

AFTER A FRESHENING AND UPGRADES FOR 2013, SHOULD THE NEXT-GEN MUSTANG BE A CLEAN-SHEET RETHINK?

By John M. Clor

What is it about Mustang people that have us always looking for more? Seems no matter what particular Mustang we happen to own, we're always doing something (or planning to do something) to it, or even looking for the next new model. That's not to say we're somehow unhappy with our cars, or that we're trying to rectify some perceived shortfall—in fact, it's quite the opposite!

Some of us are SO smitten with our Mustangs that we can't wait to personalize them and make them more "our own" with some sort of modification (usually including a power upgrade—no matter how much horsepower came from the factory). Others drive their Mustang for a short time, only to trade them in on the next hot new Mustang that comes along.

I recall buying my first new brand-new Mustang in 1977 as a young married guy who was trying to have as much fun as possible before the idea of raising kids had entered into the equation. (It's not that children aren't wonderful, mind you, but you know what I mean!) I saw my "had-to-have-it" new Mustang—a gold-on-black V8 Cobra II—at the Detroit Auto Show (yes, that was well before it became known as the "North American International Auto Show"), so I took home the free Mustang brochure that Ford was handing out and proceeded to study it harder than I did for most any of my college textbooks. (Sorry, mom!)

I also bought and read every available buff-book review of the Mustang, and talked to all of my "car guy" friends to discuss if it's best to buy "right now," or perhaps wait for something better that's in the pipeline (like the King Cobra), or that's coming in a next-gen model (like the Fox Body). I then began a series of long and carefully worded discussions with my wife, Jenny (herself a lead foot at the time), trying to convince her that a new Mustang would best serve our newlywed needs instead of us waiting further or dealing with a used fixer-upper.

To my total and complete amazement, I had actually persuaded her to give me the green light to visit a Ford dealership with my down-payment in-hand! (As you likely well know, such discussions are rarely successful after acquiring a house and kids—both of which conspire to completely erase anything that even remotely resembles "disposable income" until you emerge from the other side of the mortgage/tuition mountain. But I digress ...)

I'll save the drama of shopping for "the exact Mustang you want" vs. "surviving the wait of ordering one" for a future column, but what I was getting to here is how, after I finally took delivery of my factory fresh Cobra II, Jenny thought I had lost my mind when I began talking about how I wanted to buy bigger wheels and fatter tires and change the exhaust system to headers with duals.

"Put money in a BRAND NEW CAR?" she cried, "... what's wrong with the way it IS? I don't get you, John! You get what you asked for, and then you immediately start thinking of something else!"

Well, that's the same, exact sentiment that crossed my mind after talking to some members of my local Mustang club (the

Mustang Owners Club of South Eastern Michigan—MOCSEM) about their reactions to the recently unveiled 2013 Mustang. I figured that they'd be discussing the freshened front and rear styling, revamped lighting, more features, more power—all that good stuff Mustang fans were asking for. I also fully expected the whole "GT500 look for the standard Mustang" idea was going to dominate most of the conversation. But as it turned out, I was wrong.

To my amazement, no matter what comments surfaced about our club members' expectations for the 2013 car, talk always shifted to the "next generation" Mustang that is rumored to be replacing our current S197-based version very soon. Should an all-new Mustang be launched to coincide with the nameplate's 50th anniversary? Will it be for the 2014 or 2015 model year? Should Ford simply rework the S197 platform that we all know and love, keeping many of our classic Mustang design cues, or is it time for Mustang to kick off its next 50 years in an all new direction with a fresh, new, clean-sheet design for the future? Man, the conversation got hot and heated on both sides of that latter question!

I kept trying to interject the 2013 car back into the conversation, but to no avail. With so much to like about this latest Mustang, you'd think I could get some good feedback on it. Even though the 2013 Mustang is so new that it isn't even on the road yet, it seemed that all my MOCSEM pals wanted to talk about was what might be coming after it! ... C'mon!

I was then going to ask them why they're thinking past what was just unveiled to them at the auto show when I suddenly recalled Jenny's statement to me back in 1978: "You get what you asked for, and then you immediately start thinking of something else!"



Ford Evos Concept Car
Ford Motor Company Photo

Wow, she was right—we Mustangers are insatiable, and just can't contain ourselves!

Many of the online Mustang communities have been hunting for clues on what Ford might be thinking about for the sixth-generation Mustang. They've been prodding Ford execs about what may be in store, and some have revealed conversations with Ford stylist J Mays, the company's group vice president for global design and chief creative officer, about a possible 2015 rethink. One site reported that, at the Paris Motor Show last year, Mays hinted "something very cool" would be in store for the Mustang's 50th anniversary" and that "the next-



Ford Evos Concept Car
Ford Motor Company Photo

generation car wouldn't be an evolution of the current car." After this year's Frankfurt Motor Show, Mays reportedly told an *Automotive News* staffer that "the all-new Mustang won't have as much retro styling as the designs introduced in 2005 and 2010."

"The challenge or the opportunity for 2014 with a 50th anniversary car is to not just look back over your shoulder, but to try to win all of the Mustang faithful yet bring the brand forward as well," he was quoted as saying in the interview. "It has to look like a Mustang. But you go down a list of things that might or might not be necessary to make the car look like a Mustang."

Then came a question that asked if Mustang was going to follow Ford's "Kinetic" global design language instead of following its more classic, iconic shape, and Mays responded with the following statement:

"Mustang is an icon in itself. We will also only have a Mustang design language. As we approach what is a very exciting time—2014, the 50th anniversary of the Mustang—you can feel the weight on the design team's shoulders that we get this thing right. It's going to be a very exciting car, but have very little to do with Kinetic."

When asked which Mustang design over the past five decades was his favorite, he replied:

"Approaching 50 years of Mustang—how exciting is that?"

The '64-1/2, '65—that was the absolute greatest Mustang, the original. The '66s and '67s, those were great. Everything was on track up until about 1969 with Mustang. We went through some bleak years with Mustang, but everybody hung on because it was a fantastic nameplate. We got the car back up on the tracks, I like to say, in 2005, and that was a big hit because we created a nice balance between retro cues and modern styling. Then 2010 drove that message home even more. But now we can't simply do an evolution of the 2005 or 2010 cars".

So what did Mays finally share about the future design direction for Mustang? Only this:

"With 2014 approaching, we have got to take a jump forward. We can't lose the Mustang DNA, which is really important, but we've got to signal that Mustang has got another 50 years of life left in it. In order to do that we are going to have take a bit more of a stretch with the car, bring all of our Mustang faithful along with us—and I would be lying to you to say that it's not a daunting challenge. But the good news is that we've got a design team that's up for the challenge and we're on it. So stay tuned, and approaching 2013 you'll see a very cool Mustang."

Wow, that really got me wondering how our beloved Mustang might look in the very near future. Since that night I had spent chatting with club members about the 2013 Mustang, I've had many more conversations with other Mustang fans both inside and outside of Ford that have kept me thinking a little less about



Ford Evos Concept Car
Ford Motor Company Photo



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the present and a lot more about the future. Yes, there is no doubt that the new-for-2005 model rekindled our love affair with the classic Mustang, and that the S197 has completely rejuvenated the Mustang enthusiast world. (MOCSEM president Mike Rey told me that fifth-gen owners outnumber all the rest in our club, with first-gen owners second.) One stroll through any MCA show proves that the 2005-12 Mustang is now a dominant force in the hobby.

But even though the classic-look S197-based cars have served us well this past decade, I, too, can't help but to think that as the car nears its 50th birthday, this could very well be a great time to design a Mustang that will appeal to an all-new generation of young owners. While Mustang purists may want to have my MCA membership revoked for saying this, I'll admit that my mind is now open for a new design direction for the next Mustang. And I'm heartened to know that some other longtime Mustang lovers, fans, historians, owners and authors I've talked to feel the same way.

I recently discussed this topic on the phone with longtime Mustang devotee Paul Newitt, an Iacocca Award Winner who has penned the incredible "Mustang GT/CS Recognition Guide and Owner's Manual" hardbound book on the California Special. He told me his own "Mustang Story" (as if he needed to prove to me he's a true-blue Mustang man), then sent the following note to my email inbox:

"Having told you my story, I'll admit there is such a thing as loving something to death. We're at a crossroad, and it's tough to let go of what you think you want to keep forever just for the greater good. We want to keep those things that give us joy and memories. Collectibles only retain value for those who remember them. They're what we love, they're our heritage.

"But the sad truth is that nothing lasts forever, and that's especially true today. You can't live in the past, because you'll get passed up as we're racing to the future. Our 8-track players became iPods, and we're swapping our corded land lines into Smart Phones. Our cars must continue to evolve, too, and we can't let our view of the past cloud our vision for the future.

"We shouldn't let our obsession with previous Mustangs become a repression of efforts to make a 'bold move' with the next Mustang. (Remember the outcry over the 1994 Mustang taillights? How they were 'wrong' simply because they were horizontal?) Do Ford designers really need to remain subservient to the opinions of 'retro' Mustang design purists?

"Just as the design for 1949 Ford was a bold move—completely rethinking the stand-alone fenders of pre-and post-war Fords—now is the time now to kick this Pony Car forward and allow the designers to do what great American companies do so well: innovate! (You don't see Apple making a 'retro' Mac desktop, or Chevrolet making the new Corvette look just like the split-window StingRay!)

"I say now is the time for Ford to pull out a new sheet of paper and create a new Mustang for the next 50 years! This is not a matter of ignorance of or disrespect to the Mustang's heritage. Mustang is not just a car ... it's an attitude, a vision, a feeling, a part of automotive Americana.

"Ford knows the Mustang magic formula all too well. But to mire its progress for fear of disconnecting from the past will keep Ford from being able to do what it does best—making Mustang America's favorite sporty car. It will be how well the next car addresses the needs and desires of future generations that will determine if Mustang can ride again in the modern marketplace for another 50 years—and NOT just because it has triple vertical taillights and a horse in the grille!

"As a dyed-in-the-wool Mustang enthusiast (who HAS earned his stripes), I believe the Mustang 'retro' days have run their course, and that the time for a more 'global' Mustang has come. The Mustang faithful need to back Ford 110-percent on the next car and to trust in Team Mustang (after all, they nailed the Boss 302, so there's no reason to think they somehow don't 'get it').

"So, to the Mustang Design Team, I say, 'Go for it!' and push that Mustang envelope as far as you can!"

Wow! Thanks, Mr. Paul M. Newitt ... I couldn't have said it better myself!



I, too, think I'm ready for an ALL-NEW Mustang theme to come along. As much as I'd love to buy that new Dynacorn 1965 Mustang Convertible body we just released at SEMA and use it to build a brand-new classic Mustang, I'd also love to see the next-generation Mustang resemble the incredible Ford Evos Concept car that was unveiled at Frankfurt—and rekindle my Mustang love affair all over again for what could be a future classic.

In the meantime, let's try to enjoy all that the 2013 Mustang has to offer. It remains a true force in the enthusiast marketplace. And let's offer Team Mustang our support for whatever they're working on for the future ... and may the force be with them!

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 spent the better part of the next decade working on SVT communications, PR and Marketing. Today, he manages the www.FordPerformanceGroup.com enthusiast outreach program for Ford Racing, and is also editor of SVT Enthusiast magazine and author of the hardcover history book, Mustang Dynasty. A member of several Ford-based car-clubs, Clor is the proud owner of three '70s-era Mustangs, including one that he calls "a long-term project."

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