

Suburban Observer & Eccentric Automotive Showcase

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CARPOOL



Ford has great expectations for restyled 1996 Taurus, Sable

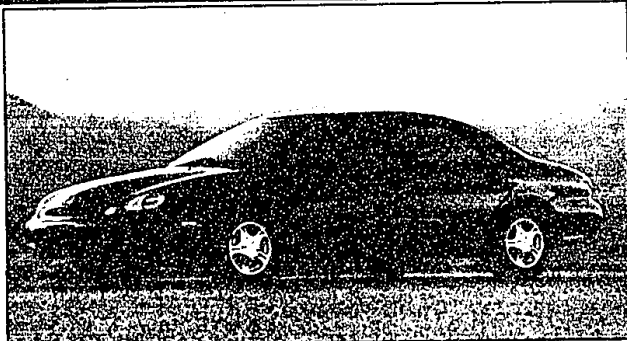
HAPEVILLE, Ga. — Culminating more than three years of preparation, Ford Motor Co. has rolled the first radically redesigned 1996 Taurus and Mercury Sable off the line at the Atlanta Assembly Plant.

When it reaches full production speed, the Atlanta plant will turn out 66 Tauruses and Sables an hour. Base price for both is around \$20,000.

The Job One introduction of both cars, as you might expect, was a celebration of pomp and circumstance. Nearly 3,000 hourly employees crowded a staging area to hoot, holler and applaud their plant manager and various Ford corporate executives as the first Taurus and first Sable ready for sale were unveiled.

"It was time for the old champ to pass the baton to the next champ," said Jim Donaldson, vice president of Ford's Large Front-Wheel-Drive Vehicle Center, who drove the maiden Taurus off the assembly line with Georgia Gov. Zell Miller beside him.

Job One at Chicago Assembly, the other plant that manufactures the Taurus and Sable, was July 17.



1996 models.

Their distinctive design and wraparound head lamps and tail lamps became an instant hit with consumers. Automakers — domestic, foreign and transplants — scrambled to mimic the wrap-around lamps for their vehicles, creating a new standard for the industry.

"Ford ... bet the company on the original Taurus and Sable program (10 years ago) and its success was beyond our wildest dreams," said Donaldson. "The Taurus and Sable changed the face of the American automotive industry and we're doing it again with these new cars."

But does it need changing? After all, the Taurus has been the best-selling car in North America for the past three years, narrowly beating out the Ohio-assembled Honda Accord. Ford has sold more than 5 million Tauruses the past decade, half of them built in

Atlanta.

The Atlanta facility underwent a \$250 million retrofit for the new Taurus and Sable. More than 900 employees were added to the payroll in the past year to replace retiring workers and to be trained for the Taurus/Sable build process.

"We've worked hard and did what we had to do to get this vehicle to meet very tough quality standards," said Joe Lerch, an assembler at the plant who was hired in March. "We're doing things right, we're proud of what we build and we're sure Taurus will be No. 1 again this year."

Ford changed more than 1,000 labor operations to boost plant efficiency and added more than 100 new processes to improve vehicle quality, said Wheeler Stanley, Atlanta plant manager. More than 100 new robots were installed at the plant for the new build.

"Two years ago, 120 employees became plant specialists and worked closely with Ford engineers in Dearborn and Atlanta to build a better car," said Stanley. "The automation process has improved, our employees have been trained well and we're ready to turn out 66 units an hour when we're up to speed."

Earlier this month, the Harbor Report, an assessor of industry quality control, rated Atlanta the most productive domestically owned automobile plant in North America. The annual report compares productivity results for vehicle assembly, body stamping and engine and automatic transmission machining and assembly for most of the automakers in North America. Nissan's Smyrna, Tenn., plant was No. 1 among all plants in the report.

"This is the most productive assembly center in America and it has the most exacting quality standards ever in Ford's history," said Donaldson. "It's a bold leap forward for Ford, but this car's quality is better than ever in our history."

Atlanta's workers have been told they'll work 50-hour weeks to meet high demand for the new Taurus and Sable. The plant will run day and afternoon shifts to accomplish production goals.

The Taurus and Sable have been totally redesigned from the ground up. Notable changes include new interior and exterior styling, new engine choices, new suspension packages, an 87-percent improvement in body stiffness, a new chassis and a new

windshield that increases visibility by 28 percent over the previous models.

The Taurus and Sable come with a standard 3.0-liter 200-horsepower V-6 Duratec engine that's so smooth, Ford swears you can balance a nickel on it while it's running. The Duratec has 100,000-mile tune-up intervals.

Base price for a Taurus GL — the model most chosen by consumers — is \$19,390, just 2 percent more than the price of a 1995 model. The GL comes standard with the 3.0-liter engine mated to an electronic 4-speed automatic overdrive transmission. Also standard are dual airbags, an air conditioner, speed control, power door locks and windows and a rear-window defroster.

A well-equipped, top-of-the-line Sable costs \$19,755.

Anne Fracassa is senior editor of *Avanti NewsFeatures*.

1996 Ford Taurus / Mercury Sable

Vehicle class ... Mid-size sedans
Engine ... 3.0-liter V-6 Duratec
Where built ... Atlanta and Chicago
Base price ... \$19,390

If you'd like to see a particular model tested or if you have a car question, send Anne Fracassa a message at AVANTI 1054, Avanti's America Online mailbox. Or comment through the Internet at AVANTI1054@aol.com

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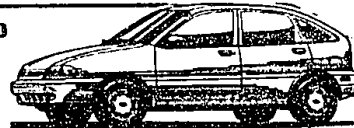
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