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A Sedan for Straightening Up and Flying ...

## A Touch of Gray

By Eric Tegler October 12, 2012 | 6:17 am | Categories: Automotive

Lincoln 2013 MKS EcoBoost · \$49,800 base, \$52,600 as tested · Lincoln

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Photo courtesy Ford Motor Company

In about five years, the entire Lincoln product range will be revamped. The company's familiar, fleet-friendly rides will be replaced with more distinctive vehicles. The makeover starts this fall with the mid-size MKZ sedan, but for the time being, the full-size, Ford-Taurus-based MKS is Lincoln's flagship baguette.

Introduced in 2008 and refreshed this year, the MKS represents an interim step in Lincoln's brand revitalization. Amid all the transformations, Lincoln is relying on the MKS to be the car that keeps a satisfied smile on the sun-wrinkled faces of its core customers: loyal (read "aging") Town Car buyers, and the not-to-be-ignored livery services operators who've wheeled us to and from the airport for two decades.

The MKS is surely not a Town Car, but it has the trunk size and rear seat volume to suffice as a replacement. Yes, its rear leg room (38.6 inches) and trunk room (19.2 cubic feet) don't match the voluminous LTC. But whatever yoga-stretch space you give up, you win back in tranquility, thanks to increased sound deadening. If you choose the EcoBoost option, you also get active noise-cancellation, similar to what's found inside your Bose headphones.

The previous model's aluminum-dominated dash has been replaced by one with more subtle brightwork and wood accents. The instrument cluster is lifted straight from the Ford Fusion, but the center stack is new. It's here you'll find the new SYNC with MyLincoln Touch technology, which is accessed by a large touchscreen. The MyLincoln Touch variation on Ford's SYNC system is standard on all MKS trim levels. You also get the voice-command system, along with the parking-assist and lane-keeping nannyware systems. I prefer these off, and I'm assuming I'm not alone — with all the various audio and visual proximity warnings, driving feels like an arcade game.

As for MyLincoln Touch, even for a Gen-Xer like myself, it's less than intuitive. I was unaware the climate control fan speed could be altered by sliding a finger across the lower "ridge" in the center stack until a Lincoln rep clued me in. As with other functions on and off the touchscreen, these gestures require the right amount of pressure. The MKS' buyer demographic will surely require a thorough briefing on all the touch-sensitive controls at the dealership before setting sail.



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Photo courtesy Ford Motor Company

The shape of the MKS has always been loaf-like, but for 2013 it has been considerably re-dressed, from the front fascia and HID headlamps all the way back to the new exhaust tips and LED tail-lamps. I like the added character lines in the hood, and the new grille is better, but it gives the front-end a bit of a Phyllis Diller look. (MKS buyers will get the reference.) Like the Taurus, the MKS is crossover-big. I parked my tester next to a Mazda CX-7, and though the Japanese steel is larger, I was struck by how similar in size the two appear. Twenty-inch rims often make a car look out of scale, but they suited the MKS EcoBoost well.

## Lincoln's stack of 'bot-ware is abetted by a continuously controlled damping system, which monitors and adjusts suspension settings up to 500 times per second.

The 2013 MKS receives other refinements, of course: a new powertrain, new suspension technology and a new interior. The base 3.7-liter V6 and the all-wheel drive EcoBoost 3.5-liter versions offer more power, the latter engine now up to full Taurus SHO-spec with 365 horsepower and 350 pound-feet of torque.

Ride and handling benefit from the application of Lincoln's "Drive Control," which lets you tailor all the important parameters: ride firmness, throttle response, shift feel, steering response and traction control. Lincoln's stack of 'bot-ware is abetted by a continuously controlled damping system, which monitors and adjusts suspension settings up to 500 times per second. There's also a torque vectoring control system, which dials out understeer by applying brake force to whichever front wheel is experiencing less grip during turns.

The result is some accomplished handling for a 4,500-pound sedan — if you select the firmer "Sport" suspension mode. Unfortunately, this requires punching the five-way button on the left side of the steering wheel through seven sub-menus to reach the suspension selections. Happily, your chosen settings stick until you change them again. If Lincoln is headed in a younger, hipper direction, why can't it offer a more obvious and sporting-minded three-way dial on the shifter quadrant?

Leave the suspension on "Sport" whether the six-speed transmission is in drive or sport, and the MKS stays confident and tidy even when approaching the limits of grip. With the suspension in "Normal" or "Comfort" mode, and the MKS grows progressively sloppier to the point where it reminds one of a crossover ... or a Town Car.

With a sticker just south of \$43,000 for the base model (and almost \$50,000 for the EcoBoost), the MKS resides in a segment with some more accomplished, much sexier competitors. Lincoln says it has made conquests of domestic and imported competitors, but that list must be relatively short. From both a dynamic and arguably technological standpoint, the MKS splits the difference between what Lincoln has been and what it seeks to become. Real progress will begin to be measured with the MKZ's arrival.

**WIRED** The 3.5-liter EcoBoost almost makes this a "Hot Rod Lincoln." More character than a Town Car. Trunk room aplenty for the wife's checked baggage.

**TIRED** The tall, Wonderbread-like profile. Poor rear visibility. MyLincoln Touch needs a touch-up. So-so fuel economy. Nearly \$50K?

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dan1101

Weird from the front, looks like a Camry from the side/back.

I know this is a flagship vehicle but shouldn't the concentrate on making the tech mostly automatic and user friendly? For example, older people seem to LOVE those headlights that automatically turn on and then off after the car has been turned off for a couple minutes.

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