



Like the Taurus sedan, the station wagon's front-end has been subtly cleaned up and made more aerodynamic. The LX package comes standard with the 140-horsepower 3.8-liter V-6. The interior is also all new, including the instrument panel with remote radio controls.

MINI-VAN WITHDRAWAL THERAPY

**ROAD
TEST**

by Daniel Charles Ross

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM FRENK

There are plenty of reasons why some people can't get used to the idea of a mini-van or are bored driving one by now, not the least of which is that, to them, the thing is just *not a car*. The therapy for van-allergic families is to liberally apply a station wagon to the affected area. Wagons have come far in the years since they were the chrome-laden anchors of suburbia's carpool relay. They perform better, look better in the driveway, are more fun

FORD TAURUS LX STATION WAGON

to drive, and still have plenty of room for Spot the Wonder Dog to stick his nose out the window. The Ford Taurus LX station wagon is a classy form of the new breed. Its looks have been skillfully freshened for the '92 model year, and an all-new interior and instrument panel reorients some control functions. At this LX trim level, lots of standard equipment is included to extend comfort as well as functionality.

This is a well-behaved car, with adequate power underfoot to hustle down the road with few apologies. Standard in the LX is a 3.8-liter V-6 making the same 140 horsepower as the base wagon's 3.0-liter six, but the bigger engine offers 215 foot-pounds of torque, 55 more than the

smaller V-6. In a city environment, the greater torque is put to use in the speed range where most of us will drive the car. At the track, our Taurus clocked 0-60 mph in 10.9 seconds and did the quarter mile in 17.9 seconds at 77.6 mph. No quarter horse, obviously, but with its power production optimized for around-town advantage, the dragstrip performance is less important.

Taurus engineers have made big strides in developing ride quality that doesn't sacrifice a performance feel, however pedestrian the actual numbers may be. Our LX wagon scored a 0.73 g on the skidpad circuit, not a ma-

neuver you'd perform with grocery bags in the back. Through the slalom, however, we achieved a relatively impressive 58.6 mph. This is testimony to the car's road-holding in the real world. We would have preferred somewhat larger tires for improved performance and a more aggressive look, but the P205/65R15 Michelin XW4 all-season rubber is a good compromise between wet and dry proficiency. The Taurus wagon's plenty sporty, but it's no "sport wagon."

In the upscale LX, each wheel comes standard with a power-assisted disc brake with anti-lock. The Ford stops confidently with good modulation and a fine pedal feel. The 3499-pound LX wagon comes to a halt from 30 mph



in 40 feet and from 60 mph in 150 feet.

We have mixed emotions about the new-for-'92 variable-ratio speed-sensitive power rack-and-pinion steering setup standard on LX models. In low-speed driving, such as parking, the assist is surprisingly high. When turns lock-to-lock are 2.5, backing into that curbside space in front of your local hang-out is a breeze. The tradeoff is that, at lower city speeds, the feel is largely absent. As speed builds, the assist seamlessly drains away until, at highway cruising velocities, the effort is reassuringly firm.

The new interior is a big step forward. The seat construction and its power-assisted adjustments are im-



proved, and the instrument panel, with large analog gauges, is easier to read and comprehend. Ford made an effort to clean up the Taurus' ergonomics by adding some radio controls and relocating others, but this was only partially successful. The radio/CD unit is located low on the dashboard and the heating/ventilation/air-conditioning controls are up higher, making the operation of these controls somewhat difficult due to the awkward positions.

On the other hand, important switchgear for the locks and power windows on both the front and rear doors has been relocated and illuminated. A driver-side airbag is still standard equipment, but now an optional passenger-side airbag will be available, too, sometime later in the



Both rear seatbacks fold down, creating and extra 36.1 cubic feet of cargo room.

model year. Ford said the airbag supplier was caught with his supply lines down by the unexpected consumer interest in airbags, and when Ford offered the unit for the passenger side, the supplier couldn't get enough additional firing mechanisms in time for Job One.

Ford's done a good job in updating the Taurus wagon. It's a car wagon-masters are going to enjoy driving. And Spot the Wonder Dog will like it, too.

MT

SECOND OPINION

Ford's Taurus is one of the few great American success stories of the '80s. By reskinning its mid-size phenomenon, Ford hopes to maintain momentum well into the '90s.

The wagon in this test has a new instrument panel, but exterior sheetmetal aft of the windshield is largely carryover. This is a prime example of that old adage, "if it ain't broke...." The Taurus works for me because it's so unwagonlike. It looks nothing at all like a beached whale, and there's no phony woodgrain to disfigure the flanks. Ford cared enough to give the Taurus wagon its own special rear suspension and a stylish sweep in the tailgate area. The only shortcut I've noticed is that the sedan's upwardly mobile beltline looks disjointed when it meets the wagon's rear window.

All that's lacking now is a SHO of force under the hood.

—Don Sherman

TECH DATA



Ford Taurus LX Station Wagon

GENERAL

Make and model	Ford Taurus LX Wagon
Manufacturer	Ford Motor Co., Dearborn, Mich.
Body style	4-door, 8-passenger
Drivetrain layout	Front engine, front drive
Base price	\$19,400 (est.)
Price as tested	\$23,400 (est.)
Options included	Preferred equipment package (includes numerous comfort and convenience items); 3.8-liter V-6 engine; heavy-duty suspension; CD player
Typical market competition	Chevrolet Caprice Wagon, Mercury Sable Wagon

DIMENSIONS

Wheelbase, in./mm	106.0/2692
Track, f/r, in./mm	61.6/59.9/1565/1521
Length, in./mm	193.1/4905
Width, in./mm	71.2/1808
Height, in./mm	55.5/1410
Ground clearance, in./mm	5.8/146
Manufacturer's curb weight, lb	3499
Weight distribution, f/r, %	60/40
Cargo capacity, cu ft	45.7
Fuel capacity, gal	16.0
Weight/power ratio, lb/hp	25.0

ENGINE

Type	90° V-6, liquid cooled, cast iron block, cast aluminum heads
Bore x stroke, in./mm	3.81 x 3.39/96.8 x 86.0
Displacement, ci/cc	232/3797
Compression ratio	9.0:1
Valve gear	OHV, 2 valves/cylinder
Fuel/induction system	Multipoint EFI
Horsepower	hp @ rpm, SAE net 140 @ 3800
Torque	lb-ft @ rpm, SAE net 215 @ 2200
Horsepower/liter	36.9
Redline, rpm	N/A
Recommended fuel	Unleaded regular

DRIVELINE

Transmission type	4-speed auto.
Gear ratios	
(1st)	2.77:1
(2nd)	1.54:1
(3rd)	1.00:1
(4th)	0.69:1
Axle ratio	3.19:1
Final-drive ratio	2.20:1
Engine rpm	
60 mph in top gear	1900

CHASSIS

Suspension	
Front	MacPherson struts, lower control arms, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Rear	Upper and lower control arms, trailing links, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering	
Type	Rack and pinion, power assist
Ratio	15.2:1
Turns, lock to lock	2.5
Turning circle	38.6
Brakes	
Front, type/dia., in.	Vented discs/10.0
Rear, type/dia., in.	Vented discs/10.0
Anti-lock	Optional
Wheels and tires	
Wheel size, in.	15 x 6.0
Wheel type/material	Cast aluminum
Tire size	205/65R15
Tire mfr. and model	Michelin XW4

INSTRUMENTATION

Instruments	85-mph speedo; 7000-rpm tach; fuel level; coolant temperature; clock
Warning lamps	Oil pressure; check engine; brake; battery; check oil; seatbelts; door ajar; ABS; airbag

PERFORMANCE AND TEST DATA

Acceleration, sec	
0-30 mph	3.6
0-40 mph	5.4
0-50 mph	8.1
0-60 mph	10.9
0-70 mph	15.0
0-80 mph	20.1
Standing quarter mile	
sec @ mph	17.9 @ 77.6
Braking, ft	
30-0 mph	40
60-0 mph	150
Handling	
Lateral acceleration, g	0.73
Speed through 600-ft slalom, mph	58.6
Speedometer error, mph	
Indicated	Actual
30	29
40	39
50	50
60	62
Interior noise, dBA	
Idling in neutral	44
Steady 60 mph in top gear	68

FUEL ECONOMY

EPA, city/hwy, mpg	N/A
Est. range, city/hwy, miles	N/A