

## IACOCCA SILVER 45<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY MUSTANG EDITION

By John M. Clor

**E**ver since I heard about the Iacocca Silver 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition Ford Mustang while I in Tulsa for the Mid-America Team Shelby Nationals, I just can't stop thinking about it. I don't mean thinking about the new car itself—a joint venture among Iacocca, designer Michael Leone, the Gaffoglio Family Metalcrafters and California's huge Galpin Ford dealership. That vehicle speaks well enough for itself. What I keep thinking about are all the other great people in Mustang history who have NOT had a special-edition Mustang named after them.

Who would you choose?

There's no question that when it comes to the Ford Mustang, Lee Iacocca is likely the one name that comes most readily to mind. But there are many other people who have played a significant role in the car's 45-year legacy and who deserve recognition. For a company as large and enduring as Ford, literally thousands of people have had a hand in making the Mustang a legend over the last 45 years. The vast majority of them, from mid-managers to marketers all the way down to the assembly line workers, have toiled their entire careers in anonymity; but Mustang fans know a handful have been permanently cast into the spotlight of Mustang history.

Take Donald Frey, for example. Frey was the Executive Engineer for Ford's car programs during the time the original Mustang was created. He's credited with conceiving the first mid-engine two-seat roadster prototype, the 1962 "Mustang I" concept. A key member of Iacocca's Fairlane Committee, Frey headed up all engineering aspects of the first Mustang as Product Manager. He was eventually promoted to Vice President of North American Product Development, and oversaw the development of all Mustangs up until completion of the 1973 model year. He was also involved in the development of the Ford Bronco.

Frey understood the kind of driving dynamics and styling needed for a successful sports car. While in the Army he had driven an Allard on the twisty European roads, and became convinced that the first order of business for the Fairlane Committee was to change the company's marketing and product planning to focus on the "Total Performance" of the Ford brand. The car that would lead the performance charge, of course, was the all-new Mustang. Frey's group conducted a number of survey programs that all indicated there was a tremendous youth market clamoring for a fun car from Ford. The charge was given to take the Falcon, re-body it, re-trim it, and re-introduce it as sports car.

Sports car-like performance would certainly be at the heart of any Mustang named after Don Frey ... and I'd bet that it would certainly have an independent rear suspension as well!

Another big Mustang name is Joe Oros. Oros is credited with creating the initial clay model for the 1964 1/2 Mustang. His striking design is said to have been the creative force that won over decision-makers at Ford, thus securing the internal green light to move forward with the Mustang project. Oros, a Ford Division Design Chief, received an Industrial Design Institute award for his work on the original Mustang.

Oros was also in charge of the Ford Studio that won the open styling competition for the Mustang. His concept, called the Cougar, featured a wide stance, long hood, short rear deck, and side sculpting that became a Mustang trademark. More importantly, his design was a key ingredient in the overwhelming success in



the market that is now central to Mustang lore. The Mustang was the first automobile to win the Tiffany Gold Medal for excellence in American design. The inscription read, "Mustang has the look, the fire and flavor of one of the great European road cars. Yet it is as American as its name and as practical as its price."

From clay to production model, Oros noted that in his career, no car had ever been so little changed from original design to production. He was also adamant that the production car be called Cougar, which had been the codename for the car during development. Market research overruled Design, the name Mustang was suggested—and kept.

Oros retired from Ford in 1981, and now lives outside suburban Los Angeles in a home filled with his original paintings and sculptures. Maybe the folks at Mercury could resurrect the S197-based Cougar idea, give it award-winning, stylish bodywork and call it the Joe Oros edition? Just thinking out loud!

How about longtime Ford stylist Gale Halderman? He worked closely with then-division vice-president Iacocca to lead the design team responsible for the Mustang—from feasibility right through production. With direction from Ford Studio Chief Oros, Halderman sketched six different ideas for the new sports car concept. The next day, Oros selected Halderman's out of the two-dozen designs that were submitted. Halderman received the Industrial Design Society Design Award for his design work on the 1965 Mustang.

From concept sketch to clay to production, Halderman served as design chief for the Mustang for eight more years. Some Mustang design advances under Halderman's leadership included the '65 2+2 Fastback, the '67 SportsRoof, the '71 Notchback, and full Fastback designs. Later, Halderman oversaw the design development of the 1979 Fox Body Mustang.

Most Mustang people associate Jack Telnack with the 1979-1993 "Fox Body" Mustang. I'm not sure how many know Halderman's contribution. Maybe they could make a "Halderman Edition" LX 5.0 some day!

One name that doesn't seem to get much love in Mustang lore is Semon E. "Bunkie" Knudsen. Bunkie became President of Ford Motor Company at age 55, after an already successful 29-year career at GM in which he rose to become head of the Pontiac Division. In his rather brief but important tenure at Ford, Knudsen pushed high performance for the entire Ford lineup including the Mustang, beginning with the Cobra Jet 428 program and culminating with the Boss 302, Boss 429, and Boss 351 models.

## FORD PERFORMANCE CORNER

The son of William S. Knudsen, a former president at GM, Bunkie reportedly jumped ship to Ford after being passed over for the president's post at GM. Henry Ford II personally recruited Bunkie in January of 1968, just days after GM's board had met and decided to offer their presidency to Edward N. Cole.

But Ford had passed over a few of its own talented insiders when it hired from outside the company. One in particular was Iacocca—the then-executive vice president who at just 44 had already proved himself a product and marketing star with the Mustang, one of the company's biggest successes, and was about to have another hit with the new Maverick compact car. Iacocca was very disappointed—shocked, actually—when he learned that Knudsen had been hired over him. But that hurt soon turned into resentment when it became apparent that Knudsen began making decisions and forcing policy changes in parts of the company that fell under Iacocca's responsibility.

It was Bunkie who ordered a bigger and heavier Mustang for 1971, with much of the enlargement said to be needed in order to fit Ford's massive 429 cubic-inch Cobra Jet V-8 under its hood without extensive modifications (unlike what was needed to be done on the 1969-'70 Boss 429 Mustang). Within months of the bigger Mustang's introduction, the muscle car market had collapsed and Knudsen faced political infighting with career Ford execs, notably Iacocca and those associated with him. It all finally led to Knudsen's firing on September 2, 1969, after rumors of his dismissal had turned one of Henry Ford's hallmark quotes, "History is bunk," into a widely circulated quip within Ford circles as, "Bunkie is history."

Following Bunkie's departure, the presidency position was vacant for more than a year until Iacocca was promoted to President in December 1970. (Ironically, Iacocca would be dismissed in similar fashion eight years later, in 1978.) Bunkie's special-edition Mustang would be big—and likely powered by the biggest engine possible!

If there's one retired Ford executive who truly deserves a Mustang named after him, it's Neil Ressler. Ressler joined Ford in 1967 as a senior research scientist and became principal design engineer for suspension and steering in 1971. But between 1981 and 1994, Ressler's career grew by leaps and bounds, serving as chief components engineer for the Climate Control Division, chief engineer of Small Car Design and Development, chief engineer of Chassis and Electrical Engineering, and then executive director of vehicle engineering at Car Product Development. But it was his growing reputation as a true "car guy" that made his opinions count when it came to making enthusiast decisions, such as supporting the SVO Mustang and SVO operations, and (my favorite) voting against turning the Mustang into the Ford Probe.

Most important, Ressler was instrumental in setting up the Ford Special Vehicle Team and getting its first SVT Mustang Cobra to market in 1993. He became a key enabler for SVT engineering to accomplish work within mainstream manufacturing and allowed SVT the autonomy it needed to succeed. Ressler soon became a strategic sponsor and mentor for a 5<sup>th</sup>-generation Mustang program that would pay homage to the early designs. He and SVT co-founder, Bob Rewey, a Ford VP in charge of marketing, set the wheels in motion to assemble a group of Mustang designers and engineers who could turn that idea into a reality by the 2005 model year.

With the SVT program already up and running, Ressler was elected a Ford vice president in 1994 as head of Core Product Development in Ford Automotive Operations and became the head of Advanced Vehicle Technology later that year. In 1998 he added the chairmanship of Jaguar Racing and Cosworth Racing to his duties and became a board member of Stewart Grand Prix.



From 1999 until his retirement in 2001, Ressler held the position of Ford Motor Company vice president and chief technical officer. He holds a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from the GM Institute, a master's and Ph.D. in physics from the University of Michigan and an MBA from Michigan State.

Two weeks after the Ford GT concept was unveiled at the 2002 North American International Auto Show, Bill Ford asked Neil Ressler to consult on the feasibility study to turn the concept into reality. Ressler, then semi-retired, was ideal for the task, as he was involved with two previous mid-engine programs: In the mid-1980s, Ressler worked on a Ferrari 308 competitor, code-named GN34; in the '90s, Ressler spearheaded the Petunia project, another two-seat, mid-engine sports car that evolved into the Ford GT concept car. Once the program was approved, Ressler assumed the role of consultant to the SVT-based Ford GT team, serving as a liaison between the team and upper management.

That leads to one big question: If a "Ressler Edition" Mustang were ever created, would it *have* to be mid-engined? Don't be surprised if you see Neal at select Mustang and Ford GT events—he's a great guy who loves cars as much as we all do.

I'd be remiss if I didn't close by mentioning my old SVT boss, O. John Coletti. But is he best known as the team leader who was put in charge of Ford's "skunkworks" effort that became the 1994 SN95 Mustang? Or will he best be remembered as Ford's modern "go-fast guru" as the head of Special Vehicle Engineering and SVT? The answer is, of course, yes—to both.

Coletti headed up the "secret group" that breathed new life into one of the most legendary automotive nameplates of all time for 1994—Mustang. Coletti's SVE group also developed noteworthy performance concept vehicles, including the Mustang Mach III, 10.0L BOSS Mustang, Ford GT90, Mustang Super Stallion, and the 6.1L Mustang CJR.

Coletti joined Ford in 1972 as a product design engineer in the General Products Division. But when the company's emphasis on Total Performance that began in the 1960s came to an abrupt halt in 1973 as the industry's focus shifted from excitement to emissions and fuel economy, Coletti's career shifted along with it. He was named Mustang business planning manager in 1989. His efforts were integral in reviving the hallowed pony car for 1994 and led to his assignment as director of the Ford Special Vehicle Team in January 1994, replacing Janine Bay as SVE's chief engineer.

While his pet projects always seemed to center around the Mustang, Coletti was charged with overseeing product development and engineering of all SVT vehicles, including the SVT Mustang Cobra and three different Cobra R-model racers, two generations of the SVT F-150 Lightning pickup, the critically acclaimed SVT Focus sport compact, and the cult-favorite SVT Contour sports sedan. Coletti also oversaw the Ford GT engineering program under Ressler, directing the ground-up development of Ford's centennial supercar.

Coletti retired in December 2004 after 33 years with the company, and while some folks thought they'd be seeing "Coletti Edition" Mustangs on the street by now, I guess it's fair to say that every Mustang wearing an SVT badge is a tribute to John.

For now, at least, we'll have 45 copies of the 2009½ Iacocca Silver Edition Mustang that will be built. They'll all have that special fastback roofline and custom bodywork, trick interior and wheels, and even some extra handling and performance, thanks to Ford Racing Performance Parts. But wouldn't it be cool to see a few of these other great names on a Mustang some day?



John Clor

John M. Clor  
Ford Racing  
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