

1984-92 Lincoln Mark VII: Doing the Unexpected

by Sam Fiorani

Edsel Ford's muse for the first Lincoln Continental was the smaller luxury cars of Europe between the world wars. His "little" Lincoln would inspire a series of coupes that epitomized what came to be known as the "personal-luxury" field. The 1956-57 Continental Mark II led to Marks III, IV, and V in the Sixties and Seventies, cars that grew generation after generation until they stretched more than 19 feet long and tipped the scales at almost 2.5 tons by 1979. What

was inspired by trim and lithe European cars had become one of the most stereotypical American luxury cars. But change was coming.

Two gas crises of the Seventies forced Detroit to downsize. At Lincoln, a crash diet dropped 700 pounds and lopped off more than a foot of length in the form of the 1980 Mark VI coupe. The corporate "Panther" platform, introduced on the full-sized 1979 Ford LTD and Mercury Marquis, now underpinned both the

Mark VI and the senior Lincolns in order to meet fuel economy standards. Plans for the Mark VI had included shifting to a midsize platform or expanding it to include more body styles, but financial troubles at Ford made it necessary for the new Mark to share much of its design with the "standard" Continental. The Mark's physical downsizing was mirrored by sales, which were nearly halved.

In 1980, Jack Telnack became chief of North American design for Ford and

After years of grandly formal Mark-series personal-luxury coupes, Lincoln embraced a smaller, sleeker concept in the mid Eighties.

oversaw the shift to a new model that would replace the unloved Mark VI. The grand and baroque styling of the Mark III and its successors didn't translate well to the smaller size of the 1980 model. Telnack knew Lincoln needed to "move as far away from the Mark VI, which was very boxy." The move needed to emulate the original Continental to become "very European" in style.

Ford's design studios were working on something radical. Following the successful launch of the aerodynamic 1979 Mustang, the company embarked on a complete transformation. Telnack and his

department focused on the next-generation Continental Mark. To hone this new aerodynamic wave, an early model found its way into Lockheed Martin's wind tunnel in early 1980.

While the seventh-generation Mark was being developed, the Ford Division was having trouble with the Thunderbird. After the massively successful 1977-79 T-Bird, the smaller 1980 edition had been a sales disaster and Ford needed to fix it quickly. The call went out to the design studios. As Telnack recalls, the design of the updated Thunderbird "bored" potential customers in focus groups. He

remembers being told "could you get that clay model [of the new Mark VII] down here" without badges on it for customer research.

"People thought we were nuts and going too far" with the new design, he says. However, "respondents went nuts" and "that's what really kicked off the [1983] Thunderbird program." Although it was designed as a Lincoln first, the approved design made its debut as the 1983 Thunderbird, a year before the introduction of the new Mark VII.

Even with the positive reception in the Thunderbird clinic, Lincoln needed to prepare the market for such a big change. To do this, Ford rolled an "idea car"—the Continental Concept 90—into the 1982 New York Auto Show. *The New York Times* reported that the "undrivable fiberglass mockup" was at the show "to test reaction and to acquaint buyers with a new direction in styling." This new styling



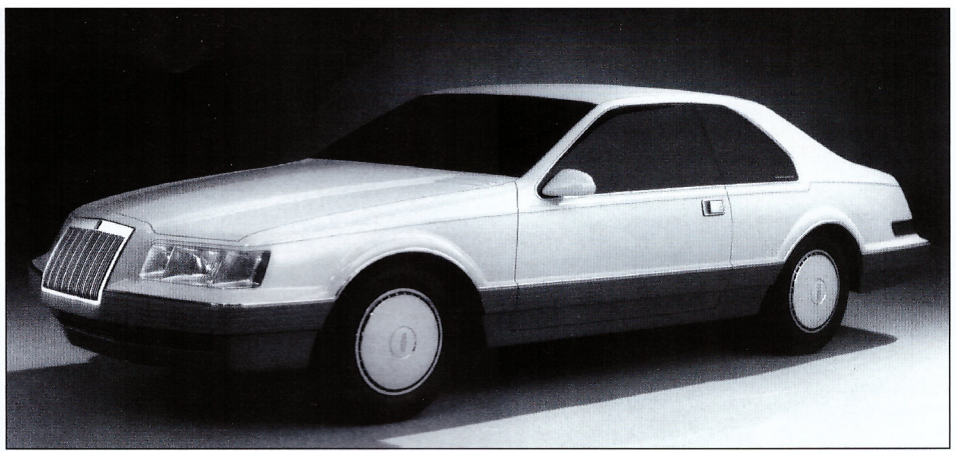


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direction echoed the influences of the original Continental.

Telnack told the *Times* that while he and Ford President Don Petersen were in Germany, they were inspired by European luxury cars. Mercedes-Benz showcased the slick new 380SEC coupe at the 1981 Frankfurt Motor Show. Telnack recalled, "I took one look, and I said 'I guess that paves the way for us, doesn't it?'" However, Telnack's coupe would combine the "good ride" expected of an American luxury car "with much more controlled response than in the past."

Like many concept cars, the Continental Concept 90 looked very futuristic. Designers leaned Lincoln's Parthenon-style grille way back, smoothly transitioning into the hood lines rather than



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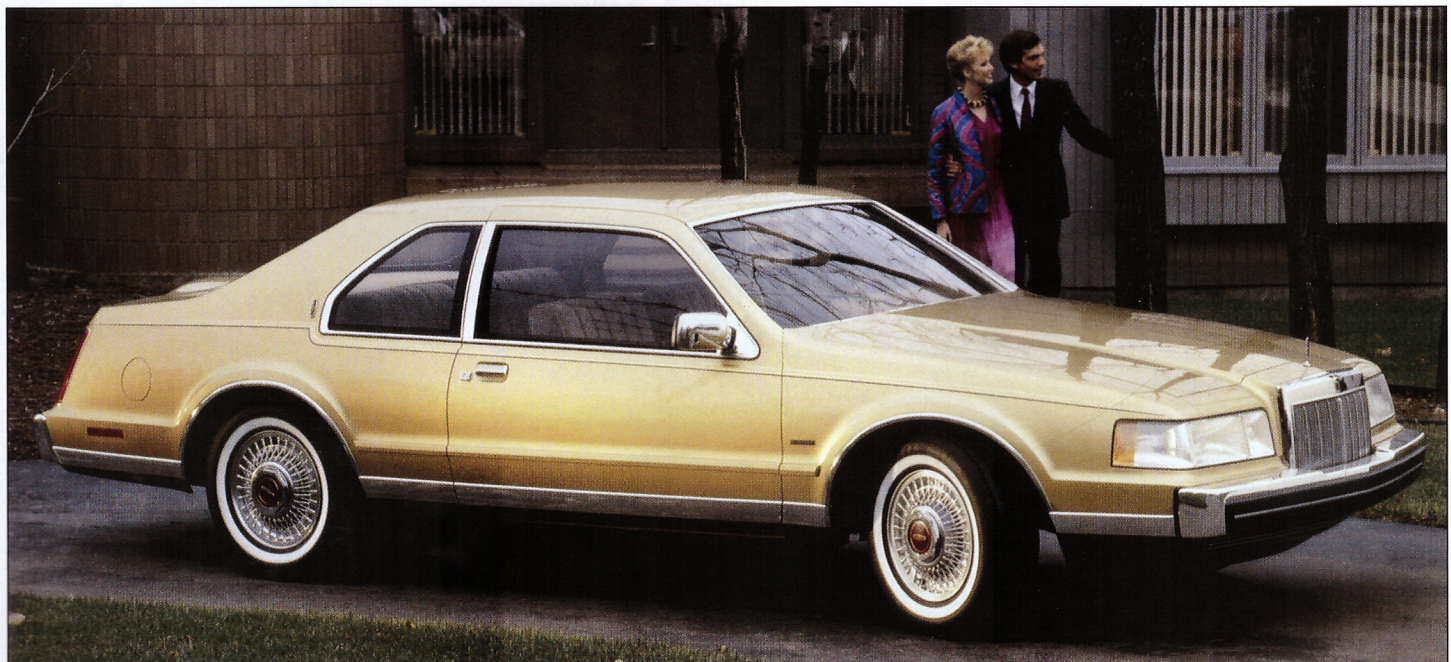


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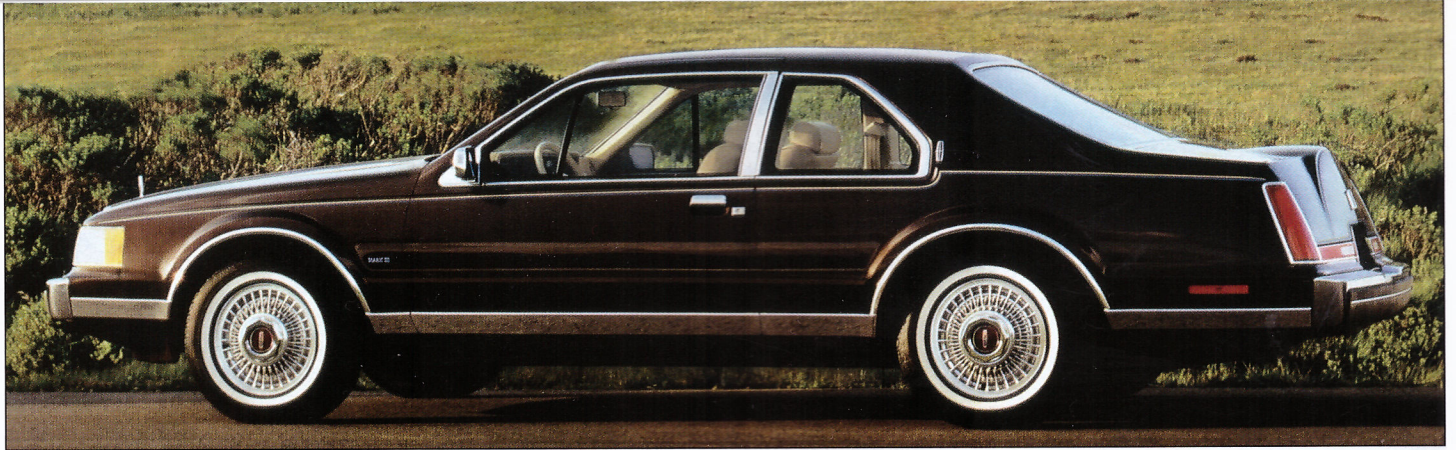
holding its traditional position as a wind break. Flanking the chrome grille were two large European-style flush headlights wrapped into the fenders—a truly rare feature on an American concept car since such headlights were banned by federal regulations. Aircraft-inspired doors wrapped up into the roof, hiding the ubiquitous rain channels. Smooth

wheel covers, inset door handles, and even a subtle spare-tire "hump" dropped the coefficient of drag to an amazing 0.32.

Even though a Ford executive told the *Times* in 1982 that the concept car "really is the '84 Mark VII, 90 to 95 percent the way it will appear," showgoers couldn't really believe it since it was so radical. *Car and Driver's* P. J. O'Rourke explained



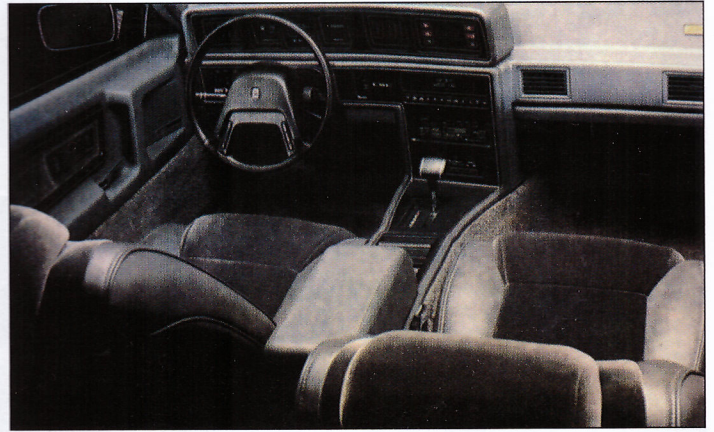
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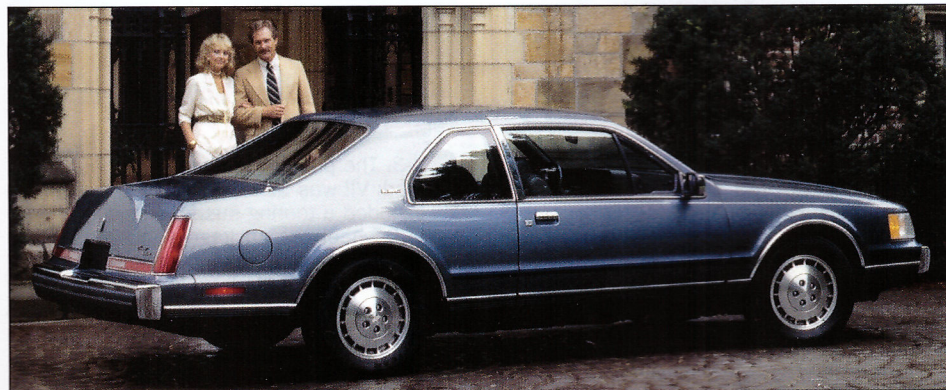
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1. Jack Telnack, Ford's North American design chief when the Lincoln Mark VII was created, shook up corporate norms with his advocacy of aerodynamic shapes. 2. The 1982 Lincoln Concept 90 show car was a fairly accurate predictor of the coming look. 3. The '83 Concept 100 went further still but added vertical taillights. 4-6. When introduced for 1984, two designer-edition trims were available for the Mark VII. Specific paint and interior colors defined the Bill Blass (4) and Versace (5, 6) models. 7, 8. The LSC, with a firmer suspension and more aggressive axle gearing, had some thinking in terms of a "hot rod Lincoln."

that at the later Chicago Auto Show "it wasn't attracting crowds, because people are hip to the fact that show cars are just corporate sideshows that give car companies something to do with the snake handlers in their styling department." O'Rourke went on to say "it's a real kick in the glands," and that "it's what the BMW people were trying to get at with the 633 before they nodded off." Then a few months later that slick '83

Thunderbird popped up in Ford showrooms and proved that an equally radical new Mark could happen.

Not only did the public need convincing, but so did regulators. Since 1940, American cars were required to have sealed-beam headlights. By 1977, designers were allowed only four different kinds of these lamps while the rest of the world could create unique styles. Ford and General Motors's Pontiac Division

petitioned the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to allow American cars to sport European-style composite headlights. The agency changed the pertinent regulation in May 1983, just in time to permit the new lights on the inaugural Mark VII. (Just in case, Ford tested prototypes with prevailing sealed beams.)

Drawing from the Concept 90 and follow-up '83 Continental Concept 100 show cars, the Mark VII lost many appearance cues that had become hallmarks of the Lincoln brand. The formal chrome grille and decklid hump connected the VII to the prior six generations of the Continental Mark series, but the edges were smoothed. Where the Concept 90 showed off a reclining grille, the production model led with a full grille, albeit with its corners softened. On the trunk, that trademark homage to the rear-mounted spare tire faded to a mere shadow of its former self.

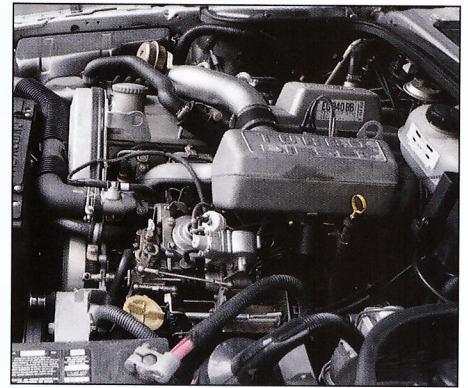
Concealed headlights, found on the previous four generations, gave way to the exposed composite units. Continuing the slick styling, designers pushed the windshield back at a wind-cheating 60 degrees, while the rear window leaned in by 63 degrees. The Concept 90's aircraft-inspired doors found their way into the production car. Flush glass, flowing lines, and complex curves also eliminated the



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need for one more signature item of period Lincolns: a padded vinyl top.

Making this trim new Lincoln required moving away from the larger body-on-frame Panther platform. In '78 Dearborn launched the compact Ford Fairmont and Mercury Zephyr on a new unitized "Fox" platform. Panther wheelbases varied by only three inches, from 114.3 to 117.3, but Fox was far more flexible. The Fairmont/Zephyr rode on a 105.5-inch version of the platform, which was shortened to 100.4 inches for the 1979 Mustang and Mercury Capri "ponycars." Then in 1980 a new generation of Thunderbird and Mercury Cougar personal coupes stretched the wheelbase to 108.4 inches. When it came time for smaller Lincolns like the 1982 Continental "personal" sedan and the Mark VII, their 108.5-inch wheelbase—the longest version of the Fox platform yet—was almost half a foot shorter than the smallest Panther span.

Fox was a front-engine/rear-wheel-drive design with MacPherson struts supporting the front and a solid axle on the rear. For the Mark VII, Ford developed an Electronic Air Suspension (EAS)

to provide a luxurious ride as well as improved handling expected from its European rivals. The EAS had its own NEC 8049 microprocessor to manage the system. Two sensors in the front and one in the rear provided information to the system, which directed compressed air to the Goodyear-supplied air springs. Other improvements to the Fox platform included five-bolt wheels and four-wheel disc brakes.

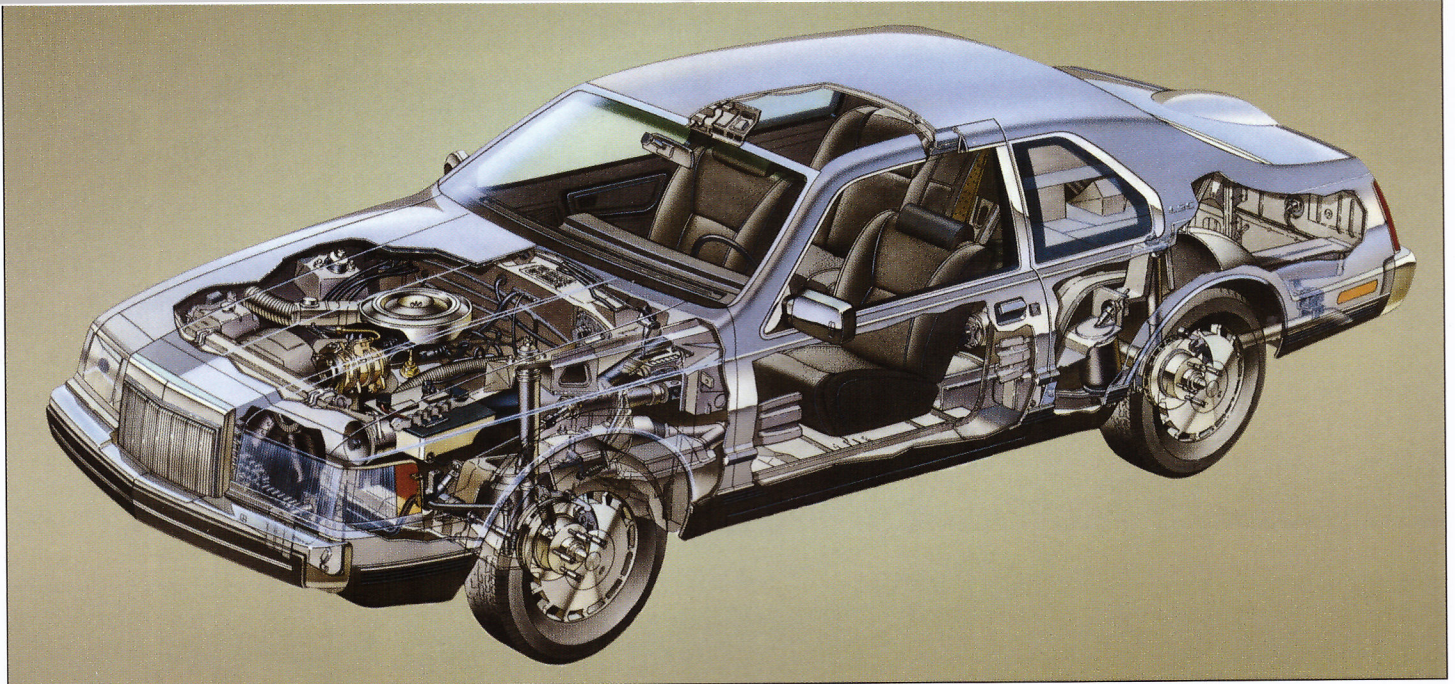
Almost 400 pounds lighter than its predecessor, the Mark VII could better harness the power of smaller engines. Standard was the 302-cid V-8 with electronic throttle-body fuel injection found in the previous Mark VI, but upgraded to 140 bhp. Also carried over from the VI was Ford's four-speed-automatic overdrive transmission. EPA fuel-economy ratings, which had been 16 mpg city/24 mpg highway in the Mark VI, were raised to 17 and 27, respectively.

Bigger powertrain news was the mid-year introduction of a diesel engine option for the Fox-body Lincolns. Designed by BMW and produced in Austria by Steyr, the M21 2.4-liter ohc inline six was the

1-3. The price for a base '84 Continental Mark VII was \$21,707. Available extras included a touring suspension with the LSC wheel/tire package—and a 115-bhp BMW turbodiesel inline six-cylinder engine. 4. The Mark VII employed unitized body construction and added four-wheel antilock brakes for most models in 1985.

first turbocharged diesel found in an American-built car, and only Lincoln's second six-cylinder engine ever, following the 3.8-liter pushrod-V-6 option in the '82 Continental. A \$1235 extra, the 115-bhp oil-burner paired with an imported ZF four-speed automatic transmission to deliver fuel-economy ratings of 26 mpg in the city and 41 mpg on the highway. In a post-oil-embargo world, these were amazing numbers for a car that still tipped the scales in excess of 3600 pounds. Speed hardly was its forte, though. *Car and Driver* clocked a diesel Mark VII at 13.7 seconds going 0-60 mph.

Keeping in the Lincoln designer tradition, the Mark VII was offered in two special editions. Designers Bill Blass and Gianni Versace added their handiwork to the new Lincoln coupe. The Bill Blass edi-



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tion came painted in Goldenrod Glamour Clearcoat Metallic over Harvest Wheat Clearcoat Metallic with Cream and Dark Green accent stripes. The interior color was Flaxen Gold with a choice of leather or cloth upholstery. The Versace Lincoln was showcased in Walnut Glamour Clearcoat Metallic paint and Tan and Bright Blue striping; the interior color

was Desert Tan. Both designer cars came with wire-spoke aluminum wheels.

Still, the Mark VII's underlying purpose was to break from tradition, and nothing did that like the Luxury Sport Coupe, or LSC. Where other models had wide, bright lower-body trim, the LSC went with a ribbed molding and black paint. A leather-covered steering wheel and gear-

shift knob highlighted the leather-clad interior, and brushed black appliques on the console, instrument panel, and doors replaced the imitation-wood accents found on other Mark VII's. To complete its sporty character, the LSC got a more aggressive 3.27:1 final-drive gear; rolled on special aluminum wheels wrapped in P215/65R15 blackwall Goodyear tires;

1984 Lincoln Continental Mark VII: Selected Specifications

General

Wheelbase (in.)	108.5
Overall length (in.)	202.8
Overall width (in.)	70.9
Overall height (in.)	54.0
Tread, front/rear (in.)	58.4/59.0
Cargo capacity (cu ft)	15.0
Fuel tank (gal)	22.3

Construction

Layout	front-engine, rear-wheel drive
Type	unitized
Body material	steel

Engines

Type, standard	90-degree ohv V-8
Fuel	gasoline
Material	cast-iron block and heads
Bore×stroke (in.)	4.00×3.00
Displacement (cid)	302
Horsepower @ rpm	140 @ 3200
Torque (lb-ft) @ rpm	250 @ 1600
Compression ratio	8.4:1
Main bearings	5
Valve lifters	hydraulic
Induction	electronic throttle-body fuel injection
Electrical system	12-volt
Type, optional	inline ohc 6-cylinder
Fuel	diesel
Material	cast-iron block, aluminum head

Bore×stroke (in.)	3.15×3.19
Displacement (cid)	149
Horsepower @ rpm	115 @ 4800
Torque (lb-ft) @ rpm	155 @ 2400
Compression ratio	23.0:1
Main bearings	4
Valve lifters	hydraulic
Induction	turbocharger, indirect fuel injection
Electrical system	12-volt

Driveline

Transmission type, standard	4-speed automatic with torque converter, overdrive top gear, floor shifter
Transmission ratios	1st: 2.40:1; 2nd: 1.47:1; 3rd: 1.00:1; 4th: 0.67:1; reverse: 2.00:1
Transmission type, optional ¹	4-speed automatic with lock-up torque converter, overdrive top gear, floor shifter
Transmission ratios	1st: 2.73:1; 2nd: 1.56:1; 3rd: 1.00:1; 4th: 0.737:1; reverse: 2.09:1
Drive type	hypoid gear
Axle ratio	
base, designer V-8	3.08:1
LSC V-8	3.27:1
diesel	3.73:1

Suspension

Front	independent with MacPherson struts, autoleveling air springs, stabilizer bar, gas-pressurized shock absorbers
Rear	solid axle with four links, autoleveling air springs, stabilizer bar, gas-pressurized shock absorbers

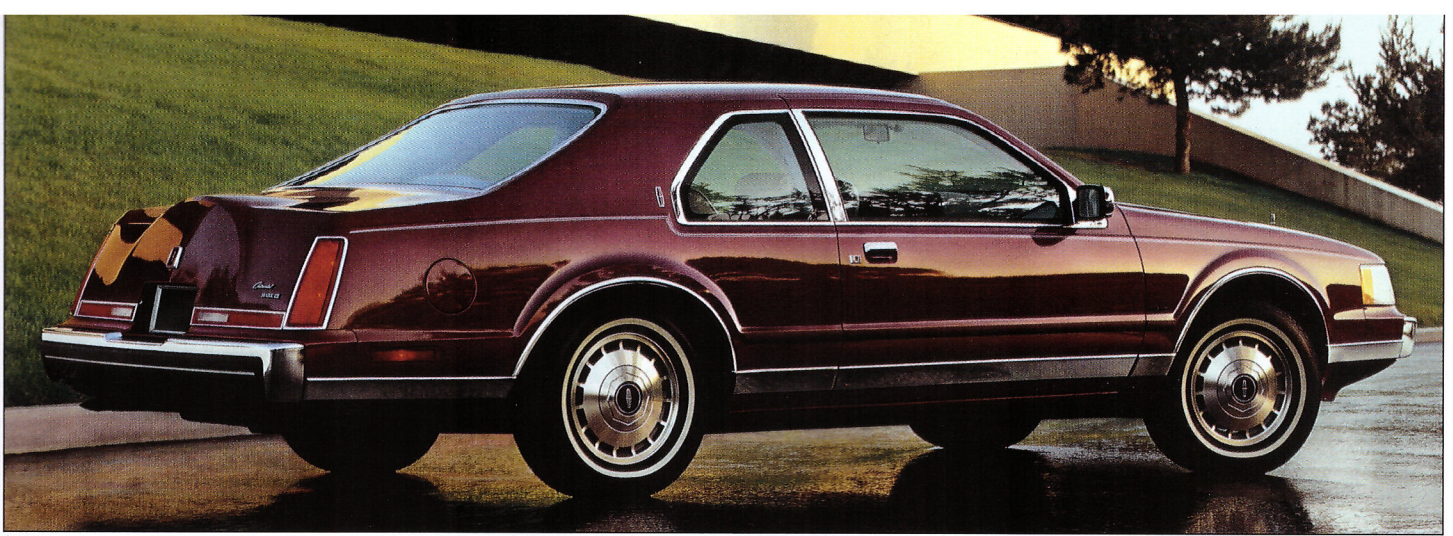
Steering and Brakes

Steering type	rack and pinion, power assisted
Turning diameter (ft)	40.0
Brake type	4-wheel hydraulic ventilated disc, power assisted

Tires and Wheels

Tire size	
base, designer	P215/70R15
LSC	P215/65R15 ²
Tire type	
base, designer	steel-belted-radial whitewall
LSC	steel-belted-radial blackwall ²
Wheel type	
base	5-bolt cast aluminum ³
designer	5-bolt wire-spoke aluminum ³
LSC	5-bolt 15×6 cast aluminum ²

¹Included with optional turbodiesel engine only. ²Included with handling package option for base and designer models. ³Standard. Forged aluminum wheels optional.



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1. The '85s were the last Marks to also have the Continental name. Afterward it would be reserved for Lincoln's smaller sedans. Forged-aluminum wheels were a dress-up option for base (shown) and designer cars. 2, 3. The LSC got a power boost to 180 bhp but retained a less-than-sporting digital instrument cluster.

and was supported by a suspension with firmer air-spring rates, thicker antiroll bars, and quicker steering. The idea of a "hot rod Lincoln," first celebrated in song in the Fifties, seemed to be coming to fruition.

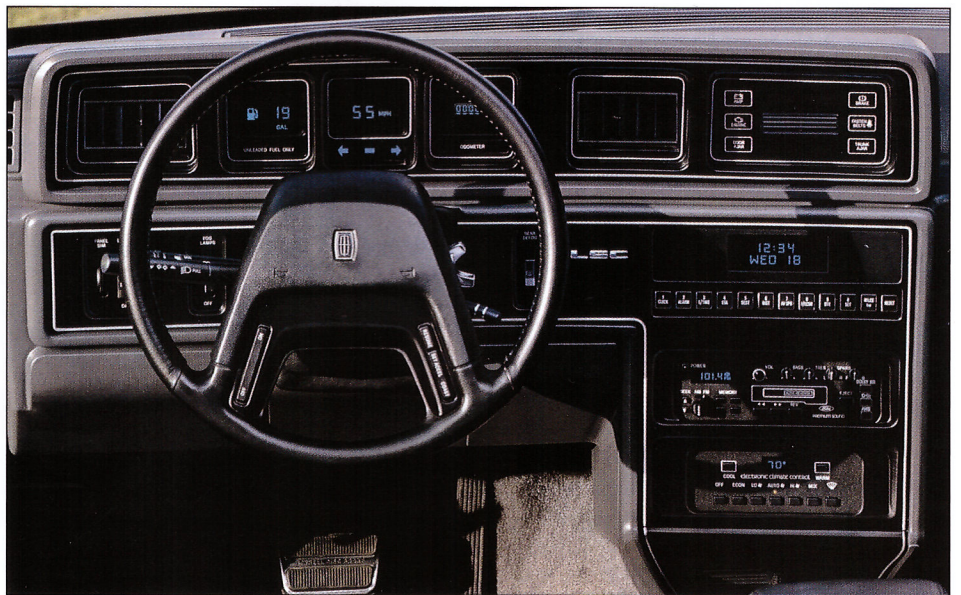
C/D's Rich Ceppos summed up the radically new Lincoln as adequate. While the styling aimed at the Germans, Ceppos reported that it was "no autobahn flier" as it took more than 11 seconds to reach 60 mph. With its digital instrument cluster featuring just a speedometer and lacking a tach, the Mark VII needed "a bank of analog gauges." However, the new model, and the LSC in particular, was "destined to stake out a spot in the no man's land between domestic and imported luxocoupees."

In its first year, the Mark VII did not set the sales charts on fire. The Mark VI had a 17-percent jump in sales for its last model year, growing by about the same rate as the whole market. As the economy continued to improve from the early Eighties recession, sales of the Lincoln brand rose by nearly 30 percent over the prior year, but Continental Mark sales only added eight percent to the previous model's sales, rising to 33,344 units. Meanwhile, the Mark's entrenched domestic sparring partner, the Cadillac Eldorado, posted an all-time-record run of 77,806 units with a design that was in its sixth year.

Lincoln's least traditional model evolved for the 1985 model year. Americans were introduced to rear-wheel antilock brakes (ABS) on the Continental Mark III and



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the Mark VII became the first U.S. car with four-wheel electronically controlled ABS through the Teves Mark 2 system. It was standard on the LSC; designer models; and gas-engine base cars sold in California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii. Changes to the camshaft,

exhaust headers, intake manifold, and throttle body resulted in a 180-bhp V-8 for the LSC. The Bill Blass and Versace editions got new colors inside and out. An optional "hands-free" integrated mobile phone was in its first full year after a spring '84 debut.



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Nineteen eight-five was the last run for the poor-selling turbodiesel engine and the Versace edition, as well as the final year for the Mark VII to wear the Continental name. Impressive as the improvements were, they couldn't prevent a 15,000-car drop in demand.

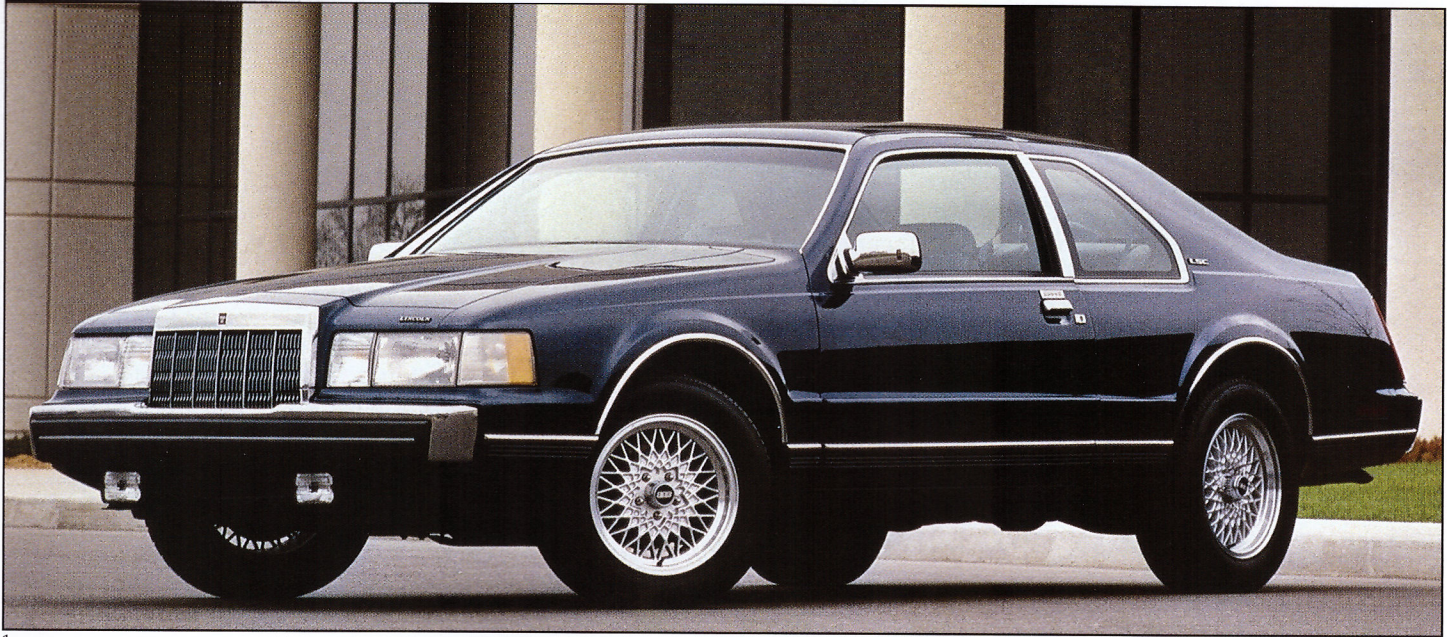
A more generous complement of standard equipment and added power swept in for 1986. The 302 V-8 adopted sequen-

tial multipoint fuel injection, which produced 150 bhp in base and Bill Blass editions, and 200 horsepower at 4000 rpm in the LSC. To better use this new power, new calibrations on the EAS firmed up the car's handling. Analog gauges, including a tachometer, replaced the less informative digital cluster in the sporting model, all of which got the attention of *Car and Driver*.

1-3. After an abbreviated 1987 production run, a refreshed Mark VII arrived that spring as an early 1988 model. The grille now had a wavy surface. 4. A 225-bhp 302-cid V-8 was new, and installed in all Marks. 5. The LSC kept its distinctive blacked-out lower body but adopted new turbine-vane alloy wheels. It cost at least \$25,016 to drive off in one. (Owners: Bruce and Helen Hutchinson)

Editor Don Sherman explained that "in previous years . . . the Lincoln Mark VII LSC was invariably the bridesmaid" in the magazine's annual "10 Best" list. Sherman expressed regret that, as good as these improvements were, they would not "be enough to draw . . . the intended clientele from the woodwork." It did, however, highlight "yet another attractive side of the big Lincoln's multifaceted personality."

As Sherman predicted, the Mark VII's only appearance on *C/D*'s list was not enough to generate a burst of sales. Demand for the 1986 coupes barely topped 20,000.



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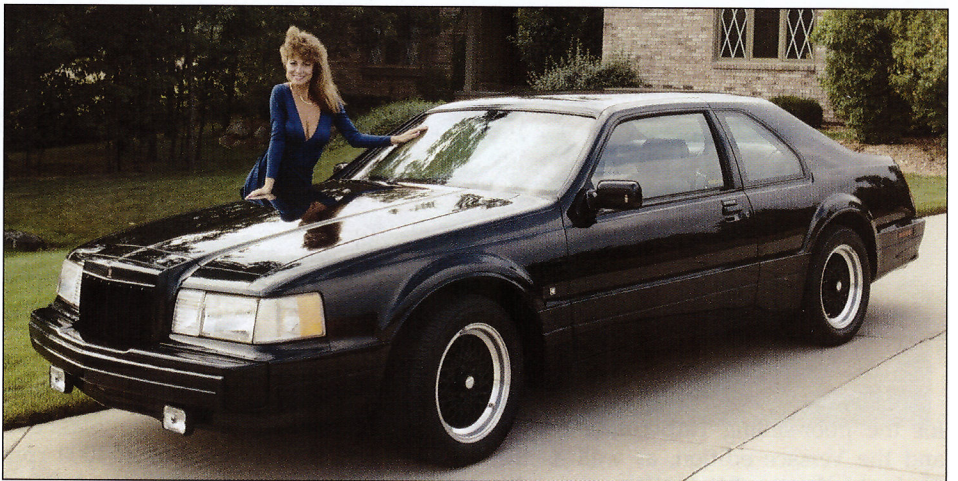
A short run of almost unchanged 1987's cleared room for the March release of an updated '88 Mark VII. The base model was discontinued. Up front there was a switch to a "wavy" grille surface, and the LSC rolled on new turbine-vane alloy wheels. A high-output 225-bhp 302-cube V-8 borrowed from the Mustang became the Mark VII's sole engine, and would remain so through the end of series production. With the extended model year, orders for the '88s ballooned to 38,259. As a result, the Mark outproduced the Eldorado for the first time since 1979.

Further annual changes were modest. Steering was upgraded in 1989. The Nineties opened with the addition of a standard driver's-side airbag, a new dash design, and lacy BBS wheels for the LSC. For the Mark VII's penultimate year, the Bill Blass edition gained its sportier sibling's tire and suspension package as standard equipment. The LSC could be ordered with a monochromatic Special Edition appearance option. In '92, the LSC got a light-gray lower-body-side tint and the Bill Blass bore tricolor accent stripes. Both received minor interior-detail changes.

Mark VII production came to an end on April 22, 1992 with 192,302 cars built in nine model years. The number of them that emerged from the Wixom, Michigan, plant would be enough to make the Mark VII of significant historical value to the Lincoln brand. Beyond that, the VII converted the Mark line from baroque boulevard cruiser to a sports coupe for grown-ups, and helped change the image of the

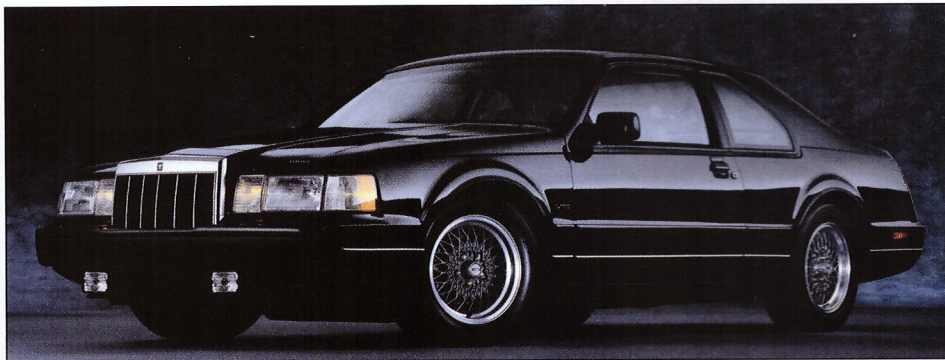


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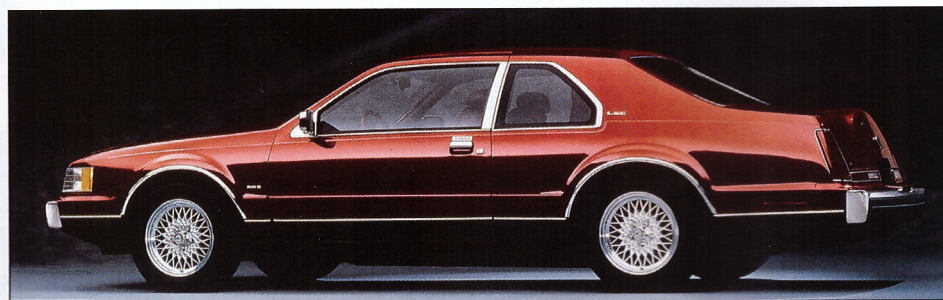
1. For 1990, the LSC switched to BBS alloy wheels. A driver's-side airbag was newly standard in Mark VII's. 2, 3. In 1986, specialty fabricator Cars & Concepts worked up a monochromatic treatment for the Mark, which proved to be a harbinger of . . . 4. . . . a Special Edition factory option for the LSC starting in 1991. 5. Cranberry leather was an upholstery choice for the LSC's articulated seats. 6. The final Mark VII was the marginally changed '92 model, of which just 5732 were made. The LSC surpassed \$32,100 to start.



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whole lineup. With the Mark VII, Lincoln kept the international theme of the original Continental alive and with it, kept the brand relevant into the end of the twentieth century. **CA**

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April 1998 (Lincoln Continental Mark IV), June 1998 (Jack Tejnack), August 2005 (1984-85 Lincoln Continental Mark VII turbodiesel), June 2009 (1977-79 Ford Thunderbird), June 2011 (Lincoln Continental Mark V), December 2011 (1983 Ford Thunderbird), June 2013 (1979 Ford Mustang), February 2018 (1984 Cadillac Eldorado).

Club for 1984-92 Lincoln Mark VII Enthusiasts

Lincoln and Continental Owners Club
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Maple Grove, MN 55311-6715
Telephone: (763) 420-7829
Website: www.lcoc.org

MARK VII

1984-92 Lincoln Mark VII: Models, Prices, Production

1984	Weight	Price	Prod
Continental (wb 108.5)			
coupe	3,625	21,707	—
LSC coupe	—	23,706	—
Bill Blass coupe	—	24,807	—
Versace coupe	—	24,406	—
Total 1984 Continental Mark VII			33,344
1985			
Continental (wb 108.5)			
coupe	3,615	22,399	—
LSC coupe	—	24,332	—
Bill Blass coupe	—	26,659	—
Versace coupe	—	26,578	—
Total 1985 Continental Mark VII			18,355
1986			
(wb 108.5)			
coupe	3,667	22,399	—
LSC coupe	3,718	23,857	—
Bill Blass coupe	3,732	23,857	—
Total 1986 Mark VII			20,056
1987			
(wb 108.5)			
coupe	3,722	24,216	—
LSC coupe	3,772	25,863	—
Bill Blass coupe	3,747	25,863	—
Total 1987 Mark VII			15,286
1988			
(wb 108.5)			
LSC coupe	3,772	25,016	—
Bill Blass coupe	3,747	25,016	—
Total 1988 Mark VII			38,259
1989			
(wb 108.5)			
LSC coupe	3,743	27,218	—
Bill Blass coupe	3,783	27,218	—
Total 1989 Mark VII			29,658
1990			
(wb 108.5)			
LSC coupe	3,779	29,437	—
Bill Blass coupe	—	29,215	—
Total 1990 Mark VII			22,313
1991			
(wb 108.5)			
LSC coupe	3,807	30,362	—
Bill Blass coupe	3,782	30,238	—
Total 1991 Mark VII			9,299
1992			
(wb 108.5)			
LSC coupe	3,781	32,156	—
Bill Blass coupe	3,768	32,032	—
Total 1992 Mark VII			5,732

Source: *Encyclopedia of American Cars*, by the Auto Editors of Consumer Guide®, Publications International, Ltd., 2006.