



FOR EVERY NEW THUNDERBIRD:

# 12-Mile Factory Test



Checked by teams of skilled drivers,  
new T-Birds are tuned to perfection

BY MELVIN BECK

THE VILLAGE of New Hudson, Michigan, numbering only a few hundred citizens, sees more new Thunderbirds than any community on earth.

This has been true since last November when an expanded program began under which every Thunderbird built is put through an intensive 12-mile road test. The route of this test runs through New

Hudson, and its citizens have by now become accustomed to the steady stream of just-built T-Birds that flows past their village up to 20 hours a day.

Thunderbird is the only car of its class that receives such a thorough testing just prior to delivery. A 12-mile drive doesn't sound so impressive until you know all of the procedures compressed into it.

The test is begun shortly after the completed Thunderbird is driven off

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*Rural roads and highways are used in Thunderbird 12-mile test drive*

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the line. The route starts in the big Wixom plant grounds, includes a circuit of the plant test track, and then twelve miles through rolling farm country on divided highways and rural two-lane roads in a loop that ends back at the plant.

The driver is a skilled observer of automobile behavior, and he is one of 40 or so such drivers at work on each of two shifts. These men, identified by their blue shop coats with "Road Test 12" on the back, spend an hour or more with each car, following recommendations in more than 30 sheets of engineering instructions.

Before the car is taken out on the road, the driver goes over it from bumper to bumper to be sure it is ready to go. He checks the level of all fluids—those for power steering, transmission, brakes—and the engine oil. Doors are opened and shut for proper closing, and during this the door warning lights and courtesy lamps are checked for correct operation. The ignition key is turned and the engine must start

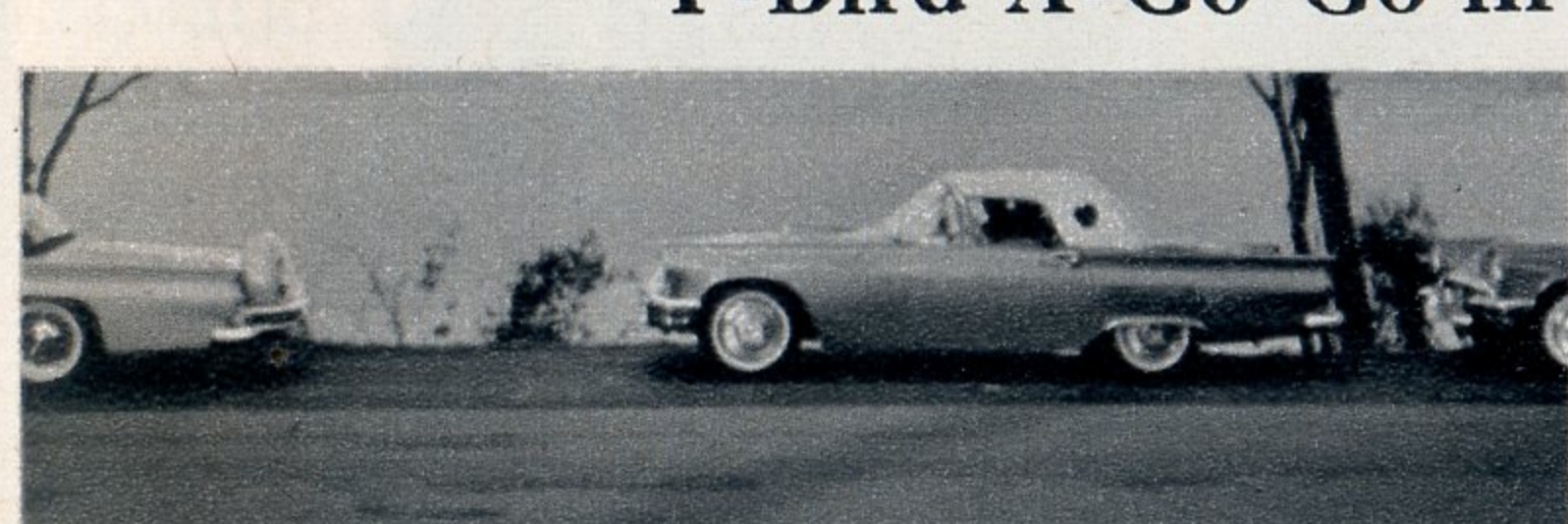
within a specified number of seconds. Levers and pedals are checked, and the amount of foot and hand effort must be within a narrow tolerance. The cigarette lighter must be engaged with no more than eight pounds of finger effort, and its "pop-out" noticeable but not noisy.

After many more pre-drive checks, the Thunderbird is headed out on its unique 12-mile test drive. A pause between an ingenious set of mirrors allows the driver to remain in the car and test the operation of all front and rear lights.

Then the car goes into the test track phase, around a stretch of banked pavement and into a hill climb, the latter to make certain, among other things, that there is no roll-back in the "park" position of the Cruise-O-Matic transmission, and that the holding power of the parking brake is satisfactory.

Out on the highway portion of the drive the transmission is put through its paces—shiftpoints are checked to see that they occur at the proper rate of speed; the "kick-

## T-Bird A-Go-Go in San Francisco



operated by car buffs who are members of the Classic Thunderbird Club, International. To these members there are no T-Birds in existence except those of the vintage two-passenger era. Late in June more than 100 of these members and their cars will attend the club's 1966 T-Bird A-Go-Go convention in Berkeley, California. During the meet people will have the rare treat of seeing these perfectly preserved cars tour the hilly avenues in caravan.

Among the tens of thousands of Thunderbirds running throughout the world today, there is a select group of more than 600 of the 1955, '56, and '57 model years

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down" passing gear is activated to see that it comes into play at the right time.

The engine is accelerated up to 65 mph by day, 55 mph by night, to see that it delivers its power promptly and smoothly, that it moves the car from 0 to 50 mph in a prescribed number of seconds, that accelerator pedal effort is within tolerance, that the speedometer needle is steady. Panic brake tests, checks for driveline vibration, tire thump, and more are included.

During the entire test the driver's observations are recorded on a check list at his side, and any function not up to specifications is writ-

ten down for correction. With every second of the hour-long test taken up in checking the Thunderbird's scores of standard features and options, the drivers utilize two pull-offs on wooded portions of the test road to catch up on their log entries. To designate these places, signs read: "T-Bird Roost."

Cars with check lists that indicate any areas that fall short of specifications are sent back into the factory, reworked, and then are taken for a "re-ride" to make sure corrections have been made.

Only after this intensive inspection is a Thunderbird released for delivery. ■

*Thunderbirds are common sight to citizens of New Hudson, Michigan*



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