

In early 1962 a British motorist with a reasonably limited budget who needed 6 seats, 6 cylinders, a large boot and a certain degree of trans-Atlantic glamour had only one real choice - the new Ford Zephyr 6 Mk.III. The Humber Hawk was more expensive and came with a 'Big Four', the elegant 3-litre Austin A110 Westminster was also pricier and the Standard Vanguard Six was by now a cramped relic of the 1950s. This left the Vauxhall PA Velox, another family saloon of Anglo-American lines that offered its own virtues combined with an appalling track record for corrosion.

Essentially the Zephyr/Zodiac Mk III built on the strengths of the previous big British Fords; the Zephyr 6 featured the same 2553cc engine as its 1956-1962 predecessor but the higher compression ratio gave an extra bhp and the chassis design was basically that of the Mk. II but with stronger construction. The gearbox was now all synchromesh 4-on-the-column as opposed to the earlier unreliable 3-on-the-tree, the rear axle was strengthened and at the time no UK production car had apparently undergone so much testing prior to its launch. The styling was via Roy Brown, who was responsible for the Cortina Mk.1 (and the Edsel, although no-one at Dagenham liked to mention that) whose ideas were inspired by a proposal from the Italian design house Fura.

The result was a reliable and dashing looking saloon with a vast 21 cu foot of boot space and enough width for 6 occupants but in a car with an overall length of little over 15 feet. The major sacrifice was legroom - although with some spanner work the *rear* bench could be moved over a few inches. The entry level model was the Zephyr 4 (replacing the Consul Mk.II), with the 1703cc engine from the Mk. II Consul (which gave virtually non-existent acceleration), supplemented by the 2.5 litre Zephyr 6 (as identified by its split radiator grille incorporating the headlamps) and the range-topping Zodiac, which boasted quad headlamps, rather stylish 6-window styling and a slightly up-rated engine to give genuine 100 mph performance. Fortunately, an attempt by Ford's US parent to insist on fitting the Mk. III range with drum brakes was quickly foiled when a prototype so-equipped proved to be almost literally unstoppable.

Of course neither the Zephyr 4 nor 6 could be described as exactly luxurious - to keep the price down a heater and windscreen washers remained on the extras list - but at least the Mk. II's vacuum wipers had been replaced by a 2-speed electric motor. As befitting its slightly higher price the Zephyr 6 was equipped with front folding armrest - very useful in keeping the driver anchored in position on the front bench - and offered a blend of smoothness and performance at a price that was well below £1,000. As a 6-cylinder fleet car, the 2.5 litre Zephyr had a very obvious appeal and, as Ford were obviously keen to build on the constabulary success of the previous Zephyrs, the Mk. III was offered as a 'police special'. British films of the early 1960s often give the impression that all British police cars of that time were either Humbers or Wolseleys but the big Ford was the definitive car of choice for many a provincial force - large enough for most general patrol duties but not so bulky as to prevent it from being used for urban work and with an excellent aftercare service provided by Dagenham.

The Zephyr 6 Police Special featured the Zodiac's higher tuned engine, extra wiring looms for the necessary equipment, heavy duty suspension, a modified dashboard to accommodate the extra calibrated speedometer and, for ease of operation, a floor mounted gear lever with closer ratios than the standard column shift. The popularity of the police Zephyr can be easily illustrated by the number of

constabularies which employed them from Devon, Exeter City, Lancashire and Plymouth City to Powys, Ulster, Somerset, West Riding and the British Transport Police. The liveries and equipment varied considerably - Somerset cars were finished in 'Goodwood Green' and bore a blue lamp, a Winkworth Bell, a bumper mounted PA and spot lamp and police signs on the grille and the rear windshield whilst Plymouth Zephyrs boasted a striking black and white livery with a roof-mounted 'police box'.

A handful of Zephyr 6 Estates, coach built by Abbots of Farnham (there was to be no large British Ford-built estate car until the introduction of the Granada in 1972) were employed on motorway duties, where their acceleration proved more than adequate even in the pre-speed limit era. Forces like Lancashire, Hertfordshire and Cheshire utilised the extra carrying capacity of the custom built estate. Overseas, police Zephyr 6s were used by the forces of New Zealand, South Africa, the Irish Republic - plus a fleet of ten vehicles used by the Sweden Polis, who needed an alternative to the Volvo Amazon and who found that the Zephyr 6 had enough space to carry several intoxicated prisoners. They might have used more examples had the Zephyr's handling proved to be more suited to the rigours of winter driving in Sweden and had Dagenham had a better attitude towards spares distribution. Few forces could afford to lay up a patrol car for a fortnight whilst waiting for parts to arrive from the UK.

Naturally each force performed their own modifications to the Zephyr, some official and some by very enterprising drivers. In the late 1960s one innovative Devon officer discovered that the Zephyr 6 was prone to easily swerving whilst on a high speed pursuit because of the car's weight distribution. His 'technical modification' to improve stability - a concrete kerbstone placed in the boot! Of all of the UK's forces, it was Lancashire that was the most associated with the Zephyr Mk.III. It was one of the comparatively few constabularies to use the under-powered Zephyr 4 - indeed when Unit Beat cars were launched in 1965 Lancashire used some ex CID Zephyr 4's, repainting their black finish for the two-tone 'Panda' finish.

However it was thanks to BBC Television that the Zephyr 6 Mk.III became indelibly associated with north country policing. Ironically, although the cars used in the original 1962 series of *Z-Cars* were authentic Lancashire Police Zephyrs, the 1963-1965 seasons used Ford PR Fleet Mk.III Zephyr 6s. But to many Britons of a certain generation, the very sight of a well-polished white Ford Zephyr 6 Mk. III conjures the dialogue "BD to Z-Victor One!" and the *Johnny Todd* theme tune. Other notable police Zephyr 6 Mk.III appearances are on *Heartbeat*, a 1967 episode of *Man in a Suitcase* plus a long forgotten 1963 B-film entitled *Impact*. But even after the last police Zephyr 6 Mk.III was demobbed in 1967/68, the abiding image is of Brian Blessed and Colin Welland spinning the wheel of Z Victors One and Two in front of some BBC back projection.

Only two genuine Ford Zephyrs remain today, a Welshpool example (albeit it hasn't been seen for several years) and PC-UKs own Adrian Cottle who took delivery of his full Police spec version this summer (see black and white centre section for photo).