

Okay, I admit it - I'm hopelessly behind the times and have no practical experience with the fourth generation Mustang. In fact, until recently, the newest model Mustang I'd driven further than one mile was my 1989 Saleen. Perhaps my teenager does actually have good reason for calling me *old* (as in very, very old).

And it is because of this 14-year-old who is driving her dad and I nuts about driving, that I decided it was time I knew a little more about this newfangled Mustang. Veronica has told us numerous times in a very matter-of-fact tone of voice that she will be driving a brand new Mustang when she turns 16.

Turning an inexperienced driver loose with a pony car seems a bit ridiculous. But then, my parents did the same thing with me - I received my brand new 351CJ-equipped 1972 Mach 1 the Christmas after I turned 16. Of course there were not as many vehicles on the road back in those ancient days, but vehicle safety equipment was a bit lacking compared to today's fare.

Attending the MCA National in Tucson, Arizona, seemed like the perfect opportunity to try out a new Mustang. We rented a 1998 convertible from Hertz at the airport and promptly began to analyze the vehicle.

Well, by analyze I mean quickly realizing that our luggage absolutely would not fit into the tiny convertible trunk, trying to

figure out how to get the top down (we learned that the parking brake must be engaged before the power top will operate) and playing with all the buttons that operate the sound system.

Our droptop-for-the-weekend was Dark Green Satin Clearcoat Metallic outside with a saddle cloth interior (which promptly built up static electricity each time we exited the vehicle). Under the hood was a V6 engine which, according to brochure information, has a horsepower



rating of 150 at 4,000 rpm. The brochure also states, "The Mustang convertible is designed and built as a convertible, unlike those that start out as hardtop coupes and are later modified. Also, the body has an X-brace under the engine compartment and heavy-gauge steel in the rocker panels for added strength."

This diehard V8 fan was very skeptical about the performance of a V6, especially in the heavier convertible configuration. Boy was I surprised! This car had plenty of get-up and go for daily driving and was amazingly tight and easy to control. Plus it was a heckuva lot of fun riding around with the top down.

While a convertible does not seem practical for a teenager, the performance of a V6-equipped Mustang does. And since we're talking about "new" as in the year 2000, performance will be even greater.

Among all the rumors and spy photos that are surfacing concerning the restyled 1999 Mustang, we obtained some interesting information from within the Ford ranks.

The 4.6 SOHC engine will be more powerful than the present version but will remain behind the DOHC version found in the Cobra Mustang. Superchargers may show up on both GT and Cobra models. And the Cobra will receive the long awaited Independent Rear Suspension (IRS).

A 35th anniversary edition will be produced in a limited number of 5,000 units. It is possible that this vehicle will be unveiled at the 35th Mustang Anniversary Celebration in April 1999 at Charlotte Motor Speedway. We have been assured that this will be a distinctive vehicle, easily recognized as something other than a regular production Mustang, and will be accompanied by appropriate paperwork proclaiming its status.

While the thought of a 35th anniversary model does grab my attention, right now I'm more interested in viewing the new look of the 1999 car. And more important, I'm interested in the reaction of the teenager who can't wait to drive.