

FORD MUSTANG ♦ 25 YEARS



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FORD MUSTANG: THE HISTORY OF A LEGEND

The time was right for Ford Mustang. In the early 1960s, a spirit of youth infused the automotive marketplace as World War II baby boomers became car-buying adults.

They wanted cars that were different from those of their parents -- cars equipped with bucket seats, floor-mounted stick shifts and high-performance engines. This generation wanted low price and sportiness, handling and performance, all packaged on one set of wheels.

Clearly, there was a market searching for a car, and Ford Motor Company committed itself to design it. In broad conceptual terms, it was to carry four people, weigh under 2,500 pounds and cost less than \$2,500.

On April 17, 1964, this concept became reality as the Ford Mustang was unveiled and took its place in automotive history. It did indeed seat four people, weighed only 2,572 pounds, and cost a reasonable \$2,368. It featured a 108-inch wheelbase, a 170-cubic-inch, six-cylinder engine and a three-speed, floor-mounted manual transmission. The Mustang had a comfortable ride, functional appeal, and embodied a spirit of fun and excitement.



The Mustang's long-hood, short-rear-deck styling promised performance and panache. And it offered enough options to fulfill that promise. Buyers could order Mustangs in three models -- convertible, hardtop or fastback -- and could equip them with powerplants ranging from the standard six to a competition-level, high-performance 289-cubic-inch V-8 that churned out 271 horsepower.

Initial response was overwhelming. On introduction day, a Ford dealer in Chicago locked the doors of Mustangs in his showroom because he feared for the safety of people trying to crowd into them. At a Garland, Texas, dealership, 15 prospective customers bid on the same Mustang, and the successful bidder insisted on sleeping in the car so that, as he put it, "they won't sell it out from under me before my check clears in the morning."

Mustang excitement spread beyond the showrooms. One enterprising restaurateur invited customers to sample his "hotcakes that were selling like Mustangs."

The favorable reaction on introduction day sustained Mustang's strength. The first-year sales estimate of 100,000 units was surpassed in four months. Some 22,000 orders were taken the first day. In just 12 months, more than 417,000 Mustangs were sold -- a record then for first-year sales. A further indication of Mustang's instant celebrity status was its almost instantaneous "cult" following: 472 Mustang clubs formed in two-and-a-half years, with a total membership of 32,000.

First-year sales held even more surprises. As expected, Mustang had enormous appeal among young people, with more than half of first-year buyers under 34 years old. The surprise was that 16 percent were in the 45-55 age bracket. Mustang seemed to bridge just about every gap in the market.

Young married couples purchased Mustangs as family cars; young singles bought them as sports cars; women bought just as many as men. About 50 percent of Mustang buyers owned another car, and over 60 percent were college educated. A majority of buyers ordered their Mustangs with a V-8 engine, power steering, power brakes, automatic transmission and a radio.

Mustang's reception immediately sparked a host of imitators. The long-hood/short-deck look became the most copied profile in the industry. By 1967, ponycars accounted for 11 percent of the market, and Mustang was out in front of the herd.

Since those early days, there have been Mustang performance cars, sports cars and economy cars. Through 25 years, along with the rest of the auto industry, Mustang has faced challenges from periods of recession, oil embargoes, changing cultural attitudes, and increasing requirements for emission control and fuel economy. Through the tough times, Mustang has survived and prospered. The youthful spirit that created a demand for a sporty, agile, performance car in the '60s is still alive and well today.

In fact, there have been three generations of Mustangs in its 25-year history -- each reflecting the mood of the times.

The first generation comprised models through 1973, when the original ponycar of 1965 quickly grew powerful muscles. A year after its introduction, the GT-350 and GT-500 models appeared. Through its first four model years, the car's lines became progressively longer, lower, wider, and in 1968 the potent 428 Cobra Jet engine was introduced.

Model-year 1969 produced Mustang's first significant styling changes, as well as more room, a more luxurious interior and more power. The "muscle-car" era was in its heyday. Mustang's Mach 1, Boss 302, Boss 429 (and Boss 351 in 1971) were the ultimate macho models of the day, with their racing-inspired hood scoops, air ducts, flared fenders, wide tires and rear spoilers.

By 1971, the Mustang was a full foot longer than it had been in 1966, with the most sweeping styling changes it had ever received. There was a flattened "sports roof," as well as a roomier, more comfortable interior.

The era of high performance ended with the oil crisis and increasingly stringent emission-control requirements. Mustangs of 1972 didn't look much different from the '71s, but "muscle" had disappeared from the automotive vocabulary, and Mustang's 1973 models marked the end of the first generation.

All-new for 1974, Mustang II was small and economical, with some striking similarities to the original Mustang of a decade earlier, and Motor Trend magazine named it "Car of the Year." It had an overhead-cam, four-cylinder engine, and came in notchback, fastback and Ghia models.

Familiar names also kept the heritage alive. Mach I was a fastback model in '74, and got a 302 cid V-8 for 1975. Cobra II was introduced as a 1976 model.

Mustang's third generation was introduced in the fall of 1978 -- totally new, built on the "Fox" platform, which it shared with the Ford Fairmont, Mercury Zephyr, and later with Thunderbird and Cougar.

The 1979-model Mustang was slightly larger (4.1 inches longer) than its immediate predecessors, and had more room inside. It also was 200 pounds lighter than the '78 model, thanks to engineering advances in the new design.

Its lowered front profile made for excellent (for the time) aerodynamics, with a 25-percent improvement in drag coefficient over the year before.

Response from the public was enthusiastic; Car & Driver readers voted it "America's most significant new car," and sales soared.

With some cosmetic changes and dramatic improvements in equipment and performance, the Mustang that was introduced as a 1979 model now leads the car line into its second quarter-century.

The Mustang GT was re-introduced in the fall of 1981, and four years later the car's power got a big kick from a 5.0-liter HO engine with electronic fuel injection. The 1987 GT model sported radically different aerodynamic bodywork below the beltline, making it one of the most distinctively "hot" looking Mustangs ever.

Nowhere has the Mustang mystique been more evident than on the race track. Early Mustangs dominated SCCA B Production amateur road racing in 1965, '66 and '67. On the professional circuits, Mustangs won Trans-Am manufacturers' championships in 1966, '67 and '70 (Jerry Titus and Parnelli Jones won drivers' titles in '67 and '70, respectively), and in drag racing Mustangs were regular winners at national events.

With Ford officially out of racing through most of the '70s and until 1981, Mustang figured prominently in its return. A turbocharged Mustang won twice in the 1981 IMSA GT series, and in Trans-Am racing, Tom Gloy scored Mustang's first victory since 1972 in the '81 season finale. In amateur racing that year, Mustang became the first domestic car ever to win SCCA's Showroom Stock A national championship.

In 1984, a Roush Racing-prepared Mustang won its first IMSA GTO race, the season finale at Daytona, and became a dominant force on the circuit for the next three years. Mustang won its class in three consecutive Daytona 24-hour races (1985, '86 and '87), and won both GTO drivers' and manufacturers' championships in '85 and '86.

Mustang also made its mark in professional drag racing, as Rickie Smith capped a series of winning seasons with the IHRA Pro Stock world championship in 1986.

In 1989, Mustang is returning for a full-scale assault on the Trans-Am championship -- its first since the early 1970s, and a fitting challenge, since it was in Trans-Am racing that Mustang established its race-winning heritage almost a quarter century ago.

###

For further information, please contact Jim Maxwell or Miche