



A more detailed look at the Davidson/Rothman '59 convertible. A fully automatic top was phased in late in the '59 model run to replace the manual top initially offered. Rear-hinged decklid is an artifact of the retractable hardtop model *a la* Ford Skyliner favored by product planners at one stage in the four-seater's development. Trunk space is pretty good, but the spare tire placement is not very convenient. Dash top and rear bench seat are styled to carry through the compartmentalized theme established by the center console.

with the new car's sales performance. In a sense, Ford had created a latter-day Continental, and this was undoubtedly part of the "Squarebird's" appeal for some buyers. It had the same kind of sporty elegance that marked the original Continental, yet sold for less than half as much as the Mark II, which was more exclusive but priced way beyond most people's reach. Ford even offered a genuine "continental kit" for the '58 Bird as a dealer accessory (though not many were fitted), and the hardtop's wide-quarter roofline echoed the top up appearance of the great 1940s Continental cabriolet. Of course, this notion probably never occurred to the "Squarebird's" creators, at least consciously, but we think the comparison

is quite apt.

One notion that did occur was giving the "Squarebird" some kind of novel roof feature. Ford product planners were fascinated by gimmicky roof designs in the Fifties as a way to boost sales, but all but one of the ideas suggested for the four-seat generation would be ruled out due to lack of time and/or money. A retractable hardtop-convertible like the Ford Skyliner was far and away the favorite, but the problem of where to stow the bulky top and its associated linkages and wires was even more of a problem than with that car because of the T-Bird's smaller trunk volume. Engineers managed to work up a "clamshell" top that broke in the middle as it folded down over itself, and

Boyer recalls that it worked quite well. Ultimately, the "retrac" was shelved for all the reasons that led McNamara to give up on the Skyliner after 1959, but its legacy can be seen in the rear-hinged decklid on the production soft top.

The "Squarebird's" extreme lowness suggested a trio of more practical ideas intended to facilitate entry/exit. One was a T-top with twin take-out panels over the front seats. Designer Gordon Buehrig had tried something similar on the stillborn TASCOS sports car project shortly before joining Ford in 1950, and Chevy would adopt it in the Sixties for the fifth-generation Corvette. An early-1957 suggestion that the T-roof hardtop be the Thunderbird's *only* 1958 body style was