

More than a Mustang

THIS ONE WON'T GET AWAY.

Text and Photos by Rex Turner

Like many owners, I have a special fondness for a particular Mustang body style. My first pony car was a Medium Bright Yellow 1972 Mach1 that I purchased in 1976. My second Mustang was also a Mach1, the same year and color. One day I read an article in Mustang Monthly about the 1972 Olympic Sprint convertibles, which I had never actually seen in person. I also regularly perused the classified ads for Mustangs for sale. When I saw a white 1972 Mustang convertible for sale in Washington, I called immediately to get more details. Once I saw the car, I knew immediately it was one of the 50 Sprints. Although the car had been repainted all white, the interior was the original blue and white. Soon after I purchased the convertible, Dick Smither contacted me telling me he also owned one. He had taken it upon himself to track down all the owners. With his list, I contacted many other owners, met some of them in person or exchanged pictures with them. One of the owners, Colonel Hagood, lived very close by. His Sprint was in excellent condition, and I took pictures of our cars side by side.

My first Sprint had suffered the fate of many daily driver cars of the 1970's. It had a fair amount of rust when I purchased it in 1985. I was able to cosmetically turn it back into what it looked like when it rolled off the Dearborn, Michigan, assembly line in March 1972. However, I did not have a garage to store it in, so regrettably I sold the convertible after owning it a year to a fellow Virginian who kept the car for several years. I kept in touch with Mr. Smither, and told him of the sale. I told him I would someday own another one that was perhaps in better condition. I did not think 18 years would pass between the first and second one, but it was worth the long wait.

With a renewed interest in the 50 cars, I visited Colonel Hagood to see if his car was still in excellent condition as



I had remembered it in 1985. The Colonel was a WWII pilot, and he was no longer able to drive. The car was stored in his garage, and had not been started in 10 years. After visiting with him several times, he decided it was time to sell the car in the fall of 2003. He had very fond memories of going for drives with his wife, who had since passed away. His daughter did not have any interest in the

car, and they were both pleased to be selling it to someone who appreciated the car's unique history. After I got the Sprint running again, I drove it home. Over the next year I replaced such items as the radiator, heater core, brakes, water pump, and other mechanical parts. The carpet had faded so it was taken out and replaced. This served to brighten up the interior quite well. Despite having



over 90,000 miles on the car, it was in remarkably excellent original condition. Since buying the car in late 2003, I have put over 10,000 miles on it.

When I informed the other owners of my new purchase, they were delighted. I used to write them once a year, but since most of them had e-mail, we began to communicate more frequently. I was able to tell them of the shows I

had attended in numerous states and all the parades in Virginia, DC, and Maryland I had driven in. I continued visiting Colonel Hagood and gave him pictures of my travels, and a Johnny Lightning die cast car that was made to resemble Howard Ducharme's Sprint. He and his daughter enjoyed my visits until 2005 when the Colonel took one last flight into the heavens. I have participated in

the DC Memorial day parades, and I'm sure he is looking down with pride as my family waves to all the parade goers watching and honoring our veterans.

Colonel Hagood purchased his Sprint from Dick Herriman Ford in Vienna, Virginia. He drove the car only on sunny days and it was always garaged. Any owner of a classic Mustang knows the cars are very prone to rusting. This is especially true with convertibles. I was amazed this car had zero rust in any of the typical places. All it took was some cosmetic freshening up, and some minor bodywork to repair a small dent in the rear fender lip. The car took first place in its first Carlisle All Ford show. Since the car is in basically unrestored condition, it is quite remarkable that it can compete with restored cars. It made the 11-hour trip to Nashville, Tennessee, and back for the Mustang 40th Anniversary with no problems. I spent the better part of one day on the track in my 1972 Mach1 and, the other days I got to know three of the other convertible owners that had come from Georgia, Ohio, and Kansas. We took many pictures of our four cars and we remarked that we did not see another Sprint Mustang at the show, even though Ford had made over 9,300 Sprint fastbacks and coupes. The other owners added the Magnum 500 wheels on their cars, while mine retains the original dog dish type aluminum hubcaps and trim rings. One owner added air conditioning so he could be cool when it got too hot for even the top to be down. The weekend went by all too quickly and we headed back to our homes with great memories of this mini reunion of our special Mustangs.

All of the sales literature from early 1972 shows Sprint Mustang fastbacks and coupes, Mavericks and Pintos. The Mustang convertible was not part of the original production plans until the Washington, DC-area Ford dealers petitioned Ford to provide special Mustang convertibles to be used in the annual Cherry Blossom parade held in early April. In March of 1972 the Dearborn assembly line produced 50 identical convertibles with consecutive serial numbers for shipment to Washington. The Mustangs accompanied Cherry Blossom princesses from the 50 states. Olympic sprinter great Jessie Owens was the Grand Marshall. After the parade the cars were distributed to the local Ford dealers for sale to the public.

The annual Washington, DC, Cherry Blossom festival has taken place every spring since 1927. The event has become a two-week celebration of the



blooming of the cherry trees ending with the parade down Constitution Avenue. The first festival queen was crowned in 1935 and is selected at random from the ladies representing the 50 states, Washington DC, and other US territories. Special souvenirs were made available including a commemorative festival license plate. These plates were used on the Mustangs driven in the parade, and are prized by memorabilia enthusiasts. I was actually able to find one of these license plates from a local collector. According to articles in the Washington Post and Evening Star newspapers, the parade in 1972 was unusually cold with temperatures only in the 40's. Headlines like "A Stalwart Few Brave the Cold" appeared the next day, but those hardy tourists and Washingtonians got to see the festival princesses ride in the 50 Mustangs among the many bands, floats, and entertainers.

As the years passed by, many of the cars made their way around the country from one owner to another. A few are still owned by the original owners that live in the DC area. One car is in Sweden and another is in Norway. I drove to Youngstown, OH, for a MCA National show in 2005, where I saw the Sprint convertible Bill Johnson had bought. His car is undergoing a complete restoration. My goal is to get as many Sprints together at the 45th and 50th Mustang anniversary shows, as even diehard Mustang enthusiasts do not get to see these very often.

All the Sprint convertible Mustangs are powered by the 302ci engine with a two-barrel carburetor. The cars all had three speed FMX transmissions, front power disc brakes, power top and AM radio. Although offered on other Mustangs, air conditioning, power windows, an FM radio, or Magnum 500 wheels were not available for the convertibles. Many owners have added these options, with the chrome Magnum 500 wheels being especially popular as those were an option for the package B on the sprint Sportsroofs and hardtops. The sticker price for the convertible was \$3,272 although rumor has it that many were sold for a hefty premium over the dealer invoice due to



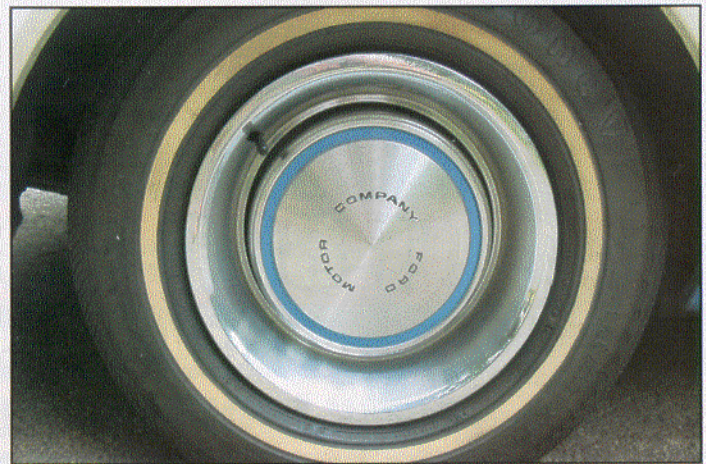
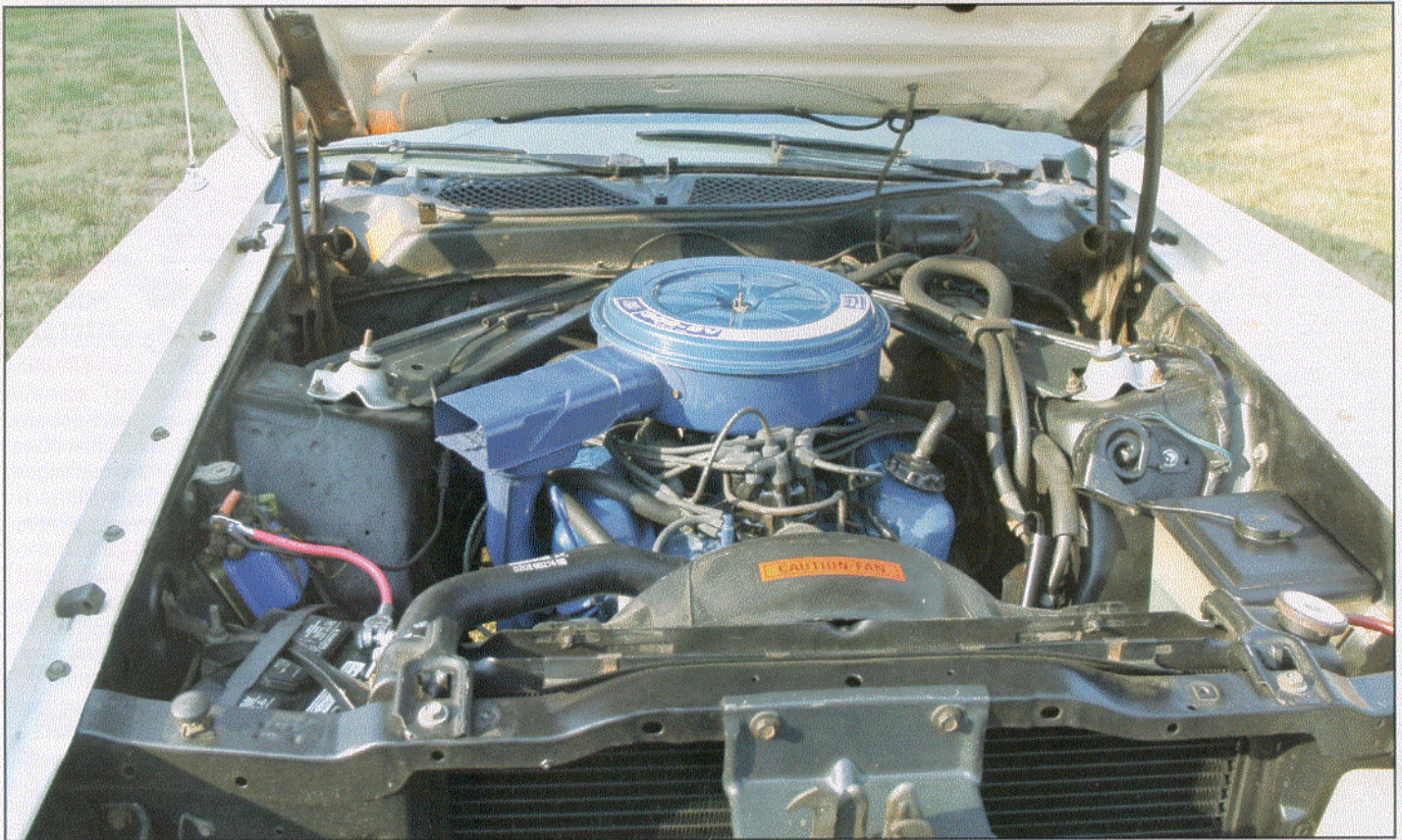
their limited availability. The seat material used in the interior of the 50 Sprint convertibles was different than the fabric used in the Sportsroof and coupe versions. A vinyl comfort-weave dark and light blue pattern differed from the blue cloth used in the hardtops. This has presented a problem when trying to restore the seats, as an exact match for the unique convertible interior has not been located.

The easiest way to tell a real Sprint from perhaps a replica is from the trim code on the door label. If the code is HB, it has the Sprint option package. However, in the case of the convertibles, the code was left blank. This was probably due to the unique seat material. While this may seem to leave the door open for someone to replicate a Sprint convertible, the serial numbers of the fifty cars were consecutive, so an original car can be easily authenticated. Other features of a Sprint are the Mach1 style body color front bumper and grille with amber sport lamps. The hood was the standard non-scoop version to distinguish it from the Boss and Mach1 twin scoop ram-air type.

So what are the chances of seeing one of these special Mustangs in person other than a MCA National show? That would depend on where you live. While I am the only known owner in Virginia, there are several of the cars in Maryland. The rest are spread out in other mainly Eastern states, in addition to two in Europe. The whereabouts of thirteen of the fifty cars is not known, which is a pretty low number, given the number of times most of the cars have changed hands. There is a new owner of one of these rare Mustangs as of January 2008, where one was sold at the famous Barrett Jackson auction. More 1972 Sprint Mustang convertible pictures can be found on www.ncrnc.org and www.1972mustangsprint.com. There is also a book available at www.blurb.com that I wrote in 2007. Although only a few of the original owners remain, every owner knows his or her car is special and will always be a collectible worthy of keeping in the family for many years. I plan to do just that, and not let this one get away.

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