



package size, but how did you arrive at those particular dimensions?

**Boyer:** There was much agonizing over that. The designers in the studio all thought it should be kept very small, a compact car with just jump seats, because all the research said that young couples only wanted enough space for carrying little children. But the planning activity said we ought to make it a full-blown vehicle that'll accommodate adults, even if it's a tight package. Ultimately, the consensus was that that was the right way to go.

**CA:** Was there always the idea that the '58 would be a more luxuriously equipped and trimmed car than the '57?

**Boyer:** Oh, yes. In those days, the [Lockheed] Constellation was the big, fast, luxurious airliner, and we in the studio began referring to the new Thunderbird as the "Constellation" of the automotive group.

**CA:** There was some styling spin-off from it in the '58 Ford grille, right?

**Boyer:** Yes, we copied that, although we couldn't stand the expense of a real bumper/grille on the Ford because of its lower price. But it reflected the essential Thunderbird theme, which we wanted to capitalize on. And of course the next year we went to the "Galaxie" roof that was patterned on the Thunderbird's. That was a big winner. Ultimately, even Cadillac picked it up. The latest Cougar still has the blind quarters; the upscale, "formal" market really likes that.

**CA:** How long was the '58 Thunderbird in gestation?

**Boyer:** At that time, we usually had to have clay approval 30 months prior to introduction, though the program would have been started 36 months before, in September or October of 1955. Then, during that winter and in the spring, we would have had to kick it out of here and into Body Engineering.

**CA:** But at that point you didn't know the car was going to be approved until McNamara came in and said to engineer it...

**Boyer:** That's right. That would have occurred at about 30 months prior to Job 1. That was the typical program in those days. This one might have been a little shorter, though—say, 24 to 26 months—because you didn't have four-door versions or station wagons to worry about. So there could have been some compression in the timing of the engineering program.

**CA:** We've seen some photos of a four-door styling model from late 1955. Was this ever seriously considered?

**Boyer:** It was never considered on the 1958-60 series. We didn't do a four-door rendering until sometime in 1964, and that came in for the '67 Bird.

**CA:** Was there any kind of competition between Ford and Lincoln-Mercury divisions over what nameplate this car would have? The '58 Thunderbird could as easily have been a small Lincoln or Lincoln Continental as a specialized Ford...

**Boyer:** Could have been, but Bob McNamara wasn't about to let go of the Thunderbird. He was perpetuator of the line, and there was no question that he was going to have it in his area. The Ford and Lincoln-Mercury guys have always been fierce competitors.

**CA:** You've been quoted elsewhere as saying McNamara "saved" the Thunderbird after 1957. Once he had done that, were you ever influenced or pressured in your work by sales considerations?

**Boyer:** We were pretty much left alone. I had to do the job regardless—that was the way it crumbled cookie-wise—which was good. When you get too much help from research and from marketing and so on, all that does is inhibit innovation. I think the '58 turned out to be so innovative because we didn't have so much "help"—

although that might have been some people's way of saying, "we'll stand back and let you get yourself in trouble."

**CA:** Well, obviously you felt you had to come up with something that would be a sales winner, so what did you look to for inspiration?

**Boyer:** Basically my own sense of style and taste. Remember that there was increasing affluence in the U.S. at that time. I felt a personal-luxury car would really find a niche. Fortunately, we were coming out of a period of conservative management at that time and we had guys around like [Lee] Iacocca who had a tremendous grasp of the market. But he wouldn't have been able to venture into the Mustang with the backing he had if we hadn't proven something with the early Birds. Once you get that sort of credibility, the powers-that-be at least tend to give you a shot at something you want to do.

**CA:** You just used the term "personal-luxury." Did you think of the '58 Thunderbird that way as you were working on it, or did that come out later?

**Boyer:** Well, its cost made it a luxury car in those days, and the fact that it was a restricted four-passenger car meant it wasn't in the big Lincoln or Mercury class or even a Lincoln Continental. So it was dubbed "personal-luxury." I don't recall any of the other ways we might have categorized it.

**CA:** It certainly set the trend for that type of car...

**Boyer:** Of course! Buick tried to one-up it with the Riviera and never quite made it. Other people tried, too. I guess the closest they came was when we forfeited that segment of the market, that size car, and Monte Carlo jumped in there while we went to a big Bird off of the Mark common body. That was the first real success they'd had breaking into that kind of market.

**CA:** Do you think the current Thunderbird is as innovative as the '58 was in its day?

**Boyer:** No, I think it has too much competition to be *that* innovative. It's innovative in being aerodynamic—it's the first Bird we had an opportunity to design that way, the first to get down to a 0.35 Cd. But there are just so many features you can put on a car, and there are more cars with more features competing against the Bird now. I'd say the market is diluted to an extent that it wasn't in those days. But as far as I'm concerned, the new Bird is doing its job and doing it well, and that has always been one of educating people, getting them accustomed to more advanced design concepts. I think it's a little far out for some people—but then the Bird's *always* been a little far out.