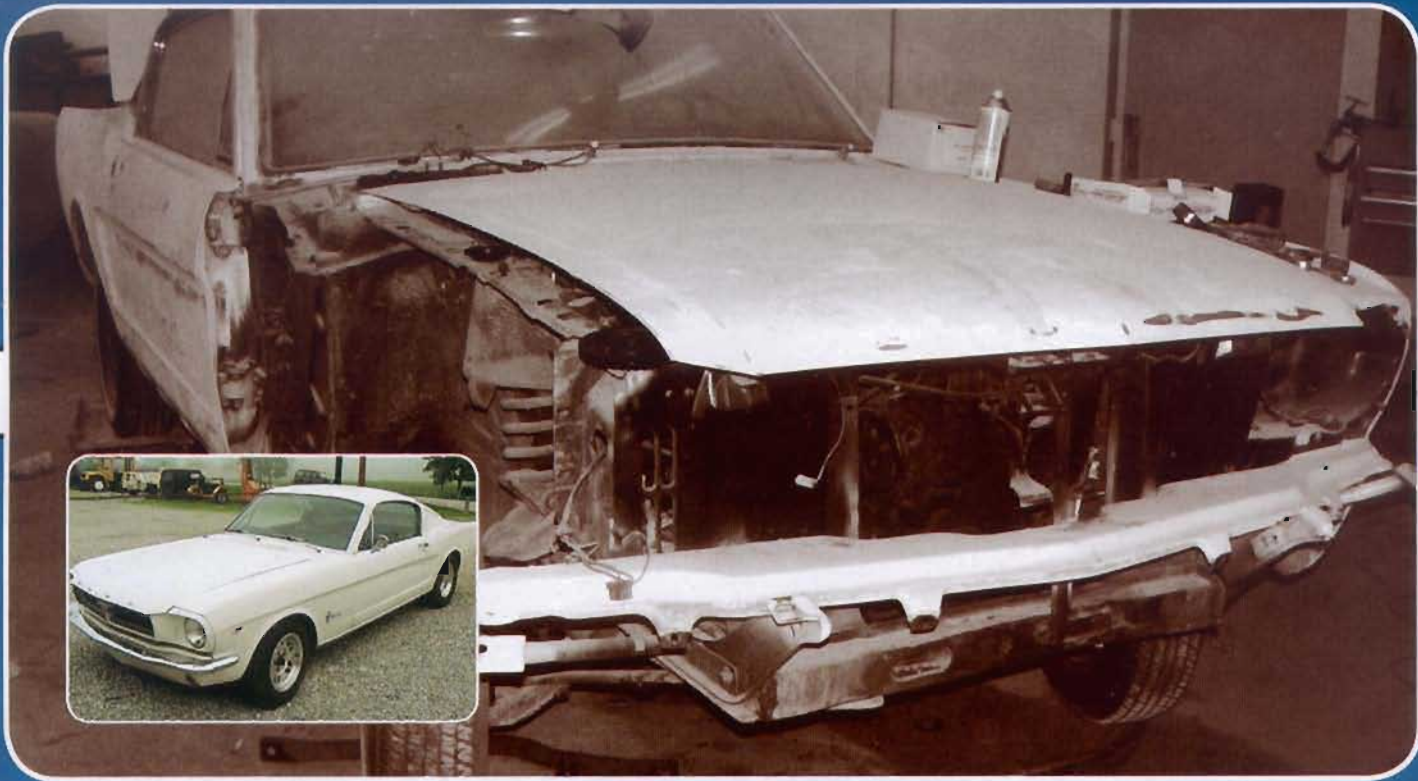


# MUSTANGS ON THE MIND



## PRESERVING A PIECE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Text and Photos by James Dillard

**A**nyone who loves classic Mustangs understands “Mustangs on the mind.” Even if you own one that’s completely finished, you still find yourself flipping through Mustang parts catalogues, browsing on-line classifieds, and searching diligently through eBay auctions.

But when you have one that is going to need a lot of work, the amount of time you spend thinking and planning about your Mustang increases that much more.

I’ve owned several early model Mustangs and a few newer ones. My first classic Mustang was a 1966 Vintage Burgundy coupe with a 200ci engine. I bought it when I was in the Air Force by making payments to a Navy guy from a nearby base. Being my first experience with a classic Mustang, I was just a little uneducated to say the least.

The quarter panels were shot, the engine wouldn’t start, the floor pans were a foregone conclusion and for some reason the headlights just wouldn’t come on. I sold that coupe a few months later to a teenager who planned on customizing it. I felt thoroughly defeated and discouraged.

Several coupes, and years of reading and learning about Mustangs later, I finally decided to find a fastback. My feverish hunt began, sparing no effort in my internet searches. A Wimbledon White 2+2 popped up on my radar, only an hour or so away. In the pictures (of course) the car looked very good. Despite riding on 1994 Ford Ranger wheels (a sacrilege by any measure), I thought I’d found myself a perfect “mild” project fastback.

I drove out with a friend, gave the Mustang the once over,

and decided this would be the fastback to restore. On the hour-drive home, the engine sounded good; it smoked a little when I idled at traffic lights, but I didn’t give it much thought. The C4 transmission seemed to be doing its job. Generally speaking, I was pleased with the car’s performance on the way home. I can’t describe the feeling of finally driving a fastback after 10 years of looking and dreaming. No words can really grasp it.

After I drove my new Pony into her stable (my attached garage), I started looking over her a little more closely. The engine compartment looked like it hadn’t been cleaned in 20 years. A Prestone coolant container was connected to the radiator overflow hose and strapped to the battery. I shuddered as I pulled this make-shift overflow reservoir from the Mustang. At some point, the block and attaching parts had been painted blue, which isn’t correct for a ‘65 Mustang. I’d have to change that to its correct color, black.



There were several other “half measures” conceived in this engine compartment, but none that were so terrible that I was concerned about fixing them. Looking at these “fixes,” the expression “get ‘er done” came to mind several times.

The paint was probably a couple decades old, and appeared to be an enamel, as no clear coat was present. Calling the paint job a “20-footer” would have been very generous. The car had been in a collision at some point as the LH fender was a replacement and the sheet metal the washer fluid bag mounts to was creased. I believe the hood is also a replacement, but fits well.



The engine compartment VIN was still present, plus I lucked out with an original door tag. It was an original Wimbledon White coupe with standard black interior. When the car was painted a couple decades ago, the interior was also replaced, and still looked decent. For some reason there are slashes in the headliner. That would also have to be addressed.



After a month or so of ownership, I decided to begin the search for a repair shop to do the paint and body work, plus an engine spruce up. With my wife’s blessing and support (you can’t safely proceed without it), I started getting quotes. In this economy, I think its easier to find someone to do this kind of work, but I don’t believe it’s necessarily any easier to find someone good to do the work.

I found a relatively local shop called Custom Addicts—a body and paint shop specializing in custom work on everything

from the oldest to the newest vehicles. His quote was much more generous than others I received, plus I’d seen a 1965 fastback at a local cruise-in that he had painted black with dark silver rally stripes, and from what I could recall, it looked great.

I had some terrible body shop experiences a couple years ago with a 1964 ½ coupe I owned. I contracted a different local shop to do very minor paint and body work on the car. We originally agreed on a four-month time frame. After a year of having my car, the car was barely in primer and my Mustang was in boxes all around his shop.

After haggling with the body shop owner about what was owed, I took my car home. I had to finish the prep work myself. I eventually had it painted at a Maaco, and it turned out fine, but that certainly wasn’t my preference.

I wanted to remove as much trim from my fastback as I could before sending it to Custom Addicts. I removed everything except the door handles, locks, and window trim. Because I was planning on having the front floor pans replaced as well, I removed the aged carpet and put the front seats on my work bench to be reinstalled later.



A week after meeting with the owner of Custom Addicts, he came to pick up my Mustang to trailer it to his shop. The master cylinder died, thus it couldn’t be driven.

Here is what I asked Custom Addicts to do for me, originally: I wanted to do a sort of “Shelbyesque” fastback, with Wimbledon White paint, Guardsman Blue rally stripes, and Guardsman stripes along the side, without the GT350 label included. I debated long and hard about how to do the hood, and after some serious back and forth with myself, I settled on the bolt-on GT350 hood scoop and not use fiberglass to blend it on the hood. I was concerned with the fiberglass cracking later on, from reading forums and talking to other Mustang owners.

Mechanically, I had plans to replace many items. The engine ran fine, so I just asked the mechanic to check it out, and unless he saw defects, I had no plans for a rebuild. The starter, solenoid, alternator, coil, spark plugs, distributor cap, and radiator were all replaced. When the mechanic was working on the engine, he found that I needed a roller rocker timing chain, so I bought an Edelbrock timing set for that. Otherwise, I had no plans for any “performance” upgrades.

Naturally, as the work progressed on the fastback, I was informed of issues I was unaware of. My budget swelled, but not dramatically.

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I chose to replace the rusty stock exhaust manifolds with painted Pertronix headers, which should (hopefully) match perfectly to the GT dual exhaust I had boxed up, ready to be installed. I had just thought to keep the stock steel wheels with correct 1965 spinner (knock-off) hubcaps. But after raising a bit more money, I resolved to find a set of Styled Steel wheels.



With each passing week, a little more work was done on my fastback. The partial quarter panels were welded in (at which time I found out that I needed a

LH outer wheel well), the engine compartment components were mostly removed and the rusty single exhaust was knocked free from the manifolds. I visited once or twice a week, each time taking pictures and looking for any potential new additions to the work order.

I kept my instructions to the body shop owner as detailed as possible. I wanted to keep several things as "original" as I could.

As I finish this article, my fastback's scheduled return date from the body shop is only three weeks distant. I have a garage full of trim and miscellaneous parts waiting to be installed on the Mustang when she returns home, but we'll talk about that in a future issue.

It's a long, sometimes frustrating process, and from the beginning I was both looking forward to it and dreading it. But it's all worth it. I look at restoring a classic Mustang as preserving an important part of American history, and while I might not be part of the original "Mustang Generation," I'm certainly doing all I can to be a part of today's. **MT**

