

*LaGalaxie*

## The James Powers Story... A Life in Design Part III by Tim Howley

*LaGalaxie* was the last major advanced design that Jim Powers worked on at Ford. It was a little more down to earth than the *Palomar*, *Volante*, and *Nucleon* discussed in the previous issue of *Lincoln and Continental Comments*. The elusive project was handled by L. David Ash with Jim Powers working under him. The *LaGalaxie* design project was done in a special studio at the new Continental plant where the Continental Mark II was then being produced.

In 1956, Ernie Breech, Ford's executive vice president, became convinced that there was something wrong with the colors Ford designers had been using for production Fords, Mercurys and Lincolns. So Breech went to the field of high fashion for assistance. Dave Ash was named "Executive Stylist - Fashion Trends and Special Assignments" to seek out trends in fabrics and colors in high fashion as they might apply to automobiles. The only direction being that Ash would get some help from J. Walter Thompson, Ford's advertising agency.

Virginia Van Brunt, a fashion consultant, worked for J. Walter Thompson. She introduced Ash to the famous fashion designer, Christian Dior. He proposed designing a car for Ford, but it never got anywhere. Ash then hired a fabric designer and weaver, Helen Vincent. Ultimately, one of the fabrics she made was used on a Lincoln that was produced. Meanwhile, Ash went to work on a concept car which was named *LaGalaxie*, and it was about as far out as fashion in cars ever went.

Jim Powers did the interior design work on this car using a separate buck. Jim also did the roof quarter and window treatment. The doors, roof and windshield rose up as a unit for entrance.

As a separate project Powers also did a rendering of an Indianapolis race car with a unique "X" and "O" design theme at the rear end. Ash incorporated this design theme at the rear end of *LaGalaxie*. The finished, full-sized fiberglass model looked like something out of *Star Wars*, but it was strictly a non-working show model. Then *LaGalaxie* was put on the show circuit for a year. It met with mixed reviews. It will be remembered as one of the most far out Ford designs of the Fifties that got as far as a full size model and went to the biggest car shows in the country.

Jim Powers played a key role in the design of the 1961 Thunderbird. As the deadline for the final direction show approached, a design had not been resolved. Bill Boyer worked on one side of the clay model and Powers worked on the other. After Boyer went home Powers stayed all night working on the model. In the showing Powers' side of the car was chosen. In that same showing Elwood Engel presented his proposal for the 1961 Thunderbird. That design finally became the 1961 Lincoln Continental.

Later Powers did early pro-

posals for the next generation Thunderbird. He also did proposals for the beginning of the Mustang program. That was back when it was originally planned to be a two-seater. And he did a 3/8 scale model which was the inspiration for the 1963 Ford Galaxie.

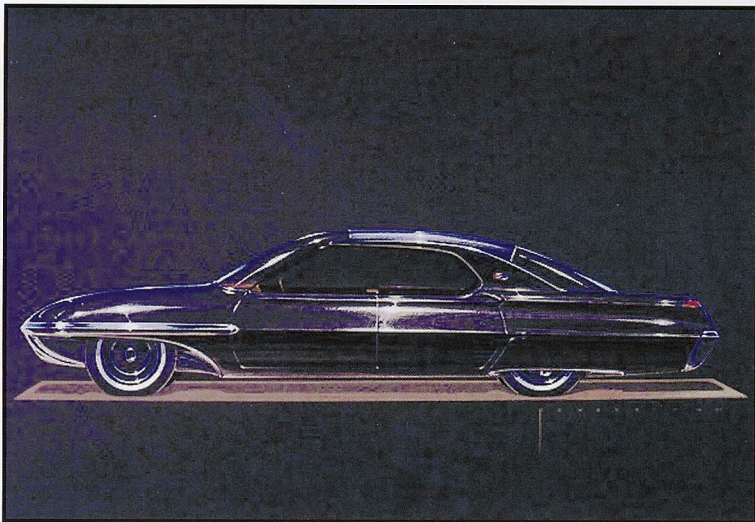
Finally he worked on 1964-66 Lincoln interiors. In fact, he became

Design Manager of Lincoln Interiors. In his early 20s, he was the youngest Design Manager at Ford. The last thing he worked on at Ford was the 1966 Lincoln. Before he left Ford he was able to do luxurious interiors which were based on contemporary furniture. He felt simple designs were more elegant. Woodgrain inserts and diecast Lincoln emblems enhanced the door panel trim.

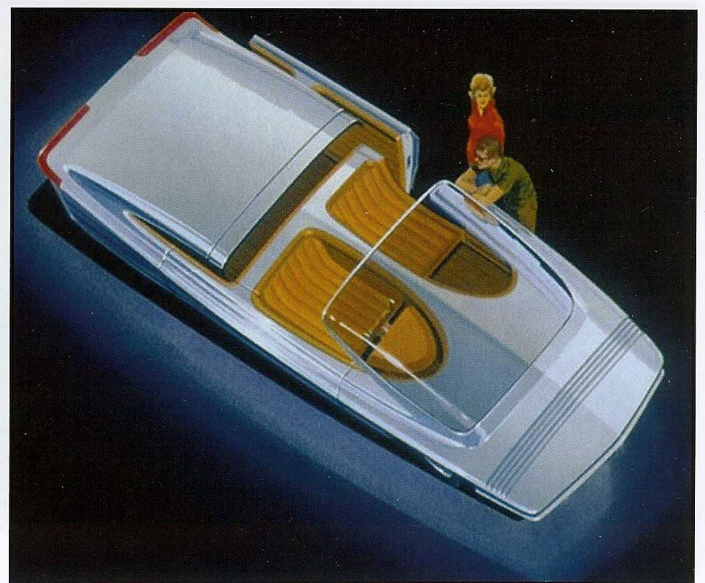
By this time Powers had begun a substantial car collection including a Mark II, and he grew weary of what the Detroit winters did to his cars. He had an offer from a Detroit firm to join their design office. Powers accepted with the provision that he would open a new office in California. Top executives at Ford, especially Joe Oros, head of Ford design, tried to talk him out of moving west. In the end, despite the wonderful job, Jim resisted all the promised raises, bonuses, perks and other incentives and left for sunny Southern California. Some time after arriving in California he opened his own design and advertising office. But that's another story for the next issue of *Lincoln and Continental Comments*.

*LaGalaxie* instrument panel.

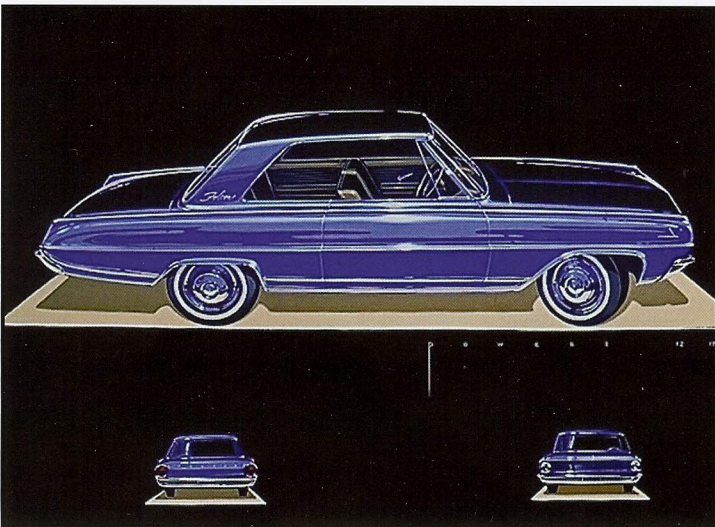




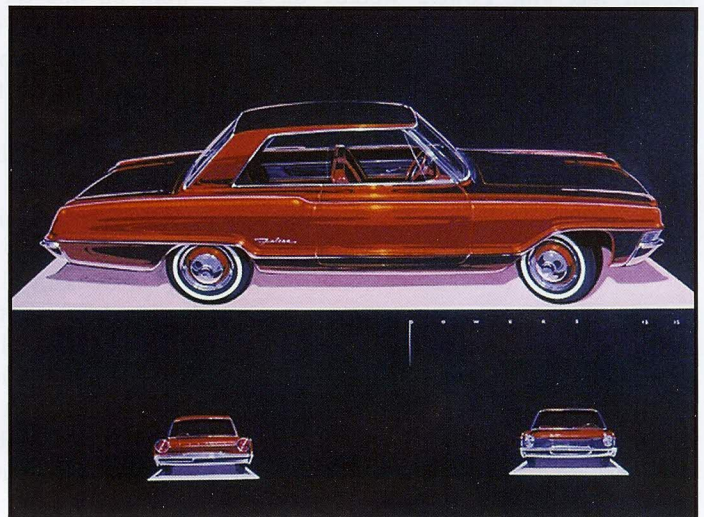
*More show car concepts, including this one with wrap-around front bumper and brushed aluminum top.*



*This design has a retractable roof and parallel-opening doors. The front bumper is shock-mounted.*



*The Falcon facelift proposal done in 1960 would give the car a more streamlined, graceful look.*



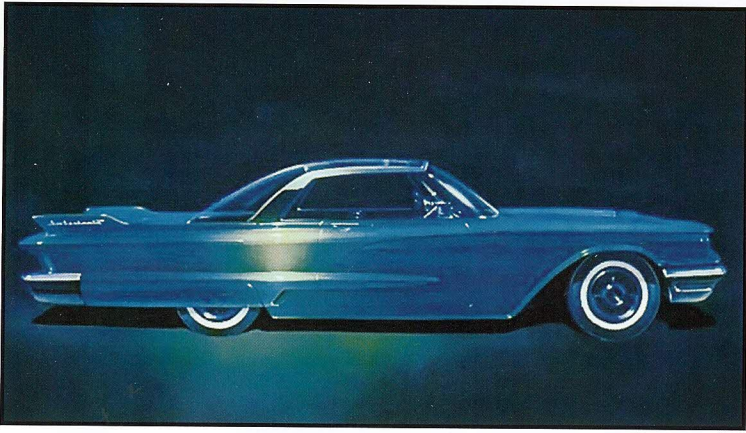
*Another Falcon facelift would provide a heavier, more contemporary impression.*



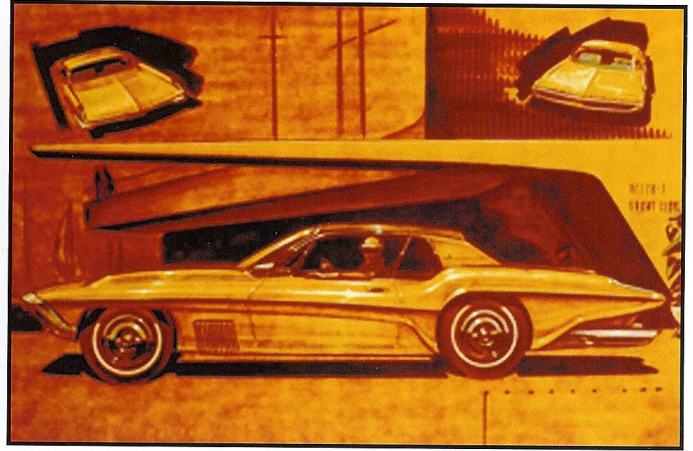
*This Mustang proposal was done at the beginning of the program, before the package was determined.*



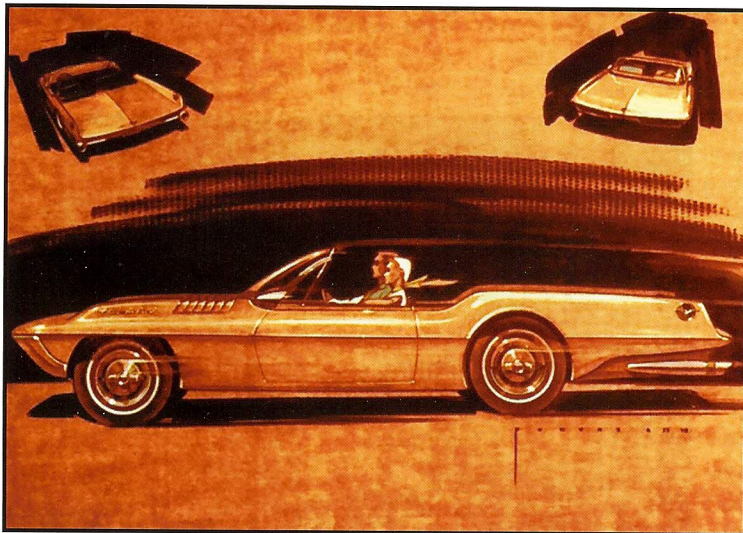
*A sporty Mustang. Later it was decided to do a four-passenger car using the side profile of the Continental Mark II.*



*There was controversy over doing a new body style for 1961. Here is Powers' idea to facelift the 1958-1960.*



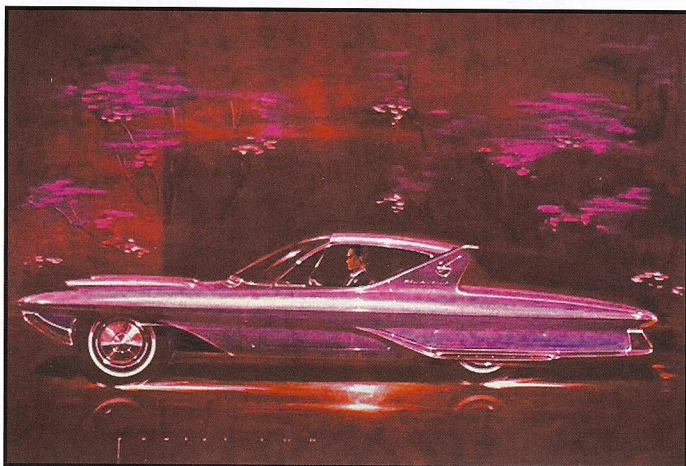
*Powers did many proposals searching for an exciting theme for the 1961 Thunderbird.*



*This idea, shown as a convertible, was very sporty. Note the floating emblem in the rear fender,*



*And another, more conservative, which served as inspiration for the "La Galaxie" show car.*

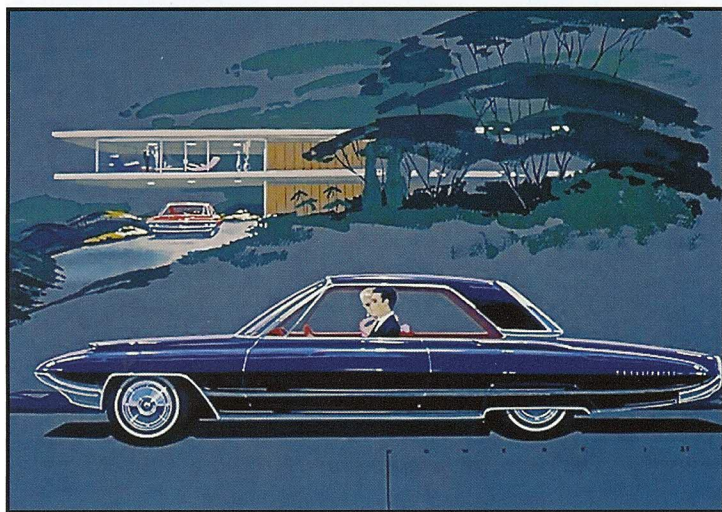


*Even this very futuristic concept was considered. It showed aircraft and rocket influence.*

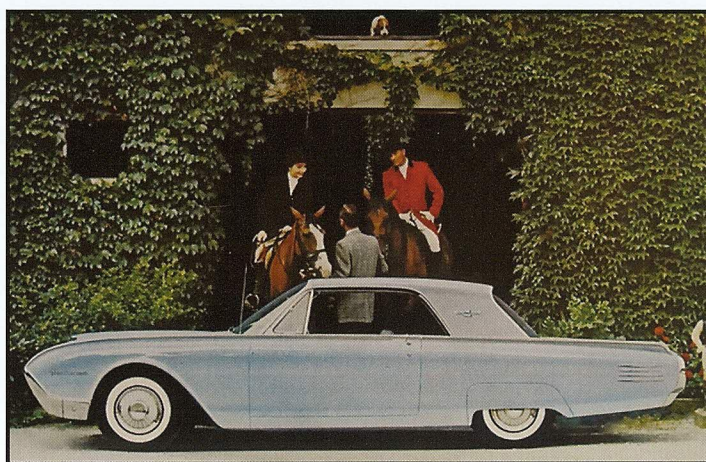


*Finally, the deadline for the 1961 came. The Studio Manager allowed Powers to do one side of the clay model while he did the other. Powers' side with the big "blast tube" was chosen.*

*The fins were found to be too costly to produce along with the Lincoln at the new Wixom Plant.*



*Shown here is Powers' final design, though it was later modified for production feasibility.*



*This is the 1961 production Thunderbird. The major character of Powers' original design is maintained.*



*This was a great departure from the 1958-60 "Square Bird", and the 1961 was called the "Rocket Bird".*



*Shown in Powers' garage is his own like-new 1961 Thunderbird. It has many first place concours awards,*



*Later, he did proposals for the 1964 Thunderbird. They were not as wild as the 1961 Thunderbird.*



*These designs were the very beginning of what finally became the 1964 Thunderbird.*