



November 2025

Newsletter

*"Moving Forward"*



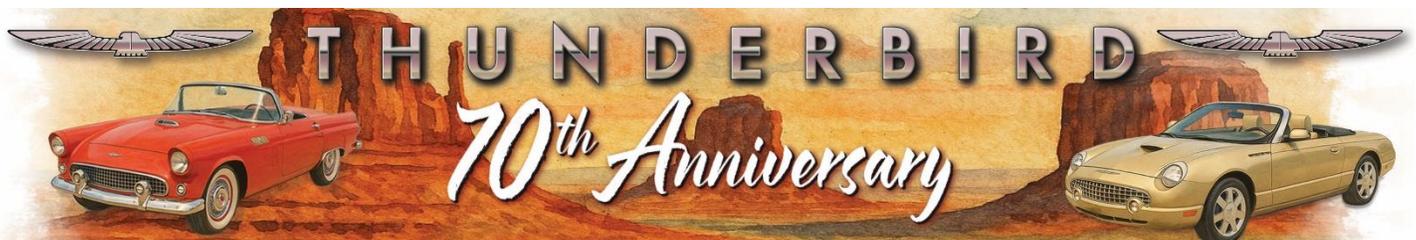
## 70 Years of Thunderbird!

Our current exhibit, "70 years of Thunderbird!", running until January 2026, is a celebration of the iconic Ford Thunderbird from the model's introduction in 1955 until the end of production in 2005. This exhibit is a showcase for the enduring legacy of this legendary model.

From a 1955 Convertible in "Torch Red" through a 2005 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition, as seen below – both are now part of the Forney



collection thanks to a very generous donation from the Forney family in memory of Patricia Forney; both Thunderbirds having been hers. With so many highlights in between, we have over two dozen Thunderbirds on display with examples from all eleven generations. With so many to see, you won't want to miss this exhibit! So make plans to come to the Forney Museum today, and check out "70 Years of Thunderbird!"



## Who wants to win a new Corvette?

As part of a very important fundraising campaign, the Forney Museum is holding a sweepstakes drawing for one lucky person to win a 2026 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray! This is an exciting opportunity that we are thrilled to offer, and money raised goes to support the Museum. There are also drawings for monthly



flash prizes, so if you have already entered then you can enter again for more chances to win! November will see up to \$2000 in free entries given away, so scan the QR Code to go to the sweepstakes website, or visit the web address [www.forneysweeps.org](http://www.forneysweeps.org) and donate today! All entries must be made by May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026, so don't miss out and enter today!



## This Month in Transportation History

**November 16, 1860** - The first permanent lighthouse on the west coast of Canada was lit just off Vancouver Island, which was a separate British colony at the time and not yet integrated with British Columbia. Located at the narrow entrance to Esquimalt Harbor on the island's southern tip, and about seven miles from the town and colony capital of Victoria, Fisgard Lighthouse served a vital navigational purpose as harbor traffic was increasing after gold was discovered in British Columbia in the 1850s. Automated in the 1920s, Fisgard Lighthouse was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 1958, and remains a popular tourist attraction to this day.

**November 21, 1913** - the first wireless messages, a major technological breakthrough, were sent in Morse code via radio telegraphy, between a railroad station and a train crew on the move. The Lackawanna Limited No. 3, leaving the station in Scranton, Pennsylvania maintained radio contact

with that station for 10 minutes en route. The second test of the system went even better as contact was maintained for the entire 30 mile journey between Binghamton and Oswego, New York.

**November 21, 1925** - The deluxe passenger train “The Orange Blossom Special” made its first regular run between New York and Florida. Envisioned as a means to increase travel from North to South in the winter, the Special was only run during the colder months of the year and ultimately covered a regular route of over 1,388 miles between New York City and Miami, Florida – with a branch line to Tampa and St. Petersburg on Florida’s west coast. Famous for luxurious amenities, the train inspired the iconic bluegrass song *Orange Blossom Special*, performed and recorded by many artists including Bill Monroe, Chet Atkins, Charlie Daniels and Johnny Cash. The last run of this iconic train was in 1953.

**November 11, 1935** - US Army Air Corps Captains Albert Stevens and Orvil Anderson, flying in the high-altitude helium balloon *Explorer II*, achieved a record altitude for manned balloon flight of 72,395 feet – over 13.7 miles! Launching from the Black Hills National Forest in South Dakota, *Explorer II* would travel 225 miles in the air before landing safely near White Lake, South Dakota eight hours later. This flight altitude record would stand until 1956, when the *Strato-Lab High I* balloon reached an altitude of 76,000 feet – 14.4 miles – from the same launch point in South Dakota.

**November 25, 1949** - A major milestone was reached as the one-millionth Cadillac, a Coupe de Ville, rolled off the production line, a little more than 47 years after the very first Cadillac had been built. From the earliest days of the company, through the acquisition by General Motors in 1909, Cadillac had been at the forefront of automotive design, pioneering many features that would later become standard across the industry. The two millionth Cadillac, a Sedan de Ville, would be produced a short nine years later in 1958.

**November 29, 1987** - Australian sailor Kay Cottee departed from Sydney Harbor on board her 37-foot yacht *Blackmores First Lady* to begin a solo circumnavigation of the globe. While staying in radio contact with relatives and Australian media throughout the easterly 23,000 mile voyage, Cottee had no in-person contact with any other vessels or individuals on the journey. When she sailed back into Sydney Harbor 189 days later, Cottee had made history as the first woman to sail around the world solo, non-stop and without any assistance.

## Free Day

On Friday, November 28<sup>th</sup> the Forney Museum will be opening its doors for another Science & Cultural Facilities District Free Day! Just in time for Black Friday, you can bring the whole family to the Museum – and maybe get some Christmas shopping done at the same time! We plan to have some of the rail equipment open for tours on this day, so if you have ever wanted to sit inside the cab of the Big Boy #4005, now you can. This will be a fun day for the whole family, so don’t miss out on the Forney Museum SCFD Black Friday Free Day on November 28<sup>th</sup>!



## “Jingle Bell Ball” at the Forney!

Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup> at 6 PM the Forney Museum will be hosting the Jingle Bell Ball. This will be a night of music and dancing to ring in the Holidays, featuring a big band, swing dance lessons, a vintage fashion show, WWII historic reenactors, vendors and more! Music will be provided by Bianca and the Flyboys, featuring special guests the Holiday Belles. Celebrating among all the vintage cars, with our holiday display as a backdrop, this is a unique and wonderful opportunity to come celebrate the season with us. Tickets are on sale now at [www.jinglebellball.org](http://www.jinglebellball.org) so make plans today to come join us for the Jingle Bell Ball on December 5<sup>th</sup>!



## Volunteer Birthdays

11/1 - Carroll Reichen

11/22 - William Sander

11/5 - Ben Aycrigg

11/27 - Jeff Dwight

11/8 - Doug Fox

11/27 - Greg Dwight

11/8 - David Torres

## The Museum needs YOU!

Anyone interested in volunteering or donating please reach out to us at the museum or email [volunteer@forneymuseum.org](mailto:volunteer@forneymuseum.org)

# Forney Vehicle Spotlight

## 1955 Thunderbird Hardtop Convertible

The Ford Thunderbird was an iconic, sporty “personal luxury vehicle” designed by Ford in the early 1950s. Credit for the idea that would develop into the Thunderbird is widely given to Lewis Crusoe, a former GM executive who was enticed out of retirement by Henry Ford II. The story goes that Crusoe and Ford Vice-President George Walker met in France in 1951, and while walking in the Grand Palais in Paris, Crusoe found inspiration in the European sports cars on display. Walker was so taken by the concept of a Ford sports car, that he telephoned Ford headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan and relayed the idea to Frank Hershey, chief stylist of the Ford division.

The early 1950s were an interesting time in the American automotive market. With so many GIs returning to civilian life after the war, there was a rising demand for



American cars similar to the sports cars the men had seen in Europe. By 1953, Ford had designed a prototype two-seat roadster, named the Vega, and while response was positive, the car was viewed as too expensive, too European and too low powered for domestic success.

However, 1953 saw one other innovation that forced Ford back to the drawing board on an American sports car, the introduction of the first

Chevrolet Corvette. Frank Hershey got to work designing Ford’s counter to the new concept with the goal of producing a two-passenger open car powered by a 252 cubic inch Ford Y-block Interceptor V8 based on a new overhead-valve Ford engine to be released for the 1954 model year. A clay model, very similar to the final design, was produced by May 1953, Lewis Crusoe gave final approval for the design in September. Henry Ford II approved the final design after returning from the 1953 Los Angeles Auto Show (Autorama) and the Thunderbird was officially slated to be Ford’s answer to the Corvette.



Thousands of names for the new model were considered, with some highlights being



the Falcon (a name owned by Chrysler at the time), Apache, Eagle, Tropicale, Hawaiian or the interestingly named Thunderbolt – so similar to the final choice. A Ford stylist who had lived in the American Southwest, suggested the name Thunderbird in reference to the powerful mythological bird of Native American myth. The origin of the name might have a

much simpler explanation, however, as Ernest Beech, at that time the chairman of Ford Motor Company, was a member of the Thunderbird Country Club in Rancho Mirage, California. Whatever the ultimate origin of the Thunderbird name, it was a wise choice as the name is as recognizable and iconic as the car itself, and soon was widely known by its nickname, “T-bird.”

The Thunderbird went through an accelerated development cycle, and quickly went from concept to prototype within a year. The Thunderbird was unveiled to the public at the Detroit Auto Show on February 20, 1954, as a two-seat convertible, available with a folding fabric top, or a detachable fiberglass hardtop. Production would begin in September of 1954, and the first Thunderbirds were sold as 1955 models in October of 1954.



Although conceived and developed as a competitor to the Corvette, Ford marketing materials at the time of the launch focused on the Thunderbird’s comfort and



convenience options as a “personal car of distinction,” deemphasizing the Thunderbird’s sportiness as a bid to distinguish the new Ford model from Chevrolet’s new design. The Thunderbird came as a true convertible with roll-up windows, power steering, and three different transmission options so that the Thunderbird could be either a luxury cruiser or a very

sporty car. The Ford Thunderbird is often credited with creating a brand new market segment; the personal luxury car.

Indeed, despite the competition with Chevrolet, the Thunderbird shared many design features and characteristics with other Ford models of the time. The single circular headlamps and tail lamps, and the modest tailfins were shared across most of Ford's 1955 line-up, but the sleeker profile sported a hood scoop and the dash console featured a 150 MPH speedometer not available on other Ford vehicles. Continuing the theme of sharing Ford philosophies and components with a brand new look, the Thunderbird had a 102 inch wheelbase frame that was a shortened version of those used in other Fords, and the new "Thunderbird V8" engine came from the company's Mercury division.



This concept of a new luxury design that was still recognizably a Ford was yet another difference from the Corvette, which carried little resemblance to other Chevy offerings, and it must have helped catch the public's imagination because the Thunderbird was an instant success – 16,155 Thunderbirds sold in the 1955 model year; Corvette sold 700!



Standard features on the Thunderbird included a fiberglass hardtop, along with the built-in fabric drop top, for use in inclement weather, a wide-

angle windshield and roll-up safety glass side windows, a telescopically adjustable steering wheel, one-piece form-contoured bucket seat, recessed door handles for better streamlining and an all-new "Astra-Dial" wraparound control panel that blends into both door panels. A push-button AM radio, heater/defroster, clock, tachometer and 150 MPH speedometer can all be found on this control panel. Options featured on this 1955 Thunderbird include a variety of different powered assist features: from big systems like power steering down to small touches like a 4-way powered seat, power windows and windshield washers. The "Torch Red" exterior with red and white vinyl interior are complimented by the classic white wall tires. One unique feature of the 1955 model is the lack of flip-down sun-visors.



The overall length was only 175.3 inches, and along with a total height just over 52



inches they gave the Thunderbird a much lower and sportier look than other Fords. The all-steel body helped distinguish it from the Corvette's extensive use of fiberglass, yet a curb weight for the car around 2,800 pounds was still considered lightweight for the time. With a light weight and a big engine, the Thunderbird looked like a sports car of the era, but Ford was focused more on

comfort than speed. A ball-joint front suspension along with the standard four wheel hydraulic brakes complemented a chassis built for a smooth ride, and the transmission on this vehicle, one of three options provided by Ford, is a "Ford-O-Matic" 3-speed floor-shifted automatic.

Although originally conceived with a 252 cubic inch Ford Y-block Interceptor V8 engine, Ford actually introduced a brand new engine in the 1955 model year just to power the new Thunderbird. This Thunderbird Special is a 292 cubic inch, overhead valve, cast iron Y-block V8, with a 4-barrel Holley carburetor that was rated at 198 horsepower and 286 ft-lbs of torque. This powerplant allowed the Thunderbird to reach



speeds up to 115 miles per hour! Although rated at 193 horsepower in vehicles with a standard transmission, the automatic transmission Thunderbirds had a higher compression ratio, contributing to a higher horsepower rating. This engine shared the 3.3 inch stroke of the standard Ford V8, but it featured a larger 3.75 inch bore, further distinguishing the Thunderbird engine from the rest of Ford's offerings. Aluminum



pistons and the short-stroke, low-friction design provided a modern touch to the design, and an interesting feature of this engine is the true "ram air" as the hood scoop is mated to the oil-bath air cleaner via a rubber seal.

Despite all of the new design features, the Thunderbird was marketed on the interchangeability of parts with other Ford

vehicles, with ad materials emphasizing that “though the Thunderbird is distinctively new and different, it is so engineered and built that it can be serviced by Ford dealers – everywhere.” Sharing parts also allowed Ford to offer the new Thunderbird at a base price of \$2,944 or \$3,764 as equipped on this example.

Whether the bold new look, the powerful new engine or the affordable price point, the 1955 Thunderbird proved to be a hit, selling over 16,000 vehicles of a new model of which Ford

had only expected to sell 10,000 units. The company knew a good thing when it had one, and capitalized by keeping the design much the same for 1956, before a minor redesign in 1957 and a brand new generation starting in the 1958 model year. Ford



would continue to produce new Thunderbirds until 1998, before reintroducing a new “retro” Thunderbird from 2001 until 2005. From introduction in 1955 until the last Thunderbird rolled off the line in 2005, over 4.4 million Thunderbirds were produced!

This classic 1955 Thunderbird was donated to the Forney Museum by the Forney family in September 2025, in memory of Patricia Forney, and can be seen on display now as part of our “70 Years of Thunderbird” exhibit.



## Memberships

Become a Forney Museum Member TODAY! We have memberships in many different levels to fit your particular needs, with options available for as low as \$50, the right membership for you can be purchased in the museum gift shop or online at [forneymuseum.org](http://forneymuseum.org). Memberships are good for one year and make great gifts, so help support the Forney by buying a membership today!

## Community Rewards Program

The Forney Museum has joined the King Soopers/City Market Community Rewards Program. For those unfamiliar with this program, it allows King Soopers or City Market loyalty reward



members to link a non-profit or charity to their loyalty card. For every purchase made with that card, King Soopers/City Market will donate a percentage of the amount to the organization you choose. What this means is that you can now support the Museum simply by purchasing groceries, at no cost to you! In fact, with the deals available to loyalty reward members, you can save money at the checkout and raise money for the Museum at the same time!

Please join today by simply visiting <https://www.kingsoopers.com/account/communityrewards> and log in as a member. From there you can search for the Forney Museum of Transportation and enroll. This is a fantastic opportunity, and we are thankful to King Soopers/City Market for their generosity and outreach to the local community.

## General Museum Needs

We are putting out the call for several items that are needed here at the museum. If you see anything in this section that you think you would be able to donate to the museum to help us with our operations please reach out to our Assistant Director, Dan at [asstdirector@forneymuseum.org](mailto:asstdirector@forneymuseum.org), or call the museum at (303) 297-1113.

- 1) Diesel pickup in running, serviceable condition
- 2) Enclosed trailer (20-foot or longer) to transport Forney Museum vehicles safely & securely
- 3) Modern tire changing machine in working order
- 4) Modern wheel balancing machine in working order
- 5) Late model minivan in serviceable condition

Thank you to everyone who has already donated!

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The Forney Newsletter team is:

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Special Thanks to all of our readers!

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- The type of browser and operating system you use to access our Website
- The date and time you access our Website

The pages, files, documents and links you access on our Website We collect non-personal information to help us evaluate and improve how our Website works and to learn how and from where visitors access it. This information is stored and used, but is not tied to your name and does not identify you as an individual. Neither the Museum nor any third party will use this information to contact you personally.

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Personal information includes information that identifies you as an individual and is linked to your name including:

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- Your email address
- Your mailing address
- Your telephone number
- Credit card or other financial information
- Demographic information (e.g. age, size of household)

The Museum will only collect personal information that is voluntarily and knowingly provided, such as when you fill out a membership, donation, or order forms, or if you sign up for a program or event, agree to participate in a survey, or request communications from the Museum. The Museum will use this information to respond to your inquiry. Under no circumstances should you email credit card or other secure information. Square is a secure interchange of such information.

## **Survey Responses**

The Museum may invite you to participate in one of our surveys that provide the Museum with valuable feedback about our exhibits and programs as well as information about visitors' experiences, preferences and needs. These surveys may request certain personal information including household and demographic information. Participation in surveys is completely voluntary and you may choose whether or not to disclose this information to us. You may be given the opportunity during the survey to opt in to further communications from the Museum, but your contact information will not be associated with your survey responses or the provided demographic information. The Museum may use third party service providers to conduct surveys or analyze survey data; such service providers will not use your personal information for any other purpose. We will not share any personal information gathered through a survey with other third parties without giving you prior notice and an opportunity to opt out.

## **Children's Information**

The Museum does not knowingly collect personal information from children under 13 years of age. If personal information regarding a child is required for program participation or similar reasons, the Museum will collect this information from the child's parent or guardian. If a child sends an email to the Museum, we will only use that address and any information provided only to respond to the particular inquiry and will not retain or use the information for any other purpose.

## **How to Opt Out of Museum Communications**

You may opt out of receiving further communications from the Museum at any time. Any communication sent to you by the Museum will include an unsubscribe link or other instructions that will allow you to opt out of future communications.

## **Information Security**

The Museum takes industry-standard precautions to protect the personal information it receives, both online and offline, from unauthorized access, as does the third party service providers who may work with us.

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