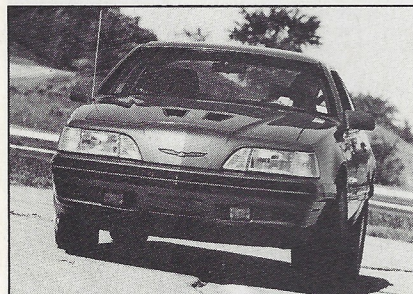
The Turbo's analog gauge cluster is excellent, except the speedo is numbered just to 80 and graduated to 95. We don't advocate using that range, understand, but we do think speedometer faces should at least reflect a car's capability. We definitely would *not* recommend the digi-graphic dash available in non-turbo Birds: It displays only one engine readout (temperature, voltage, or oil pressure) at a time and washes out pretty badly in bright sunlight. Otherwise, we like the T-Bird interior just fine, especially its ergonomically agreeable placement of switches, controls, and various storage bins. The premium stereo is also terrific in both sound and usability, though for some reason it has no "scan" function.

Added standard equipment on non-turbo Birds includes air conditioning, tinted glass, variable-rate springs and front suspension geometry im-

provements, and a "fast-fill" brake master cylinder. The mid-range LX model also gets standard speed control, leather-wrapped tilt wheel, power door locks, illuminated entry system and ETR stereo, with cassette. Also, a new sport version of the standard T-Bird offers the V-8 engine with floor-shift overdrive automatic combined with a handling suspension for those unimpressed by turbo power.

As we said, we've liked Ford's Thunderbird—especially the slick-looking, smart-handling Turbo Coupe—since its '83 reincarnation. We like it even better for 1987, and we'll likely go on liking it for some time to come.

Think of it as the average man's 635CSi and you won't be far wrong. 



### TECH DATA

#### 1987 Thunderbird Turbo Coupe

##### POWERTRAIN

Vehicle configuration.....Front engine, rear drive  
Engine configuration.....L-4, OHC, 2  
valves/cylinder  
Displacement.....2294 cc (140.0 cu in.)  
Max. power (SAE net).....190 hp @ 4600 rpm  
Max. torque (SAE net).....240 lb-ft @ 3400 rpm  
Transmission.....5-sp. man.  
Final drive ratio.....3.55:1

##### CHASSIS

Suspension, f/r.....Independent/solid axle  
Brakes, f/r.....Disc/drum  
Steering.....Rack and pinion,  
power assist  
Wheels.....16 x 7.0 in., alloy  
Tires.....P225/60VR16

##### DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase.....2647 mm (104.2 in.)  
Overall length.....5133 mm (202.1 in.)  
Curb weight.....1421 kg (3133 lb)  
Fuel capacity.....69.0 L (18.2 gal)

##### PERFORMANCE

Acceleration, 0-60.....8.40 sec  
Standing quarter mile.....16.13 sec/81.8 mph  
Braking, 60-0.....N/A  
Lateral acceleration.....N/A