

Auto Sunday

Ford gives Taurus style, tech makeover

BY ANN M. JOB
For The Associated Press

Just about everything that a car buyer can see, touch and feel is changed for the 2010 Ford Taurus, and it's a good thing.

From the new styling lines outside to the sizable center stack of controls in the middle of the dashboard inside, the new Taurus is tastefully upgraded as a near-premium large sedan. Even better, it offers so many safety features usually reserved for luxury cars, it sets a new safety benchmark for mainstream family size sedans.

Among the high-tech safety features available — not necessarily standard on every Taurus — are programmable adjustments a parent can make for when a teenager will be driving the car and radar-controlled adaptive cruise control that automatically slows the car if it's closing on a vehicle ahead on the highway.

Best of all, starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, for a 2010 Taurus is the same \$25,995 that it was for the 2009 model. This is for a base, front-wheel drive SE with 263-horsepower, 3.5-liter V-6 and six-speed automatic transmission.

Competitors include the Toyota Avalon, which starts at \$28,595 for a 2009 model with 268-horsepower V-6, and the 2010 Buick LaCrosse that starts at \$27,835 with 255-horsepower V-6.

Expect to be surprised at how sizable and substantial the new Taurus looks and feels. The powerdome shape of the hood and high trunk lid visually convey a strong, powerful sedan.

Once behind the wheel, a driver notices that this Taurus feels solid and weighty. Even the base Taurus weighs more than 4,000 pounds.

The ride is exceptional during highway cruising. Most road bumps were damped, and there was even a minimal amount of vibrations coming through to passengers in the test car.

On winding roads, the Taurus' heft and size plus compliant suspension had me backing off aggressive moves in the test car as my passengers and

At a glance

Price as tested: \$38,135
Engine: 3.5-liter, dual overhead cam, Duratec V-6
City/highway fuel economy: 17/25 miles per gallon
Length: 202.9 inches
Wheelbase: 112.9 inches
Curb weight: 3,752 pounds
Built: Chicago
Destination charge: \$825

I readily noticed body mass shifting this way and that.

I also discovered that the Taurus has a large, nearly 40-foot turning circle. It took some time to gauge where the corners of this big car were as I maneuvered in tight spaces. From the driver's seat, I never saw the edges of the hood nor could I see very well the back end of the car. Thank goodness that the Taurus Limited came with an enhanced rear sensing system that provided audible warnings as I backed up.

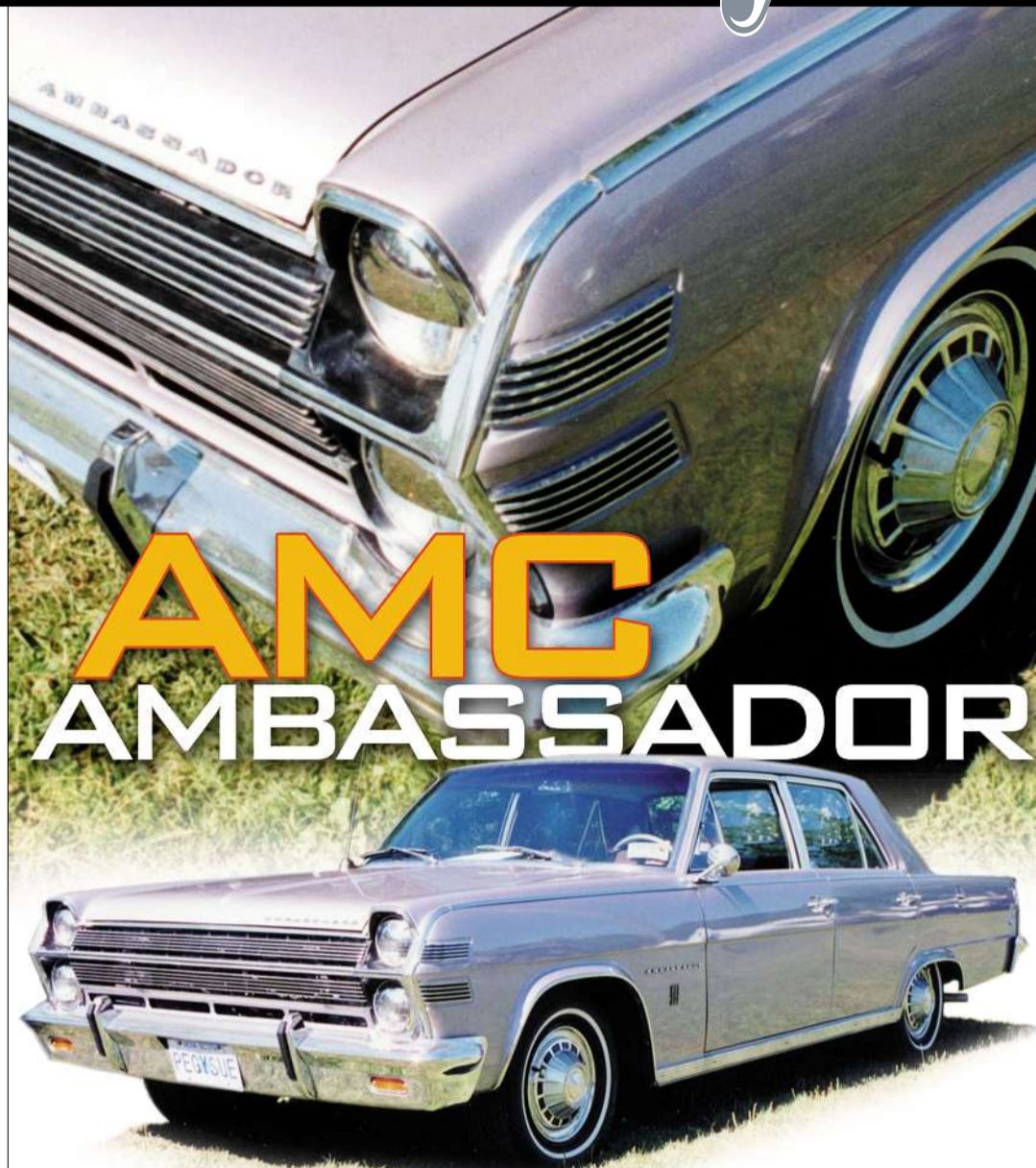
The radar system is enhanced because it not only beeps to let you know if you're getting close to an object directly behind the vehicle, it beeps and provides a visual alert if a vehicle is approaching from either right or left side as you back up. The detection range starts at about three parking spaces away.

The base engine is the same 3.5-liter, dual overhead cam, Duratec V-6 that was in last year's model. It puts out enough power — 263 horses and 249 foot-pounds of torque at 4,500 rpm — that the Taurus moves well in traffic and out on open roads.

During the test drive, I managed to average 19.3 miles per gallon, with highway miles accounting for 65 percent of my travel.

The Taurus has a wide array of high-tech equipment, including the Sync system that allows a driver to talk to the car to make phone calls and manage other in-car duties.

But probably one of the most memorable is MyKey, which limits top speed to 80 mph, provides speed alert chimes at speeds as low as 45 mph and keeps a teenager from deactivating traction control, among other things.



In an age of bigger-was-better, AMC's Ambassador helped keep the company competitive with Detroit

BY MALCOLM GUNN
Wheelbase Communications

Sleek and stylish, the redesigned American Motors Ambassador had everything going for it when it first appeared in 1965. As the company's flagship fashion statement, the car seemed — on paper at least — to be the equal of its Big Three competition.

The Ambassador also represented a fundamental shift in corporate ideology for AMC. The Kenosha, Wis.-based auto-

maker would shift its focus away from primarily fuel-efficient vehicles, instead turning out bigger, faster and potentially more profitable cars.

The cost of competing with General Motors, Ford and Chrysler had always been difficult for the company. A mid-'50s merger between Nash Motors and Hudson Motors to form American Motors Corp. helped a bit, but still left the newly combined venture in a distant fourth place. Lacking sufficient sales volume, and the resulting financial muscle, meant the retooling and development costs necessary to create new products was always a profit-zapping proposition. Product change was not only an expensive gamble, but getting it wrong was a surefire way to financial disaster.

Back in those days, the top-of-the-line Nash (later Rambler) Ambassador was a prime example of "right-car/wrong-decade" timing. In the early 1950s, the car's soap dish shape and pioneering unit-body construction ran counter to the flashier but overwrought excesses built by the Big Three. Even after hiring famed Italian stylist Battista Pininfarina to help reshape the sheet metal, the Ambassador could not shake its bloated look and stodgy character.

Following the Hudson merger, the Ambassador brand finally began showing signs of life, eventually sprouting a modest set of tail fins and generating decent sales as it helped AMC stay in the black.

By the early 1960s, AMC was focused on building three specific vehicle lines: the compact Rambler American; mid-size Rambler Classic; and full-size Rambler Ambassador. The thrifty



American maintained its connection with a small but determined group of car buyers that prized fuel economy above all else while the Classic and Ambassador catered to roomier and more luxurious tastes. Both of these cars also caught the attention of Motor Trend magazine, which, in 1963, bestowed its Car-of-the-Year honors on the duo.

Under the leadership of company president Roy Abernathy and chief stylist Dick Teague, AMC began charting a very different course, with the Ambassador leading the way. The all-new 1965 model had grown four inches in overall length while maintaining an understated appearance (advertising of the day referred to the Ambassador line as the "sensible spectaculars"). Although the base Ambassador 880 or better equipped 990 could be ordered with a 232-cubic-inch inline six-cylinder powerplant, many versions featured a 327-cubic-inch V-8 that delivered up to 270 horsepower. The 990 was available as a two-door hardtop and convertible that were as attractive as anything built by its Detroit-based competitors. And with a list price of around \$3,000, few could quibble about the cost of ownership.

Other corporate changes, however well-meaning, completely missed the mark. In an attempt to mimic the success of the Ford Mustang and Plymouth Barracuda, AMC attached a swoopy fastback roof onto its Classic-series body. The resulting calamity managed to fool about 10,000 buyers into thinking they were buying something sporty instead of a cartoonish looking car that carted more than the model upon which it was based.

A further break with tradition occurred in 1966, when the 66-year-old Rambler

surname was dropped from the Ambassador as part of an overall brand phaseout. Abernathy correctly surmised that the public linked it to AMC's econo-car past instead of to its big-car future. That year the Ambassador also gained a new deluxe version called the DPL. This was essentially a 990-series two-door hardtop with distinctive exterior trim and an interior that contained a floor console and reclining front bucket seats dressed in houndstooth fabric.

At the shallow end of the pool, AMC's normally fuel-sipping Rambler American featured the Rogue, which was a sporty compact with racing stripes, floor-mounted four-speed gearbox and tire-squealing V-8 power.

Although AMC's traditional budget-minded buyers had no idea what had happened to their beloved buttoned-down car company, sales nonetheless began to steadily move up the ladder, an indicator that Abernathy and Teague were on the right track.

Unfortunately, increased new-car deliveries failed to staunch the rising tide of red ink sweeping over the organization. AMC's board of directors forced Roy Abernathy out of office, but the quest to produce ever bigger Ambassadors as well as more youth-oriented machinery like the Javelin and AMX would continue unabated for years to come.

In the end, it was the Ambassador that helped to fundamentally alter AMC's direction. It may have accounted for a mere fraction of total passenger car sales, but it was an important first step in trying to bring the company's products in tune with what the consumer of the day really wanted.

• E-mail feature writer Malcolm Gunn at www.wheelbase.ws/mailbag.html.

Open-door indicator switches can fail

Q. I own a 2004 Ford F-150 Super Crew Cab Lariat, four-door, 5.4L, 4X4 with 121,000 miles. Recently, after opening and closing both driver's-side doors, the DIC indicated that there was a "door ajar" when the truck was put in gear/drive. I returned to park and found that all doors were shut. I then opened and closed the driver's-side doors and drove away. The "door ajar" indication light was no longer activated.



Doug McAllister
Under the hood

Since doing that, I have noticed that:

- The door locks do not automatically lock when in drive and operating.
- The chime for the ignition key left in the ignition does not function.
- The chime for the headlights inadvertently left "on" does not function.
- The odometer (Driver Information Center indicator) does not illuminate when the door is opened.
- The interior/courtesy lights do not illuminate when the door is opened. They do work when manually operated from the headlight switch or the "push" lens switch at the individual light.
- The "door ajar" indication does not work.
- DIC — Auto locks feature indicates "data error."
- DIC — Auto lamp delay indicates "data error."
- Seat Memory — Light indicates memory set but seat does not reposition when the button is pushed.
- Factory Alarm — Indicates "set" with two beeps but does not seem to work when door opened.
- When left "on," the radio does not turn "off" when the door is opened.

All of the remaining functions work as they should. The "low fuel" indication on the DIC illuminates and chimes correctly.

I have checked/verified the individual door switches by attempting to set the alarm with each door open (individually done) and received two horn beeps. When setting the alarm with all four doors closed I get one alarm beep upon activation.

I would like to correct/repair these malfunctions, especially the interior light failure. Can you suggest a course of action to restore these functions?

A. Thank you for all the detail you've given me. At first when I started reading your situation, I immediately thought you have a bad door switch. It still may have a bad switch but, with everything else you have going on, it may be there are a couple of things wrong.

I reviewed the situation with one of my technicians and he said it would be important to look at all the data that the module is receiving using the Ford Scan Tool (IDS) before making a repair decision.

It seems that the DIC is working properly and most of the errors and failures do tie to a door or doors.

I recommend you take the vehicle to the shop to have the problem diagnosed. Make sure they have the IDS tool so they can get all the pertinent data.

• Douglas Automotive is at 312 S. Hager Ave., Barrington, and 7218B Virginia Road, Crystal Lake. For information, visit douglassautomotive.com. Send questions to underthehood@dailyherald.com.



Pictured, from left, with a 2010 Lancer Sportback are Frances Oda, vice president, marketing, Mitsubishi Motors of North America; Jim Allegretti, co-owner Grand Mitsubishi; John Koenig, executive vice president, sales operations, MMNA; Ken Konieczka, vice president, sales operations, MMNA; Keith Schumann, co-owner Grand Mitsubishi; Shinichi Kurihara, president/CEO, MMNA; Keizo Fuchita, senior executive vice president, MMNA; Kenny Yamamoto and Kirk Smith, co-directors, zone retail operations, MMNA.

Local Mitsubishi dealer hosts company executives

Shinichi Kurihara, president and CEO of Mitsubishi Motors of North America, as well as other top MMNA executives were in Chicago Oct. 15 and 16. During their visit, they met with Keith Schumann and Jim Allegretti, owners of Grand Mitsubishi in Bensenville.

The executives are traveling around the country to meet with Mitsubishi Motors' top

dealerships. Their goal is to gather direct input from the dealers on company initiatives as well as to gauge the climate of the automobile industry in various markets.

Grand Mitsubishi was the No. 1 volume Mitsubishi dealership in Chicago and the fifth largest volume Mitsubishi dealership in the country for the month of September.