

Buyer's Guide from Hemmings Muscle Machines

July, 2009 - [Jeff Koch](#)

1988-'92 Lincoln MK VII LSC



When the Lincoln Mk VII hit the road in 1984, it was immediately polarizing. Radical even in plush Blass and Versace variants, the LSC--short for Lincoln Sport Coupe--tightened up the suspension, rode the same blackwall Goodyears as the Camaro Z28, largely dispensed with the chrome, and brought in a sporting pretext (despite making just 130hp from the 5.0L V-8). Lincoln hadn't been known for anything approaching performance in about three decades, since the Carrera Panamericana road race was last run. The Mk VII couldn't have been more different from its predecessors. Ford even pushed NHTSA to accept the flush-mounted, European-style headlamps--and won. (It tooled up for the nose to accept sealed-beams, too, just in case.) With these lamps, the Mk VII quite literally changed the face of the American automotive landscape. The only vestige of the old days was the faux-spare-tire hump molded into the trunk.

The Mk VII had a market unto itself: It was sportier than the Cadillac competition, Eldorado (and had the proper wheels driving, to boot), yet was cheaper than the overseas offerings--while embracing an all-American driving feel all its own. While it appeared a wild move at first, Lincoln's wisdom was shown at the start of the next decade; the Mk VII suddenly seemed perfectly in tune with what other cars on the road looked like. It was a Ford Mustang, tailor-made for adults.

As the model years rolled on, Lincoln eschewed body changes in favor of performance and comfort updates; model year 1988 (launching in mid-1987) marked the most significant mechanical changes--the inclusion of Ford's now-legendary 225hp 5.0L H.O. V-8 and 16-inch wheels with anti-lock brakes.



From that point, Lincoln's executive express sailed through to 1992 with only detail and trim changes, and sold more than 100,000 units in the process. (The Bill Blass model took on the LSC's engine, trimmings and suspension details starting in 1990, and from then on became a mechanical twin to the LSC.)

Today, the Mk VII is at its value nadir: They're still plentiful if you know where to look, and because the newest ones are less than 20 years old, some are still considered to be used cars rather than classics. What does this mean for you? Now is the time to buy, and here's what to look for.



ENGINE

The basics of Ford's legendary small-block family 302 engine (actually 4.9 liters, but called a 5.0 in literature) date back to 1969--suffice it to say that Ford got the bugs worked out. In fuel-injected form, with the two-piece intake, high-flow heads and tubular exhaust headers cribbed from the Mustang GT, this engine puts out 225hp and a respectable 300-lbs.ft. of torque. Compression ratio was at 9.2:1 for the 1988-'89 models, and dropped to 9.0:1 for the 1990 and up models, although power and torque ratings, and their respective peaks, remained identical. The LSC and SE used this engine from 1988-'92, and 1990-up designer (i.e., Bill Blass) models used this engine as well. Any Mk VII so equipped will have a letter E in the eighth place in its VIN.

We talked with Art Bailey Jr., currently owner of half a dozen Mk VII's, and also vice president (and newsletter editor) of the Lincoln Mk VII club; he told us that the Mk VII driveline was more than just a case of putting a Mustang engine in the Lincoln. "On our old Internet forum, someone who worked for New Vehicle Design told us that all components that were shared between car lines were classified. Any components--cranks, pistons--anything with dead-on tolerances or a high-quality finish went to Lincoln. (Anything that was down the middle went to Mercury, and the rest went to Ford.) My own experience as an owner tells me this makes sense; I've seen that, given the shared components, Lincoln will outlast the Ford stuff."

Production of the 5.0L engine lasted into 2001 in Ford Explorers, and complete engines are available through the Ford Performance catalog as well. But, if matching numbers is the route you want to go, rebuilt kits are available and, as such things go, are cheap.



TRANSMISSION

Ford offered a single transmission in the Mk VII: the four-speed automatic overdrive, known in Ford circles simply as AOD. Some pre-'88 Mk VIIIs had a weak servo that would smoke the overdrive, but that was solved by the time the 225hp models arrived partway through 1987. LSCs and SEs were all floor-shifted.

They were reliable enough cog-swappers, but the throttle-valve cable bushing (located at the connection to the throttle body) is a small yet crucial piece of the linkage. "That little plastic bushing likes to fall out, and if it does, it'll smoke your transmission in 10 miles," Art said. "It's what tells the transmission how hard to shift, and without it, you can't hold overdrive." Yikes. The good news? "It's a \$4 piece and takes five minutes to install."

DIFFERENTIAL

Ford's long-lived 8.8-inch ring-and-pinion lived beneath the Mk VII. All LSC models received a 3.27:1 gear with a limited-slip differential, as did the 1990-and-up Bill Blass models. Pre-'90 Blass models received a milder 3.08 rear, so be careful if you're swapping rears around. Rebuilding the differential is simple enough, and as a bonus, a variety of hairier ratios are available for an invisible performance gain.

CHASSIS AND SUSPENSION

The Mk VII offered a back seat that adults could actually fit in, thanks in part to its 108.6-inch wheelbase (a full eight inches longer than the Mustang); this also helped translate to a smoother ride. Like virtually every other Fox-body out there, from the '78 Fairmont through to the death of the SN95 Mustang in 2004, the Mk VII ran MacPherson struts in front and a solid axle with four trailing links in back. (The LSC also featured a rear anti-roll bar.)

Unlike nearly every other Fox-body out there, the Mk VII also ran a set of computer-regulated air springs, for an automatic load-leveling feature. Developed as a joint venture between Ford and Goodyear, the air spring itself is a pressurized rubber bag, and the four bags are connected, via plastic tubing, to an electric air compressor and sealed by solenoid valves. The microprocessor regulates the spring's pressure (from 75-100 PSI) according to three sensors: one at each front control arm, and another on the rear axle. It's also connected to the two open-door sensors and a brake sensor. The result: a soft ride that will firm up in the corners.

New airbags are no longer available from the parts counter, but can be sourced from places like Arnott Industries and Bagmasters. "Either new or rebuilt, they're \$70 to \$100 apiece," Art said. "Commonly, the spring rubber simply gets tired. You know, it's a balloon. As it expands and contracts, it folds onto itself, and the rubber deteriorates from weather, ozone--they're like tires."

And here's something you can't say about coil springs: "Replacing the airbags is a 20-minute job; it takes me longer to take the wheel and tire on and off than to replace an airbag."

BRAKES

Along with the Mustang SVO, Ford helped make sure that the Mk VII LSC was the first Fox-body to sport vented four-wheel-disc brakes and five-lug wheels: The Lincoln ran 10.9-inch rotors in front and 11.3-inch rotors in the rear, at least in part to help quash brake dive. Teves-developed anti-lock was a standard feature starting in 1986.

Art also swears that they're plenty reliable: "Sometimes they'll burn up a pump motor, but that's rare, and usually means something else has gone wrong. Pads and parts are all parts-counter items, still.

"A popular swap among our club members is to use an SN95 Mustang front spindle, rotor and caliper, though this requires a new ball-joint arrangement and a 17-inch-or-larger wheel."

WHEELS AND TIRES

Starting in 1988, the Mk VII LSC came standard with blackwall 225/60R16 Goodyear Eagle GT radials; although you could probably find a fresh set of these popular tires hiding on the internet somewhere, 20 years of tire development has produced rubber that will likely both corner more sharply and ride nicer than these.

The LSC has always had aluminum wheels standard, and like the rest of the driveline, these were upgraded through the years. Sixteen-inch wheels became standard on the LSC in 1988, and in 1988 and '89, Lincoln used the turbine wheel, a sporty, multi-bladed design.

Starting in 1990, Lincoln changed to a lace-style wheel, as was popular in those days. There were two indistinguishable styles: a BBS wheel, which was a short-run piece, fairly rare and used only until Ford's own production got up to speed, and a version that was a direct Ford copy. The only way to tell is in front of the wheel, near the lug nuts, which will most likely say Ford, or occasionally BBS. "Those BBS wheels are a chunk of gold," Art told us. Wheels on the 1991 and '92 SE models only will feature dark grey centers, while all others will be a bright argent silver.

"Until 1989, the locking lug, one of the wheel studs and the wheel all had a dot on them somewhere; the wheel was clocked to the car. Also, there was a quarter-ounce balance weight mounted opposite the valve stem. The 1988 owner's manual calls attention to it, but it disappeared from the '89 manual. Whether Lincoln stopped clocking the pieces or just deleted this information from the manual, who knows; two decades later, the marks are all gone anyway," advised Art.



BODY AND INTERIOR

Good news: Sheetmetal and glass were the same throughout the Mk VII's life. Allowing for trim differences like grille shapes and whether the side mirrors were chrome or body-color, pieces from a 1984 model should fit a 1992 model, and vice versa. A Special Edition model from 1990-'92 offered more body-colored trim, like mirrors, bumpers and wheels.

The headlamps are prone to yellowing, though they can be rubbed out; this seems to have more to do with age than exposure to the elements. The low-slung Marchal foglamps have a habit of getting smashed, and are in short supply.

Also, a 1992-only color, Deep Jewel Green Metallic, has some resonance with followers of these particular models.

Good luck finding a clean one, though. "Burning through the clearcoat on these is not uncommon, especially those that were exposed to the sun," Art told us. Yet the sun might not have been entirely to blame. "As it was explained to me, Ford used a primer that, as it went off, would leach some chemical out. It would escape through the color coat, but the clearcoat was more of a boundary, and it would lift the clearcoat from underneath. Darker colors were worse. There was some sort of a class-action suit, not a recall; for a time, Ford honored anyone who brought in a peeling car. The offer for repainting expired long ago."



There were plenty of interior changes in 1990: a new instrument panel, door panels, smaller headrests, deletion of the adjustable seat bolster, an airbag steering wheel and rear shoulder belts among them. There were also a variety of seating options available. Standard was the Sport Seat, the most common LSC seat. This came with perforated leather, although you could also order a color-coded velour seat insert in lieu of leather.

This may be the way to go when picking out your Mk VII, as the leather seating areas tend to crack and split over time; Art suggested that the perforated leather, which allows sweat and body oils to penetrate the seat, may have something to do with the low survival rate. (There was also the Sport Delete seat, basically a Bill Blass-spec chair without the pillow back, which was comfortable in a straight line but was hopeless in turns.)

Also, pre-'90 steering wheels have a nasty habit of reacting with sunlight and emitting a sticky black ooze through the leather rim. "Someone described it as 'a bag of grease installed inside the wheel,' which is as good a description as I've heard," Art said.

The airbag-equipped wheels aren't nearly as bad, and short of not parking in the sun, or installing a steering wheel cover or some sort of aftermarket wheel, there isn't much that can be done to remedy the situation.



RESTORATION AND PERFORMANCE PARTS

The collector market for the Mk VII has not yet matured, and restoration parts are few and far between. Parts cars are cheap enough that you should be able to get rot-free steel from Western sources with little trouble.

That said, performance parts are plentiful: Ford's fuel-injected 302 is the engine that convinced a country built on carburetors that there's no reason to be afraid of fuel injection. It's the same driveline and, to an extent, the

same chassis as the hard-charging Mustang--save for some curb weight, it should be able to do anything and everything that a Mustang can be made to.

Swaps to the T5 five-speed are said to be fairly common, and some people have even ditched the airbags in favor of conventional coils. Meanwhile, to Mustang fans, the LSC rear is a performance part, and will accept the same limited-slip differentials and gearsets as a Mustang.

Owner's View

I bought a new Lincoln Mk VII in 1986; it was the most expensive car I've ever purchased, and since I still have it, it's the cheapest, too. I bought it because it was tow-rated and I had a 21-foot jet boat; I went 600 miles round-trip twice a month for five years worth of summers towing that boat; I've got a quarter-million miles on it now, and I've never had the valve covers off.

I've got five in the driveway right now, including this black Special Edition. I only buy these cars; over the years, I've only ever sold one of them.--Art Bailey Jr.

This article originally appeared in the July, 2009 issue of Hemmings Muscle Machines.

