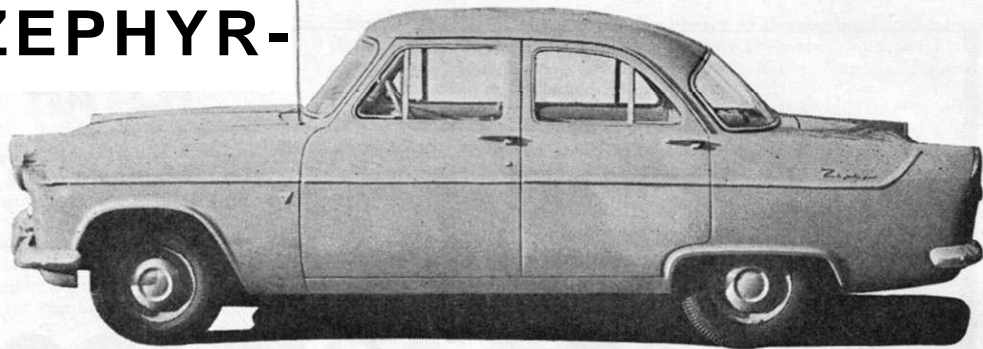


The FORD ZEPHYR-

Emphasis on value-for-money

SIDE VIEW OF THE FORD ZEPHYR, showing the graceful lines, with front wings well in the driver's line of vision, trailing doors and large luggage boot; both boot lid and bonnet have sensible over-centre spring-loaded hinges and the petrol filler is concealed beneath the hinged back number-plate.



FORD has been the symbol of motoring value-for-money (allied to sound engineering and superb servicing facilities) from the days of the model-T. It is no accident that British Ford sales of private cars at home and abroad exceed that of any other make produced in these Islands. Possession of a vast modern factory standing on more than 22,000 concrete piles on reclaimed marshland at Dagenham, on London's back doorstep (a factory so impressive that Roger Pilkington in his charming "Thames Waters" finds himself compelled to devote considerable space to a description of it in a book otherwise devoted to less hectic matters), would not put Ford at the head of Britain's automobile industry if its cars did not meet the people's needs and deserve their good reputation. The fact is that every model in the Ford range offers excellent value for the purchaser's "lolly."

The Popular is the least-expensive four-wheeled four-door saloon on the market. The Anglia and Prefect are excellent small saloons, available also in commercial and estate-car versions. While we query the wisdom of employing side-valve engines and three-speed gearboxes for these cars in what is, after all, 1956, nevertheless these small Fords meet the requirements of a vast body of British users, and the Anglia is undercut in price only by the Ford Popular and a few "mini-cars." The Consul is an admirable family car in the under-£800 class, supported by the new Farnham estate model, and the Zephyr equally good value as a business executive's or enthusiast's saloon, augmented by a convertible and the de luxe Zodiac. Couple to this range the lowest-priced British car with fully-automatic transmission, which Ford offers in the Borg-Warner Zephyr costing less than £1,059, and it isn't difficult to see why this great organisation on the shore of London's river outstrips other big motor-manufacturing plants in respect of output and sales.

It was recently our privilege to test the latest version of Zephyr over a considerable distance, including a fast night run from London to the Lake District to intercept the M.C.C. Rally, during which we discovered what excellent value-for-money this roomy car, the high-performance model of the British Ford range, represents. Announced as new models just after the 1955 London Show, the New Consul and New Zephyr, now more commonly referred to as the Mk. II versions, proved to be sensibly developed from earlier Ford favourites, rather than entirely new models.

The Zephyr is a six-seater saloon capable, with its 86-b.h.p. 2 1/2-litre six-cylinder engine, of 85 m.p.h. and acceleration almost up to sports-car standards. At the price of £871 7s. (inclusive of purchase tax) it does represent unbeatable value. This is the price of a Mk. II Zephyr unadorned, as it were, and the car lent to Motor Sport for road test had as extras overdrive, radio and heater, which lifted the total price to £980 2s. 5d. The basic price is only £580.

The Zephyr can be described as a "scaled-down" American car, yet this, while emphasising its spaciousness and effortless performance, does it less than justice, because it is firmly sprung and not ornate in appearance. Moreover, if it appears to be a bulky automobile, and one which certainly seats six in comfort even with the front seat adjusted to suit a tall driver, this is largely offset by good driver visibility, including a very clear view of both front wings.

There is nothing elaborate about the Zephyr's appointments or controls, yet little has been left out that mars the practical convenience of the car.

A bench front seat is used, easily adjustable, but admittedly not particularly comfortable, especially as its cushion seems hard after it has been occupied for some hours, while lateral support is poor; nor is a central armrest provided to stabilise a lone front-compartment passenger on this very wide seat. The two-spoke steering-wheel, with full horn-ring above it, is metal rimmed and austere, nor are pockets provided in any of the doors. Instrumentation is supremely simple—a big hooded 100-m.p.h. A.C. speedometer in front of the driver, incorporating a total milemeter reading to tenths but no "trip"), with, below it, warning lights for ignition, main

headlamps beam and low oil pressure, with a further window at each end for the direction-flashers warning lights. Below these are the three knobs, suitably lettered, for choke, wipers and lamps, the last-named being twisted to bring in the sidelamps and pulled out to bring on the headlamps—it is well placed for flashing a warning, and augmented by a foot dimmer. The ignition key, serving also to lock doors, boot and cubby-hole lid, turns to the right to start the engine, to the left to retain the auxiliary electrical services without the ignition. It is placed rather too close to the steering-column for convenience and has unpleasantly sharp edges. A little, rather "fumbly," tumbler switch under the dash controls the instrument lighting.

The dash has a wide sill, containing a lidded, lined ashtray, a "Zephyr" scroll, and an underhung cubby-hole lid. The raised catch of this lid is an excellent thumb-amputator. In its centre is provision for the Enfo radio, of non-push-button type, but effective, with speaker in the rear parcels-shelf. The aerial cannot be extended from within the car. Below the radio are the commendably simple control quadrants for the very powerful heater/demister. This has a booster fan for use at low speeds and warms both back and front compartments. The self-parking screenwipers are suction-type, their speed adjustable by turning the control knob. They left a small unwiped patch in the centre of each arc and were very noisy. A pessimistic fuel gauge and an ammeter are the only instruments apart from the speedometer, but a water thermometer is available as an extra. The pendant clutch and brake pedals are set too high off the floor, braking time being lost in transferring the right foot from the treadle-accelerator up onto the brake pedal.

Twin visors are fitted, capable of being swivelled round to combat side dazzle, but no vanity mirror is provided for the passenger. A clock is not supplied. The tinted central rear-view mirror hangs from the roof and gives rather shallow vision. All four doors trail, which is sensible, they have push-button handles, and all have small armrests-cum-pulls. The front doors possess stiff-to-open ventilator windows with reasonable, but certainly not thief-resisting, catches and the winders for the main windows are usefully geared at 2 1/2 turns up-to-down, compared with just over 4 1/2 turns for the windows in the back doors. The back doors lock normally but there is a rather awkward lock in each front door, in conjunction with interior sill locks. On the car tested the wipers knob fell off repeatedly and the interior lamp, which is mounted on the near-side door pillar and normally lights when the doors are opened, soon ceased to function.

The steering-column gear-lever extends on the left of the column, with the lever for operating the self-cancelling direction-flashers on the right. The "umbrella-handle" hand-brake is well placed at an angle by the dash for operation by the left hand, and pull-out toggles for overdrive and bonnet-release are set under the dash for right-hand manipulation. The steering-wheel is set well clear of the dash and is low in relation to the screen sill.

The back seat has a good fold-away central armrest and there is an ashtray on the back of the front-seat squab. To offset the absence of door pockets there is a parcels-shelf under the dash, but this, although commodious, has a shallow lip which fails to restrain restless objects from falling on to the floor, nor does this shelf extend to the driver's side. There is, of course, the usual shelf behind the back seat and this is of vast area and well "lipped."

The Zephyr is graced by a very generous-sized luggage boot, so large that Ford refers to it as the "attic," but calf-skin suitcases may not care to share it with jack, tools and a vertically-mounted spare wheel! Nor does the provision of Firestone de luxe gum-dipped four-ply tubeless tyres ensure immunity from roadside wheel changes, for one of these tubeless covers deflated as rapidly as any old-fangled tyre after we had negotiated a short, admittedly rough, Lakeland lane. Perhaps it was dipped in the wrong gum! The side-jack functions well.

The fuel filler is concealed beneath the hinged back number-

THE FORD ZEPHYR SALOON

Engine : Six cylinders, 82.55 by 79.55 mm. (2,553 c.c.). Push-rod o.h. valves; 7.8 to 1 compression-ratio; 86 b.h.p. at 4,200 r.p.m.

Gear ratios : Borg-Warner overdrive in all ratios, with "kick-down" control. First, 11.08 to 1; overdrive first, 7.76 to 1; second, 6.40 to 1; overdrive second, 4.49 to 1; top, 3.90 to 1; overdrive top, 2.83 to 1.

Tyres : 6.40 by 13 Firestone de luxe four-ply gum-dipped tubeless, on bolt-on steel disc wheels.

Weight : 1 ton 4 cwt. 0 qtr. 14 lb. (without occupants, but ready for the road, with approximately four gallons of petrol).

Fuel capacity : 11 gallons (range approximately 265 miles).

Wheelbase : 8 ft. 11 in.

Track : Front, 4 ft. 5 in.; rear, 4 ft. 4 in.

Dimensions: 14 ft. 10 1/2 in. by 5 ft. 7 in. by 4 ft. 11 1/2 in.

(high).

Price : £580 (£871 7s., inclusive of purchase tax). With

extras as tested £980 2s. 5d.

Makers : The Ford Motor Company, Ltd., Dagenham,

Essex, England.



MOST POWERFUL OF THE BRITISH FORDS.—The restyled New Zephyr, which is excellent value for money at £871 7s. inclusive of purchase tax, possessing, as it does, vivid acceleration for a six-seater saloon and 85 m.p.h. maximum speed.

plate, but as no provision is made for holding down this sharp-edged plate with its powerful return spring, nor is the cap integral with the plate, it would seem that in this detail the sales department got the better of the engineers.

Coming now to the road-behaviour and driving of the Ford Zephyr, it will be appreciated from the foregoing how uncomplicated the car is to handle.

The o.h.v. engine starts easily (although on a damp morning it required a little persuasion), and displays life and power which make the Zephyr master of almost any traffic situation. Peak indicated speeds of 35 m.p.h. and 62 m.p.h. are obtainable in first and second gears, and 80 m.p.h. comes up commendably quickly in the 3.9-to-1 top gear. Indeed, the Zephyr can be made to embarrass drivers of small sports cars, as it will reach 50 m.p.h. from the traffic lights in about 12 sec. will be running at a mile-a-minute in approximately 18 sec. or less, and can devour a standing-start 1/4-mile in 2 1/2 sec. Such performance is accomplished entirely without effort, although the engine can be heard turning out its smooth power and the exhaust has quite a note, from outside the car, when accelerating. But at cruising speeds in overdrive it is so quiet you can hear the creak of the seat springs, and when idling it is inaudible.

Overdrive is brought in by pushing in the control-toggle, and provides a set of high gears, overdrive top being 2.83 to 1. Overdrive second (4.5 to 1) can be retained up to 80 m.p.h. if required, but there is little to choose between normal and overdrive top in respect of maximum speed, 85 m.p.h. or a shade more being obtainable under favourable conditions in either ratio. However, the employment of overdrive results in commendable petrol economy, over 27 m.p.g. being recorded on a fast main-road journey, whereas this increased to 21.7 m.p.g. when overdrive was put out of use in the hilly country of the Lake District.

By "kick-down" on the accelerator overdrive can be put out of use automatically in all gears, but on light throttle openings it comes in at 31 m.p.h., or at 27 m.p.h. on the over-run. When overdrive is in use the car freewheels at under 30 m.p.h. This is not a true free-wheel, as the car cannot be driven to a standstill without using the clutch, but it does save petrol and enables a silent change into bottom gear to be accomplished with the car rolling, at the expense of snatch when accelerating sharply. The engine had a disconcerting habit of stalling at times when the car was freewheeling. The arrangement of this Borg-Warner overdrive on the Ford Zephyr is generally better than that in which selection is by manual switch alone with overdrive available in top gear only, although some jerkiness results in traffic because of the low speed at which overdrive automatically cuts in. Nor is "kick-down" selection of normal ratios good for petrol economy.

To complement the overdrive arrangement, the Ford steering-column gear-change, crude as the actual lever is, can claim to be amongst the best of its kind, being positive and quick in action. Only the design of the human wrist makes it less convenient than a "real" gear-lever. First and reverse are uppermost, reverse unguarded. The clutch action is light and smooth, the throttle action likewise.

The Zephyr is very definitely a dual-purpose car, happy ambling along in top gear, yet able to motor in rally-fashion when handled by an experienced driver.

The suspension, i.f.s. sliding pillar coil spring in front and "cart-spring" at the back, is quite firm and fast cornering results in only moderate roll and very little protest from the tyres. The rear wheels hold down better than was the case with earlier Zephyrs and the nose does not dip to any extent when braking. The ride is comfortable, but with rather a lot of up-and-down movement, except when the small (13 in.) wheels meet an exceptionally severe undulation, or rally-cornering calls for seat-belts on the wide benches!

The worm-and-peg steering is sensibly high-g geared, at three turns lock-to-lock (turning circle 36 ft.), and if this results in heavy action when manoeuvring, at normal speeds the steering is fairly light and smooth, although not quite the sort that places to an inch, being vague but not spongy. There is some high-frequency kick-back, but only occasionally, over certain types of surface, and not much vibration at the wheel. Castor-action is mild, but helpful. Over rough roads the back axle tries to wag the car's tail and rear-end breakaway occurs on slippery roads more readily than a novice would relish. For this reason care in braking is advisable from high speeds on dubious surfaces, but on the whole this Zephyr handles well for a car of family type.

The brakes are really excellent, being light, very powerful and progressive and free from vices. We were reminded that the New Zephyr still lacks adhesion on the back wheels when, forgetting it wasn't a V——n, we drove it onto wet grass and had to be pushed off. The hand brake is merely a parking brake and, while it held the car well, its "dead" action makes re-starting on hills a not particularly pleasant operation.

We were requested to run the Ford on Esso Extra petrol and Castrolite; so far as the latter is concerned only half a pint was consumed during this 1,250-mile test. The lamps are powerful but the cut-off when dimmed is poor and fog-lamps are not supplied as standard. The dash lighting works only when the sidelamps are in use.

It is nice to find a lockable, spring-balanced lid to the luggage-boot and another practical feature of this Ford is the easily-washable upholstery and roof lining. Under the bonnet, which is also spring-balanced, the dip-stick, water and oil fillers and Enfo battery are readily accessible.

In conclusion, the Ford Zephyr is an uncommonly useful car. its slight austerity in a few matters being more than compensated by the practical worth of a car in which spacious accommodation is allied to very good performance and economy. The handling qualities, although quite unlike those desirable in a sports car, enable excellent average speeds to be accomplished and performance is such that even rally drivers do not find it frustrating. Verily, Ford is likely to retain its place as Britain's best-seller!

The Zephyr meets competition in its price-class from cars of more American conception and cars essentially English, but the writer recommends the largest of the Dagenham Fords as a car of outstanding value backed by an excellent spares service. —W. B.