

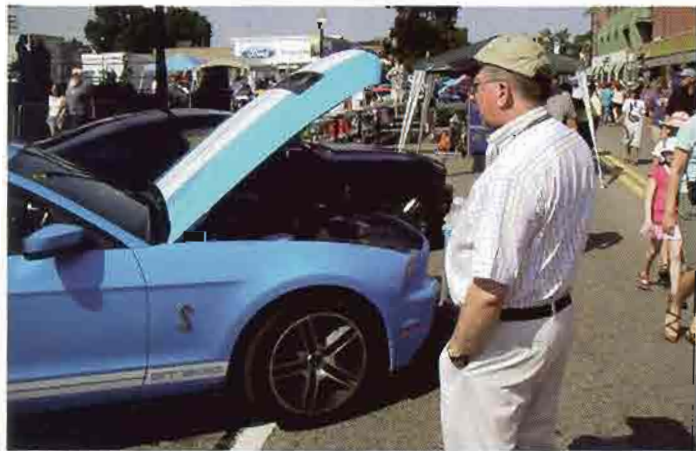
WOODWARD'S MUSTANG ALLEY: TALLY: MUSTANG II, BOREDOM 0

By John M. Clor

Well, IT happened again. I planned to write about the Motor City's annual automotive phenomenon, the Woodward Dream Cruise—mostly because I had taken exception to a comment made by a good friend who lives in Pennsylvania. She'd surmised that, outside of Detroit, there aren't that many people who know about Woodward Avenue, its place in muscle car history or, more recently, the yearly mega-cruise that has grown to become the largest, single-day automotive event on the planet.

To me, any self-proclaimed car person who doesn't know about Woodward Avenue and the annual Dream Cruise is like someone who claims to be a music lover but has never heard of Woodstock. Actually, with some 40,000 vehicles attracting more than 1 million attendees each year, the Woodward cruise dwarfs the music love-fest in sheer numbers—and even repeats the feat every 12 months. And when you consider how OEM engineers had used Woodward as a real-life, late-night testing grounds to prove-out their latest pumped-up performance products against each other. I'd even say that Woodward doesn't take a back seat to Woodstock in historical significance, either.

But then it happened. And it was just too important not to become the focus of this column—despite the fact that one of the best parts of the Woodward cruise, the so-called "Mustang Alley," had set a record this year with more than 500 Mustangs registered to be parked off Woodward along Nine Mile Road for all to see. And also that Ford Racing had its "Mustang Garage" set up this year, where attendees could get sweet deals on Ford Racing Performance Parts upgrades and have them installed right there on the spot!



Oh sure, I had wanted to tell you that Ford Division's enthusiast events marketing manager had landed me a vendor's spot next to the JDRF tent in the manufacturers midway to sell my book, *The Mustang Dynasty, 45th Anniversary Collector's Edition*. The volunteers next to me represent the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. They sold cute Mustang teddy bears to raise funds. I find their charity so worthwhile, I agreed to donate \$5 from every *Dynasty* book sold towards their efforts.

Better still, I was even going to mention that I got the distinct honor to take a stroll down Mustang Alley with Lewis Booth, the CFO of Ford Motor Company! We chatted about the event as a

powerful expression of owner passion while he and his group picked out some of their favorite Mustangs on display. (They even came by my tent later to purchase their own personalized copies of *The Mustang Dynasty* from me! I was blown away—just as I was when Ford CEO Alan Mulally got one of my books at the 45th Anniversary, plus Jim Farley and Ken Czubay before that! I'm thrilled that the guys at the very top of Ford have so much interest in our beloved Mustang!

But as I said earlier—IT happened. And it was just as I was leaving Mustang Alley late in the afternoon to head up Woodward and join my friends in the SVT Owners Association and the Motor City Marauders club to do some serious Detroit cruising. As I was pulling my 1978 Mustang II King Cobra out of the display area, some middle-aged guy I passed blurted out to his wife for all to hear, "There's a Pinto Mustang!"

I quickly stopped, spun my head around and blurted back: "Don't you know ANYTHING about Mustangs?" I had to correct him in front of his wife and onlookers. "There is far less Pinto in a Mustang II than there is Falcon in an original Mustang, or Fairmont in a Fox Body!" I said. "Go do some homework before you bark out bad information—try reading a book!"

And I drove off, not angry at his opinion of my car, because that's his right, but upset about ongoing ignorance about the Mustang II. How come so many people remain in the dark about the second-generation Mustangs? I guess suggesting folks read a typical Mustang book won't really help, as most auto journalists simply repeat what's become urban legend about II's, rather than put them into the context of the times. I mean, it's OK to hate what emissions laws did to vehicle performance in the late-'70s and early '80s—but that certainly wasn't limited to or the fault of the Mustang III!

Look, for those of us who own Mustangs, there's no greater joy than to drive one's prized Stang to an all-Mustang show—and experience the wonderfully diverse expressions of Mustang love. It's like one, big, happy family picnic. But for owners of second-generation Mustangs, that joy is often bittersweet. That's because certain members of our hobby still hold a personal disdain for all things related to the 1974-'78 Mustang II—as if it were the troublesome redheaded stepchild of the Mustang family. Personal tastes aside, I think it's time WE ALL put that sort of exclusionary thinking to bed, and allow the facts about the Mustang II to address the common misconceptions that still prevail among so-called "Mustang purists."

Every generation Mustang needs to be measured on its own merits, and taken in context when any form of success is considered. Those who would knock the Mustang II because it was so radically "downsized" need to understand the market dynamics of the 1970s to appreciate the II for being Ford's "Right Car at the Right Time." When the upsized 1971-'73 Mustangs began floundering in the marketplace, the Muscle Car-Era was coming to an end, insurance premiums were skyrocketing, and federally mandated emissions controls were choking performance out of old-tech large-displacement V-8s. The 250 cid inline six found in the 1973 Mustang put out only 95 hp, and the 302 V-8 that came standard in the '73 Mach 1 was rated at a mere 136 hp. Even the 351 (optional in the '73 Stang) was only making around 155!

Mustang production for 1971 had dropped below 150,000 units, and for '72 fell to a bit over 125,000. In 1973, the nation

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was rocked by an energy crisis fueled by an Arab oil embargo, and Mustang sales were crippled by the growing popularity of small, sporty import coupes. Eugene Bordinat, vice-president of Ford design at the time, noted that with the Mustang, “We started out with a secretary’s car, and all of a sudden we had a behemoth.” But the “father” of the Mustang, Lee Iacocca, was about to fix that and rejuvenate the Mustang brand with something he called the “little jewel.”

Mustang II bowed in 1974, praised for its perfect timing in the marketplace, much like the original ‘65. Sales rebounded, and with model-year production of nearly 400,000 units, the Mustang II came to within 10 percent of equaling the original’s Mustang’s first-year sales record. It remains the sixth best-selling Mustang of all time. Much trimmer and thrifter than the ‘71-’73s, Mustang II was 20 inches shorter, 4-inches narrower, an inch lower, and almost 500 pounds lighter. (What self-respecting enthusiast wouldn’t want his favorite sports car to get smaller and lighter, instead of bigger and heavier?)

Despite it being the only year the Mustang wasn’t offered with a V-8, in 1974 the Mustang II was named *Motor Trend* Car of the Year (the only other Mustang to win that honor was the ‘94.) One common knock against the II is its relationship with the Pinto. I find this strange, as 1st-generation Mustangs were also based on Ford’s economy car at the time (Falcon), plus the 3rd- and 4th- generation cars were based on Ford’s entry-level car of their era as well (Fairmont). Technically, Mustang II’s platform was quite different than Pinto’s, with only a few chassis items such as wheel spindles and brake discs common to both after 1973, when Pinto got heavier and was in need of sturdier componentry found in the II’s front suspension (which became the model for many street rods).

Comparatively, the 1st-generation and Fox-bodied Mustangs have more Falcon and Fairmont in them than Mustang II has Pinto, yet nobody demeans them for it—go figure!

Finally, there’s the rap that the Mustang II was embarrassingly underpowered. When its performance is put in context of the times, Mustang II actually offered segment-topping bang for the buck. True, the ‘78 Mustang II’s 302 V-8 made 139hp, but its rival, the heavier Chevy Camaro, got only 145hp from its slightly

larger, 305 cid V-8. Even the 4bb1 350 in the slow-selling Z-28 made just 185 hp, and with a sticker price of \$6,500, the Z-28 was some \$2,300 more than a base Mustang II V-8 coupe—a big money difference for only 46 extra hp! Heck, Smokey and The Bandit’s “mighty” 400-cid powered ‘78 Pontiac Trans Am delivered a mere 180 horses—and it was an iconic Hollywood movie performer!

Mustang purists should also consider that performance actually DROPPED from Mustang II levels into the Fox-body era when the 118hp 255 V-8 replaced the 302. When performance was reborn in ‘82 with the Mustang GT, its 5.0-liter cranked out a whopping 18 more hp than the Mustang II had in ‘78. You see, the fact of the matter is that the Mustang II was as much a viable performer during its time as almost any other era Mustang. And more than a million of them were sold in just five years.

There were two other Mustang II’s on Mustang Alley this year—both of them black ‘78 Cobra IIs with the factory red “billboard” stripes. I talked to one owner whose low-mileage car was in spectacular shape, and he told me that he, too, was the victim of a verbal jab. I joked to him that the only thing I can do to help is try to sell more copies of my book—plus I said I’d try to raise awareness with my *Mustang Times* column, too. Imagine how boring a Mustang show would be if we all liked the exact same Mustangs!

So, now armed with some facts, a sense of historical perspective and a taste for special Mustangs—the next time you’re at a car show and want to see something really rare, just walk past the row of Boss Mustangs and the other high-dollar Mustangs, and seek out a Mustang II. You might just begin to see it in a different light.

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