

Information for New Classic Thunderbird Owners

*Adapted From the Potomac Classic Thunderbird
Club Website* (Copyright 2004, SAW)

Congratulations! If this is your first classic Thunderbird (or you're dreaming of owning one) then this page is for you! This discussion assumes that you're interested more in **driving** your car than in owning a non-driven show vehicle.

Probably the most important things you need to know are:

1. What documentation is out there, and where do I get it?
2. Where can I find parts and accessories?
3. Where can I get it repaired?
4. How do I register and insure it?
5. How do I find other folks with similar interests?
6. Where else do I go if I have a question?

Documentation

A half-century old car is very different from modern cars. Better in many ways! You don't need a computer to work on it, but it drives differently and is maintained differently than that modern car in your garage. Fifteen thousand mile service intervals? Stopping as fast as a car with disk brakes? No way! Your life with your new car will be much easier if you have the right reference material. Plus, if your car has had parts removed or replaced with non-stock modifications this will help you get back to snuff (if you care). Here is the essential minimum set of documentation (available for each model year):

1. *Owners Handbook* -- Remember, we said they drive differently, and have different service intervals?
2. *Shop Manual* -- This is a good place to start if you need to do something with your car.

Some of us keep both garage and armchair copies of each. In addition, you will eventually want:

1. *Electrical Manual* -- You'll want this if you ever do any electrical work on the car (available for each model year).
2. *Trim & Sealer Manual* -- This is good for upholstery, weather stripping, etc. (available for each model year).
3. *1949-1959 Ford Parts and Accessories Book* -- Diagrams of almost everything, and more detailed descriptions on individual parts.
4. *CTCI Restoration Details & Specifications (with Addenda)* -- Lots of excellent photographs to help put your car into factory condition.
5. *CTCI Concours and Touring Division Rules* -- In addition to information on how judging is done, there is an excellent guide on the correct color and finish of many parts.
6. Back issues of *The EarlyBird* -- These contain lots of good technical info, and can be obtained both from CTCI and on EBay. A searchable index for *The EarlyBird* is available on the CTCI web site.

Finding Parts and Accessories

There are many excellent companies that specialize in providing parts, accessories, and documentation for our cars. You can find them on our links page. Patronizing these companies will help to ensure that they remain a viable source of parts for the future.

In addition, you can accessorize and upgrade certain parts of our cars to more modern technologies. The number one modification all should consider is a Pertronix Ignitor II. For under \$100 and about 10 minutes of your time you can make a huge difference in the performance and gas mileage of your car. (Don't worry about the ballast resistor and connect both wires directly to the coil.) Radial tires are probably the number two modification you should consider.

E-Bay is another source for parts, especially those not available from our parts suppliers. Of course, buyer beware.

Finally, swap meets are a source. These can be found everywhere, but excellent ones occur at Carlisle, PA several times a year.

Getting It Repaired

Tires, belts, hoses, oil changes, etc. aren't usually a problem with your local garage. More significant repairs, such as mechanical, body, or electrical, can be a lot tougher to get done -- both in finding someone competent and also willing to do the work. This is where belonging to a club can really help, since other folks in the club at least know where to get work done, and many are available to either do it for you or at least show you how to do it yourself. Many retirees from all walks of life have turned antique auto repair into a second career.

An additional source is often the same specialty companies that will sell you parts and accessories. You can find them on our links page. Unfortunately, it's likely these companies won't be local to you. Typically, this means that using them, due to distance, is often limited to significant restoration jobs.

Registration and Insurance

There are many options to register and insure your car for less than your everyday car costs, especially if you have a good driving record. Most, probably all states have discounted antique vehicle registration, some of which also permit use of year-of-manufacture license plates (which aren't hard to find). Antique vehicle registration does tend to limit the mileage and use for your car, but this usually isn't a problem.

Antique vehicle insurance can also be a bargain, again, with limitations on mileage and use for your car. Make sure you get "agreed value" insurance -- what your car is worth on the market -- otherwise a loss may only be paid at the Blue Book rate (not good!).

You can find more information on registration and insurance on our links page.

Finding Like-Minded Folks

This is easy! Join The Classic Thunderbird Club International (CTCI), and also join a local chapter. You can go to the CTCI web site for membership information, and also to find a local chapter. CTCI clubs have a lot of fun activities; folks exist with knowledge at all levels about our cars; and *The EarlyBird*, the official publication of CTCI, is a great source of information. CTCI also sells much of the documentation mentioned. There are other excellent Thunderbird clubs out there, but CTCI is the only club that focuses solely on 1955-1957 Classic Thunderbirds. You can belong to more than one club!

Happy T-Birding!