

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

FRISKO
FREEZE



Pony Express!

1966 Ford Mustang Hardtop Coupe
AMERICA'S CAR MUSEUM COLLECTION



Words by **Walt Tomsic**, Managing Editor, *OpenRoad* Photography by **Michael Craft**, - Cover and Autobiography



T

here were affordable cars prior to the Model T. There were small vans before there was a Chrysler Minivan and the VW Beetle was not the first exercise in vehicular minutia. It can be persuasively argued sporty cars with tight seating for two additional passengers had plied the roads prior to the Mustang. But... and it's a huge but, all suffered at least two of the three following fates: they were few in number, short-lived and commercial flops. In other words, they were largely irrelevant... not so the "T," the Bug, the Minivan or the "Stang."

In order to be considered a bona fide status quo busting, segment creating phenom, you have to be a bolt from the blue that sweeps the buying public off its feet and goes on to sell in huge numbers for years on end. The, "Wow, I didn't see that coming"—Mustang qualifies on every count. If location, location, location is the Holy Grail of retail and real estate, timing, timing, timing is the equivalent in comedy and selling cars.

The Mustang was the perfect answer to a question no one else was asking. What kind of car would appeal to a ballooning population of 20-something baby boomers finding themselves newly employed and/or newly married, possibly with a child but staunchly refusing to surrender their self-image to the perceived tedium of adulthood? Answer... the Mustang... a sporty car capable of carrying groceries and a toddler or two—panache and practicality in the same package. And as an added bonus, it was nothing like dad's Olds, or Buick, or whatever.

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At the time, the Mustang represented an act of corporate courage. In hindsight, it was a sure-fire lock from day one... a car that perfectly met prevailing demographic and psychographic criteria. It was young-adult targeted, affordable and sufficiently functional (demographics/objective data). It projected an image of uniqueness, youthful vitality and a dash of anti-establishment rebellion (psychographics/subjective perception).

I certainly fit the profile... age 21, fresh out of college and headed off to graduate school at the University of Colorado in Boulder. My ride... a freshly bought, Springtime Yellow, packed to the headliner Mustang fastback. Chalk one up for stereotypes. Oh, and it didn't exactly hurt sales that the idea of having a "second car" was also beginning to catch on.

Help From Above

W

ithout benevolence from above, cars like the Mustang never see the street. It takes suits in upper floor corner offices to champion any "off the beaten path" project. Fortunately, the Mustang enjoyed the support of a core of key executives... and, unlike in the case of the Edsel fiasco, mountains of positive market research. In keeping with the 1960s' fixation on youth, many of the movers and shakers behind America's first "Pony Car" were themselves relatively young. Ford Division head Lee Iacocca was in his late 30s. Product planner Hal Sperlich had yet to reach age 35. In the end, the decision to build the car rested with company CEO Henry Ford II. The "Deuce," after exhaustive planning sessions, gave his approval. Still stinging from the Edsel experience, he commented, "It had better work!"

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SPECIFICATIONS

1966 Ford Mustang Hardtop Coupe

Base Price:	\$2,372
Engine:	170 CD Straight-six, 101 HP @ 4400r pm 260 CD V-8, 164 HP @4400 rpm 289 CD V-8, 220 HP @4400 rpm
Compression:	8.7-1, 8.7-1, 9.2-1
Transmission	3-Speed, 4-Speed, 3-Speed Cruise-O-Matic
Brakes:	Base - 4-wheel Drum / Optional Front Disc
Dimensions:	Wheelbase -108" Track - 55.4" (6-cyl.) /56" (8-cyl.) Length - 181.6" / Width - 68.2" Curb Weight - 2556 (Hardtop) / 2606 (Fastback)

**Specification data can, and often does, vary from source to source. When in doubt, we use those most often cited.*

The Rollout & Reception

When it comes to intricately planned and executed campaigns, the rollout of the Mustang takes a backseat to none. I'd put it up against Alexander's invasion of the Persian Empire.

It started when the Mustang I concept was unveiled a full two years prior to the production car appearing in showrooms. A year later, the Mustang II concept kept the flames of anticipation well stoked.

In one of the more brilliant moves, the Mustang broke with accepted practice by debuting in the spring of 1964 rather than in the fall with every other new car—the venue... the New York World's Fair. Journalists were furnished Mustangs and sent on tours. The car was placed on display in shopping malls, airport terminals and hotel lobbies. Ads saturated the media leading up to the official reveal. To say a frenzy had been created, would not be an overstatement.

The resulting pandemonium took even Ford by surprise. People in droves camped out in front of dealerships so as not to miss the chance to buy one. Pop culture soon hopped on with songs, movie and TV appearances including the white hard-top Mary Tyler Moore drove in the opening scenes of her hit show. Over a quarter of a million Mustangs sold before the end of the year, well beyond the company's projected annual figure of 100,000. Within two years, sales had reached one million. Henry need not have worried... it worked!



AUTO TRIVIA

■ Introduced on April 17, 1964, the Mustang reached the 1-million unit mark just two years later, a record formerly held by its predecessor, the Ford Falcon.

■ The Mustang driver's median age was 31. 35% were single and 25% were under 25 years of age. Women represented 42% of Mustang buyers. All these figures were substantially higher than those of other Ford products at the time.

■ The average Mustang customer spent \$500 on options to personalize their car, an amount equivalent to about \$6,000 on the average car today. The 1964-1/2 'notch back' coupe carried a base price of \$2,368. In today's money, that's about \$18,000... econocar territory.

■ About that name... according to Ford Motor Company historians, initial design concepts carried many names: Cougar, Torino, Turino, Allegro, Aventura and Thunderbird II to name a few. The man officially credited as having suggested the name "Mustang" was Executive stylist John Najjar, who was a fan of the World War II P-51 Mustang fighter plane. Najjar's boss, Bob Maguire, thought the name too "airplaney" so Najjar shifted to the wild horse association which Maguire found acceptable.

■ A persistent urban myth held that Iacocca chose the name after watching a football game between Michigan and SMU. He supposedly liked the Texas team's spirit and their name. In reality, the "Mustang" name had been officially adopted prior to the game's scheduled date.

■ The yellow Mustang driven by Carl Kolchak (Darren McGavin) in the TV series "Night Stalker" had the straight six engine. You can tell because the 289 emblem is missing.

■ Introduced this 50th anniversary year, the latest iteration of the Mustang boasts two significant firsts for the model. It will be the first time a Mustang is available with a 4-cylinder turbo-charged engine and independent rear suspension. **STOP**

Photo Shoot Location: Frisko Freeze, Tacoma, Washington
Seattle has its Dick's Drive-In, Tacoma has the Frisko Freeze. A local fixture since 1950, the "Freeze" is "Happy Days" and hamburgers with a side of fries and hanging out on a Friday night after a football game. We couldn't think of a better place to stage our iconic '66 Mustang. Like cheeseburgers and high school football, this pony is an "All American."

Michael Craft, ACM's official photographer, created these striking photographs. To see more of his work visit www.michaelcraftphotography.com.

The list of options on the Mustang was long indeed. Few left the showroom at the **\$2,372 base price**. Here are prices for a few of the options on the base V-8 model... "ca-ching, ca-ching."

289 CID, 210 HP V-8... **+\$181.70**

289 CID, 271 HP V-8... **+\$437.80**



Front Disc Brakes... **+\$56.77**

Styled Steel Wheels... **+\$119.71**

Limited Slip Differential... **+\$41.60**

Power Steering... **+\$84.47**

Luggage rack... **+\$35.00**

Air Conditioning... **+\$277.20**

Retractable Seatbelts... **+\$7.39**

Full-length Console... **+\$50.41**

Deluxe Steering Wheel... **+\$31.52**

AM Radio... **+\$53.50**

Glove Box Lock... **+\$2.49**

Tinted Glass... **+\$30.35**

Vinyl Roof... **+\$74.19**

4-Speed stick shift... **+\$184.02**