

Ford Tough: Bill Ford and the Battle to Rebuild Americas Automaker

David Magee

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It doesnt take a love of cars to appreciate the finer points of this audio book, which features the inspiring efforts of William Clay “Bill” Ford, Jr. to revitalize the Ford Motor company after years of decline in the 1990s.

The auto industry is by its nature prone to cyclical downturns, but Ford, family-owned for more than 100 years, experienced additional challenges from the repercussions of strategic decisions. When Henry Ford II ran the company in the 1940s, car manufacturing was the firms core business.

However, the strategy changed drastically when Nasser, President of Automotive Operations in 1997 and later CEO, drove an aggressive plan of divestiture into other automotive businesses. A former Ford aide reported that Nasser “wanted to own the value chain under Ford Motor Company,” by purchasing interests in other foreign motor companies including Volvo, Jaguar, and Mazda, as well as a chain of body shops and other related businesses.

The pace of change was too quick for the conservative company to handle, the acquisitions were overpriced, and the technology was more complex than expected. Some of the programs were unsuccessful, dealerships became alienated and disenchanted, and the company went into a serious decline. The book relates stories from former employees about the impact of the changes.

The author credits the charisma and hands-on leadership style of Bill Ford in turning the company around and restoring its status as one of Americas “Big 3” automakers. His rise through the ranks of the company to Chairman and CEO, his extreme compassion for employees injured in a plant explosion, and his environmental concerns made him likeable. His “back to basics” campaign and strategy of recruiting seasoned managers to lead the company, even coaxing a couple of them out of retirement, made him effective and exceptionally successful in reshaping the company and returning it to profitability. He was regarded as a “quiet Chairman,” but his integrity earned him the respect and loyalty of the companys employees.

Magee is owner and founder of Jefferson Press, a small literary publisher, and has written two other books- *Turnaround: How Carlos Ghosn Rescued Nissan* and *The John Deere Way*. Here, he focuses his final chapters on the success of the flagship truck F 150, the “new face of Ford,” and the Ford car and truck line in the 2000s, including the GT 40 sports car.

The narrators conversational tone makes the story come alive with the feel of an insiders view. This crisply written audio book chronicles the companys history with the twists and turns of a thriller, telling a captivating story with lessons to be learned about effective leadership and strategic response to change.

CINDY KRYSZAK (August 18, 2009)

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