



**F**ord Car Marketing Manager Robert Parker has spent a lifetime with Ford Mustang. His father restored Mustangs when Parker was growing up and he sold his first restoration to pay for college. In this FORD World interview he shares his knowledge and enthusiasm for the Mustang brand.

## Q. HOW IMPORTANT IS THE MUSTANG MYSTIQUE TO MARKETING THE VEHICLE?

*A. With a history like Mustang's of nearly 43 years, there's certainly a lot to talk about. Great brands like Mustang that deliver a consistent message over a long period are the ones that become the most iconic. That's why Mustang is as strong as it is. I would argue it's the strongest automotive brand in the world.*

## Q. WHEN WAS THE MUSTANG LAST REDESIGNED?

*A. It was last redesigned in 2005, which was the Mustang brand's 40th anniversary. It was originally launched in April of 1964 and it took the country by storm. It seems there isn't a person—certainly at Ford—who doesn't have a Mustang story, and that's what's neat about marketing this vehicle. When you talk to people about Mustang, they always have some interesting story about their first experience with a Mustang, first date in a Mustang, first ticket in a Mustang. That's what makes it fun and interesting.*

*Strong brands inspire people to do things like get Mustang tattoos. It just shows you how much people love and revere it.*

## Q. DOES THAT MAKE IT EASIER TO MARKET OR MORE DIFFICULT?

*A. Both. The standard is higher; the expectations are greater so people expect more. We eat, sleep and breathe Mustang so it is part of who we are. With this amount of passion for the brand, by nature it is more challenging. The result of the passion and energy inspires great ideas from our advertising agency and strategic partners.*

## Q. THERE SEEMS TO BE PLENTY OF PARTNERSHIPS WITH MUSTANG. IS IT THE BRAND THAT ATTRACTS OTHER COMPANIES, OR DO WE SEEK OUT THESE PARTNERSHIPS?

*A. One thing I can guarantee you is that the phone will ring today and it will be somebody asking us to do a partnership with the Mustang. Every day of the week,*

*every month of the year. And that really speaks to the strength of the Mustang brand. We can be very selective on who we choose as a partner. We pick partners that will further accentuate the brand, maybe take it to heights by stretching the brand, while at the same time amplifying key aspects of the brand, ensuring that it delivers everything that it has over the last 40 years. We jokingly say that the target customer for Mustang is everybody under 40 and everybody over 40, but what Mustang was to my father is what it is to me and is to my children. The iconic nature of it—be it design, marketing, in these partnerships—further builds on the legend.*

*When I was a kid and when my father was building and buying Mustangs, the partnerships, such as the one with Carroll Shelby, spoke to that generation. The partnerships of today take it further into new generations and those people who speak now are not necessarily the same people who spoke to our parents' generation. Through new channels and people like Chip Foose, Funkmaster Flex, Ashley Force we are able to amplify the brand and reach new customers.*

## Q. WHAT IS THE GENESIS OF THE NEW KING OF THE ROAD VERSION THAT'S COMING OUT?

*A. Well, 40 years ago at the New York Auto Show Carroll Shelby introduced a Shelby called the GT500KR Mustang. At the time there was a GT500 Mustang, so Carroll just added the KR. And there's a funny story Carroll tells about that. He had gotten wind that Chevrolet was about to introduce a performance model and call it the "King of the Road." They had already started producing literature and Carroll had gotten wind from printers in town that they were off printing literature to promote the brand at the New York Auto Show. One thing they hadn't stopped to do was to trademark the name.*

*So Carroll, being smaller and maybe a bit more cantankerous and aggressive, called 3M, had the car striped with the KR on it, patented the name King of the Road, and got to the New York auto show and preempted Chevrolet's model.*

*So, that is obviously an iconic nameplate that really made sense. We put the plans in place two years ago to have it at the 40th anniversary of the New York Auto Show. It will have additional horsepower. It will have additional design cues that completely match the original version and update them.*

## Q. WHO ARE THE TYPICAL MUSTANG CUSTOMERS—UNDER AND OVER 40?

*A. Our target customer is male, in his thirties, somebody who wants a car that reflects his personality. A car that he daydreams about, and looks forward to driving every day. He likes a car that touches all the senses and increases the heart rate. Like when you ride a Harley, you feel different behind the wheel of a Mustang. Really, though, everybody is a potential Mustang customer—male or female. More than a third of our buyers are female. Clearly Mustang is popular with men and women alike.*

## Q. WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MUSTANG ENTHUSIAST CLUBS IN HELPING TO DRIVE THE BRAND?

*A. Mustang is the most customized vehicle in the world. The customizing business is a multibillion dollar industry and many of its products are built around Mustang. If you go to the specialty equipment manufacturers meeting in Las Vegas, you'll see rows and rows of Mustangs that are customized and there's no telling how many businesses exist solely to provide parts and accessories for Mustangs. We give them the palette, they paint the picture they want, and a lot of variations of those pictures have been painted through the years.*

## Q. DOES FORD MAKE MONEY ON THE PARTS AND THE PARAPHERNALIA THAT ARE SOLD?

*A. Certainly. Of all the licensed products we carry, the pony and the other iconic symbols trademarked by the corporation are huge drivers of revenue for our licensing business.*

## Q. HOW DO YOU DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN EACH MODEL? HOW STRONGLY DIFFERENT DO THEY HAVE TO BE IN ORDER TO HOLD UP IN THE MARKETPLACE?

*A. Well, if you go back to the '60s and you look at the products that have the historical link to them, we always try to match the delta over the base Mustang or better it. So, let me give you a case in point. If the original Shelby GT500KR had a horsepower rating of 400 horsepower, we have to meet or beat that number to build on the heritage of the original. Any time we do a product that is linked with the past, we try to at least match or better whatever equipment was on that vehicle. When we decided to name the car King of the Road, there's an expectation there that it is better than the base GT500, so we worked with Ford Racing and added an additional increment of horsepower which right now is somewhere between 40 and 50 horsepower more than 500. We also made sure the iconic design cues of the original GT500KR were there to provide the 'shorthand' for enthusiasts making sure it is instantly recognizable as a KR.*

## Q. WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF SHELBY AND FORD? DOES IT HAVE A LONG FUTURE AHEAD OF IT?

*A. It does have a long future. Carroll is a great friend of the corporation. And he's a great friend of enthusiasts worldwide. So obviously people look to him for inspiration. He's still very involved in the business.*

## Q. HOW ARE MUSTANG SALES DOING VERSUS PLAN?

*A. We had a rough February but our market share was up-climbing to over 50 percent of the segment. It is not an easy challenge in the sports car world. Typically it's like fashion. It comes and it goes. So, these new versions of Mustangs, especially vehicles that we're creating, are meant to help us to stay vibrant and fresh. Mustang is America's favorite muscle car and we intend to keep it that way.*

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