

Lightning Striking Twice

The Taurus Times Two

By Roger Witherspoon

A generation ago, the designers at Ford did something special.

They tossed out the square, sluggish, ungainly, bottom heavy mold which dictated the shape of virtually every station wagon then on the road and came up with something new which they called the Taurus. Unlike the clumsy astrological bull it was named after, this vehicular Taurus was an eye-catching, aero-dynamic, curved, powerful crossover offering the storage capacity of the traditional, boxy station wagons with the sex appeal, speed and handling of full size sedans.

The Taurus crossover wagon was a hit and, for five years, it was the top selling car in the nation. Unfortunately, Ford neglected the Taurus, letting it descend into the ranks of undistinguished midsized sedans and, eventually, fade into irrelevance. The legend of the Ford Taurus exists: it remains one of the best known names among all Ford vehicles, along with the Mustang and F-150 pickup. But the appeal of the Taurus as a stylish and practical car that people wanted to drive was gone.

Now Ford is hoping lightning can strike again, and has resurrected the storied name not once, but twice in the form of the Taurus sedan *and* an SUV called the Taurus X. In each case, Ford has taken an existing vehicle with promise but a mediocre track record, given it an extensive makeover, and hopes that the Taurus name will cause people to take another and more favorable look. In both cases, there is a new look – the three-bar chrome grill popularized by the new, successful, Ford Edge crossover – dominates the front and ensures a family resemblance. The pairing is a gamble which the astrological gods may actually smile upon.

The Taurus sedan replaces the Ford Five Hundred, a competent and comfortable but undistinguished and underpowered sedan. Ford's decision to replace the Five Hundred with the Taurus sedan was easy: "Consumer awareness of the Taurus name is double that of the Five Hundred that it's replacing," explained Ford President Mark Fields.

The look of the Five Hundred was the first casualty of the transformation to a Taurus. Design manager Mark Conforzi said the front end of the Five Hundred had to go. "We felt it was too full and heavy," he said. "We took a lot of the visual weight off by knocking off the corners."

In the end, the new Taurus sedan resembles an updated version of Lincoln LS without any of its stodginess, and looks nothing like the undersized, unlamented old Taurus. The decreased weight of the redesigned front was augmented by dumping the Five Hundred's undersized engine and adding a 263-horsepower V-6 – and engine that allows the Taurus run with the Avalons, Chevy Impalas, and Acuras on the road.

Inside, the new Taurus is also reminiscent of a Lincoln. The center console and doors are framed in polished wood accented with chrome. The seats, gear shift and steering wheel, are covered with soft, double-stitched leather, and the power adjustable front seats may be heated. The power sun roof adds to the spacious feel of the interior

The Taurus X, a vehicle Ford terms a “full size crossover” replaces the interesting but undistinguished Ford Freestyle SUV. The reincarnated version features three rows of seats and the storage space of the big box, full sized, gas guzzling SUVs, but has the sleeker styling, shape and – most importantly – the handling of the smaller, sexier, two-row crossovers such as the Infiniti FX. That style change was for more than just looks.

The driving was easy through Pennsylvania’s Allegheny Mountains en route to the Gettysburg Battlefield when the sun was abruptly replaced by roiling storm clouds riding on 50 mile an hour wind gusts which periodically slammed sheets of rain into the Taurus X from different directions.

At that point, the value of traveling in a vehicle with the sleeker styling and curved lines of the crossover rather than the big box of the full sized SUV was clearly evident. The Taurus X, with its all wheel drive and electronic stability control program was, at all times, a car under control slicing through the elements rather than a target to be buffeted at the will of the wind. In fact, it was difficult to tell how hard the wind was gusting with the windows up, since the new Taurus emphasizes a quiet ride and the outside elements did not interfere with the jazz flute solos emanating from the in-dash CD player.

Inside, the Taurus X is laid out as you might expect from a \$37,000 SUV that is aimed at a shoot-out with the popular Chrysler Pacifica. Care was taken to décor in the Taurus X, with two-tone, leather seats which, in front, can be heated. The second row features a pair of captain’s chairs with space between them – which is handy for easy access to children who may be in the third row. The cavity in the floor in front of the second row of seats serves two functions: it provides additional leg room for passengers who are over six feet tall, and a convenient fold-away niche for the seats if you want to fold them down to enlarge the storage area.

The third row of the Taurus X is intended primarily for kids or small adults, but they will ride in comfort. In addition the rear row can fold flat to expand what would otherwise be a small trunk area.

For a road trip, Ford spent some time on the SUV’s interior attractions. There is a satellite driven navigation system which had no trouble finding out-of-the-way hamlets in the hills around Gettysburg. It has a touch activated screen which is a lot easier to use than the toggle systems. The six-disc, in-dash CD and MP3 player is augmented by a DVD player for the enjoyment of those in the rear. Both the Taurus sedan and SUV feature Sirius satellite radio in addition to the locally broadcast, AM and FM channels.

Cars don’t usually get the opportunity to rise like a Phoenix and start a second life. But Taurus does have an enduring name, and in its upscale incarnations of sedan and SUV, may have another long run at the head of the vehicular pack.

2008 Taurus X AWD 7 - Passenger SUV

MSRP:		\$37,110
EPA Mileage:	15 MPG City	22 MPG Highway
As Tested Mileage:	15 MPG City	19.4 MPG Highway

Performance/ Safety:

Towing Capacity: 2,000 Pounds

3.5-Liter aluminum, DOHC V-6 engine producing 263 horsepower and 249 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission; all wheel drive; 18-inch, 7-spoke chrome wheels; Macpherson strut front suspension; independent multi-link rear suspension; power rack & pinion steering; advanced traction control, 4-wheel, anti-lock disc brakes; reverse sensor system; front seat side airbags; 3-row safety airbag canopy; fog lamps.

Interior/ Comfort:

AM/FM/ Sirius satellite radio; DVD player; 6-disc, in-dash CD and MP3 player; voice activated media system; satellite navigation system; tilt & telescope steering wheel with fingertip media and cruise controls; telescope foot pedals; 3-zone climate controls; roof rails; heated front seats; fold flat 2nd and 3rd row seats.

2008 Taurus Limited FWD

4 – Door Sedan

MSRP: \$31,650
EPA Mileage: 18 MPG City 28 MPG Highway

Performance / Safety:
0 – 60 MPH 7.7 Seconds
Top Speed 110 MPH

3.5-Liter aluminum, DOHC V-6 engine producing 263 horsepower and 249 pound-feet of torque; 6-speed automatic transmission; front wheel drive; 18-inch, 8-spoke aluminum wheels; Macpherson strut front suspension; independent multi-link rear suspension; power rack & pinion steering; advanced traction control, 4-wheel, anti-lock disc brakes; reverse sensor system; dual stage, front seat, side airbags.

Interior/ Comfort:

AM/FM/ Sirius satellite radio; 6-disc, in-dash CD and MP3 player; voice activated media system; satellite navigation system; tilt & telescope steering wheel with fingertip media and cruise controls; telescope foot pedals; power sunroof.