

FIRSTHAND DRIVE REPORT



Have you driven a Ford that looks like this lately? Aerodynamic Taurus has more radical lines than Audi.

1986 FORD TAURUS AND MERCURY SABLE

Ford brings aerodynamics to the heartland with its new family cars.

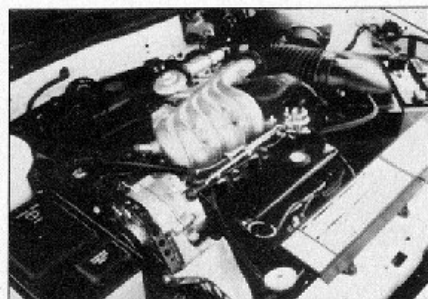
BY DANIEL CHARLES ROSS
Detroit Editor

Why all the hoopla over the Ford Taurus and Mercury Sable? Ford intentionally started leaking photos to the press several months before anyone had a chance to see and drive the new line. It's probably to condition everyone to the radically aerodynamic styling of a front-wheel-drive, mid-range car that will replace the intermediate-size rear-drivers—LTD and Marquis—that have long been among the favorites of American families.

The new Ford family automobiles won't go on sale until later this year, but we've already had a crack at them at the Moroso Motorsports Park road racing track in Florida. We drove sedans and wagons that were dubbed production-quality cars, though still engineering test mules. On the track we found that

the Taurus and Sable have more than just styling going for them. The suspension is fully independent front and rear, consisting of four-corner MacPherson struts, Motorcraft double-acting nitrogen-pressurized shock absorbers and coil springs. Both front and rear setups feature a stabilizer bar. Brakes are vacuum-assisted discs in front, drums in the rear.

The station wagon's rear suspension differs from the sedan's, with the use of unequal-length control arms in place of the struts. This eliminates the shock towers that would otherwise intrude into the cargo area.



All-new 3-liter V6 has 60° angle between cylinder banks for smooth operation. Distinctive fuel-injection manifold is aluminum.

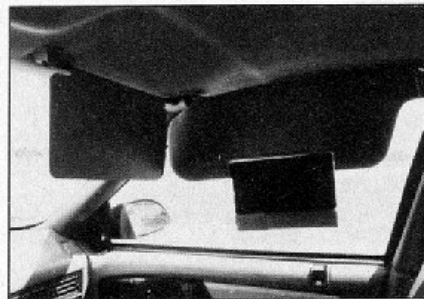
Slick interior, too

The interior treatment is contemporary in feel and execution. The instrument cluster presents an uncluttered look of easy readability. Controls are simple to identify and are within a driver's reach. A bank of power window buttons is located on the driver's door, as is the power mirror switch. The sun visors are engineered to fold down and sideways to protect from the sun in front and at the side.

New engines

When they go on sale, Sable and

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Unique double-hinged sun visors have a pull-down see-through blind on side that will protect even small kids from the sun.

FORD TAURUS/MERCURY SABLE

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Taurus will be powered almost exclusively by a new 3-liter 60° pushrod V6 that has a cast-iron block, an aluminum intake manifold, overhead valves and port fuel injection. The engine should make 140 hp at 4,800 rpm and 160 lb.-ft. of torque at 3,000 rpm. Later on, Ford will offer a 2.5-liter Four of 95 hp.

A newly designed four-speed auto-



Even though there's no tailgate, you can lunch or party at this slide-out picnic table.

matic overdrive transaxle puts the V6's power to the front wheels. A three-speed automatic will be offered with the Four, and four-speed manuals are in the works for both engines, as is a V6 police package that handles like no cop car I've ever been in.

After several hours of driving, we knew that Ford had done its homework on the Taurus/Sable. Swooping through curves and corners, taking the turns faster than one might to exit a typical expressway off-ramp, we found that all the models were rock-steady and completely predictable in response to steering input. Both sedan and wagon were sure-footed during braking maneuvers, with no straight-line deviation.

The handling capability the vehicles display is due in part to standard power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering, which exhibits good road feel. Ford suspension engineers have taken lessons learned from target-cars such as the BMW 733i and Audi 5000S and applied them to bread-and-butter cars that parents will use to shuttle children to school. What a concept!

With that in mind, the Taurus/Sable sedans and station wagons probably offer the best handling and highest margin of operational safety in a domestic family car. We took the wagon

down Moroso's long main straight at well over 55 mph, and simulated the action required to swerve suddenly away from an imaginary truck panic-braking in front. The car displayed very little longitudinal roll during this maneuver, and always remained under control without feeling any need to slow down.

Hard dodging left and right in both the wagon and sedan demonstrated a level of stability we've never associated with family cars.

In an Audi 5000S that Ford provided for comparison, we repeated the sequence and experienced a significantly greater amount of body roll, a phenomenon repeated when we took the Audi around the track at the same pace as the Fords. The Ford station wagon had outhandled an Audi 5000S!

The bottom line of this exercise is that the Taurus and its Sable stablemate bring to the everyday family car the high-quality maneuverability and handling surety previously associated only with expensive sports sedans. None of this detracts from the cars' ride quality or low-speed handling.

Family performance cars

Taurus and Sable are a totally new breed of car, able to offer the luxury of a family car combined with the safe capability of a sports car, all in a 21st-century sheet-metal wrapper. They sacrifice none of the family car's amenities, yet are safer and better-handling than any domestic bread-and-butter car in recent memory. After them, car pooling will never be the same.

PM

THE PM REPORT CARD

Ford Taurus/ Mercury Sable	GRADES	COMMENTS
Acceleration	B+	Good power with V6
Handling	A+	Outhandles Audi 5000S
Braking	B	Significant nose dive
Steering	A	Precise, good feedback
Transmission	B	Automatic is class-average, four-speed is an A
Ride	A+	Filters bumps without diminishing handling
Fuel economy	NA	No good guesses yet
Seating	A	Comfortable yet supportive, wagon seats 8-9!
Vision	B+	Big greenhouse diminishes blind spots
Gauges/controls	B	Highly readable in analog; LCD also fun
Ventilation	A	Lots of well-placed outlets
Noise @ 55 mph	A	Quiet as a limo
Cargo capacity	A	Big trunk in coupe; wagon's seats fold flat to hold 4'x8' panels
Engine serviceability	B+	Few problems for garage mechanics
Fit and finish	A	Ford improves with each new model