

Ford Taurus is one for the history books



The 2018 Ford Taurus SE, it seems, is part of the last generation of the iconic sedan that the automaker first introduced in the mid-1980s. FORD

Chris Woodyard
USA TODAY

At a time when companies loathed taking risks, Ford couldn't have made a bolder move than to create the Taurus, a sleek, European-style sedan that stood apart from the boxy, clunky American cars of its day.

Ford's bet-the-company move in 1985 was emulated again two decades later when another risk-taking and revered executive, CEO Alan Mulally, revived the Taurus nameplate the company had abandoned.

Now Taurus is going away again, most likely for all time. Ford announced that as part of its move to beef up its truck and SUV lineup, it's going to kill the Taurus, along with the Fiesta, the Fusion and its small van, the C-Max. Focus will be recreated as a more robust hatchback, the Focus Active. The only car in the existing lineup that will remain is the iconic Mustang.

These days, Taurus is a vestige of the past. While full-size cars ruled U.S. highways through the 1970s, the gas-

price shocks that followed made mid-size models such as the Fusion the most popular. Now even they are overshadowed by small crossovers.

Taurus is seen mostly on highways in its police version, but even that market has turned to SUVs.

Yet Taurus' place in automotive history is secure.

In the mid-1980s, Ford wanted a game changer. Sedan design had grown stale. Taurus would be completely different — a car that people would proudly want to park in their driveways to show off to neighbors.

"Taurus will live on in history as one of Ford's brightest ideas," said Leslie Kendall, curator of the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles. "A lot of other manufacturers looked at the Taurus and said, 'We had better catch up.'"

John Clinard, a semi-retired public relations executive for Ford, recalled the nervous moments when Taurus was introduced.

"It was a big gamble," he said.

With the car's lack of a conventional grille and rounded, rather than squared

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Curator of the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles

off, shape, consumers brought together to critique future designs in focus groups hated it. Ford, showing a courage that few companies nowadays would muster, moved ahead with a conviction that it had a potential hit on its hands.

"It was a car that did not research well, but people knew in their gut this would work," Clinard said.

They were right. Sales roared for the Taurus and its Mercury sibling model, the Sable. The station wagon version was as shapely as the sedan. Enthusiasts embraced a performance version, the SHO, for Super High Output.

Ford says even though Taurus and the other car models are going away,

drivers should look to the future. It hopes people will come to see its reinvigorated lineup of SUVs and crossovers as the cars of tomorrow — sleek, practical and fuel-efficient.

"I think the Taurus was a fantastic vehicle for Ford, and I think our new lineup is even cooler," said Jim Farley, president of Ford's global division and himself a fan of Taurus' SHO version.

Still, that's not much comfort to enthusiasts such as Ron Porter in Lake Orion, Mich., owner of a 1989 Taurus SHO in "currant red."

He bought it in 2008, and it's worth more today, he said. "People still like it."

The SHO version was a car that people could drive to work during the week and race on weekends.

Porter, a member of the national SHO Club, which brings Taurus fans together in droves to kick tires, said it will hurt to see it go.

When Taurus SHO came out, the idea of a modern Ford-built, high-performance sedan "was pretty radical," he said. Now, "Ford people are left without that kind of option."

Should fliers be forced to watch the safety video?

George Hobica
Special to USA TODAY

Whenever there's an emergency on a plane, we see the same disturbing images of passengers who either never watched a pre-flight safety video or chose to ignore it. Three examples:

■ Passengers escaping crash landings in San Francisco and Dubai, carrying their luggage and not wearing shoes.

■ Passengers disembarking a plane in the middle of the Hudson River without their life jackets on.

■ Passengers, most recently on Southwest Flight 1380, who had no idea how to wear an oxygen mask.

I could go on.

So why does this happen, and what can be done about it?

Airlines spend millions on safety videos, updating them, making them "watchable," and spicing them up with humor and celebrities in some cases. But no one listens.

Most airline passengers believe no harm will come to them when they fly. And while it's true that death is extremely rare in commercial aviation, serious injuries do happen, most often because of air turbulence when passengers have ignored the advice to keep seatbelts fastened while sitting, even if the seatbelt sign is off.

And although many frequent fliers think they know what to do in an emergency, in fact most probably haven't listened to the safety videos in years, and if you quizzed them, they'd flunk.

You've probably noticed that the content of safety videos is virtually the same no matter what airline you fly. The International Civil Aviation Organization, whose members are chosen by national regulators such as the FAA in the U.S., establishes basic information that all airlines must include in the videos, according to Campbell Wilson, who produces videos for Singapore Airlines and spent well over \$1 million redoing Singapore's latest videos.

Much of what is included in these safety videos is there because something happened unexpectedly during a past emergency. The bit about waiting to inflate your life jacket until you're about to jump out of the plane? That's because when a hijacked Ethiopian Airlines jet ditched in the ocean, many passengers who inflated while still inside the plane died when rising waters lifted them to the ceiling, where they were trapped and drowned.

The bit about keeping your shoes on?



A bit of explanation could go a long way with safety demonstrations. GETTY IMAGES

When a plane makes an emergency landing, and you have to run away from burning wreckage on a tarmac hot enough to fry an egg, your feet won't suffer third-degree burns, and you'll be able to run to safety faster.

And yet airlines continue to create videos that no one watches.

I truly believe that if the videos explained the reasons behind the instructions they give, people would listen more. For instance, the exhortation to "place the mask over your mouth and nose" could be changed to "place the mask over both your nose and mouth because otherwise you won't get enough oxygen and you'll pass out."

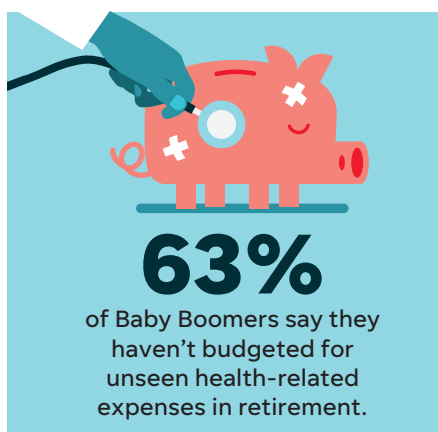
I flew recently on Japan Air Lines. Rather than humor or celebrities in the video, they use animation, and it's all very serious and straightforward. But it

was way more informative than many I've seen on other airlines. To demonstrate leaving the plane in an emergency, a line of animated passengers waits at the exit door, and one by one they pull the cord on their life vests as they leave the plane. The video also shows the correct way to jump onto the slide, and when one passenger tries to leave with his bags, the flight attendant stops him.

I have two suggestions. First, airlines should make it a requirement that passengers put down reading material, iPads and smartphones and watch and listen to the safety briefing. Cabin crew should enforce this.

And second, although I appreciate a sense of humor, this is no joking matter. I'd like to see all airlines follow JAL's lead and show in greater detail the do's and don'ts of flight safety.

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SOURCE The NHP Foundation survey of 1,000 adults 50 and older
JAE YANG, KARL GELLES/USA TODAY