

April 17, 1964 — Birth Of A Legend

April 17, 1964 was the culmination of a dream for Lee Iacocca, his Fairlane Committee, and an aggressive group of Ford management personnel who stuck to their guns even in the face of managements memory one of history's biggest marketing disasters — the Edsel.

In a confidential dealer information brochure published by Ford prior to the introduction of the world's first Pony car, General Marketing Manager Chase Morseley Jr. wrote:

"In mid-April, your dealership will be the most distinctive in the nation. You will have an exclusive — an exciting exclusive — the Ford Mustang.

"The Mustang is more than new. It is an entirely different car ... unlike any Ford or any competitive line. It is a distinct car line with a personality all its own. It has sports-car flavor ... a low, sleek car with a foreign sports-car look that belies its low cost.

The cover of the Ford "dealer use only" marketing brochure is reproduced on the cover of this month's Mustang Times. Twenty-five years later, it is amazing how prophetic Morseley's words turned out to be.

When the Mustang hit the market on April 17, 1964, Ford Motor Company was ill prepared for the overnight success waiting in the wings. Though Morseley warned dealers to "keep your Mustang on display as long as you can and to use it to attract visitors," the buying public flocked to Ford showrooms. Dealers made a living selling cars. Turning away crazed buyers with fistfuls of cash just naturally goes against the grain. Mustangs disappeared from showroom floors overnight, and the public wanted more.

Iacocca, who had pried a paltry \$40 million out of a reluctant and skeptical Ford board of directors for the development of the Mustang, managed in one stroke to obliterate the memory of the Edsel and replace it with an instant legend.

No matter that the Mustang was little more than a trustworthy Falcon in a sexy bikini. It had style, it had class and — most of all — it was affordably priced. And Ford spared no effort in selling that to an eagerly awaiting public.

National television exposure set an industry precedent. For the introduction of the Mustang, Ford did something that had never been done before — purchased prime-time television advertising in the adult time slots on all three major national networks.

In addition, spots were purchased on the most popular game shows of the day.

That was just the beginning. Ford arranged a special promotional campaign with Holiday Inns, and the Mustang was featured on the back cover of the Holiday Inn magazine read by 23 million guests. Mustangs appeared on the cover of seven million Holiday Inn directories. Mustangs were displayed at the country's most prominent airports. Sea & Ski introduced a new, nationwide campaign for its line of Renault sun glasses and featured Ford Mustangs in its national advertising. A special model Mustang was offered in 24 national magazines, including *Look*, *Life*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Reader's Digest*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Time* and *Newsweek*. Mustang announcement ads ran in 2,612 newspapers. A special announcement ad aimed directly at the women's market was scheduled to run in the women's pages of most major national newspapers.

The Mustang became an overnight sensation. Sales jumped off the charts. Harried Ford workers were simply unable to keep pace with demand. Iacocca became a legend. And Dearborn was delirious.

None could have suspected, despite the buildup, that the Mustang would become the longest, uninterrupted name plate ever produced by Ford.

How and why are questions best left to history. But the facts speak for themselves. Now, today — 1989 — thousands upon thousands celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Ford Mustang.

An inventive Mustanger in Amarillo, TX probably summed it up best in absentia. There, waiting to be judged in a national Mustang show was his prized pony — complete with car-hop tray, hamburger, french fries, Coca-Cola and a true relic of the past, a drive-in movie speaker.

If one picture is worth a thousand words, that particular portrait is worth far more — like something on the order of 25 years of youth, innocence, war, guilt, frustration, elation, maturity, contentment, and history.

The sexy, sporty, affordable Mustang wasn't just a car. It was a portrait of a generation. And to that portrait this edition is devoted.

Happy reading.

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