

FORD RACING GOES FLAT OUT TO BRING TOGETHER FORD ENTHUSIASTS

By John M. Clor

Many folks think the primary focus of Ford Racing is to help racers who drive Fords go flat-out faster to the finish line. Of course a race-winning performance isn't just a matter of keeping the hammer down; it takes the right mix of power, engineering, durability, and skill to be "First On Race Day." But in reality, one of the main purposes behind Ford Racing is to help build the Ford brand in the hearts, minds, and eyes of everyday consumers. What's more, research has proven that racing fans are influential promoters for the brands that they follow and support.

Racing and winning on the professional stage shows off to the world a car company's engineering expertise and product integrity—and thus, it helps influence sales. Just as important, racing success on the grass roots level also drives brand awareness and purchase consideration with real-world car buyers. Research proves that enthusiasts—including racers, amateur sportsmen, car collectors, car club members, and active brand loyalists—all serve to drive word-of-mouth sales by promoting a company's image as they interact with fellow car buyers on their own turf.

That's precisely why Ford Racing is actively involved in all aspects of the automotive enthusiasts' realm—even those outside of the racetrack. Our entire Ford Racing Performance Parts operation is designed to enhance the ownership experience of performance Fords. And the wide range of automotive events supported by an appearance from our Ford Racing events display trailer helps Ford connect with customers across the entire spectrum of racing and enthusiast activities.

A lot of other car companies put marketing efforts into racing and enthusiast events for that same reason. But none of them have built a true connection/interaction with fans and enthusiasts the way Ford has through efforts like our weekly "Fast News From Ford Racing" e-blast, our own Ford Performance Group of enthusiast organizations that we promote and support on FordPerformance.com, and the toll-free 800.FORD.788 (800.367.3788) Ford Performance Info Center and Ford Racing Tech Line.

The "Fast News" e-mail newsletter started out just a few years ago as the evolution of our Team Ford Racing program and a digital extension of TFR's old "Inside the Oval" monthly print magazine. We had a few thousand opt-in e-mail addresses, mostly TFR race fans, plus some folks who'd followed the old stand-alone SVT. Ford.com website. After just a few years of working together with Ford Racing, event marketing efforts, and our FPG club outreach program, the number of people who now receive our weekly "Fast News" e-blast has surpassed 325,000! That means we're connecting and communicating with quite a few Ford enthusiasts and race fans each and every week!

As a member of the Mustang Club of America (or any of the 10 enthusiast clubs now promoted on FordPerformanceGroup.com), you should already be seeing "Fast News" in your email inbox every Thursday. If you're not, go to FordPerformance.com/home/ and click on the Cobra Jet Mustang at the bottom left of the page to sign up. And make sure you've given the MCA your current email address.

You don't have to be a full-fledged Ford racing fan to enjoy "Fast News," as there's plenty of other great info from the world of Ford

performance included each week. From what the MCA and other Ford enthusiast clubs are doing to hot performance parts, top events, car shows and cool happenings in the club world, to the latest in concept cars and hot production Fords—and even our "Ford Fan Spotlight" feature, where we showcase YOU and YOUR Ford to 325,000 of your favorite friends.

We've promoted hundreds of great Mustang shows and events, hosted by some of the nation's top MCA Regional clubs, in "Fast News." (We've even attended many of them in person!) Many of our "Fast News" readers find info on activities that they never even knew existed! My hope is that all club members use "Fast News" as a resource to stay informed about what's going on in the world of Ford; to use FordPerformanceGroup.com as the place to get unique enthusiast info (even production data on SVTs and other performance Fords); and use the aforementioned Info Line to talk to a knowledgeable person about any Ford performance vehicle question you may have. We also have dedicated websites in FordRacing.com and FordRacingParts.com, and of course Ford Racing is on Facebook. But no other car company connects with their loyalists like Ford with a triple play of a weekly email newsletter, a dedicated club outreach and promotion program, and toll-free Info Center and Tech Line.

Another connection I'm hoping to make as part of our program this year is one with Ford retirees. As Mustang fans, many of you have told me you enjoy it when Ford Racing can shed new light on the people and programs of the past that gave us the cars we collect and treasure today. I mentioned this in a previous column about attending one of my own Mustang club's monthly meetings and hearing former Ford Racing Director Charlie Gray share fascinating "insider" stories on the Lightweight Galaxie and Thunderbolt Fairlane programs from back in the day.

I must have been so blown away from hearing what he and my own boss, Ford's North American Motorsports Director Jamie Allison, had to say at that meeting—that not only did I misspell my club president's name in that column, but I also gave the wrong date for the club's annual "Mustang Memories" car show! I must have been thinking how much my local club president is like a ray of sunshine, because Mike Rey does such an upbeat job running the Mustang Owners Club of South Eastern Michigan (MOCSEM).

I'm trying to meet and chat with some Ford retirees with whom I think we need to build a closer relationship. I mentioned having lunch in Dearborn with Alan Anderson, who was the lead engineer on the 1964½ Mustang Convertible. I'm looking forward to sharing with you some of the insights he gave me into that exciting time in Mustang's early history. Over the holiday break, I was also blessed with meeting and having lunch with one of the top people in Mustang history—Gale Halderman!

Halderman and his wife appeared at a Saturday afternoon Mustang history presentation I gave at the Roush Museum in Livonia, Michigan, in the wake of my *Mustang Times* column about the demolition of the Dearborn motel once known as the Fairlane Inn. That's where Lee Iacocca's legendary "Fairlane Committee" mapped the development of the Ford Mustang after work. I was thrilled when Halderman invited me to the Dearborn Country Club for lunch and a long chat about Mustang history. This was the thrill of a lifetime for me; I cherished every moment.

Gale told me the story behind Mustang's original design team, and helped me sort out what the "org chart" looked like. Here's how it was set up on paper: Eugene Bordinat, Vice President of Styling, was responsible to Ford management for the Mustang's overall design. Joseph Oros, chief stylist, was assigned responsibility for the exterior design. David Ash reported to Oros, and assigned to Ash were Halderman and Charles Phaneuf. Damon Woods was assigned responsibility for the interior design, and John Najjar and John Foster were assigned to him.

I also discussed contributions from people like Phil Clark and John Najjar, who penned some of the production car's interior (but is best known for promoting the Mustang name and pushing the design for the Mustang I Prototype.)

I learned that I, like many Mustang historians, have incorrectly given much of Mustang's design credit to the oft-mentioned Ash, who Halderman noted had headed up the program but had very little direct influence on car's lines. Indeed, after doing more research I came across an old interview with Oros; in it, he clearly dismissed some of Ash's basic concepts for that first clay model:

"Lee Iacocca wanted a car that was more of a personalized, sporty four-seater rather than a tight, European 2+2 package. Gene Bordinat requested proposals for it from our Ford studio, Lincoln-Mercury [and Corporate Advanced]. The request came through on a Monday, and I had gone off to a one-week seminar: training sessions on problem analysis and problem-solving methods. Dave Ash was my executive. On Tuesday I called him to find out how things are going, and he told me about the new assignment. Ash had already made some sketches, and my understanding was that the studio was rapidly putting together a clay model for me to see the following Monday. I could hardly wait. I had difficulty concentrating on the seminar.

"The following Monday, I went to the Design building early and hot-trotted down to the Ford studio. There was this car with a low mouth-type front end, a bumper integral with the grille opening, and a greenhouse with a reverse backlight like those on recent Lincolns, Mercurys, and the British Ford Anglia.

"I thought, 'We can't use a reverse backlight if this car is supposed to be new. And the front end is going to be expensive and add weight.' The bodysides were not new and exciting, either. So I didn't think we would win all the marbles against the other studios. Then the designers started trickling in, and I asked Gale Halderman and John Foster, two managers working under Ash, 'What happened here?' They said, 'It's what Dave wanted to start with.' When Dave walked in I said, 'Please cover this model.'"

What I was able to verify with Halderman was what happened after Oros covered Ash's clay model and decided to have the team start over. It turns out that Gale went home and sketched six different ideas for the new sports car concept. The next day, Oros selected Halderman's out of the two-dozen designs that were submitted and reviewed, and work on a new clay began. I'd known that Oros has long credited Halderman not only for contributing to the design but also for skillfully guiding the Mustang from clay-model dream to a manufactured reality. But I found that Halderman gives most of the credit for Mustang to legendary product analyst Hal Sperlich.

Again research backs these stories up, both from an old interview Gale did on the original car, as well as from a 1989 talk he gave at the Dearborn Ritz Carlton during Mustang's 25th Anniversary party. Here's part of that interview:

"They were just starting work on the '65 full-size Ford and I was assigned to work on it with Joe Oros. But one day Joe said, 'We've just been told by Bordinat to do a proposal for a small car that Lee wants to build.' I told Joe, 'I won't have time. I'm doing the '65 Ford.' He told me I had to give him some designs. So I went home and

sketched. I took about five or six sketches with me the next morning and put them up on the board. Joe picked one of those to be clay-modeled.

"Dave Ash had already done a clay—very boxy, very stiff-looking. Joe came back from a management conference and said, 'No, no, no, we're not going to do that!' That's when he said he wanted me to submit some designs. So we actually started over on the clay model using the theme from one of my designs, which had scoops on the sides and the hop-up quarter lines. ...

"George Schumaker was assigned to follow my sketch into the full-sized clay model. I was still working on the big '65 Ford across the hall, but during the day I kept going over to where the Mustang clay was to help interpret my sketch. Then Joe got me in there working on the taillamps and rear end while he and Charlie Phaneuf did the front end.

"After the Mustang clay was approved, Joe asked me to manage the feasibility process. We had to modify the hood and headlamp area, and the front bumpers a little to accommodate the parking lamps. ... We had to repropose it slightly for manufacturing. The fastback was Joe Oros' idea and designed in Charlie Phaneuf's studio. ... We did it in secret. No one, including Sperlich or Iacocca, saw it until it was finished. We cast it in fiberglass, painted it bright red, and then showed it to Iacocca. He said, 'We've got to do it!'

"No one knew the Mustang was going to be as popular as it was, but it created a huge stir in the company. Everybody just loved it, even the engineers, though we must have bent 75 in-house engineering and manufacturing rules. The Mustang had the first floating bumpers. The whole front end was a die-casting with a floating hood.

"There were so many things the engineers said we shouldn't be doing, but they didn't want to change them either. There was so much enthusiasm right from the beginning. Even the drivers at the test track loved it. We would go there for meetings, and the crowds of people around it were huge. That was totally unusual, so we suspected the Mustang was going to be a hit.

"Iacocca pushed the Mustang through and is entitled to the credit for it. Mr. Ford knew that Iacocca had assigned Hal Sperlich to determine where the holes were in our car lines, markets where we didn't have cars. He came back and said we don't have an entry-level car for young people, something exciting for them to drive to work, for newly married couples, and so forth. At first, Henry Ford II didn't want it because it was a brand-new vehicle, and we just had a failure called the Edsel. But Lee loved it."

The rest, as they say, is history. Halderman later received the Industrial Design Society Design Award for his work on the '65 Mustang, and served as design chief for the Mustang for eight more years. Mustang design advances under his leadership included the '65 2+2 Fastback, '67 SportsRoof and '71 Notchback and full Fastback designs. Later, he oversaw the design development of the 1979 Fox-body.

What an afternoon of Mustang history. And if all that wasn't enough, I went on to have another meeting with yet another Ford retiree steeped in Ford performance history—Dan Rivard. I'll save his insights for another time. Until then, keep reading "Fast News" and stay connected!

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