

BONUS!

MERCEDES-BENZ GUIDE TO ALBERT PARK GP

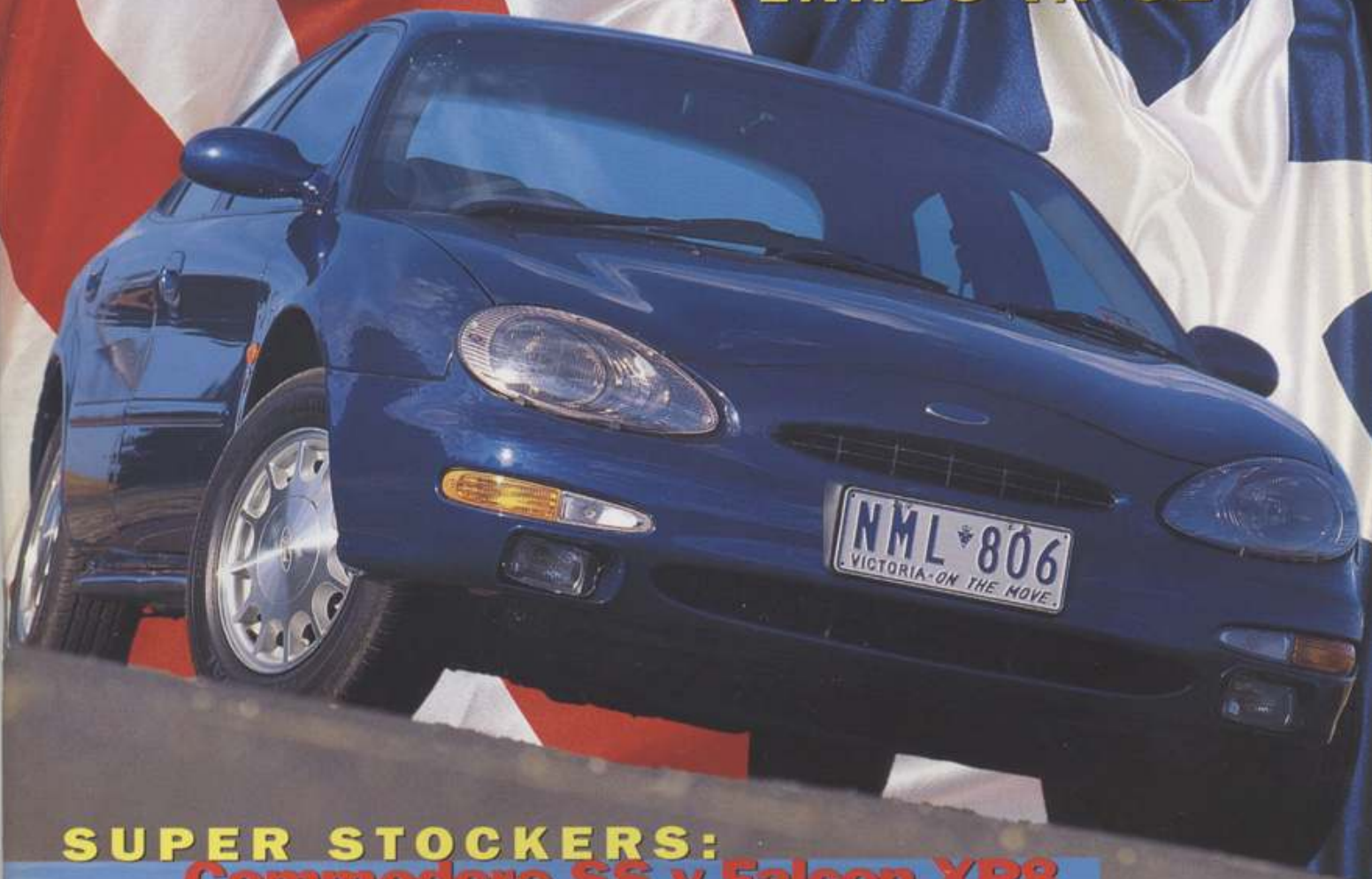
MOTOR

March 1996 \$5.90*
NZ \$8.90 (incl GST)

FORD TAURUS

Yankee Falcon

LANDS IN OZ



**SUPER STOCKERS:
Commodore SS v Falcon XR8**



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firstdrive

1996 FORD TAURUS

▲ Top-selling Yank ▲ Daring styling ▲ On sale now

photography by WARWICK KENT



Star struck



THE SPACESHIP STYLING OF FORD'S NEW TAURUS SHOULD NOT BE A PUT-OFF SAYS PAUL ELLIS. TOUCH IT, SIT IN IT, DRIVE IT AND CHANCES ARE YOU'LL LIKE IT.

A bit like a UFO (Unique Ford Offering) it sat proudly in front of the hotel, gleaming like a polished trophy, waiting to be touched. The keys firmly in my grip, I remained unsure whether to approach and unlock it or wait for ET to appear from behind with tilted head and clumsy smile to introduce me to this spaceship of automotive design.

In an era when most new cars are chained down with the same 'Me-Too' looks, Ford's new Taurus Ghia breaks the shackles and screams 'Look-At-Me!'. I looked, looked again and wondered if my eyes were playing tricks on the grey matter.

No, this was real alright, as real as the cold sliver of the key in my palm. Ah, what the hell! The valet parking attendant, stung too by the appearance of the new-age Ford sedan he had ushered from the car park darkness, threw a wry smile as I slotted behind the wheel.

"Have a nice day, sir."

On the street it magnetised stares like nothing else. Only Ferraris generate this sort of curiosity. A young guy in his hotted-up Honda CRX damn near ran into us, drifting over the lane markers as he ogled over the futuristic styling of the gleaming blue bolt that must have looked as out of place as Shane Warne in a Colombo nightclub.

With open roads nearing, traffic thinning and composure regained we hunted hard along the black top. Five hundred kilometres and six hours later it was back to the hotel and the same valet fella.

"Pleasant day, sir?"

"You bet!" If Taurus looked awkward, it certainly didn't behave so.

A solid day spent fanging Ford's fandangled new four-door had wiped out any reservations about its styling. First impressions revealed the chassis to be taut, the ride and steering excellent, its handling close to class leading for a large front-drive sedan, the interior comfy, ergonomics friendly and the 3.0-litre V6 engine punchy.

Immediately it made instant sense why this model came so close to being anointed as the EF Falcon's successor, albeit modified to

suit Aussie tastes. That is until Ford bosses realised what a marvellous engineering job Ford Australia did with the current car and gave the \$750-million go-ahead for its replacement in '98.

Taurus may be new to us but it's not new to Ford. For 10 years it's been a top-seller in its US home market where it's positioned as a Falcon equivalent. What's truly new is this swoopy 1996 Taurus — Ford's first true 'world car' designed for both left and right-hand drive markets. Hence its arrival on our shores.

Detroit brass, indeed local Ford execs as

well, will watch its progress here with keen interest, for although Falcon's rear-drive layout has been given the green light until 2002, there is still a 50-50 chance Falcon may do the unthinkable after that and go front-drive as it's fully integrated into Ford 2000.

Don't take it personally, it all comes down to business. Ford spent a reported \$4-billion developing the new Taurus, incorporating the latest engine, gearbox, safety and electronics technology, so it's keen to have the investment widely absorbed. Right now the thought of a front-drive Falcon may be

harder to swallow than an ice cube, but if we warm to Taurus it may one day trickle down the throat like honey.

Our first contact with Taurus — and maybe yours too when you drive it — indicates it's a superb motor car and *just possibly* a worthy Falcon replacement. While technical suitability is one thing though, altering the Australian psyche is another.

Ford supremo Alex Trotman hopes Australia will embrace Taurus and buy 10,000 in the first year, however local boss David Morgan reckons 5000 cars is more realistic, given that his sales troops must

“... the endearment comes not from the inner aesthetics but from the seat of your pants once you begin to sample the quality of the way Taurus delivers its motoring ...”



You have to like ovals with the Taurus as they're everywhere, especially the interior, left.





Under the bonnet is Ford's cutting edge engine technology with the all-aluminium 3.0-litre Duratec V6 pushing out 149kW, almost as much as Falcon's 4.0-litre.



Ford Taurus Ghia

SPEC CHECK

Body	4-door sedan
Drive	Front
Engine	3.0-litre DOHC V6
Power	149kW/5750rpm
Torque	272Nm/4500rpm
Gearbox	Four-speed automatic
Suspension	Independent by MacPherson strut, anti-roll bar (front). Independent by Quadralink, anti-roll bar (rear).
Steering	Power assisted rack and pinion
Brakes	Four wheel discs with ABS
Performance	0-100km/h 9.3secs (est.)
Price	\$43,000 approx.

market a vehicle the likes of which we have never seen or experienced before. No matter how good it is, getting used to Taurus won't be easy.

While most cars attract from the outside with simple but stylish lines and creamy curves, the overwhelming exterior presence of the Taurus means you need to further explore it to get the gooey warm feelings happening.

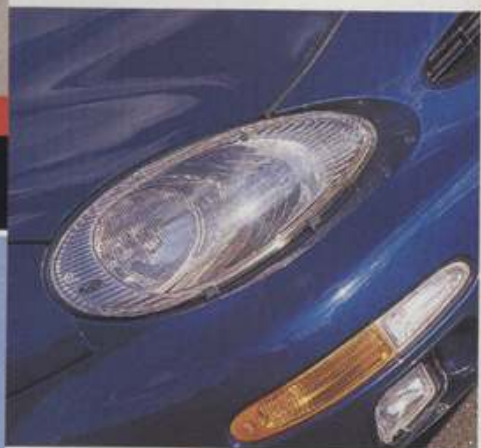
The interior — adventurous with its steeply raked windscreen, heavily sculptured dashboard and stark black football sized centre console panel — is less imposing, but the endearment comes not from the inner aesthetics but from the seat of your pants once you begin to sample the quality of the way Taurus delivers its motoring.

The hard sell with Taurus will be getting discerning Aussie buyers, who unlike the Yanks don't confuse kitsch with cachet, to look beyond the elliptical extravaganza, grab the wheel and go for a blast. Packaged as a prestige machine, Taurus delivers with commendable refinement, but to that it adds a dose of spirited sports sedan performance minus any nasty surprises.

Although similar in size and weight to the Falcon, Taurus behaves like a different ani-

mal. For starters, it's front-drive and the engine isn't a big ol' torquey lump of in-line-six iron. Taurus sports Ford's cutting edge engine technology in the form of the Duratec 3.0-litre V6 — all aluminium, four camshafts and 24 valves it produces 149kW at 5750rpm. Despite giving away one litre to the Falcon, Taurus is only eight kilowatts poorer in the power stakes. The Duratec spins freely, especially at high revs, showing a happiness near the red-line that the Falcon can only dream about.

But, and it's a big one — the V6 is well down on torque, producing 272Nm at 4500rpm, which is not only 85Nm shy of Falcon, but comes 1500rpm higher up the engine speed scale. It's the low-down response, or rather lack of it, that's going to take some getting used to for traditional Falcon and Commodore buyers.



THE VITAL STATS

	Ford Taurus Ghia	Ford Falcon GLI
Length	5029mm	4906mm
Width	1854mm	1861mm
Height	1417mm	1445mm
Wheelbase	2757mm	2791mm
Weight	1540kg	1546kg
Fuel tank	68 litres	68 litres
Boot	439 litres	465 litres
Engine	3.0-litre V6	4.0-litre in-line six
Valves	4 per cylinder	2 per cylinder
Cams	Four	One
Power	149kW/5750rpm	157kW/4900rpm
Torque	272Nm/4500rpm	357Nm/3000rpm
Drive	Front	Rear
Fuel	ULP	ULP
Price	\$43,000 (approx)	\$37,998 (Fairmont)

Sophisticated engine technology cannot overcome a lack of cubes.

Moving the power along is a four-speed electronic transmission and there's no manual option on Taurus. Ford hasn't quoted performance figures, but Taurus won't be quicker than Falcon to 100km/h or down the 400 metres. Where it should better Falcon is in fuel consumption, AS2877 tests show 11 litres of unleaded slurped for every 100kms on the city cycle and seven litres on the highway.

Ventilated front and sold rear discs provide good retardation through a pedal that offers great feel. The steering too is wonderfully communicative, weighted and geared; far from the vagueness and lightness normally associated with American cars — a real surprise!

Suspension on this Yankee is independent on all corners with MacPherson struts up front and a neatly packaged and clever working Quadralink system out back. There's also an anti-roll bar at each end. The hardware is fitted to a body that's had torsional rigidity improved by 87 per cent over the previous model. It all means nothing to us, but the gain is worth mentioning because the slippery saucer (0.30 Cd) is very stable at high speed and when tipped hard into corners.

Understeer prevails naturally enough, but the chassis is taut, body roll is minimal and

the ho-hum 205/65/R15 US-made tyres on the neat alloy wheels offer better than expected levels of grip, giving fail-safe and fun punting.

Ride too is commendable and given the coil spring and damper rates are untouched from the American spec, it isn't marshmallow soft. The bias is still towards typical American sponginess, but bump and rebound are progressive and controlled, meaning compliance and comfort are more in tune with what we're used to from prestige cars such as Fairlane and Statesman. As a package it's hard to fault.

The oval optics featured on the outside with the radiator opening, headlamps, rear window and even the door handle treatment, extends inside to oval air vents, oval T-bar

facia and a dominating oval centre console panel that attracts the eye. The big black Emu egg with its assortment of (you guessed it!) oval buttons for clock, audio and air-conditioning controls, appears cluttered and confusing at first, but after a few minutes familiarisation it makes sense and becomes easy to use.

As an up-market prestige car Taurus gets all the good gear. Air-con, power windows, mirrors and front seats, and a premium stereo with electric aerial come as standard creature comforts but strangely there's no sign of a sunroof, even as an option. On the safety side there's four-channel ABS, twin airbags and a sash belt for 'Point Four' in the back seat. A legacy of colder climes than ours is heated side mirrors, while there's a cup holder big enough to secure a giant Coke.

Only one model — the Ghia — will be available here when sales begin later this month. For \$2500 you can get the Luxury Pack, which features full leather trim, six-disc CD stacker and electric front seat lumbar adjustment.

Asking price for Taurus Ghia will be about \$43,000, which makes it \$5000 more expensive than Fairmont, its logical rival in the Falcon range. Right now Ford doesn't want to confuse the two, so the marketing campaign will be aimed squarely at rivals such as Accord, Maxima, Verada and Vienta.

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