

Flashback FAIRMONT

Story and pics by Craig 'Style' Counsell



The sixties was a busy decade. Rock 'n' roll progressed into rock, hair got longer, the Beatles spearheaded the British music invasion into the USA and muscle cars were born. Performance V8s found their way into family wagons and by 1966 one could buy a top of the line Ford Fairmont with a factory 289 under the hood. This XR long-roof is one of those '60s survivors...

On the showroom floor with an asking price of between \$2350 and \$3250 (depending on model and factory options ticked by the buyer) the all new 1966 XR Ford Fairmont lured many a discerning buyer. V8 versions equipped with the two-barrel 289 Windsor and Cruise-O-Matic auto delivered just over 200 horses, so mum got her easy-to-drive family grocery-getter while dad had fun on weekends (driving the car, that is).

This particular 1966 XR Fairmont, now under the ownership of Rob and Maree McBrier of Paraparaumu, was imported into New Zealand (assembled in Australia) sometime in late 1966/early 1967. Its early history is a mystery but what is known is that long after countless oil

and tyre changes and the coats of factory wax being washed away, the once gleaming wagon found its way onto a suburban lawn behind a shed in Otaki, where it was literally rusting in peace.

In 2009 a friend of Rob and Maree's went in search for a donor car for a project he was working on and stumbled across this factory V8 XR. He decided it was too good to part out and called Rob to see if he was keen on the wagon as a project for himself. Rob's interest was piqued and he cruised north to check it out.

The Fairmont had been parked up for some time and the owner was unsure whether it would start. A price was settled and Rob eagerly tipped some gasoline down the carburettor and fitted a battery he





had with him. After a few cranks the 289 fired up. That wasn't the only thing that went up; the seller then decided that since it ran okay an extra \$500 was required. Rob was (kind of) happy to pay it. As tempting as it was to drive it, the wagon was trailered home and a teardown began. Rob's attention to detail meant no aspect of the rebuild would be neglected. He obtained a few panels to replace those that weren't good enough to repair and even managed to source a genuine Fairmont electric tailgate from Australia. That alone has a good tale with MAF involvement. Son Robbie is an accomplished panelbeater, so he and Rob spent hours upon hours bringing the body back to life; the swinging sixties had seen this wagon party hard! With the new panels fitted, remaining original panels resuscitated, and the Fairmont badging removed to give a smoother look, the body was given its final prep before being sprayed by friend Kane Watson in Rob and Maree's choice of colour: 2009 Ford Fiesta green. Underneath was also rebuilt. All new suspension with Nolathane bushes was fitted, and the brake system was given a complete overhaul. Wanting to keep the wagon true to the era, a set of Cheviot Hustlers were fitted, shod with new rubber, all right at home under the cavernous guards. Although it ran, the Windsor was tired. Being meticulous with the build, Rob handed the block over to Steve Hunwick at Automotive



NZR FEATURE:

1966 XR FORD FAIRMONT
Rob and Maree McBrier, Paraparaumu

CHASSIS

Frame: Factory unibody design, 111-inch wheelbase.
Suspension: Fully rebuilt suspension with Nolathane bushes. Front end is independent with coil springs and gas shocks, rear end comprises of parallel leaf springs (lowered 50mm) and gas shocks.
Brakes: Ventilated discs up front, drum brakes on the rear, remote factory booster.
Steering: Factory non-power steering.
Wheels: Genuine old school 14-inch Cheviot Hustlers.
Tyres: Hankook rubber: 195/60 front, 235/60 rear.

DRIVETRAIN

Engine: Factory-issued 289 Windsor fully rebuilt by Steve Hunwick at Automotive Reconditioners Limited in Otaki. Block sleeved back to standard spec, forged pistons with static compression ratio 9.8:1. Scat I-beam rods, Crower cam, Edelbrock Performer intake manifold sports an Edelbrock 600 carburettor topped off with finned oval alloy air cleaner. Intake and stock rocker covers in traditional ford blue. Modified headers from Summit Racing combine with a dual system that's all HPC coated. Ignition is an electronic MSD unit with a Pro-Billet dizzy. Cooling via stock radiator.
Gearbox: Factory Cruise-O-Matic with column shifter.
Rear end: Borg Warner LSD with 2.77:1 cogs.

INSIDE AND OUT

Body and paint: Factory Fairmont wagon, replacement sheetmetal where required. All panel work carried out in owner's shed. Paint is 2009 PPG Ford Fiesta Green with House of Kolor clear, all laid down by Kane Watson. Shaved badges and tailgate trim. Factory bumpers, lights and electric tailgate.
Interior: Factory seats, refurbished in black vinyl tuck 'n' roll by Kohl Rod and Custom in Tawa. New carpet, hoodlining and door trim. Dash painted, new dash pad.
Audio: 289 cubic inches of V8.



Reconditioners in Otaki. Steve sleeved the block back to stock, machined and fitted all new internals and topped it off with a new Edelbrock intake and carb package. Once detailed the engine and transmission were slotted back into the engine bay. Modified headers (all HPC coated in polished silver) were added and Rob took care of the wiring; not bad for a fitter/welder by trade, huh? An all new electronic ignition system fires the XR up and the factory 62-litre gas tank remains in the hind quarters.

The cabin was left to Bomber and Zach at Kohl Rod and Custom in Tawa. Like Rob and Robbie, this father and son team also worked magic on the long-roof - by completely refurbishing the interior in black tuck 'n' roll with new carpet and hoodlining. With the gauge cluster out, Rob and Maree's daughter Cara used her orange nail polish to bring the needles back to life. The combination of Kohl Rod and Custom's trim work, and the exterior green paint carried through to the interior, has resulted in a period perfect, clean and classy look. Any form of audio system is yet to be fitted - the rumbling bass note of the 289 suffices nicely.

Now finished, the '66 delivers a very cool flashback to simpler times.






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