

RACETRACK CAR CORRALS – A GREAT NEW WAY FOR FAMILIES TO ENJOY MUSTANG OWNERSHIP



By John M. Clor

It's hard to believe that most of this year's car show season is already behind us! Seems like only yesterday we were making our "to-do" lists on what work we needed or wanted done to get our Mustang ready for another summer full of cruise nights and caravans to car shows. I've been able to attend many regional and local shows so far this year on behalf of Ford Racing and our Ford Performance group program, and feel lucky to have had the opportunity to meet so many new MCA friends and see lots of great Mustangs.

Unfortunately, many of us have had to cut back on our level of participation in the hobby of late, mostly because our nation's ailing economy has put the brakes on our ability to spend what economists like to call our "disposable income." (Man, I hate that term: "disposable" is what we should have left in our wallets after all of our necessary bills are paid. But I know more than a few Mustang fanatics who have put off a needed house repair or paying down a credit card—just to fix up or modify their car, or to afford that weekend getaway at a big MCA club show!)

For some people, the tough financial times have meant they only hit the big car show that they planned their family vacation around, and cut out outings to smaller shows they had wanted to attend. For others, they've skipped the big car-show vacation this year, and instead planned a few shorter trips to shows a bit closer to home. Others still have simply dropped car shows entirely, and settle for a "staycation" where they'll take their time off work doing some backyard putzing on their car.

However folks have made their own personal adjustment to the recession, there seems to be one constant to the Mustang show crowd: The attendance compromise. By that I mean, for Mustang owners and fans who like to attend car shows, how do you make the event more attractive to your spouse, "significant other," or kids?

Oh, sure—many wives prefer to let their husbands just go on their own, or have a dad, brother, or fellow car-guy buddy tag

along for the day. Other wives will agree to go to a show, albeit disinterested, with the understanding that a shopping trip or a dinner afterward will be exchanged for that car-filled day out in the sun. For many of them, a brief walk through the show field will suffice, while their partner seems to stop for some "car talk" with just about every showgoer they meet.

Some Mustang-owning moms have other challenges, such as: Do you bring the kids or get a babysitter? And if mom and dad do decide to take the Mustang and bring the whole family along to a show, how can they make it fun for both them, the young ones and the teens alike?

Yes, many regional car shows have been trying to make their events more family oriented—with music, food, vendors, raffles—even some activities for the kids like model-car contests, face-painting and the like. Other families have found that taking the kids along on a cruise night or out to the ice cream shop is a good way to get everybody together for a drive in their Mustang on a warm summer's evening. But wouldn't it be great if there were other ways to make a family outing from getting together with other Mustang owners and seeing great cars? Well, there is!

I'm talking about the growing popularity of Mustang "Car Corral" programs at road-racing venues held at racetracks across the country. Such programs usually offer Mustang clubs and individual owners discounts on race tickets and special "infield corral" parking privileges for their Mustang while giving the family the chance to enjoy a day at the races in a picnic-like setting. That way, instead of dad heading off to the car show or the racetrack while mom takes the kids to the park for a picnic and some play time in the great outdoors—you can combine both activities into a single, family event.

I witnessed one such Mustang "Car Corral" day at the Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course in Lexington, Ohio, this past June. The weekend of road racing played host to the Grand-Am Continental Sports Car Challenge, which pits both FR500 Mustang race cars and the new 2011 Mustang Boss 302Rs against such makes as Porsche, BMW, and Camaro. If that wasn't enough, the Mustang

Challenge series also was racing that same weekend, so there was plenty of high-speed Mustang action out on the track.

The Grand-Am folks worked with the track to offer Mustang club members a package deal for a \$30 weekend pass that included special "corral parking;" a general admission seat in the grandstands; discount coupons for savings on food and merchandise at the track; on-track parade laps in your own Mustang between races; special meet-'n-greets with teams and drivers in the paddock; and eligibility for Grand-Am giveaways of things like T-shirts, series flags and lanyards, even Piloti racing shoes!

The mini Mustang show that gathered in the infield at Mid-Ohio included some 30 Mustangs of varying vintages, from modded SN-95s to some sweet S197 GT500s and even a couple of brand-new 2011 Mustang GT 5.0s. Ford Racing was there, and brought along a 2011 Daytona 500 Pace Car replica Mustang GT Convertible (you might recall that only 50 Daytona Pace Car replicas have been offered for sale to the general public), **PLUS** an honest-to-goodness Focus RS500 that few Americans will ever get to see unless they frequent Europe. Owners got to hang out with some Ford powertrain folks who worked on the new 5.0, plus Team Mustang and AAI employees who came to see Ford Racing's new Boss 302R race car in competition.



After touring the paddock area and taking garage tours hosted by the race teams, I got to tag along with Todd Soderquist, Ford's Mustang business planning manager, for a couple of parade laps around Mid-Ohio's picturesque 2.25-mile road course in a new 5.0-liter Mustang GT convertible. Later, I watched the Grand-Am race along with a group of Mustang owners who brought their picnic baskets and set up blankets on the hillside at the end of the main straightaway. The cool thing about that is, while they were soaking in the racing action out on the track from their "lawn seats" (outdoor concert style), some had their kids playing catch on the grass like at a family day at the park. The atmosphere was great, and the only way the day could have been better was if a Boss 302R had won.



As it had turned out, the No. 61 Ford Mustang piloted by Billy Johnson and Jack Roush Jr., came in fourth in the EMCO Gears Classic race—this after leading the most laps (49)—but had made contact with the No. 97 BMW on the very last lap and got knocked off a podium finish. The fans who returned the next day watched Jason von Kluge of Ann Arbor, Michigan, lead every lap from pole to finish to capture his fourth Mustang Challenge Series race of the season. When you consider all the exciting racing going on, plus the infield car show, "special attractions," the parade laps, and especially the "day at the park" picnic setting for the whole family to enjoy, the idea of attending a car corral at a race venue sure makes for a great outing that you'll need to experience to properly appreciate!

What you may not know is that your MCA membership gives you the inside track to information on when such racetrack corral packages are offered, and special access to tickets as a club member. Ford Racing regularly sends out notices about these and other fun events in our weekly e-newsletter, "Fast News from Ford Racing," so make sure you check it out each time it reaches your email inbox.

Maybe the next weekend you get the urge to catch a Mustang car show and yet would also like to include the family in some summer fun outdoors, a trip to the racetrack for a "Mustang Corral" might prove the perfect outing!

If I don't meet you at the next Mustang show, I hope to see you at the races!

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, including one he calls "a long-term project."

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