

MAKING ITS MARK

Big Lincoln shows the brand is finally hitting its stride *BY JOE SAGE*

Lincoln has worked hard to prove itself to still be, well, the Cadillac of Fords. But for the past couple of decades, it has seemed less Cadillac-ish and more reskinned, badge-engineered Ford-ish.

This is now well on the way to being corrected. Various style treatments have come and gone, most recently the waterfall grille (still on about half the lineup), which worked well for elegance and brand distinction, but less so for images of power and strength. Enter a new unification effort.

As the lineup itself has evolved, so has its nomenclature. For the past dozen years or more, the group has borne a set of painfully indistinguishable letter codes: MKC, MKS, MKT, MKX, MKZ—presumably evoking the classic Lincoln Continental Mark series, but not the kind of brand names that embed themselves top-of-mind when it's time to go vehicle shopping. Fortunately, Lincoln seems to have finally gotten the memo on this.

The new-in-2017 Continental full-size luxury sedan departed from this (goodbye, MKS) and also introduced a new grille and overall style. For 2018,

the MKC, MKT and MKX linger with their old names and the waterfall grille (a sure sign that more change is coming), while the MKZ kept its old triple-alpha name but received the new grille.

For 2019, a new Nautilus will officially replace the MKX, and the Aviator badge will return, effectively (though so far not officially) replacing the MKT. That leaves MKC and MKZ. The MKC has already been shown for 2019, with the new grille treatment but the old name. Perhaps MKZ—not yet shown—will get its short-lived past Zephyr name back along with the new grille next year?

Yes, take a deep breath—that's exactly how difficult these names have been to follow. But the big Navigator flagship utility—the bold new version of which we are driving here—was never pushed into that MK-whatever naming scheme. All it needed was the new styling, now tied in with the Continental flagship sedan. The new Lincoln grille does convey heft, style, luxury and a healthy degree of dominance—but not arrogance, as the big Navigator's most obvious competitor is famous for

in your rear view mirror. It's maybe not a hundred percent proprietary to the brand (it's a bit reminiscent of one-time cousin Jaguar), but it is about a hundred percent fit to the brand.

The roughly hundred-thousand-dollar price tag on our Black Label example here is also a good fit for a full-size, three-row luxury SUV with seating for eight or over 100 cubic feet of cargo volume behind the front seats—and, in fact, you can get into the Navigator game for just \$72,555 for a rear-driver or \$75,210 for a 4x4. (There is also a long wheelbase—the Navigator Extended Length, or Navigator L for short—with full cargo volume of over 120 cubic feet, starting at \$79,255 and running to \$96,905 for a long-wheelbase Black Label.)

Luxury land yachts decades ago used to mimic the home living room, with perhaps a plush button-upholstered suede sofa for a front seat. Those days are long gone in both vehicles and homes. The interior of the new Navigator features extremely comfortable seats—which neatly avoid the current trend toward quilting, while also conquering the need for perforated leather for cooling, by creating a pattern with those perforations. The seat shells are firm and thick, while the cushions are thin and form-fitting. Well done. Add a luxuri-

ously and usefully wide wood-face console deck, and we realize this may still match a living room, but now the most stylish and modern kind.

All three rows are nicely accommodated in this big Lincoln—not only with 40-plus legroom for all eight occupants, but with a big double sunroof that can be variously controlled, front and rear, tilted open for fresh air or shielded from the sun.

The interface team has worked hard on this vehicle, with generally superior results, though in some cases the quest for elegance or tech-trickery overrides functionality. One instance is the shift interface, a subset of a horizontal chrome trim bar (see below) functioning as a pushbutton shifter. There are ribs on two key bars (R, D), but you still have to look, as they are in line with your finger's path, so you don't really feel the ribs.

When you change audio volume or climate temperature, a huge circle zoom-animates to fill the entire screen with superfluous (volume by number, which is of no value, or one huge temp, which wipes out the more useful left/right temps otherwise displayed). This could be shown with a one-inch inset, if it were even needed at all. If you also want to change the station, forget it—anything else is impossible till it finally fades away again.

Power folding rear seats are easily operated via a matrix of buttons in the left rear, although it is set up at 90 degrees to the seats' actual orien-

tation, another detail that could so easily be fixed.

There are fully six or seven drive modes, not only bearing names that depart from the common normal-eco-sport settings, but also each with a descriptive slogan. Normal is “effortless and balanced”; Conserve is “for efficient driving”; Excite is “for responsive and engaged driving”; and so on. Settings for slippery, deep and climbing conditions have even longer descriptors.

Acceleration and handling are not quite Euro-precise, but for a three-ton American craft they're more than up to the task. Even its 40.8-foot turning circle feels trim for this big eight-seater. And torque is prodigious: a huge bonus from its shared Ford Expedition DNA is tow capacity of more than 8000 pounds (8300 for 4x4, 8700 for 4x2).

Lincoln Navigator is making notable inroads in the marketplace against not only Cadillac but also luxury Europeans such as Mercedes-Benz and Land Rover—with sales up by triple digits (more than double) year-over-year so far, while buyer profiles have broadened to include younger, tech-savvy clients who appreciate such inclusions as WAZE, Alexa, Android and Apple integration.

Bold but not arrogant, powerful yet refined, and with a name you can remember, the Lincoln Navigator—marking 20 years this year and now in its fourth generation—is clearly more than ready to claim its turf in the luxury big SUV market. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

BUILD/SEATSunitized welded steel body / 8	
ENGINE3.5L twin-turbocharged V6	
HP/TORQUE450 hp / 510 lb-ft	
TRANSMISSION10-spd auto w SelectShift	
DRIVETRAIN4x4 (4x2 RWD avail)	
SUSPENSIONF: indep short & long-arm,	
(SLA), coil-over shocks, stblzr bar	
R: independent multi-link,	
coil-over shocks, stblzr bar	
STEERINGadaptive	
BRAKESF: 13.8 vent 2-piston / R: 13.8 solid	
WHEELS / TIRES22" / P285/45HR22	
LENGTH / WHEELBASE210.0 / 122.5 in	
TURNING CIRCLE40.8 ft	
LEGROOM (F/2/3)43.9 / 41.1 / 42.3 in	
CARGO CAPACITY19.3 / 57.5 / 103.3 cu.ft	
TOW CAPACITY4X4: 8300 lb (4X2: 8700 lb)	
WEIGHT5855 lb	
FUEL / FUEL CAPACITYprem recmd / 23.0 gal	
FUEL ECONOMY16/21/18 (city/hwy/comb)	
BASE PRICE	\$93,705
BLACK LABEL INCLUDES: Chalet theme Venetian leather interior w Lincoln Star perforated seats, panoramic vista roof, 22" ebony black painted 21-spoke wheels, SYNC3, Revel Ultimate 20-speaker audio, AM-FM-SiriusXM-HD radio, voice activated nav with SiriusXM traffic and travel link, front console CD player, 40-passthrough-40 heated 2nd row seats, technology package, illuminated power running boards, heavy-duty tow package.	
CHROMA MOLTEN GOLD PAINT	1750
30-WAY FRONT SEATS w massage.....	1250
REAR SEAT ENT w wireless headphones.....	1995
CARGO PACKAGE	420
DESTINATION CHARGE	1195
TOTAL	\$100,315

