

FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1959 Ford Thunderbird Restoration Guide

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Factory-Correct Restoration Reference

1959 Ford Thunderbird Restoration Guide

Model Years 1959

Model year	1959
Generation	Square Bird (second generation)
Engine	352 cu in FE V8 (430 MEL optional)
Output	300 hp (430 MEL: 350 hp)
Transmission	3-speed manual or Cruise-O-Matic automatic
Production	67,456

Every specification in this guide was checked against factory literature, marque references, period road tests, and documented survivor vehicles. Where sources disagree or the record is silent, this guide says so rather than guessing.

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How This Guide Works

This is a **single-year restoration** guide for the 1959 Ford Thunderbird - one model year, given its own guide because the year changes are the restoration: specifications, finishes and procedures that differ from the year before and the year after are called out in the 1959 Register below, and shared platform material is labeled as shared. Ford factory shop manuals 1958-1966; Vintage Thunderbird Club marque references; period road tests; Motor Trend Car of the Year record.

Scope. This guide covers the 1959 Ford Thunderbird as built. Neighboring years appear only where a change boundary must be drawn - a part or procedure belonging to another year is named as such, never silently applied to this one.

Platform Snapshot

Fact	Detail
Model year	1959
Engine (standard)	352 cu in FE V8 (430 MEL optional)
Output	300 hp (430 MEL: 350 hp)
Transmission	3-speed manual or Cruise-O-Matic automatic
Chassis	Unibody; 113 in wheelbase; revised rear suspension
Original list price	Hardtop class carried from 1958 with detail changes
Production	67,456

The 1959 Register - What Makes a 1959 a 1959

- Square Bird, year two: the changes are a new grille pattern, revised badging and nameplates, and a modified hood scoop - trim-level changes over the 1958 structure, which is why originality on a 1959 is judged on trim correctness.
- The 430 cu in MEL V8 (350 hp) joins the option list - Lincoln's big engine in the Thunderbird, and the top 1959 power option.
- Rear suspension is revised for 1959 - check the fitted specification against the 1959 manual rather than assuming 1958 hardware.
- Sales nearly doubled to 67,456 - the four-seat formula proving itself in its first full year.

Engines - the 1959 Specification

Engine	Output	Notes
352 FE V8	300 hp	Standard
430 MEL V8	350 hp	Optional; MEL (Mercury-Edsel-Lincoln) big-block family

The 430 MEL is NOT an FE: different block family, different parts book. A 430 car must be restored as a 430 car - FE manifolds and accessories do not transfer.

Decode the engine from the data plate before any parts order; 352 and 430 cars look alike at ten paces.



Year-Correct Procedures

Rear-suspension service follows the revised 1959 specification - bushings and settings differ from the 1958 launch hardware.

Unibody inspection discipline carries over from 1958: structure first, cosmetics second.

Finishes and Trim - 1959 Only

- 1959 grille and badge placement are the year's exterior signature - the grille mesh pattern is the fastest 1958/1959 separator at the front.
- Two round taillight units per side continue for 1959 - the triple-unit lamps are a 1960 change.

Restoration Sequence Notes

- Photograph and record the car's tags, casting numbers and as-found trim before teardown - on a single-year restoration the as-found evidence is what the finished car is judged against.
- Verify every year-locked item in the 1959 Register before ordering parts; the commonest defect in this model's restorations is a neighboring year's part fitted without malice and without record.
- Keep a build file: sources consulted, measurements taken, and every substitution made, however small.

Recommended for this restoration

Shop exact-fit supplies on Amazon

- Ford FE 352 390 428 engine rebuild gasket set
- 1958-1966 Ford Thunderbird weatherstrip kit
- Ford Thunderbird sequential turn signal sequencer

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Sources Consulted

Ford factory shop manuals 1958-1966; Vintage Thunderbird Club marque references; period road tests; Motor Trend Car of the Year record. Where sources disagreed, the disagreement is recorded in this guide's corrections file and the disputed figure is not asserted.

Thank you for restoring a 1959 Ford Thunderbird the way it was built - one year at a time. - RestorationEssentials