

1956-1962

Amazing Graces

How to cash in on Ford's cult-status Mk II Consul, Zephyr and Zodiac

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2/56: Mk II Consul, Zephyr and launched, in saloon and convertible forms.

10/56: Zodiac convertible launched and an Abbott-converted estate joins the range

10/57: The Consul de Luxe arrives, and the Zephyr gets a revised grille.

2/59: There are now low-line versions of the Consul, Zephyr and Zodiac. The roofline is 1.5 inches lower (all above the glasshouse) plus there are trim and instrumentation differences.

9/60: Front disc brakes are now optional.

5/61: Front disc brakes are now standard, along with sealed-beam headlights.

4/62: The Mk III range in showrooms.

Which is which?

Some cars don't have to try hard; they're just effortlessly cool. And one of the coolest, ever since it arrived in 1956, is the Ford Consul, Zephyr and Zodiac Mk II. It doesn't matter whether you buy a saloon, a convertible, or one of the ultra-rare estates, this is a classic that looks perfect from every angle – a snapshot of 1950s Americana that made (and still makes) its contemporaries look just a little bit ordinary.

Cars capable of providing comfortable family transport on long journeys, the Mk II Consul, Zephyr and Zodiac (Zephyr with higher-spec bling), dubbed by Ford as the Three Graces, were equally at home in international rallying or circuit racing. Now it's just as at home transporting the family on a classic drive out as it is being admired in a classic car show. But prices are rising, reflecting the Mk II's cult status, so jump in quick, before they're out of reach.

BODYWORK

The Mk I Consul and Zephyr were monocoque pioneers for Ford; the Mk II built on this with a larger, stronger and stiffer bodyshell that was barely any heavier. Despite a lack of rustproofing on the production line, many Mk IIs have survived pretty well thanks to panels made of thick steel, which also makes panel repairs easier. That's just

as well, as original replacements are scarce, although Ex-pressed Steel Panels does a decent range of repro items and they're not expensive; wings aren't available but repair sections are, such as lower door skins (£75.60 apiece), outer sills (£124.80) and rear valances (£97.20).

The whole of the car needs close inspection, but focus on the door bottoms and the leading edge of the bonnet, checking adjacent to the hinge mountings while you're at it. Decent bonnets are hard to find, as they're double-skinned in places and rot lurks out of sight; by the time it's visible, repairs tend to be involved. It's a similar story with the bootlid, so check that too, especially along its trailing edge.

As with any Ford featuring MacPherson struts up front, you need to check each inner wing where the strut top is mounted; these aren't as rot-prone as with some models, but it's still worth scrutinising. So too is the section behind each headlight, the boot floor (especially around the wheel tubs or inner wheelarches), the windscreen surround, A-posts and the rain gutters on the saloons and estates.

The outer wings can also rust badly, although damage is usually confined to the headlight surrounds, the joint with the front valance and the trailing edge. This latter area is a pain to repair properly, so watch out for filler; proper repairs are made easier by the front wings being bolted on.

The whole of the underside needs careful inspection too, especially the chassis rails,



FAULT-FINDER

Start your rust inspection with the door bottoms... then check the wings.

**FAULT-FINDER**

Outriggers, jacking points and inner wings all need checking.

steering box mounts and jacking points, along with the sills and outriggers. Most panels are available, but repairs can be involved, and hence costly if you're farming it out. Also check the seams; any signs of rust breaking out means there's likely to be plenty of hidden corrosion.

ENGINE

The cast iron engines of the Mk I were carried over largely unchanged, but the Consul's four-cylinder unit jumped in capacity from 1508cc to 1703cc, while the six-cylinder cars' displacement increased to 2553cc from 2262cc. Six-cylinder engines generally live longest, as they lead less stressful

lives, but all Mk II powerplants can suffer from worn piston rings, valvegear and bearings. Expect to get 80-100,000 miles between rebuilds, with a complete DIY overhaul of a four-cylinder unit costing around £800; add another £300 for a six-cylinder unit. If you prefer to just slot in an exchange engine, four-cylinder units cost £1500 while a six-cylinder item is £2000.

Mk II engines tend to sound tappety, even when in rude health; unless things are alarmingly noisy, assume all is at least reasonably well. The biggest problem is a worn rocker shaft; the rocker tips wear when the seal for the oil feed pipe comes off. It's easy to fix if caught in time, but once the



The Zephyr doesn't exactly go like the wind it's named after, but it'll keep up with modern traffic.

Specifications

	Consul saloon	Zephyr saloon	Zodiac saloon	Consul convertible	Zephyr convertible
ENGINE	1703cc/4-cyl	2553cc/6-cyl	2553cc/6-cyl	1703cc/4-cyl	2553cc/6-cyl
POWER	59bhp@4200rpm	85bhp@4000rpm	85bhp@4000rpm	59bhp@4400rpm	85bhp@4000rpm
TORQUE	91lb ft@4400rpm	133lb ft@2000rpm	133lb ft@2000rpm	91lb ft@2300rpm	133lb ft@2000rpm
TOPSPEED	79mph	84mph	84mph	78mph	84mph
0-60MPH	23.2sec	17.9sec	17.9sec	24.2sec	17.9sec
CONSUMPTION	29mpg	25mpg	25mpg	25mpg	25mpg
GEARBOX	3-speed manual	3-speed manual (O/D or 3-sp auto opt)	3-speed manual (O/D or 3-sp auto opt)	3-speed manual	3-speed manual (O/D or 3-sp auto opt)
LENGTH	14ft 4in (4.37m)	14ft 10in (4.36m)	15ft 1/2in (4.59m)	14ft 4in (4.37m)	14ft 10in (4.36m)
WIDTH	5ft 9in (1.75m)	5ft 9in (1.75m)	5ft 9in (1.75m)	5ft 9in (1.75m)	5ft 9in (1.75m)
WEIGHT	2492lb (1130kg)	2688lb (1219kg)	2744lb (1244kg)	2660lb (1207kg)	2800lb (1270kg)

Need to know

LIVING WITH ONE

The Mk II is easy to own as DIY maintenance is generally straightforward and practicality is excellent. They're comfortable too, and are more than capable of keeping up with modern traffic, especially in six-pot form.

WHAT SHOULD I PAY?

If you can find a tatty saloon you'll pay from £1500 for it; good four-cylinder cars start at £2500 while equivalent six-pots are £5000. A nice six-cylinder convertible is worth £15,000, equivalent four-

cylinder cars are £8000+, while the best open-topped Mk IIs fetch over £25,000. The best four-cylinder saloons go for £8000, six-cylinder cars £12,000.

KEY SPECIALISTS

- **Aldridge Trimming**, Wolverhampton: 01902 710805, www.aldridge.co.uk
- **Ex-Pressed Steel Panels**, Yorks: 01535 632721, www.steelpanels.co.uk
- **Goldendays**, Norwich: 01603 881155, www.goldendaysparts.co.uk

- **Old Ford Autos**, Berks: 01344 422731, www.oldfordautos.co.uk
- **Zodiac Motor Services**, Kent: 01322 439666, <http://zodiacmotorservices.com>

SCARCE PARTS

- Original interior trim
- Original panels
- Overdrive units

COPING WITH UNLEADED

You'll need to use an additive or have hardened valve seats fitted or risk valve recession.

IDENTIFYING MARKS

There's a commission plate screwed to the radiator support panel, to the left of the radiator; the number on that should correspond with the number stamped into the offside strut top mounting. The engine number is on the offside of the block, above the engine mounting bracket.

OWNERS' CLUB

- Mk II Consul, Zephyr, Zodiac Owners' Club: <http://fordczzmkil.webs.com>

Kevin Dipchan has run Zodiac Motor Services for 14 years – but has worked on these cars for nearly 25 and has been an enthusiast even longer. His company offers anything from a service to a full rebuild, with parts supply being a major asset of the business. He sells great examples of these cars when he can source them, and is always seeking similar vehicles and parts.

The specialist

camshaft has worn it gets more involved (and hence more costly) as the engine has to come out. Worn rocker shafts are a particular problem where six-cylinder engines are concerned, as they're now scarce.

Other common issues include overheating (an electric fan is useful in modern traffic) along with poor running because the original carb hasn't been set up properly. The best cure for this is simply a refurbished carburettor, set up properly; expect to pay £100 for a rebuilt carb.

TRANSMISSION

The same three-speed manual gearbox is used on four and six-cylinder Mk IIs, with overdrive available on six-cylinder cars; this extra is now hugely sought after. Six-pot Z-cars were also available with a three-speed automatic gearbox; such cars are unusual, and so too are problems, other than those of wear and tear, so check for slipping and make sure the gear selection isn't jerky. The manual transmission isn't especially strong, with jumping out of second gear par for the course, so accelerate through the ratios, expecting hassle and grief. Exchange rebuilt gearboxes are £300, with a decent used non-

overdrive item around £75; a second-hand auto box is around £500. As everyone wants overdrive and there aren't many boxes to go round, you'll pay at least £1000 for a used unit. Even at that price it may still need an overhaul, which could double the cost thanks to a lack of available spares.

Clutches are weak and now hard to find, with pressure plates especially scarce. New six-cylinder parts are extinct, with used bits seriously hard to find. Although used Consul bits are marginally more plentiful and they'll fit the six-cylinder cars, they're not strong enough so they'll fail almost immediately.

Despite these problems, it's best to avoid reconditioned clutches as they rarely last long. So your only option is to hope that you drop on some new old stock; if you do, expect to pay £150 for a three-piece kit.

Differentials are strong, unless they're allowed to run dry. Once this happens there could be problems, as replacements are hard to find and there aren't many parts left for rebuilds.

STEERING & SUSPENSION

The steering can be a weak spot, so make sure



GUIDE PRICE

This 1961 Zephyr saloon is in superb condition – expect to pay £12,000 for a similar example.





Even healthy Mk II six-cylinder engines can sound tappety.



Leatherette trim as standard on Mk IIs – cloth or leather optional.

'BE PREPARED TO WAIT TO GET THE MK II OF YOUR DREAMS'

it's light and precise, with no more than an inch and a half of play at the steering wheel. Stiff spots mean the box has been overtightened to adjust out the play – which may have damaged it beyond repair. Reconditioned steering boxes are available though, for £175.

Lift the bonnet and see if the rubber cap is in place on top of the strut; if it's not there, water will have got in, which is a real pain as replacement bearings simply aren't available.

There are 14 greasing points in the suspension, which need attention every 1000 miles, so wear is common. Worn front struts can be a problem too, so bounce test each corner and see if the car quickly settles.

If it keeps bouncing, a rebuild is needed – but the piston that's at the heart of each strut is no longer available, with even used ones now very hard to find. Cars that have been left standing for ages may have a rusty piston; that's a major problem as they're no longer available, whereas a leaky damper isn't an issue, because replacement seals are now available for just £16.

WHEELS & BRAKES

The all-drum braking system of pre-May 1961 Mk IIs is straightforward and everything is available, but bleeding the set-up effectively isn't easy. However, eliminating a spongy pedal should just be a question of bleeding as usual, although you might need to do it more than once before you get a firm pedal.

Later cars got discs at the front, either optionally or as standard, with the same set-up used on four-cylinder cars as six-pot editions. Consuls don't really need discs; any braking inadequacies of drum-equipped cars are usually down to seized front wheel cylinders.



TRIM & ELECTRICS

New interior and exterior trim are extinct, with decent used stuff very scarce, so make sure what's there is complete and undamaged. Some brightwork (grilles, side trim) are chrome on brass, so they can be revived, bonnet mascots are Mazac, which makes restoration tricky.

All cars got leatherette trim as standard; hide or cloth were optional on all Mk IIs. Used interiors do crop up, but constant design tweaks make it hard to source exactly the right one. Headlinings tend to stain and fitting a new one means

removing the front and rear screens – replacement headlinings cost £135 from Aldridge Trimming. Decent carpets are easy to source, at £200 for a full set.

Window regulator mechanisms are a pain to fix, so check the glass goes up and down as it should and that there's no glazing damage, because replacement glass is scarce.

If you're looking at a convertible, inspect the roof closely as replacing it costs at least £1000.

The electrical system is incredibly simple – perhaps a bit too much so. There are just two fuses in the bulkhead-mounted fusebox, so any short circuits can lead to all sorts of problems.

Brittle wiring and poor earths are normal, but if things have got really bad it's possible to buy a new loom from Autosparks (0115 949 7211, www.autosparks.co.uk) for £252.

CONCLUSION

If you're looking for a slice of 1950s Heaven, Ford's Mk II range should fit the bill. There are some superb examples out there and these cars are extremely usable, but the Mk II's desirability means prices are high because demand constantly outstrips supply.

Tarted-up Z-cars aren't unusual, but there are lots of good ones around. They don't come onto the market that often, though, so be prepared to search and also to wait to get the Consul, Zephyr or Zodiac Mk II of your dreams. ■



The owner

As membership secretary for the 650-strong Mk II Club, Ken Hall owns a Zodiac convertible as well as the superb 1961 Zephyr saloon you see here. Says Ken: 'I had one when I was younger, so Mk II ownership is a nostalgia trip. The Mk II is comfy and stylish and thanks to a restoration by its previous owner, my car is in superb condition. It'll be at the club's biggest weekend of the year, at Wicksteed Park near Kettering, on July 7-8.'

THANKS TO
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