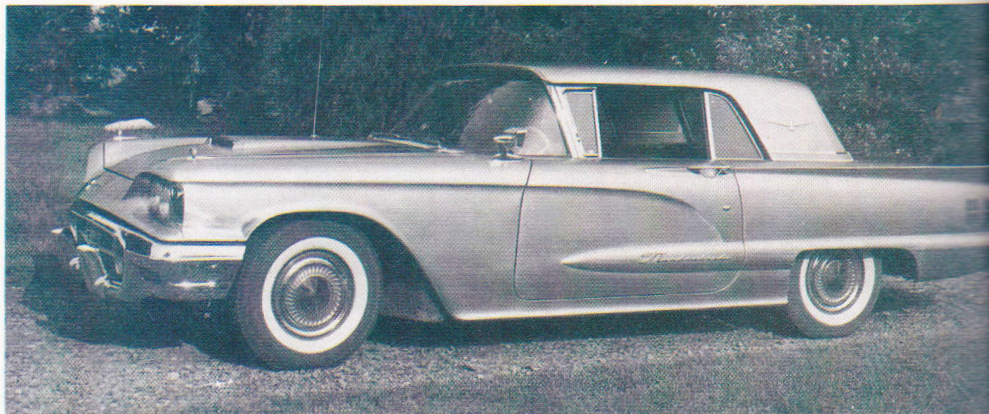
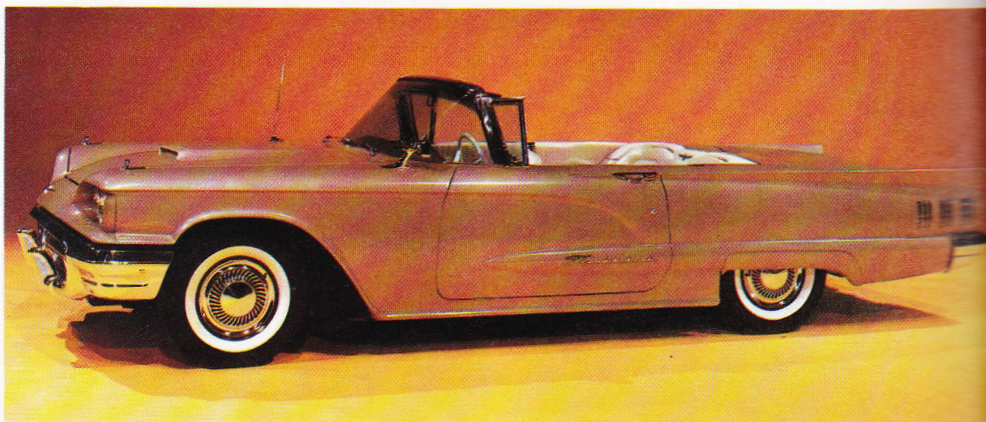


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Opposite page: The "Squarebird" was mostly the same for its third and final year, but the 1960 model revived the sliding steel sunroof for the first time since before the war. Only 2536 cars were equipped with this option (owner: Barbara Walker Cadena). This page, right: "Bootless" rear deck was a feature of all "Squarebird" convertibles like this 1960 model. Lower right: One of the two "stainless" '60s. A twin was buried in a time capsule.

too, and prices went up by about \$50. Buyers apparently didn't mind this repeat performance, and model year production forged ahead to over 67,000 units.

Production surged upward again for 1960, reaching nearly 91,000 units, a record that would not be surpassed until late 1977. The third and final edition of the "Squarebird" was mechanically untouched. Appearance was freshened up with a square-mesh grille insert (the pattern again repeated at the rear) behind a large horizontal bar with three vertical dividers, three-element taillight clusters (with the backup lamps going in-board), plus reworked name script and emblems and the return of the hash marks, this time on the rear fenders. Standard equipment was expanded with a driver's door mirror and polarized day/night inside rear-view mirror, and there was the usual raft of new paint colors and upholstery choices. The one significant new option, the sliding sunroof,



failed to find many takers at \$212.40 extra, and only 2536 cars were so equipped. Production wound down in July to make way for the all-new 1961 "rocketship" design. Shortly afterwards, Allegheny-Ludlum Steel teamed up with Budd to build two

1960s with stainless-steel bodies. (They had to wait until production ended, because the stainless completely wiped out the dies.) One of these cars was sealed away for posterity in a "time capsule." The other is still owned by the steelmaker, which

The Collectible "Squarebird": Prime-Pick Collectible

Any collectible automobile, no matter how rare or admirable, is no better than the people devoted to it—including those who provide parts and restoration assistance. The 1958-60 Thunderbird is an excellent example. Fifteen years ago there was next to no collector interest in this car despite its historical significance as the pioneer of the personal-luxury concept. Prices were severely depressed and parts supplies were thinning as quickly as the number of unclaimed 1955-57 models. Today it's all so different. Underrated for years because of the "classic" two-seaters, the first-generation four-seater has long since come of age. Values have risen appreciably, though they're far from unreasonable even

now. And they show every sign of continuing to advance in the years ahead. The "Squarebird" enthusiast also enjoys the support of a very active club, the Vintage Thunderbird Club of America (VTCA), whose efforts are partly responsible for one of the best restoration and parts situations in the hobby. What all this adds up to is a collectible that's easy to own and restore and an excellent long-term investment.

The steady rise in "Squarebird" values since the late Sixties reflects this wider and more organized following, as well as a very low survival rate, estimated by VTCA national concours chairman Jim Dottling at no more than 10 percent. Dottling contends it's difficult to find top-condition ragtops for under \$10,000, and \$12,000-\$18,000 is more like the going rate. He also notes that hardtops tend to cost about 20 percent more than most guide prices.

When it comes to desirability, though, these Birds run true to collector car form. Convertibles in any condition class command a price premium of at least 50 percent over comparably equipped hardtops in any model year. Next on the list are the 1960 sunroof hardtops, including the special limited-production "gold edition" model, followed by 1959-60 cars with the 430-cid V-8 (a mere 377 of the '60 hardtops were built with both options). The Lincoln engine is definitely worth looking for, though its greater weight works against handling (which wasn't that outstanding to begin with) and poses more serviceability headaches than the standard 352. Despite their greater rarity and status as first of the line, the '58s enjoy no price advantage right now.

Restoring a 1958-60 T-Bird is not at all difficult as far as parts are concerned. In fact, virtually everything except