

ALABAMA SSP

ALABAMA STATE TROOPERS
DROVE 5.0 LX MUSTANGS



Text and Photos by Byron Randolph

The year 1988 was a good one in Alabama—unless you were speeding. You see, that was the year the Alabama Department of Public Safety took delivery of 29 brand-new SSP Mustangs. Ford designed the SSP Mustang with pursuit in mind. Unfortunately for speeders in Alabama the Troopers knew how to make these horses run!

The Mustangs were given to senior Troopers initially. To get familiar with their new hot rods, they were taken to the old pursuit course (flight line) in Selma, Alabama. There they learned a few tricks. Several Troopers found out quick the Mustang didn't like wet roads. And traveling on dirt roads could turn in to an adventure. Spinning the car around in the median could easily result in a 360-degree turn by mistake. Slowing and

stopping was assisted greatly by hard down shifting because the brakes faded faster than the heavier Crown Vics. But that does happen when you're carrying more speed! Even with a few negatives every Trooper wanted to get behind the wheel.

Troopers like Corporal Frank Sazera. Here is what he had to say about the little pony car: "I inherited my Mustang from Trooper Tim Butts. He didn't say exactly why he wanted to swap cars, but I found out soon. The car was a little uncomfortable and it had very limited room for equipment. I made the trade anyway with Captain Franklin's blessings and gave him my brand new Chevrolet Caprice. I think the Chevy was a 1990. In my opinion he lost in this deal. The Mustang came as a coupe (w/trunk) in LX trim. I guess the GT was too pricey and flashy. We got the 5.0 HO engine, but had no power windows, door locks or cruise control. The body shop sprayed the polished



aluminum rims with gloss black paint. I'm not sure why. The suspension was beefed up and it rode like a wagon. The clutch, yes it was a 5-speed manual was incredibly stiff and made the 8 or 10 hour shift seem longer than normal. An automatic transmission would have been great. Shifting gears and talking on the radio was a challenge during pursuits. The passenger's front seat could transport a small to medium sized prisoner with ease, but I did have to call Sergeant Darryl Moore on one occasion to transport a guy that was about 6' 5" and near 300 lbs. The big guy was even trying to help me get him in the car, because he really wanted to ride in the Mustang to jail.

"The trunk could hold only a few pieces of gear like extra ticket/warning books, gas mask, riot helmet, spray paint cans and a metal camera case. The majority of the trunk was taken up by the full sized Goodyear Gatorback tire. I had to later move my

camera case to the rear floor board behind the driver's seat to prop the seat up in a comfortable position. I was on my second front seat and we didn't have any more seats to swap out. The tilt brackets continued to bend or break from shifting stress. That was the fun part about the car. It had extreme torque and especially in 3rd gear. The speed range, if I remember correctly, was about 80 to 110 mph and in a pursuit situation on curvy roads it was going to stick with most anything. The top speed was a bit disappointing at 139 mph, but I guess the gear ratio and the big/ugly Jetsonic light bar contributed to that.

"My Mustang was taken off the road after 164,000 fun miles. It went in for a second sway bar bracket replacement and was deemed unsafe because of the high mileage. The brackets became a common failure after about 120,000. I would have been OK with replacing all of the worn suspension parts and



staying in the car. The engine was still strong and the Mustang was the lowest of the Montgomery Post vehicles on the cost maintenance sheet each year.

"I'm not sure in the beginning if the DPS promoted this car to the public as our "new pursuit vehicle" or as a pursuit deterrent vehicle. I participated in more pursuits than I initiated and soon found out that the reputation of the Mustang deterred many from running or trying to get to the next exit to hide. My Mustang won out in every pursuit that I initiated. I typically drove the Mustang slow when crossing over in the median to catch back up to a speeding motorist. That maneuver in the Crown Vic would normally give the motorist a chance to get to an exit or get out of sight. On several occasions I was told by more than a few motorists that they thought about speeding up to get to an exit but knew the Mustang would catch them anyway. The Mustang became a huge deterrent and only the extremely desperate would try to run from one. Overall I enjoyed the whole experience with the Mustang. The odd look with blue lights was a big hit with the public, both young and old alike."

The SSP Mustang pictured here is the last Alabama State Trooper Mustang on active duty. It was retired from daily use on the Alabama roads and spent a couple of years on loan to the Alabama Motorsports Hall of Fame located at the Talladega Superspeedway. The Troopers now have it back in the motor pool and have started a restoration. The motor is fresh and ready to go, the typical Trooper blue and gray has been re-sprayed. The car is nearly complete with a few small details to go. I found out about the Mustang early last year and contacted them to find out more. Although it is no longer used for patrol, it has been an excellent tool in schools to help promote safety on the highways. It is also used for special events.

I was fortunate enough to have Trooper Sergeant Steven Jarrett help us out with the Muscle Shoals Christmas parade. His Mustang lead a long line of Mustang convertibles. With the blue lights flashing it was a real crowd pleaser. The best part is I got to go for a ride. I'm not sure if the smile on my face was because I was getting to ride it such a cool car, or was it because it was the first time I got to ride in the "front seat" of a police car. **MT**

