

Automated Luxury

In a Computerized Lincoln

By Roger Witherspoon

If you like slapstick comedy, Ford's commercials for its computer-driven SYNC system are hysterical.

There are a series of short spots where a motorist, spoiled by Ford's voice activated operating system, forgets they are no longer in a Lincoln MKZ and crashes into reality when they try ordering doors or windows around. And while it may not be nice to laugh at the image of a harried woman who is obviously late for work run full tilt into a glass door which refused to move, the commercial does make a point: Ford's SYNC system can be habit forming.

SYNC, developed by Microsoft and Ford, is simply the latest in voice activated control of automotive systems and sets a standard for easy to use technology that rapidly becomes an integral part of the driving experience. And it adds to the styling, performance, and interior design which makes the Lincoln extremely competitive in a tough, mid-sized sedan market.

Ford has put a lot of work into the driving experience, pricing the Lincoln MKZ into a category where it can compete with Mercedes, BMW and Infiniti in terms of quality, if not performance.

The MKZ is a large sedan, a four-door with enough leg and head room in the rear for a pair of NBA forwards. And if extra trunk space is needed, the rear seats can fold flat. There is soft leather throughout, the seats as well as the padding on the dash and arm rests – something that is appreciated during long trips. The front seats are heated or air cooled, with three temperature settings, and both front seats are powered. There is a dual climate control system which is actually capable of pumping air conditioning to the passenger and heat to the driver.

Overhead is a sun roof, which tilts and has enough overhang to keep the front seats dry even during a heavy downpour. In the center of the dash is the color screen which can be tilted for better viewing. The navigation system utilizes a touch screen, which makes it intuitive and easy to use. It does, of course, respond to the extensive directions of SYNC which lets you keep your hands on the wheel.

The Lincoln comes with a Bluetooth phone system which automatically detects and connects to your cell phone as soon as you enter the car. It, too, can be activated by SYNC, or pushing a button on the steering wheel.

The entertainment system has AM and FM radio, and if that isn't enough there is the Sirius satellite radio, and the six-disc, in-dash CD player. Or, you can plug either a memory stick or iPod into the Lincoln's USB port and play 1,000 or so of your favorite jams, switching effortlessly between systems by using SYNC.

And as for the quality of sound, it doesn't matter if you are playing 'Trane's mellow *Love Supreme* or jamming to Usher's *Yeah!* – the THX-II audio system, with a 12-channel, 600-watt amplifier and 14 speakers turns the MKZ's cabin into a rolling home entertainment center.

In terms of styling, the Lincoln brand aims for an understated classy look, with simple lines flowing from the wide, distinctive chrome grill to a tapered rear. Under the hood, the MKZ has a 263-horsepower V-6 engine which is not intended to drag race an

Infiniti M, but has more than enough power to cruise in triple digits all day. More importantly, the MKZ handles like a high performance sedan.

Just as the crocuses were beginning to make their annual appearance in my garden, winter decided to dump nine inches of snow on the region in its own frigid salute to the coming of spring. There was little traffic, and the streets had yet to be plowed; which seemed like a fine time for leisurely drive.

I have been in cars where the traction control system was overwhelmed by ice and snow and, in a form of electronic fit, simply disconnected the drive train and left me stuck. But snow was just another interesting surface to the traction control system of the MKZ, which did not skid on level surfaces or slide when going up steep hills.

I pulled into an empty mall parking lot and began driving slow, figure eights to test the traction. Not until the speedometer passed 35 miles per hour did the wheels skid slightly, though the system quickly corrected for the conditions and regained control. Fifty miles an hour proved too much for the Lincoln's system – but that was faster than any sane and sober person has any business driving in deep snow, and not many off-road vehicles could have kept up.

Which makes the Lincoln MKZ an easy ride for all conditions and all occasions.

2008 Lincoln MKZ AWD

MSRP:		\$38,840
EPA Mileage:	17 MPG City	24 MPG Highway

Performance / Safety:

3.5-Liter DOHC V-6 aluminum engine producing 263 horsepower and 249 pound-feet of torque; six speed automatic transmission; 4-wheel disc brakes; reverse sensing system; 17-inch 8-spoke wheels; halogen headlights and fog lamps; all wheel drive; independent front and rear suspension; power rack & pinion steering; traction control; dual-stage driver and passenger front air bags; side curtain air bags for front & rear.

Interior/ Comfort:

AM/FM/ Sirius satellite radio; 6-disc CD player with MP3 and USB connections; THX II premium sound system with 14 speakers; power sunroof; SYNC voice activated navigation and entertainment system; leather seats and surfaces; heated and cooled, powered front seats; heated exterior mirrors; tilt & telescope steering wheel with fingertip audio and cruise controls.