

1964½ - 1965

The Mustang mystique Mania.

There are many stories much ballyhooed arrival daily newspapers and overseas journals carried

the newest entry in the Detroit sweepstakes. It's been estimated that nearly 30 million television viewers witnessed the unveiling on April 16 and, on the day of the launch at the New York World's Fair, over 2,500 newspapers ran advertisements.



was born in a burst of Mustang

about the long-awaited and of the Ford Mustang. Major U.S. news magazines and several "exclusive" features detailing the

Between March 9, when the first Mustang emerged from the Dearborn factory and early April, the company produced 8,160 so that each Ford dealer across the United States had at least one in the showroom. On Friday, April 17, the official launch day, crowds flocked to dealers and the media blitz leading up to the debut resulted in numerous apocryphal accounts.

- At an Alabama track, a pre-release Mustang pace car was mobbed by over 9,000 spectators eager to see one up-close and touch the new phenom. It took an hour to restore order and the race to get underway.

- A Chicago dealer had to lock his doors to ward off overcrowding and prevent the curious from hurting themselves.

- In Texas, the buyer of the last showroom model beat out 14 other bidders and slept in his car to assert ownership until his check cleared the next morning.

- A truck driver in San Francisco, transfixed by the sight of the slick new creation, drove through the dealership window.

- And in Pittsburgh, a Mustang up on a lube rack drew so much attention that the dealer couldn't get the car down until after closing time.

So it went, four million curious visited their local Ford showrooms that first weekend. Dealers couldn't get them fast enough, booking over 22,000 orders during the opening hours. The demand far exceeded expectations with 100,000 selling in the first four months. To meet the public's clamor, Ford's San Jose, California plant was converted to the production of the Mustang. One year later, On April 16, 1965, the 418,812th Mustang was sold in California, close to one half-million units in the car's first year -- a new record. By the end of the first full model run, April 1964 through August '65, a total of 680,989 were purchased, and by March 1966, the millionth Mustang rolled from the assembly lines. One compelling manifestation of the Mustang's immediate impact and

acceptance was its selection as the 1964 Indianapolis 500 pace car -- a scant six weeks after its April 17 introduction.

There's an interesting historic note that requires some elaboration. Did you know the 1964 Ford Mustang never existed? As far as company records are concerned, there are no 1964 or, as they were popularly dubbed, "1964 1/2 Mustangs." Those built between March '64 and mid-August '65 are known as "early 1965 Mustangs," whereas those produced after August 17, 1964 are referred to as "late 1965s." Suffice to say, the initial Ford Mustangs were all part of an unprecedented 18-month model production year.

What was the attraction of this overnight legend (be it "1964 1/2" or "early 1965")...just what kind of automobile had evolved from the engineering, testing and adaptations; from the several prototypes, from the preconditions of price, options, styling and performance?

For the record, 92,705 hardtop and 28,833 convertible "early" Mustangs were manufactured. And, based on the reception accorded the sporty new models, a fastback, also referred to as the "2+2," was introduced in September, 1964. "Late" production statistics reveal 372,123 standard, 22,232 luxury and 14,905 (with bench seats) hardtops; 65,663 standard, 5,338 luxury and 2,111 bench seat-equipped convertibles and 71,303 standard and 5,776 luxury fastbacks; Base sticker prices were \$2,321 for a hardtop; \$2,558 for a convertible and \$2,533 for the 2+2 fastback.

The original Mustangs styling featured a long, low hood and short rear deck, sculptured sides and a sport interior with standard components that had only been options up until then. Exterior colors alone came in a palette of over 25 shades -- from Raven Black to Wimbledon White, from Poppy Red to Pagoda Green, and from Vintage Burgundy to Twilight Turquoise. Interiors and trim also came in a variety and combination of shades.

The front end was accentuated by a honeycomb grille with the galloping Mustang emblem inside a chrome rectangle "corral" held in place by horizontal chrome arms and short, vertical braces; non-functional air intake gills on either side of the grille; slightly recessed headlights; chrome bumper and bumper guards, and amber turn signals/parking lights with chrome housings recessed in the valance extending below the bumper. The leading edge of the long hood complemented the upper edge of the front grille, contained FORD in block letters across the leading edge and curved under to meet the headlight assemblies.

The sculpted side presented a scooped-out channel or cove that started just behind the leading edge of the front fenders, becoming deeper as it progressed to a point just forward of the rear wheel opening. A chromed simulated air intake at the rear of the scoop completed the effect on the hardtop and convertible but was omitted from the fastback. Behind the front wheel openings the galloping pony emblem was superimposed over red, white and blue vertical bars followed by MUSTANG. The wheel well openings, both front and rear, were slightly flared. A three-inch, bright metal rocker

panel extended from the front to rear wheel wells on the fastback models and was an option on other '65s.

As counterpoint to Mustang's long hood was its short, slightly upswept rear deck that helped achieve a sporty elegance. The rear deck was left uncluttered. The tail lights, mounted behind the trunk panel, were given a bright metal bezel (or collar) around the lenses that were divided into three vertical openings that gave the illusion of multiple lights. A die-cast medallion, stamped FORD and MUSTANG around the perimeter, with the pony embossed over the tri-color bars on a black, ceramic center, was in fact the gas tank cap. The bright metal rear bumper added to the stylish accents. Extending across the slightly curved rear surface, the bumpers curved upward at the outside edge to meet the rear quarter panels' trailing ends. The rear valance enhanced the upswept rear contour curving smoothly into the trailing edges of the lower rear quarter panels. Brackets beneath the bumper completed the effect and back-up lights inserted into the valance were optional.

Wheels and tires came in a variety of option configurations, as did wheel covers.

The hardtop roof highlighted a sculpted concave indentation that started at the base of the rear pillars and continued around the rear window outline. This detail was omitted from the fastback model. Instead, the 2+2 incorporated air extractor vents in the side panels behind the doorways where the rear quarter window would appear.

The Mustang's interior was the focal point for the many options the car offered owners. Customers were offered their choice of five-all-vinyl interiors with pairs of color choices in vinyl or cloth in hardtops; standard bucket seats with a bench seat optional in the convertible and hardtop; a selection of floor-mounted shifters for manual or automatic transmissions located in full or shortened consoles; a steering column mounted clock/tachometer combination; and optional air conditioning under the instrument panel, to list but a few. The dash featured a foam rubber crash pad inside a vinyl-molded, color-keyed cover. All the instrumentation was mounted inside a long, wide bezel housing speedometer, odometer, warning lights and gauges.

The steering wheel was designed to resemble those found in many contemporary sports cars, with three centered spokes and simulated circular cutouts to effect a lightweight metallic look and feel. At the hub was the horn with the pony atop the three vertical color bars.

Under the hood, customers were given a selection of power plants. The "thinwall" small blocks were efficient, powerful and lightweight. When the car was first introduced, it came equipped with either a 170 ci, 101hp, 6-cylinder; a 260 ci, 164 horse, 8-cylinder, or a 289ci, 210hp, 8 cylinder engine. In the fall of 1964, the 170 ci was replaced with a 200ci variant; the 260ci and low-compression 289 ci were dropped from inventory, and a 289ci, 271hp, "high-performance," V-8 added. The latter was available in 2-barrel configuration capable of 200hp, or a 4-barrel version rated at 225hp and remained basically the same throughout the production year.

The chassis platform included side rails with five welded crossmembers to assure strength and rigidity. Body panels were welded to the platform forming an integrated steel shell. Heavier gauge steel was used on the platform for convertibles.

The car had an independent ball-joint front suspension with single lower arms and A-frame upper arms; constant rate shock absorbers; independent coil springs, and an anti-roll bar. The rear suspension constituted two rigid axles attached to calibrated, semi-elliptical leaf springs and two angle-mounted shock absorbers. The rear axle was the standard semi-floating, hypoid type. Drum-type brakes were standard equipment for both front and rear. Steering gear was the worm-recirculating ball type. The initial Mustangs came equipped with cooling systems and heaters with radiators for six-cylinder model having an 8 1/2 quart capacity, and 14 quarts for eight-cylinder models. Exhaust systems of early Mustangs used a traverse muffler located between the rear axle and fuel tank. Dual exhaust models had dual inlets and outlets and used two additional mufflers located forward of the rear axle. Later, the dual inlet/outlet mufflers were discontinued and replaced by resonators housed in the dual tailpipes.

There was one other modification made within the first months of Mustang production. Initially, the cars came equipped with belt-driven DC generators. In the summer of '64, the generators gave way to alternator charging systems.

The options-rich Mustang, both factory-built and dealer-available, provided choices that were about to expand even further as the car's first anniversary approached. The Mustang provided an interesting counterpoint to an apocryphal story attributed to Henry Ford, the company's founder. Ford, congratulated on the success of his Model-T, was asked if he would be offering the following year's model in an assortment of colors. Ford is said to have replied that customers could have the Model-T in any color they wanted -- as long as it was black!

SPECIAL EDITIONS

Elated over the ponycar's resounding reception by the American public. Ford management decided to sweeten its product mix. To mark the first anniversary, two option packages were made available.

The first was an "Interior Decor Group" that included among its accouterments padded sun visors; simulated woodgrain on the instrument panel and glove box door; bolstered seats and door panels; a walnut-like steering wheel; interior door courtesy lights; bright metal trimmed pedals, and a small herd of galloping ponies in relief on seatback inserts.

The other option package introduced was the "GT Equipment Group." The features included in this assortment were already available from existing factory installed regular production options, but taken as a whole, they constituted quite an attractive package. Available on 225 and 271hp, V-8 engines only, special features included fog lights embedded into the honeycomb grille; front disc brakes with the feature noted on the

brake pedal; rear bumper guards were displaced to accommodate twin exhaust trumpets that exited the rear valance; a five-dial instrument cluster in black and chrome mylar, a "GT" shield mounted behind each front wheel well, as well as on the gas cap cover, and a GT stripe placed along the rocker panels below the sculpted side cove. Numerous other mechanical or performance options -- from luggage racks to tissue dispenser, from remote trunk latch release to air horns -- were obtainable so buyers could personalize their Mustang.

Perhaps the single biggest break with then company policy was an opportunity to return to competitive racing, and what better vehicle for Ford's re-entry but the sporty, spirited Mustang.

In late 1964, Carroll Shelby developed a sports car capable of competing in Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) events using the Mustang fastback. Ford enjoyed enormous publicity and resultant sales advantages brought about by successful racing campaigns.

Shelby was a renowned sports car driver who captured many, if not most, of the prestigious rallies on the European circuit in the mid- to late 50s. Stepping out of the cockpit in 1960, the colorful Shelby turned his hand to building competitive race cars. He matched Ford's lightweight V-8 260ci and 289ci engines with the strong, ultralight open sports car bodies built by A.C. Cars, Ltd. of Great Britain. The result was his "Cobra," racers that replaced Ferraris as world champions in the early 1960s.

Designated the GT350, Ford's San Jose, California plant initially turned out 100 standard Wimbledon White fastbacks equipped with 289ci high-performance engines. These were delivered to Shelby's Los Angeles plant where he and his crew quickly modified them for SCCA inspection and certification.

Among the modifications were a fiberglass hood with functional air scoop, removing the chrome ornamentation in front of the grille and all other Mustang logos except for the gas cap; moving the horse and tri-color bar trademark to the driver's side of the grille; the addition of racing -style hood pins; a pair of wide blue racing stripes that extended from the front, below-bumper valance, up over the hood, over the roof and rear deck to the rear valance, and placement of a blue side stripe along the rocker panels with a "GT350" designation just aft the front wheel openings.

The GT350's interior was black and outfitted with a special instrumentation pod that included a tachometer and oil pressure gauge at the top center of the dash. The steering wheel was three-spoke aluminum with a wooden rim; seat belts were three-inch wide competition models, and a one-piece fiberglass shelf with mounted spare tire replaced the rear fold-down seat.

The standard 289ci "Hi-Po" V-8s, modified to crank out 306hp, featured an aluminum high-rise intake manifold, Holley 715cfm center-pivot float carburetor, finned aluminum valve covers, extra-capacity aluminum oil pan, Tri-Y exhaust headers, straight-through glass-pack mufflers that exited just in front of the rear wheels.

The GT350 suspension featured a larger, one-inch stabilizer bar; lowered upper "A" arms, rear traction bars and travel-limiting cables attached to the rear axle housing. Koni adjustable shocks were installed in place of stock components. The front end was stiffened with a one-piece export-type brace between the dash panel wall and two shock towers; a "Monte Carlo" bar was used between the fenders and special Pitman and idler arms installed for better steering. To adjust weight balance, the battery was removed to the trunk. Large disc brakes were installed on the front wheels and Galaxie station wagon drums were used on the rear. The standard wheel rim was a station wagon rim, but mag-alloy wheels were an option. A special five-spoke aluminum Shelby wheel, built to Shelby's specs by Cragar, was another option that included a chrome die-cast center cap with the initials "CS." Special Goodyear Blu Dot tires rounded out the package. Using lightweight components, approximately 300 pounds were removed from the GT350's overall mass making it a formidable contender.

Two versions of the special prototype were planned from the start -- an S-model for the street and R-model for competitive racing. The racing version had power boosted to 350hp; came equipped with a fiberglass front lower apron or spoiler that directed air to the radiator and front brakes; a functional side air scoop to force air over the rear brakes; an engine oil cooler; large diameter rear-exit exhaust pipes without mufflers; 15 X 7 magnesium wheels with enlarged wheel openings; a 34-gallon capacity gas tank, quick-fill gas cap and electric fuel pump; interior safety features such as a roll bar, shoulder harness and fire extinguisher; and dash panel instrumentation including tachometer, speedometer, oil pressure and temperature, water temperature and fuel pressure.

Transmissions were aluminum case Borg-Warner units with close ratio gears. Rear ends were large, shortened nine-inch numbers featuring a Detroit Automotive "No Spin" ratcheting differential.

The street model was capable of a 0-60 run in an average 6.5 seconds, with a top speed in the 130-135mph range. The racing version proved a winner immediately, capturing the bulk of 1965's SCCA B-Production competition. Of interest, to keep NHRA enthusiasts happy, a dragster version of the GT350 was also developed.

In all, 560 GT350s were built at the Shelby plant in Los Angeles that first year -- 516 street production models, 36 racing models and 9 drag cars. The street version retailed for \$4,547 while the competition model sold for \$5,995.

While the Shelbys may have emphasized handling and performance at the expense of ride and comfort, they were as close to a race car as one could buy from their friendly neighborhood Ford dealer.

The 1964-65 Mustang had to be considered a work in progress. During the 18-month production period, more modifications and changes occurred during that span than in the changeover from 1965 to 1966 models. The stampede to Mustang was on and its

acceptance seemed to carry over into the corporation's entire operation, engendering a spirit of challenge, transition, innovation. One of the corporate advertising slogans at the time perhaps sums it up best...

Before you buy any new car...STOP! See how Fords have changed!