William Clay Ford Oral History

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Note to Readers

The Automotive Design Oral History Project, Accession 91.1.1673, consists of over 120 interviews with designers and engineers conducted during the 1980s by David Crippen of The Henry Ford.

This copy was produced from a bound, hard copy final version of the interview.

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- Benson Ford Research Center staff, 2023

AUTOMOTIVE DESIGN
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

FORD, WILLIAM CLAY

1986

EDSEL B. FORD DESIGN HISTORY CENTER

Henry Ford Museum &
Greenfield Village

FORD, WILLIAM CLAY

DESIGN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

February 20, 1986

Q This is Dave Crippen at the Edison Institute's Design History Center, the Edsel B. Ford Design History Center. Today is February 20, 1986, and we're speaking with William Clay Ford, currently Vice Chairman of the Ford Motor Company, at his 12th floor, World Headquarters office, and we are asking Mr. Ford today to review his career both with the Company and before he went with the Ford Motor Company in terms of design history and product development. We'd like to ask you, Mr. Ford, to start out with your earliest influences that you had in terms of being a member of a prominent automobile family and the earliest influences when you first begin to look at cars in terms of their design and their function.

A It's difficult to pinpoint when you first became aware of the shape of cars and the design per se. Obviously, I was very young, and, as you say, I was brought up with automobiles, constantly; it's all I ever knew. My father's [feelings are] well documented--[he] was very big on automotive design.

Q Really almost a leader, you'd say.

A Yes, yes. But, of course, as a kid, and I'm speaking of, probably, when I was ten or eleven years old, I wouldn't have had any idea whether he was a leader or just what it was all about. I just happened to know that we had an easel at home, and he painted, and he sketched cars. Some of the sketches that he did were actually fabricated into automobiles at custom body design. Several aluminum body cars that I remember that were probably, mostly, I guess, you'd call them sports cars, in that they were

two seaters. Of course, in those days everything had a long hood. That's really the things that I remember first was the fact that he fiddled around with, let's say, painting and sketching, and every once in awhile in the driveway a new car would appear which clearly was not a production car. So it was a hobby for him, if you will, and, of course, later on I learned of the influence that he had. Well, before I get to the Lincoln Continental, which was really the first time that I knew that what he was doing had some production capabilities. The rest of it, as I say, was more or less hobbies. I looked at the cars. I guess I was intrigued by them. I liked the sporty flavor that they had to them. I guess he knew that I was interested. He took me around when I was twelve, thirteen years old, and we went to automobile races, we went to the old Roosevelt Raceway out in Long Island, we went over to England to the Brooklands Racetrack which I guess was demolished during World War II.* I can remember driving around Brooklands, being fascinated with the MG, pre-war MG car, which to me was, and I might add, still is kind of the ultimate sports car. That's what a sports car is all about, and I think that the design of that particular car was kind of the type of car that appealed to my father a great deal. There are parts of that that you can see in the Lincoln Continental that he later worked on.

Q Then there does seem to be an emphasis on sporty, even racing cars in your background as you grew up.

A Well, maybe that's a throwback to my grandfather to his racing, literally--racing days. Yes, I think speed and race cars, as you know, the Company in the Thirties got into the race car business.

*Editor's Note: See "The Epic That Was Brooklands" by William Brody and related articles in Automobile Quarterly, Vol. IX, No. 1, Fall, 1970.

A Well, I remember, I'd say the first time my father took me to Indianapolis was 1936 so I was eleven years old at the time, and those were the days when they had riding mechanics, so there were two people in the car. There was a fascination with me from, you know, way back then for design of cars, for speed, for all the things that, you know, are part of sports cars and the things that go with racing.

Q Well, I think it's a natural outgrowth of an adolescence that you had, that cars and speed would be a fascination.

A Well, needless to say, he sort of spoiled me rotten. My sister and I were given small cars, maybe when we were about ten years old, that were gasoline-powered, but they wouldn't go probably [more than] eight or ten miles an hour. Of course, they were a lot of fun, and the trick was to see which one he could make [go] faster than the other one. So, you know, I learned to fool around a little bit with engines at that age trying to get an extra half mile an hour out of it so I could go faster than her car would.

Q Did you drive around Gaukler Point or could you get out on Lake Shore Drive?

A Well, in those days you could. You could get out on Lake Shore Drive. We were in land's end out there then. There was no development or anything, and Lake Shore Drive was a pretty isolated place, but, fortunately, there was a lot of property out there, and also the cars, don't ask me how they got there, but they ended up in his [H.F. I] place at Fair Lane out in Dearborn.

Q We've seen some pictures.

A Yes, and we would drive them around there. Good Lord, they were

even over in the Rouge. We drove them around the Triple E Building, you know, in back of the Museum there.

Q Lots of room back there.

A Absolutely. From there, speaking personally, I think the next inkling that I got was a midget race car in the true sense of the word. It had an English engine, the body was made in Indianapolis, I believe, and he put a governor on it that was supposed to keep me to 30 miles an hour, and, I think, it took me roughly ten minutes to figure how to get the governor off. That came off pretty regularly when he wasn't around, and all my friends would drive it. I went and bought a whole set of racing flags like they had at Indianapolis and stopwatches, and we'd time each other racing around my family's place out in Grosse Pointe.

Q This is about 1939 wasn't it?

A Yes, it was. I think that's when I got it. I think I was fourteen years old when I got the car. Well, that car's still in existence.

Q Is it really? You still have it?

A I don't have it. It was in the [Henry Ford] Museum for a long time, and what's happened to it since then--that wasn't too many years ago that I saw it over there in the Museum. So it was still lying around. I remember one particular recollection is that I brought it out to the test track out here in Dearborn one weekend when my family was away. Took it out on the track, took the governor off, got it going a little over a hundred miles an hour and got the governor stuck with a wide-open throttle.

Q How did you get out of that one?

A Well, that caused no end of conversation around the track, and I've

got to admit, well, it taught me how to drive pretty fast, rather quickly, I mean. I was driving fast, but I learned how to handle a car in a pretty short period of time.

Q Do you remember Al Esper at the track in those days?

A Yes, I remember [him], but I don't know whether Al was around there. Actually, the guy that arranged it for me was Ray Dahlinger. I remember calling up Ray and saying that my family was out of town, and I thought it would be a good time for me to take the car out to the test track out in Dearborn. Poor Ray, I guess, was caught between a rock and a hard pile, so, okay, fine, bring it out. I remember he was standing there, and I really don't remember whether it was Esper or who was connected with the track at that time, but they were pale as ghosts when I finally came roaring in down the straightaway. I had the car in neutral and was trying to brake it without skidding it, and here's the engine stuck wide open and this thing's going a hundred, a hundred ten miles a hour. It might well have been Esper because someone said, "Congratulations, I think you just set the new track record."

Q Esper died a couple of months ago in Dearborn.

A Oh really, I didn't know that.

Q He was about 87.

A I would imagine he'd be. He must have been.

Q Delightful guy.

A Yes. Well, my family didn't find out about that. That was fine they didn't find out until, oh God, six, eight months later, I guess. There was all hell to pay when they found out, but luckily I walked away from it, so everything was fine. So, I guess, I go back to racing and

speed, and my love for race cars in Indianapolis, and I mentioned Brooklands in England and Roosevelt Raceway, and I still follow it.

Q Fascinating sport.

A It's a fascinating sport, and, I think, there's a direct tie in between automobile racing and production cars both in design and in features that have been developed through racing, so it fascinates me. I guess after the midget racer there was a car that you alluded to earlier which was a sports car that was sort of like an MG in design.

Q How did that come about? Do you have a little case history on that?

A I was just trying to think how it came about. No, not really. My father was full of surprises. This just arrived on a Christmas or birthday, I'm not sure which it was, and it was similar in design to the MG. It had the doors that curved out and that kind of thing and could rest your arm on. Of course, it wasn't as hot as the midget racer. It didn't have the performance. As a matter of fact, it really didn't handle very well. It wasn't all that safe, but it was a very fancy looking car. I know he was pretty proud of it. Well, I was in seventh heaven, but I know the looks of it appealed to him.

Q I suppose at this point it might be instructive to talk a bit about your father. Obviously, [it was] a very benevolent and affectionate relationship with your father that you had and why he may have indulged you. I suspect he was strict where he had to be and fair when he had to be.

A Yes.

Q In terms of your relationship and in terms of maybe a long-term

look at the history of automotive design, does anything stand out in your adolescence before his death as to his feelings about design, his sensitivity to design?

A Well, I think I was really too young, I know I was, to get involved in any of the discussions on changing the Model T or the Model A and those kind of things. Really, speaking personally, the earliest recollections that I have were the Lincoln Continental in the late 'Thirties.

Q That must have been a vision to a young man's eyes.

A Well, again, it was a custom car, I mean the story has been very well documented, but happens to be true that, you know, I think he built it for himself, and I think he was going to build, I understand, two others--one for my brothers, one each for my two older brothers, and I remember driving like....

Q The original one?

A The original one.

Q Were you down there that Winter? [1938-1939]

A Yes, I was. Down in Florida, and that's when I took it, and I took a date out in the thing, and it was an awful car to drive. I shudder to think how much the thing weighed; but good Lord....

Q A ton?

A Yes, literally it was--I remember driving up to a little town called Stuart, Florida, which was some twenty mile away from where we were down there, and it took about a mile to stop this car after you got it up to about 65 miles an hour. The brakes were totally inadequate. I don't know how much lead there was in the thing, but it was really a lead

sled, all the way around.

Q Right, I understand it leaked like a sieve when you got caught in a rain storm down there.

A You know, I don't remember that part. All I remember was the brakes. The brakes stand out in my mind maybe because of my addiction to speed again. I was probably driving it a lot faster than it should have been driven, but I do remember going down this road, which was a pretty desolate road, and when approaching the town of Stuart when more cars appeared that, you know, obviously, I figured I'd better start slowing this thing down. I had my hands full. I don't know what the turning radius on it was, but I remember just turning the thing around was a major achievement.

Q No power steering in those days?

A No power steering, no. Needless to say, it wasn't ready for production, but it was an eye-catcher.

Q It did excite a lot of comment.

A Oh, no question about it, no question about it.

Q From all his [Edsel B. Ford] friends?

A Yes, they looked at it, and said "Gee, I've got to get one of those." You know, as I say, it's one story that's not apocryphal. He literally came back from that vacation with orders galore for it. What the corporate decisions were to make it into a production car, I have no idea. I never knew what really went on out here in Dearborn.

Q Does this stand out in your mind as probably the, in terms of aesthetic quality, one of the better ones that came out of that shop?

A Absolutely, absolutely.

Q Especially in '40 and '41?

A Yes, yes. Exactly, the more I look at it, and, oh, I've got a '39 Ford Station Wagon at home that I drive and take the grandchildren out in, and the grille of that is reminiscent of the grille that was on the Lincoln Continental, and it's, you know, it's a functional grille, it's simple, and one of the prettiest grilles I think that's ever been put on a car. I don't know, the more you examine that car, I think the more you appreciate the feeling that went into designing it. There's nothing--production, or, you know, run-of-the-mill, about it, there was thought that was put into every detail of it. That is the highlight, there is no question that car is the highlight in my mind.

Q The aesthetics behind it seem to have come out of a very interesting matrix. I've talked with Bob Gregorie, your father's old designer who's still lively in his eighties, he's fantastic, and he said that Edsel Ford would come over to the design shop in the Triple E Building almost every day, and they would talk informally. They would exchange ideas, and Bob Gregorie would sketch (he was great at quick sketches), your father would say, "I like that," and "Maybe we could do this," and then they'd do some more sketches and more talking. And out of that seemingly casual matrix came the design that he liked--the Continental. He had [just] come back from Europe.

A That's right, that's right.

Q He'd seen a couple of designs he'd liked (contemporary designs), and so it's instructive to me that this marvelous catalytic relationship between he and his chief designer, seemingly casual, but not so casual, came up with this marvelous automobile.

A Of course, as you know, and I'm sure that as Bob Gregorie told you, automotive design was a pretty low echelon in the corporation at that time, and it came under Engineering, and it was way down on the pecking order of things that engineers did. There's no question, I mean, I do remember being in Europe with my father, and he would look at all these cars with a very appreciative and a very critical eye, and I think that he took the best features of the cars that he saw over there and incorporated them into the Continental. I mean this would go good in this kind of car.

Q It's certainly a classic design, and still today it looks fresh and exciting.

A Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I mean that's the test right there. If you can look at it today, and it still looks like a car you'd like to drive.

Q Shortly, the year of your father's death, I believe, you enlisted into the Naval Air Corps.

A Correct. Right. 1943.

Q To what were you first assigned? How did that go?

A Well, unfortunately, just before I went into the Navy, my father died, so he was never around when I was in the service, and I started out in Ann Arbor. At the time I enlisted in the Naval Air Corps, they were looking for flyers, you know, very badly, so I guess everybody rushed down and enlisted.

Q Were you in the V-5 program?

A I was, exactly. You know, typical, first there's a shortage, then they enlist, and they have a glut.

Q The same thing happened to me.

A Okay, so it was a way of killing time getting sent out to Ann Arbor and spent a scholastic year out there--eight, nine months, I guess. Then I went all over the country, Floyd Bennett Field, I went next in New York, and then I went out to St. Mary's pre-flight in California, and I spent about six months out there, and then I went to Ottumwa, Iowa, for primary flight training, and Glenview, Illinois, and then eventually the war ended, and I got out shortly after that.

Q I had a similar experience. So there you were about 1945, you'd only finished high school as of '43.

A Yes. The doctors told me, and I think it's probably true, that my father, medically speaking, probably should have died about three weeks before my graduation from boarding school, and I think he kind of willed himself alive, if you will, till the day I got home, and came home and I'd won the school tennis championship, so I had my trophy and I had my diploma. About two days after that he died. I had no idea really up till then, good grief, about the day before I graduated from school, that he was that critically ill. I really thought he was going to be up for my graduation, then I got a handwritten letter from him saying that he was laid up and wouldn't be able to make it, and then my mother called and said she wouldn't be able to make it, and my sister and her husband came up, and they told me what the real story was, and they said, you know, we're going home, no airplanes, we're catching the old Detroiter train that night. So we caught the thing from Poughkeepsie, New York, and went right on home, and I saw him. As soon as I walked in the house the next morning, I mean, he was in bed, but he was very coherent, and we had a fine

discussion. So that part of it was great, and he congratulated me on whatever I'd done. That was fine, but then about two days later, he passed away. And, as I said, the doctor said if it hadn't been for this particular event, he probably would have gone three weeks before then. He had no business living as long as he did.

Q That's a marvelous story. So, you had decided to enter the University. How did you happen to pick Yale?

A It's strange because I can't answer the question. I'd always wanted to go there. Henry [II] had gone to Yale, but that had no bearing on it. Long before Henry ever went to Yale, I just--as a kid, six, seven, eight years old, I always wanted to go to Yale. I have no idea why, I just did.

Q You spent a delightful four years there.

A Oh, wonderful time. Looking back, probably the best time I've ever had anywhere. Well, to add to the confusion or whatever of going to college after the war, I got married after my sophomore year there, and our first kid was born up in New Haven. She was born...

Q Martha?

A Yes. She was christened in the Battell Chapel on the old campus up there, and the dean of the college that I'd lived in before got married, was the one who christened her. So, I really can't tell you why I went to Yale except it was the one place I always wanted to go. I think I would have been very disappointed if I hadn't gotten in there. Just before going in the Navy, we'd taken entrance exams and everything else for college. I'd been accepted at Yale, so I knew that after the war that [if] everything worked out okay according to plan, that that's

where I'd be going.

Q As I recall my experience, I'd gotten an awful lot of credits when I came out of the Navy.

A Yes. Practically sophomore [standing]. That's right.

Q Did you belong to any clubs or organizations that you recall?

A Yes. I was a member of the Fence Club which is, well, it's a defunct branch of Psi U[psilon], which is a national fraternity.

Q What was the name again?

A It was called the Fence Club. It was your traditional college fraternity, and then Yale has a peculiar system that they've been fighting for a hundred years which will probably go on for the next hundred years of something called Senior Societies, and you're elected to those--if you're elected. Unfortunately, when I was there, there were, I think, six of them, and they only took fifteen kids each Spring. So that wasn't very many out of, you know, a call of 1500, or whatever it was at that time--a 1000 plus, and I joined the senior society called Wolf's Head. A lot of my friends that I still see today were members of the same delegation of Wolf's Head or were in prior delegations. I've had a very close affinity with a lot of those, so that's probably the one part of college that I've kept up through the years. I do see members of that senior society.

Q What was your major in college?

A I got a bachelor of science degree in applied economics. I started out as an engineer. I kind of lost my taste [for it], I would guess, about just starting out my junior year. I'd always done a lot of athletics in college. I played on the varsity tennis team and the varsity soccer team

which was great. I loved it, but it was also pretty time consuming. As you know, the engineers had a pretty tough curriculum, and there were too many labs and too much time, and I wasn't particularly all that captivated by engineering, anyway. The more I got into it, the less I really enjoyed it, so I transferred over to this applied economics course, and that I really enjoyed. Then, fortunately, all my engineering credits applied to that, but I got a chance to take a more liberal arts kind of an education for the last year. I was delighted. I mean the courses, I think, that have served me best, post-college, were from the liberal arts courses that I took.

Q The story, as I remember, is that you were definitely scheduled to come to the Company as soon as you got out of Yale.

A Yes, I took about a month off, no more than that.

Q I remember something about grouse shooting?

A No, I graduated--well, as you know, things got screwed up during the war, and graduations came at weird times. I happened to graduate in February.

Q February of 1949?

A Right, and I came to work the next March. So my service date goes back to March of '49. You know, I've been asked in the past when did you decide that you would work for the Ford Motor Company. Well, there was never--there wasn't any decision. I don't mean that anybody forced me to, I mean nothing had ever crossed my mind other than working for Ford Motor Company. You know, it was no decision that I made, it was perfectly logical that...

Q It was assumed and you assumed?

A Oh, yes, I really don't know that everybody else assumed it or not, just in my own mind that's what I was going to do. As I say, after about a three-week vacation after college, I was ready to go to work at the company, and it was fine.

Q Was there any sort of family discussion or family conference, let's say, with your mother or with Henry as to what you might do initially and how you might break in.

A No. I had a preconceived notion, but don't ask me where I got it. I got it at Yale, that's where I got it, because I had a very good, I guess, political science teacher.

Q Who was that?

A Good Lord, I'm sorry you asked me his name. It'll come to me. For some reason, I thought that industrial relations would be the field that I wanted to get off in, and when I first started out with the company, Henry, correctly, thought that I ought to get a pretty general training program in all aspects of the company, at least, as many as I could. So, that's where I started out in sales and advertising.

Q I have a picture of you at that point.

A You probably have.

Q You and Jack Davis, your first mentor.

A He was my first mentor, you're right. Good Lord, I haven't seen this thing in.... I started out working for Jack, that's right.

Q Jack had been a mentor of Henry's, or, at least, a good friend.

A I guess Henry got him back from Siberia after he'd been in exile.*

*Editors Note: John R. Davis, successful sales chief of Ford Motor in the late 1930's and early 1940's, ran afoul of the Harry Bennett machine and was sent to California. One of Henry Ford II's earliest acts, in 1945, was to bring Davis back to sales.

Q But, apparently, he thought then that would be a good place for you to start as well.

A Yes. That was on my agenda. So, that was March. Then, in June, John Bugas, who was then head of industrial relations (we had a collective bargaining agreement coming in that September, and negotiations were beginning), thought it would be good if I got put on the bargaining table and become part of that group. So I talked it over with Henry, and it seemed fine. John talked to him, and so I joined the industrial relations team then in June of that year and stayed with that through the end of September [29], when we signed the contract.

Q How was that experience? Did you find it instructive?

A Yes, it was wonderful. It was probably the most taxing experience that I've had. Long hours and, for me, a neophyte, fresh out of college, I was a pretty good target for those UAW sharpshooters.

Q It would [have been] Walter [Reuther], I suppose?

A Well, Walter, yes, which was a great experience because Walter was there. There aren't too many people around today who've actually sat across the bargaining table from Walter Reuther, and I was fortunate enough, if that's the right word, to have had that experience.

Q Adversarial though it was, he was a marvelous person.

A Yes. He was a spellbinder. He was a little loose with words. Something that he'd tell you one day might not apply the next, but I had a very good relationship with him as I did with the other members of the UAW bargaining team. Well, Ken Bannon was head of the whole Ford group. I still talk to him, he calls me up--oh, we've got a pretty good relationship still. I got him tickets for the Superbowl game a couple of

years ago. A fellow named Gene Prado was at Local 600 at that time, he's since died. But, at any rate, I felt I was really under the gun the whole time in the negotiation period. A great experience, really tough hours, and towards the end we were going, literally, around the clock, and we were going seven days a week, and it was tough.

Q In this regard, Mr. Ford, was John Bugas a good teacher, a good friend, and one who broke you in into labor relations/industrial relations?

A John was wonderful. He was another father to me. He looked out for me. He kept me under his wing. He and a man named Mel Lindquist, who was John's right-hand man, between the two of them, they made sure I didn't get into too much trouble, and nobody picked on me too badly, and as I say, the whole thing was a great learning experience for me, a tough one, but a really good one. Then, after that I continued working in industrial relations for a little bit under Mel Lindquist, and, I guess, during that period my love affair for industrial relations really started to cool off. I thought, you know, if you have to come in to work every day, and the only thing you have to look forward to is a number of complaints that people have got, after awhile it was a Chinese water torture. You know, it's not much fun just coming in to work and listening to complaints all the time, so I'd had my experience, I was glad I went through it, it was good experience. I still cherish it, but I wouldn't want to do it again.

Q So how did you get out of it? Did you just say to Henry, I'm looking for new work experiences?

A Yes, I said, "Okay, I've done that, that's enough, let's move on to

something else."

Q Was it the new jet engine that you were working on?

A Yes, it was.

Q The J what?

A Oh Lord, I don't know. It was a Westinghouse. Yes, I think, it was the designation.

Q J-50, or something like that? [Pratt and Whitney J-57 turbo jet engine]

A Yes, and for some reason I ended up in quality control on that [gas turbine plant, 1951] which someone felt would be a good experience for me in manufacturing. I really wasn't very happy with it--first of all it was non-automotive. It might have been a pretty good exercise in engineering.

Q You could hark back to your engineering background.

A Yes, and some of the things I had learned were applicable, but it really wasn't the kind of thing that turned me on. During this time when I was in the Lincoln-Mercury thing, Ernie Breech--from time to time, I'd come over to the old Rotunda and have lunch with him over there; not very often, maybe half a dozen times a year. But, oddly enough, quite a few times--and it really wasn't for my benefit--Ernie Breech would bring up the old Lincoln Continental. [He'd say] "You know, gee, I wonder if we ought to bring that car back. There's been a lot of demands." I guess he was getting letters.

Q There had been a sort of half movement in that direction in resurrecting the face-lifted ones just after the war.

A Yes. That's right, that's right. Aesthetically, those really

didn't appeal to me a whole lot, the post war jobs. They were, well, first of all, the front end was just too much, they were massive. It was totally incompatible, as far as I was concerned, with the rest of the sheet metal that went on the car, but this was just a nebulous idea in his mind. I don't really think he had any thoughts as to how to go about doing it, if it should be done at all. But we would talk about it.

Q Piqued your curiosity?

A Yes, it did. I kind of perked up at that. He, obviously, sensed that I did, and I said, "Gee, that would be kind of fun, you know, if you decide to come out with another Continental, it would be kind of fun to get involved with it." I really didn't know in what capacity I'd be involved, or if at all, or if there would be anything. This went on for, gee, oh, I would guess, a couple of years, maybe, a year and a half. Very informal discussions, and we were talking about, you know, whether we should make the bodies out of plastic, if it was going to be a low-volume car, whether that was the way to go.

Q You were still thinking of it still as a luxury, low-volume car at that time?

A Yes, the whole thing was so nebulous, there was no plan. It was, well, "If we do, maybe we should," kind of thing. But it was always that "if". But I kept it filed away in the back of my mind as something I thought would be appealing. Then I remember one day, I have no idea what triggered it on his part, but he just, you know, flat out asked me, "Would you like to head up the project like this?" I thought it was the greatest thing in the world. You know, I couldn't wait for it. I thought it would be nifty. So, a paper was prepared, it was called the "Davis

Report." Jack Davis.

Q Drew up a sort of perspective?

A Well, he was the tour director of the thing, and Bob McNamara had a lot of input on it from finance staff. I don't know who all the signatories of the thing were. I'm sure there's a copy of it floating around someplace. But, Arjay Miller, and there were a lot of them that had some input on it, and it was a [position] paper that said that a project should be undertaken to look at the feasibility of coming out with another Continental, so that piece of paper was kind of my mandate.

Q What date was that? Late '51?

A Yes, exactly, late '51. Ernie said, "Okay, this is it, see what you can do with it." I really don't think, and, properly so from his point of view, he held a whole lot of hope for me that I was going to come up with much. I was awfully green, I'd had no experience in anything like that, but he could tell that I was, you know, interested by it--more than that, fascinated by it. This would be a pretty good place for me to cut my teeth, and, I guess, I really couldn't mess things up too badly, no matter what I did, so with that I was told, "Okay, you've got one employee," it turned out to be Harley Copp, "and go figure out where you're going to do it, how you're going to do it, what it's going to look like."

Q Harley Copp, in a sense, was your body engineer?

A Yes.

Q Design, body?

A Yes. Harley was, well, after I was given the project, Harley was my only employee for a couple of months, and the two of us would, you

know, sit down every day, figure out, number one, where were we going to put this group together. We ended up in the old Henry Ford Trade School, which was then stuck in the woods out here off Michigan Avenue on a little dirt road that came in off Michigan Avenue. It was very attractive and a nice white wooden building.

Q It had been used by the U.S. Navy during World War II, as I recall.

A I think that's right. It was in semi-disrepair. It wasn't--it was kind of a mess, but there was enough space there, and we took what was the gymnasium, and that became our design studio. We laid out some plans of office space and one thing and another, and Harley was more familiar with personnel than I was. Clearly, we needed engineers, and, clearly, we needed a designer.

Q Had you come up with the term Special Products yet by this time, or didn't you have a name for it yet?

A Yes, I think, once we physically got located in the Trade School, I think, we became Special Product Operations [mid-1952]. Who gave us that name, I don't know. I'll give Ernie Breech the credit because he was kind of the guy that was behind the whole project. I don't think we dreamt it up. As time went on, we tried to make a mystery out of what Special Product Operations was all about. This was our Manhattan Project that we had going out there. Harley found John Reinhart.

Q Now, had John been with the Company, or had he been elsewhere?

A I think John may have had some prior experience with the Company. I don't think at that time he was. Somehow, I think he was with Packard.

Q That's right, he was.

A Where Harley knew him, I don't know. I was never too clear on

that, but he told me, "I'd like you interview John Reinhart," he said, "I think he's the kind of person that, number one, you'd work well with, and, secondly, he's done work on classic cars like the old Packards." He said, "You know, if this is the kind of car that we're going to be doing, he's had experience with that kind of machine."

Q He'd been with Studebaker, also.

A That's right. So, John came in, and we hit it off the first second he came in. He was very low key, and I liked the way he talked. I liked his ideas of the kind of car that we were going to build. I liked everything about him.

Q He was a delight.

A Oh, yes, and he had great taste. Really, he had a lot of--the more I think about it, he had the personal traits that my father had. He was a very kind man. He wasn't a screamer or a table-pounder or anything else, he was very reserved, quiet, dignified, and had great taste. I mean, that was great, as far as I was concerned.

Q And Harley Copp had recommended him and had confidence in him, also?

A Yes, he did. I remember Earl MacPherson was the Vice-President of Engineering at that time, and I remember going over and talking to Mac and asking what kind of help I was going to get with this thing, and he said, "I'm giving you a bright engineer in Harley Copp, and, he said, "You're going to have to scrounge around and put the rest of it together yourself."

Q It must have been a bit daunting?

A Well, it was. I mean the whole thing was a challenge from the word

go, you know, there was nothing. When I look at the product programs that we go into today and the thought that goes into them before we undertake them, this was hit and miss and a wing and prayer all the way.

Q That was the last time it really happened?

A I think so, and, as you know, we became a totally autonomous group. I think, maybe, the first, inside the Ford Motor Company, where we had our own purchasing, our own manufacturing, our own design staff. We had everything. We were totally decentralized.

Q Within the structure of the company?

A Yes.

Q What did Henry [II] think of all of this, was he supportive?

A Yes, he was supportive. I don't think he knew really what we were doing over there, and I'm not saying that we did, either. He knew that I was, you know, busy doing something over there, and that we had a time-table of when we would have sketches and/or clay models to show, and we'd, obviously, laid this whole thing out, and we'd laid out an introduction date, and, working backwards from there, we'd built an assembly plant. We had to look at what components--and I don't take any credit for this, this was Harley's doing--what components from existing Lincoln or other cars could be used, if any, and he designed the unique frame for this car to lower it down to 56 inches, which was unheard of in those days. I mean, this was about six inches lower than the regular car that was on the streets and still make it comfortable, still give it the feel and the luxury that the original Lincoln Continental had. So he designed this cow-belly frame on the thing. We took the Lincoln engine, we took a lot of the components--the drive train. We modified a lot of things too.

The sheet metal, of course, was totally unique, the wheelbase was unique. We fooled around with, gee, I'd hate to think the number of hours I spent in the gymnasium with John Reinhart and the staff that he put together, a lot of whom are still in the Design Center. I say a lot, maybe, as of five years [ago], there were a lot, but a lot of them are starting to retire now, but there's still quite a few of them that worked on that project.

Q When did Gordon Buehrig come into the project?

A Oh, Gordon came in, I'd say, about a year after we'd gotten underway. Interesting, I knew the name Gordon Buehrig.

Q The Cord and so forth?

A Yes. Well, I didn't really know Gordon personally, and Harley told me, he said, "I'm hiring Gordon as body engineer, but I've told him he's got to stay out of the design studio." I said, "What's the problem?" He said, "Well, you know Gordon, he's designed cars in the past, and he's going to want to design this car, and," he said, "I don't want him to design this car. I want him strictly as a body engineer, and," he said, "I've made him promise he would stay out of the design studio." Well, Gordon did, I mean, of course, Harley's a pretty forceful guy even when he was very young. He still had a way of getting things across, and Gordon, he knew that if he ever stuck his nose in there, he'd be looking for a job someplace else. So Gordon came aboard, really, as just a body engineer. John Reinhart hired a fellow by the name of Bob Thomas as his right-hand man, and then the design group kind of grew from there. Bob--I still correspond with Bob--he's just written a couple of books. You know, Bob was great, he was a good designer, too. Fortunately, personality-wise,

he and John got along great. From a design point of view, they were different, and that was fine, so we had a couple of different schools there that were able to express themselves, and, really, the car that we ended up with was kind of a marriage of--really all of our ideas--the three of us and Harley, too, he had a lot of input into it. So it was really John, Bob Thomas, Harley and myself that kind of put our best thoughts together and came up with what eventually turned out to be the car that was put into production. Harley knew a lot more about the inner workings of the company than I did, and he knew about the politics that went on. We were making periodic reports back to, I guess it was called the Executive Committee. I don't remember--Ernie Breech and you know, Henry and some of the other people--we were giving them progress reports that we were coming along and that we thought that we had a design, although we had not shown it to them, that we had a design that we thought was going to satisfy what Ernie and the rest of them were looking for and what was called for in the outline of that "Davis Report". So they said, "Well, maybe you'd better get some outside consultants in on this," and we were all young, we were all in our twenties. I guess John [Reinhart] was the old man, I guess John might have been in his early thirties. But the rest of us were in our mid-to-late twenties and hadn't had that much experience. So we got--jeez, we got Raymond Loewy, and we got George Walker, then we got my brother-in-law, Wally Ford, and there were a couple of others that had formed their own design team that had worked for Kaiser [on] the Henry J.--a fellow named "Buzz" Grisinger. And they all submitted--well, before they submitted their ideas, Harley had a great idea; he said, "There is going to be an awful lot of bias thrown

into the selection of the final car here unless we can neutralize it. I said, "Great, how do we neutralize a bias towards Raymond Loewy or George Walker," to name some of the more prominent names? Well, he laid out a grid--we had a straight on front view, side view, three-quarter front, three-quarter rear--and he picked a color--a body color--it was a blue; and the ground rules that were given to each of these outside consultants was that, number one, their car had to fall within the limits laid out on the grid, they all had to be painted, so there couldn't be any fancy air brush work, and one of them come up with a spectacular color that might be more appealing. They were all uniform in color, they were all done in this blue, and nobody could sign their names to them. They had to be numbered. I thought that was a great idea. And, of course, our entry was put in with all the others; and after we finally got them all assembled, we got all the outside people's work in, and, needless to say, we were refining our own [design], the whole time. But for the first car that we originally looked at, internally, that we all thought was pretty close to what we wanted, oddly enough, didn't have a tire on the back, and, you know, this seemed kind of a departure to come up with a Lincoln Continental that didn't have a rear-mounted spare tire. But the proportions of the car were great, and we felt, okay, this is good, this is the right kind of grille, it's the right proportion of greenhouse to sheet metal, and we liked everything about it. Oh, we had to incorporate the tire on it, and most of our early designs had had exterior-mounted tires like the original Lincoln Continental had. We took this thing, stuck it inside the trunk, and molded the sheet metal around the tire.

Q Whose idea was that? Could you pinpoint it?

A No, I couldn't. I don't know whether I had--I felt that that was one of the cues of the Mark and that it had to have it. Whether I insisted on that or whether John did, I really don't know, but I do remember that, oddly enough, the original thing that we looked at--we thought, okay, this is the car, but where's the tire? They were afraid that I wasn't going to like that car because it did not have that tire. I remember that they approached me with great trepidation and said, "We've looked at all the designs and refined all the lines," (I'd work every night for hours with John), "and you're going to like this, but,"--and, of course, the "but" was that there was no tire. Well, anyway, we managed to work the tire in there.

Q It, obviously, would be that you would say look, we really should have a tire for the Continental look.

A Yes, but we really weren't quite sure how to go about doing it. We mounted the tire externally, it didn't look right. We just fiddled around, and finally, okay, let's stick it in the trunk and mold the sheet metal around it.

Q It was a glorious inspiration.

A Yes. It was pretty impractical because one of the things that I guess I insisted on, and everybody else did, too, but was one of my things that I refused to depart from, was everything on the car had to be functional. I didn't want a phony imprint of a tire if there was no tire there, so we stuck the tire there. Now, as far as loading luggage and everything else, it was a pain to have to load it over that tire. It wasn't too practical, but it...

Q It lost trunk space.

A Yes. Well, it justified our putting the shape in the sheet metal of the deck lid. I'll never forget it: we told the design committee, which was Henry, Ernie and Jack Davis and the rest of them. I conducted a tour with them, individually, and asked them when they left to please not discuss it with other members of the committee. I would make notes with each one of them of their comments on the design. I would ask them to pick one, two and three, and they, obviously, had no idea who'd done what because, as I say, they were numbered, and that was the only clue they had. I was the only one who had the keys to what the numbers were--who'd done what. I said, "Please don't talk to anybody else so you don't influence their decisions." My brother, Ben, was part of that group, too. By the time we finished (I think there were seven of them) that looked at it, and, you know, oddly enough, our choice was picked unanimously. I think it was--I can't say it surprised us that much because we thought we were the best, but, I know, it sure surprised them.

Q Then you came out and announced that the one that they'd picked unanimously was [the] in-house [design]?

A In-house, exactly. And I've never seen so many shocked people in my life.

Q They didn't accuse you of rigging, they couldn't.

A No, they couldn't. It was the most honest competition you could ever think of, I mean, everybody got an equal shot. Everybody's [model] was, as I say, painted the same color, and all fit the same grid. There was no cheating on anything.

Q What would happen to those competing designs? Did you keep them for awhile?

A Yes, for awhile. I have no idea really what happened to them.

Q It would be interesting to see what they look like. Now, what was the date of this historic decision?

A Well, this must have been about late '52 or early '53, because we were looking at a Fall of '55 introduction date, right.

Q You had a number of prototypes floating around. I recall seeing pictures of one called the 195X.

A Yes, that's right. That was with Harley's chassis, and we took existing Lincoln sheet metal and carved it all up and stretched it. And we used Hess and Eisenhardt down in Cincinnati to make the prototypes.

Q That's interesting.

A Yes.

Q About this time or a few months later, your official announcement of the Special Product Division organization--I have a blue letter here that you signed which notes that Harley Copp continues as Chief Product Engineer, Douglas Holmes is the financial man, Charlie DeVoss is the manufacturing planning man, Ray Hulse is the purchasing man, Doug McClure (a familiar name) is the sales man, William Wallace is administrative assistant, and Russell Smith was your industrial relations representative. You had a full-fledged, fully-approved division.

A Yes, we did.

Q And were you about to graduate from the Trade School, physically, about this time, or was that a couple years later?

A That was still a little ways away because we had to build the assembly plant on Oakwood Boulevard, and there was a big fuss about that site location. Del Harder was then corporate vice-president of manufac-

turing, and we had to get involved with Del Harder and the plant engineering people [over] what was a suitable site. Of course, they all had contingency plans, and I'm sure they knew we were going to fall on our face, so in the event that we fell on our face, what could this property be used for? Were we going to run into political problems because it wasn't part of Dearborn, it was Allen Park? Oh, Lord, we went through, it seems to me, more unnecessary delays and red tape.

Q It was company property though?

A Well, I guess, it was.

Q Just inside Allen Park?

A That's right. And there was--gee, what was the fuss about that--something about the tax base of Allen Park. We were the first industrial plant in there, and, oh, Lord, I don't know, we had the officials from Allen Park come in and assure us there wasn't going to be any change in assessments, and we had to go through more rigamarole. That plant--I remember when it was finished because I went over to Europe that Summer. That's the grouse shooting thing we were talking about. We were over [there] shooting, and that was in the Summer of '54. I remember we were flying back into Detroit, and we'd been gone for a couple of weeks, everybody was dying to get home, and I said, "Let's fly over the plant and see what it looks like." Everybody in the plane thought I was absolutely nuts, "Let's land, we're finally home." I said, "No, we've got to fly around and see what it looks like from the air." So we flew around the plant on Oakwood Boulevard, and they'd made great progress, and I could see that we were going to move in there before too long.

Q You had a pretty good team, this group that you announced in '53?

A Oh, it was a wonderful team, and the esprit de corps that they had, and still have. I still hear from them. Oh, I got a letter just the day before yesterday from the guy that used to work for Doug Holmes, and he's retired now, but he wants to get a Lincoln Town Car, and he was reminiscing about the days in the Continental Division. So, really, there's a great bond there of all the people that used to work there.

Q I think, largely, one of the great bonds was your personality and the fact that you felt you were part of the group that really accomplished something.

A It was great fun because, number one, it was all new. We were in totally uncharted waters. We really didn't know where we were going. I had an idea rattling around in the back of my head through this whole thing of what I wanted the car to look like, and, maybe, I was able to transmit that to some of the other people around, and, okay, we're going to get this thing, and we're going to do it right, and I'll know it when I see it, and I've got some ideas of when we get in, it's going to be the car that we all want it to be. Gee, everybody, I mean, you couldn't ask enough of them, you didn't have to ask them, they'd volunteer. They'd work any kinds of hours, all hours, day and night, Saturdays and Sundays. They were really dedicated to the thing. It was a great opportunity for everybody because they all were young, and here was a way for them to make a name for themselves.

Q John Reinhart indicated in his interview that this was very much the case, that there was great esprit de corps. He said it was largely due to your wonderfully supportive [attitude].

A Well, that's nice to hear.

Q He said it was a joy working with you and that he never had a better experience in his life.

A Well, I think we all had a good time. We were a very compatible group, and it was a learning experience for all. We learned every day from each other, and Harley [Copp]--I'll give Harley full marks--being an engineer, he, at least, had some sense of what he had to accomplish from an engineering point of view. The rest of us were kind of batting around in the dark and really not knowing what was going to come up next, and, oh, gee, in the process of designing, we went through all kinds of gimmicks. We went--well, maybe John told you about this--there was the 3-D [effect]--we had the corporate design committee, again Henry, Ben, Ernie Breech and Jack Davis, wearing these 3-D glasses, and we were showing them little models, and they were putting their glasses on. We were very creative, and rather than going to the expense of building a full-size clay, we built a tenth [-size] clay model, and we built everything to scale. We built people standing by the cars that were tenth scale. It was a lot cheaper, a lot quicker, and like everything else, we took them in and put the 3-D glasses on them and showed them these things, and, you know, as I think back now as we're starting to talk about it, things are coming back to me that I haven't thought about in years--some of the gimmicks and some of the tricks that we used to try to sell our product! About the toughest selling job was selling it to our own management, forget the public, I mean, that was....

Q I wanted to ask you about some of the by-play that went on at that point. Your relationship with Ernie Breech, of course, was probably very good, and Henry was undoubtedly supportive, was there others like Lewis

Crusoe who cast a jaundiced eye?

Q Lewis Crusoe was starting to look at us with a very jaundiced eye. He was just starting to put together his own empire, and, of course, he put together the Ford Division. He had his eyes on Lincoln-Mercury, he was about to take them over, and he wanted to pull us into his fold too.

Q It's my impression over the years that Mr. Crusoe was a rather formidable adversary, if he wanted to be.

A Yes. There's no question about it, and, of course, I was pretty naive. I didn't realize [that] others were kind of looking at us with such envy and such jealousy. Here we were, as I say, a totally autonomous group. We didn't fit the pattern of any of the other vehicle divisions. I don't think we were cocky or full of ourselves, but we were self-confident, and, I think the fact that we'd been vindicated with our own design against some pretty tough opposition, gave us confidence in ourselves. And we thought that we knew our product better than somebody like Lewis Crusoe knew our product, and that we knew what we wanted to do, and that was the course we were staying on. People were starting to snipe at us. It got, towards the end, totally political, which was unfortunate. But, you know, in the early days, gee, we were all gung ho, and, as I say, I, unfortunately, was naive enough to think that what we did and what we did best was the best thing for the Ford Motor Company and who was going to quarrel with that? I didn't realize the jealousies that some of the other people had, that they wanted to usurp us and make us part of their empire.

Q So Mr. Crusoe was, indeed, a formidable adversary at that point?

A Sure. As a matter of fact, one of the things that still sticks in

my craw was the development of the original Thunderbird. It was conceived after we had started the Continental Mark II project, and the original T-Bird, as approved by the product committee of the Company, had the Crown Victoria roof called the basket handle, and that was the roof that was on the T-Bird. That was the way the T-Bird was approved. Crusoe sent one of his guys over, and Chase Morsey was that person. I didn't know he was there, but he got into our design studio, saw our roof, took the design of that roof, and put it on the T-Bird, and this just galled me. I mean, I was really seeing fire. This is where I first started my fallout with Lewis Crusoe, and we had a design committee meeting, not of the Mark II but some other company products, and the T-Bird came up, and I told them right in the meeting, I said, "Look, if you're a little short of tracing paper, we can lend you some. You've got this great big...," and he had the whole design studio under him [with] hundreds of people, and I had this little group of a dozen or so guys, and they swiped our design. They were going to come to production first because they were working at it now, and we still had to build our plant and go through that thing. It still bothers me to this day that the corporate--I guess, you have to look at it as, probably, a good thing. The T-Bird was a success, and the roof was part of it, but it was still <u>our</u> roof.

Q What was Crusoe's reaction? Did he give any reaction?

A Oh, his beady little eyes sparkled and said, "You don't have any proprietary interest in anything that's designed in this company." And I said, "I think I do if it's done in my division." That was the beginning of our falling out, and, oh yeah, when I told him he could use some

tracing paper if he was really that hard up for designers, that didn't set well [with him] at all, and everybody heard it. We were at a special meeting that I [had] requested. I said, "Look, this guy's stolen my design. I want the T-Bird and I want the Continental brought in [together] in full size models, and you look at them and see if he hasn't swiped my roof and whether it isn't going to hurt my car." And we did. We had a meeting like that, and Jack Davis, I believe, was the guy who resolved it for lack of another word. He said, "Well, yeah, there's no question there's a similarity, but the cars are so different in size and in concept that I don't think it's going to hurt." I wasn't particularly pleased with the outcome, but that's the way it was ultimately resolved.

Q A diplomatic [solution]?

A Yes, that was Jack's solution to the thing to supposedly keep everybody happy. Crusoe was happy, and I wasn't.

Q But did you then go on to another design?

A No. That's the design that was on that car with a blind rear quarter because the T-Bird never had the blind rear quarter, it had the basket handle Victoria roof. But, as you'll remember, the 'Bird that came out that year--they beat us into production by a year--had the blind quarter in that roof, and then the next year, they stuck a porthole in it.

Q Another Crusoe innovation?

A That's right.

Q You couldn't see out. So the design was pretty much frozen by this point.

A Yes, it was.

Q All the approvals been given, and you were satisfied?

A Yeah. One [thing] are the details. I do not mean to belabor another point, but one of the things that we spent an enormous amount of time on--I remember it very well because I took one of the prototypes you referred to earlier home on Christmas Eve and showed it to my mother--the thing that we spent, I don't know how many hours on, was the hood ornament. We labored over that hood ornament. I wanted something that was readily identifiable like the Rolls-Royce, like the Mercedes star, you didn't need to see a name, you knew what it was. Once you saw it, that's a Rolls, that's a Mercedes. I said "I want this for our car. I don't want people to have to look to see what is that. Once they see that emblem, okay, that's a Lincoln Continental, or that's a Continental Mark II," or whatever the terminology was going to be at the time. So, I mean, [this] just as an example of the attention that we paid to detail. The hood ornament was one of our big hangups, and, as I say, I had this thing put on a cobbled-up car [with] Lincoln sheet metal and drove my mother around in it, and we had her critique the hood ornament. She liked it.

Q Was that the final one? The star?

A Yes. The star.

Q It was a beautiful job. Was it someone on the staff who came up with that?

A I think Bob Thomas had the most to do with that.

Q It came from several prototypes before you came to that [decision]?

A Oh, absolutely. Oh yeah, we went through whole--and the same thing with the needles on the speedometer. We had a tach on there which was

unusual in those days to put a tach on a car, and we wanted the hands to look like they were the hands of a Cartier watch. We really wanted the needles to be fine, and so there was more attention paid to detail in that car than anything that I've ever been exposed to before or since.

Q It must have been great fun.

A It was, and half the fun was laboring over--is this the right shaped needle for the speedometer, and does the door handle feel right, does the ash tray open correctly? And everything about it was fun. The leathers that we picked for the interiors. All of the detail that goes into a car that, nowadays, we take pretty much for granted, but we were lucky in that we got involved in all of that. I was lucky that I got involved in all of that.

Q Well, everybody that I've talked to who was involved with it, Gordon and Reinhart, and I hope to talk to Harley, sometime.

A I hope you do.

Q Was it that it was a gorgeous experience? The esprit de corps you mentioned--the camaraderie, the pride of achievement, the fact that you did it--a little out of the mainstream of the Company?

A Yeah, totally out of the mainstream.

Q And you came up with something that was unique for that period. How did you happen to swing the new production plant? There must have been some opposition to that.

A Well, there was and there wasn't. Because it was so unique, it clearly wasn't going to fit into any existing assembly plant that we had, and I think the plant came out of necessity. We had to build our own assembly plant.

Q There really wasn't any room.

A No, there wasn't, plus our whole paint system was unique. We were putting on many more coats, and we were using a different kind of lacquer. Nothing fitted into any of the existing facilities at that time.

Q Who was your paint supplier, by the way? Do you remember?

A I think it was Rinshed-Mason.

Q Right. I assumed it was. Very special concoctions.

A Right.

Q When the Continental Division--you came up with the Special Product Operation announcement in '53. When was the Continental Division organized?

A Well, again I can't tell you who did it, I think it was Dick Morris, who was my public relations guy. There was a Lincoln Continental Owners Club, and he formed a relationship with them, and we sort of worked it out that, probably, their annual meeting would be a great place to announce the fact that Ford Motor Company was coming out with a new Continental, and so, in conjunction with them, we had an elaborate dinner all planned out. John Daly was the master of ceremonies, and, we had a big function.

Q I've seen some pictures.

A Yes, and we discussed it internally and asked them whether they thought this was an appropriate time for the Company to make an announcement. Everybody thought, sure, this was fine, go ahead and do it that way, if that's the way you want to do it, so that's when we announced that there would be a Continental car coming out, and right after that, we changed the name of the division to the Continental Division. [April, 1955]

Q There had never been any thought in your mind from the beginning that it was [to be] called anything but Continental?

A No, because it was unique, and dealers had always said the Mercury was a cobbled-up Ford, and, you know, this wasn't a cobbled-up anything. This was a totally unique vehicle.

Q Dick Morris' public relations campaign for the announcement and the background of it was a masterpiece. Some of the material that he [used was well crafted.]

A Yes, Dick and Doug McClure worked very, very closely on all of that promotional material.

Q And who had the idea to call it the Mark II? Do you remember how that came about? Obviously, it was out of the [military] service [nomenclature]?

A I'm not so sure that Ray Holtz wasn't the guy that came up with that. I may be wrong, [but] I remember we used to have a staff meeting--all of these people that you mentioned--and we would meet once a week, and we got a round of names. We kicked it around. Should it be Lincoln Continental? Nobody really thought it should be because there'd been an hiatus between the last one.

Q And you really weren't part of the Lincoln [Division]?

A No, we weren't part of the Lincoln. Actually, at that time, there was just the Lincoln-Mercury Division, there was no separate Lincoln division. Somebody in one of our staff meetings said, "What do you think of the Mark designation?" Of course, all of us said, "Well, it's a military thing. Let's assume that the car that my father did was the Mark I, and let's [say] Mark II, well, okay, it sounds good." I remember,

again, taking it to the policy committee here at the Company, and Red Duffy, of course, had been a colonel in the army procurement. "Mark we used that for tanks, and things, you know, rifles and stuff like that." We said, "Yeah, but what does it mean in the military?" "Well, it's, you know, it's an advanced [model]." "Very well," I said, "exactly, that's what we've got." So, that's how it was born. Everybody thought it was strange, but they couldn't think of any reason why it shouldn't be called that, so, okay.

Q Worked out well?

A Yeah, [they said] call it the Mark II, so we did.

Q So, you got the official designation, you got the official approval, and you're ready to go into production.

A Right.

Q Any problems there that you recall in the beginnings of production?

A Yes, the car was so unique. We'd accumulated [consumer reaction] by word of mouth, and I went around the country, and so did a lot of other guys, with pictures, and we had cocktail parties and receptions, and we'd show them to people, and we had a pretty good backlog of orders. One of the problems was, how do we ship the car? It had to be delivered in mint condition. We didn't want it rattling around [in] the haulaways, and, good Lord, we have the fleece-lined bags that we were packing the cars in, putting them on the haulaways, and they didn't fit the haulaways just right because of the wheelbase, and there were a million problems associated with getting the cars out. We had problems with the paint--orange peel and that kind of effect, but they all got smoothed out. The

prototypes were good cars. We had our own mini test track behind our plant, and we had railroad ties, we had water bath, and we had all those things in there--cobblestone ride. It was a little quarter-mile track, and we'd drive the cars around on that. So we were fully integrated. We really had everything.

Q Charlie DeVoss was your production man at that time?

A Yup, he was.

Q He must have had a myriad of problems to begin with.

A Well, he did. He had problems with the whole plant layout, and, I think, probably, his biggest problem was dealing with us who had no experience at all and didn't know what he was talking about half the time. Charlie, really, by nature, was not too articulate, and I remember the first meeting we had. He started out, and he had a blackboard, and he said, "There are 365 days in the year." Well, I wasn't going to quarrel with that. I thought what the hell is he talking about. And then he said, "Then you subtract weekends, and then you take away vacation time, and down time, and you do this and [we] end up with 200 working days of the year on the assembly line, and if we produce X number of cars per day, then we will have our annual production." All this was fine, I mean, it was the ABC's of doing it, but when we started out, there was 365 days in the year. I thought, "This is our manufacturing man. What is he getting at?"

Q You thought he was lecturing to a group of...?

A I didn't know what he was doing.

Q Secondary students?

A Exactly, exactly, or grade school, you know, second grade. I

thought I knew how many days there were in a year, but when he finally got through, then he'd plan what our annual volume would be, and then he could figure out line speed, and how many cars per day, and it all started to fall into place. But, I think, really one of his problems was educating us as much as it was doing the actual plant layout and all the other things that he had to do which he did. Obviously, he hired a lot of other people, too, who helped him out with it, but he was our main guy that we relied on. I might add, because I think it's important to the whole story, it's crucial to the whole story, really: when the car was approved by the policy committee, it was never approved as a profit center. It was considered to be three-dimensional advertising for the Ford Motor Company. It would take the place of a four-color spread in Life magazine, and we got it, financially, to where we thought we could put it on a break-even basis; but even from day one, it was always projected as a loss.

Q A universal agreement?

A Yeah, exactly. Those ground rules changed as we went along, and that was one of the things that led to the demise of the division. But, it was clearly stated in the initial paper that this was going to be corporate advertising, and this would fall under that umbrella and that this would be--well, it was my idea originally with the car (we'd always been chasing Cadillac, so to speak, and were always a nickel short and a day late and behind them), I said, "Why don't we go around them?" In the those days a $6000 car was an expensive car. I said, "Let's just leapfrog them, and let's put this as a $10,000 car," which was an unheard of price in this country in those days.

Q Scared the hell out of everybody?

A Yeah, and this is what we'll do, and we don't have to worry about chasing Cadillac--we've established a new pinnacle that we will be setting up. Everybody thought that was a pretty good idea. So that was the kind of thinking that went on along behind the car and really how the whole program got approved: that, okay, this was would be the Ford Motor Company's prestige car. It was a $10,000 car. It wasn't a me-too Lincoln following a Cadillac and that this aura of prestige would rub off on the other Ford Motor Company products, so, therefore, it really didn't have to make a profit. It was taking the place of a lot of corporate advertising that we would have done in other fields. But that premise is [the] key to subsequent events that happened to the division.

Q You introduced, I guess, in mid-'55?

A Yeah, we did. Early fall of '55. [October 4]

Q And created quite a stir.

A Oh yeah. We had showings all around the country. Again, we had a dog and pony show that we put on and went around, I think it was six or eight different cities. Went around the country.

Q Doug McClure would have you scheduled...?

A Yeah, Doug and Dick Morris and the rest of them would schedule us in Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, San Francisco.

Q Would you fly a car with you?

A I can't remember how they worked the cars. I think they had four cars, two would be at the city we were going to, and then two would be on a train going to the next place, and they'd just keep rotating them around. I think it was in Dallas, oh, jeez, I almost had a heart attack.

The cars were roped off in the ballrooms where we were showing them in the hotels, and there was a green (I may have the colors reversed, but it doesn't matter) car that had the wrong color steering wheel on it.

Q It didn't match?

A Mismatch. A total mismatch, and, oh, my God, what happened to this thing? It was a black interior, it's got a red steering wheel on the thing, or vice versa, I can't remember what it was except that it was a total mismatch on color. Well, fortunately, the ropes kept the people away from the cars pretty much, and nobody had a chance--the light was either bad or good enough, depending on your point of view, so you couldn't really pick it out. It wasn't that glaring of a mistake, but we were worried about stuff like that. It was a great battle when we first showed the car. Everyone wanted to have the first one, and Frank Sinatra, when we were in L.A., he had to have the first one. My mother [-in-law's] uncle, Leonard Firestone, thought they were great. He had to have the first one in L.A. Well, how are we going to arrange two first cars in L.A.? We did that pretty well, we'd got two different dealers in different parts of the city.

Q Each of them thought that was the first one?

A And you can deliver this one at 12 o'clock, and you can deliver this at 12 o'clock, so the two cars got delivered simultaneously from two different dealerships. They both had the first car in Los Angeles.

Q Your father had a similar dilemma with the Model A, as you've probably heard.

A I really didn't know that.

Q Yes. Doug [Fairbanks] and Mary Pickford wanted one of the first ones.

A Oh, really, okay, with the Hollywood bunch, you can't always [deliver] the first.

Q What a remarkable reception for a totally new product!

A Yes, it was. It was a great reception. It was an innovative design, and, I think, it did all the things that we'd hoped it would do. It was a distinctive car, and I'm not blowing my own horn, I'm just reciting it to you as I saw it.

Q The popular reception was lavish, but so was the critical reception. You got nothing but kudos from the automobile press.

A That's right. The buff magazines and everything else gave us great reviews on the thing.

Q It must have been a very exciting time for you.

A It was great. Unfortunately, for me it wasn't. I'd injured myself pretty badly, physically, at that point. I'd broken my Achilles tendon.

Q That was when that happened?

A Yeah, it happened, oh, Lord, just before Christmas in '55. I'd been playing paddle tennis, and it was dead of Winter, and I was playing outside, and it was cold, and this thing snapped, and the car had only been on the road about six weeks at that time.

Q It put you out of circulation for a time?

A It sure did. I was in a hip cast and on crutches for about seven months, and I couldn't get around. I didn't get to the office for a long time, and the whole thing was terrible. It was terrible, and, I guess, during my absence that's when a lot of the in-fighting went on--a lot of the shooting down of the division started, and I wasn't there to protect my own interest.

Q Would you like to put any of that on record?

A Oh, sure.

Q I'd love to hear about how that gradually happened.

A Well, it goes back, really to Lewie Crusoe and his empire building, and, you know, he wanted the whole automotive side of Ford Motor Company, cars and trucks.

Q Did he have the tacit backing of Ernie Breech in those days?

A He really did, at that time. He was always sniping at us; throughout this whole procedure, he was sniping at us. He was the only one who'd get these little digs in all the time. "Well, I go back to the Wills St. Claire, and I've seen cars like this come and go." But his point was they'd always gone. "Oh yeah, luxury cars are fine, they're good for awhile, but they don't last, these high-priced cars don't last." And then he'd recite chapter and verse. Well, I listened to him, I heard him, but I really didn't believe what he was saying because I felt that we had a car that would be viable. But, I guess, he put on a full-court press when I wasn't around. I guess one of the--it was not a criticism of the Mark II, per se, but one of the things that our buyers wanted was a four-door model, and we started to work right away on the four-door, and, as a matter of fact, when the Continental Division was folded, we had a four-door, we had the die model all made. The whole car was ready to go into production. We were ready to start making tools for it, so we would have had a four-door sedan model--have a two door and a four door--but, unfortunately, we got shot down before we were able to put that into production.

Q Not to put the final point on it, but what was Henry's position in all this?

A Well, this was 1956, it was the first year that the company went public with its stock.

Q He was busy with that?

A He was busy with that, but there was also a fear that Ernie Breech expressed--Ernie was going to be the chairman of the first annual meeting--that some questions might be asked, like, "Do you have divisions that are losing money?" And we were in the red, we were programmed to be in the red, this was nothing out of the ordinary, but he was afraid that some shareholder might raise hell, you know, "Is the Continental Division making a profit?" Well, how do I answer that? And, really, it was--again, they were in uncharted waters. The company had never been public before.

Q They were very cautious.

A Very cautious, very apprehensive to anything that might be asked. You know, who knows [if] people had been dying to own a share of Ford Motor Company for years, and now they've got a chance, you were opening Pandora's box here.

Q Right, or so you thought?

A Yeah, exactly. And Ernie was very apprehensive about it, and, I think, putting it under the umbrella of Crusoe with all the other car divisions was a good way of hiding the fact that it was operating in the red. Well, we never divulged profits by divisions, it all comes under our car and truck, and they are making a profit. And, unfortunately, the timing was just bad from a market point of view. You mentioned the Edsel. It came out a few years later, but that was during a slump in the middle- and high-priced market. Our car would have survived. I think

there's no question about it. Our car would have survived, especially, with the entry of the four door, but, internally, the pressures--and then, as I say, I wasn't here to battle for my own cause, and we got swallowed up, one, by Crusoe's aggressiveness and, secondly, by, really, fear of the shareholders meeting--operating a division that wasn't operating in the black.

Q So even though Breech had been very supportive in the beginning and throughout, he finally succumbed to the apprehension that the public....

A Well, when he was most supportive, of course, there was no thought of the stock going public at that time, and I think these fears started to loom into his head at this point [1956], and he thought, "Oh, gee, how we do we justify a division that's in a loss mode?" It was all justified in the paper, and it was going to be advertised. It was going to give a prestige to the Ford Motor Company that it didn't have with its other products. That was fine, internally, but he was worried about how do you explain that, externally.

Q In retrospect, it seems almost absurd that he would have been so cautious at that time.

A Yeah, but I guess they really didn't know what to expect.

Q No, it was their first venture. And [obviously] everybody was apprehensive about it.

A Sure. And they knew the UAW, for instance, would be shareholders, and they'd find out, the books would be opened, and I mean they were just so scared of anything, anything and everything, then plus the fact that Lewie wanted to build an empire, and Lewie wanted us to be part of his empire.

Q He was a tough customer, wasn't he?

A Yeah, he was a tough customer, he was a tough customer. He was a farmer, and I always felt he should have stayed on the farm or should have stayed in charge of our trucks and tractors, and he was ideally suited to that but was not ideally suited to luxury cars. One of the things after the Continental, well, it was emasculated, but it was kept going for awhile under Crusoe, and I was--I don't know what you'd call it--group vice-president, I guess--and I had the Lincoln and Continental divisions. It was kind of absurd because I was still general manager of Continental, so I reported to myself, and, in turn, up to Lewie Crusoe, and my brother, Ben, had Mercury with, subsequently, the Edsel.

A Lewie's idea of identifying all the cars under a sort of corporate umbrella was to take the hood ornaments and encase them in plastic and have a round plastic hood ornament with the insignia of that particular car line on there. I blew my stack at that, and I said "You're not taking my Continental star and sticking that in any two-bit plastic casing." "Oh, yes I am." I said, "Like hell you are." We had terrific--it was petty stuff like that. This was his idea of [being] really classy: put a plastic hood ornament on everything with the [divisional] insignia encased in the plastic. I said, "You're going to do that on a $10,000 car?" Well, first of all, he outranked me and had a lot more experience than I did, but I just wanted to tell him you have no idea what a class car should be, and he didn't.

Q So the steps leading up to the demise, as you say, was, first, absorption by a larger divisional setup?

A Right.

Q So you became part of the Lincoln Continental group reporting to the group vice-president?

A Right, right.

Q What was the next step after that? By this time were you back in harness and healed?

A Yeah, I was back in harness [and] getting around fairly well.

Q But your heart wasn't in it because you could see what was coming?

A Well, really, it was a fait accompli at that time.

Q Even though it hadn't been announced?

A No, but it was all set that we were going to be swallowed up and probably, eventually, dissolved.

Q At this point, what was the next step in the in-fighting at the corporate level that brought about the eventual demise of the Continental?

A Well, it was decided by the policy committee that the Continental Division would be dissolved.

Q Now, how did that come about? What were the arguments for and against it?

A Well, to tell you the truth, when those arguments were taking place, I really wasn't present at....

Q You were still convalescing?

A Yeah, I was still laid up.

Q But, of course, you got reports?

A Oh, I got reports, and, you know, I got upset and tried to talk to my brother, and he was traveling all over the world, and I really never had any satisfactory conversations with him. Unfortunately, Crusoe

really had his ear.

Q Oh, he did at this point?

A Oh, yeah, yeah--100 percent.

Q And Breech was going along with it also?

A And Crusoe was literally traveling with my brother, and, you know, trying to crack that was impossible. I never got my licks in at all to defend the case. The final meeting where the resolution was made to dissolve the division.

Q This was the policy committee meeting?

A Yes, yes, and I had my day in court. I guess I had about five minutes to explain my case. Well, the die was already cast. The vote was cast. I voted no. I made sure the secretary made due note of the fact that I voted no. I was, again, on crutches and in a cast. I was sitting in the back of the room with my leg up, and "All those in favor say yea, and opposed...." Me in the background [saying, "Nay"]. I remember Henry turning around and looking at me, "Oh, that's Bill."

Q But you made the point to the secretary that you opposed it?

A Oh, I said, "Yes [it's me], and I want that duly recorded that there's a nay vote on this."

Q Well, it must have been particularly galling to you, at this point.

A I hated it. I felt I'd had the heart cut out of me at that point, I mean, I really did. And I felt so badly for all the people that had worked for me in the division, and, you know, how do you tell them? Because their reasons for why it should continue was, obviously, the same as mine, and I couldn't give them a good reason why it shouldn't be in existence, but it had been decided that.... And that was about it.

Q It was a real accomplished fact.

A Yeah.

Q You felt that when you came in the room....

A Oh, oh, no question. When this was the purpose of the meeting, "Okay, we're going to dissolve the Continental Division today." So my protest was symbolic, if nothing else. I was hoping it would be something else, but I kind of knew down deep it wasn't going to be.

Q What date was that, do you remember?

A Well, it must have been the middle of '56.

Q '56, that soon?

A Yeah, I'd guess July or August of '56. [Lincoln and Continental divisions consolidated July 21.]

Q There was some discussion at the time, wasn't there, about the price of the car? That Ernie and Lewie thought that the $10,000 car was just way out of line and nobody would buy it. Do you remember any talk about that?

A I, personally, don't remember any discussions about that. I really don't. You know, again, maybe it was trying to put it on a profitable basis on paper that if we reduced the price of it and increased the volume..., that was fine, except it was totally contrary to what our mandate really was from these same people. You see, the ground rules changed as we went along. Mine didn't, but their's did.

Q Would you have agreed to that?

A No, no, no.

Q So you stuck to your guns, stood your ground?

A Yes.

Q Did you say, for a time, there was a sort of an interim cooling off period where the Continental was continued, I think, until '57?

A Yeah, that's right, we ran a '57 model. Just going through the motions really. We knew there was not going to be a car to follow it up. We knew there was never going to be a '58. The four-door model that I alluded to earlier, that was scrapped. We were just winding down, that was all.

Q It must have been demoralizing for all of you to continue on that basis.

A Everybody at that point that worked for me was kind of wondering, well, where do I go from here? Where do I get a job? And, I don't blame them. I tried to absorb as many as I could over in the Design Center, but, you know, a lot of people obviously didn't fit in that category.

Q Something occurs to me at this point in time, probably irrelevant to what we were talking about, but I'm interested in knowing your relationships with people like George Walker, and Gene Bordinat--George Walker, especially--apparently, something of an adversarial situation there.

A Well, George was kind of a unique personality. He was, totally, a good designer, had good people [working] for him, his two henchmen (Elwood Engel and Joe Oros) were really accomplished designers.

Q Henchmen is a good word.

A Well, they were. But, you know, George had an ego that wouldn't fit in this office, and was a very flamboyant kind of a guy. No practical business sense at all.

Q And not much design experience either.

A Really, really not. You know, he made his name with Henry [II] with the '49 Ford.

Q Which turns out to be partly [designed] by other other hands.

A Yeah, sure, but, you know, he'd let Elwood and Joe and the other guys do all the work, but George would take all the credit for anything that was done. The only thing that I could ever see that he ever did was draw initials. You'd go into his office, and he'd have a great big pad and a grease pencil, and he'd do your monogram. "What do you think of this?" "Oh, that's wonderful, George." And then he would start talking about somebody else, and he'd be sketching their initials in a monogram to stick on the door of a car. That's about his contribution as far as I could see. He was great at doing initials.

Q The great picture that you used in the [Ford] styling booklet shows yourself in a characteristic carefree mood, your legs are crossed, your arms are crossed, and you're leaning against the desk looking toward the camera smiling, and, behind you, just to your right, is a resplendent George Walker, this marvelous iridescent smile, and yet it seems a bit empty at this point where things aren't going so well.

A George was a bit empty.

Q Then there was Elwood Engel, the angular, spectral-looking character standing in the middle of the room glaring into the camera and then Gene Bordinat sitting on a couch behind him with his usual grin, as if he knew what was going on.

A Probably did.

Q And then a few other guys were around, Buzz Grisinger, one or two others, but I've always wondered if you remember that particular occasion.

A Vaguely, now that you mention it, I vaguely do. George was a consultant, as you know, for the Company, and then after the demise of the Continental, I had quite a few talks with Henry about what did I want to do. And I said I wanted to stay in the design [area], that I felt that's, number one, where I had the most interest, and, secondly, I felt that it was where I could contribute the most, and it was something that really turned me on. "But, gee, you can't do that." And I said, "Oh, why? Why can't I?" "Well, Lewie Crusoe's got all that." Same old thing. Lewie, at that point, had built himself, literally, a secret office over in the Design Center where you had to push the paneling on the door, and the door would pop open. If you walked down the hall, you'd never know there was a door there. He'd built an office there, and he built a product planning staff, and he had design and product planning under his thumb, and then [Henry] said, "No, you can't have that, that's Lewie's. How would you like International?" "I don't want International." The kids were just young and growing up and in school, and I said, "No, I don't want to go overseas, I have no interest in that at all." Well, this kept up for a little while, and, I guess, nature took over. Lewie had a heart attack, and, you know, I hate to say it, but it was the best thing that ever happened to me.

Q Quite providential?

A Yeah, really. He'd led to my demise, and I got even.

Q A lot of people felt a sigh of relief around the Company.

A I think so, I think so. I didn't know it at the time, but the more playback I started getting in later years...he was a tyrant, and even my brother finally caught on to his act, but that took a little while, too.

He couldn't believe it when I was telling him, but when other people started to report to him, I guess he started to go along with it. But one of the things that I inherited in the Design Center was George Walker, and, as I say, George was flamboyant, he was a flashy dresser, perpetual tan, cared more about his appearance than anything else. If you ever, in the course of your taking down memoirs of people, you might talk to George Haviland 'cause he had to deal him from a public relations point of view.

Q I'd like to if you have no objections.

A Oh, no, no. I think it would be great, and, I think, he could add an awful lot of insight. He, through no fault of his own, got to know George better than anybody.

Q You needed a buffer at this time.

A Yeah. If George Walker had to make a speech, George Haviland would be stuck with the job of writing the speech for him, and George's command of the English language was something to behold, too. He was trying to talk about artisans that he had working, and he kept calling them artesians, like they were all digging wells out there or something. He had more malapropsisms than you could shake a stick at, and he didn't know what the words were or anything else, and George Haviland would write him a little crib sheet of words that he could use, so, if anybody, some press guy happened to stop him, George could pull this sheet that would fit in the palm of his hand, and he'd have the buzz words written down, and he'd go into some dissertation that probably didn't make any sense but had a lot of good words in it. It was just double talk, but his contributions, personally, I think, were pretty minimal. Whether he

had a good name in the industry as a designer, I don't know. I think the feeling [internally] was that having George Walker as your chief stylist added some prestige to the Company. Whether, in fact, it did or not, I really don't know. Because I was so close to him, I couldn't see where it would, but, on the other hand, maybe he had some image outside, certainly not as far as I was concerned.

Q He certainly rode the success of the '49 Ford for a number of years.

A Oh, yeah. Oh, sure.

Q And it was hard to shoot him down because of that.

A Yeah, and he, again, took credit for it. But these futuristic show cars that we did, you know, he would always take credit for those. Whether Elwood did them or Joe or whoever was something again, but George would always be in the forefront. The one that ended up as the Batmobile...?

Q The Futura?

A Yeah, the Futura, exactly. And he had one that was the X-100....

Q We still have that over in the museum.

A Okay, you know, kind of jet engine type of thing--big, round ports on the thing, and that kind of stuff. So there was a very flamboyant [image], and, maybe, he was able to convey the point to the press that Ford looked into the future as far as design goes. That may have been his contribution.

Q There was that incredible Time magazine cover, I don't know who engineered it, but he was called the "Cellini of Chrome." He had great pride in that.

A Well, I don't think he knew what it meant.

Q No. He obviously didn't understand the ironic implications.

A Of course, of course.

Q And I'm sure that Time did that tongue-in-cheek.

A Oh, I'm sure they did, but, oh, jeez, I don't know how many hundred copies of Time he had around his office. He'd pass them out the same as calling cards,

Q Well, your relationship as his real superior then must have been dicey at times.

A Yeah, it was, because he didn't really have a grasp of what was going on. You talk about that photograph that [has] Gene Bordinat sitting on a couch kind of understanding what was going on. Gene did. When Henry finally caught on to George's act and said, "We've got to get rid of that guy," and I'm saying, "Yeah, I've been trying to tell you that for years."

Q They never listen to the younger brother.

A Oh no, no, no. And who's going to succeed him? I think in everybody's mind around here, except mine, [that] Joe Oros was going to be the successor. Elwood [Engel] may have been better. I say, may have, as a designer. Joe was a much better business man, much better organized, knew how to run a styling department, knew how to set up a budget, and George had no clue as to what any of that was about. And Elwood was a little more along George's line, although Elwood had a lot more design talent than George had. I'd always had my eye on Gene Bordinat. I mean I thought he was a good combination of both. And, I remember, I think we were going down to an annual shareholders meeting, and somebody had a

blue paper for my signature as to who George Walker's successor was going to be. It was going to be announced. They had one with Joe Oros, and they had one with Gene Bordinat. I was always saying Gene Bordinat, and everybody else was kind of talking Joe Oros, and, I think, it was Henry who said, "Well, it's your decision to make." I said, "That's very simple." I took the Gene Bordinat one, and I signed the paper, and that was that.

Q And he seemed to embody all the qualities that you wanted at that time. He was a good administrator, had some sense of fitness of design.

A Exactly.

Q And was someone who they could look up to in terms [of experience].

A But Gene had a good design background. I mean, he was a true professional designer, and he'd been through the ropes here at the company and had been through the Harley Earl School of Design, and everything else, and he was a good administrator. And the Design Center was--I was almost embarrassed when every year we'd have to come up with our budget because it was so nebulous. Nobody really had a handle on it. But Gene was good at that, Gene had a handle and was good at cost control.

Q He was good at personnel?

A Yeah, good at personnel, exactly.

Q And recognizing good people.

A Right, and Gene had a flair about him, too, which was great.

Q A delightful companion.

A Oh, exactly, exactly. A delight to work with, and just, you know, a fine person all the way around. Our relationship was great. I enjoyed working with Gene. I was so delighted that I was able to make Gene George's successor and not have to, for a change, listen to what of all

of these Einsteins up here [World Headquarters--FMC] told me I should do.

Q So, in effect, you were able then, finally, to exert your own philosophical influence on the design of the cars?

A Right.

Q And that has remained to this day, as you're still very much involved in styling and design.

A Absolutely. Yeah, I think I'm probably more heavily [involved] right now than I have been in a long time because of the new trend in Ford Motor Company product designs.

Q Which has been very exciting in the last five years.

A Absolutely, absolutely.

Q The demise of the Continental and all the attendant political maneuvering that went on must have been a crushing blow, but you, obviously, recovered and went on to a more congenial [type of] operation in the product and design field, as chief of it.

A Yeah. You know, I, fortunately, still have the job as Chairman of the Design Committee, and, again, fortunately, it's a very small committee. There are only four of us that are members of it. That's the way I think it should be when you pick out a design for a car.

Q Who's on the committee?

A Mr. [Donald] Petersen, [Harold] Poling, Don Kopka, and myself. We have, depending on who's making the presentation, if it's North American, then Lou Ross and some of his people would be in there, or if it's truck, the truck people will be in there, but we're the only members of the committee, and we ultimately make the decisions. I think an interesting

transition has taken place, starting with the Thunderbird in '83, [to] I guess, what we're calling the aerodynamic look, which, in fact, it is. Cars like the Mark II and most post-war cars had the big engines, so, in the classic cars like the Mark II, you had a justification for a long hood. All the classic cars, maybe that's a pretty encompassing statement, but certainly most of the classic cars dating way back into the 'Twenties, were all long-hood jobs. Of course, they had V-12's, V-16's in some cases. It was functional. Then along comes the oil crunch of the 'Seventies, and here's the automobile industry with really no fuel-efficient, small engines, and we were still predominantly into 8-cylinder cars. And then, all of a sudden, we started redesigning engines, and we came up with 4-cylinder engines that are now mounted East/West instead of the traditional North/South way of mounting, so you don't have a justification for a long hood any more. You got a 4-cylinder job that's going sideways, and this is what, I think, has led to the aerodynamic look of today's car. Again it's an old cliche', but it's a matter again of form following function, and it literally has. Our wind tunnel tests have proven that the more aerodynamic the shape, the better the fuel economy, and, as you know, we're very conscious of fuel economy having to meet the Federal standards, and so you are seeing a whole new school of design, and, as far as I can tell, it's the first new school of design that's come [out] since World War II. After World War II, you got rid of fenders, per se, you got rid of running boards, bumpers became more integrated. But then there was really nothing dramatic. They were all different refinements. Then we got into kind of a glitzy, gimmicky, or, you know, in the 'Fifties and 'Sixties with the robin's egg colors, the

portholes, the fins, excessive use of chrome, but no real basic change in the style of the car, just gimmicking the thing up, which I thought--I guess I'm a purist--that just offended me, I mean, I hated every part of that style of design. But now I think we're back to functional design again, albeit, with different proportions. And I think it's exciting because, well, with the advent of what we're able to do now [with] curved glass, for instance, the roof of the car is sort of becoming an extension of the hood. You've got a sloping hood that's coming up to a fast windshield, and it's almost evolving into a straight line, maybe a curved line. But instead of--the lines of demarcation were very pronounced in the old school of design where you had a long hood that was one area of the car, and then you had a fairly vertical windshield, and then you had the passenger compartment, they're all sort of melding into one now. And I think, to go back a ways, it's been tried before, but again it's a question of proportion. I mean, you go back to the old Chrysler Airflow. Now we're talking in the 'Thirties.

Q Early 'Thirties.

A That was an attempt at it, but the hood was too long. The proportions were wrong. It needed a shorter hood to make that line a pleasing, flowing line. To go to the opposite extreme, you had the VW Beetle. Well, it looked like it had run into a wall. I mean it was crushed. And you need a reasonable wheelbase, like we have starting with the T-Bird, and then up to today's Taurus and Sable that we've got on the market now. You need a sufficient wheelbase, not too much like they had in the Chrysler Airflow, and not too little like they had in the VW Beetle, but the right wheelbase so that you can get a pleasing line that doesn't

necessarily have to [have a] long hood the way cars did in the past. I think that's where the future is evolving in the shape of cars to come; that aerodynamics are really going to play a much more important part, and we're able to do so much more with some of the exotic metals that are coming out of it--space-age stuff, and, again, it's going to be proportion. I guess the fashions change, but good taste doesn't change. It's a question of proportion to make [design] good taste. I think, at least for the moment, we've struck on a very happy solution to the whole thing where we've gotten very pleasing lines. Certainly, the public acceptance to us [has been good], whereas, I think, they were a little skeptical when the first T-Birds came out and the Tempo/Topaz. But now it's catching on, and, I think, we're the leaders, and I'm delighted to see Ford Motor Company leading in the design field.

Q Can you harken back briefly to that watershed period where, obviously, you'd reached a dead end in the late 'Seventies in styling, and they looked funky and old hat, and [the design] people were getting tired, and you needed fresh blood. With Petersen and your former chairman, Phil Caldwell, and yourself and, presumably, with Henry's okay, you begin to look at a new breed of designers like Jack Telnack and say to them, "Look, we've got to have something fresh and new." Is that how it happened, more or less?

A Yes. Fortunately, Don Petersen's product oriented. As the Chairman, it is a great help to me, because I'm not trying to overemphasize my role, to have somebody on the design committee who's not strictly a cost-conscious person, but who is aware of product and likes product and likes the aesthetics, and, I think, he is one that really gave the

Telnacks and the North American designers their head to come up with something new. The one dinosaur that keeps sticking in there, and people know it as the Lincoln Town Car. There it is, the same old box that we had for years and years, and you talk about those old designs of the 'Seventies.

Q It's becoming a slight embarrassment, but you don't dare get rid of it, do you?

A We can't get rid of it. We've get too many orders. It makes nothing but money, so why--"if it ain't broke, don't fix it." So, there is a market for that [type]. But we've got a facelift on the boards. That'll be out in a year or so where there won't be any mistaking the fact it's a Lincoln Town Car. It'll still be brought up to date and look a lot better than it does, but, you know, that's the aberration. The norm is the kind of cars that we've talking about--the Birds, and the Tempo/Topaz, and Taurus/Sables. I'll go back to what I said earlier, I think it was the oil crunch change in engine design that has led and helped the designers come up with a new school of design.

Q You had the situation where the retiring Gene Bordinat had really pretty much run the whole operation, and, apparently, this time a decision was made, perhaps at your behest, to come up with an operating group like NAD (North American Design) but to continue the vice-presidental office for Ford Design and to select Don Kopka. Was that pretty much your decision?

A The decision to split it up wasn't really mine--not that I had any objection to it--but it was not my idea. The idea was to make North American Automotive Operations a more integrated unit, and that design,

probably, should fall within their purview, and I couldn't take any issue with that. I do--as it's turned out, I like the way it's working out because you've got Don Kopka and his staff and then you have a lot of advanced design.

Q Marvelous things coming out of there.

A Absolutely, and they've got our Ghia studios in Italy.

Q I'm glad you picked them back up.

A Yeah, exactly, and they make a real contribution both to Ford of Europe and Ford North America, and so really it's worked out very nicely, and I think the two complement each other very well. And, when it comes to, oh, we're looking at now the--it'll be a 1990 successor to the Mark, and, gee, there's an exciting car that's on the boards right now that I can't wait to get over and [take] another look at it to see how it's coming along 'cause it's [being] done by a very young man. I was surprised. They showed us some renderings about two months ago. "What do you think? This is the new Mark." Well, they were abominable, and I told Jack [Telnack] that. He said "Well, we've researched this." He didn't say this, but they had one of those product planners--"We've researched this, and we've done this, and the car's been very well accepted, and we like it, so keep your remarks down to a minimum. We can change a few things, but it's pretty well set." So I said, "Well, I'll keep my remarks down to a minimum. It stinks! I don't know how more succinct I can be." And Petersen and Poling looked at me, and they agreed with me. And so, okay, back to the drawing board. They went back to the drawing board. We had to hurry the meetings because our time schedules [were] compressed on the thing, and they came back with some full-

size renderings, and gee, there was one there that was a knockout. I think it's a very logical progression. (I'm not particularly in love with the Mark VII that's on the road now.) Even if I could personalize it again, I think it would be a wonderful 1990 extension of the Mark II so to speak, but a very up-to-date car. And I asked Jack Telnack, I said "God, I think, boy, you're really on the right track with this one. It's a knockout. Who did it?" Well, it was the son of one of the guys who graduated from Art Center at the same time Jack Telnack did, and this kid, I think he's 27 years old, and, boy, he's a crackerjack.

Q He's on the staff?

A Yup, he's on the North American staff, and I was delighted to see a kid that's that young; of course, I'm talking like an old man now. I was that young myself when I did the Mark II. But he's able to grasp the feel of that car and yet keep it totally modern and an exciting design.

Q So the current direction, obviously, was with your approval and with your impetus and, of course, fits in with your feelings about new and exciting directions in design?

A Yeah. I think cars are taking a new shape, and, again, I think it's a question of function. As I say, we're always going to have to try to keep the pleasing proportion to it. But, you've noticed the difference in front ends of the cars from the way they used to be. The radiator has virtually disappeared. The grilles, now they're hidden down. There are so many things that are--the whole car is becoming so much more integrated. I think we have to pay particular attention--it's a phase that we haven't talked about at all and one that probably shouldn't get

into now--interiors. I think interiors are a vital part of automotive design.

Q The direction of the company in the next ten years--five years at least--is pretty much set, and it's a logical, exciting extension of what you've been doing.

A I think so. I'm very enthused about it. Very enthused about it.

Q Well, thank you Mr. Ford. It's been delightful.

A A pleasure.

Q We're very appreciative of you giving us this interview.

A My favorite topic.

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