

Editor's Note: This month's "My Mustang" column is a departure. As I read this I laughed until I hurt, at the Cretacci's expense. I just had to share their story.

By Dominic Cretacci

First let me start by saying I am a procrastinator. I have always been and will always be a procrastinator. That is why I am writing an article about the 45th Anniversary of the Mustang four months late. Well actually it is not so much an article about the 45th Anniversary of the Mustang as it is about our trip to the celebration of the 45th Anniversary of the Mustang.

Now I'd like to tell you about what I like to call

"The Road Trip From HELL"

Before we left on this trip I told my ex mechanic to look my 1990 7-Up Mustang over with a fine tooth comb. I asked him to check the front end, the rear end, universals, transmission, brakes, etc, etc, etc.



He gave it a clean bill of health. Said it needed the air conditioner charged and the rear self adjusters freed up a little. I was happy to hear that. Little did I know that the man who owns the shop I have been taking my Mustang (and other cars) to was still there, but his son was now doing most of the work. But not to worry, I had confidence in the shop and that was that. We were meeting the rest of our driving club, The Pony Drive, in Orlando. The group was to leave for Birmingham, then on to New Orleans, Houston, then on to Las Vegas and return home to their respective states from there. We split from the club in New Orleans and headed for Texas City, Texas, to visit friends and then return home to South West Florida from there.

In Birmingham, my Mustang's front end began to shake. I took the Mustang to a local shop that was recommended by Pony Drive members. They said this shop was fair and did good work. OK, not to worry, as my mechanic had already looked my car over and gave it a clean bill of health. Being a backyard

mechanic all my life I figured I threw a wheel weight or something simple like that. So I told their mechanic that my mechanic (Is this getting confusing?) had already looked my car over and given it a clean bill of health. Well, their mechanic came out and asked, "Is your mechanic trying to kill you"? Of course I asked, "What do you mean?" He said that one of my tie rod ends was about to fall off and proceeded to show me. Whew, it's a good thing we caught that. After a closer inspection, and me saying that I had also felt a small vibration when I applied the brakes, we ended up spending \$1,200 in front end parts—tie rod end, (as I mentioned) new rotors, (they were warped and didn't have enough left to turn) rebuilt rack & pinion steering, (it was leaking, they offered to put some Stop Leak in the rack & pinion but said I would have to eventually replace it) and inner and outer wheel bearings. The rest of the vibration was coming from a wheel bearing that was getting ready to lock up, so I replaced inner and outer bearings on both sides to be safe. My wife and I spent some quality time together (the whole day to be exact) but we missed the Friday show. My ex mechanic missed it all. Not to worry as we were pre registered and there were still two more days—Saturday and Sunday—which we attended. Then we had to buy five tires. That's right I said five. We had to replace the tires because they were 10 years old and coming apart (another part of the vibration). Little did I know that if a car sits most of the time, as ours does, the tires should be replaced every five years to be safe, even if they look to be in good shape, as ours did. Well we blew one of the new tires with 310 miles on it after hitting some road kill and having its shoulder bone pierce the right rear tire. (I wanted to save it as a souvenir [the shoulder bone, not the tire] but decided to toss it.) We were on one of those long, low bridges in Alabama and had to get to the other side. By the time we reached the other side it was really flat and we destroyed the side wall. Toast! (How embarrassing—a 5.0 Mustang brought down by a squirrel). Had to buy tire # 5. This time I got road hazard on all four tires, it wasn't offered on the original purchase. All the while I kept saying to my wife, "Look behind us because that is where we are leaving all our troubles." I didn't know how wrong I was. It gets worse from here, folks. We all had Walkie Talkies to communicate with each other and used them often. Unfortunately, sometimes the message can come too late. There was a piece of sheet metal in the middle of the road that everyone else missed. We ran it over. By the time someone got on the Walkie Talkie to inform everyone to move over as there is something in the middle of the road, the car in front of us swerved over and there it was. I hit

it dead on. It looked like a piece of furnace or air conditioning duct work. It rolled up under the car and got spit out the rear. Fortunately it was only a piece of light weight sheetmetal and fortunately, no one else hit it. We had the car checked at a local Ford dealer who said it didn't do any damage but our automatic transmission fluid was way over filled. I imagine that during the oil change, while our Mustang was being gone over with a fine tooth comb, the fluid levels were topped off without really checking to see if they were low, and too much transmission fluid was added. The rest of the trip was uneventful as we had fun and partied with our friends in New Orleans. Then it was on to Texas City, Texas, to visit friends. We navigated that part of our trip with nothing bad to report. Then it was time to head home to South West Florida. We had a wonderful and fun trip with our friends despite our mechanical problems. Once again I told my wife, "Look behind us because that is where we are leaving all our troubles." By the time we got to Ocala, on the way home, I tried to pass a slow moving car and found the transmission lost high gear and overdrive. Not wanting to travel the last leg of our trip in second gear, we had the car brought home on a flat bed for the last 165 miles. Wouldn't you know it—the transmission needed to be rebuilt.



Oh well, I guess it could have been worse, the tie rod end could have let go at 70 miles an hour on the interstate and I could have rolled the car and totaled it. My wife Kathie and I could be in some southern back woods hospital with tubes sticking out of us and we could have a doctor named Cooter with three teeth taking care of us. Sooooo—Life is good!

