

May 2024

## OFFICERS

Co-Presidents

Steve Kelley

443-371-3030

[skelley@gottogotravel.net](mailto:skelley@gottogotravel.net)

Cathy Kelley

443-417-0441

[cathykelley49@gmail.com](mailto:cathykelley49@gmail.com)

V. President,

Membership

Mike Melnyk

610-279-6279

[thunderbirdmike@juno.com](mailto:thunderbirdmike@juno.com)

Treasurer

Frank Long

410-569-8539

[fglong1@hotmail.com](mailto:fglong1@hotmail.com)

Secretary

Lynn Horn

410-377-5824

[lynnhorn704@gmail.com](mailto:lynnhorn704@gmail.com)

y

Editor

Skip Panowitz

410-456-5276

[skip.panowitz@yahoo.com](mailto:skip.panowitz@yahoo.com)

Webmaster

Steve Kelley

443-371-3030

[skelley@gottogotravel.net](mailto:skelley@gottogotravel.net)

Sunshine Lady

Peg Long

410-569-8539

[peglong3@gmail.com](mailto:peglong3@gmail.com)

## Board of Directors

Phyllis Cherry 410-747-1209

Ron Hill 410-569-0106

Tom Young\* 410- 653-3108

Skip Panowitz\* 410-456-5276

\*Past President

**Deadline for submitting  
Newsletter photos, articles,  
etc., is the 20th of each  
month.**

## MID-ATLANTIC THUNDERBIRD CLUB

*Charter & Founding Chapter, International Thunderbird Club*



<http://www.midatlantictbirdclub.org>

## **This Month in *Thunderbird* History:**

- **May 2017:** Inaugural celebration of Thunderbird Appreciation Day on the third Sunday in May, the Sunday after Mother's Day to encourage universal recognition of the iconic marque.

**Thursday-May 16, 2024 @ 9:30 am\*\*\*\***

Greek Village Restaurant - 129 Baltimore Pike, Bel Air, MD 21014  
*Please let Cathy know if you are planning to attend so the restaurant can be prepared.*

**Thunderbird Appreciation Day/  
MATC 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Weekend  
May 18-20<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – Roanoke, Virginia**



The Mid Atlantic Thunderbird Club (MATC) is planning a weekend away May 18-20 in the Roanoke VA area to celebrate both the anniversary of the formation of our club 50 years ago as well as Thunderbird Appreciation Day on May 19<sup>th</sup>. On Sunday, May 19, we plan to caravan to nearby Smith Mountain Lake to have a lunch cruise on the Virginia Dare boat at 3pm. We would love to have any and all folks join our club members if you can make it. We would need to know in advance to guarantee room on the boat so please get the word out to your members soon if you are interested.

We plan to meet in the parking lot at our hotel in Roanoke, the Comfort Inn Civic Center, 815 Gainsboro Rd, Roanoke VA 24016 at 1:30. The ride out to the boat is about an hour. It is Virginia Dare Cruises and Marina at 3619 Airport Rd, Moneta, VA 24121. The cruise is at 3pm. The cruise is at 3pm. You will need to get tickets in advance at <https://www.vadaresml.com/cruises>. Click on the calendar to find May 19. Please contact Cathy or Steve if you are interested in joining us.



## President's Message May 2024

### Let's See those 'Birds Out!

We hope you folks are getting the Thunderbirds out on the roads. That's what they were made for. A nice group of us are going to join LVTC at **Boyertown Vintage Vehicle Museum** on Sunday, May 5, meeting on the museum parking lot at 10am. After a tour with expert guides we'll hop over to the **Americana Diner** for lunch at 2pm. If you haven't told us you will be there, please do so as the Melnyks are making reservations. Should be a great day!

We have planned to celebrate **Thunderbird Appreciation Day, May 19 and MATC's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary** as a club in the Roanoke VA area. We are disappointed that only a few MATC members seem to be interested, but we invited folks from VA and PA clubs and several of them are joining us. If you are still interested, please let us know. Complete details were in last month's newsletter and in an email we sent to everyone. We'll be staying at the Comfort Inn Civic Center in Roanoke. For dinner Saturday evening we're going to Shakers Restaurant which has a fabulous menu. On Sunday, which is Thunderbird Appreciation Day, we have tickets on the Virginia Dare paddlewheel boat for an afternoon cruise at 3pm (including a meal for just \$45) on Smith Mountain Lake. They have reserved parking for our Tbirds. Another fun day!

Please don't forget to register for **All Ford Nationals in Carlisle!** Skip has sent many emails and has more information elsewhere in the newsletter. This is a big event with friends from many clubs attending! MATC will have a Thunderbird themed **quilt for raffle** there and at the VTCl convention.

This year the **VTCl convention** is in Grand Rapids MI Aug 7-11 and we are planning to go, arriving on the 8th. They have lots of things planned, like a visit to the Gerald R Ford Museum, Gilmore Car Museum and Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park as well as BBQs, Buffets and Banquet. Oh, and of course Tbird judging and awards. We met some great people at the convention in GA last year. Won't you join us this year? The flyer and registration is in this newsletter. Let us know if you register.

We tried to get folks together for ice cream in Havre de Grace the last weekend in April but didn't get much interest. Maybe folks are too busy on weekends so we thought we would try again on a week night, going forward all summer. If you are too far from our area, talk to other club members near you and plan something in your neck of the woods. That would be a great opportunity to get out in the Thunderbirds to show them off. Planning on Wednesday, May 22, 7pm, at Bomboy's in Havre de Grace again. Please let us know if you can join us.

*Cathy & Steve*

## EVENTS CALENDAR

*Official MATC/ITC activities are marked with \*\*\* and printed in bold. Our Thunderbird Club events are open to all years of Thunderbirds. Other events such as "AACA" events adhere to the 25-year rule or other designation. Applicable restrictions will be noted with each event.*

Date	Event	Sponsor	Location	Additional Information
Third Thursday 9:30 AM Monthly	Monthly Breakfast Gathering	***MATC	Greek Village Diner 129 Baltimore Pike Bel Air, MD 21014	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/pages/Greek-Village-Restaurant/203026953055071">https://www.facebook.com/pages/Greek-Village-Restaurant/203026953055071</a>
May thru October	Cars & Coffee: No Competition, No Trophies, Just Fun & Socialization	-	Bel Air Plaza SC Bel Air, MD	7-9 Am, Every Sunday Weather permitting
<b>2024</b>				
May 18-20	MATC 50 <sup>th</sup> Anniversary/ Thunderbird Appreciation Day Weekend	***MATC	Roanoke, VA	See Details in Presidents Message. Book your room reservation now!
May 31-June 2	Carlisle Ford Nationals		Carlisle, PA	Make Your Hotel Reservations Now!!
June 8	Go Topless!	CMC	Classic Motor Museum St. Michael's, MD	Possible MATC activity
July 14	National Collector Car Appreciation Day		TBD	
July 14	Pot Luck Annual Gathering @ The Denham's	***MATC	5626 Williams Road Hyde, MD 21082	More details to follow
August 4	Das Awkscht Fest TBird Club Day	AACA	Macungie, PA	Details to follow
August 7-11	VTCl Annual Convention	VTCl	Grand Rapids, MI	Details and reservation info to be provided as available
September 15	"Cherry Fest" @ Phyllis Cherry's Cabin	***MATC	Cascade, MD	More details as we get closer
December 8	MATC Christmas Dinner	***MATC	Dobbin House Gettysburg, PA	Details and reservation info to be provided as available

There are many car shows and cruise nights in our service area on a weekly basis. Some of the more popular events are listed above. Please also check out the complete list of events on the Car Show & Cruise Guide website @ [www.cruiseguide.com](http://www.cruiseguide.com). If you know of a "local" show that you think will be of interest to our membership, please provide the information to Skip.



**[Save the hobby.org](http://Save the hobby.org)**

This is our new charitable partner beginning in 2024.



The officers and members of MATC wish the following members a very happy birthday:

**May Birthdays:**

**Linda Loving (21) Betty Marcellino (30)**

*If your birthday was overlooked, please let the editor know ASAP.*

**Membership:**

Please be sure to use the recruitment cards and/or attached flyer when you see prospective members and their cars.

Need an application for MATC, ITC or VTCI? Contact Cathy, Steve, Mike or Skip

**MEMBER NEWS & HAPPENINGS:**

- Several of our members continue to receive on-going medical treatment for various medical issues. These include Dan Denham, Dwight Dixon, Steve Kelley, Mike Melnyk and Christine Young. . Please keep them in your thoughts and prayers.

Best wishes for a quick, complete, and successful recovery for our members.

*Please submit your news, special occasions, etc., to the editor for publication in the Newsletter to keep the membership up to date on member happenings, health, and well-being. Remember, inquiring minds want to know!*

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**Registry of Retro Thunderbirds By Color:**

MATC is developing a register of 2002-05 Retro Thunderbirds owned by our members by year, color, and specialty model as applicable (Niemann Marcus, 007, Pacific Coast Roadster, Cashmere). Included with this edition of the newsletter is the updated roster of members. If your retro Thunderbird year and color are not indicated, please notify Skip @ [skip.panowitz@yahoo.com](mailto:skip.panowitz@yahoo.com) with the information so that the register is as accurate as possible. Thanks!

## Mid Atlantic Thunderbird Club 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Shirts

Here you see a picture of the latest MATC 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary polo shirts that we have ordered Listed are your options. They are nice quality. Another order is in progress. At least six items are required to place an order.

Men's Polo XS –XL \$22

2x \$24, 3X \$27, 5X

\$32

Black

Navy

Graphite Gray

Forest green

Red

Ladies Polo XS – XL

\$22

2X \$24, 3X \$27

Black

Navy

Graphite Gray

Forest Green

Red

Ladies Scoop Tee

XS – XL \$17

Black

Navy

Graphite Gray

Forest Green

Red

Azelea Pink

Sweatshirt Unisex

S-XL \$28 , 2X \$33, 3X

\$35

Black

Navy

Charcoal Gray

Forest green



## Future "Thunderbird" Events 2024

*Revised May 1, 2024*

### **Federal Armored Express/Dunbar Armored Museum Tour & Lunch-Pending For 2024**

This is an opportunity to visit a museum dedicated to a great American success story. Founded in 1956 by James Dunbar, it grew from a one armored vehicle operation to the #3 armored car service in America with nearly 1000 vehicles and operations nationwide. Acquired by Brinks a few years ago, the museum showcases the vehicles and history of the company. Cost is \$25 per person which includes lunch. The museum is located at 130 Lake Front Drive, Cockeysville, MD. Please RSVP Skip ([skip.panowitz@yahoo.com](mailto:skip.panowitz@yahoo.com)) NLT November 6<sup>th</sup> as space may be limited.

### **Thunderbird Friends Reunion #2, Carlisle, PA, May 31-June 2, 2024**

A reunion of Thunderbird friends is again being planned in conjunction with the 2024 Carlisle Ford Nationals. Unfortunately the block of rooms has been discontinued as of April 30<sup>th</sup> but you can check with the hotel for availability and pricing. Advise them that you are with the [Thunderbird Friends Reunion](#) group.

**Holiday Inn Express & Suites Carlisle Southwest I-81**  
**1501 Commerce Ave**  
**Carlisle, PA**  
**717-241-0052**

The hotel is an easy drive from the Carlisle Fairgrounds right off of I-81.

There will be a group dinner on Friday and Saturday nights. Specifics will be published soon. All are welcome to attend. Specific information will be published soon. There will be a hospitality room at the hotel as well.

We look forward to lots of Fun, Fun, Fun in 2024.



VTCI 2024 International  
August 7th-11th

# GRAND RAPIDS

MICHIGAN

## Tentative Schedule

Wednesday	Afternoon	Tour: Gerald R Ford Presidential Museum
	Evening	Event: Welcome Reception
Thursday	Morning	Meeting: VTCI Board of Directors / General Meeting
	Afternoon	Tour: Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park
	Evening	Event: Birds, BBQ and Beer (Patio)
Friday	Morning	Tour: Gilmore Car Museum
	Evening	Event: Friday Night Social
Saturday	Judgment Day	Meeting: Owners & Judges
		Event: Concours Judging
	Evening	Event: Awards Banquet
Sunday	Bon Voyage ... Have a Safe Trip Home	



## Proposed Tours



### Gerald R Ford Presidential Museum

... whatever your politics, the opportunity to explore the role one man played in American history for over 50 years. There's also a chance to explore the "woman behind the power" as Betty Ford's contribution to history and our culture is emphasized.

... and no, that oval office is not Rod Wake's



### Frederik Meijer Gardens & Sculpture Park

... our love for Mother Nature may equal the way VTCI members treasure their T-Birds, but appreciation for the beauty of a formal garden is brought together with the art of sculpture in one of Michigan's most popular attractions ... sorry, no T-Bird sculpture to be found!



### Gilmore Car Museum

... OK automobile enthusiasts, there may not be a bevy of T-Birds located in one of America's most prestigious auto museums, but there still plenty to enjoy over a day's visit - including the opportunity to ride in some of these older treasures - unfortunately, none meet Paul Prokop's high standards for concours judging!

## 2024 VTCI

## International Convention

August 7-11, 2024

Grand Rapids MI



Earlier in 2023, the VTCI signed a contract to bring "The VTCI Experience" to the largest metropolitan area in Western Michigan ... Grand Rapids. The idea to bring the VTCI to the Grand Rapids area originated with former Vice President, Ed Elzings, who not only provided the idea, but also the basic agenda for this convention.



Starting in 2022, the Board of Directors began working with the Experience Grand Rapids Convention and Visitors Bureau. As Interim Regional Director for the Northeast Region (NE), VTCI's Vice President, Bob McNeill, working with the North Central Region's Director (NC), Larry Graham, began to explore hotel options and potential tours to serve VTCI's members. An exploratory information sheet was provided to various hotels and proposals were solicited.



Joined later by the real management team of Terri McNeill and Kate Graham, Larry, Bob and company visited the Grand Rapids area in April 2023 to review the hotels and evaluate each hotel to enable the best choice for the club. The eventual choice:

DoubleTree by Hilton  
Grand Rapids Airport  
4747 28<sup>th</sup> Street SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49512  
\$105 / Night



**NOTE:** Registration form and the event schedule are included as attachments with the MATC newsletter.

## Romancing The Chrome

The threat of inclement weather kept most of our club members that had planned attend away. But the weather turned out to be better than expected. And our dedicate RTC attendee, Doug Read, did attend the show. And his 2004 Merlot placed third in its class. Congratulations!! Also, Doug saw several other Thunderbirds there and recruited the owners for MATC membership. What club spirit! Thank you Doug for representing and supporting MATC.



Doug & Sandy's 2004 Merlot



Anyone recognize this "Bird"? Or know the owner?

## Cars & Coffee – Bel Air Maryland



Thanks to another dedicated MATC member, Dan Luber, for represnting MATC at the weekly Sunday morning Cars & Coffee gathering at the Bel Air Plaza shopping center. Please consider joining Dan and other club members on a future Sunday. This event has grown from just a few vehicles (only three on the first Sunday in 2016) to oftern 75-100 or more.

## May Thunderbird Quiz



Who are the Actors:

What Year Is The Thunderbird?:

Bonus: What is the movie this scene appeared in?

.

*Respond to Skip with your guesses...er answers.*

*It is never too late to submit your answer.*

## April Thunderbird Quiz



Who Is The Actress?: **Audrey Hepburn**

What Year Is The Thunderbird?: **1956**

Bonus: Who is the famous actor that is standing with her. **Mel Ferrer**

*Congratulations to Marsha Dixon who responded with the correct answers in record time!!*

### Previous Winners:

May: Judy Dickinson & Steve Kelley

June: Tom Young

July: Mike Melnyk

August: Al Herman

September: Bob Bossoli

October: Phyllis Cherry

November: Dwight Dixon

February: Judy Dickinson

March: Ann Collins / Scott Mummert

April: Marsha Dixon

## **CLASSIFIEDS**



A

B

**Still Available**  
**MATC & TBird T-Shirts**  
**While They Last!**

**A = 45<sup>th</sup> MATC Anniversary T-Shirt; Sizes - L, XL, XXL; \$10 each - 2 for \$25 plus S&H**

**B = Retro TBird Logo T-Shirt; XXL only; \$10 each plus S&H**

*Note: Classified ads are inserted at no cost for MATC members until the item is sold depending on space. Non-member cost to advertise is complimentary for the first month then \$10 for each three months thereafter. This policy is subject to change.*

## **Collector's Corner:**

For those of us that are collectors of Thunderbird models and memorabilia, the diecast model makers have finally discovered that there is a market for the "big" Birds, the 1972-76 versions of this great marque. These are previewed below. Let me know in advance if you are interested in any of them to be certain I have enough to meet demand. The more ex

**GREENLIGHT**  
1:64 SCALE DIECAST CARS

**SHOWROOM**  
*Floor*



1974

These are 1:64 scale produced by Greenlight. Price will be about \$7.00 each. I expect to have them available mid-year.



39150E - 1:64 1976 Ford Thunderbird  
 "Treat Yourself to One of the World's Great Luxury Car Buys"

These are by Goldvarg. They are superb quality and are very well detailed. And they are pricey, about \$80 each to MATC members, retail is \$100+. Other manufacturer models of the same quality are 2-3 times more expensive. The model year is 1976. I expect to have these later this year. A very limited quantity of about 150 each is being produced so if interested let me know ASAP. They are sold out at Goldvarg and my source only has a few still available from their allotment.

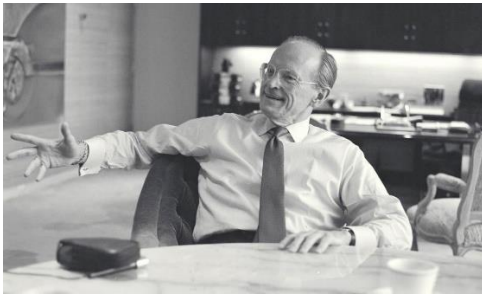


# Don Petersen, CEO who steered Ford to success in late 1980s, dies at 97

A mechanical engineer with a zeal for quality, Petersen was only the second person outside the founding Ford family to lead the automaker.

Automotive News - April 25, 2024

DAVID PHILLIPS and BILL KOENIG



Donald Petersen, a former chairman and CEO of [Ford Motor Co.](#) whose focus on quality, unbridled product design and a collaborative workplace helped the company recover and prosper during the mid- to late 1980s, has died. He was 97.

Petersen died Wednesday at his home near Detroit in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., his niece Laura Peterson told *Automotive News* in an email.

Petersen was just the second person outside of the Ford family to steward the automaker, after his predecessor, Philip Caldwell.

During Petersen's tenure as chairman and CEO, from 1985 to 1990, Ford's [profits surged](#), fueled in part by a pair of popular new "jelly bean" cars, and outpaced those of larger rival General Motors, in 1986-87, for the first time since the 1920s. And the company's share of the U.S. light-vehicle market rose by a third to 22.3 percent in 1989 from 16.6 percent in 1981. A [new marketing tag](#) for the Ford division — "Quality is Job One" — was hatched in the summer of 1981, after Petersen became president in 1980.

"Any way you slice it, there was no more exciting automobile company to work for in the 1980s than Ford," Petersen recalled later.

In 1988, CEOs polled by Fortune magazine voted Petersen the country's most effective CEO.

But he retired unexpectedly in 1990 at age 63, two years before the automaker's normal retirement age for executives, saying at the time he wanted to "repot" himself.

William Clay Ford Sr., a grandson of Ford's founder, Henry Ford, and other directors had become disenchanted with Petersen and increasingly worried about succession at Detroit's No. 2 automaker. They wanted Ford COO Red Poling to replace Petersen.

After a series of unsuccessful attempts by Ford directors to persuade Petersen to step aside and retire, Ford director Drew Lewis, a former secretary of transportation in the Reagan White House, [delivered the news](#) in October 1989.

Petersen announced plans to step down in November 1989, effective the following March. Poling, who was a year older than Petersen, postponed his retirement to become chairman and CEO.

Ford Motor Co., in a statement, called Petersen a "steadfast leader during an important part" of the company's history.

"He insisted on teamwork and excellence in the name of customers and guided Ford through a period of revitalization and intense competition in the global auto industry," Ford said. "Donald pushed his teams to design and deliver vehicles they'd be proud to park in their own driveways, a standard to which we still hold ourselves."

Under Petersen, Ford introduced the [Ford Taurus](#) and Mercury Sable, two radical sedans that popularized rounded, aerodynamic styling.

He was widely admired for encouraging subordinates to seek consensus, a practice that stood in sharp contrast to the more autocratic style of Ford's previous leaders, notably [Lee Iacocca](#) and Henry Ford II.

Petersen, brilliant enough to be a member of Mensa, became a public advocate for a collaborative workplace, often giving interviews and speeches on the topic while CEO.

But books published after he retired exposed Petersen for not always practicing what he preached and sometimes engaging in outbursts at subordinates.

Petersen also clashed with the founding Ford family.

r What

### **Product planner**

Petersen was born Sept. 4, 1926, in Pipestone, Minn. His close-knit family eventually moved to California.

"Although my own family didn't have much money when I was growing up, my parents always praised me, especially for what I accomplished at school," Petersen wrote in a 1991 book, "A Better Idea: Redefining the Way Americans Work," an essay on work ethic and quality in the United States.

He joined Ford in 1949 after serving in the Marines during World War II. Petersen received a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Washington and an MBA from Stanford University.

At Ford, he held a series of product planning posts and was a member of the team that developed the original Mustang in 1964.

His early career in product planning also included development work on the Ford LTD and Maverick and Lincoln Continental Mark III.

He became vice president for car planning and research in 1969 and beginning in the early 1970s oversaw Ford's truck operations, giving him broad product experience.

"The truck division was traditionally where they sent you if you weren't on the fast track," Petersen said in his 1991 book. "The atmosphere ... was positive because these people had come to know one another well and had found they liked working on trucks. In my four years in the truck division I discovered that any organization can function better if people work together with a common goal of Petersen later was named executive vice president for diversified products, which linked Ford with suppliers and subsidiaries, and vice president for international operations.

He was elected to Ford's board of directors on Sept. 8, 1977, and was named president in March 1980, serving under CEO Philip Caldwell, who had succeeded Henry Ford II to become the first nonfamily head of the automaker.

Petersen said the worst day in his 40 years with Ford came shortly after he was named president and he realized that Detroit's No. 2 automaker was in worse shape than he'd thought.

Ford had just reported a \$1.17 billion loss for 1979, the company's second straight annual loss. Ford's financial slide was accelerating, hurt by rising gasoline prices and interest rates, which were making cars less affordable.

"It was certainly a sobering day," Petersen told the Associated Press in a 1989 interview. "It was probably the most sobering day."

But Petersen was also aware of what was on the drawing board inside Ford's styling studios.

His hands-off policy of giving designers more latitude led to the development of the highly successful 1983 Thunderbird.

Petersen: Poling was a great Ford teammate

### **Changing course**

In one famous meeting in 1980, when Ford designers were focused solely on "filling out the cube," as then-design chief Jack Telnack once put it, Petersen changed the course of Ford design.

"Are you really happy with what you're doing here," Petersen bluntly asked Telnack one day, who replied with a ready "no."

"Well," Petersen asked, "if that isn't what you like, what would you like to do?"

Telnack said he wanted some time before meeting again with Petersen.

Within weeks, Telnack gathered sketches that designers had created on the side that showed Thunderbirds with voluminous shape rather than geometry. Petersen immediately took steps to liberate company designers from the industry's styling norm, which was then established by GM.

The exchange between Petersen and Telnack set the stage for the shapely look of the first Taurus sedan.

"What was so striking to me about the Taurus was that it put the stamp of certified acceptance and rightness on the efforts of Ford Motor Co. in a fashion that I did not anticipate fully," Petersen said in the 1989 AP interview. "To me, we had started the process long before.

"I thought of the '83 Thunderbird as really, if you will, the benchmark car that really declared that there was going to be a very different direction, specifically in design of automobiles."

The company developed the Taurus during Caldwell's tenure and the car was unveiled in January 1985 at an elaborate event in Southern California, just before Caldwell's retirement as CEO. Petersen still enjoyed credit for the Taurus' success.

He later chided Ford's communications department for the lavish Taurus introduction and admonished its leaders to never again spend \$1 million on a product reveal.

Petersen also is credited with helping to improve Ford's quality at a time when Japanese imports were taking a bigger bite out of the Detroit 3's U.S. market share.

While Petersen was president in the early 1980s, Ford tapped W. Edwards Deming, an aging expert on quality who had famously studied Japanese plants after World War II and devised a set of 14 points that company management should embrace, to optimize employee performance.

### **Hertz, Mazda and Jaguar**

Petersen, under pressure from Ford directors to diversify the company's operations, oversaw the purchase of a controlling stake in car-rental giant Hertz for \$1.3 billion in 1987. He was also the major force behind Ford's increasing stake in Mazda in the 1980s.

"We needed a beachhead in Asia," Petersen wrote in his 1991 book. "And, even more importantly, Mazda had terrific experience with front-wheel-drive technology. They were on the cutting edge — we needed their R&D. As a brand name, however, Mazda was irrelevant. It did have the cachet of manufacturing a high-quality car."

In his biggest deal, Ford acquired Jaguar in 1989 for \$2.5 billion under Petersen. The price was \$2 billion more than rival GM paid for a 50 percent stake in Saab, and the Jaguar deal alienated some members of the Ford family.

"I never lost any sleep over it," Petersen told the Chicago Tribune in 1991. "We purchased Jaguar for the long, long term. Ford still didn't have a presence in the luxury market in Europe. Lincoln made money for us here, and with the Jaguar tradition we felt Ford could be a major player in that market for us in Europe."

### **Magenta days**

As Ford generated profits and gained a reputation for superior quality among the Detroit 3, "Petersen was emerging as a corporate philosopher, an enlightened businessman whose thoughtful, people-oriented ideas carried relevance to all those who cared about America's fate in the rowdy new world of global competition," Paul Ingrassia and Joseph B. White wrote in their 1994 book, "Comeback: The Fall and Rise of the American Automobile Industry."

He developed a hectic speaking schedule and blocked out several days a month for one-on-one conferences with colleagues or solitary thinking. They became known as "magenta days" because Petersen's secretary used a magenta felt-tip pen to keep track of the engagements in his calendar.

The Ingrassia-White book also detailed episodes in which Petersen berated subordinates while being praised as a progressive executive. "No one can live like a saint every day of their lives," Petersen told the authors, adding he had started cultural change at Ford.

Inside Ford, some critics referred to him as the Smiling Cobra.

### **Board clashes**

By the late 1980s, Petersen was running into new problems. In late 1988, Edsel Ford II and Bill Ford Jr. went public in a Fortune magazine article with their dissatisfaction about what they regarded as their lack of meaningful assignments on the company's board.

"I'm not a caretaker for anybody," Petersen told Fortune in 1988. "I admire the fact that [Edsel and Bill] are trying very hard to go as far as they can. But being a Ford does not give them a leg up. The principle we must operate on is that selection to top management is based solely on merit."

In May 1989, the Ford cousins joined the board's executive and finance committees.

Petersen's views on Bill Ford Jr. surfaced again when the company celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2003.

"I used to send him from department to department for experience," Petersen recalled in an October 2002 interview with author Douglas Brinkley, as described in Brinkley's 2003 book, "Wheels for the World: Henry Ford, His Company, and a Century of Progress." "I thought he was the most likely fourth-generation Ford to rise to the top. Not that he had any remarkable skill. What he had was a fine manner. He never became fully knowledgeable of any particular aspect of the company. But he was naturally bright and that can compensate for a lot."

According to the Ingrassia-White book, the board disagreed with Petersen on other issues, including succession and potential acquisitions, and forced out the executive.

Petersen, in interviews for the Ingrassia-White book, said he left voluntarily.

At the news conference to announce his retirement, Petersen fought back tears as he said that 10 years as COO and CEO, capping a 40-year career at Ford, was enough. He cited a need "to make a change in my life."

He was first inspired to retire early in March 1989, Petersen said, when William Clay Ford retired as vice chairman of Ford at age 63 after 40 years. Petersen, on reflection, said he realized he had had little time to himself and with his family during his career.

His job had frequently required seven days a week of international travel, speaking engagements, ceremonial functions and meetings.

“While the demands of the job have increased, my energy level is progressively declining,” he said, smiling. Aside from weariness, he said there was the matter of individual growth, and he cited the thinking of an educator at his alma mater.

“I have been struck with the philosophy of Ernie Arbuckle, who at one time was the dean of Stanford’s graduate business school,” Petersen said. “He followed a plan to change occupations every 10 years. He called it repotting himself. Well, 10 years are up, and it’s time to repot myself.”

Hard times bred a Ford triumph

### **Talks with Mulally**

Petersen, a former director of Boeing Co., [took notice of Alan Mulally](#) long before Mulally became Ford’s CEO in 2006, according to a 2011 article in Chief Executive magazine.

In the 1980s, Mulally was Boeing’s chief engineer for the design of the 777, and Petersen asked him to meet with Ford’s team designing the Taurus.

“I invited the entire Team Taurus out to Seattle for three days,” Mulally told Chief Executive. “We compared notes on technology, on process, and being market-driven and customer-oriented. So when Bill Ford called asking me to come to Ford, I checked in with Don with whom I stayed in close contact. It felt like I was coming home because I knew the environment.”

Petersen, in an interview in the fall 2010 issue of Motor Trend Classic, said he and Mulally became good friends and that Petersen may have helped Mulally hone his management philosophy.

“We had a lot of conversations about what we did at Ford and what he might learn from that,” Petersen said. “He is extremely good as a leader, and he has done a lot of good things to further my ideas because he shares them.”

One of those ideas was getting Ford’s North American and European operations to share more engineering duties.

Petersen’s attempt at co-engineering led to the 1994 European Ford Mondeo and 1995 Ford Contour and Mercury Mystique sold in North America.

The sedans were smaller than the Taurus and Sable. But high development costs, a lack of shared parts and numerous other compromises, such as a cramped rear seat in the North American version, resulted in cars that fell short of Ford’s expectations.

In contrast, the 2011 Ford Focus sold in Europe, and developed under Mulally’s One Ford strategy, shared 90 percent of its parts with its U.S. cousin — and each car sold well in its market.

The Contour and Mystique may have struggled, but the Taurus wasn't the only home run Ford hit under Petersen. In March 1990, the automaker rolled out the Ford Explorer.

The Explorer, developed under Petersen's watch as a more refined alternative to the rugged and aging Bronco II, was an instant hit and helped ignite the SUV boom that swept the industry in the 1990s.

### **Car-guy mystique**

While he was just one of many "car guys" with motor oil in their veins to steer a Detroit automaker, Petersen downplayed the mystique in an August 2007 interview with The New York Times, saying "the concept's been overdone," after industry outsiders — Mulally and Bob Nardelli — were named to run Ford and Chrysler.

By insisting that only homegrown talent be promoted, Petersen added, some in the U.S. auto industry "were undervaluing the inherent knowledge that you get about how things do in fact work in a very complex industrial setting."

In an interview published in 2005 with the University of Washington's College of Arts and Sciences, where he once was chairman of the advisory board, Petersen said engineering was never his grand passion.

"I was following in the footsteps of my older brother. It was 1944 and I signed up for the Navy V-12 program, which was designed to generate engineering officers for the Navy," Petersen told the college's Perspectives newsletter. "Every semester, I requested permission from the Navy captain to change majors. But I was doing just fine, so I was denied every semester. At some point I realized that I was going to have a degree in engineering whether I wanted one or not."

Petersen told the publication he later pursued an MBA because he thought he'd "be a mediocre engineer and needed another wing to fly on."

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"Serving the customer instead of playing political games."

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***Editor's Note:** This is a long article. But I think it is important because it not only addresses the important part Peterson played in development of the Thunderbird in later years but also because it gives a good "snapshot" of Ford history as well as Ford and the auto industry in general in the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*



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"A Club for Enthusiasts of the Ford Thunderbird of all years"

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(Revised November 2023)

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65



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