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Ford Thunderbird

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ences of the mid-1950's with its special effects and challenged them with its ideas.

Forbidden Planet recasts English playwright William Shakespeare's play about a marooned magician and his daughter, *The Tempest* (1611), on the imaginary planet Altair-IV in the twenty-third century. A United Planets spaceship, in the form of a flying saucer, arrives to determine the fate of an earlier mission. However, the crew find only two survivors, Dr. Morbius (played by Walter Pidgeon) and his daughter Altaira (Anne Francis), who are being waited upon by an ingenious robot.

Morbius explains to the cruiser's commander, John J. Adams (Leslie Nielsen, who would later win fame in comic roles), that the rest of the mission's crew died at the hands of a savage, invisible monster. Later he reluctantly reveals an underground network built by a vanished race known as the Krell and boasts that he has used one of their machines to "boost" his own intelligence. Adams realizes that the doctor's own energized id is the "monster" that killed his colleagues and that has now begun attacking Adams's crew.

Impact Aside from Walter Pidgeon, the cast of *Forbidden Planet* was unremarkable. However, its psychological theme, spectacular imagery, and otherworldly soundtrack set it apart from most science-fiction films of the decade. It influenced films and television series for decades to come and is considered one of the primary inspirations for the 1960's television series *Star Trek*.

Further Reading

Harris, Steven B. "A.I. and the Return of the Krell Machine: Nanotechnology, the Singularity, and the Empty Planet Syndrome." *Skeptic* 9, no. 3 (2002): 68-79. Harris argues that *Forbidden Planet* is important for the questions it raises about advanced technologies.

Kennedy, Harlan. "Prospero's Flicks." *Film Comment* 28 (1992): 45-59. Kennedy discusses several filmed adaptations of *The Tempest*, including *Forbidden Planet*.

Grove Koger

See also *Captain Video*; *Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The*, *Destination Moon*; Film in the United States; Flying saucers; *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*; *Sputnik I*; *Thing from Another World*, *The*, *War of the Worlds*, *The*.

■ Ford Thunderbird

Identification Luxury-oriented automobile model

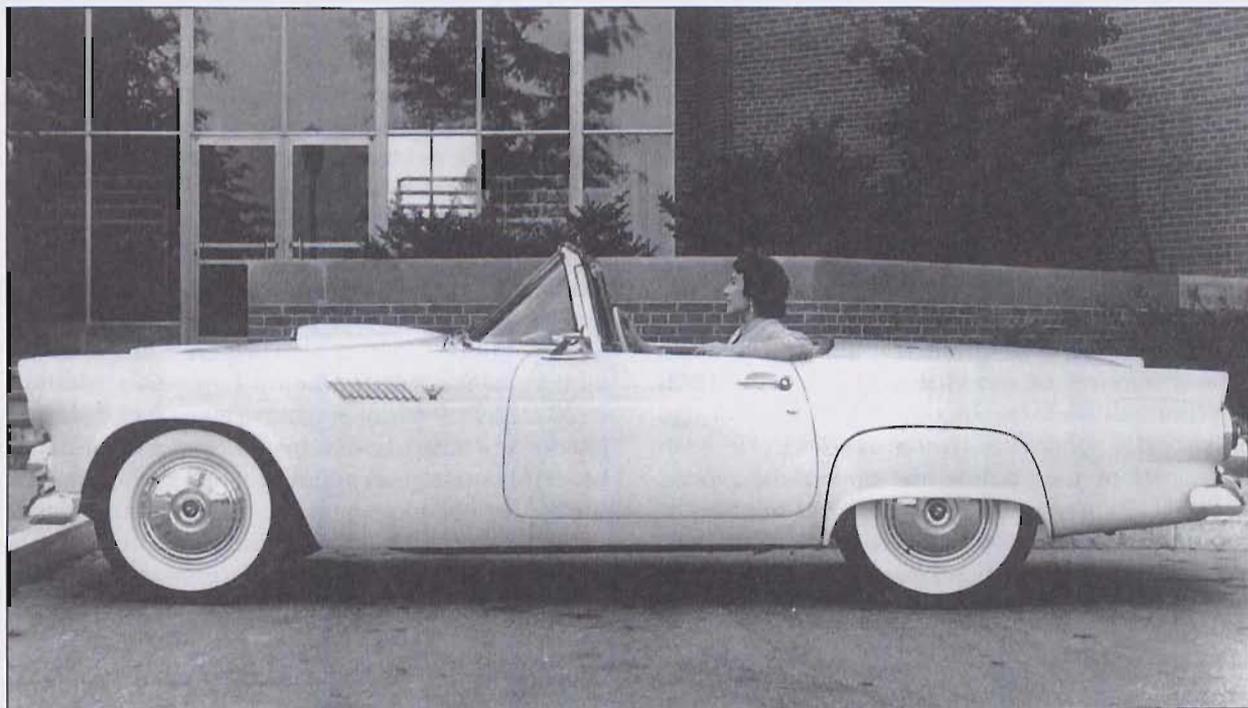
Date Entered the consumer market on October 22, 1954

Ford, with its introduction of the Thunderbird, became the first car manufacturer to create the market segment for personal luxury cars. The car became the trendsetting automobile of the 1950's and defined personal status during the decade of consumer excess.

The concept for the Thunderbird—named after a mythical bird of great power and beauty in Indian lore—reflected the American public's passion for automobiles during the early 1950's, an era during which there existed a significant interest in V-8 engines and performance, European sports cars, and California's leisure lifestyle. As a result, the first Thunderbird mixed a touch of European influence, a hood scoop, "frenched headlights," and fender louvers. Despite occasional marketing references to it as a sports car, Ford created a unique niche by calling it a "personal luxury car" in the hope that it could distinguish the Thunderbird from its primary American rival, the Chevrolet Corvette from General Motors (GM).

In the fall of 1952, Ford's chief designer, Frank Hershey, learned of the GM Corvette project, and with assistance from William Boyer, he began work on a car that would have a distinctive American and Ford appearance. Initially the car was named after Henry Ford's estate, Fairlane, but after an employee contest, the name "Thunderbird" was assigned to the car. Compared to the Corvette's six-cylinder engine and automatic transmission, the Thunderbird had a V-8 engine, both manual and automatic transmission options, and a level of comfort that included power steering, brakes, seats, and windows. The spartan Corvette, fitted with side curtains instead of roll-up windows, simply could not match the Thunderbird for luxury and comfort. After its unveiling, interest in the two-seat Thunderbird, with its clean styling, luxurious comforts, and V-8 refinements, was immediate.

Impact Given the era's affluence and desire for status-oriented consumer goods, it was no surprise that the introduction of the 1955 Thunderbird was a huge success, easily filling a market niche. Actor



The first model of the Ford Thunderbird featured a wrap-around windshield, fender skirts, and modest tail fins. (AP/Wide World Photos)

Clark Gable was photographed in his 1955 Thunderbird cruising Hollywood; Marilyn Monroe owned a 1956 model painted in Sunset Coral. The car's preeminence with noted Hollywood celebrities was only one indication of its success during the decade. Initially a two-seat car, the roadster eventually was changed to four seats after the public indicated it wanted a car with more passenger and cargo room. The revamped 1958 Thunderbird was an instant success, and it was named *Motor Trend Magazine's* Car of the Year in 1958.

Further Reading

Boyer, William P. *Thunderbird: An Odyssey in Automotive Design*. Dallas, Tex.: Taylor, 1986. An important history written by one of the early designers of the Thunderbird.

Gunnell, John, ed. *T-Bird: Forty Years of Thunder*. Iola, Wis.: Krause, 1995. A history of the car containing detailed information.

John A. Heitmann

See also Automobiles and auto manufacturing; Chevrolet Corvette; Edsel; General Motors; Interstate highway system; Volkswagen.

■ Foreign policy of Canada

Canadian foreign policy during the 1950's vacillated between Canada's strong alliance with the United States and its opposition to the Soviet Union and international communism and Canada's efforts to be an independent nation with its own policies distinct from those of the United States.

Canada emerged from World War II in a relatively strong defense position, holding the world's fourth largest military. However, in terms of its foreign policy, Canada was in an awkward position. Traditionally, as a member of the British Empire, its closest ally always had been Great Britain. In fact, the war demonstrated that Canada could no longer depend solely on Britain to defend its security. The obvious successor in that role was the United States, and as early as 1940, Canada pursued a closer defense relationship with it. This shift, however, meant a movement toward continentalism, an approach prior Canadian governments had resisted historically because of the potential for Canada's domination by the much larger and more powerful United States.