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The opening pages of

1973 Ford Bronco Restoration Guide

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RESTORATION ESSENTIALS

1973 Ford Bronco

Factory-Correct Restoration Guide

RestorationEssentials single-year guide · Model year 1973 only · Early Bronco (first generation), 92-inch wheelbase

KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

- **Model year covered:** 1973 only. This guide does not cover other years except where differences from 1973 are explicitly noted.
- **Body styles (1973):** U15 Wagon only — the pickup is discontinued.
- **Engines (1973):** 200 cu in inline six (S) — 84 hp (SAE net); 302 cu in V8 (G) — Net rating — see note.
- **Transmission (1973):** 3-speed manual standard. NEW: C4 three-speed automatic optional — V8 only (Consumer Guide). With the automatic comes the J-handle transfer-case shifter; a 1973 manual truck could still be built with the T-handle or the J-shifter.
- **Front axle / brakes (1973):** Dana 44; Drums all around.
- **Production (1973):** 21,894 wagons (Consumer Guide). Hagerty cites 26,300 built and calls 1973 the best seller to that point — the two records conflict; see the corrections file..

1. Manufacturer history: Ford

Ford Motor Company was incorporated on June 16, 1903. By the mid-1960s Ford had deep four-wheel-drive experience — it had built more than 270,000 Jeeps during World War II and designed the M151 MUTT in 1951 — but no civilian off-roader of its own. Product manager Donald Frey and Lee Iacocca saw Jeep's CJ-5 and International Harvester's Scout selling strongly and wanted a share of that market.

The Bronco, introduced in August 1965 as a 1966 model, was Ford's answer: a purpose-built short-wheelbase (92-inch) 4x4 on its own box-section frame, shared with no other Ford line, with coil-sprung Mono-Beam front suspension, radius arms, and a track bar — a more civilized machine than the CJ, with roll-up windows, a padded dash, and a fully synchronized three-speed. It ran twelve model years essentially unchanged in outline, evolving by accumulation — safety equipment, a stronger front axle, an automatic, power steering, disc brakes — before the full-size F-Series-based Bronco replaced it for 1978.

2. Model history: the early Bronco, and where 1973 sits

The first-generation Bronco ran 1966–1977 on its own chassis: U13 Roadster, U14 half-cab Pickup, and U15 Wagon at launch; the Roadster ended after 1968, the Pickup after 1972, and the Wagon carried the line alone to 1977. The changes that matter, in order: safety equipment and the Sport package (1967), federal markers and the end of the 289 and the Roadster (1968), the 302 and a strengthened body (1969), Sport as a trim level (1970), the Dana 44 front axle and the Stroppe Baja Bronco (1971), net ratings, the J-pattern shifter, and the Ranger package (1972), the 200 six, the C4 automatic, and power steering (1973), detail-only changes (1974), the V8-only range (1975), front disc brakes and quicker steering (1976), and the final-year revisions (1977). This guide covers 1973 only; the year-change register in Section 3 states exactly what 1973 changed, what it kept, and what it ended.

3. What is unique about the 1973 Bronco

- The convenience year: the C4 automatic and power steering reach the Bronco option list for the first time on regular production — both tied to the 302 V8. This is the change that broadened the Bronco's buyer base, and 1973 is the pivot year of the whole twelve-year run.
- The 200 six replaces the 170 as the standard engine (VIN code S). A 1973 six-cylinder Bronco is a 200, never a 170.
- Wagon-only range: with the pickup gone, every 1973 Bronco is a U15.
- The automatic's installation brings the J-handle transfer-case shifter with it; manual-transmission trucks straddle the T/J changeover this year.

Year-change register — 1973 vs. the year before:

- NEW: 200 six (84 hp net); C4 automatic option (V8 only); power steering option (V8 only); J-handle shifter with automatic.
- DELETED: U14 Pickup; 170 six.
- CARRIED OVER: Dana 44, Ford 9-inch rear, drum brakes.

4. Technical restoration data — 1973 Ford Bronco

4.1 Specification table (1973)

Item	1973 specification
Body styles	U15 Wagon only — the pickup is discontinued
Transmission / transfer case	3-speed manual standard. NEW: C4 three-speed automatic optional — V8 only (Consumer Guide). With the automatic comes the J-handle transfer-case shifter; a 1973 manual truck could still be built with the T-handle or the J-shifter.
Front axle	Dana 44
Rear axle	Ford 9-inch
Brakes	Drums all around
Steering	Power steering offered for the first time — V8 only (Consumer Guide). The Baja Bronco's Stroppe-fitted system (1971–72) is the only earlier exception.
Production	21,894 wagons (Consumer Guide). Hagerty cites 26,300 built and calls 1973 the best seller to that point — the two records conflict; see the corrections file.
Prices	Not printed — see the corrections file.
Colors	17 colors (Hagerty).

Engines (1973):

Engine	Rating	Notes
200 cu in inline six (S)	84 hp (SAE net)	NEW standard engine — the veteran Ford 200 replaces the 170. Offered through 1974 in the Bronco.
302 cu in V8 (G)	Net rating — see note	Required for the new automatic and power-steering options. Motor Trend's buyer's guide summarizes the later 302 at 137 hp net — a period summary figure, printed here with attribution, not as a 1973 factory sheet value.

4.2 VIN and warranty-plate decoding

The VIN is carried on the warranty plate on the inner face of the glovebox door, and the same number is stamped on top of the right frame rail near the passenger footwell / body mount. The two must match; the frame stamp governs when they disagree. The warranty plate also carries paint, trim, axle, transmission, and DSO codes — decode the plate, then verify the axle ratio against the tag on the axle housing, because gears are the most commonly changed item on these trucks.

Code	Meaning
U13	Roadster (1966–1968 only)
U14	Half-cab Pickup (called Sports Utility in 1966)
U15	Wagon
F	170 cu in inline six
S	200 cu in inline six (1973–1974)