

# AUTOMOTIVE

## Ford's New Dashboard: Is It a Better Idea?

It would be a challenging assignment for any designer: into a space a fraction of the size of an small bathroom, cram a bunch of gauges, a network of ducts for hot or cold air, a pair of air bags, a set of sophisticated audio components, a digital clock, several miles of electrical wire and the knobs, buttons and switches to turn it all on and off and up or down.

And don't forget the big "easys" - everything has to be easy to reach and easy to read.

For the 1996 models, Detroit's

dashboard designers are gambling on distinctive new layouts. Ford, for example, is gambling on radical ovals in its Taurus and Sable models, which have undergone a multi-billion-dollar face lift inside and out, the most complete makeover since they first hit the streets 10 years ago.

The centerpiece is an all-in-one unit for the radio, the heater and the air conditioner - an "integrated control panel," in Detroit jargon. It's slightly off-center egg shape carries the roundness of the newly reshaped rear windows and front end into the

passenger compartment.

Ford is not alone, of course. Detroit designers have been asking basic questions about the way they lay out dashboards, which they prefer to call "instrument panels."

What is the best place for the headlight and windshield-wiper controls? Do knobs or sliding switches make the best heater controls? What shape knob is the easiest to twist? Does it make sense to line up the radio or heater controls vertically instead of horizontally?

Dashboards date back to the

horse and buggy.

"When horses dashed, they threw mud up in your face," said Bruce Hannah, the former chairman of the industrial design department at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. The name for this inside front panel stuck even if the mud no longer did. Fast-forward past Henry Ford and the "any color as long as it's black" cars. Since the big-finned models of the 1950s, dashboards have conveyed what Michael McDonough, a New York architect, calls "the big-picture metaphor."

"Airplane? Rocket ship? Living

room?" he said. "Americans want comfort."

Indeed, 25 years ago, Ford advertised the dashboard design for its flagship LTD and Galaxie 500 models as "the front room." It wasn't exactly an old-fashioned front parlor, but it had a clearly defined instrument cluster on the driver's side and a wide, open space with a relatively inconspicuous glove compartment on the right. Ford's original Taurus echoed that theme, even as it brought easy-to-grab knobs to Detroit. (Saab, made in Sweden, already had them.)

But the Taurus and Sable makeover gave both cars softer, rounder silhouettes that approximate Ford's jellybean-shaped trademark. "You can sketch the whole car within that oval," said Ara Ekizian, a Ford design manager who worked on the project.

Inside, the dashboard designers had a chance to rethink the placement of all the elements except the steering wheel. "There are a lot of times where two, three or four are competing to occupy the same space," Ekizian said.

## Keep Your Car Running Cool

Summer temperatures can be as brutal on a poorly maintained automobile as the most chilling winter weather.

"It is trouble for many motorists when the temperature hits 90 degrees, said AAA President Roger Graybeal. "Vehicles with weak batteries may have difficulty starting, air conditioning systems can fail and poorly maintained cooling systems can overheat. Cracked belts may snap and worn hoses can blister and begin leaking as temperatures rise inside and outside the engine.

Have the car inspected by an auto technician to keep vehicles free from heat-related problems. Throughout the summer, motorists can conduct their own visual inspection of hoses, tires and fluid levels, but only when the engine is cold. Keep a list handy of the items that need checking.

Keep the antifreeze/coolant level high to prevent the radiator from overheating. Make certain proper 50/50 mixture of antifreeze and coolant is present. If the coolant is rust colored, have the radiator flushed out. Once every 2 years, have the radiator flushed out.

Check the owner's manual and follow the manufacturer's recommendation. Your car may require a summer grade oil.

Replace cracked belts, and worn, cracked, blistered or soft hoses. A \$15 hose could save as much as \$1,000 in repairs on an overheated engine.

Have the air conditioning system checked for leaks.

Battery performance is compromised by extremes in temperatures. A weak batter should be tested and replaced.

Keep you engine tuned-up. A

misfiring spark plug can reduce fuel efficiency by up to 30 percent.

Check your tire pressure. Under-inflated tires can overheat, increase wear, reduce fuel efficiency and make your vehicle handling more difficult.

Rotate and balance your car's tires every 6,000 to 8,000 miles. It will help guard against blow-outs.

Motorists can keep the cabin area cooler by using a cardboard sunshade in the windshield when the car is parked. Avoid discomfort and minor burns by shading the vinyl and plastic surfaces of the car's interior. It will also help prevent cracks in the seats, dashboard and doors.

"Even a well-maintained car can bread down," said Graybeal. It is a good idea to carry drinking water. Also, carry a cellular telephone or a citizens band radio so you can call for help."

## Road Construction Information Available

Over 180 Department of Transportation road improvement projects are underway throughout Oregon. The odds are not in your favor - you're bound to run into one of them.

There is something you can do about it.

An Oregon Road Construction informational brochure is available that will let you know where the road projects are, plan for the delays or avoid the construction entirely.

Nearly 100 projects are listed. If the route you're taking is not shown, you can call ODOT's Road Construction Hotline numbers at 731-3081 for the Portland area, or 1-503-976-7277 (30 cents toll) or 1-503-889-3999 (long distance rate). The phone reports include

ODOT construction and maintenance delay information on routes, in addition to those shown on the brochure. The brochure is available at Transportation, Department of Motor Vehicles and State Police offices and at visitor information centers and chambers of commerce around the state.

Also, the new 1995-96 ODOT Official Highway Map of Oregon is available now at the same locations.

Officials also remind motorists to remember to obey all work zone signing, stay alert for construction related traffic impacts, watch out for construction workers and remember that when it comes to road construction workers: "Give 'Em A Brake."

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