



■ The art of Ferrari suspension and Brembo brakes.

racing machinery, steering for the F50 is by rack and pinion, with a ratio of 14.0:1. The rack housing is cast in aluminum, while the 3-piece steering column comprises two universal joints and carries an elegant and purposeful Momo steering wheel.

Bodywork and aerodynamics

THE F50 CAN be had as either an open spider or a coupe. Turning one style into the other involves exchanging the forward part of the rear deck of the open version for a different one with a roof and rear window, or vice-versa, while the two rollbars remain in place. Like the rest of the body, the roof is made of composite material consisting of a carbon-fiber, Kevlar and Nomex sandwich.

The styling is by Pininfarina and features attractive flowing lines, largely dictated by aerodynamic considerations, with high priority being given to achieving a good amount of downforce. The large rear wing plays an important part in this, as does the front spoiler, which also has a raised central area that improves the airflow under the car. The underside of the F50 is completely flat, rising at the rear on either side of the gearbox fairing to act as a diffuser. The fast-flowing air between the car's underbody and the road creates a low-pressure zone, thereby generating downforce. More front downforce is obtained both by the plunging front end and by the air exiting through a wide opening on the front deck after going through the front-mounted engine radiator. The intakes on the body sides feed air to the engine compartment and to the standard air-conditioning system.

For the unladen weight of the complete car, Ferrari quotes 2712 lb., though this does not say whether it includes the weight of the fuel in the 27.7-gal. tank, as is normal European practice. The engine accounts for 437 lb. The claimed maximum speed is 202 mph with a 0-60-mph time of 3.7 seconds.

I certainly look forward to driving this Ferrari.—Paul Frère

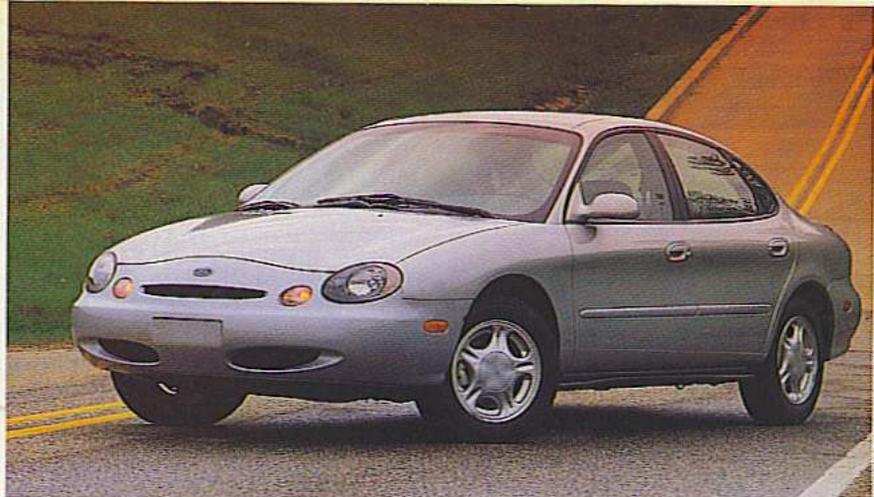


PHOTO BY RON SULLIVANS

1996 FORD TAURUS

PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY are the targets in Ford's crosshairs. The Taurus has been the family-car sales leader for three years now, bar all comers, a title that executives think can be retained as the new sedan and station wagon enter production this fall.

Once again, Taurus and its near clone with more chrome, Mercury Sable, are traveling down an anti-GM design path with about 200 in. of what some say is radical sheet metal. The sedans are roughly 6 in. longer and 2 in. wider than the older, slab-sided designs, but the swooping shapes and a 28-percent increase in glass area disguise the growth. The interior, at 102.5 cu. ft. of space, is slightly larger than last year's.

The Ford Taurus LX sedan concerns us here, the one aimed at the many buyers of the Honda Accord and Toyota Camry sedans. With a new all-aluminum V-6 engine, an electronically controlled 4-speed automatic transaxle, dual airbags and optional Bosch anti-lock brakes, this up-level Taurus has the needed equipment to find its way onto the family-car shopping list. A day of brisk driving of pre-production cars at Ford's Michigan Proving

Grounds on punishing development roads shows that time in Honda and Toyota products has been well spent by the engineering staff.

Impressive immediately are the genial manners of the new 200-bhp 3.0-liter dohc engine. In character the new Cleveland-built engine is balanced, smooth and high revving—virtues import buyers cite in their 4-valve-per-cylinder engines.

This engine comes only with an automatic transaxle, diminishing the joy that comes from selecting a gear and keeping a twincam engine singing above, in this case, the 4000-rpm range where the secondary throttles in the intake manifold are electronically opened and the serious production of horsepower begins. Torque peaks at 200 lb.-ft. at 4500 rpm, and the 200 bhp arrives at 5750 rpm.

A commendable lack of engine noise and vibration, combined with a vastly strengthened unit-body and various tweaks to reduce wind noise, tends to disguise how rapidly the pavement is passing underneath the P205/65R-15 tires. I calculate the Taurus will formally test with mid-8-second 0-to-60-mph times and a 16.5-sec. quarter mile.

Speed isn't the point here; a supple, quiet ride is. While the chassis (Mac-

FORD TAURUS SHO

■ With the production of radical new Taurus and Sable sedan and station wagon models in progress, Ford engineers are turning their attention to the final calibrations of the V-8-powered SHO sedan due in the spring of 1996. At the same time, there's also discussion about giving a badge-engineered version of the SHO to Mercury.

The new, small-displacement, aluminum 4-cam V-8 engine—a joint venture with Yamaha (maker of the current 220-bhp SHO V-6)—is a 60-degree design with a crankshaft-driven, counterrotating balance shaft to eliminate vibrations caused by the uneven firing. Final calibration isn't public yet, but the V-8 is expected to produce at least 230 bhp at 6000 rpm and 225 lb.-ft. of torque at 4800. A manual gearbox won't be offered on the new SHO.

P225/55VR-16 performance tires mounted on 5-spoke chrome wheels will be standard. Anti-roll bars, front and rear, are also larger than stock. Height sensors at each wheel measure wheel-to-body distance for the electronic adjustment of the shock absorbers, toggling between soft and firm rates. The electronic shocks are said to eliminate the traces of family-car float that can be detected in the existing SHO.—Ken Zino

SNEAK PREVIEW

Pherson struts in front and Chapman struts with control arms in back) appears to be carried over, extensive modification of strut mounts, bushings and spring rates allows for greater control of wheel motions.

The power-assisted rack-and-pinion steering exhibited similar refinement, with linear response off-center and—finally from Ford—a boost level that presumes you have non-atrophied forearms and shoulders.

Base price for a 1996 Taurus LX is \$21,680. The equivalent V-6-powered Camry now sells for about \$25,000.

—K.Z.

BMW Z3 ROADSTER

THE MOST RECENT source of mystery emanating from BMW research and development concerns the details of the Z3 roadster.

To be produced by Americans, for Americans (and for export, presumably) at BMW's new plant in Spartanburg, South Carolina, the Z3 is apparently targeted as a higher-priced alternative to the Mazda MX-5 Miata. There is an approximate \$10,000 cost differential between the two, with



■ Available early next year, the BMW Z3 is built off the 3-Series platform. A top speed of 150 mph and a 0-to-60 time of under 7 seconds are projected.



the BMW's reported price tag coming close to \$30,000, but how much this will matter is yet to be seen in a market where the power of the roadster "experience" often defines the car's salability.

BMW will introduce the Z3 at the Detroit auto show next January, and it will be available in showrooms in February, although the public will see it first with James Bond in the mid-November release of *GoldenEye*.

The South Carolina assembly line will build two different 1.8-liter fours for the Z3, producing 115 and 140 bhp, respectively. Speculation about the installation of the 325's new 2.8-liter inline-6 persists.

James Bond might be a perfect fit for the new Z3, but only time will tell if the Z3 fits the U.S. market as well as it does 007.—M. Justin Fort

■ It can't get any better, can it? Porsche tries to improve its best in 1997 with the new 996.



PORSCHE 996

INTRODUCED IN 1963 as the Type 901, Butzi Porsche's unique design evolved as a 911, but never strayed far from its original concept. Nor will it, as these computer-enhanced spy shots prove. Despite obvious visual distinctions (and some significant mechanical ones), the Type 996 is easily recognizable as a 911—for a very good reason: It's the best-selling Porsche ever.

Classic shape and rear-engine layout notwithstanding, there's little (nothing?) of the old 911 left in the new Porsche that shares the front half of its floorpan and its front suspension with the Boxster. Although the 996's front and rear suspensions have been updated (lightened too), conceptually they're identical to the current model that uses MacPherson struts up front and a Weissach-type, multilink setup at the rear. Rumored: cockpit adjustable shock absorbers (a la Chevrolet Corvette and Nissan 300ZX) as a possible option.

In addition to the floorpan, the 996 uses the same water-cooled, dohc 24-valve flat-6 as the Boxster. Enlarged to 3.2 liters, it's said to develop 275 bhp, which seems modest until you consider