



1961-65 Lincoln Continental: "Distinguished, Durable, Beautiful"

by James W. (Bill) Howell, Ph.D.



The "Land Yacht" 1958-60 Lincolns were a failure in the marketplace, so for 1961 Ford pointed its flagship marque in a different direction. Sales were unexceptional at first, but over time a continuity of design turned Lincoln into a true threat to Cadillac.

The '61 Continental marked a new beginning for Lincoln.
(Owner: Blaine Jenkins)

What if today you could go out and buy a luxury car you knew had undergone exhaustive testing by specially trained factory personnel before being shipped to the dealer? What if you knew each engine was bench tested at an equivalent of 98 mph, broken down, reinspected, reassembled, and finally tested again while mounted in the engine compartment? What if you knew that after testing the entire electrical system of the car, including the measurement of precisely how much current each component of the system was drawing, the car was taken on a rigorous 12-mile road test? And that the test covered 189 items for the quality of function and adjustment? And what if that car carried a two-year/24,000 mile warranty—at a time when 90 days and 4,000 miles was the norm?

Well, if you had the money and the need for such a luxury car, you would probably go out and buy it. This is just what a great many people did when Ford Motor Company introduced the 1961 Lincoln Continental.

For the era, the people at Lincoln had done something astounding, having downsized a huge luxury car from the year before, cutting a wallop of 14 inches from its length and about 1½ inches from its width. If this wasn't enough, the final product was a car that gained almost universal acceptance and praise for excellence of design. Indeed, the car won the annual award presented by the Industrial Designers' Institute, one not dedicated solely to automobile styling, as well as the 1961 Automotive Engineering Excellence award from *Car Life* magazine. The elegant simplicity of the '61 Lincoln Continental is still much admired today by design professionals and the public alike, and a while back the Milestone Car Society chose it as a postwar "Milestone."

Automotive design was forever changed with the introduction of the '61 Lincoln Continental. The age of chrome and extensive body sculpturing was on the wane. It was only a question of time before other manufacturers got in line to follow the lead set by Lincoln. General Motors did so first with its 1962 Pontiac Bonneville and Grand Prix, followed quickly by the introduction of the '63 Buick Riviera. Chrysler wooed master designer, Elwood P. Engel, author of the style change at Lincoln, away from Ford to instill some simplicity in the aftermath of its "Forward Look."

Ford was really reaching for the big brass ring with the debut of this unique car. No corners were cut. The departure

from the methods of operation of previous years was almost total. There was one major exception. As with the 1958-60 models, these cars were built without a standard frame. Planning for the production of a Lincoln without a separate frame had been extensive and not without problems.

Even before the 1956 Lincoln was released, planning had already begun for the fundamental change in the body of the Lincoln. Management decided to build a new plant in Wixom, Michigan, expressly for the production of a new type of body, a unit body or unibody. This type of construction is also known as "uniframe" because the chassis and body are essentially a single structure welded together.

Lincoln had tried this type of body on the 1936 Zephyr. From the standpoint of engineering, this was a big step. True, the unibody concept had been used in smaller cars, but the '58 Lincoln was hardly a small car by anyone's standards. Ford designer John Najjar had been told to outdo Cadillac in both exterior and interior measurements—and he did just that!

This was a daring move.

There had been some real concern in the hierarchy at Lincoln, especially from chief engineer Harley Copp, as to whether the company could build such a large car using unibody construction—or, if it could be built, would the thing vibrate too much and/or be too heavy? There were a lot of "ifs" and "maybes." But, at the time, many knowledgeable people in the automotive world thought the unit body was the coming thing.

The original idea in building a specialized plant at Wixom was for the production of the new unibody four-passenger '58 Thunderbird, the car collectors now affectionately call the "Squarebird" (*CA*, September 1984).

Additionally, "unit thinking" involved the makes of the cars being produced. The Continental Mark II both began and ended the Continental Division at Ford. Sales had been disappointing, so management concluded that the Lincoln and the Continental must share the same bodyshell for economy of scale in manufacturing. With the advent of the '61, Lincoln also shared some components with the Thunderbird. It has been said that the '61 was designed starting with the Thunderbird's firewall, in addition to starting out its life as a T-Bird.

The first unibody Lincolns, the 1958-60 models (*CA*, June 1988), were mammoth machines, some of the largest production cars ever put on the American road—

certainly the largest unibody cars ever built. But the elegant unibody design that lasted an incredible nine model years was born with the '61.

Ironically, the design concept started out as a prospective two-door '61 Thunderbird (*CA*, August 1990). Ford's vice-president for styling, George Walker, had decided he wanted a Continental-type Thunderbird. This came as a surprise to almost everyone since Joe Oros and his team were already working on the T-Bird. Walker's "right-hand man" was Elwood P. Engel, who was Staff Stylist, or chief advanced studio stylist, and acted in a sort of freelance way, roving the various design studios at Ford. Engel was responsible for overseeing the progress of designs throughout the Design Center for Walker. In addition, he was responsible for the styling produced in the Advanced, International, and Tractor Studios. John Najjar acted as his Executive Stylist, responsible to him for the design activity in each of these areas.

There was obviously no combined studio area to house all three activities. International was in one end of the basement, Advanced at the other, while the Tractor studio was relegated to a small corner upstairs in a first floor design bay. The full-size design bays on the first floor measured a generous 95 feet by 32 feet, having 12-foot-tall folding accordion doors between them. The Lincoln-Mercury and Ford Studios had six to eight open bays.

Engel's roving took place both day and night; he enjoyed going through the studios in the evening looking through sketches and models. This master designer had an advanced design studio for his Special Products Team in a very narrow room in a basement at Ford, laughingly called the "submarine" or "stiletto" studio. The building containing the studio had been built immediately after the Korean War as a multi-purpose structure, perhaps because another war might come along. Deliberately designed so it could be used as a warehouse, for manufacturing, or for design studios, its floors could be partitioned off temporarily as needed.

Engel's advanced design studio was a sort of left-over space in one end of the basement. Indeed, it was necessary to place a mirror on one wall of this narrow enclosure just to be able to see the other side of a clay model! Not only was that area cramped, the lighting was poor—stylists couldn't get a good view of the flow of their designs within the studio. To do that, a full-size clay model had to be laboriously removed from its mechanical bridge (a measuring device used to insure



consistency), hauled down the basement corridor, up the freight elevator, and finally another three to four hundred feet to the showroom or the courtyard. Only then could the designers get a balanced view of their work. Najjar recalls: "In retrospect, we were pretty lucky because in many instances we saw our complete clay model from a distance just minutes before our management reviewed it. The upstairs studios had their problems too, but the basement [submarine] studio's task was a little tougher."

Cramped as it was, this is where Engel set his crew to work on the Continental-type Thunderbird ordered by Walker. Bob Thomas was sent over to Oros' studio to get the dimensions of the package, after which the project got underway.

As executive designer for Engel, Najjar oversaw the work of designers in the submarine studio: Robert M. (Bob) Thomas, Engel's design analyst, John Orff (who had

just returned from England where he had been Chief Stylist at Ford's operation there), and Colin Neale, senior designer. He made sure fresh ideas were produced for Engel to consider on his frequent visits. To do this, he culled through numerous proposals, ideas, and suggestions made each day by his staff, choosing the more promising ones for Engel's scrutiny.

Engel had a specific concept in mind. In fact, he had told Najjar that "I want two vertical blades with the greenhouse nestled in between." Incidentally, throughout the development process the passenger housing above the beltline of the car was always referred to as the "Continental greenhouse." Remember that originally this was to be a T-bird, thus Engel envisioned a somewhat smaller two-door automobile at the time. Engel and Najjar had been instructed to incorporate the flavor of the Continental Mark II in this two-door design exercise for the enlarged T-Bird.

What eventually became the '61 Lincoln Continental actually began life as a Thunderbird design effort, the idea being to create a T-Bird with the class and "flavor" of the 1940-48 Lincoln Continental. The clay models seen here reflect that mission, and a close look should suggest the reason why Robert S. McNamara was inspired to ask that a four-door version be created to become the '61 Lincoln. The grille (top left) would appear in modified form on the '69 Imperial, the rear-end "hump" on the '64 Imp, while the big, round taillights scalloped into the bumper (center right) found their way onto the '62 Ford. In addition, the huge vertical bumper caps (bottom left) were seen on the 1967-68 Imperial, and look much like the design theme used on Cadillacs since the mid-Sixties. Note, however, the slabsided look that was to become the trademark of the '61 and later Lincolns.



The four-door "T-Bird" was looking very much like a Lincoln Continental by November 11, 1959 (top left), though even on February 1, 1960 (top right) the grille hadn't been finalized. However, this matter was apparently settled by April 11, 1960 (center right). The hashmarks and Lincoln badge on the lower front fender were dropped along the way. In May 1960, the '61 Continental (bottom row) was pretty much ready to roll.

By this time Engel and Najjar had heard the negative responses from the automotive design critics and the buying public concerning their last collaborative effort, the '58 Lincoln. Engel was determined to learn from that experience. He told Najjar, "I want a clean car—no garbage!"

When Thomas returned from Oros' studio with the package dimensions, he thought it best to keep the width of the car at the same dimension as the width at the cowl, pulling out the plan view at the rear to yield a wide low base on which to set the greenhouse. Engel agreed with this

concept because it left a lot of space between the C-pillar and the ends of the rear fenders.

At one point, Walker walked into the studio and asked Thomas if the clay model was still within the package dimensions. "Yes, sir," Thomas said, "right on package." But a day before a presentation of the model, Thomas measured the rear and found it was five inches over package. He and the other designers had to work all night to bring the model back on target. Luckily, this didn't hurt the design. One minor problem the designers had with the original project model was the taillights. They were too small in square inches and had to be widened by the time the car went into production.

By August 1958, Engel, Najjar, and staff had reached a plateau in developing a simple, but elegant, design for the Continental-style T-Bird. When Walker brought Robert S. McNamara—who was soon to become Ford Motor Company

president and later U.S. Secretary of State under President Kennedy—down to the studio to see the results, he was quite impressed. McNamara liked the elegance of the design so much that he suggested the clay model be redone as a four-door Lincoln Continental.

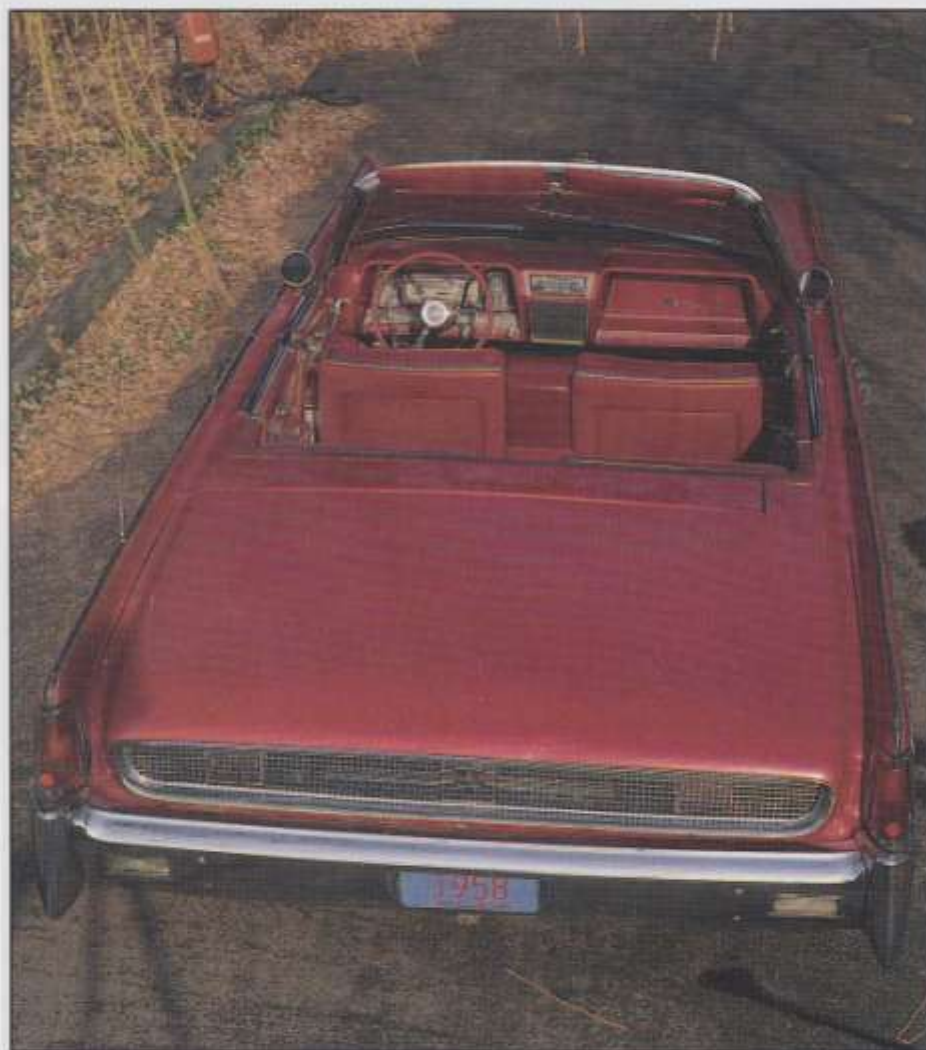
This came as a surprise to everyone because Ford management had already approved a design for the '61 Lincoln. Following the flavor of the 1958-60 models, Eugene "Gene" Bordinat's design team had already developed, and gotten approval on, a completely different and much larger model bearing a resemblance to the 1958-60 Lincoln/Continental. With Bordinat heading the Lincoln design studio, this was as would be expected. Looking back on it now, lovers of beautiful automobiles can fully appreciate McNamara's suggestion. The Bordinat model just didn't have the lasting classic elegance embodied in the Engel design.

"Suffice to say," Najjar recalls, "compe-



The '61 Continental is generally considered the "purest" of the Sixties Lincolns. It's notable for the high-mount front bumper design, unique to the '61s. (Owner: Blaine Jenkins)

Compared to the fins and flash of the late '50s, the elegant simplicity of the '61 Lincoln Continental design was a big gamble for Ford.



If ever a car could be described as slab-sided, the '61 Lincoln Continental probably qualified better than any other. Only two models were offered, a four-door sedan and the four-door convertible seen here. It was priced at \$6713. (Compliments of the Dells Auto Museum, Wisconsin Dells)

tion in the Design Center was fierce as it should be and Elwood really wanted to have his Studio design both the Thunderbird and the Continental! We put in 10- to 12-hour days, six days a week for quite a while. I think that the effort by the total Design Center on those two 1961 vehicles was outstanding."

In fact, the design was quite a departure for Engel himself—remember that he had also done the '58 Lincoln with Najjar. That car had been quite a flamboyant radical design with its distinctive body sculpting. Some critics had called it "The Chinese Look."

However, according to Ford designer Arnold B. "Buzz" Grisinger, one of Engel's trademarks could be clearly seen on the '61: there was the unusually high-riding bumper up front, a device he had used before. This singular design motif disappeared on the car after the first year of production. Body engineers weren't too fond of such high-bar bumpers because they required too much metal behind the grille to hold them up.

The full-size clay model of what had started out as a new T-Bird was brought out of its cramped quarters in the stiletto portion of the basement and into its rightful place in the Lincoln design studio to be "Lincolnized." Somewhat unusual was the fact that this Lincoln was always modeled full-scale, never in fractional scale as with most car designs.

Although Najjar attended some of the design meetings related to the '61, it was now the task of Bordinat and his staff "to maintain the look and bring the design home" to completion. But Engel followed the car through the entire process, from its inception in the basement to its final production-line form. This was an awkward situation. Bordinat, as head of the Lincoln studio, and his team had made a proposal for the '61 Lincoln and got it approved, only to have it set aside for Engel's design. Bordinat's idea had been to give the Lincoln design continuity, much as Cadillac had maintained styling continuity for quite some time via its tailfins and eggcrate grille texture. Thus, it had been his strategy to maintain the design theme of the '58-'60 Lincolns with his '61 proposal. Needless to say, Engel and Bordinat were not great buddies. But both acted professionally, keeping the communication lines open, each doing his part to finish the '61. Bordinat was assisted in his efforts by executive stylist Don DeLaRossa, who did much of the spade work and the arguing with the engineers, assisting Bordinat in preparing the car for produc-



Lincoln began emphasizing design continuity almost as soon as the '61 Continental debuted. Though that was a risky move in early '60s Detroit, Lincoln stuck to its guns, pushing instead the idea that the Continental was "Timeless in styling." It's not too surprising, then, that the '63 model wasn't changed too much. No matter, car spotters could distinguish the '63 because of its new front and rear grilles. The convertible was up in price over 1961 by just over \$200, to \$6916. Output of the four-door convertible would never be great, and the 3138 built for 1963 was about average for the seven years the soft top sedan was built. (Owner: Eldon T. Anson)



that strip stainless steel instead of chrome.

A wraparound windshield was not used on this car, which made it easier to get in and out. The back-hinged rear doors were also part of the strategy of making it relatively easy to enter or exit. The designers referred to the car's door arrangement as "barn doors." Of course, the public has always referred to them as "suicide doors" because of the supposed consequences of opening a rear door while at highway speeds. Perhaps this latter point is the reason Lincoln installed a "door-ajar" warning light on the dash.

Through the long process of developing the '61, several designers of distinction assisted Engel in working out the design. Joe Orff did the front end and Neale the rear. Thomas worked on the body sectioning and the greenhouse. The '61 Lincoln project's chief engineer was Harold C. MacDonald.

Najjar remembers Engel, flushed with the success of having the model from the basement replace Bordinat's design, setting to work on the interior. To describe his ideas for the dashboard instrument cluster, Engel set some vertical metal cylinders out on a table and made some suggestions in clay. L. David Ash, quite a master designer himself (and later chief designer for the Mark III project), then applied his special creativity to develop the exceptional luxury interior that looks so right even today. Engel watched its progress closely, suggesting motifs and sometimes having appliqués cast in metal to see how they looked. He oversaw, directly, the basic work on the instrument cluster and the steering wheel. Everything had to be up to his standard.

The designers named to receive the design award from the Industrial Design Institute were Walker, Engel, Najjar, Thomas, Bordinat, and DeLaRossa. Again, this was an awkward situation. A photo showing the proud designers receiving the award was made on one Monday morning in 1961 in Bordinat's office. Thomas pointed out in his book, *Confessions of an Automotive Stylist*, that Walker presented quite a smile to the camera in spite of the fact that this had been his office just the week before—Walker had already been fired by Ford and Engel was well on his way to his job at Chrysler. The story around town was that top management had found out about Walker's efforts with Chrysler on behalf of his colleague. Top management didn't care for this maneuvering on Walker's part.

Unlike previous Lincolns, the public had a choice between only two 123-inch-wheelbase models: four-door thin-pillar



The mildly facelifted '62 Lincoln Continental sported a more conventional front bumper and new front and rear grilles composed of small rectangles. Interiors exuded luxury. (Owner: Col. J.L. Sanders)



Lincoln called its 1962 Continental "A remarkable investment," and indeed the convertible would prove exactly that over time. Compared to 1961, the price had edged up only \$7, to \$6720, while the weight, already a hefty 5215 pounds in 1961, increased to an even portlier 5370. This made the Lincoln 740 pounds heavier than the Cadillac Series Sixty-Two (two-door) ragtop, even though the Caddy measured about 10 inches longer overall. The "suicide" rear doors were a novel—and some said dangerous—feature, but they did make entry and egress easier. (Owner: Frank J. Monhart III)

sedan and four-door convertible. Because of 100 pounds of ballast-balancing and the complex top mechanism, the convertible weighed about 300 pounds more than the sedan. In fact, the engineers went to great lengths to properly balance the convertible. Under the fender, between the bumper and the front wheel, was the evidence: Mounted to the uniframe, on both sides of the car, was a massive hunk of metal ballast the size of a cannon ball! There were also tuning weights at the rear.

The convertible sedan was the first such car Lincoln had built since 1939, and the only production four-door convertible

available in the world at the time. Storage of the top was unique. When the mechanism was set in motion, which the driver initiated at the touch of a finger, two bolts were automatically released from the top of the windshield, the trunk lid unbolted, and through a complex series of relays the top automatically folded into the trunk. When stored, the rear deck was perfectly flat because a small panel unfolded from the trunk lid during the cycle, replacing what had been the rear package shelf when the top was up. Putting the top up or down was always a traffic stopper.

Of course, Ford had produced a retract-

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able hardtop from 1957-59, and this was basically the same complex mechanism. However, the idea had originally been proposed for the '56 Continental Mark II. Thomas and some of the other designers at the old Continental Division had presented management with the idea, but only a little money was given for development. But the top was too expensive for the low-volume Continental, so Ford division produced the retractable, which wasn't a great commercial success. Ironically, the mechanism returned to the Lincoln Continental, albeit for a soft-top adaptation, which had appeared earlier on the '58 T-Bird. For the 1961 Lincoln, the mechanism was the right idea at the right time.

Though the '61 Continental was 10 and 15 inches shorter than the Cadillac and Imperial, it weighed about the same. And with 300 horsepower and a two-barrel carb, compared to 325 and 350 horses and four-barrel units, the Lincoln was slower. In an April 1961 *Motor Trend* test, the Continental took 12.9 seconds in the 0-60-mph sprint, compared to 10.4 and 10.5 seconds for the Caddy and Imp. Surprisingly, while the competition scored 8-12 miles per gallon, *MT* credited the Lincoln with 10-14 mpg. With a four-barrel and 320 bhp, *MT* coaxed the '63 Continental from 0-60 in a more creditable 10.9 seconds, and quoted gas mileage in the 9-14 mpg range.

As noted earlier, the high-bar front bumper was changed to a more conventional unit for '62. The idea was to normalize, but retain the essence of the front-end design, this time with a rectangular eggcrate grille texture. Other changes, cosmetically speaking, were minor, although the Continental emblem was eliminated from the wheel covers. In its place, the name of the car was spelled out in a circle. Narrower whitewall tires were mounted, though wide-whites were still available. Inside, the flip-down air conditioner ducts on the center of the dash were replaced by regular vents. Under the skin, additional sound insulation was placed throughout the car. Power vent windows, electric radio antenna, and remote control exterior mirrors were available. Also listed was an automatic headlight dimmer and a remote decklid release.

For 1963, the radio antenna was moved from the right rear fender to the front left. The framed portion on the rear of the car received five Continental stars. Finally, a four-barrel carburetor replaced the two-barrel unit that had been used for 1961-62. Very little, if any, fuel economy was lost, and the engine now produced 320 bhp



How does one go about facilitating "pure elegance"? Very carefully, if these design studies are any indication. A May 18, 1960 proposal (top) retained the '61-style front bumper, but sported the small rectangles that would show up for 1962. An April 1961 clay model (second from top) looked very much like the eventual production version, while a July 1961 creation (above) featured a rear tire in the "continental" tradition. It's probably just as well that this vertical-bar grille (left) never made it to production.



Just about the only decoration on the sides of the '63 Lincoln (top) was the "Continental" nameplate on the rear fenders. Even with the top up, the convertible sedan looked good. (Owner: Andy Hotton) The '64 Continental (second from top) featured an eggcrate grille both above and in the rear bumper. (Owner: Roger Clements) An October 1962 styling study (above) sported nine vertical hashmarks on the rear doors, while a June 1961 proposal (right) looked like a '62 all ready to go.



instead of 300. An alternator replaced the generator on all models, and this was the first year an AM-FM radio was listed as an option. Sedans received the flared aluminum brake drums that until now came only on the ragtop.

The '64 Lincoln Continental sported a more extensive facelift. The framed rear-end motif was replaced by a lip. The interior's dual-cowl dashboard was changed to a form consisting of an instrument cluster with a straight, flat treatment to the right on the glovebox side. Other new touches included a low fuel warning light, automatic parking brake release, and a vertically adjustable steering wheel. Tire size also changed, to 9.15 X 15.

Najjar, though by then working on unrelated projects, remembers being pulled into a studio by Bordinat, who was now Vice-President for Design, to look at two Lincolns. One was a production '61, the other was the same model, but had flat side glass rather than curved. "Look," he said to Najjar, "the flat glass doesn't affect the looks of the car, and it will save some production costs." Flat glass duly appeared for '64, but Thomas, who had worked on the '61, was horrified. "The car was just not designed for flat side glass. It didn't look right, especially from the 3/4-view."

A seasoned designer, Buzz Grisinger, was brought in to do the Lincoln facelifts from '64 on, the philosophy being to "freshen it up every year." Receiving the package plans from engineering, Buzz and his team went with a theme a bit more conventional than the original design. He wasn't given a choice about the flat side glass, that matter having already been decided.

Both the buying public and automotive critics had been unhappy with the narrowness of the entry way into the back seat. Given the lead time and the engineering involved, 1964 had been the first time Lincoln had been able to address that criticism. The answer was to add three inches to the 123-inch wheelbase, which went into widening the rear entry. Because of the added length, engineers were able to give the convertible a lower profile top. Low-profile 15-inch tires were also used. The added length also made it possible to increase the capacity of the trunk by installing a deeper well.

The overall design motif was a fine-bar grille; an appliqué appeared in a narrow strip across the top of the rear bumper. The fine lines were repeated in the interior, which was liberally lighted by several standard courtesy lights and map lights. This was the first year the interior rear-view mirror was bonded directly to the



The '64 Lincoln Continental convertible sedan (top and left) listed at \$6938, making it \$308 more expensive than the two-door Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz ragtop. It was also more popular, outselling the Caddy by 3328 units to 1870. Narrow-band whitewall tires were most often selected by buyers, but wide whites, as seen here, were still available. (Owners: Patricia and Rexford Parker) The '64 sedan (above) stickered at \$6292.

windshield. Grisinger attempted to set off the front of the car for added brightness, reasoning that if he could have his fine-bar grille tipped at an angle he could achieve a great deal of sparkle. However, this was not to be. Before production, an unknown body engineer adjusted the grille to the vertical and the sparkle effect was lost.

The general design features, as well as the engineering basics were carried on into 1965. One exception, however, was new standard front disc brakes. By this time, people were becoming more safety conscious, and seat belts were being installed in new cars. One other safety consideration being addressed was the night visibility of the car in profile. One common solution to this problem was to have front parking lights and taillights that wrapped around to the sides. Grisinger's crew chose this approach for the '65, though the rear of the car had already been visible from the sides because of the insert-style taillights. Parking lights were placed on the front fenders above the bumper guards in a somewhat reduced and sharpened version of the ones that were used on the '63 Buick Riviera. Both the taillights and the front parking lights were encased in metal grilles. A vinyl roof was made available as a factory option for the first time in 1965. For the first time in this series, there was no metal appliqué design on the rear of the car, just the Continental star over the keyhole.

The '66 Lincoln Continental was re-skinned and given a curvier shape, though it was still obviously a Lincoln. Facelifts would continue through 1969, after which the uniframe cars would be replaced by an all-new, and larger, body-on-frame 1970 model. Like the 1961-69 generation, the '70 would survive for a decade.

The '61 Lincoln had hit the automotive marketplace by surprise. Cadillac had by that time diminished its fin size, which had peaked in '59. The Imperial was still of monstrous proportions, including its tailfins. But in 1961, the other automakers rushed back to their styling studios when they saw the elegant Lincoln Continental. One quick look was enough to convince anybody that Lincoln was now setting the design pace in the luxury field.

Motor Trend noted in 1961 that "The

The '65 Lincoln Continental (top) was treated to a new grille, which was more vertical than before and sported a bowed-out center section. Wood-tone trim adorned the dashboard (center), which is topped here with an automatic headlight dimmer. The 430 V-8 engine (bottom) was mildly tuned to 320 smooth horsepower.



**Clubs for 1961-65
Lincoln Continental Lovers**

Lincoln and Continental Owners Club
P.O. Box 549
Nogales, Arizona 85628
Telephone: (602) 281-8193
Recognizes all Lincolns and Continentals

Colorado Continental Convertible Club
683 South Carr Street
Lakewood, CO 80226
Telephone: (303) 986-8402
Recognizes 1961-67 Lincoln Continental

The Milestone Car Society
P.O. Box 55013
Indianapolis, IN 46205
Telephone: (317) 257-1978

Years later, Paul R. Woudenberg, in the *Illustrated Lincoln Buyer's Guide*, said of the '61 that "The end result was an extraordinarily elegant design which rendered the bizarre offerings of Cadillac and Chrysler at once obsolete." In *Lincoln & Continental: The Postwar Years*, he proclaimed that "The ['61] was the first of the 'new look' cars of the sixties, quite unlike any luxury competition and soon to be copied by all." And Thomas E. Bonsall, in *The Lincoln Motorcar: Sixty Years of Excellence*, wrote that "The 1961

**1961 Lincoln Continental
Specifications**

General

Wheelbase (in.):	123.0
Overall length (in.):	212.4
Overall width (in.):	78.6
Overall height (in.):	53.5
Tread, front (in.):	62.1
Tread, rear (in.):	61.0
Weight, sdn/cvt (lbs):	4,927/5,215
Turning circle (ft):	46.7
Steering, turns lock-to-lock:	3.7
Ground clearance (in.):	5.5
Trunk (cu ft):	10.5

Engine and Drivetrain

Type:	90-degree ohv V-8
Displacement (cid):	430.0
Bore x stroke (in.):	4.30 x 3.70
Compression ratio:	10.0:1
Carburetor:	2-bbl
Horsepower @ rpm:	300 @ 4,100
Torque (lbs/ft) @ rpm:	465 @ 2,000
Transmission:	3-speed auto
Differential:	hypoid, semi-floating
Rear axle ratio:	2.89:1
Brakes:	hydraulic, duo-servo (power)
Brake lining area (sq in.):	227.0
Suspension, front:	independent, coil springs
Suspension, rear:	solid axle, 7-leaf semi-elliptic springs

Lincoln Continental was something no Lincoln had been since the original Continental: it was influential. . . [It] sparked a styling revolution in Detroit that was felt far outside the luxury car field and which continues to this day. The influence on Cadillac styling was seen as early as 1963, but Chrysler paid the ultimate compliment: it hired Engel away from Ford. If the 1964 Imperial was not exactly a Lincoln clone, it was obviously cut from similar cloth." In *The Golden Anniversary of the Lincoln Motorcar*, editor Beverly Rae Kimes opined that "Timelessness is a mark of good design; obviously the Lincoln Continental has it."

Interestingly, the 1961 Lincoln set the style legacy—or identity—that Bordinat had been searching for when he proposed a 1958-style Lincoln for the '61 design. Though he lost out to Engel for that design generation, the '61 Lincoln Continental set the character—and continuity—for that fine family of automobiles. Set a 1987 Lincoln Town Car next to a 1961 Lincoln Continental: the family resemblance is instantly recognizable. Ironically, Cadillac seemingly lost the continuity of its design heritage, though in the past several years it appears to be finding its way again.

Lincoln management must have been disappointed with the sales of their beautiful '61 Continental. Output rose only marginally from 24,820 units in 1960 to 25,164, though this was in a down market. However, Lincoln's design consistency would soon begin to help: production increased to 31,061 for 1962, 31,233 for '63, 37,297 for '64, and 40,180 for '65 (including about 3,000 convertible sedans per year). This was still a long way from Cadillac, whose output ranged from 138,379 to 182,435 in the 1961-65 era. Nonetheless, Lincoln crossed the 100,000-unit threshold in 1973, and model year sales in 1989 exceeded 200,000. Obviously, continuity of design (plus a wider selection of models) has paid off handsomely for Lincoln over time.

A couple of years before he passed away, Elwood Engel's wife found a '61 Lincoln Continental in very good condition and gave it to him as a Christmas present. An example of this triumph of automotive design had been returned to its creator. He'd be proud that the continuity he helped give Lincoln starting in 1961 is still very much in evidence in 1991.

Special thanks to John Najjar, Buzz Grisinger, Bob Thomas, Jon Jacks, Ron Stein, Ron Baker, Tara Summer, Jeanna Swanson, Max Hirskowitz, Jimmy L. Howell, and Alan Bell.





Opposite page: The Lincoln Continental's soft top was fully automatic. Its basic mechanism had been originally developed for the 1956 Continental Mark II, but deemed too expensive to put into production. The system, however, did show up on the '57 Ford Fairlane 500 Skyliner retractable hardtop, and was then transferred over to the '58 Thunderbird ragtop, and finally to the '61 Lincoln convertible. *This page:* One of the main virtues of the Continental's soft top was that it disappeared entirely, leaving a clear rear deck. It also did away with the bothersome boot. (Owner: Sherman Williams)

1961-65 Lincoln Continental Models, Prices, Production

1961											
Continental (wb 123.0)	Wght	Price	Prod	74A	cvt sdn	5,340	6,916	3,138			
53A	htp sdn	4,927	6,067	22,303	1963 Engine			bore × stroke	bhp	availability	
57C	htp sdn, special model	—	—	4	V8, 430.0	4.30 × 3.70	320	S-all			
74A	cvt sdn	5,215	6,713	2,857	1964						
1961 Engine				bore × stroke	bhp	availability	Continental (wb 126.0)				
V8, 430.0	4.30 × 3.70	300	S-all	82	htp sdn	5,055	\$6,292	32,969			
1962											
Continental (wb 123.0)				Wght	Price	Prod	86	cvt sdn	5,393	6,938	3,328
53A	htp sdn	4,966	\$6,074	27,849	1964 Engine						
74A	cvt sdn	5,370	6,720	3,212	V8, 430.0	4.30 × 3.70	320	S-all			
1962 Engine				bore × stroke	bhp	availability	1965				
V8, 430.0	4.30 × 3.70	300	S-all	Continental (wb 126.0)							
1963											
Continental (wb 123.0)				Wght	Price	Prod	82	htp sdn	5,075	\$6,292	36,824
53A	htp sdn	4,936	\$6,270	28,095	86	cvt sdn	5,475	6,938	3,356		
1965 Engine				bore × stroke	bhp	availability	1965 Engine				
V8, 430.0	4.30 × 3.70	320	S-all								

A Lack of Lilliputian Lincolns

by Dennis Doty

Those collecting only current, more easily available miniatures of the cars featured in CA will need only a short shopping list this time—there are few.

For the 1961-65 Lincoln Continental, only a '65 convertible from Century is currently offered. It's a handbuilt 1/43-scale white metal model (#14) that comes in a number of colors. The most desirable out-of-production miniatures were made by AMT in the form of 1/25-scale kits and promos/frictions. For 1961, there were promos and frictions of the "hardtop" and convertible, molded in acetate plastic. Cylolac, a more stable, non-warping type, came into use later in 1961 and Continentals were also produced in that material, although the "hardtop" became a sedan. Very unusual. In kits, both the sedan and convertible (K-412) were available, without engines (for the last time), in the annual 3-in-1 series: stock, custom, and in this case, Pace Car. Frictions were gone by 1962, with the sedan and ragtop listed and offered in promo form through 1963. For 1964 and '65, only sedan promos were made.

In kit form, the sedan was offered in

1962 (#K422) along with the convertible (K411). A sedan replaced the "hardtop" for 1963 (6423, convertible 06-413), 1964 (6424 and 6414), and 1965 (6425 and 6415). The '65 convertible was interesting in that it featured a custom station wagon option. This kit (and option) was reissued in the late '60s (T338), and recently in the Prestige Series (6504). A '62 sedan kit in 1/32 scale was made by Sanwa Tokyo Plamo, while Ideal turned out a battery-powered toy of a '64, possibly in 1/24 scale, though likely smaller.

Turning to out-of-production diecasts, Cheryca offered a 1/43-scale 1961 sedan (#17), as did Yonezawa (217). Hubley also made a '61, but in about 1/40 scale. Tekno turned out a 1/43-scale '62 sedan (829), while Dinky produced a '64 sedan in the same scale (170), later offered by Nicky of India. The last 1/43-scale diecast was a '65 from Diapet (D-217). In the smaller three-inch diecasts, a very good '64 sedan was offered by Matchbox (31); Maxwell also featured a sedan (505), plus a police car (513), fire chief car (514), and Red Cross car (515).

For current models of the 1953-54 Chev-

rolet, there are few, but they are goodies. In 1/43 scale, Motor City USA makes both a Bel Air Sport Coupe (#MC7) and a convertible, either in top-up or top-down form (MC8u and MC8). Also produced is a sedan delivery (MC9), along with a limited-edition sedan delivery with Motor City USA markings (MC9s). Monogram makes a 1/24-scale '53 Bel Air hardtop as a two-way stock/rod kit (2781), which was first offered in 1978 (2237). Revell has a non-stock 1/25-scale '54 sedan in a set with a stock '55 and '57 Chevy (7447). In HO-scale, Magnuson offers a Bel Air hardtop as a resin kit with white metal parts.

Previous offerings must start with the bank promos from PMC. The 1/25-scale '53s included a series One-Fifty two- and four-door sedan, Two-Ten two-door club coupe, and Bel Air two- and four-door sedans, Sport Coupe, and ragtop. These promos lacked interiors, except for the convertible, and had plated metal windows. A '53 Two-Ten four-door sedan in 1/25 scale was offered by Banthrico in slush cast pot metal. PMC and Banthrico models were all back for the '54 update, in all the same forms, with one exception: the club coupe



Among AMT's 1961-65 Lincoln Continentals was a nice 1/25-scale '65 "Hardtop Customizing Kit."



AMT's '61 Continental ragtop promo: 1/25 scale.



AMT also did the '62 Lincoln Continental promo.



For 1964, AMT highlighted the ragtop sedan.