



## 1962-1966 Ford Zephyr 6 MkIII

**BUILT: 105,256 UK SURVIVORS: 200**

*Transatlantic dash, smooth six-cylinder thrust and room for a large family made the Zephyr MkIII a huge Sixties hit – but today you'd be lucky to find one*

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**I**N APRIL 1962 the top choice for a motorist who needed a car to establish his image as a successful businessman – but who had less than £1000 to do so – was the Ford Zephyr 6 MkIII. It was a car that offered the magic formula of six seats, six cylinders, a big boot and a substantial offering of transatlantic

glamour, plus ease of spares and servicing at your local Ford dealer.

What's more, the Zephyr 6 was less rust-prone than the Vauxhall Velox PB, far less expensive than the Austin A110 Westminster and definitely more glamorous than a Standard Vanguard Luxury 6.

The UK motoring press greeted the Zephyr

MkIII warmly as a logical development of the previous big British Fords. The Zephyr 6 was the mid-range offering, sandwiched between the underpowered 1.7-litre Zephyr 4 and the high-spec Zodiac.

It featured the same 2553cc engine as its 1956-1962 predecessors, but improvements gave an extra 20bhp. Fortunately, an attempt by Ford's US parent to fit the MkIII with drum brakes on all four wheels was foiled when a prototype proved almost unstoppable.

In addition, the MkIII's unreliable three-speed gearbox finally made way for an all-synchromesh four-on-the-column and its abysmal vacuum wipers were superseded by a two-speed electric unit.

But as far as the average visitor in the showroom was concerned, the car's big appeal wasn't its strengthened rear axle or even the fact that the entire pre-production testing process was unique for a British car at that time – it was the Zephyr's styling that mattered most. The MkIII's lines were the happy fusion of an original proposal from Italian design house Frua and ideas from Ford's own Roy Brown; the result was a dashing saloon that promised an affluent future in which everyone

## Ghosts of the past

A 20bhp boost over its predecessor, quasi-US styling and a cabin with room for six made the Zephyr 6 MkIII a big hit with Sixties motorists



THE ZEPHYR'S ROLE IN THE UK WAS TO PROVIDE PRACTICAL US-STYLE GLAMOUR AT A PRICE THAT WOULD TEMPT FLEET BUYERS



would own a car with a strip speedometer, PVC upholstery and canted tail fins.

The key to the Zephyr's popularity with British drivers was that such quasi-American glamour did not mean compromising on practicality. The fact that the heater, windscreen washers, cigarette lighter and whitewall tyres on our test car were all extras was a mere detail to most buyers, as the Zephyr's role in the UK was to provide practical US-style glamour at a price that would tempt fleet buyers.

There was a vast boot, though this came at the expense of rear legroom; the Zephyr MkIII may have been wide enough to accommodate six people comfortably, but only if the rear passengers were rather short.

The front bench boasted a centre armrest to anchor the occupants, but the Zephyr 6 was never intended to be a sports saloon: this was a softly sprung (and crossply-shod) cruiser that could travel all day at 70mph in fourth gear on motorways and Australian dirt roads alike.

The MkIII was also made in several Commonwealth countries, where it proved a more than capable rival to Dearborn's Ford Falcon as a 'compact 6'.

In Britain the Zephyr 6 made a big impact as a police car – it was large enough for general patrol duties but not too bulky for urban work and it had an excellent aftercare service.


To further tempt the boys in blue, Dagenham produced the Zephyr 6 Police Special, featuring the Zodiac's higher-tuned engine, wiring looms for extra equipment, heavy-duty suspension, a modified dashboard to accommodate the recalibrated speedometer, and a floor-mounted gearlever with closer ratios than the standard column shift.

One problem was that the Zephyr 6's weight distribution meant it was apt to swerve during high-speed pursuits. However, an enterprising police driver in Devon devised a not-too-technical modification to cure this trait – a concrete kerbstone plonked in the boot to counteract the car's nose-heaviness.

Valuable publicity came along when the 1963-65 seasons of BBC's *Z-Cars* used Ford PR fleet MkIII Zephyr 6s – if you were around at the time the phrase 'BD to Z-Victor One' will be indelibly stamped in your memory.

Ford never intended the Zephyr MkIII to be produced for more than four years, and in the Seventies its ranks were decimated by a

combination of salted winter roads, the 1973 fuel crisis and banger racing. Ironically, the Eighties saw the MkIII's classic appeal suffer on the same grounds that initially made it such a success – its crisp lines were far less flamboyant than those of its predecessors.

Today classic car enthusiasts are finally realising the MkIII's desirability and the owners' club is tireless in its efforts to preserve the remaining examples of a car that gave many a British motorist his – and it would have been 'his' in the early and mid-sixties – first taste of six-cylinder motoring. 

### 1963 Ford Zephyr 6 MkIII

**Engine** 2553cc, in-line six cylinder, ohv, two downdraught Zenith 36 W1A carburettors **Power and torque** 98bhp @ 4750rpm; 139lb ft @ 2000rpm **Transmission** Four-speed manual **Suspension** Front: independent, MacPherson struts, lower wishbones, anti-roll bar. Rear: live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs **Steering** Worm and roller **Brakes** Discs front, drums rear, servo-assisted **Weight** 1242kg (2738lb) **Performance** Top speed: 95mph; 0-60mph: 16.1sec **Cost new** £837 **Value now** £3000