

## STURGIS MUSTANG RALLY PUTS EXCLAMATION POINT ON MUSTANG BRAND

By John M. Clor

**A** key element of Ford Racing's ongoing enthusiast outreach effort is getting directly into the Ford performance community and connecting with our customers face-to-face. To that end, Ford Racing's marketing events trailer has crisscrossed the country again this year to deliver a Ford product presence at a wide variety of major enthusiast events and car shows—many of them Mustang and/or MCA-related.

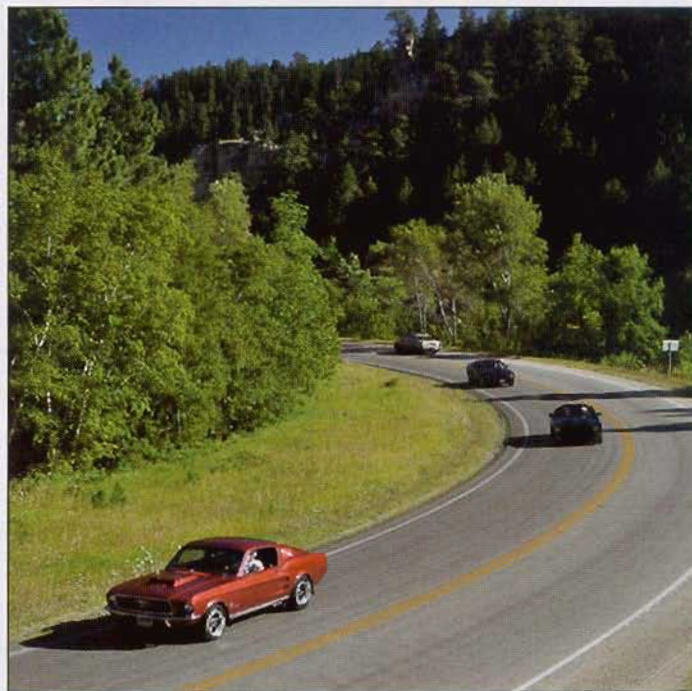
But this time around we've also leveraged our relationships in our club-focused Ford Performance Group program to support a second tier of club shows and independent events on smaller, more personal scale. That initiative has kept me out on the road nearly every weekend since mid-March, making appearances at as many club shows and regional events as possible.

I'll be sharing those eye-opening experiences with you in an upcoming column, but for now I'd like to offer a little insight on another goal of our initiative—to go places Ford hasn't been before and to seek out the new or out-of-the-way venues that are attracting YOU. Bringing back to the office key feedback on what's happening in the enthusiast world helps Ford Racing focus our marketing resources to where they can make the biggest grassroots impact for the company.

Yes, there's much to be said for the annual "conventions" that many of the major specialty clubs put on—some have been going on for a good number of years and all have their own unique appeal. The annual "numbered" SAAC conventions have covered nearly four decades now, while an SVTOA "Experience" event is a more recent series of owner celebrations. Others, such as last year's 4<sup>th</sup> MidWest Ford Fest at KCIR and this year's 1<sup>st</sup> SVT SuperFest at VIR, are great ideas that are just getting off the ground. Whether it's a longstanding show, like the Shelby Spring Fling held in Brown County, IN, or an up-and-coming happening such as ShelbyFest in Hermann, MO—it's quite clear that a select few car-savvy event organizers have been able to come up with a successful formula that ensures attendees will be coming back, year after year.

And of course there are the well-established "must see" annual events—such as the Fabulous Fords Forever show at Knott's Berry Farm in Anaheim, CA; the Ford Nationals in Carlisle, PA; and the Shelby Mid-America Meet in Tulsa, OK. And I'd venture to say that you could now add Mustang Week in Myrtle Beach, SC, to that list. Those big shows have grown to become "givens" on any Ford enthusiast's calendar. And I wouldn't be surprised if the upstart "Fords at The Summit" event in Norwalk, OH, begins to take off in the next few years as well.

But every once and a while, I've come across a new experience that well deserves both mention on our part and future consideration on your part. I'm happy to report that I recently returned from a uniquely positioned event that has to be one of the fastest-growing, stand-alone Mustang shows in the country. If you guessed that I'm talking about the Sturgis Mustang Rally—then you should be proud of how well you keep your ear to the ground in the Mustang hobby!



After attending this year's Sturgis Mustang Rally over Labor Day weekend, I must admit that even a well-traveled, media-experienced show veteran like me can still be impressed by the power of Mustang passion at a well-oiled, uniquely appealing event like the SMR show.

I'd guess some appeal rests in the "Sturgis" name. There's no question that the tiny outpost of Sturgis, South Dakota, is best-known for hosting the largest biker event in the world each summer. And after driving out there from Detroit I can now understand why hundreds of thousands of bikers make the annual pilgrimage to the Black Hills for the storied "Sturgis Motorcycle Rally" (a.k.a. "Bike Week")—the scenery can be breathtaking! I'll also admit, however, that after spending hour after hour after hour driving across the vast expanses of grasslands along I-90, it can be somewhat numbing as well. But at least now I see why the "I Rode Mine to Sturgis" tee shirt is such a big deal to bikers—doing so would certainly require beverage or two and a night in the hot tub!

And yes, while you're in that neck of the woods I'd also recommend taking the 20-minute trip from Sturgis down to Rapid City, SD—a place where just about any type of family entertainment is available. It makes the perfect home base to plan a visit up to see historic Mt. Rushmore. (C'mon, you can't really visit this part of the country and NOT see this spectacular national monument—and yes, it also proved to be quite a sight!)

But I wasn't there to be a tourist—I drove to Sturgis to experience for myself this Mustang Rally that I had been hearing so much about. More than a year ago, during a guest speaking appearance I made before an SVTOA car show at Apple Valley Ford outside Minneapolis, I met fellow enthusiast Scott MacIntosh who told me about the great time he had at the Sturgis Rally last year. After he'd sent me some pictures





and info, I was convinced that I needed to make the trip for myself. And when SMR event coordinator Ed Hinker told me he was looking for a guest speaker for his banquet and would love to have Ford Racing participate in the show—I signed up!

Just a few weeks after this year's 70<sup>th</sup> Annual Sturgis Motorcycle Rally rolled out of town in early August, hundreds of wild Mustangs galloped in for their own mega-event of the four-wheeled kind. The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Sturgis Mustang Rally, set over the 2010 Labor Day weekend, boasted a litany of activities designed to offer some fun for the entire family. There was a registration reception and a wine-tasting with live music on Thursday night, followed by a Black Hills poker run tour, kids events and an evening pub-crawl on Friday.

By the time I got into town Saturday morning for the big Show 'n' Shine on Main Street, Hinker and his SMR staff had already reserved a prime corner spot for me to set up my tent for a Ford Performance Group meet-n-greet, right next to the event registration headquarters. I wasn't prepared to see more Mustangs lined up at this show than I saw on Detroit's own "Mustang Alley" during the Woodward Dream Cruise—but when the number of registered cars that lined both sides of the street for blocks had passed 500, I knew this was going to be a special day.

Sure enough, it was. From early morning until late afternoon, I chatted with a steady stream of Mustang and Ford fans, handing out several hundred free Ford Racing posters and Ford Racing Performance Parts 2010 CD catalogs in the process. I met and talked with owners and their wives and even kids, plus MCA National Treasurer Ron Bramlett, Great American Pony Drive Organizer David Turnbull, and even the mayor of Sturgis! During a lunch break I headed over to one of the many local restaurants for a 15-minute interview on the local radio station, which was broadcasting live from the show. There I talked about the appeal of the Mustang brand, the quality, safety, technology and fuel efficiency in the Ford product lineup, and how people can go to [www.FordRacing.com](http://www.FordRacing.com) and sign up for our weekly



"Fast News From Ford Racing" email to stay connected with what's going on in the world of Ford performance.

Then it was back to tent for more conversations and giveaways before the classic Mustang auction and the Cruiser Night Parade lineup. Before I knew it, the cars were pulling out for the parade through town and out to the Thunder Dome complex just three miles east of Sturgis. That was followed by an evening of drag racing at nearby Sturgis Dragway, right up 'til midnight!

Sunday was sunny and the autocross event out at the Thunder Dome, plus a daylong Mustang corral and swap meet. Before you knew it, it was time for the show's big giveaway of a new Mustang GT, plus a prize auction leading up to dinner in the huge Thunder Dome tent. A fine meal for all was served amazingly fast, and I soon got the nod to head up on the big stage to give my presentation on Ford Racing's role in Mustang history. I gave away a 5.0 tee shirt and a copy of my own "Mustang Dynasty" book during my talk, then hung around for the awards presentation and the live music. But I had to be back on the road heading home on Monday morning to be able to help produce our "Fast News" e-blast by Wednesday, so I had to skip the planned "Mustang Rodeo" day out at the Thunder Dome.

All in all, it was a great time in a great place. The Mustangs and scenery were eye-popping, and the people I met were a blast to hang out with—I couldn't have been more impressed with how well the event was put together and how much it was enjoyed by attendees. That, my dear friends, is really what this great Mustang enthusiast hobby is all about!

I can't tell you where my Ford Racing travels may take me during the upcoming show season, but I can tell you that no matter what Mustang event might be on your wish list next year, you'd be hard-pressed to top a Labor Day holiday getaway to the beautiful Black Hills of South Dakota to celebrate Mustangs in Sturgis!

*Editor's Note: Veteran automotive journalist John Clor has owned, raced, worked on or written about Fords and Mustangs for nearly 30 years. After a 15-year career at The Detroit News, Clor shifted to automotive journalism with stints at AutoWeek and later Edmunds.com. He joined the Ford Special Vehicle Team in 1995 and had spent the better part of the next decade working on SVT communications, PR and Marketing. Today, he manages [www.FordPerformance.com](http://www.FordPerformance.com) for Ford Racing, and is also a columnist for Mustang Enthusiast and Mustang Trader magazines, editor of SVT Enthusiast magazine, and author of a hardcover book, *The Mustang Dynasty*. Clor is also the proud owner of three '70s-era Mustangs, including one he calls "a long-term project."*

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