

# Ford's Thunderbolt

by Steve Repergel

Imagine strolling into your Ford dealership and buying a hand assembled, high performance race car that was ready for the strip. This is exactly what you could do in 1964 if you had about \$4,000 in your pocket and were willing to accept no warranty. The automobile was, of course, the Thunderbolt.



Photo Credit: Bill Siuru

Essentially, the Thunderbolt, or T-bolt as it was later coined, was a modified Ford Fairlane that carried a massive 427 cubic inch V8 engine with two four-barrel carburetors, a hi-rise aluminum intake and special intake/exhaust valves. With such performance enhancements, the 427 cubic inch power plant produced a conservative 450-500 horsepower. With an automatic or four-speed manual transmission and your choice of a 4:57 or 4:71 rear end, the T-bolt could set speeds of over 120 miles per hour inside of 11 seconds. Not bad for a car that weighed in at 3,200 pounds.



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Of course cosmetics were not as important as speed and handling. As a result, ornamentation was stripped down and huge stove pipes replaced two of the four headlights to maintain adequate air cooling for the 427 cubic inch V8. Other modifications included traction bars, a drive shaft loop and 6.70X15-inch nylon ply tires.

To keep weight to a minimum, fiberglass was issued for the hood, air scoop and front fenders while the battery was placed in the trunk. Rear side and vent windows were made of Plexiglas and bumpers came in either aluminum or fiberglass. Some of the first edition T-bolts even had fiberglass doors.

Production numbers seem obscure for the Thunderbolt with figures somewhere around 100 units. The first 11 cars came in Vintage Burgundy and remained 'factory' automobiles. Sold to the public were models painted Wimbledon White with optional paint designs such as racing stripes or flames.



Photo Credit: Ford Hi-PO V-8 Muscle Cars by Anthony Young

Ford spent \$2,000 above the sticker price building each Thunderbolt. Although they may have lost money building these automobiles, the return on Ford's investment paid off through advertising and publicity.

With few exceptions, the T-Bolt is really the only car offering an inside look at Ford's performance days. Anyone owning a Thunderbolt today has a wonderful and valuable piece of automotive history.