



2010 Lincoln MKZ. PHOTO COURTESY OF NETCARSHOW.COM

Lincoln MKZ

Unexpected luxury

By CASEY WILLIAMS
MyCarData

Lincoln's MKZ is the car that has thus far lived three lives. It started as the Zephyr, co-developed with the Mazda6-based Ford Fusion and Mercury Milan. I like the Ford and Mercury, but Zephyr's soft leather interior with dual cowl dash design appealed to my sense of detail. The THX sound system was beyond compare. It also rode softer, making it a comfortable long-distance tourer. I drove the revised MKZ from Memphis to Chicago and back in 2007. From its American style to Japanese handling, the sedan was a delight. Here comes an even better car, fresh off a substantial update.

Leading the way is a "bow-wake" grille, shared with the MKS and derived from the original 1940 Lincoln Continental. LED taillamps brighten the rear and highlight a contemporary appearance. The rest of the exterior is a mild update of the Zephyr/MKZ, but is still handsome with its Euro-Japanese profile.

Interior design is not as distinct or historically inspired as the last MKZ, but it shares good looks with the larger MKS and is crafted from much higher-quality materials. Redesigned seats are upholstered with ultra-soft Bridge of Weir leather, sourced from the same tannery as the classic 1956 Continental. I don't know how much it costs Lincoln to install these seats, but it is worth every penny for just the smells alone.

Under the MKZ's taut skin is Ford's excellent 3.5-litre Duratec V6 engine that delivers 263 horsepower and 249 lb.-ft. of torque. The engine produces smooth power at almost any speed. A six-speed automatic transmission with manual shift mode is standard. All-wheel-drive remains optional (front-drive is standard). Although 0-100 mph times dropped from 7.7 to 7.1 seconds, fuel economy is a relatively frugal 13.1/8.7 L/100 km city/highway.

To make sure you only feel, but do not hear, the excellent powertrain, engineers stuffed in extra insula-

tion, laminated glass, and an acoustic headliner. They even flowed 130 km/h air at the car from all angles to insure no unwanted noise was heard. That's all the better since you'll want to luxuriate in sound from the THX II 5.1 surround sound with a 12-channel amplifier, 600 watts, and 14 speakers that include two subwoofers. A 10 GB hard drive stores up to 2,400 songs.

Said Chief Engineer J. D. Shanahan, "The customer definitely should notice how quiet the MKZ is. That's important—especially with luxury sedan buyers who perceive that quietness equates to quality."

Luxury sedan drivers also expect the latest electronics, going way beyond concert quality audio. There's a long list that starts with Ford's SYNC system, co-developed with Microsoft, that allows voice access to linked iPods, navigation, phone, and Sirius satellite radio. Buyers can also select a rear-backing camera and rain-sensing wipers. A VHR (Vehicle Health Report), which is a compilation of data gathered from the car's diagnostics computer, can be uplinked to Lincoln service personnel if a malfunction arises on the road. SIRIUS Travel Link™ has thousands of restaurants and gas stations pre-loaded, but can also route you around traffic and accidents.

Shanahan continued, "The driving experience has been improved, delivering a better ride and vehicle control. Ride enhancements, a new sport package, new technologies, the signature Lincoln design and a strong quality help the new 2010 Lincoln MKZ set a new standard in midsize luxury sedans."

By the specs, an MKZ would seem like little more than a restyle of an aging sedan based on similar Ford and Mercury models. That would be a huge under-estimation of all that has been under the MKZ. It is by all accounts a first-rate entry-luxury car with technology and attention to detail (still loving the seats) that is unmatched by rivals. With prices beginning at \$37,900, competitors include the Cadillac CTS, Lexus ES, Volvo S60, Saab 9-3, and Acura TL.

Aptly named

Dodge Challenger

beats any challenge in 2009

By JO ANN HOLT

Driving the 2009 Dodge Challenger R/T around town—especially on the freeway—may be the most fun you can have this summer. It will also guarantee you more attention than you ever wanted. But if you love muscle cars that go from zero to 100 in less than a heartbeat, this car is made for you.

I had only been driving the test car, (a dazzling TorRed red with black racing stripes, six-speed manual transmission Challenger with 5.7-litre V8 Hemi® VCT), about 10 minutes when a Sheriff's Deputy stopped me. He was working a freeway "speed trap," and I saw his vehicle parked ahead in time to slow down a little. Not quite enough though.

As he got out and walked slowly around the vehicle, I pulled out my driver's license and insurance papers, prepared to take my speeding ticket as graciously as possible. The officer asked, "Did you know you were going 111 in a 100 km/h zone?"

"No sir, I wasn't sure how fast I was going," I admitted somewhat sheepishly.

"Do you mind if I ask why you were in such a hurry?"

"Well, I really wasn't in a hurry. I just got behind the wheel of this car for the first time, so I was practicing shifting gears, and when I went into third gear it suddenly jumped way ahead of my expectations. To tell you the truth, my heart went right up into my throat," I added.

The officer smiled at this, and said, "I'm not giving you a ticket this time, just a warning to hold it down from now on. And to tell you the truth, I really just wanted to get a better look at this great-looking car."

I learned from this experience, and was very careful the rest of the week not to jump into third gear unless I was in a 105 or 115 km/h speed zone. Like a prize-winning racehorse, the Challenger does not like it when other cars speed ahead of it.

The next day I drove the Challenger out to the Music Hall at Fair Park for a business meeting, which had just started when a female voice came on the intercom asking "Will whoever is driving the red Dodge Challenger please come to the front security desk?"

Fearful that I might be illegally parked, I left the meeting and ran upstairs. It turned out to be Music Hall manager Becky Terrill, who just wanted to look inside the car.

"This is my dream car," she



2009 Dodge Challenger. PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAWN EDWARDS AT MUSIC HALL



Ms. Terrill in the Challenger. PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAWN EDWARDS AT MUSIC HALL

explained. "Can I have a look inside?"

The attached photo, taken by Information Specialist Shawn at DSM, shows Ms. Terrill enjoying the view from the front seat of the Challenger. Many of the male employees of the Music Hall had followed us upstairs to look at the car, which gave me a great idea for wanna-be buyers of the Challenger. The owner of this charismatic vehicle could probably make monthly payments just by charging people to sit in the car or have their photos made near the car. Worth a try.

The 2009 Dodge Challenger R/T averages 14.7 L/100 km in town and 9.4 on the highway, not bad at all for this kind of power. The base price is \$34,995 and standard equipment includes advanced multistage front air bags and supplemental side curtain front and rear air bags; electronic stability program and all-speed traction control; performance steering and suspension; instrument cluster with tachometer; and anti-lock 4-wheel disc performance brakes. It also comes with air conditioning, remote keyless entry, and a 72 L fuel tank, which means far fewer stops at

the gas station. The test model had added optional equipment that raised the standard 4 speakers to 6 Boston Acoustic speakers with 276-watt amplifier and Sirius satellite radio; plus body-colour exterior mirrors, heated front seats and leather-trimmed bucket seats. An electronics convenience group added auto-dimming rearview mirror with microphone, security alarm, traveler trip computer, Uconnect phone, iPod® interface, and universal garage door opener for an additional \$1,560.

A multimedia navigation system with GPS, compact spare tire and 20-inch aluminum chrome clad wheels along with the R/T Hood to Fender Stripes brought the total price on the test vehicle to \$40,000.

If we were doing something similar to those credit card commercials on TV, it would be: Annual fuel cost at \$0.90 cents/litre is \$2,600 (which is much higher than people in the Dallas/North Texas area are currently paying at the pump); total price of vehicle with extra options \$42,410; and celebrity car driver status, priceless.

Jo Ann Holt is a journalist and car columnist based in Dallas, Texas, and a member of Texas Auto Writers Association (TAWA).

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