

**WHY YOU SHOULD LOVE OUR FORD RACING BOSS**

By John M. Clor

**B**y now you've likely heard that we at Ford Racing have a new director. Our former boss, Brian Wolfe has returned to the global product development part of the business, and Jamie Allison, who had managed our Ford Racing Performance Parts business, has been given the helm of Ford North America Motorsports. Normally, such management changes don't gain much attention from those outside of the company, as they are meant to be quite seamless to the consumer. But in this case, I think you might enjoy a little bit of "insider" perspective on Jamie, because as enthusiast club members, it's good to know that there are people at Ford who truly understand you and your wants and needs. And I can tell you that Jamie is certainly one of those people.



If you visit [FordRacing.com](http://FordRacing.com) and get our Fast News from Ford Racing e-blast, you may have already read Jamie's thoughts about managing Ford's racing program. "We've been entrusted with a legacy of winning that no other auto manufacturer in the world can match," he had said. "The spirit of Henry Ford for innovation and his can-do attitude still guides us today; we are unwavering in our will to win. That same spirit is found in the new Ford Motor Company that is now making the most exciting, fuel-efficient, fun-to-drive and high quality cars around the world. If you are not in one today, I ask you to drive one!"

Yes, he's passionate about Ford. He's also a true "Mustang" guy. But the real tip off on him should have dawned on you when you then read the part that said, "I offer all of you the chance to submit any question on your mind to us via [askTFR@Ford.com](mailto:askTFR@Ford.com) during this year, and we will answer one question a week as part of our Fast News e-newsletter. You see, Jamie is not only interested in gaining new friends for Ford, but also is keen on keeping "connected" to Ford enthusiasts—and that, my dear friends, should be music to all of our ears, as our voices will continue to be heard!

Jamie joined Ford Motor Company in 1987, after graduating from the University of Michigan-Dearborn with an electrical engineering degree. He later returned to earn a MBA in marketing from the same university. He began his career at Ford in product engineering, and spent the first 10 years of his career working within engineering and product planning.



In 1997, Jamie made the transition to product marketing, and held a series of marketing jobs within the company before joining Ford Racing Technology in 2003, where he has overseen the Ford Racing Performance Parts business, as well as North America Motorsports Marketing. Under his leadership, the Ford Racing Performance Parts business was transformed by offering ready-to-race vehicles for production-based racing, Performance Packs and new vehicle modifications for enthusiasts. The team also partnered with Shelby on the launch of exciting new Shelby performance vehicles, and created the Ford Performance Group as an outreach to Ford Clubs—all of which reinvigorated Ford's support of performance enthusiasts.



I know first-hand that Ford's connection with enthusiasts is important to you. It sure has been at the center of my own career at Ford. Every job has its ups and downs, but sometimes you can actually wind up doing something that you truly love to do. Whether through careful selection or simply dumb luck, you may find yourself part of an endeavor that is so much fun and so personally rewarding that you just don't seem to notice how insanely hard you are working. Well, that's exactly how it was for me after I left a great job at a weekly car magazine to join the Ford Special Vehicle Team PR and marketing staff way back in 1995.

Our entire SVT marketing program had been dealer-funded, and was done with NO advertising budget. Instead, we were tasked with promoting this new SVT brand and its performance vehicles strictly through the enthusiast media and grassroots interaction with prospective customers. While that may sound crazy, consider what Ford's Jim Farley, group vice president, Global Marketing and Canada, Mexico and South America operations, had told bloggers during Detroit's 2010 North American International Auto Show. He said that his "a-ha" moment in automotive marketing came while he was at Scion, when he learned that for a brand that people don't yet know, a company must rely on others to tell the story. Simply put, third-party endorsements carry more weight with most would-be customers than company paid promotions or ads.

Considering the total cost and number of people involved with the old SVT marketing operation, the results of using enthusiast media and events to launch and promote a new brand among performance oriented buyers were no less than amazing. During its 12-year run of continuous in-market operations from 1993 to 2004, SVT grew to become the longest-running, best-selling most successful niche performance vehicle program in Ford's 100-plus year history.

For those of us who had been part of that team, easily the coolest part of our job was participating in the weekly "pizza meeting." While holding a pizza luncheon was originally envisioned to ensure attendance during busy workweeks, the food was actually NOT the reason our conference room rarely had an empty seat. Rather, it was because all voices were heard at this meeting—a place where marketers could take customer feedback directly back to engineers and impact product with their input, and where the engineers could help evaluate the marketing and PR efforts and give their own input on how to best bring the brand message and products to the enthusiast community. Let me tell you, there's no better way to become inspired with your work at a car company than to have direct impact on product.

Better still, we didn't have problems figuring out what our customers wanted. One reason was because we had spent so much of our marketing efforts interacting directly with Ford enthusiast customers across the country. From car shows to driving events to racing venues, we were there, on the ground and in-person. Everyone was assigned to "chat duty" at our display trailer—from the engineers to the PR team, and from managers to the info-center staff. Talking face-to-face with such a wide variety of customers and prospects at so many different events turned out to be a much more valuable information resource than any third-party customer research study or expensive focus group could ever hope to be.

Another reason we were so in-tune to our customer wants and needs was that most of the folks on the team were true "car guys." That meant we didn't have to spend much time discussing customer views of what's cool and what's lame—because we WERE the customers. We knew because we lived the same enthusiast-oriented lives that our customers lived. It was a thing of beauty.

After SVT's founders retired and the team's unique marketing operations and stand-alone dealer program were disbanded during a series of Ford senior management changes in 2005, some of us from the team wound up working at Ford Racing. Luckily for us, the value of our enthusiast experience wasn't lost on Jamie Allison. He knew that enthusiast owners and prospective customers are among the most active and influential of all Ford brand loyalists. Making performance products that satisfy their desires helps to activate them and make them "disciples" to preach the Ford "gospel" to their peers. And that kind of customer endorsement is key for any manufacturer to grow all-important purchase consideration among prospective customers.



To that end, Jamie has spearheaded a variety of Ford Racing projects designed specifically to help Ford build on this connection with enthusiasts, and I'm thrilled to be involved in one of them. It's Ford Racing's Ford Performance Group initiative, which puts a face and a place on Ford Motor Company's connection to enthusiast clubs and the performance aftermarket.

The program features a portal web site that facilitates more interactive communications between Ford and its past, present and future performance customers. Its goal is to help promote Ford-based clubs, coordinate the company's contact with the myriad of Ford-centered events, and provide a web showcase for all of the new performance offerings from Ford—all in one place.

Using an umbrella approach, [www.FordPerformanceGroup.com](http://www.FordPerformanceGroup.com) brings some unique resources within Ford Racing to bear on communicating with Ford enthusiasts and promoting their lifestyle. The Ford Performance Group of clubs enjoys a variety of benefits beyond the establishment of an internet-based, Ford-sponsored information clearinghouse. Enthusiasts can also get club and event information on participating organizations via a phone call to the Ford Performance Info Center (1-800-FORD-788), which also handles questions on Ford performance offerings. And there's even expert technical assistance available on Ford performance engines and hardware via the Ford Racing Tech Line staff.

Together, they provide the only service of its kind offered by any of the major auto makers. The fact is, no other carmaker promotes their enthusiast clubs like this, or gives their loyal performance customers a direct, toll-free line to the factory. What's more, members of participating Ford-based clubs qualify for a discount on purchases of special Ford enthusiast merchandise. Items now available through the Info Center and on [www.FordShowParts.com](http://www.FordShowParts.com) include out-of-print SVT product brochures, tech data cards and posters, official SVT and Ford Certificates of Authenticity, as well as unique hardcover Mustang, SVT and Ford GT books. And it's all just a phone call or a mouse-click away.

The man charged with steering this innovative outreach program is Ford Performance Marketing Manager Mickey Matus. His performance roots at Ford trace way back to SVT and eventually through SVT, so Mickey is uniquely qualified to keep his Ford Racing responsibilities focused on true enthusiasts. Yes, the Ford Performance Group web site has since grown to promote 10 different car clubs, but it is certainly anchored by the MCA. Fueled by the unequalled popularity of the Mustang, there are far more Ford-based vehicle clubs than any other marque. And thanks to all those years of working with them at the grassroots level, Ford Racing is able to offer clubs and their members what they had said they wanted the most—a way to have Ford help them promote their performance passion and also to gain a sustainable connection with the company.



Part of my job on [FordPerformanceGroup.com](http://FordPerformanceGroup.com) is to come up with the kind of unique web site content that comes directly from Ford performance vehicle fans. While some people may see that as a daunting task, it's something that any Ford or Mustang enthusiast would love to do—and indeed something that the people behind *Mustang Times* magazine clearly love to do. So yet again, I have found myself working on another really cool enthusiast-focused Ford program that deals directly with the same Mustang and performance people that I have come to know so well over the years.

If you appreciate the idea that Ford has put into place a program to stay connected with you as Ford performance enthusiasts, then I suggest that you employ and enjoy this rekindled relationship. For starters, you should bookmark [www.FordPerformanceGroup.com](http://www.FordPerformanceGroup.com) and visit it regularly. Then check out [www.FordRacing.com](http://www.FordRacing.com) and sign up for our weekly Fast News e-newsletter. And don't hesitate to call the Ford Performance Info Center (1-800-FORD-788) if you have a question about what you see on [www.FordVehicles.com](http://www.FordVehicles.com), want to share an idea about Ford products or performance merchandise you'd like to see, or when you need to tap into the experts on the Ford Racing Tech Line.

And finally, by all means, get out there and enjoy your performance Ford. Find and attend a club meeting, a car show, cruise, or any driving or racing event—and discover the fun and all the friendly people involved in the world of Ford performance. Hopefully, we'll all be "Driving Ford Passion" with the MCA and the Ford Performance Group for many more years to come!

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[www.FordPerformance.com](http://www.FordPerformance.com)

