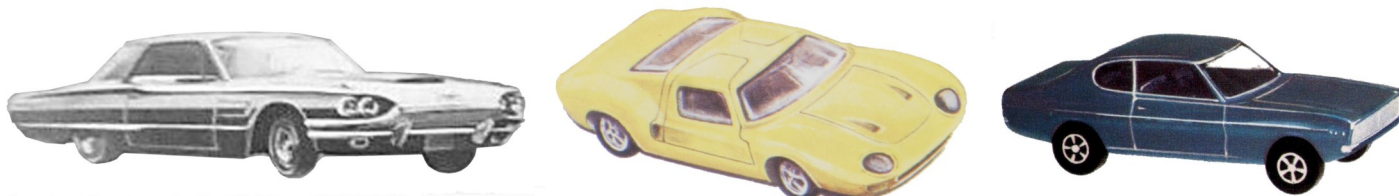


Lone Star's Forgotten Fords

The search is on for three Fords that failed to cross the Lone Star finishing line. Several Fords did make it into the line-up but could there have been a whole lot more? James Robertshaw finds out.



These images are taken from Lone Star catalogues and show our trio of 'forgotten Fords'. There's no disputing that the Thunderbird, GT40 and Capri were iconic Ford cars so what happened to Lone Star's models?

Introduction

During the 1960s and 70s Ford were enjoying a significant chunk of the British car market with popular models such as Zephyrs and Corsairs giving way to stylish new Cortinas and Capris. My family were proud Ford owners and so it seemed were most of my petrolhead classmate's dads. It was therefore no surprise then that some of our favourite toy cars were those which sported Ford's famous blue oval badge.



Lone Star's first range of toy cars date from 1957 and included two impressive models from Ford, the legendary Model T and stylish Thunderbird. These American-based Fords were available separately or in this attractive twin set, a must for any Ford fan!

Lone Star recognised the popularity of the Ford brand right from the off by including two Ford models in its very first range of toy cars. The 'Roadmasters' range of seven models, launched in 1957, was a mix of then contemporary and veteran cars. The two Fords were both based on iconic American prototypes, the stylish 1955

'Impy Super Cars.' These were packed with as many realistic features as possible in an attempt to outshine the competition. Let's have a look at the Ford cars that did make it into the range.



Lone Star's second range of 'Roadmaster' cars included an American Ford Sunliner. Note the white plastic wheels on the later version, presumably an attempt to replicate white wall tyres.

Ford Thunderbird and the car that started it all, Henry Ford's revolutionary Model T. Unfortunately the range was not successful but Lone Star returned in 1960 with a completely new range of 'Roadmaster' cars again featuring an American Ford, this time the Galaxie Sunliner. These new Roadmasters were more popular although Lone Star's big breakthrough came in 1966 when it introduced its smaller scale

Impy & Flyers Fords

The Impy range launched with an initial line-up of eight cars plus a schedule to release further models. Excitingly for blue-oval fans three of the first eight cars were based on Fords. No.18 (For some reason Impy model numbering started at No.10) was a neat model of the Ford Corsair which was also modelled by rivals Matchbox and Dinky



Toys. No.14 was a rather over-bodied looking Ford Zodiac Mk.III Estate not helped by the one-size Impy wheels which were too small for this model. The Zodiac estate was also used as the base for a third Ford model; No.16 Motorway Patrol Car. This was a good choice for a police car with many Zephyr/Zodiac saloon and estate cars in service with police forces across the UK as well as appearing on BBC TV's popular 'Z Cars' series. Indeed, Corgi, Dinky Toys and Spot-On all produced models of similar Ford Zephyr/Zodiac police cars.

The following year another completely new Ford casting joined the Impy line-up, but this time Lone Star looked to the continent for inspiration. Like the Corsair this was a saloon but based on the P4 Taunus 12M from Ford of Germany. The Taunus entered the range as No.27 and was one of several new Impy cars based on European models signifying the importance Lone Star attached to export markets. Indeed Lone Star went as far as producing special versions of its Impy Police car for overseas markets. The trusty British Ford Zodiac police car was substituted with the powerful Chrysler Imperial for North America and luxurious Mercedes SE220 for European countries.

In 1968 a fifth Ford car entered the Impy range when the existing No.18 Ford Corsair was used to produce No.32 Fire Chief Car. This looked the part finished in bright red with a blue roof beacon but it's doubtful any real Corsairs performed such a roll. With Fire Chief cars predominately found in America, Matchbox's rival version based on an American Ford Galaxie made for a much more appropriate model. The Galaxie with its mighty 360hp 7-litre V8 Ford engine would have certainly out-performed Lone Star's Corsair with its measly 92 horsepower!

Lone Star's 'Impy Super Cars' launched in 1966 with eight initial models, three of which were Fords as seen here. No.18 was a Ford Corsair whilst No.14 was a Zodiac Mk.III estate which was also used for No.16 Motorway Patrol Car.



Lone Star's fourth Impy Ford car was based on the popular Taunus saloon from Ford of Germany. The Impy version was issued in these attractive colours, dark red being the rarest.



Lone Star used its Ford Corsair casting to produce a Fire Chief car. This was one of several Impy models where special versions were produced for overseas countries. The rare 'Feuerwehr' version (right) was produced for German speaking markets.



Lone Star's Ford Zodiac estate appeared as a new hi-speed Flyers model in April 1969 but it wasn't until the following year that rivals Matchbox caught up by fitting Superfast wheels to its Ford Zodiac saloon. Bizarrely, on early Flyers and Superfast boxes, both manufacturers misspelt the model name 'Zodiak' as seen here.

The new 'Flyers' Fords really looked the part with 'deep lustre' paint finishes replacing the traditional colours used for the previous Impy models. Early Flyers cars featured racing stripes and a 'silver disc' style of hi-speed wheels as seen here on Ford Corrsair, Zodiac and Taunus models.

In mid-1968, just as Lone Star's Impy range was gaining momentum, the toy car industry was turned on its head when Mattel launched its revolutionary 'Hot Wheels'. Lone Star shelved any further proposed Impy models and instead focused on converting the Impy cars to run on new low-friction wheels. The resulting 'Flyers' cars launched in April 1969. All five Impy Fords were converted and with their new 'deep lustre' paint finishes and contrasting racing stripes (excluding the Police and Fire variants of course) they looked fantastic and a world apart from the traditional Impy models.

The Flyers sold very well but despite this Lone Star only added seven further cars to the range over the following years. These new models reflected where the Flyers were successful and in addition to British cars (including a now iconic model of the Vauxhall Firenza) the first Japanese model, a Toyota 2000GT was added to the range. The final three Flyers cars were all based on American prototypes and along with a new Corvette and a Cadillac came our sixth Ford model with the legendary Mustang. Not surprisingly Matchbox, Corgi and Dinky Toys

had all been quick to produce models of the Mustang although Lone Star's later version was based on Ford's revamped sleeker and larger 1967 Fastback model.

With sales likely in decline (due primarily to the arrival of cheaper imported toys), Lone Star opted to replace the Flyers range in 1978 with a series of low-cost models. These mainly comprised of the old Flyers castings but now with all opening features cast shut and fitted with blacked out windows and plastic bases. The only Ford to survive into this final down-market 'Impy Super Models' range was the Mustang.

Lone Star's four different Ford castings, plus Police and Fire Chief versions, provide both Ford and Lone Star fans with plenty of scope especially considering



For a short period, Lone Star issued its Flyers cars as 'Silver Flyers' with a plated 'gleam' finish. These are ultra rare and the only Ford known to exist in the range is the Corrsair.

By the early 1970s it was all about speed with 'Flyers', 'Superfast' and 'Whizzwheels' branding from Lone Star, Matchbox and Corgi. All three manufacturers offered fire chief cars, and all were based on Fords represented by Corrsair, Galaxie and Capri models.

that most models were issued in an array of colours. However, if all had gone to plan at Lone Star there should have been three further Ford cars in the Impy/Flyers line up. All three appeared in Lone Star's model listings, trade price lists and were even pictured in trade catalogues. So, what were these forgotten Fords and what happened to them?

Impy No.13 Ford Thunderbird

From the start Lone Star were keen to reassure both the trade and public that it's new 'Impy Super Cars' were a serious undertaking. An early leaflet promoting the upcoming Impy range stated:

"Many months of careful planning have been put into these IMPY Super Cars. The whole programme has been carried out in accordance with very careful and detailed schedules. At least eight models will be ready for release in May, followed by a new model every month. Already models are in the Drawing Board, Tooling or Pre-production state to ensure continuity throughout 1965 and 1966!"

Well, this was Lone Star and straight away things went awry! The range actually launched in 1966, so despite all the 'careful planning' the launch was either significantly delayed or Lone Star carelessly published the wrong years in the leaflet. It was Lone Star's 1966 trade catalogue that first announced the actual arrival of the Impy range and also repeated the above statement although now with the years amended to '1966 and 1967'. Again, eight models are stated as being ready although ten models are shown and one of the eight didn't actually appear until the following year.

Of special interest here is a model illustrated in this initial leaflet and also listed in the trade catalogue as one of '20 planned models'. This is our first forgotten Ford, the 'No.13 Ford Thunderbird'. Tantalisingly a small photograph of an actual Impy Ford Thunderbird model appeared in the 1966 trade catalogue and even featured on the front cover. Careful study of this grainy



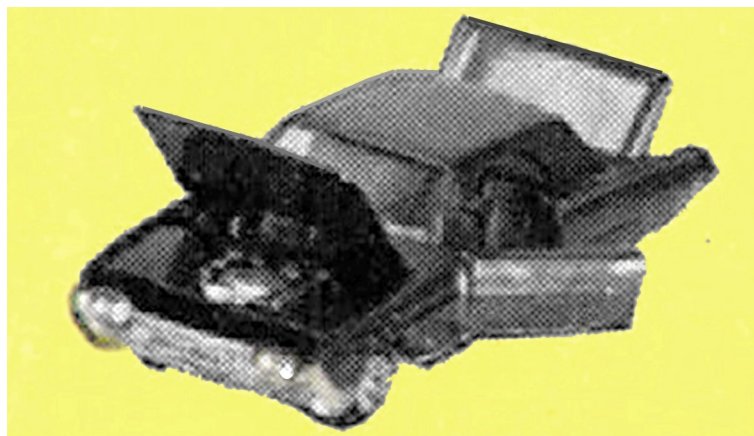
1970 saw the introduction of the final new 'Flyers' Ford, the iconic 1967 Mustang. Had Lone Star used a darker shade of green then this Mustang would have been a perfect replica of the one famously driven by Steve McQueen in the 1968 movie 'Bullitt'. The Mustang was the only Ford to continue into the low-cost 'Impy Super Models' range (right).

photograph shows the Impy model to be based on the Mk.3 Thunderbird produced by Ford between 1961-63.

To clear up yet more Lone Star confusion, the initial Impy leaflet actually depicts the later Mk.4 Thunderbird but then it also wrongly depicts the later P5 Ford Taunus model too. With this leaflet only featuring images of real cars, it's likely pictures of 'current' vehicles were sourced by Lone Star rather than images that matched the actual Impy models already under development. Again not exactly 'careful planning'.



The above leaflet was the first to show Lone Star's new Impy range. Four of the twelve models shown are Fords which includes the illusive Thunderbird. Two of the images wrongly depict the latest Ford models rather than those already under development at Lone Star. The Thunderbird shown is the Mk.4 rather than the Mk.3 and the Taunus is the P5 model rather than the earlier P4 model as released by Lone Star.



Excitingly this grainy photo from Lone Star's 1966 trade catalogue shows an actual Impy Ford Thunderbird proving the existence of a finished model. But was this just a pre-production example or did a batch of models make it off the assembly line? Fortunately the photo contains enough detail to identify this model as a third generation Thunderbird produced by Ford between 1961-63.

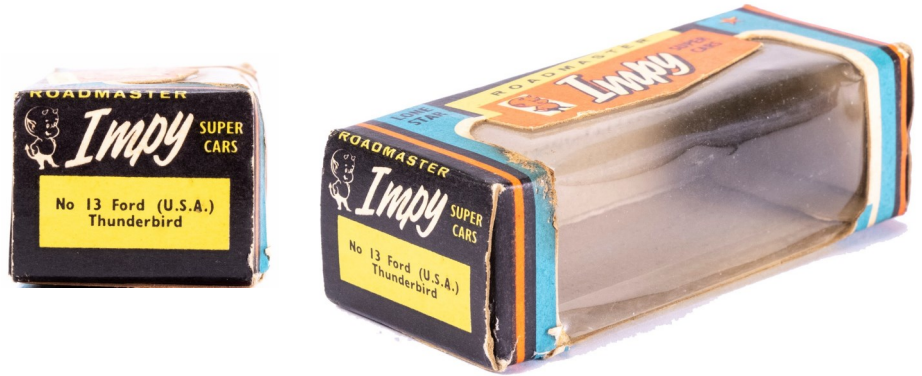
The appearance of the Impy Ford Thunderbird model in the 1966 trade catalogue has to be one of the most intriguing mysteries surrounding Lone Star and it's ranges of toy cars. It seems bizarre for a model to make it through the time-consuming design process, the expensive tooling stage and to reach production and to then not appear as part of the range. Perhaps there was a licencing issue with Ford although given these were usually ironed out at the design stage and Lone Star had produced other Ford models (including the Mk1. Thunderbird in its Road-masters range) this seems unlikely.

Another consideration could be a failure with the tooling during the very early stages of production which proved uneconomical to repair. This theory is perhaps substantiated by the exciting discovery of an Impy box with end flaps stamped for this model as 'No.13 Ford (USA) Thunderbird'. Perhaps Lone Star prepared a batch of Impy Ford Thunderbird boxes as the model neared the production stage or, even more exciting, did a small number of boxed Ford Thunderbird models actually leave the factory? The author has not seen or heard of one over the last 40 years but is there one out there?

Back in the day any youngster still on the lookout for the Impy Thunderbird would have finally given up when in 1970 the unlucky No.13 model number was instead allocated to the new Flyers Toyota 2000GT. The Thunderbird is out first forgotten Ford, now lets investigate the second which rather fittingly first appeared in Lone Star's new hi-speed Flyers listings.



This colourful page is from a 1970 Flyers booklet issued by Japanese importers Maursan. Whilst the page design and (not entirely relevant) race car photo were by Maursan, the images of the Flyers cars were provided by Lone Star and include our illusive Ford GT40 along with the Mustang.



An ultra rare find is this Impy box with end flaps stamped 'No 13 Ford (U.S.A.) Thunderbird'. But did this box ever contain the model? This tantalising discovery just adds to the mystery surrounding the illusive Thunderbird. (Photo courtesy of Mark Woodford)

This attractive 'Impy dispenser stand' was issued by Lone Star although the final design differed slightly. The six Impy cars displayed along the top are all easily identifiable until you get to the far-right model which is our mysterious Ford Thunderbird. This photograph of the dispenser unit continued to appear in Lone Star trade catalogues meaning in this guise our illusive Ford Thunderbird sneaked into catalogues for four more years!



Flyers No.37 Ford GT40

This proposed hi-speed Flyers model was based on Fords legendary GT40 race car. The GT40 was developed specifically to compete in endurance races and in particular to take on the dominant Ferraris following a fall out between Henry Ford II and Enzo Ferrari. Toy manufacturers from around the globe produced models of Ford's impressive GT40 and Lone Star looked to be on track to add one to its new Flyers range.

Artist's impressions of Lone Star's GT40 appeared in 1969 and 1970 Flyers leaflets no doubt causing excitement amongst young Ford fans.

The GT40's only trade catalogue appearance was in 1970 where it was again represented by a drawing. However, careful study of this trade catalogue reveals more GT40 images and excitingly these were not mere drawings but photographs of actual models.

To accompany its hi-speed Flyers cars, and to compete with Hot Wheels, Lone Star launched a range of plastic race-track sets. The 1970 trade catalogue promotes these with a series of staged action shots showing Flyers cars speeding along the assembled track sets. The most im-

pressive set is the 'Double loop-the-loop Racing Set' which is photographed complete with the latest two Flyers cars posed in a mid-action shot. No.36 Lotus Europa is seen having just completed the loop-the-loop whilst No.37 Ford GT40 is seen speeding towards the adjacent loop section. Whilst the Lotus looks like a finished die-cast model the GT40 looks more like a one-piece resin prototype. This photo excitingly confirms Lone Star's Ford GT40 made it off the drawing board and at least as far as the pre-production stage.

With development of the Flyers GT40 model nearing completion, boxes for this model were once again produced by Lone Star. Only a handful of these have ever surfaced but unlike the mysterious Ford Thunderbird Impy box it's known that these sadly did not contain Ford GT40 models. The surviving examples have had the numbered end flaps crudely altered from '37' to '15' (for the VW Microbus). However, with the boxes still featuring striking GT40 artwork and model name there must have been some disappointed children when these boxes were opened and out rolled an antiquated Volkswagen bus!

It should be pointed out that in recent years a full range of reproduction Flyers boxes have been produced which include several 'what if' and 'fantasy' models including the GT40. The artwork on the GT40 reproduction boxes is very similar to the genuine boxes as it was available to copy from the Flyers 'Six Car Gift Set' where Lone Star also featured the same side profile drawing of the Ford GT40. Fortunately, there are enough differences to tell the reproduction boxes from the ultra-rare genuine examples.

With evidence of pre-production Ford Thunderbird and Ford GT40 models plus the existence of finished boxes, it appears our first two forgotten Fords came very close to making it into full scale production. However, our third and final forgotten Ford is more elusive.



This image from Lone Star's 1970 trade catalogue shows the impressive 'Double Loop-The-Loop Racing Set' complete with the latest Flyers cars. The model in the centre about to perform a loop-the-loop is the Flyers Ford GT40 proving pre-production models were made.



Usually any graffiti, wear and tear and original toy shop stickers are detrimental to a model's packaging but here they all help verify these as genuine original Ford GT40 boxes. The model numbers on the end-flaps have been crudely changed to '15' which was the model number for the somewhat less sporty Volkswagen Microbus!



The side profile artwork for the Ford GT40 also appeared on the packaging for the Flyers 'Six Car Gift Set'. This attractive set would impress any young Ford fan by containing Ford Zodiac, Taunus and Mustang models, but alas never the illustrated GT40.



This colourful page from Lone Star's 1971 trade catalogue shows the latest Flyers cars mixed in with proposed models. Although illustrated by a drawing the 'No.8 Ford Capri' was likely shelved as Lone Star redirected its efforts on what is described here as a 'New 1971 model of a popular car'. Despite the vague drawing looking a little Capri like, this was the Vauxhall Firenza which was produced exclusively by Lone Star in conjunction with Vauxhall.

Flyers No.8 Ford Capri

Lone Star's 1970 trade catalogue not only featured the Ford GT40 but it also announced the arrival of a second brand-new Ford model, the stylish and super sleek Ford Capri. Introduced by Ford in 1969 the idea was to mirror the success of the American Mustang with a similar sporty coupe designed for the European market. With its long bonnet and 'D shape' rear side windows it certainly stood out from the crowd.

At the time Lone Star produced its 1970 trade catalogue the Flyers 'No.8 Ford Capri' model must have been in the very early stages of development as not even an artist's illustration was shown. Instead, the space reserved for an image was simply occupied with the text 'Ford Capri'. With the real Capri proving a hit across Britain and Europe Lone Star should have forged ahead with its new Flyers model. However the following year's 1971 trade catalogue still failed to illustrate a model of the Capri



No.8 Ford Capri appeared again in the 1972 trade catalogue now shown alongside the new 'No.7 Vauxhall Firenza'. Presumably there was still no Flyers Capri model available so this time a photo of a real Capri was used for the illustration.



ultimately frustratingly) the accompanying list of available Flyers models (shown in yellow) includes both these Fords as No.8 and No.37 respectively.

which was instead represented by a basic artist's impression.

A possible reason why Lone Star's Ford Capri never materialised was also first hinted at in this 1971 trade catalogue where a generic drawing of another new Flyers car was shown with the mysterious announcement 'New 1971 model of popular car to be released during the course of the year'. This would turn out to be the Vauxhall Firenza and the secrecy was due to the model being produced in conjunction with Vauxhall for release on the same day as the full-size car. Landing a deal to exclusively produce a new model from motoring giants Vauxhall must have been a huge scoop for Lone Star who undoubtedly gave the project it's full attention. This would have likely been to the detriment of the planned Capri model especially given the Firenza and Capri were rival cars going head-to-head in the same market sector. It might not have been well received at Vauxhall if Lone Star had also released the competing Capri alongside its new Firenza.

Lone Star didn't completely give up on the No.8 Ford Capri though as it again appeared in the following years trade catalogue now shown alongside the Vauxhall Firenza which was No.7. Strangely Lone Star had decided to plug some of the previously unused low model numbers with these two models. There was still no model and this time a photo of a real Capri was used. 1972 was the last trade catalogue appearance for the Capri and with the Flyers range missed from the 1973 catalogue, perhaps this signified the start of the demise of the range.

The Flyers 'Six Car Gift Set' shown earlier not only featured the Ford GT40 on the front, but also a large drawing of the Capri on the rear. Tantalisingly (but ultimately

Conclusion

Lone Star has developed a bit of a reputation for including models in its product listings which then never materialised. Other Impy no-shows included a cement mixer, horse box, and articulated truck. Our three Fords however were the only unissued cars to feature in listings and unlike the proposed lorries, all three Fords were also illustrated in trade catalogues. In the rush to publish the upcoming years catalogue it was not uncommon for manufacturers to include drawings and mock-ups of planned models but perhaps Lone Star could have

helped themselves by marking proposed models as such, or at least as 'coming soon' or 'available later'. Simply including them in and amongst the rest of the range and even listing them on packaging and in trade price lists must have caused confusion and frustrations with young collectors and trade customers alike – something Lone Star had set out to avoid with its 'careful planning' statement.

Looking at the bigger picture it should be remembered that toy cars were just one of a diverse range of toys manufactured by Lone Star which included popular ranges of toy guns and accessories often licenced with the latest TV show or films. Some of Lone

Star's actions might now appear chaotic but by not dwelling on established ranges and quickly switching resources to the latest ideas and trends did help Lone Star survive and outlast its bigger rival British toy car manufacturers.

With evidence of both the Ford Thunderbird and Ford GT40 making it to the final stages of pre-production, plus a serious intention to produce a Capri, it's exciting to think that examples could be out there. Lone Star have left us with many Ford toy cars to enjoy but what a pity this trio of iconic Ford models didn't make it across the finish line.



Fabulous Ford finale! These colourful Flyers Fords, plus the earlier Impy models, provide both Ford and Lone Star collectors with plenty of scope. But just think what could have been if our trio of 'forgotten Fords' had made it past Lone Star's finishing line!