



nixed due to high tooling costs, so stylists proposed replacing the panels with retractable sections that worked like a rolltop desk. That didn't even get off the drawing board, though. Next came small "flipper" cut-outs, which were almost as quickly abandoned. In the end, the most practical idea was the one chosen: a sliding metal sunroof. Offered as a 1960 option, it didn't sell well and was dropped after only a year, but it did mark the return of this feature to American production for the first time since before the war.

The "Squarebird" may have been a big success in the showroom, but it was less so on the road. *Motor Trend* tested the fifth hand-built pilot-assembly car, and reported an unimpressive 13.5 seconds in the 0-60 mph sprint and a quarter-mile time of 16.8 seconds. Writer Bill Carroll was somewhat disappointed with the car's braking ability, but noted "no one in the Ford family can match brilliance with the Bird's four 32-candlepower

stoplights." Engineers had tried to provide better brakes, but the four-seater arrived with a scant 5.66 square inches more total lining area (175.32 sq. in.) than the much lighter two-seat models. And, of course, the new car's greater heft took the edge off performance. However, *MT* judged the ride as good, and rear seat access, usually a problem in two-doors, was easy thanks to the industry's widest doors and front seatbacks that folded down "far enough to squash a walnut," as Tom McCahill put it. *MT* found the driver's seat low and the wheel high, a typical situation in Ford products, it noted. The report also mentioned the loss of the '57 model's tachometer and telescopically adjustable steering wheel. Visibility was good but not great, the wrapped windshield only moving the blind spot further back.

Despite such carping, the magazine named the four-seat T-Bird its "Car of the Year" in May 1958, principally because it had "the most totally new concept in interior packaging... And

more than that, it's a car that combines safety with performance and comfort with compactness. These are hard qualities to amalgamate."

*Mechanix Illustrated's* McCahill, long a Ford booster, claimed he bought the first 1955 Thunderbird and ran it at the Daytona Beach Speed Trials at 127 mph. With this bias, his review of the new '58 was predictably lukewarm: "The only way to approach this car is to throw away all thoughts we ever had about the earlier Thunderbird and consider what kind of sedan it is. In this light, the '58 T-Bird comes off quite well." But, he cracked, "The ride and stability through corners and over dipped roads is typical family-car style, with not even a remote hint of 'sports car feel.'" He also pointed out that a '58 ran at Daytona that year at "a surprising 107 mph, just 20 mph slower than my 1955 Bird." Summing up, "Uncle Tom" opined: "The '58 Thunderbird is an all-new four-passenger sedan with fairly live characteristics, capable of turning 0-60