ELEMENTS OF INDUSTRIAL ONOMASTICS: THE NAMES OF *FORD* MODELS

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Abstract

Over a century of activity, the international *Ford* motor company has produced hundreds of models, covering the entire range of vehicles. A genuine example of technical craftsmanship and American industrial design, *Ford* models are also an interesting object of study from the perspective of industrial onomastics. In this article we will analyze an extensive list of the most diverse names assigned to these models.

Key words: *industrial onomastics*, *metaphor, xenism, alphanumeric indicator, marketing*

Résumé

Dans un siècle d'activité, la société automobile internationale *Ford* a produit de centaines de modèles, en couvrant toute la gamme de véhicules automobiles. Véritable exemple d'art technique et de design industriel américain, les modèles *Ford* sont aussi un intéressant objet d'étude de la perspective de l'onomastique industrielle. Dans cet article on s'est proposé d'analyser une liste étendue de plus divers noms attribués à ces modèles.

Mots-clés: *onomastique industrielle, métaphore, xénisme, indicatif alphanumérique, marketing*

The American manufacturer *Ford* is one of the world leaders in the field of automotive industry. Over a century of activity, the *Ford* motor company has produced hundreds of models, covering the full range of vehicles: cars, race and rally cars, prototypes (including models used in the movie industry), utility cars and multirollers (vans, off-road vehicles, MPVs, SUVs), light trucks and trucks, buses, tractors, military cars. An example of technical craftsmanship and American industrial design, *Ford* models are a proof of industrial onomastics ingenuity, the company giving, over time, the most diverse names to the vehicles they manufactured.

There is an international onomastic pattern in the automotive industry, which, by simplification, includes the name of the manufacturer, of the model and, where appropriate, the alphanumeric indicator (method of naming by letters and/or figures), concerning the equipment level and/or technical data (motoring, transmission, generation); some other times the alphanumeric indicator does not have a real referent, but represents a marketing strategy in itself[1]. The process is part of the so-called brand language[2],which equally indicates a public objective, one of marketing and an internal objective, part of strategic management, because it includes design and/or production codes. The function of brand language is to transmit corporate identity as well as the

[1] *Automotive trim nomenclature*, https://en.wikipedia.org.

[2] For an elementary definition of the concept, see *Brand language*, https://en.wikipedia.org.

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specificity of products marketed under a brand, both domestically and especially internationally, where a world-wide producer can encounter major cultural differences, which the universal language of advertising (represented by the minimalist direction of the advertising spot and the slogan) does not always overcome. The names of *Ford* models essentially seek to differentiate products from those of their competitors by metaphorically exaggerating quality and functionality, as well as by promoting brand traditions. We have not studied and described the full model naming scheme (most of the names include different submodels and generations), which, anyway, has varied over time, while mainly analyzing only the basic name (*Ford* ***Fiesta***)[3]. One should mention that *Ford*'s onomastics process is obscure: studying the original commercial brochures available on the internet, we have not found any references to the origin of the names. The process is often aleatory, established by the board of directors or within the company's marketing department. The situation is the same in the case of any major automotive manufacturer: the customer does not need to know how a name has been reached, he/she must identify himself/herself with the car as such. A dose of mystery increases the attraction of the potential customer for a car.

In line with the established study objectives, we have identified some onomastic categories of the names of *Ford* models.

In the first decades of production, when marketing resources were limited, and the automotive market customers were fewer, *Ford* models were named by alphanumeric indicators (*Ford Model A*, *Model AC*[4], *Model B*, *Model C*, *Model S*, *Model T*, *Model 77*, *Model 82A*), which indicate the number of the model or prototype from 1903 until the 1940s. The alphanumeric method has been preserved over time and, although it is rarely used for serial cars produced after 1940 (*Ford LTD II*, *Ford ZX2*), it is mainly used for race and rally models (*Ford C100*, *Ford GT40*, *Ford P68*), or prototypes (*Ford 427*, *Ford Cobra 230 ME*, *Ford F-150 Street*).

The category of toponyms is very diverse. It involves: country names (these indicate, where appropriate, the place of production abroad): *Ford Anglia* (model named after the Great Britain declared war against Germany, in September 1939, produced in England); names of cities outside the USA: *Köln* (manufactured in Germany until 1935), *Landau* (originally a German town name, where it was first manufactured in the 18th century, a luxury carriage model with a convertible roof; the name comes from the fact that this model was provided with a vinyl roof), *Vendôme*, *Versailles*[5] (historical cities in France, tourist destinations; these models, produced in France, are luxurious, with many chrome elements), *Cortina* (the name comes from the winter resort in Italy, Cortina d'Ampezzo; the association of the locality with this model is explained by the fact that

[3] For model names, we have consulted the following source: *List of Ford Vehicles*, https://en.wikipedia.org. To avoid redundant citation of the sources and the unnecessary overloading of notes, please note that all information on *Ford* models has been obtained from *Wikipedia* resources by entering the name of each model on the Google search engine. Where we consulted other electronic documents, they were mentioned as such. With the intention to avoid an undesirable amount of information, we have not included in the article, with a few exceptions, data on the years in which the models quoted were produced, although the chronological references have a certain relevance from the onomastic point of view.

[4] An example of *Ford*'s internal encoding for the first models: model A of 1903 was equipped with the stronger engine of model C, resulting in the *Ford Model AC*.

[5] This model was produced in four versions: *Versailles*, *Trianon*, *Régence*, *Marly.*

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several cars were run on the bob track of the resort called "Cortina Auto-Bobbing"[6], in an advertising action), *Granada* (a very beautiful Spanish city, marked by the Moorish civilization; a luxury model), *Torino* (Italian city, considered the seat of the Italian car industry, the model being thus associated with the main features of the Italian car industry: technical quality, speed and attractive design), *Capri* (Italian island; a fastback coupé model made in Europe, an exotic name for a very popular car), *Verona* (an Italian city famous for its beauty, considered a symbol of love; the model is a small family car), *Del Rio* (a city in Texas, in a semiarid area; the model is an utility car – the full title is *Ford Del Rio Ranch Wagon*), *Fairlane* (the name comes from Henry Ford's estate, Fair Lane, near Dearborn, Michigan), *Fairmont* (a city in West Virginia, USA), *Durango* (Durango is a state in Mexico, and a city in Colorado near the New Mexico border; coupé utility manufactured in California). The toponyms of Spanish origin often designate utility models which are thus positioned in relation to the arid climate and the desert location specific to the southern USA and Mexico[7].

Oronyms are names used for prototypes and models with large sales: *Ford Alpe* (prototype), *Atlas*[8] (mountain in Northwest Africa; prototype), *Eifel* (mountain range in Germany; model produced in Germany until 1939), *Taunus* (mountain range in Germany; produced in Germany), *Everest* (peak in the Himalayan Mountains; SUV).

Anthroponyms are rarer. The *Edsel*[9] model comes from the name of Edsel B. Ford, the son of Henry Ford. This naming was against the Ford family, by a decision of the board of directors. The car did not sell and caused huge damage to the company. Besides the technical and commercial causes (the model was luxurious, expensive, in a crisis period, with poor technology, and the design was unattractive), another explanation for the failure was the unpopular name that did not help potential customers to identify themselves with the product. Ironically, *Edsel* has become synonymous, in the American industrial marketing culture, with failure: in marketing jargon, unsuccessful products are commonly called *Edsels*. The *Shelby Mustang* model shows that the *Mustang* saw an ultra-performance version in collaboration with Carroll Shelby, the race car manufacturer. *Crown Victoria* (also known as *Crown Vic*) "Queen Victoria" was a popular, reliable model that inspired prestige and luxury, widely used as a taxi and police car.

The category of xenisms (from the perspective of English) is diversified, but Spanish origin names are predominant (similarly to Spanish toponyms), through the Mexican and Cuban cultural influences, especially in the southern USA. Xenisms denote, by the exotic names, uniqueness, utility, reliability and also worldwide manufacturer character: *Ford Corcel* (Ptg., "stallion"; the model, produced in Brazil, was sold in Latin American countries), *Corrida* (Sp., "corrida"; prototype), *Del Rey* (Sp., "royal"; the model, produced in Brazil, was sold in Latin American countries), *Fiesta*

[6] The town hosted the Winter Olympics in 1956.

[7] Spanish origin names were popular in the American auto industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s: *Cadillac Eldorado*, *Cadillac Cimarron*, *Chevrolet El Camino*, *GMC Caballero Amarillo*, *GMC Caballero Diablo* (see also Dan Nosowitz, *Cracking the Secret Code of Car Names*, www.atlasobscura.com).

[8] Equally, the name of this prototype may refer to Atlas, the mythological character.

[9] *Edsel* was a *Ford* group. To choose a suitable name, the marketing department turned to Marianne Moore, the modernist poet, in 1955. She proposed an extensive list of eccentric names or, in any case, totally inappropriate, from which we quote: *Utopian Turtletop*, *Pastelogram*, *Dearborn Diamanté*, *The Intelligent Whale*, *The Resilient Bullet*, *The Ford Fabergé*, *Andante con Moto*, *Anticipator*, *Regina-Rex*, *Mongoose Civique* (Shaun Usher, *Utopian Turtletop*, www.listsofnote.com).

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(Sp., "celebration, feast"; small, very popular car), *Mondeo*[10] (from the Lat. *mundus* "world"; widespread family car, the name indicating the manufacturer's global ambition for this model), *Fiera* (Sp., "beast, wild animal"; the SUV model produced in the Philippines), *Galaxie*[11] (Fr., "galaxy, pleiad"; the car was manufactured from 1959 and the name was inspired by the race to conquer the cosmic space that dominated the era[12]), *Lobo* (Sp., "wolf"; light truck produced in Mexico), *Pampa* (Fr. *pampa*, a word from an indigenous South American language; a two-seater, produced in Brazil), *Pinto*[13] (Sp., "spotted, mottled"), *Ranchero* (Sp., "farmer, worker in a ranch"; coupé utility), *Sierra* (Sp., "mountain range, cordillera"; family car), *Tempo* (It., "rhythm, cadence"). Though not part of the category of xenisms, I have mentioned here a word borrowed from Latin: *Raptor* (Lat., "robber, looter", in English certified with the meaning of "prey bird")[14].

The metaphor (which we have also noticed in the class of xenisms) remains the most used method for naming *Ford* models. Through the metaphorization process (we often find the implicit comparison with animals[15], as well as metaphors from the field of science, astronomy, etc.), the fundamental characteristics of the models are indicated: reliability, safety, power, utility, grace - beauty - design, technological advance): *Ford Abeille* (Fr., "bee"; a practical car produced in France, with a name that indicates industriousness, adaptability and popularity, conceived as an agricultural utility car, for outdoor trips, or for small merchants[16]), *Comète* (Fr., "comet"; car with luxury elements, produced in France, a sports coupé), *Consul* ("consul, consular representative"; technically advanced model, manufactured in England, with a stylized, elegant bodywork), *Contour* ("silhouette", in arts "proportion, harmony"), *Corsair* ("corsair, pirate"), *Cougar* ("American panther"; sports coupé), *Country Squire* ("a landowner", a model that sold very well and had an extremely popular name in the USA[17]; a very large family car in the station wagon class), *Elite* (Fr., "elite"; luxury model), *Escort* ("guard"; a very popular family car), *Executive* (in American English, "manager of a company"; luxury limousine), *Falcon*, *Focus*[18] (a Latin word, used in physics, meaning "center" by extension), *Fusion*[19] ("union, merge"; a technical word, also "melting"), *Laser* (physics; model in the compact class with an impact name, exclusively meant for the emerging

[10] For this name, *Ford* used a marketing firm (*Interbrand*) with the intention of creating an international name for a global market model (*Mondeo. Interbrand*, web.archive.org/web).

[11] *Ford La Galaxie*; not to confuse with *Ford Galaxy* (1995), which is a distinct model.

[12] Other examples: *Mercury Comet*, *Mercury Meteor* (*Mercury* is a *Ford* brand), *Plymouth Satellite* (see also Dan Nosowitz, *Cracking the Secret Code of Car Names*, www.atlasobscura.com).

[13] In English, in the phrase *pinto horse* "spotted, skewbald horse". The model was related to *Ford Mustang*, from the so-called *pony car* class.

[14] See COD, 857; *Ford F-150 Raptor*: the *F* letter indicates in the company's nomenclature the class of light trucks and medium power trucks (*Ford F-Series*, https://en.wikipedia.org).

[15] *Ford Cars with Animal Names*, www.jenningsforddirect.co.uk.

[16] The *Abeille* model was produced from 1952 until 1954; the name seems somehow naive, but such onomastic categories had a marketing effect at the time.

[17] The name was used without interruption for 41 years. This remarkable onomastic longevity was surpassed in *Ford*'s history by only two models: *Thunderbird* and *Mustang.*

[18] The *Ford* company was sued by *Burda,* the German editorial group holding the *Focus* magazine, for trademark infringement. But the Americans managed to use the name for the European market and, in particular, for the German market.

[19] The name of the model comes from its features, one of the versions (*Ford Fusion Hybrid*) being built with two different engines: electric and gasoline engine (*What do the Names of the Ford Models Mean?*,www.thenewswheel.com).

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markets in Asia, South America, Africa, etc.), *Lynx* (prototype), *Galaxy* ("pleiad"; MPV model), *Maverick* (in American English, "wandering cow, unbranded calf", by extension "wanderer, loiterer"; the logo of the coupé model has some horns); *Mustang*[20] (the model inaugurated the American *pony car* class; affordable sports coupé), *Orion* (constellation that can be seen worldwide; small family car sold throughout Europe), *Probe*[21] ("space probe", without a crew, which collects and transmits environmental data, which explores; sports model); *Puma* (small coupé), *Ranger* ("policeman", "forester"), *Scorpio* (Scorpio constellation and sign; limousine), *Taurus* (Taurus constellation), *Zephyr* ("breeze"), *Zodiac*. We have retained a name associated with American native folklore: *Thunderbird*[22] (the name of this very popular model refers to a legendary creature from the folklore of the North American indigenous population, a bird with supernatural powers). SUV cars express, through a metaphoric process, power, agility, adventure spirit, the exploration of an inaccessible territory: *Ford Bronco* (in American English, "wild horse or half wild horse"[23]), *Edge* ("ridge, peak, peak of a mountain"), *Escape* ("run"), *Endeavour* ("effort, boldness"), *Expedition*, *Explorer*, *Kuga* (familiar pronunciation of the English *cougar* "puma"[24]), *Raider* (participant in a raid, round-up; corsair"), *Territory.*

We have also retained a model with a trivial name, manufactured in 1956: *Ford Parklane*[25] ("parking bandwidth"). Sometimes the name is chosen randomly and has no meaning, except the fact that it has low sound and graphics: *Ka* is a small name[26] for the smallest model produced by *Ford.*

The names given to prototypes and experimental models produced over the years are very suggestive. We have selected a few names referring to aerospace terminology (*Ford Mach I*, *Mach II*, *Ford Thunderbird Saturn I*, *Thunderbird Saturn II*), and the field of music: *Allegro* (It., "fast, lively, joyful"; a fastback coupé model), *La Tosca* (the title of the famous opera[27] was given to a model with a futuristic design, conceived in 1955, never manufactured as mass production).

In the 1950s, *Ford* produced and named a number of independent models, simply, but efficiently, depending on the level of equipment (the submodels are identified

[20] The designer John Najjar, an admirer of *P-51 Mustang* hunting plane from World War II might be the one that suggested the name of the model. Another story suggests that the head of *Ford*'s market research division would have received a gift from his wife, a book by J. Frank Dobie, *The Mustangs*, which inspired him to choose this name.

[21] Because of polysemy (the meaning "medical probe"), the name is found in a top of the most uninspired names (Stirling Matheson, *The 25 Most Ridiculous Car Names of all Time*, www.complex.com).

[22] Brian Long, *Origin of the Thunderbird Name*, in Brian Long, *The Book of the Ford Thunderbird from 1954*, https//:books.google.ro.

[23] The word is borrowed from Sp. *bronco* "turbulent, brawler" (COD, 116).

[24] In Serbo-Croatian *kuga* means "wound, sore": this is a classical error of industrial onomastics caused by the globalization process.

[25] The writing was modified in the model name *Mercury Park Lane*.

[26] The only problem is about pronunciation. The name is pronounced with a long *a*, short *a* or with the letters pronounced separately. Although the *Ford* press office hesitated, the final indicated pronunciation was *Ka* as in *cat*: *a* pronounced like[æ] (Vijay Pattni, *Car names – the unpronounceables*, www.autotrader.co.uk).

[27] The name is in French. The Italian Puccini, the author of *Tosca*, was inspired by the melodramatic play of the French author Victorien Sardou, *La Tosca.*

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by the type of bodywork, designated by Americanisms[28]): *Crestline* ("top range"; *Ford Crestline Sunliner*, *Crestline Skyliner*, *Crestline 4-door Sedan*, *Crestline Victoria*), *Mainline* ("main range/basic range"; *Ford V8 Mainline Coupé Utility*, *Ford Mainline Ranch Wagon*, *Mainline 4-door sedan*), *Customline* ("personalized range, made to order"; *Ford Customline Country Sedan*, *Customline 2-door Sedan*), *Starliner* ("top range/reference range"; *Ford Starliner 2-door*[29] *Hardtop*). This onomastic method has been rarely used by *Ford*[30] and is generally little used by world car manufacturers.

Truck names (*Ford C-Series*, *CL-Series*, *L-Series*, *Model 51*, *Model AA*, *Cargo*, *Courier*, *Freighter*, *Super Duty*, *Transcontinental*), buses (*Ford Transit Bus*, *Ford 70*, *81-B*, *G997*, *R-Series*, *Ford Trader*), tractors (*Ford 1000*, *2910*, *3430*, *Workmaster*, *Powermaster*), vans (*Ford Transit* "transit, merchandise transportation", *Tourneo*[31]) are coded, alphanumeric or directly indicate the functionality of the vehicle, since these motor vehicles are not intended for the acquisition of the general public.

From the category of military vehicles, we have selected the *Ford GPW* model. This is the basis of the legendary jeep, and the decoding of the technical abbreviation is difficult. The history of the jeep begins in 1940, when the US army, against the background of an intensified program for equipping and modernizing the military, launches a bid for a military light, four-wheel drive vehicle, used in reconnaissance missions and other auxiliary activities. The government contract was granted to *Willys-Overland Motors*; later on, as the demand was very high, the government gave *Ford* the right to produce the *Willys* model under license: the resulting model was *Ford GPW*. *GPW* are *Ford* production codes. The decoding is performed as follows: *G* from *government (contract)*, *P* is an indication of the pieces manufactured for the 80-inch wheelbase, and *W*, to identify the *Willys*license (the full abbreviated phrase is *Government contract 80-inch wheelbase reconnaissance car Willys pattern*)[32].

The onomastic category of abbreviations is very important. First of all, we quote the international car abbreviations that fall within the onomastics of *Ford* models: *GT* (*grand tourer/touring*, after It. *gran turismo*, referring to a performance, sports and luxury car, capable of covering long distances rapidly), *GTP* (*grand touring prototype*, race car category), *GTX* (the letter X has an element of generic anonymity and besides, the *GTX* group has an impressive sound, superior to the *GT* abbreviation, so other decoding proposals are unrealistic[33]), *RS* (*Rally special*), *WRC* (*World Rally Championship*),

[28] For example (some translations are approximate): *coupé utility*, *sunliner* "convertible car", *skyliner* "having a glass roof", *hardtop* "with one side window", *ranch wagon* "utility/agricultural break".

[29] In American English car jargon, the *2-door, 4-door* models are called *Tudor* and *Fordor* (the two terms also appear in *Ford*'s commercial brochures).

[30] The method was also used to designate the independent model *De Luxe Ford* (manufactured from 1937 until 1940); in 1941, *Ford* introduced two levels of equipment (so they no longer represented different models, marketed as such): *De Luxe* and *Super De Luxe*, respectively. French terminology emphasizes the idea of luxury.

[31] From the Engl. *tour* "trip, journey", probably after the name *Mondeo*.

[32] The name etymology is very interesting, in the sense that the origin of the word *jeep* does not come from the *GP* initials, which abbreviate the phrase *general purpose* "general use/destination", used in the military technical language at that time for the *General Purpose Motor Vehicles* category (administrative, tactic, transportation vehicles, etc.). See, for the quoted material, and also for the deepening of etymological hypotheses, our article, DragoşVlad Topală, *On the Origin of the Word* jeep, in „Studii și cercetări de onomastică și lexicologie", VII, nr. 1-2/2014, Editura Sitech, p. 288-291.

[33] *What does GTX stand for*, https://answers.yahoo.com. Other attempts for decoding: *Grand Touring Luxury*, *Grand Touring Exclusive*.

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Cosworth (from the names of mechanical engineers *Mike* ***Cos****tin* and *Keith Duck****worth***)[34]. Phrases: *Ford GT*, *Ford GT40* (the figure indicates 40 inches, equivalent to 1.02 m, standard car bodywork height for the race cars in this class), *Ford Mustang GTP*, *Ford GTX1*, *Ford Capri RS*, *Ford Fiesta RS WRC*, *Ford Sierra RS Cosworth*.

Some letter combinations are false abbreviations, difficult to classify as such in the absence of official information or documents from *Ford*. This is why the interested public will always try to obtain the decoding of aleatory, meaningless combinations of letters, but following a marketing and branding strategy. *Ford EXP*, according to some theories, comes either from *experimental* or from the phrase *Erika Project Personal*: *Erika* is the code name for the European *Escort* model (to which the *EXP* model is related), and *X* is an indication for prototypes[35]; most likely, *EXP* does not mean anything. Another example is the combination *LTD* (*Ford LTD*), which has three possible decoding options: *luxury trim decor, limited trim designation* (for *Galaxie*[36]) or *Lincoln typ edesign* (a phrase that circulated in Australian brochures). Because none of these variants appears in *Ford*'s printed documents, the fourth solution, the right one, is that *LTD* does not mean anything. In general, abbreviations used in the automotive industry are difficult to decode. In the name *Ford ZX2*, *Z* comes from the *Zetec* engine, *X* from the phrase *generation X*[37] for which the car was conceived, and *2* from the coupé model; the *Zetec*[38] engine was named as such to avoid the original name *Zeta*, as *Ford* was threatened with legal action by *Lancia*, the owner of the *Zeta* trademark. *Zetec* therefore indicates a type of engine, but for some markets it has become a name that at some point designated a level of equipment (sports level[39]). The name of the *Ford Flex* model is easy to decode (from *flexible* "adaptable").

A new research direction should analyze in depth the names of submodels (according to the level of equipment and generation), the trademarks for *Ford* engines and gearboxes, and also the different names under which the same model was marketed depending on the country[40].

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[34] *Cosworth* is a British company specializing in the manufacture of high performance engines for race cars (*Cosworth*, www.cosworth.com).

[35] For instance: *Ford Mustang RSX* (concept car).

[36] *Ford Galaxie 500 LTD*; see also *Ford Galaxie 500 XL*, a name where *XL* is not an abbreviation.

[37] In a broader sense, the phrase "generation X", used in sociology and marketing, indicates the generation of people born between 1965 and 1982 (the delimitation is approximate); see *Generation X*, https://en.wikipedia.org.

[38] The engine names and gearbox names are highly appreciated trademarks as they support *Ford*'s general marketing. For the name of the first automatic transmission (1951), *Ford*, *J. Walter Thompson* advertising agency, and even *Time* magazine collaborated with the public by opinion polls. There resulted a list of more than 1,500 words, from which *Fordomatic* was chosen (also written *Ford-O-Matic*), a name suggested by Eleanor Knapp, a bank clerk in Detroit. This transmission was replaced in 1958 by *Cruiseomatic* (*Cruise-O-Matic*), while *Mercury* cars received the brand *Mercomatic* (*Merc-O-Matic*); for the information source and other interesting details, see *Ford Automatic Transmissions, An Anecdotal History, 1951-2001*, www.wordsmithllc.org, and also *List of Ford Transmissions*, https://en.wikipedia.org. At present, many trademarks are used for the engines used by *Ford*: *Duratec*, *Duratorq*, *EcoBoost,* etc. (see *List of Ford Engines*, https://en.wikipedia.org).

[39] For the UK market (in 1999), *Fiesta* had the following levels of equipment: *Encore*, *Finesse*, *Zetec*, *LX*, *Ghia.* For the information source and for details, see *Ford Zetec Engine*, https://en.wikipedia.org.

[40] One example: the *Ford Starliner* model was traded in Egypt under the name *Ramses Concord*. The process aims at identifying cultural landmarks specific to a local market with a certain personality. The names (and models) on the US market differ in many cases from those used in South America, Australia, Asia, etc.

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