

TURNING A ROLLER



Photo: Noel Jennings/R-A Motorsports

INTO REALITY

PART ONE: A MUSTANG IN BOXES

By John M. Clor

If you stay in the Mustang hobby long enough, there's a really good chance that you're going to pick up a "project car" or two to go along with your Mustang driver or show car. It's just a matter of time for most of us. In fact, if you don't already have a car torn apart yourself, then I'm sure you already know of a Mustang owner who has at least one project car that's being stored, or in some stages of being worked on, or worse—a Mustang that's mostly in boxes.

You know exactly what I'm talking about. Seems that regardless of our own actual mechanical ability, we're all pretty good at taking things apart. Oh sure, we have every intention of getting it all put back together, even better than new and as quickly as possible! We even take the time to put the parts that we remove into boxes, and to bag up all the fasteners. But then something happens ... I think it's called "life."

What I mean by that is, after we wind up taking everything apart to find out what work needs to be done, we usually discover that we don't have enough of the two most important ingredients required

to complete any Mustang project: time and money. Consequently, there it will sit—taking up what little room, as well as time and cash, that we have until the spouse begins to see the whole project as one, big colossal waste.

Well, I admit I am one of those people. At first it was funny when my wife, Jenny, started telling people, "John's got one junker Mustang in his friend's garage across town, plus has rolled another old Mustang into the garage of the elderly neighbor across the street! ... And he has the nerve to talk about buying another one!"

I know that when she puts it that way, it sounds like I am crazy. But there's a simple explanation for it all.

Like most of us, I drove Mustangs in my youth, but they were all bought used. I finally was able to buy a new one the year after I got married, so I ordered the hottest new Mustang available from my Ford dealer in 1977—a black-and-gold Mustang II Cobra II with a 302, 4-speed and T-tops! No matter that my order had just missed the end of the '77 model run and I had to wait until the 1978s went into production—it would be my first brand new Mustang!

Someday I'll share that wonderful new Mustang ownership experience with you, but long story short—when the babies came along, I wound up selling off my Cobra II and later lost track of it ... until 2001, when I heard it was for sale in a small town about 100 miles away. Of course I went out to look at it, and my heart sank to see it in such a state of disrepair. It wasn't even running anymore. But since it still was my first new Mustang, I paid way too much for it, towed it home and took it all apart. With no progress on it three years later, it hit me that it would take me many more years—and dollars—until I could get that thing back together!

At about the same time, I came across another Cobra II—this one a red-on-white '77 302, automatic T-Top "project car" owned by Joe Rementer in upstate New York. Paint, bodywork and suspension were all re-done beautifully and the rest was all there—in boxes. I figured if I just bought that car off Joe (who had lost interest), I could re-do the interior, get the engine and trans rebuilt and have a real driver done in no time!

Somehow I convinced Jenny that I should just put away that black Mustang to work on later, and to buy that sweet white roller so that I can get that Mustang on the road much faster than my other one! (To this day I have no idea how I talked her into that deal!)

Now it's six years later ... and the white one's still in boxes, too.

Oh, sure, I got the motor redone—and even bought a rebuilt C4 trans for it. But with no other progress on it since 2004, it hit me that like my black Mustang, it would take me many years—and dollars—until I could get that thing back together! (Seeing a pattern here yet?)

But then something happened to break the cycle. Maybe having two kids in college, zilch for free time, no extra money and being out of storage space, something just had to give. (Uh, sorry—selling them both was out of the question). But I needed help!

Help arrived when I least expected it. In my travels for the Ford Performance Group last summer, I happened to attend the Midwest Ford Fest in Kansas City, put on by the Mid-America Cobra Club. The featured car at the show was the 1969-1971 Boss Mustang, plus there was the 2nd annual Twister Special reunion, and the 1st annual Dominator GT reunion. The MACC folks put on a great event, and even I got to meet the people behind the

new Twister and Dominator Mustangs, Jeff and Julie Yergovich.

Jeff and Julie happen to run R&A Motorsports in suburban Kansas City, and invited me to see their 25,000 square-foot shop after the car show. During the tour, Noel Jennings, R&A's sales and marketing director, mentioned that R&A has established a reputation as the premier restorer for "National Champion" Shelybys and other high-end Mustangs.

After seeing the cars being worked on at the time, I knew that these folks were used to dealing with some of the most demanding, top-shelf Mustang restoration work in the business. I also knew I had a way to stump them: Mustang II restorations are nearly impossible, what with hardly any NOS or remanufactured parts available at any price, and no one left out there who knows enough about Mustang IIs to do the work correctly. So I made a quip that yes, they can restore even the rarest of Mustangs and score record dollars at auction, but I bet they couldn't get a Mustang II Cobra II back together properly!

Much to my surprise, Jeff, Julie, and Noel showed NO FEAR when they took the bet! They told me to show up with the car and the parts, and they'll figure it all out correctly and get it back together the right way in just a few months!

Jenny and I came to the realization that when project cars stay in boxes for years on end, you either have to get them done with professional help or simply sell them off. While I admit I'm over my head trying to restore my Mustang IIs by myself, it would be VERY interesting to see if one of the top Mustang restoration shops in the country finds a "II" restoration just as difficult as, say, a rare Shelby. So we all agreed to do the project and follow the progress step by step with you on the pages on *Mustang Times*.

After delivering the car to R&A, the shop's team of experts looked over my red-striped white "roller" Cobra II like it was an all-new Mustang species! Undaunted, some headed off to do a little research, while others carefully cataloged all the parts in the boxes that came with

the car, and spread out all the sandwich bags of nuts and bolts and fasteners to see just what they had. Within a matter of days under R&A's care, Noel had contacted me to say that I need to go back into my garage and storage shed because they have determined that I had not included all of the parts needed to restore the car!

I already give them credit for knowing what boxes of parts I had forgotten to send, and have since spent many emails and phone calls trying to track everything down for them. (My new best friend is the guy at the UPS Store!) Noel has promised to take pictures of all the work, and each month for the next few months I'll report back on the challenges we face getting a Mustang II out of boxes and put back together!

The lesson here is, if your Mustang project car has been apart for years on end, you're likely going to need real help. I'm O.K. with that now, and next month we'll see just how much goes into putting things back together. So stay tuned—this should be interesting. **MT**



Photo: Jenny Clor

▲ Purchase of a white '77 roller meant the black '78 project car would be headed back into storage.



Photo: John Clor

▲ Each year the car was rolled out of the garage, and rolled back in due to lack of time and money.



Photo: Noel Jennings/R-A Motorsports

▲ R&A's first order of business was to test-fire the rebuilt engine to fill the empty engine bay.



Photo: John Clor

▲ Car was stored with powertrain pulled, as engine and transmission were sent out for rebuilding.



Photo: John Clor

▲ Boxes of parts filled the project car's interior as well as our nearby backyard storage shed.



Photo: Noel Jennings/R-A Motorsports

▲ R&A had to sort through hundreds of removed fasteners in marked baggies before reassembly could begin.