



wing" dual headlamp workouts, wrapped windshields, and a "twin-pod" rear deck with large quadruple taillamps set in rectangular nacelles. All these ideas would appear in production. In the initial stages, side treatments for both two- and four-seat Birds were quite similar to that of the '57 model, the main differences being elimination of the ventilator doors in the front fenders and the addition of tubular spears and four upright hash marks on each side. Shortly before production was to begin, these elements were shuffled slightly. The spears were moved up into the doors and a sculptured "character line" was added above, running rearward from the headlamps and curving down to disappear in the rear door area. One big difference involved construction. While the proposed '58 two-seater would have looked like a short-chassis version of the "big Bird," its styling would have been carried out as a major facelift of the existing platform, which meant separate body and frame. By contrast, the four-seater was planned for unitized construction from the outset.

In the end, the two-seater died because there was simply no place for it in Ford's manufacturing scheme. Notes stylist Boyer: "Everybody thought it was going to die a natural death [after 1957] because it had been done on a little rinky-dink line in a corner of the Rouge [plant] and launched off '55 Ford components. It was a parasitic vehicle. . . . The reason they wanted to drop it was because, economically, it didn't make any sense. It wasn't a money maker—you couldn't prove that it [would yield a return on investment] within the financial guidelines of the company. . . ." But Boyer is quick to credit McNamara with winning approval for the four-seat concept: "[He] simply recognized that the Thunderbird image and the attractiveness of it had immense rub-off value that you



couldn't put a dollar amount on—which was unusual for Bob McNamara, because he was strictly a very tightfisted financial kind of guy. The fact that he came to the defense of the Bird and perpetuated it astounded everybody. But he did." Of course, part of McNamara's pitch was that the four-seater would make *real* money—which it did—but it was not an easy sell. Observes Boyer: "[The original Thunderbird] had made a name for itself and had become a 'legend in its own time.' We knew we'd better have a pretty good reason for changing it, because we were gonna make all the 'two-passenger guys' very mad at us. And we did, definitely. But we managed to pick up 40,000 others. . . . [It was] a good business decision, because the volume of the Bird virtually doubled from 1957."

That decision came down officially in the spring of 1956. Recalls Boyer:

"Everybody thought [the Thunderbird] was going to die—everybody but the studio, I guess [because] we continued development on a four-passenger vehicle. Engineering kind of ignored it [up to that point] because it wasn't what was called a 'validated program'—no resources, no funding, no engineering support. All of a sudden, Bob McNamara came in and said we're gonna do it, and [chief engineer] Henry Grebe and company had to do a quick turnaround and get some engineering support to it. So they simply took templates off our clay. I guess you'd have to say the studio did the packaging," which was a reversal of normal Ford product development procedure. Besides McNamara and Boyer, other key figures in the development effort were Crusoe, product planner Case, Thunderbird chief engineer Bob Hennessy, and John Hollowell, the