

LAP 28 — STREET OR TRACK?

Driving your Mustang on the street is a wonderful experience that gives enormous satisfaction with the added benefit of promoting the hobby. Driving a performance machine as unique as the Mustang is an experience many never get. Driving your Mustang on the track brings an entirely different perspective to ownership. While a street-legal Mustang can be quite capable on the track, it remains a compromise when compared to a full out race car. For many reasons, most owners cannot have more than one Mustang and since it is much easier to get a charge from taking the street car for a drive than the race car for a spin the decision is made. Therefore, preparing a street car to perform double duty as a performer on the track is a common endeavor. This lap, we'll investigate many of the things to be considered in building a double duty car.

There is a tremendous difference between a dedicated track Mustang and one that is street legal. Because it is not street legal, I only get to drive my race car in the pits and during races. Sometimes, after several months between races, I'll be driving it through the pits and think the thing is just about to fall apart with all the cracking, popping, lack of brakes, and ill handling. Later, out on the track it just comes alive when placed in the environment it was designed for. There is no way the alignment, suspension, and brakes on this Shelby would be suitable for the street. This example can be used as a proxy to help better understand just how far a race car is from a street Mustang and should be remembered as you prepare your street car for the track. Driving a street-legal car on the track requires compromise.

Think about weight first. Your street Mustang is heavy compared to a race car so think twice about making improvements that add weight. The cheapest way to go faster is to remove weight. While removing weight is usually impractical on a street car, preventing the addition of weight is a great place to start. Try to avoid power adders by focusing on improving the brakes, tires, and suspension. More power will not help you go faster into and through the corners. In an environment like open track events, cars are not classed based upon technical specifications, they're classed based upon driver skill. Therefore someone will usually have more power than you so why fight it? Believe me, "Mr. Big Motor" will point you by after getting tired of watching you run up on him in the corners and after passing you'll never see him again, especially in the pits. What you want is a dependable Mustang that provides maximum track time and allows you to explore the limits of grip and braking. When starting out, your goal should be to run every available lap and never worry about brakes that fade, or temperatures that run too hot. The only thing you should be concerned about are track conditions, fuel, and tire wear.

It's easy to imagine how much faster your Mustang will be after adding components that the catalog says will make you faster. A better idea is to invest in things not normally found over the counter, like better brakes. Adding cooling ducts that really flow more fresh air using 3-inch diameter hose will make your pads and rotors last longer and perform

fade free. Investing in several sets of carbon-kevlar pads and changing them regularly will assure problem free operation. Stock calipers are adequate, invest your time and money in maintenance, not in the bling of expensive parts designed to replace OEM components. Instead, why not invest in a set of dedicated track tires and wheels for your street car?

Good, sticky tires that are usually not street legal will dramatically improve your Mustang on the track. The additional cornering speed they deliver will dramatically reduce lap times and teach you more about the handling of your Mustang than possible on street tires. With them, you'll be better able to drive at the grip limit and enjoy the benefits of later braking. An added benefit is you're not wearing out your street tires on the track while suffering from the compromised performance they deliver. Remember, sticky tires allow better acceleration, cornering and braking. Best of all, they give you the ability to really pester "Mr. Big Motor."

Suspension upgrades are expensive and hard to quantify. There is no doubt, some of the aftermarket solutions offered by major suppliers are serious upgrades that will dramatically improve your Mustang, but they are expensive. Why not save the money and maximize the stock setup by focusing on maintenance items like alignment and lubrication? When was the last time you disassembled your suspension to inspect and lubricate it? Making sure your suspension is clean, free of bind and operating freely will deliver maximum performance. Usually, the only time the stock suspension comes off the Mustang is to make room for something from the aftermarket.

Remember, Ford did it right the first time. You should enjoy the benefit.

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Charlie Jones, a.k.a.

Roadracer

