

LAP 32 — RACING COSTS

It's expensive to race, that's a fact, but if you really want to get your Mustang out on the track in a competitive environment you can do it for less than you think. Many Mustang owners forego the urge to race because they feel it takes a huge, never ending pile of cash to be competitive. It doesn't. So in this lap we'll be honest about the costs and explain how to save some money and get that pony out on the track and play!

Racing is about competition and to some degree that includes spending money. Rules are about boundaries, creating a level playing field that permits real competition and not pseudo competition based solely upon the dollars spent. There are primarily three sanctioning bodies creating opportunities to race your Mustang. The SCCA, NASA, and the Vintage Motorsports Council are organizations sanctioning various clubs across the nation that have specific classes and rules focused on creating competitive racing while controlling cost. Certainly, there are ways to get your Mustang on the track but these events are generally not sanctioned implying loose rules and little, if any, cost control. There are numerous annual events celebrating particular marques that advertise "exhibition racing" but most allow cars masquerading as "race cars" to run yet be built to no particular specification and without the natural limits (and thus costs) that come from running the correct engine displacement, brakes or transmission required in vintage racing. This is why many choose to race in events sponsored by sanctioned clubs.

There are two kinds of cost, fixed and variable. Fixed costs are those associated with your Mustang including its purchase and items that don't generally wear out from racing. Things like the fuel cell, fire system, and suspension parts like control arms, springs, and shocks. Other fixed costs can be associated with items like tools, safety gear, and your car trailer. The good thing about fixed costs is that they are essentially "one time" and not a function of the amount of track time your Mustang sees. The secret to keeping your racing costs low is to make sure the fixed costs are truly "one time" costs and not ongoing. For example, building your Mustang once and following proven advice will prevent fixed costs from rising as "improvements" are made. The key here is to stick to what is proven to work. Set yourself a budget for fixed costs and stick to it because you'll need the rest for variable expenses.

Variable expenses are closely related to the amount of racing you do. One of the largest is associated to your engine. From the day you first fire it, your engine is self destructing at a rate proportional to the build specification. There are many road racers that never open the hood all weekend except to check fluids because their engine packages are trouble free. If you target one of these builds it can dramatically reduce your costs. I know racers running the same short block they put in service

ten years ago by sticking to a routine maintenance program. I realize it's hard to believe an engine can live that long but with a careful build and attention to detail it is possible. Building a reasonable engine, with moderate valve lift and compression ratio, can result in a very competitive Mustang when combined with a light car and a good suspension. If you keep valve lift below .600" and compression below 10.5:1, it is easy to run in the middle of the pack where there is plenty of good competitive racing going on. Oh, and one more thing, you get to run on pump gas which is much, much cheaper than race fuel.

After the engine, brakes and tires are the highest contributors to variable costs. Most racers use Carbon Kevlar shoes and pads that cost no more than the street versions. This makes running the brakes on your street Mustang similar because although you wear them out much faster on the track, you probably drive more miles on the street which makes the cost comparable. Tires are another matter. Every racer wants to find someone to pay for new tires, unfortunately, most of us never do. This can be a problem because nothing cures bad handling like new tires. Learning to

drive fast on old tires is a lost art you need to learn. Making your Mustang handle well with old tires will make you much, much faster on new tires. Many racers save the best for the last, only running new tires in the Sunday points race.

You don't need an unlimited budget to race. Yes it's expensive, but the costs are manageable provided you pick a venue that levels the playing field by limiting the entrants through the strict interpretation of set rules and build your Mustang to maximize track time through reliability.

In our club, several of the guys running pump gas motors place high in the points because they make and finish every race.

You can do this, too.

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Charlie Jones, a.k.a.

Roadracer

