

Thunder Words



February 2026, Volume 49 #2
Dedicated to the 55, 56, & 57 Thunderbird
Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club



Prez Says: I hope all our members have been warm and safe this last week, and I am thankful we missed the worst of the snow and ice storm. January and February do not allow us to enjoy our T-Birds, much less work on them. I find these days useful for catching up on my T-Bird-related reading. I read the club magazines from CTCI and VTCL, Hemmings Motor News, Old Cars, and Hagerty's Drivers Club. I also enjoy several online forums. This time of year is also great for watching the big car auction results. I have also been experimenting with ChatGPT AI to solve classic car-related problems. I gave it four scenarios and evaluated its answers (see the tech article in this issue). Stay warm and don't forget to send me your ideas for this year's activities and events that you want the club to consider.

We lost a long-time club member, Larry Smith, on January 29, and further information regarding his funeral arrangements will be sent out in a separate email blast in a couple of days.

Martin Bierman, President

Next Event
Larry Smith Memorial
February 15, 2026
Braman Mortuary, 72 St.
Chapel. 3 – 5 PM
Omaha, NE

2026 Meeting Dates:
Waverly – March – May – July – Sept. – Dec.
19 21 16 17 17
Omaha – April - June - Aug. - Oct.
16 18 20 15
November Friendsgiving - TBD

Next
Business Meeting
March 19, 2026
Track Side Bar & Grill
Waverly, NE



www.Nebraskalandtbirds.org
<https://www.facebook.com/nebraskatbirds/>
Sponsored by Lee Sapp Ford



TECH TALK

By Martin Bierman

Using AI to Diagnose Classic Car Problems



A recent article studied using artificial intelligence (AI) to diagnose classic car problems. I thought I would give this a try with several questions posed to AI by ChatGPT. The first question posed was to diagnose a “crank but no start” problem in a classic 1955 Thunderbird. AI quickly separated the problem into no spark or no fuel issues. It went through all the usual causes for each of the issues. It also listed timing problems, electrical problems, compression problems (stuck valves) and flooded engine as possible causes. Ironically “out of gasoline” was not a listed possibility. Because of this I gave AI a B+ for this test. Next I asked it for the differential diagnosis of heated rear wheels in a 55 Thunderbird. It returned a fairly exhaustive list of items to produce this, and I was particularly interested if it would list a swollen brake hose acting as a check valve to the rear lines as a cause. It did, and I gave it a grade of A due to its detailed list of items to check. Next I asked a more specific question regarding dragging rear brakes on a 55 Thunderbird. This returned more specific information and importantly included the issue of a swollen or occluded rear brake hose. I particularly liked the detailed explanation on how to adjust brakes in particular how to use the star wheel adjuster. It got a grade of A on this issue as well. Finally, I gave it a fourth test and asked it to discuss why a 1955 T-Bird with a Fordomatic transmission is not shifting from 2nd to 3rd gear. This is usually a problem that involves adjusting the throttle to transmission rod at the throttle assembly linkage. It’s not documented in the 1955 or 1956 shop manuals and is a frequent source of confusion. Surprisingly, it gave a very good discussion of adjusting the throttle rod and the problems if it is not adjusted properly. It did stumble on discussing adjustment of the accelerator pedal and had a reference to shifts from 1st to 2nd gear despite the fact that the Fordomatic transmission starts in 2nd gear. Overall, the discussion was a fairly representative discussion of the adjustment of the throttle to transmission rod as described in the Fordomatic transmission manual, and I gave it a B+ grade.



I was quite pleased with AI’s discussion on these various issues. One caution: Be as specific as possible in asking AI questions. The more refined the question is, the more specific the answer will be. Be prepared for possible answers conflicting with your knowledge or experience.



Minutes of the Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club, January 2026

As you are aware, we did not have a business meeting in January. After reading Marty's Tech Talk, I decided to try AI to produce an article. I have been posting winter driving tips for a couple of months, so I asked AI to write something about winter in the Midwest. The following are the results. It was kind of fun. JES

During the Wintertime

Understanding the Season of Cold and Transformation

Introduction

Winter is a unique and transformative season that brings distinct changes to the environment, daily life, and human activities. In the northern hemisphere, winter typically spans from December to February, although exact dates and conditions vary by region. The season is characterized by colder temperatures, shorter days, and, in many areas, snowfall and icy conditions.

Environmental Changes

During winter, temperatures drop as Earth's tilt reduces direct sunlight to certain regions. This results in a range of environmental changes, including frost, snow, and the freezing of lakes and rivers. Trees shed their leaves, and many plants enter a dormant state to conserve energy until the warmth of spring returns.

Wildlife Adaptations

Many animals adapt to winter conditions by migrating to warmer areas, hibernating, or growing thicker fur to withstand the cold. Birds such as geese and ducks often fly south, while mammals like bears hibernate in dens, slowing their metabolism to survive with limited food resources.

Human Activities and Traditions

For people, winter is often associated with holidays and traditions, such as Christmas, Hanukkah, and New Year's celebrations. Activities such as ice skating, skiing, and snowboarding have become popular in snow-covered regions. Winter also brings challenges, including the need for warmer clothing, heating homes, and managing icy roads.

Health and Lifestyle Considerations

Colder weather can increase the risk of seasonal illnesses, including the flu and colds. People spend more time indoors, which can affect physical activity and mental health. Taking steps to stay active, eat nutritious foods, and keep in touch with friends and family can help maintain well-being during the winter months.

Conclusion

Winter is a season of both beauty and challenge. It's cold, quiet days provide an opportunity for reflection, rest, and togetherness. Whether enjoying winter sports, celebrating traditions, or simply marveling at a snowy landscape, winter holds a special place in the year's cycle.



CTCI Board Meeting Highlights

CTCI Annual Board Meeting

January 16, 2026

Treasurer's Report: John Kledis explained that he was working on the Year-End Financials for 2025. He explained that it would be a bit before he would have the financial reports ready. In addition to the Financial Reports, John will be working on the 990, which is the Federal Tax filing.

Member Renewals: Garrett Shropshire, through the Office Activity Report, documented Member Renewals. Member Renewals: Last year (12/31/2024), we ended up with 3,601 active members. Between January and December of 2025, we gained 187 New Members. In addition, we gained 29 members who returned to CTCI from prior years (before 2024). As of 12/31/2025, we are now at 3,271 active members. At this point, we have 485 Members who have not renewed. Of that total, we have only received 61 notices of dropouts. We are pleased that we have achieved (and exceeded) our planned member membership number of 3,200 by the end of the year. Thus we only ended up with a "Year over Year net loss of 330 members. This is better than in 2024, when we had a net loss of 414 members.

Office Activity: The CTCI Activity Report & stats for the Factory Invoices and Merchandise Sales for the whole year of 2024 and 2025 are included for your review. We have assisted the invoice committee in processing 52 Invoice requests in 2025 which is 15 off the same time last year. Merchandise sales for the year is at \$ 15,164.95. We are UP in merchandise sales from the same period in 2024.

Committee's Named for 2026: The following committees were named for 2026. They are:

- Executive – Finance
- TOA – Joint Events
- Membership & Local Club Interaction
- OP & P
- 2026 Convention
- Nominating
- The Early Bird Advisory
- Website
- Authenticity
- Judge Training
- Concours Judging
- Retro Restoration & Upkeep
- Factory Invoice
- Scoring
- Publicity
- Newsletter Contest
- Ford Johnson – Ron McCloud

The next regular Board meeting is set for December 11, 2026, at 10:00 AM Central.

On Behalf of the Board,
Bob Bly, President



The following message was received by President Marty Bierman. It is self-explanatory. If you are interested in serving on the CTCI board, please let Marty know. I would recommend that, if interested, you let Marty know sooner rather than later.

For Chapter Leadership: Board Vacancy Recommendations

Information for Chapter Leadership

Presidents,

The Board is beginning the process of filling several current vacancies and is asking for your recommendations. If you or someone in your club would be a strong, constructive contributor at the Board level, please send the name and contact information to Garrett at the CTCI Office. [EMAIL](#)

The Nominating Committee will follow a brief vetting process to ensure all candidates understand the responsibilities of Board service.

CTCI Board of Directors



INN at Mazatlan Resident

2026 Calendar of Events

March 6-8 – 71st World of Wheels – CHI Arena & Convention Center
 March 8 – 51st Annual Rocky Mountain Manginelli Swap Meet – Sandhills Global Event Center - Lincoln
 (same location, new name – 4100 North 84th Street)
 March 19 – Business Meeting – 6:00 PM – Track Side Bar & Grill – 13901 Guildford 7, Waverly, NE



Please use the attached form to submit your dues. The dues are still only \$15 per year, probably the best deal in town.

2026 Membership dues - \$15.00

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City/Town _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Numbers: Home _____ Cell _____ Work _____

Email(s) _____

Please send this form and check for membership dues payable to Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club care of **Jeff Brown**,
 Treasure, 7225 South 103 Street, LaVista, NE 68128

Established in 1975, the **Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club** is dedicated to preserving and enjoying one of the greatest cars ever created: the **Ford Thunderbird**.

Advantages of club membership include:

- Regular driving events and monthly meetings every third Thursday
- Social functions such as picnics, shows, and the annual Christmas/Friendsgiving party
- Members with restoration and repair experience
- Assistance with parts acquisition and location
- CTCI master judge to assist with authenticity issues
- Monthly newsletter with a calendar of events and tech articles



Thunderbird Historical Facts

Sometimes the best ideas don't come from within a company but rather arise in response to external forces. When Chevrolet brought its two-seat Corvette to the New York Auto Show in 1953, it couldn't have known that it was about to inspire Ford to punch back with one of the most storied nameplates in the Blue Oval's history: the Thunderbird.

Although developed in response to the 'Vette, the T-Bird would travel down a winding path, as the vehicle would over the course of its lifetime be made available as a coupe, a roadster, and a sedan. The Thunderbird would also avoid the Corvette's sports car image in favor of "personal luxury," a term that would hold meaning in the industry until the segment was unceremoniously eviscerated by SUVs in the mid-'90s.

1957 Ford Thunderbird *Evan Klein*

The first decade of Thunderbird production would see dramatic shifts in styling, power, and market position. The very first generation of Ford Thunderbird was built exclusively as a two-seat convertible and only offered for a short spell from 1955 to 1957. As with many '50s domestics, future valuation prospects for the first-gen Thunderbird don't look exceptional at the moment, and certain variants remain very approachable for collectors.

A gold-standard, #1-condition (Concours-quality) '55 trades for \$65,900, while a driver-quality car is less than half that. For 1957, a rare supercharged edition V-8 soars to nearly a quarter million dollars, with base #3-condition (Good) cars checking in at just under \$40,000 (similar in pricing to 1956 models).

Mechanically, the 1955–57 Thunderbirds are simple and are known for being relatively trouble-free. While decoding the VIN and data plate, all T-Birds of this vintage are motivated by a V-8 and could be found with either a manual or an automatic transmission.

Power output, however, varies significantly depending on which V-8 engine is under the hood. The standard for the first year of production was a 292-cubic-inch unit fitted with a four-barrel carburetor, rated at 193 horsepower and 280 lb.-ft of torque (manual gearbox), or 198 hp and 286 lb.-ft (three-speed Ford-O-Matic automatic), with the latter featuring a slightly higher compression ratio.

For the next year, the T-Bird would keep a 202-horsepower version of the 292-cid motor in base models (with 289 lb.-ft of twist on tap), but also add Ford's 312-cid engine to the option sheet, which pushed output to 215 horses and 317 lb.-ft of torque (manual) or 225 hp and 324 lb-ft (Ford-O-Matic).

In 1957, the 292 stuck around yet again to be joined by a 245-horsepower 312, a dual-quad version of the same motor that produced between 270 and 285 horsepower (depending on whether one selected the 10:1 compression engine or not), and finally a supercharged 312 that made use of a McCullough-Paxton blower to churn out 300 horses and 345 lb.-ft of twist. Only 212 examples of the latter left the factory, representing less than 1% of the '57 production run.

1957 Ford Thunderbird *Evan Klein*

"The F-code supercharged cars are a huge value booster," says Dave Adams of Concord, California's Thunderbird Headquarters, which supplies numerous restoration parts for the roadster. "It's quite rare."

There are a few downsides to Ford V8 or transmission reliability from this era, aside from one issue common to the 312 across all vehicles.

"The rear main seal on the 312 is prone to leaking. In fact, even if you replace it, which is roughly a \$1000 job, within six months to a year, it's virtually guaranteed to start leaking again," explains Adams. "No one's been able to put a finger on a fail-safe repair for this problem yet."

Marvin Hill of Hill's Classic Car Restorations in Racine, Ohio, which has been rebuilding T-Birds for more than a quarter century, agrees. Hill adds that you must expect at least a little oil leak from the rear main seal on any 312-equipped car you look at. He cautions, however, not to tolerate the same from the transmission.

"If the gearbox is leaking, keep in mind that in order to repair it both the transmission and the engine have to be pulled from the car, which is a labor-intensive process," he says. "It can be between \$800 and \$1500 in labor alone just to pop the drivetrain in and out of the vehicle – it's a big job."

Hill also mentions that power steering leaks are normal, but repairable.



Nebraskaland Thunderbird Club

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Member Birthdays
February
John Stekly – 4
Bob McGowan – 20
Joan Lacy - 23
If you want to be recognized,
please send your birthdate to
jesanford@cox.net.



Where I spent January!!!

