

FOUR SEASONS REVIEW

1998 LINCOLN TOWN CAR

By Kimatni D. Rawlins



Photo by Joel Radik

The all-new luxury sport-utility segment that has surfaced in the last five years with the Lincoln Navigator, Lexus LX470 and, most recently, Cadillac Escalade, has diverted attention and sales away from luxury passenger cars. Back in the day, when you thought of luxury, one of the marques that immediately came to mind was Lincoln.

Now Lincoln is trying to regain that status with its redesigned Town Car. This \$44,000 luxury touring sedan is a far departure from its predecessors. But even with all the changes, it's still perceived as a car for my Dad, or even his Dad.

At any rate, I spent the winter testing the car on D.C. roads. Unfortunately, it was like a magnet for cops: twice I was stopped for what I thought was no apparent reason. Each time the tags and license checked out, and I was free to go with no citation given. But the question nagged me: Why can't a young man drive a Lincoln?

But as I continued to think about it and continued to drive it, something else hit me: Why would a young man want to buy a Lincoln?

The rounded rear, curvaceous design and touches of chrome draw you to the car. The stylish exterior is a bit of a surprise given the size of the Town Car, which is among the largest passenger cars on the market today. No doubt, it makes

a distinctive statement in a big way, packing a lot of personality.

Unfortunately, once inside the car, you are disappointed, as you face a dashboard dating back to the 1970s.

Sure it has all of the knobs and buttons to activate the amenities, but it just looks plain, dull, uninspired — an after thought.

This is a stark contrast to the wraparound dashboards found in European makes.

Still, there are a lot of features in the Lincoln that would appeal to drivers of any age. These vehicles are comfortable, and the seats offer the flexibility of movement you would expect in a luxury car. The brutally cold weather forced me to turn on the heated seat, which is warm and pleasant. You might want to monitor the heating level, because it doesn't take long for the heat to kick in.

What the interior lacks in appeal, it makes up in space, seating six comfortably. Large, heated side view mirrors allow for greater visibility. The trunk can easily hold enough gear to outfit a basketball team and groceries to feed them afterward. The large trunk was especially helpful during the holidays when it held loads of packages.

An improved suspension helps the Town Car's handling while keeping the ride classically smooth. Power is another issue. The 4.6-liter V8 produces 220-horsepower in the Signature model we're testing, 20 more than the base model. Yet

it feels weighted down when fully occupied. It's chief competitor, the Cadillac DeVille, gets a 300-horsepower engine as its top choice.

During adverse weather conditions, traction control and Michelin all-season 16-inch tires kept the Town Car in full control. This allowed me to continue my busy schedule while others were restrained by the Blizzard of '99's icy effects.

Driver conveniences, like the analog, six-message information center, found on the left of the instrument panel, are helpful but can also be a nuisance, as is the miles-to-empty message, which lights up at the fifty-mile mark — something that occurred all-too frequently in this gas-guzzling car. At 17,000 miles, our Town Car is in great health. A slow leak, which led to a flat when the car was docile for long periods, was our only impediment. However, the full-service warranty took care of that.

All in all, the 1998 Town Car is a pure beauty with added value, yet it needs more beef in its V8 and a little more spice in the interior to draw a younger buyer.

THIRD OF FOUR REVIEWS

SPECIFICATIONS

Base Price.....	\$39,680
Price as tested.....	\$44,140
Engine.....	220 horsepower, 4.6-liter V8
Transmission.....	4-speed automatic
EPA mileage.....	17 city/25highway
Mileage to date.....	17,000