

AN UNFLATTERING BIRTHDAY BOOK GOES UNAPPRECIATED

By John M. Clor

Somehow, people think that if you're a car person, then you'll like just about any car-themed item out there as a gift. Well, folks who know me also know I like Mustangs, so I have lots of cool Mustang stuff, some of which I received as gifts, but much of it I just purchased for myself. Oh, I do like most car stuff—die-casts and memorabilia and the like—but when it comes to things like old advertisements or hardbound books, I like to collect only those that have something to do with Ford Motor Company or the Mustang.

People who know me really well also know I happen to like Mustang IIs, as they are still unappreciated in our hobby. So it's not uncommon for me to get a Christmas or birthday gift that has something to do with 1974-1978 Mustangs—and I appreciate that very much. But I celebrated another birthday recently, and I got a book as a gift from a friend who happens to have an odd sense of humor. Oh sure, he teases me about Mustang IIs, but he also knows that I'm highly sensitive about defending Mustangs, so he doesn't take his teasing too far.

Until my birthday.

Now I'm usually polite when I get lousy gifts. Like the time I got a die-cast model from my younger brother a couple of years ago. It was a 1/43rd-scale model of a 1969 Mustang, and I was really happy to have it until I took it out of the box to get a closer look. I could tell instantly that the front grille and headlamps were way out of proportion, and that the wheels and tires were incorrect for the era. I quickly realized that this was a low-buck knock-off from China, and not something I'd be very proud of and put in my display case in my office or on my desk at Ford Racing. (Thank goodness we have Ford Brand Licensing to try to keep such disappointments to a minimum.)

Experiencing disappointment over a cheesy gift is one thing—but getting one that actually makes you angry is quite another. I'm talking about my getting a little car book on my birthday that my friend thought would be fun for a Mustang lover like me. Now I'll admit that I was both appreciative and amused after tearing off the wrapping paper and seeing the book cover, topped with the words "Crap Cars" over a picture of a yellow Yugo ragtop. "Thanks!" I had said to my friend. "This ought to be a fun read!"

On his birthday, I had given him a copy of my own book, *Mustang Dynasty*. Now I don't usually consider price when it comes to giving gifts to friends, but I was kind of surprised to notice that his "Crap Cars" book carried a retail price of \$14.95—and knowing that my buddy is pretty slow going for his wallet when the check arrives—I figured that he likely bought the book for me on clearance, since its U.S. printing had dated back to 2005.

In any event, I hated to admit to him that someone else had already given me that book a couple of Christmases ago—and I hated it! In "Crap Cars," a self-proclaimed British automotive journalist counts down his list of the top 50 "crap cars" of all time "ever to hit the American highway." Now don't ask me what a British journalist would truly know about the "American highway"—or, more importantly, about American cars for that matter. In fact, if you really think about it, the very term "British

automotive journalist" is somewhat of an oxymoron, considering the total lack of any real British auto industry. But no matter, because a single glance at the book's table of contents goes a long way to show you that neither this author (whose claim to fame is writing for the BBC's overly Euro-centric Top Gear program) nor the ill-informed researcher who he employed to compile this list of "crap cars," knows very much about the history of the American automotive market.

As you'd expect, such perennially bashed nameplates as the Ford Pinto, the Chevy Vega, and the AMC Gremlin and Pacer are included (at Numbers 11, 6, 15 and 3, respectively), and naturally there's also the Yugo, Chevy Citation, Hyundai Excel, Geo Metro, Chrysler K-car, and the Renault Alliance, just to name the totally obvious. Geez, it's not like you'd really have to be some sort of automotive genius to take potshots at the low-cost, entry-level disposable cars of the 1970s and 1980s! But things went from the predictable to the ridiculous with entries such as the Porsche 924, the Merkur Scorpio, DeLorean DMC-12, Hummer H1, Datsun B210, Pontiac Fiero 2M4, the VW Fox, and even the iconic VW Beetle!

All right, it's true the problem of auto journalists exhibiting a total and complete absence of real knowledge about the cars of that era is almost universal. In fact, their sheer lack of ability to put cars of this ilk into any sort of automotive context is frightening. But then came the inevitable: Their No. 1 "crap car" of all-time? The Ford Mustang II! WHAT?

COME ON! I could not believe it when I first saw that. I mean, them's fightin' words! I was both outraged and enraged! It's bad enough when so-called Mustang people continue to propagate the same old ill-informed clichés about the second generation Mustang—but coming from an English smart-aleck, well, that's simply intolerable. If you've been reading *Mustang Times* for a while, then you likely already know my stand on the beleaguered Mustang II. In fact, it was one of the reasons I spent years researching and writing my own Mustang book. To me, narrow-minded opinions that show no insight into the subject matter are awfully hard to respect. Let's face it—anything can sound stupid when taken out of context, so why do folks insist on taking the Mustang II out of context when all they need to do is a little history homework?

I know. This pseudo-journalistic "worst list" type of book is a cheesy tactic for crackpot auto scribes to make a quick buck off real enthusiasts, but is also akin to poking a stick into a car-lover's beehive: there's no real purpose but to stir things up. It's been done again and again, with books like "Lemon!" (oh, let's rehash the Edsel and the Chevy Corvair for the umpteenth time—nothing more original than that!), and the totally forgettable "Automotive Atrocities: The Cars We Love to Hate." Except that the real atrocity with that book is that the author ridicules the 1978 Mustang II King Cobra for its array of decals and emissions-choked 5.0-liter V-8, yet himself owns a "Smoky and the Bandit" era Pontiac Trans Am, "Screaming Chicken" on the hood and all. (Like disco-era "in-your-face" graphics are only cool when GM does them?) What's worse is that the same author later penned a magazine article on future collectible cars that talked about the rising value potential of late-1970s name-

plates, and he used the following text as one of his entries:

"1974-1979 Ford Mustang II, especially Cobra II and King Cobra variants: Though subject to criticism for their connection to the Ford Pinto, these Mustangs are agile and light, handle quite well and, with minor tweaks, V-8 models can be formidable."

Nothing like talking out of both sides of your mouth, depending on who's paying you, of course!

Frankly, I'm tired of people preaching the "badness" of cars from the 1970s and '80s. It just shows ignorance about the industry that was left reeling from consecutive body blows by OPEC, government-mandated crash, fuel economy and emissions regulations, insurance company meddling, and a fickle, flip-flopping buying public. Fact is, many of the badmouthed cars of this era were actually viable solutions to market problems that were not easily solved. I mean, think about it: Is having a big hood decal on a post-1960s muscle car REALLY more atrocious than the optional rear wings on some of today's buzz-bomb subcompacts?

For my money, I prefer to skip any books telling me which cars I should dislike—and if they also happen to rag on any Ford Mustang, then I'll just toss it in the trash! My goal is to own and read every Mustang book ever printed. While some are better than others, I love them all—just as I do Mustangs and the Mustang II.

So when you're out on the show circuit this year, checking out swap meets or vendors, it's a good idea to look for die-casts or even books that carry the "Official Licensed Ford Product" logo. After all—bad jokes aside—quality is always worth owning.

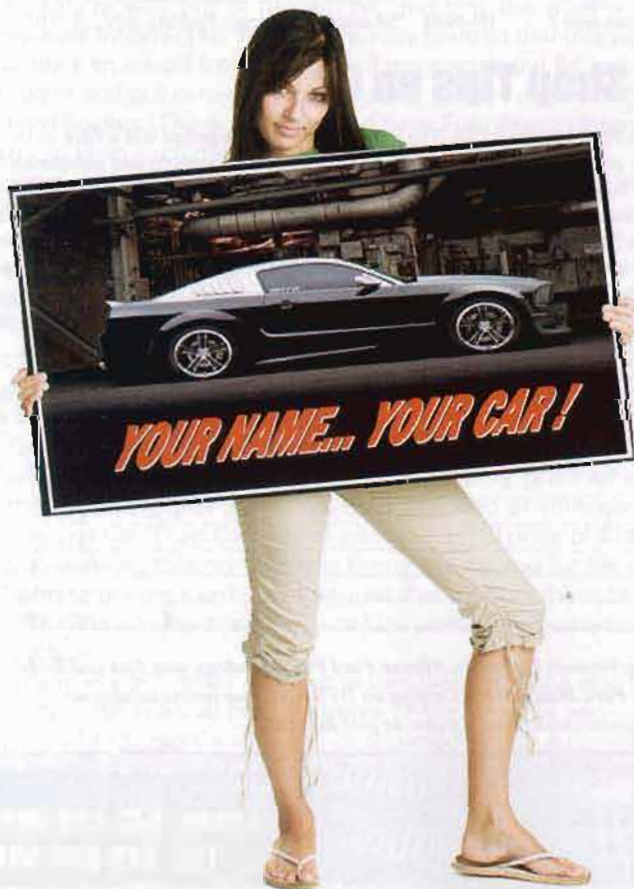
Editor's Note: Veteran automotive journalist John Clor has owned, raced, worked on or written about Fords and Mustangs for nearly 30 years. After a 15-year career at The Detroit News, Clor shifted to automotive journalism with stints at *AutoWeek* and later *Edmunds.com*. He joined the Ford Special Vehicle 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 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—two of which he describes as "long term projects."

John Clor



John M. Clor
Ford Racing

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