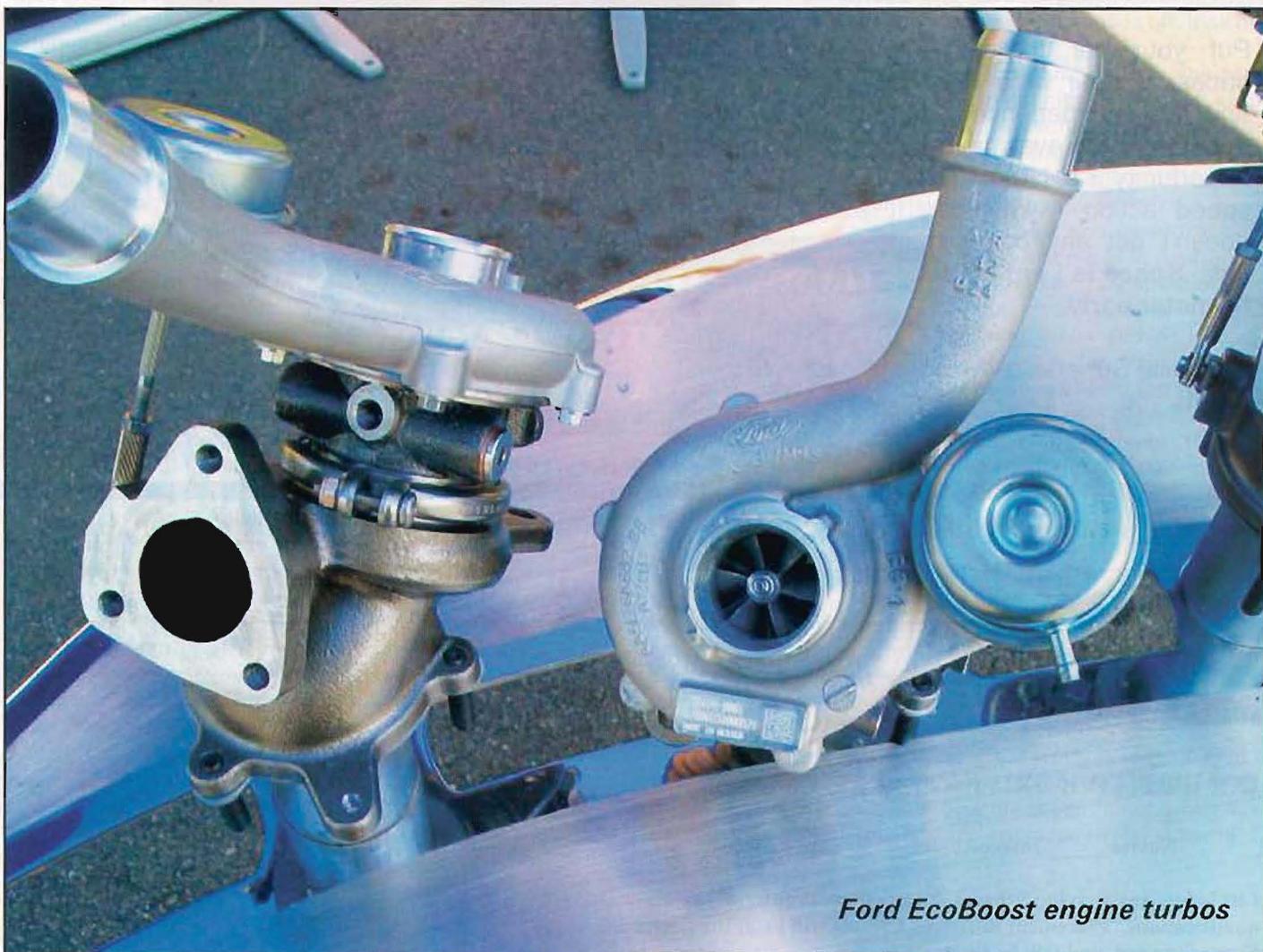


WITH ECOBOOST AND TODAY'S FUEL-CONSCIOUS MARKET, IS THE RETURN OF A FOUR-BANGER IN MUSTANG'S FUTURE?



Ford EcoBoost engine turbos

By John M. Clor

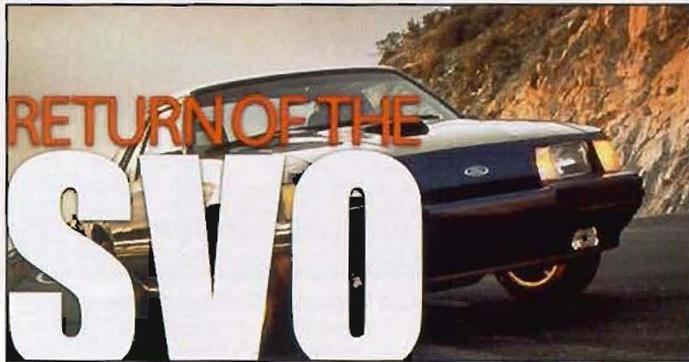
If there's one thing you can count on from the Mustang community, it's the huge amount of interest that any talk of a new Mustang platform, body design or powertrain will bring. Always a hot topic at club meetings and web site discussion groups, information on upcoming Ford products easily trumps whatever else enthusiasts have on their minds.

That's exactly why I wasn't surprised over the "buzz" created after Ford Chairman Bill Ford Jr. had reportedly commented that an EcoBoost engine would eventually appear in a Mustang. According to a report posted on an automotive web site, Mr. Ford was speaking at Princeton University when

an audience member had asked him about the possibility that Mustang would be offered with an EcoBoost powerplant. Mr. Ford apparently confirmed to the student that the company's new turbocharged engine would indeed make its way into America's original Pony car, but no specifics were revealed.

The web site that claimed to break the story also posted that they had followed up with Ford PR folks, who told them they were not going to deny the statement if Mr. Ford had actually said it. (A refreshing response—and better than what has become the standard line we've been conditioned to give to prying enthusiasts and members of the media when asked these kinds of questions: "We don't comment of future products.")

Almost immediately, Mustang fans everywhere were weighing in on whether it would be a 2.0-liter or 2.5-liter EcoBoost inline four-cylinder engine, already capable of making around 250 horsepower, or Ford's 3.5-liter EcoBoost V-6, which today has topped 360 horses. Of course, there were pledges of allegiance to only the 5.0 V-8, as well as plenty of cheers for any additional Mustang fuel economy improvements. Some commented that they expect to see a turbo offered in an upcoming S197-based Mustang, while others have surmised EcoBoost will arrive when the current Mustang gets a redesign. Heck, I even spotted a proclamation that predicts, "The Return of the SVO!"



But what is really at the root of all this speculation and discussion goes far beyond our overwhelming obsession with all things Mustang. It goes back to a growing assumption that today's car buyers value fuel economy more than anything else—an assumption with which I happen to disagree. You'll recall my mention in a previous column of an opinion piece penned by a veteran auto journalist who had matter-of-factly stated: "Car Owners Want Fuel Economy Over Power."

"For decades," she wrote, "auto executives and engineers couldn't stomach the thought of keeping a vehicle's horsepower the same, or worse, lowering it a bit in a new model year, even if the result was better fuel economy ... But I hope auto industry officials know that attitude is so yesterday."

She concluded her column with: "... many consumers already are forsaking power for fuel economy. ... Car company executives have long pointed to surveys that say Americans don't want to compromise: They want both power and fuel economy. What would you expect them to say? I hope car company executives recognize they can retire the old paradigm. The fact is fuel mileage numbers now are more treasured than horsepower numbers for everyday Americans."

And my reaction to that was: Wow. ... Really? Perhaps that's the prevailing thinking going on along the Left and Right coasts, but I think that there's a whole nation of drivers living in the "fly-over states" who don't totally agree with an apparent disdain for American cars, pickup trucks and powerful V-8 engines. This is especially true when promoting the false belief that everybody needs and wants to drive a little imported hybrid car or possibly even an electric vehicle. Forget that hybrids still account for only about three percent of total vehicle sales in the United States—somehow we're supposed to all want the same kind of car, regardless of the realities in the marketplace.

Now don't get me wrong—no matter where the price of gas winds up this summer or next winter or even next year, we all need to be aware of fuel economy. But with the world economy in such disarray, we also need to be just as aware of our own personal economics—and if a hybrid or electric car simply

doesn't fit your needs or budget, having the government force it upon you, even just financially, is pure lunacy.

I have to tell you that a letter did cross my desk a while back at the Ford Performance Group that suggested Ford should develop and sell a new hybrid-powered Mustang. Boy, that sure caused a big discussion at our Ford Racing office! Essentially the question became, despite the base Mustang's strong heritage of being an economical and affordable car, when does the idea of high fuel economy erode Mustang's hard-fought and long-held high performance brand identity?

As with most things, history has a lesson for us here. Anyone who knows me also knows that I will go to my grave defending the second-generation Mustangs, and there was much learned about the Mustang business from 1974 through 1978 that certainly applies today. I sure hope product planners working on the next Mustang pay attention to the II.

You'll recall that during the Arab oil embargo of the 1970s, Americans abandoned their big, V-8-powered domestic cars in droves and snapped up anything small and imported, plus the newly introduced American subcompacts powered by thrifty little four-bangers. In fact, the main reason why nearly a half-million Mustang IIs had sold in just the first two years of production was because the all-new-downsized Stang was launched with those same fuel-efficient four- and six-cylinder engines.

But it's also true that the big reason why most enthusiasts don't embrace the Mustang II today is because of those same little engines. Oh sure, the Mustang community made Ford well-aware that it was unhappy America's favorite pony car no longer offered a V-8 option for '74. But the small-block Windsor that reappeared in 1975 was so emasculated in the wake of government-mandated CAFÉ and emissions standards, that there was no horsepower number worthy of enthusiast consideration—even from the smog-pump-equipped, 139-hp, 302 cubic-inch Cobra II V-8!

Yes, the turbocharged 2.3-liter, four-cylinder Fox-Body Mustang—especially in SVO guise—made great strides to prove that a small, four-cylinder engine and enthusiast-pleasing horsepower is not an oxymoron. But once improvements in emissions engineering allowed the 5.0-liter V-8 to match the SVO's 175-205 horses underhood, the high-end, European-inspired, inline-four turbo model took a back seat to the venerable 5.0-powered Mustang, and the SVOs soon disappeared from Ford showrooms.

Fast forward to last year's North American International Auto Show in Detroit. As I sat in on Toyota's press conference in Cobo Hall's Riverfront Ballroom for the 2010 Prius Hybrid, I listened with interest as Toyota officials attempted to address their little hybrid hatchback's abysmal reputation for off-the-line power. Despite an owner base so holier-than-thou that you'd swear they've signed some sort of pact to never speak an ill word about the pricey Prius aloud, the car's lackluster 10.0- to 11.5-second 0-60 mph acceleration rate (depending on whose test you read) was apparently a real buyer bugaboo. Al Gore's speeding son aside, it seems that getting a fully loaded Prius to the bottom of a short freeway on-ramp in time to merge just in front of an 18-wheeler may be somewhat unnerving, or possibly unsafe—even to those completely brainwashed in today's all-too-politically-correct hybrid hysteria.

Why-oh-why can't we have hybrid-like fuel economy with the "green" lower emissions and yet still have V-8-like power with a big, fat torque curve to make acceleration fun instead of feeble?



Well, it turns out, we can. And it doesn't require the high initial (and repair/replacement?) cost of dual-powertrain hybrid cars, or waiting for new battery technology to come along, or being held hostage by the world's major lithium reserves residing in Socialist Bolivia, or even any future clogging of our landfills with millions of used-up car batteries from a new rash of electric autos. Nope—all it requires is that you go out and do something inherently good for our nation's economy ... go out and buy yourself a new Ford.

That's because Ford's has targeted fuel economy leadership for all of its cars, crossovers and even light-duty trucks by 2013. But instead of employing any number of the more complex and costly hybrid systems, this new breed of Ford engines uses EcoBoost technology, which combines turbocharging and gasoline direct injection. EcoBoost improves fuel efficiency, emissions and combustion, allowing a smaller engine to generate horsepower comparable to a larger conventional engine. If you think this sounds like something Mustang lovers would want, I think you're right!

"We're all about the smaller displacement as a way to drive significant fuel economy without sacrificing performance," said Derrick Kuzak, Ford's group vice president of global product development. The plan was to have EcoBoost offered across the entire range of Ford products in North America—and four-cylinders were to account for nearly two-thirds of that mix. This should go a long way to help Ford meet strict new CAFÉ regulations that will go into effect for 2015. But if you think that also means Ford would again somehow drop a V-8 from the Mustang lineup, you needn't worry. Kuzak has gone on record to say that, "going forward, V-8s will have a place in pickup trucks, large SUVs and the Mustang sports coupe."

Even so, surely you can see the wisdom of also having EcoBoost on tap for Mustang in the not-so-distant future? Consider that Toyota and more recently Hyundai have announced a new turbocharged engine lineup that is not coincidentally similar to Ford's EcoBoost plan. And there's even word that General Motors has been working on several new turbo applications—including one for the Camaro. Could the same be on tap for the Mustang? While few could argue

against a twin-turbo V-6—could an inline four return to the Mustang engine bay—especially a much more powerful one than ever before?

On paper, it sure makes sense—and certainly much more so than a typical hybrid or newfangled electric powertrain. Other than perhaps to some big-block V-8 purists, an EcoBoost four-cylinder Mustang would have few downsides as a production car: Enthusiast-worthy horsepower and torque, lighter weight, better handling, lower emissions and of course benchmark fuel economy ratings. Nope, this wouldn't be anything like a 2.3-liter-powered Mustang II or Fox Body, and far beyond anything even the 2.3 Turbo and even the SVO Mustangs had to offer. And better still, for those of us who still have gasoline in our veins—*batteries not included!*

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, John 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 a columnist for Mustang Trader magazine, editor of SVT Enthusiast magazine, and author of the hardcover history book, Mustang Dynasty. A member of several Ford-based car-clubs, John is the proud owner of three '70s-era Mustangs, including one that he calls "a long-term project."*

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