

INTRODUCTION

By Steve Saxty

THE CARS YOU ALWAYS PROMISED YOURSELF

One weekend in 1974 my parents and I were driving north in their Triumph 1300 up the A12 dual carriageway in Essex, south-east England. As we passed two ugly-looking Fiat 127s, my mother pointed and said excitedly: “Look, look – it’s the new Ford in disguise.” My response, like I guess any other small boy’s would have been, was to sniffily dismiss what she was saying since these were so obviously Fiats. But Mum was right and proved it by thrusting a copy of the local *Southend Echo* under my nose. And there it was: a photo of one of these prototype Ford mules – a Fiat 127 with a Fiesta front end grafted on. From then on, I was hooked on the secret world of car design.

I was still at school and my former interest in aircraft now shifted wholesale to a fascination with cars. It was further ignited by discovering *CAR Magazine*, which opened my mind to cars that seemed impossibly exotic to an Essex lad. Each month I’d read the columns and stories by writers who seemed to me like friends: Setright, Bishop, Cropley, Green and Nichols. The pictures spoke to me too. Whether beautifully shot Ferraris or fuzzy prototypes, each was a spellbinding glimpse of a world tantalizingly out of reach. The April 1979 issue of *CAR* was especially exciting. “Ford’s sensational new Escort!” screamed the cover and the scoop story it flagged was headed “An Escort called Erika”. Here was my local team’s new star player, waiting in the wings, still almost two years away from launch. My mind was made up and all I wanted to do was design, or engineer, future Fords.

I was lucky enough to join Ford as a trainee and later became a product designer before switching to sales and then eventually,

after I left Ford, marketing. I was there through the ’80s, and some of the more dramatic years of the company’s history, before going to Mazda in 1990. Every day I would drive my Tickford Capri to Dunton. I recall, too, some truly hairy drives in a 280bhp Cosworth I ran for a while and, when it was loaned to me, the utter joy of the RS200’s mid-engined sharpness. Although I’ve driven everything from Ladas to Lamborghinis, I can honestly say I’ve had some of my more memorable drives in the fastest of Fords.

The inspiration for this book was relatively simple: to tell the story of Ford of Europe before, during and after its halcyon days of the ’70s and ’80s. You may want to read this book because you have a connection to Ford, or care about its more memorable cars of that era and beyond. Equally, you may have an interest in how the culture of a particular period influenced car design and advertising. I’ve read many car books as an enthusiast and found that writers are often forced to offer an opinion on something that they, quite



understandably, only know superficially. After more than 30 years working in the car industry, and as one who started out at Ford, I felt that enthusiasts deserved to be taken inside the design studios and engineering centres and see first-hand what happened as cars as iconic as these Fords were born. I have always wanted to read a book like this myself, and hear from legends like Bob Lutz, Patrick le Quément and Rod Mansfield. What was it like behind the scenes as they conceived, designed and engineered icons like the Capri Injection and Cosworth? What was it like to design and market the Sierra?

For this to be one book and not a trilogy I also needed a lens through which to tell the story. I decided that lens should focus on the more glamorous coupes, and the faster Fords that were often derived from them. So the Ford coupe is the book's central 'character' that morphs, Dr Who-like, from one model to the next. My reasoning is straightforward: the coupes have the most interesting tales to tell, although their co-stars – the Fiesta, Escort/Focus and Cortina/Sierra/Mondeo and even Granada – are always present because their lives and stories overlap and intersect. I had intended to start with the Capri – it *is* the car I always promised myself – but soon realized we needed to go back farther than that. I needed to explain the impact of Henry Ford II's Total Performance plan to make sporting cars, and so the book starts in the early-'60s, before I was born. I found it a fascinating chapter to research and I hope you will enjoy reading it, even if you have little interest in that era. It serves to remind us that Ford is, at its heart, a global company and the fate of its European coupes was always intertwined with those of North America's. Ford's decision to make the Mustang and race the GT40 led to a mutation in the company's DNA.

The direct descendants of these two cars remain in production 50 years later, reminding us that Ford is almost unique among mass-manufacturers in its commitment to making high-performance vehicles.

Car companies are more than the sum of their products. They've always been about the people who work for and with them, too. In Ford's case there have been some

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remarkable leaders who inspired the cars, exceptional designers who created them, and pre-eminent engineers who turned the dreams into reality. But making cars is just the first step. Getting them to market – bringing them to the attention of the right buyers and imbuing them with the right image – calls for equally good communication skills. It is a joy that Terry Holben and Peter Sugden, who for decades crafted so many of Ford's memorable press ads and TV commercials, have told their story, as imaginatively as ever, on page 172 in the style of an '80s Ford ad created especially for this book.

As we travel through the pages and across the decades, famous names come and go. Along the way, we learn a little more about the launch of one vehicle, the abandoned designs of another and, sometimes, in a separate chapter, delve more into the product planning and strategy behind

the cars. I've found it a fascinating way to peer into the different facets of Ford and see how its products evolved and adapted to changing times. Only when you know the tale behind the Escort's design can you appreciate how the XR3i came to be, or make sense of the never-seen-before RS prototypes by knowing the back story of the Capri, Puma and Fiesta.

I wrote a very modest book on the Capri 22 years ago. When I mentioned to Bob Lutz that I was attempting something more ambitious, his first comment was "I'm just amazed that it's taken you so long to get around to it, Steve". Well, I have been a little busy over the past two decades but when I did start my two years of research for this book I hadn't anticipated the extent of the enthusiastic help I would receive. So many people at Ford have been supportive, and so have the retired Ford designers, engineers and marketers who donated many, many hours to helping me unpick this tale, and shared their own photos and stories. This journey wouldn't have been possible without them. I must single out Bob Lutz, Rod Mansfield, Stuart Turner and Bill Camplisson. Patrick le Quément has been spectacularly helpful by providing his photos and recollections, always with a wry wit and, as you will see, writing for us his very personal memories of working with Uwe Bahnsen on the Sierra's design. Designer Pavel Hušek kindly gave me some of his brilliant sketches and Geoff Fox of Special Vehicle Engineering has been an endless source of help and guidance – thank you Geoff.

To go back to today's Ford for a moment, the goodwill of the company cannot be overstated. In particular, I'm beyond grateful for Nick Zea-Smith's assistance. He trusted me to spend days camped out in Ford's high-security, zero-humidity, low temperature archives to

capture much of the material you will see. I promised myself that any book of mine would avoid the lazy use of press pictures and so I am delighted that 85 per cent of the photos have never been published before. Outside Ford, Allen Patch of the XR Owners Club has been a fantastic source of information and support, along with serial Capri owner Paul Windram, who read my early rough drafts and, despite that, still encouraged me.

I mentioned *CAR* Magazine earlier and that brings me to another person you will hear from, one of the magazine's more notable former editors, Mel Nichols. I am beyond delighted to say that he is also the editor of this book and having his help and guidance has been invaluable – if there is some of the feel of the old *CAR* here then you will know why. The look of the book is, we think, stunning and I must thank Art Director Adrian Morris for both his astonishing talent and patience.

From the outset, my intention was to use social media. I needed to connect with Ford retirees and Ford communities around the world and the commitment they have made in return has been astonishing. It's been an overwhelming and incredibly rewarding aspect that allows this book to have a breadth and scope that could not have been conceived of a few years ago. So, although it has taken me a long time to get around to writing it, the technology and connectivity of today has allowed us to look back into the past in a way I had previously assumed was impossible. Sadly, I don't have the pages to thank the hundreds of people from the various Facebook Groups who provided assistance and encouragement, although I have pointed out a few more on the Acknowledgments page.

You'll want to get going now. I'm sure you will want to flick quickly through the pictures and then dive in and read about your favourite era or car. If you can resist that temptation (and I probably wouldn't) then I think you will enjoy the story more by starting at the beginning. Enjoy this trip, for it is a trip – spiced, I hope by the various song titles I used as subtitles to amuse myself along the way. My task now is to gently step back into the role of your narrator for the journey ahead of us, and I'll join you again at the end.

The cars you always promised yourself have a 50-year story to tell. And it starts Right here, Right now.

My friend Pete Smith took this photo in 1973 of me haring around a bend in Wiltshire in an RS3100 for a review I was writing. Look at it: nose up, tail out, hunkering over the nearside rear tyre which is rolling under in a way you don't see with today's ultra-low tyres. For me, this picture captures the essence of the Capri: a car with enough grunt, ability and spirit to give its driver fun and satisfaction. It meant business, and nothing much matched it at the money. In the 1970s, when motoring writers like me wanted a fast car for a dash to Scotland or the Continent, or just the weekend, we'd often ask Ford for a V6 Capri. It was quick at a time when most cars weren't, handled well, seated four, would be entertaining for the driver, comfortable enough for the passengers and not likely to break down. The Capri became the go-to car. Thanks to its steady development, it stayed that way for a long time and, down the years, remained unbeatable value.

But far more importantly than journalists admiring Ford's European coupe, the people it was designed for knew how well it did its job. A Scottish audio engineer called Ivor Tiefenbrun MBE is one of the Capri buyers who found that it was the only car of its era that delivered what he needed. He had a string of them, culminating in Janspeed Turbos.



EDITOR'S INTRO

By Mel Nichols, editor of *CAR* Magazine from 1974 to 1981

From the 2.0litre Capri, bought in 1969 when he was 23, Ivor soon graduated to 3000GTs and by 1973 was running a rather special V6 that was one of three built for a 24-hour endurance event, though not raced. "Its engine was fettled, blue-printed and balanced but the body looked normal apart from a small front spoiler that gave it 120lb of downforce at 120mph. It'd show 135mph on the speedo." That speed was important to Ivor. He'd just started making the now-legendary Linn Sondek LP12 turntable in the early days of what would become one of the world's most prestigious audio brands. But Linn was in Glasgow and many of its potential customers were 400 miles away in and around London. That's where the Capri came in. "Nothing else would have done what I wanted," Ivor says. "I was young, so I wanted a good-looking car, but I had a wife and two kids so it had to be practical. For work, I had to carry a lot of equipment and get to London and back fast. The

Capri was perfect: swift, compact, stylish and, when the hatchback arrived, roomy enough to lug all my kit, including large Isobarik speakers. I'd leave Glasgow around 7am and be in London by 11 or 12, demonstrate our hi-fi at several dealers all afternoon, then drive back. I'd be home in bed by midnight. Even with the car fully-loaded the V6 still had the grunt you needed to overtake." Some of Ivor's journey times became legendary. He was logging 60,000 miles a year so changed Capris every couple of years and had many. "They were a joy to drive and the only thing I ever needed to do was replace clutch cables and wheel bearings."

Memories of the satisfying times I had in fast Fords, and stories I'd heard, like Ivor's, came flooding back while I was editing Steve's manuscript for this book. But it wasn't just memories. Although I knew most of the cars well and had spent quite a lot of time with many of the people responsible for them, I found Steve's unfolding tale a constant and fascinating source of learning.

I first ran across Steve's work when a friend, a Vice-President at General Motors's Detroit headquarters, showed me a brand strategy Steve had produced for GM while he was running FutureBrand's global automotive practice in New York City. It was seriously impressive and opened my eyes to the power of clear thinking about brands.

The depth of Steve's knowledge and the exceptional access he's had to Ford's archives and people, past and present, are clear in this book. Even if you know the automotive industry – and Ford in particular – very well, I'm sure you'll find unusual insights into the complex and intertwined process of how cars are conceived, designed, engineered, signed-off or cancelled, marketed and sold, and succeed or fail.

One aspect that shines through the chapters is how, even in a company employing hundreds of thousands of people, just a few key players make a profound difference: the people with exceptional talent, instinct, commitment, energy, and guts. As this story of the glamorous and fast European Fords evolves, it highlights the critical importance of game-changers such as Walter Hayes, Alex Trotman, Bob Lutz, Jac Nasser, Rod Mansfield, Richard-Parry-Jones, Uwe Bahnsen, Patrick le Quément, Chris Svensson and J Mays (many of whom have helped with this book).

But there's a perspective bigger than Ford here. Take the work of Bob Lutz, Uwe Bahnsen and Richard Parry-Jones in particular. What they did changed cars, not just Fords. Uwe, as you'll read in Patrick le Quément's heart-felt tribute on Page 14, had a profound effect on car design overall. Uwe expressed his passion for good, progressive design with a quiet eloquence that made what he said all the more compelling.

Bob Lutz's burning desire to make Fords stand out reminded me of his reaction, at the time of the 1981 Escort launch, when he heard I was taking an Alfasud – then the best-handling small car – to the Lommel test track to compare with his new baby. Ford of Europe's Chairman dropped everything, flew to Lommel and drove the cars back-to-back with me and my colleagues, grinning with delight when the 1.3 Escort edged past the 1.5litre Sud at just over 100mph. Surprising though it seems, such enthusiasm is rare among car company heads. As Steve's story makes clear, Bob's contribution to Ford was immense, just as it was at BMW, Chrysler and GM.

When my *Autocar* colleague Steve Copley and I went back to Lommel 11 years later, a few weeks before the Mondeo's launch, we were met by a then little-known engineer called Richard Parry-Jones. He led us swiftly to a workshop where a Mondeo was high on a hoist. The first we saw of this radical new Ford was its underside as RP-J, pointing out the details, talked about the design of its suspension and the quality of its bushes. We knew immediately that this man truly understood about making drivers' cars, and when we went driving we soon learned that the Mondeo was best-in-class. It wasn't just Fords that rode and handled better because of his work; all the competitors' cars had to improve in response. I especially like one story I heard about RP-J. When Ford and VW were jointly developing the first Galaxy/Sharan, the two teams of engineers met for a prototype drive debrief, Ford chaps on one side of the table and VW people down the other. The development tasks had been split and the chassis and steering was one of VW's jobs. The VW engineers declared that the steering was good to go. RP-J said that, with respect, he begged to differ; the steering had too much friction. An argument followed – until VW Chairman

Ferdinand Piëch, who'd been sitting in, got up, walked around to Ford's side and said "I'm sorry, my Volkswagen colleagues, but I agree with Mr Parry-Jones, and we will do as he says."

Think, too, of the efforts of Rod Mansfield and his team at SVE, all carefully detailed in these pages. Their contribution is vital to motoring, not just to Ford's reputation. A world without fast, good handling Fords is unthinkable now.

Among the many other insights, Steve explains high-end strategies such as Ford 2000 especially well, outlining how a company can change its modus operandi, and the effects it can have, good and bad.

The text in this book is full of revelations and the photographs and illustrations are a feast. I think it's an important book about an important company, important people and the important cars they made.

Mel Nichols was editor of CAR Magazine from 1974 to 1981 and later Editorial Director of Autocar, What Car?, Classic & Sports Car, PistonHeads and many other titles for more than 20 years. The Kindle edition of his book And The Revs Keep Rising, which contains 50 of his stories about driving fast cars, is at amazon.co.uk

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