Ford Introduces Next-Gen Connectivity Suite Called MyFord; Should Be Awesome

What iDrive? It's all about MyFord these days.

MICHAEL AUSTIN Published: Jan 6, 2010

We're already fans of Ford's Sync system for a number of reasons. It's easy to use, easy to understand, and, most important, it's widely available and affordable. At this year's Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Ford is showing off the next generation of its in-car connectivity, which promises new ways to interact with your vehicle. Ford is branding the new system MyFord (or MyMercury or MyLincoln depending on the vehicle), which makes us iWish all this McBranding would MyStop. It debuts later this year in the updated 2011 Ford Edge and Lincoln MKX, followed by the 2012 Ford Focus. The company says that 80 percent of Ford vehicles will have a version of MyFord available by 2015. Here's an overview of the new features and components.

The New Interface

The biggest news concerns the ways in which customers will interact with their interiors using both the basic MyFord system as well as the high-zoot MyFord Touch. Both use a combination of LCD screens and a five-way switch consisting of four directional arrows and a center “select” button. At this point, Ford is saying MyFord will be standard; it will include a 4.2-inch display in the instrument cluster and another one in the center stack. The optional MyFord Touch will come with three LCD screens, including two 4.2-inch displays in the instrument panel and a single 8-inch screen in the familiar position on the center stack. MyFord Touch also gets a second five-way controller for the additional screen in the instrument cluster. The left screen in the instrument panel (or only IP screen in the basic MyFord) shows vehicle settings such as stability control level, automatic headlamp delay, and parking assist, as well as tachometer or trip-computer information. The right screen displays audio and telephone information. The large center touch screen is laid out so that the four main functions (telephone, audio, climate, and navigation) correspond to a specific corner and color. There are also a number of personalization settings that allow folks to customize things like the center-screen home display, where owners can choose between a custom photo wallpaper, a summary of all four corners, or a set of customizable shortcuts.

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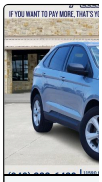

USED
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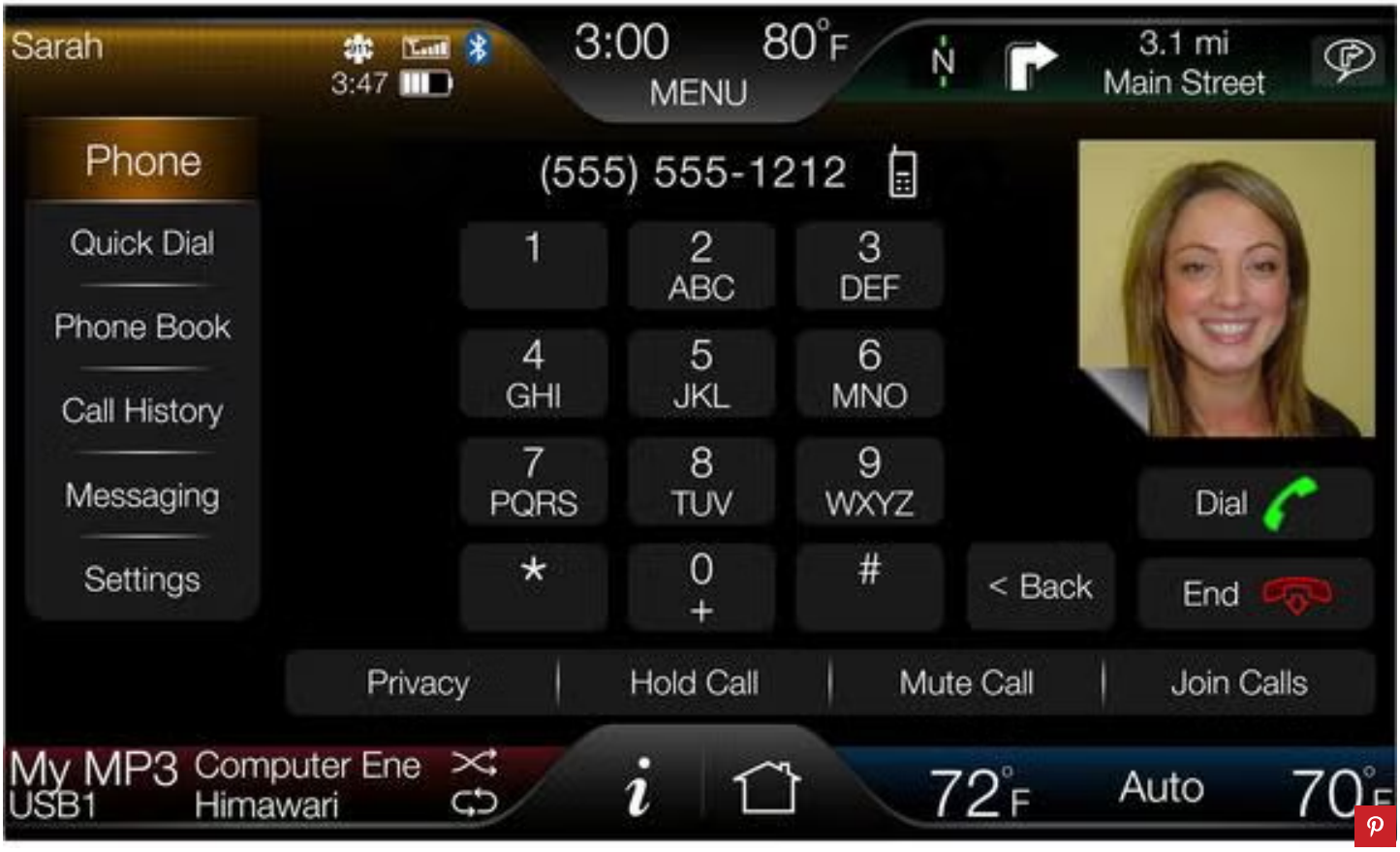
Lincoln Gets an Exclusive Feature

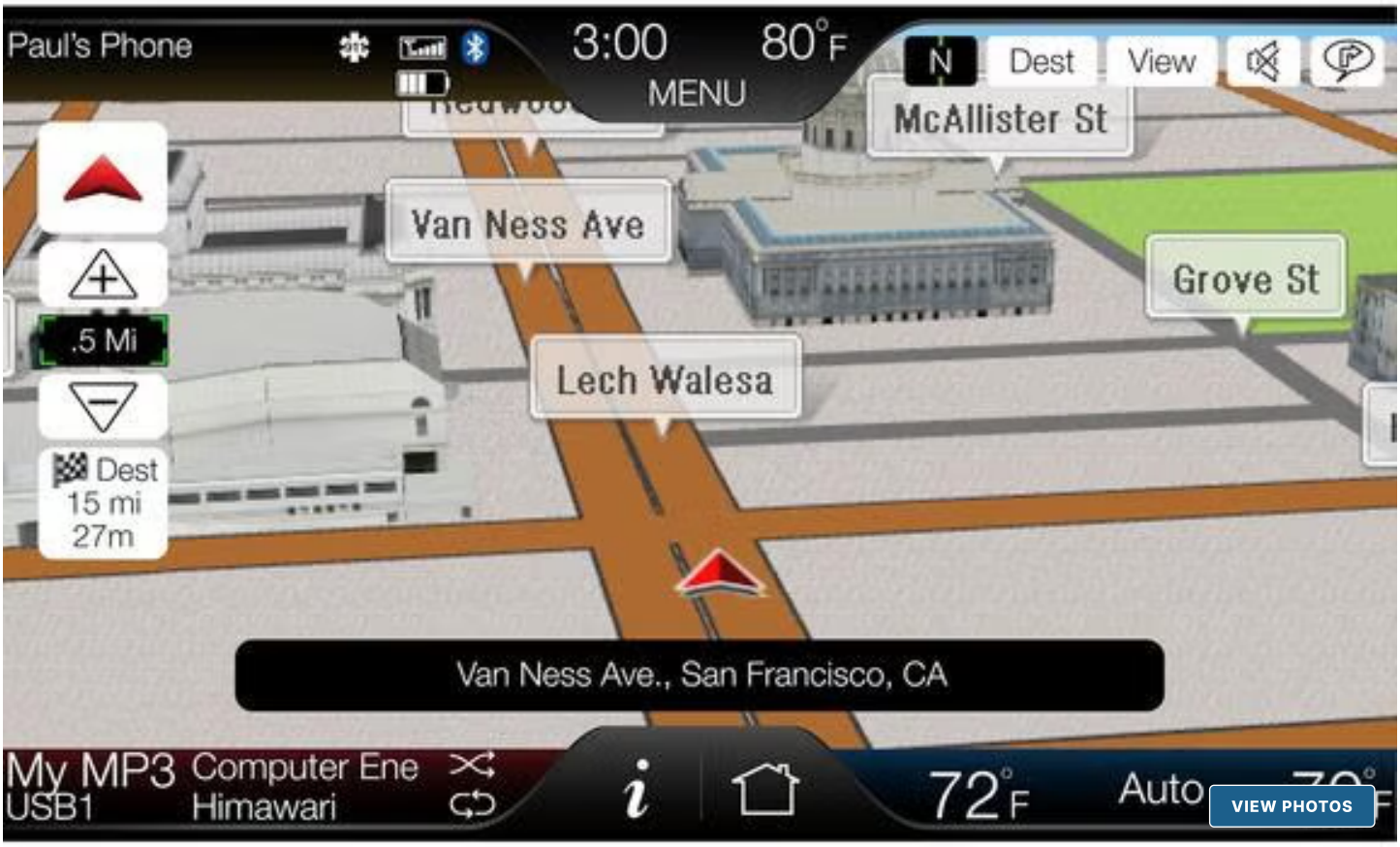
New Ford family interiors will have touch-sensitive capacitive switches, rather than hard buttons, for certain functions. The Lincoln version goes a step further with touch-sensitive slider bars for stereo volume and climate-control fan speed instead of the rotary knobs that will be on Ford vehicles. Swipe your finger along the slider and the settings change; a white light trails your motion. Our questions: Will your grandfather know how cool of a car he has? And how will they work with gloves?

Improved Voice Control



Development partner Nuance provides the latest generation of speech recognition, which it promises offers fewer prompts and better functionality. Navigation uses “one-shot” programming, so you can just rattle off an entire address instead of speaking the city, then the street, then the house number. To call someone, you just say “call [name]” instead of specifying that you want to use the phone first. And there are more functions for Sirius satellite radio, such as searching for music genres or specific sporting events using voice commands. We dig; it sounds like using the ship’s computer in *Star Trek*.

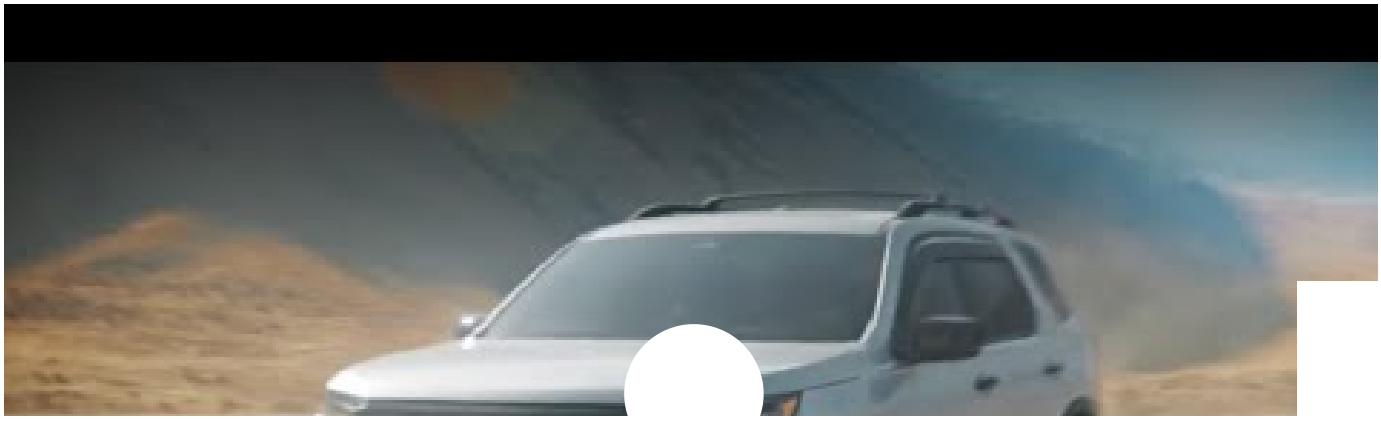
New Navigation



Both MyFord and MyFord Touch come with a new navigation system that runs entirely off an SD memory card, which allows the system to be updated more easily than hard-drive-based systems. As before, the nav works in concert with Sync and can access downloadable pre-set destinations, live traffic, gas prices, and point-of-interest information through either the driver's phone or the Sirius Travel Link service.

From The Brand

Provided by Honda



iTunes Tagging for HD Radio

MyFord Touch will include an HD radio receiver that receives higher-quality terrestrial radio. It will also allow you to tag any song you like (up to a limit of 100) that is saved on the radio until an iPod is connected. The list is then transferred to the iPod and you can download the songs you like either via computer, or wirelessly if you have an iPhone or iPod touch.

Wireless Connectivity

Sync will now have built-in Wifi, so you can connect to the internet through your home network or at your local coffee shop. It can also pair with an existing USB broadband modem, like those used in laptop computers, turning the car into a Wi-Fi hotspot for high-speed internet access. While parked, the driver can also use a browser in the MyFord Touch screen. In-car broadband isn't new, but we like how Ford lets you use hardware that you already have instead of forcing you to buy something new. The company's similar approach to digital media—such as plugging in your iPod instead of using an onboard hard drive—is one of the reasons we like Sync in the first place

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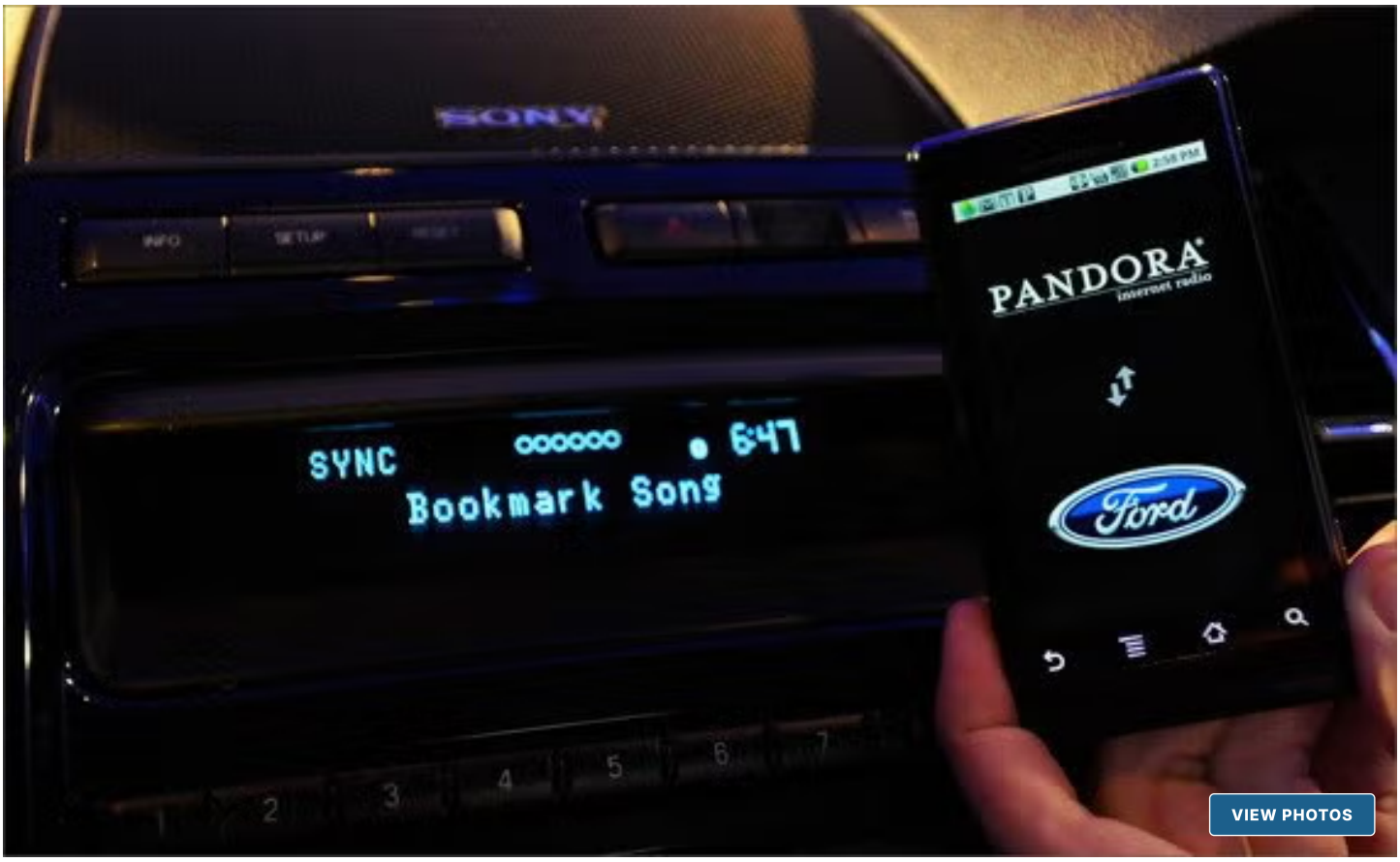
Apps Available for All Sync Versions



Ford announced during CEO Alan Mullaly's CES keynote address that iPhone and iPod touch applications will be available for Sync later this year. The first three will be Pandora, Stitcher, and OpenBeak; Pandora streams music, Stitcher streams podcasts and radio programs, and OpenBeak is a Twitter client. All of the apps are basically extensions of the existing iPhone apps, so programming the extra integration with Sync was fairly easy, according to the company. Both Pandora and Stitcher were able to develop the first versions of their applications in fewer than ten days. Ford's Doug Van Dagens, director of connected services for Ford, was speaking a little prematurely when he said that "some automakers are talking about creating an app store; Ford's is already up and running," because we can't get any exact date for when the apps will be available. We have been told that the apps will work with existing Sync systems, not just the new one seen here.

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