



Living Large in a Lincoln

By Roger Witherspoon

They call it the Goat Trail, and on a good day it's a bad ride.

You enter the one lane snake from the east side of the Bear Mountain Bridge, just south of West Point, where the road begins a steep winding drop more than 400 feet from the mountainside to the shore of the Hudson River. The single lane road is a series of curves and switchbacks flanked by the rising mountain on one side and a straight drop on the other.

It is a road which demands that drivers pay strict attention, a task complicated at night when motorists may or may not turn off their bright headlights in time to avoid blinding an oncoming car.

I drive that route frequently enough that I usually do it with one hand on the headlight switch. On this occasion, however, I noticed that the lights dimmed before I touched them, and resumed the full force of the high density headlamps, whose beams shifted in the direction of each sharp turn. It seems the radar system in this luxury sedan had the ability to detect headlights or tail lights up to 500 feet in front of the car, and adjust the strength of the headlights accordingly. Its warning radar can detect objects as much as 1,500 feet in front of the car, a bonus in a region where there are more than 1,000 collisions between autos and deer.

It was a pleasant surprise in the technological luxury road trip that is the new Lincoln MKS, which is intended to be the flagship of the Lincoln line. It is aimed at

those seeking a mid-priced, full sized, luxury performance car; a market that has been grabbed in recent years by the Acura RL, Infiniti M, and Lexus GS. While it is never going to drag race with those three, the MKS may well give them a run for the luxury money.

The technology behind the adaptive headlights is part of the allure of the MKS. Ford, financially the healthiest of the three American auto makers, is revving up its Lincoln line and attempting to get away from its image as a producer of big boats used primarily by limo drivers to haul the high lifers and police departments to haul the low. But Ford hopes those fleet cars will no longer be the main image people have when they think of its Lincoln division. And the company is pinning its hopes on the MKS to anchor the top of the Lincoln line.

The MKS is new, rather than a retooled version of its Town Car or a longer version of the mid-sized MKZ. The experience starts up front, with the distinct, slashing, chrome grill and long sloping front. The sides are wide, a distinct departure from the trim look of most of its competitors. This is a deliberate throwback to the styling of the large Lincoln boats of the 50s and 60s – but it does not look ungainly. The windows seem small inset in such a sea of heavy metal, but the overall impression is pleasantly solid, rather than bloated.

Under the hood, the MKS has a 3.7-liter V-6 engine cranking out 275 horsepower. That's low for a car weighing nearly three tons and, as a result, the acceleration is just average and the top speed is just 130 miles per hour. It is not a car to take road running against Lexus, Infiniti, or Acura. Next year, however, Lincoln is coming out with a larger engine pushing 100 more horses and twin turbo chargers which should let the big car run with the big dogs on the road. How that powerhouse upgrade will impact the current \$47,000 price tag remains to be determined.

But this is a luxury car intended for those who are demanding but not in a hurry. Inside, where you spend your time, the technology and thoughtful touches stand out. The windows are small and the seats are set low in the car. While that limits some of the range of view, the MKS has side radar – in addition to backup cameras – to assist you in backing up and avoiding obstacles you cannot see. The interior is not dark or claustrophobic, however, since there are two skylights: one for the front which can tilt or slide completely open, and one for the rear. There are sun screens for each.

The seats are deep, soft, wide, leather and powered: both the front and rear seats may be heated or air cooled, depending on your choice and the outside weather. The leather arm rests in the center and on the doors – which curve slightly outwards – ensures that you won't have sore elbows at the end of a long trip.

Then, there is the next generation of Ford's integrated SYNC system, the voice or manually operated, everything-control which can run the navigation system, cell phone, regular or satellite radio, CD player or iPod, MP3 player or flash drive inserted into the convenient USB port. The media system's recorder lets you build your own internal playlist in the built-in juke box capable of storing 150 hours of music. The sound emanates from a 600-watt THX II system consisting of 16 speakers and a 10-inch sub woofer. The eight-inch color screen used for the navigation system can also show DVDs when the car is not moving.

Lincoln's are an acquired taste. The styling is for those who seek sedate and classy, rather than sleek and racy. The interior, however, is for all who demand

performance in their technology and comforts but with understatement rather than flair. As the leader of the new Lincoln lineup, the MKS is worth a second ride.



2009 Lincoln MKS AWD

| | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| MSRP: | | \$47,260 |
| EPA Mileage: | 16 MPG City | 23 MPG Highway |
| Towing Capacity: | | 1,000 Pounds |

Performance / Safety:

3.7-Liter Duratec V6 aluminum engine producing 275 horsepower and 276 pound-feet of torque; all wheel drive; 6-speed automatic transmission with electronic manual mode; 19-inch cast aluminum wheels; power rack & pinion steering; 4-wheel disc brakes; traction and electronic stability control; adaptive high density headlamps; fog lamps; reverse sensing system and backup camera; adaptive cruise control; forward sensing system; dual stage front air bags; driver & passenger side airbags.

Interior / Comfort:

AM/FM/Sirius satellite radio; 600-watt THX II sound system with 12 speakers and 10-inch sub woofer; DVD player; CD, MP3 & iPod player; USB port; SYNC voice-activated control system; touch-screen or voice navigation system; tilt & telescoping , leather wrapped steering wheel with fingertip cruise and entertainment controls; Bluetooth; front & rear sunroofs; heated or cooled front and rear leather seats; powered front seats.