THE 1962 & 1963 THUNDERBIRD SPORTS ROADSTERS

The 1961-63 Thunderbird in considered by many to be the most beautiful Thunderbird ever built. While sales of Thunderbirds were strong through the late 1950s and early 1960s, purists besieged Ford with demands for the return of a two-place Thunderbird. Division Chief Lee Iacocca tapped designer Bud Kaufman to develop a solution. Kaufman returned with the stunning Sports Roadster, which built upon Thunderbird's sweeping lines with a unique fiberglass tonneau cover extending from the trunk to behind the front seats, effectively transforming the four-passenger Thunderbird to a two-seater. The Sport Roadster package included a passenger grab bar, unique side badges, and stunning 48-spoke Kelsey Hayes wire wheels.

The 1962 & 1963 Ford Thunderbird Sports Roadsters are a distinct and unusual rarity within the world of classic cars. To some, this might look like almost any other American car from this time period, but the simple notion of only having two seats in such a large car is what makes this T-Bird as iconic as it is impractical. By the early 1960s, the Thunderbird nameplate was beginning to take on a life of its own. In fact, the name alone was so significant that Ford had even considered creating an entirely different division, dubbed as Thunderbird, as opposed to a mere model in the lineup. The Sports Roadster was an insane and frivolous exhibition of FoMoCo's faith in the T-Bird lineup, and even though it didn't sell very well, it continues to stand out to this day. Robert McNamara's strategy of turning the Ford Thunderbird into a larger platform was in full bore by 1963, however, the designers had still sought to recapture some vague semblance of the model's original glory as a roadster during the mid-1950s. The Sports Roadster trim was essentially their solution to this, which was highlighted by the distinctive, fiberglass tonneau cover that was positioned across the rear seats, giving the illusion of a two-seat sports car. Illusion is not a term to be taken lightly to this strategy, as the entire package weighed in at a portly 4,563 lbs. Not exactly the type of equipment you'd want for a cornering advantage, but to each their own. Power came from Ford's M-Code 390ci V8, which produced 300bhp and was mated to the Cruise-O-Matic 3-speed.

Altogether, the entirety of the Sports Roadster versions was nowhere near as popular as Ford had envisioned back when this trim level was first unleashed in 1962. For that initial year, only 1,427 cars were sold, versus just 455 units for 1963. In short, the Thunderbird Sports Roadster was nothing more than a brief experiment on Ford's behalf to see if the public was willing to accept a dash of nostalgia, even after only a few years since they'd magnified the entire size of the T-Bird. Had they downsized the car itself, things could possibly have changed, although Ford had been focused on creating an entirely different form of small, performance-oriented car during this era, the Mustang. Even so, the T-Bird would only continue to grow in size, but with a more direct focus on luxury over performance, as evidenced by the four-door models that emerged in 1967 and carried on until 1971.

As a result of these low production figures, the value of the 1963 Ford Thunderbird Sports Roadster is definitely among the highest of the Thunderbird lineup for this timeframe. Depending on condition, these cars can be had at prices going up to the heights of the six-figure range, although some examples can be had for around $40,000. As always, a vast array of factors affect the overall pricing of classics, ranging from overall condition, originality, degree and quality of restoration, as well as historical significance.

Thunderbird

The 1962 Thunderbird Sports Roadster

Thunderbird

P R N DRIVE

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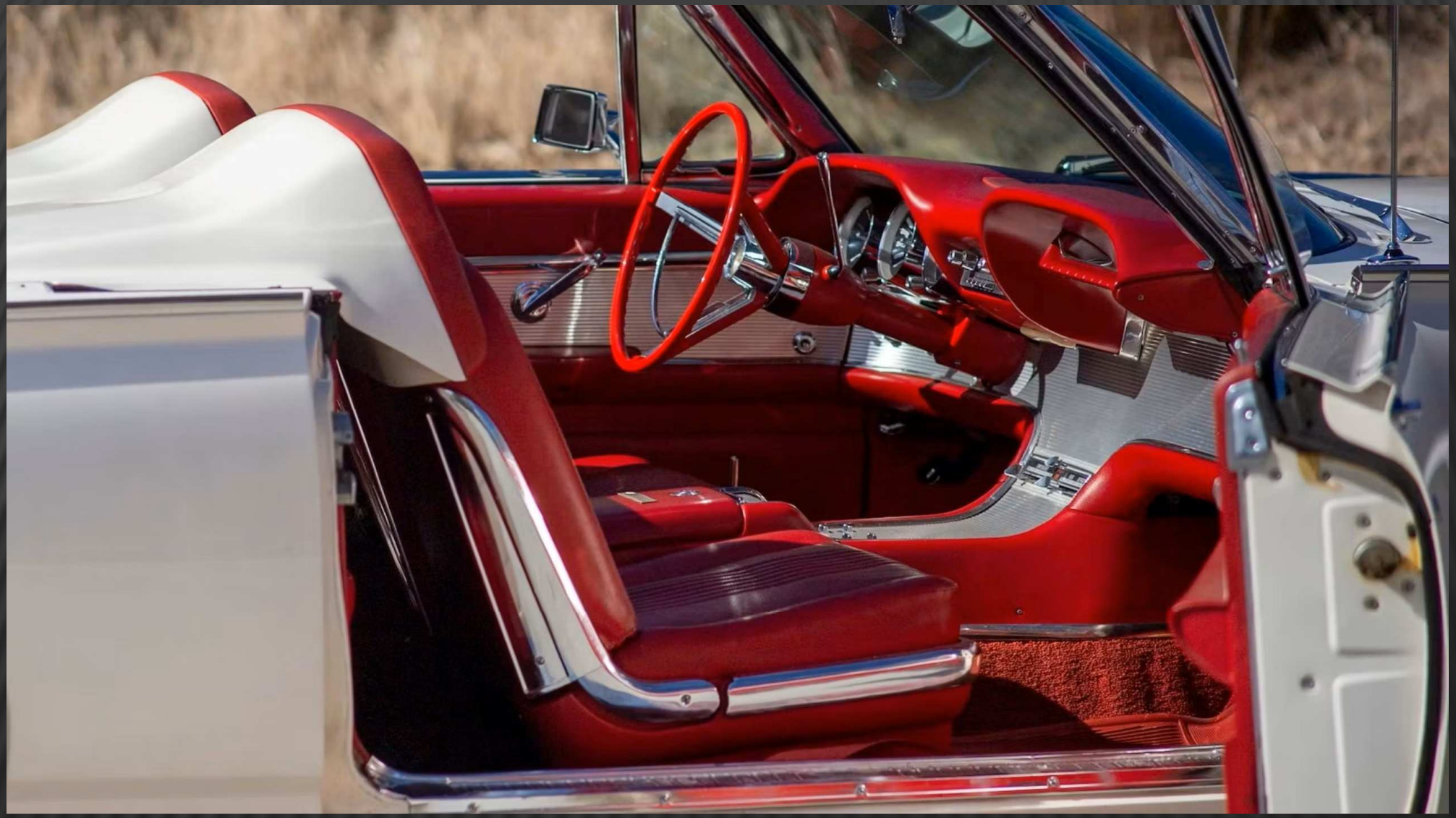

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