

NICHE VEHICLES IN THE OEM

often get asked the question: "Why can't Ford do ____ (fill in the blank)? Or Why doesn't Ford just do ____ (fill in the blank)?" Let's take a quick look behind the scenes and we may have a better understanding of the answers to these questions. I will use the Bullitt, Mach 1, and Cobra as examples, but first we need to understand the corporate culture which ultimately gives permission to move forward or shuts product ideas down.

Ok, let's start with the obvious! Ford Motor Company is a huge Company! Huge companies have a huge list of rules, procedures and requirements. Huge companies also have every personality type known to man represented, usually at every level of the organization. Huge companies have a mix of "Go Getters," Politicians, "Steady Eddy's," Nay Sayers, and dead wood. So managing through this "corporate soup" is sometimes more difficult than developing new product ideas and delivering them to market. I have a little saying for this corporate dynamic: I call it "Managing the Corporate Immune System." The principle is quite simple; if you can anticipate the political, personal, and professional agendas then you can remove all of the reasons for that person or organization to reject your product ideas. I know, you are thinking that this is a lot like predicting the future and anticipating the person's next step...and you're right! I agree it is easier said than done. One more important piece of insight: huge companies typically have products that are produced in large volumes. The system is set up to think in terms of large volumes, so to ask that complex system to think in terms of very small volumes is difficult, stressful and often resisted.

So, if the cards seem stacked against the OEM from producing low volume, really cool cars, it's because they are! If this is true, how did products like the 2001 Bullitt, 2003 Mach 1, and 2003 Cobra slip through the cracks? My short answer is kind of corny, but I believe it—it was through a magical alignment of people and circumstances that allowed these cars to be developed and now exist. At the time, Ford's SVT team was running strong under the leadership of John Colletti, and "main stream product development" activity was focusing on the history's first all new Mustang—the S197 2005 Mustang. The Company was transitioning from the Jac Nassar era with a lot of excitement and energy everywhere. With John Colletti bending on the executives' ears for moving Ford branded products into a performance market leadership and the mainstream product development team focused on the future of all-New Mustang, a gap emerged in the product line up and market place. Two key questions were raised: How do we keep the market satisfied throughout the price range and performance range? How do we keep the product exciting until the all-new Mustang is released?

Within this hustle and bustle of energy, a small Product Development Group emerged to address these questions. The group was small in the number of people whose primary job was to manage the engineering efforts (the number was two to

be exact). But the group was much larger in terms of people who volunteered time and expertise to make the product a success. We had dozens of enthusiastic engineers and a professional rally around the Bullitt and Mach 1 offering to deliver these products in addition to their "real" job, (which typically took 45 to 60 hours a week). Why did these people give over and above? I think one reason is that cars like these had not been produced by main stream product development in decades. These cars were not simply cosmetic appearance packages, they had substance with a theme that crossed all vehicle functions—they were real cars for real people who love cars. Internally at Ford, we had a catch phrase for the Bullitt and Mach 1 programs; it was "Specialty cars designed by enthusiasts, built by enthusiasts, for enthusiasts." I think that pretty much sums up how these cars were pulled off within main stream product development.

While the small team worked on bringing the Bullitt and Mach 1 to reality, the SVT team was pushing the envelope to develop the biggest, "in your face" vehicles to ever leave a Ford assembly plant—the Mustang Cobra! John Colletti's team provided the Bullitt and Mach 1 team very good "air cover" from upper management as they pushed the envelope within responsible boundaries to

design and produce vehicles that were the ultimate in excitement and performance. John's team of dedicated support staff and engineers was quite a bit larger than the Bullitt and Mach 1 teams, but they were a separate, stand-alone organization within the product development community. A key characteristic many leaders of these teams possessed was that they were not politicians for self gain, did not participate in these products to further their career, did not build these vehicles for themselves, but instead focused on the core "grass roots" enthusiast customer and designed a car that would meet and exceed the enthusiast's expectations. What a cool time to be a part of the Ford Motor Company team!

Many of the Bullitt, Mach 1, and Cobra leaders are no longer with the Ford Motor Company, but by the looks of products like the Shelby GT 500, Shelby GT500KR, and the 2012 Boss, I think building high-end performance cars is still alive and well in the Mustang team. The open question many people have is: What specialty car's going to be produced for the grass roots enthusiasts and where will they be priced?

Let the niche vehicles "Motor On!"

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Scott Hoag

