

# MINIATURE MUSTANG ALERT!

by Dave Goff

**F**ew things are more exciting to a diecast collector than to be the first "kid" in the neighborhood to discover a brand new car that no one even knew was coming. Several members of our Charlotte-based Mustang club (Carolina Regional Mustang Club) specialize in diecast Mustangs, and we are continually on the lookout for that elusive Mustang that none of the other guys have seen yet. Not only do we look for every excuse possible to check by the regular stops in our hometowns each week, but we also make it a point to visit every single discount department store we pass by as we travel for work or pleasure. With the increasing popularity of the Internet, we have also been able to search for sneak previews of diecast Mustangs on the Web sites of the "Big Four" diecast manufacturers - Playing Mantis, who makes the Johnny Lightning cars; Mattel, who produces Hot Wheels; the new kids on the diecast block, Racing Champions; and the "granddaddy" of diecasts, Matchbox by Tyco, also owned by Mattel. It is not unusual to see an Internet announcement of an upcoming diecast several months before it hits the shelves.

There are two types of diecast Mustangs on the market today - the single edition Mustangs that are included in a larger grouping of cars such as a 1996 Mustang Cobra issued along with 75 other multi-make cars, or the series of Mustangs which is issued a different edition number as the cars change colors during the run of the series. With a series of Mustangs, a collector may work to

assemble all the colors of the Mattel Custom Mustangs, the Johnny Lightning Boss 302s, or the Indy Pace Car Mustangs.

The most colorful of all diecast Mustang series has to be the new Stock Rod Mustangs issued by Racing Champions. These hybrid Mustangs were developed by combining their Street Rod bodies with their Stock Car paint schemes, hence the name Stock Rods. The result is some of the wildest looking Ford Mustangs you've ever seen including 1968 Shelys, 1966 coupes, and 1996 Cobras painted in the team colors of the Exide, McDonald's, Penske, Remington, PrimeStar, Valvoline, and Tide NASCAR teams. Some of these models are already appearing at swap meets selling for two to four times their original 1997 purchase price!

Imagine my excitement when a buddy shared with me his copy of the Playing Mantis Club newsletter announcing a brand new ten-car Mustang Classics series.

The name of the set is the Johnny Lightning Mustang Classics series. Rather than simply changing the color of a single model during the run, the series will consist of ten different Mustang models. The cars that were selected for the Spring 1998 debut are special in their own right, and even more so as an integral part of an entire Mustang series. The list includes some of the all-time favorites, but is unusual in that there are some first-timers included among the ten, and some usual favorites left out.

Car Number One is the 1963 Mustang II concept car, the fore-

runner of the car that started the pony car craze. Car Number Two is a 1967 Shelby GT (no collection would be complete without a Shelby creation in the mix). Car Number Three is a 1968 Mustang GT and Car Number Four is a 1969 Mach 1.

Car Number Five will be the "flatback" 1973 Mach 1. And daring to make a break from tradition, a 1977 Cobra II is Car Number Six. Of all the Mustangs replicated in diecast form, the Mustang II is the most rare. Except for several Mustang II drag cars, and a yellow King Cobra diecast, the Mustang II has been largely overlooked to date.

The Fox platform Mustangs are represented by Car Number Seven, a 1988 5.0 version. Car Number Eight will have special significance for Mustang fans as it will represent the final Mustang design of the late Larry Shinoda, creator of the famous Boss Mustangs.

Car Number Nine is an interesting choice that probably wasn't on anyone's "top ten" Mustang list - a 1975 Cobra racer. Again, a Mustang II diecast will immediately become collectible, especially since it is a race version of a car Ford never made.

The final car announced in the Johnny Lightning Mustang Classics series is no stranger to late model Ford Mustang fans. Car Number Ten is a 1996 Saleen racer!

For the Mustang diecast collector, the Playing Mantis Johnny Lightning Mustang Classics series is about as good as it gets. For the non collector, what better excuse do you need to start a collection?

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