

MUSTANG A SPORTS CAR FOR



THE MASSES

Consider the 1960's ... the Aquarius ... JFK,...The New Frontier ... LBJ...the Great Society ... the War on Poverty ... the Space Race ... man walks on the moon ... Pop Art ... the Beatles ... organ transplants ... civil rights ... nuclear non-proliferation ... the Concorde ... nonviolence ... environmentalism ... feminism... Woodstock. In sports it was Mays, Mantle, Maris and a lefty named Sandy ... it was Super Bowl I with Lombardi and Starr ... Namath's "guarantee" in Super Bowl III ... it was Aaron ... Ali ... Arnie... and Arthur Ashe.

It was also a time of civil disobedience...sit-ins...assassinations ... countercultures ... anti-war demonstrations ... campus unrest ... draft card burnings ... the Berlin Wall ... the Six Day War ... Power to the People ... the Chicago Seven ... Tonkin Gulf and Tet ... the Bay of Pigs ... Manson ... Mai Lai ... Altamont and Chappaquiddick. It was flag burnings and cities consumed in flame -- Watts, Detroit, Newark, New York, Chicago, Cleveland. It was the Torrey Canyon oil spill and the Santa Barbara blowout... the Apollo I tragedy ... Hendrix and Joplin ... Haight-Ashbury.

One might say the 1960's were the quintessence of Dickens' opening for The Tale of Two Cities -- "It was best of times, it was the worst of times."

Amid the change and tumult came unparalleled economic and technological growth and accelerated exchange of information. Industry was moving beyond domestic borders to become multi-national. The computer was replacing the calculator ... television more and more became the prime source of news and information ... distance was no longer measured in miles but hours and minutes ... major industrial powers in Asia and Europe had emerged from the ashes of World War II ... mankind was moving closer to controlling its environment, increasing its food supply and improving its standard of living.

Despite the decade's pace, the American public pretty much went about its business in time-honored fashion. Dad put in his 40 hours, Mom raised the kids and both put a little money away each week for life's little luxuries ... a color television, up-to-date appliances, perhaps a second car.

The first wave of the "baby boomers" had reached high school and were ready to become consumers in their own right.

Nowhere was the tempo of the times more closely watched than in the automotive industry. By the time the 60s dawned, many old line automotive giants had passed from the scene -- Hudson, Kaiser-Frazer, Nash, Packard -- with names like DeSoto and Studebaker soon to follow.

Changing tastes, trends and attitudes in the marketplace factored heavily in new model design and styling. And, nowhere was the public pulse monitored more closely than in Dearborn, Michigan, home of the Ford Motor Company.

Ford had prospered over the post-war years for several reasons. It was a dominant force already in place to meet the pent-up demand created by returning veterans and their new families; it responded to buyers' appetites for innovative engineering and styling; and it had a management team that had the ability to anticipate and gauge consumer tastes.

Henry Ford II, upon his release from the U.S. Navy, headed into the executive suite and revitalized the company, converting it from wartime to civilian production. Under his leadership, Ford Motor Company became a formidable competitor to the other automotive giants. Models like the Ford Sportsman, Crestliner and Victoria eventually evolved into the trend-setting Thunderbird, launched in 1955.

That same year, Robert S. McNamara, who would later join the Kennedy administration then move on to the presidency of the World Bank, was named general manager of the Ford Division. McNamara, already a ten-year veteran at Ford, concentrated his focus on the bottom line. Image was out and earnings were in. He canceled model lines that were too expensive to build or marginally profitable. At his direction, the two-seat Thunderbird was enlarged to four seats, altering its appeal from the sports to luxury car market. Under his stewardship, the inexpensive yet profitable Falcon compact was introduced.

While he was not considered a "car man," McNamara was recognized, however, as a brilliant financial manager and the Ford Division balance sheet prospered under his astute leadership. When he left to become Secretary of Defense in 1961, Henry Ford II picked the division's vice president of sales, Lee Iacocca, to be his successor as general manager.

Iacocca set out to put some excitement back into the Ford product line. He put a V-8 motor into the Falcon sport coupe, added fastback roofs to some of the larger Ford models, like the Galaxie, and got the company back into competitive racing on the NASCAR circuit.

His real aim was to develop a car for the youth-oriented, sports car market something that would compete with the Chevrolet Corvette and myriad European entries into the U. S. market.

One of Iacocca's first decisions was to assemble a team of top Ford executives and consultants who became heavily involved in market research on one hand, and in engineering and design on the other. Market studies came under the supervision of Chase Morse, Jr., Ford marketing manager, while the engineering effort would be headed up by product planning manager Donald N. Frey.

Intensive market research revealed that the postwar population boom would expand by 40 percent before the decade was over and this category would account for more than half of the new car sales in the time period. That segment of society also had specific ideas about styling and performance. Per capita income was expected to rise over 150 percent in the coming decade, and women and teenagers would become a significant factor as new car purchasers.

These demographics established that there was a sizable, young, affluent market ready and waiting for something distinctively new, sporty and exciting, but not too radical or expensive. Iacocca is reputed to have described the climate in 1961 as that of "a market in search of a car."

Part of the dilemma in developing a "sports car for the masses" was how to capitalize on the brand equity enjoyed by Ford's Thunderbird. Would the new model be a smaller, two-seat version of the T-Bird? Costs to develop were a consideration ... the company might have to invest upward of \$100 million to create an entirely new car. Cost to the consumer was another consideration. The team established a target price of \$2,500; an overall weight of 2,500 pounds; 180 inches maximum length; four seats; a floorshift, and a host of options that would allow buyers to custom-tailor the car to their individual personalities.

With those general parameters, the engineering department set out to craft the prototype for a project referred to as T-5. Three men quarterbacked the effort - Herb Misch, an engineer; Gene Bordinant, a stylist, and Roy Lunn, a product planner. In an unparalleled 21 days, the design for a low, sleek show car with roll bar and retractable headlights went from drawing board to clay mock-up.

The engine was adapted from a V-4 being developed in Europe for the "Cardinal" subcompact. Mounted laterally behind the cockpit, it was capable of generating 90 horsepower at 6400 rpm. It was cooled by two small radiators located at air vents placed just ahead of the rear wheels. It featured wishbone suspension; coil springs and shocks; rack and pinion steering; front disc brakes and rear drum brakes, and a four-speed transaxle with cable-operated linkage. The skin was stressed aluminum riveted to a multi-tubular steel chassis.

The innovative prototype weighed 1,200 pounds, stood 40 inches high atop a 90-inch wheelbase with five inches of ground clearance. Its long, low sloping nose housed a spare tire; it featured a racing style windshield, and the dashboard and cockpit were simple but functional.

The T-5 (Mustang 1) was introduced in October, 1962 at Watkins Glen for those attending the U.S. Grand Prix. Dan Gurney and Sterling Moss each piloted the model for several demonstration laps around the raceway. Capable of 115 mph and covering a quarter-mile in 18.2 seconds, it enjoyed an immediate, enthusiastic reception from the racing fraternity. Management, however, felt it lacked the broader appeal necessary to capture a significant segment of the mass market. So it was back to the development

lab to come up with a four-seater that met all the parameters of weight, price and options.

Four in-house styling teams were assigned to come up with proposals for a car that would meet the revised specifications. Numerous designs were submitted and the successful entry was the brainchild of Joe Oros, head of the Ford Division design studio; Gaff Halderman, studio manager, and executive designer L. David Ash. The winning design was based on Falcon specs with a wheelbase of 108 inches, overall length of 186 inches and capable of accepting either the company's 289 ci, 271 bhp Fairlane V-8 or standard six. Iacocca had to convince senior management that the Torino (Mustang II), as it became known, was a worthy product and would meet or exceed projected sales of 86,000 units. The project was approved in September 1962 and production engineering was initiated.

Using proven, off-the-shelf Falcon and Fairlane components such as chassis, engines, suspension and drive trains, otherwise massive engineering and tooling costs were eliminated. The team was operating on parallel tracks, gearing up the Dearborn plant to build next year's models while at the same time producing a second prototype based on the production version. The latter was again introduced at Watkins Glen in time for the crowds attending the 1963 U.S. Grand Prix and again, it attracted much favorable attention.

It now remained for the final design modifications to be incorporated into the initial production run with delivery of the first unit to roll off the assembly line targeted for March, 1964.

At this point, management realized their breakthrough car needed identification. Throughout its development phase, the car was variously called the T-5, the Cougar, the Aventura, Allegro, Stiletto, Torino, Torino, even XT-Bird.

Whence the name "Mustang"? There are two schools of thought. One holds that it was based on North American Aviation's P-51 "Mustang," a fighter-pilot's fighter plane that enjoyed an outstanding reputation in World War II -- one that compared extremely favorably with Great Britain's "Spitfire;" Japan's Mitsubishi "Zero," and Germany's Messerschmitt 109. The second shifted the image to that small, hardy horse that helped tame the Western Plains. Descended from Arabian stock and brought to the New World by the Conquistadors to form the nucleus of those sturdy herds tamed by the American Indian, the U.S. Cavalry, the cowboy and the vaquero. The name is derived from the Spanish "mestengo" or stray animal.

What better image for a new, rugged breed of car than that of a wild, free roaming spirit. And the distinctive Mustang logo -- the pony with its mane and tail flying, galloping across vertical red, white and blue bars left no doubt concerning its American roots. Of interest is the fact that the original sketch had the pony running to the left. When the artwork was converted into a metal die for stamping, it was inadvertently reversed and the pony would forever gallop from right to left.

Armed with the success accorded both the 1962 and 1963 prototypes; the commitment from top management approving production, and market studies and all forecasts indicating an enthusiastic reception, a Spring '64 launch date was targeted.

And the rest ... as the popular expression goes ... is history!

When it was finally released to the public on April 17, 1964, the Mustang touched a nerve in the American psyche. Its appeal was universal -- to young and old, men and women, Republicans and Democrats. Overnight it became the most popular car ever, selling over one-half million in that first year and 3 million in its first decade.

At its inception, It became a talisman for the youthful idealism and exuberance of the early 1960's. Its classic styling, coupled with its unpretentiousness and dependability, have made it a favorite over the past 35 years. In that time, it has taken on its own aura, a radiance, a certain magic, for want of a better description ... the MUSTANG mystique.

This chronicle of Mustang's first three and one-half decades is meant to provide owners (past and present), enthusiasts and those with only a passing interest with a year-by-year account of the car's evolution through styling and performance modifications; some of the people responsible for the car's development and evolution over the last 35 years; its various manifestations as sport car, family car, economy car or luxury car, and the numerous specialty or hybrid versions that grew out of America's basic "pony car."

Enjoy!