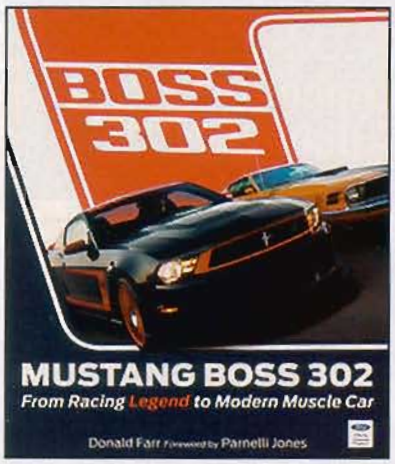
THE 'INSIDE STORY' BEHIND DONALD FARR'S NEW BOSS 302 MUSTANG BOOK

By John M. Clor

I was out on the road, on my way to set up another Ford Performance Group "meet-and-greet" at a big Mustang Club of America show, when I first got word on my cell phone that my good friend, Donald Farr, had mentioned me in his *Mustang Monthly* "Hoofbeats" column. The well-known and well-liked editor of one of our favorite Mustang magazines (besides *Mustang Times*, of course!) had finally decided to break his silence (in print, at least) about one of the worst-kept secrets in the entire Mustang community this past year: Yes, Don has penned a new hardbound book entitled, *Boss Mustang: From Racing Legend to Modern Muscle Car* that is due out this summer.

In Donald's magazine column, he revealed how the recent launch of Ford's 2012 Boss 302 Mustang had finally afforded him a long-sought-after opportunity to revise and reprint an updated version of his now impossible-to-find Boss 302 paperback that he had published way back in 1982. In typical Donald Farr fashion, he selflessly credits the people who helped him get that very thing accomplished—instead of just taking a bow for all the hard work and passion that I know he's put into getting this project done. If you know or have ever met Donald, or perhaps have had him feature your car on the pages of his excellent publication, then this gentleman's humility here will not surprise you.



That's because Donald Farr is a true Mustang enthusiast first, and a high-profile automotive journalist second. By that I mean, it's never about him, it's always about the cars. And that focus shines through journalistically in Donald's written work. It's a talent that's unique—both old-fashioned and yet refreshing in today's "look-at-me" media world.

Oh sure, the Mustang hobby—much like any other fan-based cultural phenomenon—has its share of speculators, would-be profit-takers, and self-proclaimed "experts" who all are in the business to make a name for themselves for one reason or another. But what really separates the Mustang community from much of the rest of the collector car industry is that most Mustang people you'll meet are honest, hard-working, middle-class Americans who are true-blue to Ford and this powerful little "pony car" known as Mustang. As an owner himself, Donald Farr is cut from the same cloth as the rest of us, and is easy to converse with as "just a regular car guy"—despite the fact that his knowledge level puts him among the Mustang elite. That's what makes him so special to me.

Here's another classy thing that Donald did. Not only did he mention my help in the Boss book project in his recent magazine column, but he also allowed me to write the prelude to his wonderful new hardcover history (yes, I've read the manuscript) to explain why I took a supporting role in this undertaking. So that's what I'd like to share with you here—the inside story of how this latest Mustang book went from concept to reality. But let's start at the beginning.

Other than a love for cars and a passion for the automotive industry, there's a common thread that bonds a professional auto journalist with anyone worth their salt on an automaker's payroll—and that's the desire to impact product. An auto writer writes with the basic hope that a car company takes the words to heart in guiding it toward making a better vehicle.

Additionally, having a hand in building and selling a great product should be the driving force behind all those who work directly for automaker's and their suppliers.

It was that same desire to become a guiding voice in the development of a new vehicle that got me to give up my career as a buff-book auto editor and join the Ford SVT Marketing staff back in 1995. The idea of contributing to the creation of high-performance Fords in a "skunkworks" environment was simply intoxicating. And what a rewarding feeling it was to know that the product knowledge I had gained working in the enthusiast world could be leveraged to help our niche group bring performance Fords to market that were truly aspirational! Surely, this was a once-in-a-lifetime career moment.

Or so I had thought.

After moving to Ford Racing in 2006 and heading up a truly innovative grassroots enthusiast outreach program spearheaded by Mickey Matus, I quickly became much more involved in the Mustang community than ever before. Drawn to the car's storied history and timeless appeal, I found myself meddling in anything "Mustang"—from compiling product backgrounders for Ford marketing and ad agency types to answering product history questions and media inquiries for the Ford PR staff. Still an enthusiast at heart, I continued to see the car through a journalist's eyes—especially when hearing intriguing "war stories" about the Mustang program from both current and past Ford employees.

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Now I need to admit here that I'm a Mustang book junkie. I must own nearly every publication ever produced that has anything to do with Mustang product history, and know many of the authors either professionally of personally. I have read each book with great interest, and some even more than once. Consequently, I consider myself familiar with what is generally accepted as Mustang's reported history, as well as what could be considered the commonly held Mustang myths. So it shouldn't be surprising that my conversations with people associated with Mustang over the years have always included a "history vs. myth" discussion. After all, there's the reported story, someone's recollection or interpretation of that story, and—well, the real truth.

These many Mustang discussions, as well as my own research and observations on how the automotive product development process really works at a major carmaker like Ford, eventually afforded me some fresh insight to Mustang's colorful past. And that's what inspired me to pen my own hardcover history book, *Mustang Dynasty* (Chronicle Books, 2007) and its *"45th Anniversary Edition"* second-printing (T-5 Design, 2009)—both while under Ford's employ. My Ford Racing bosses supported me in adding "author" to my resume, as it opened new doors for me in the Mustang world and enhanced my work as a liaison with Ford clubs and enthusiasts.

But an unexpected bonus from my Mustang book effort was that it shed some light on me as an avid enthusiast within the company. At least that's what I credit for being invited to join a special internal consulting group put together by then-Mustang Product Marketing Manager Allison Revier, who dubbed us the "Maverick Committee." No, we weren't being asked our thoughts on a new Ford Maverick, and none of us in the group could really be defined as "mavericks." But we all were huge Mustang fans, owners or collectors, and were brought together several times over a two-year period to offer input on the development of a new Boss 302 Mustang for 2012—which for me was clearly yet another "once-in-a-lifetime career moment."

Beyond sharing my views on the car's direction as a voice for the Mustang community, my assigned role was to help document the story behind Ford bringing the iconic Boss model back to life in the hopes of having it live forever on the pages of a new book. Even at that very early stage, I immediately began a search for a possible publisher—which is usually the major stumbling block to any book idea. Timing was critical, as the best time for a book to appear would be when the 2012 Boss Mustang was to hit the market by the summer of 2011. But so was confidentiality, since I would need to sell the idea out in the automotive book world many months before Ford's top-secret Boss Mustang program would even be announced. It would be a tall order, at best.

After nearly a year of working every contact and angle I could find, I finally entered into serious discussions with an automotive publisher, but the devil proved to be in the details. Soon after they agreed to confidentiality, they told me they wanted a history of the original Boss cars, but could add my story on the 2012 Boss 302 at the end of the book. Plus they wanted to avoid any direct involvement with Ford. I was insistent on leading with the story behind the 2012 Boss (including putting it on the cover), followed by the history of the original cars, plus having the book fully approved to wear the "Official Licensed Ford Product" label. Unable to find a compromise, that deal fell through.

There was only one problem with that: I was made part of the product team to get a book deal done and, as Mickey Matus (my boss at Ford Racing) reminded me, failure just wasn't an option. A brief meeting with our Ford Racing Director, Jamie Allison, gave us a "Figure out a way to get it accomplished" response, so it was back to the drawing board. Amazingly, that very next day I had an encouraging phone discussion with Zack Miller, publisher of Motorbooks International, that really got the ball rolling again.

But there was an even bigger complication this time around. I had chatted with *Mustang Monthly*'s Donald Farr at the Carlisle (PA) Ford Nationals the previous summer to pick his brain about writing a Boss book. After all, everyone knows Donald's own *Boss 302: Ford's Trans Am Pony Car* is to this day considered the holy grail of Boss 302 history. But it remains one of the few Mustang books I still do not own. Why? Because despite it being long out of print, copies of Farr's Boss book have been fetching several hundred dollars each on online auctions and in the collector literature market!

Not surprisingly, Donald had often talked about someday rewriting and reworking his original effort, as he told me the old book's printing plates were long since lost while interest in the Boss content has remained high. But when Farr said that he had already reworked and updated most of his previous copy and was at the point now of just looking for a publisher, I broke out in a sweat.

"When do you think you'd go to press if you do a new Boss book?" I had asked Donald, knowing full well that my own Boss book project would need to be printed sometime in 2011.

"Oh, I'd say sometime in 2011," he replied. "... why?"

It was time for me to come clean with Mr. Farr. I knew that if Motorbooks International agreed to publish my then-secret Boss 302 book project, they could back out of the deal if they

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got wind that Farr was also putting a Boss 302 book on the market that same year. Worse, my research efforts on the old cars would be nitpicked against Donald's recognized history—and then there's the bigger question of, would Mustang people buy TWO Boss books, one for my inside story on the new Boss car and another for Donald's recognized gospel on the old Boss cars? The right answer, of course, was that there should be just one book, covering both the development of the new and the legacy of the old.

Though I had first entertained the idea of co-authoring an all-encompassing book with Donald, I decided to turn over what I had learned about the new car to him after reading just how cemented his name was in the Boss 302 collector community, best evidenced by the following passage on the Boss 302 Registry's www.Boss302.com web site:

"First tip, buy this book, if you can: *Mustang BOSS 302 Ford's Trans-Am Pony Car* by Donald Farr. It is currently OUT OF PRINT ... Considered the 'bible' on the BOSS 302, it tells the whole story from beginning to end. It's worth the investment and is nothing compared to the thousands of dollars you will spend buying and keeping your BOSS 302 running and looking good. We don't get any money from the author for saying that. It's just a fact this book is the best, and there's no point in us trying to re-do something that has already been done so well."

So I heeded that advice, and quietly took a back seat on this book project. I gladly hosted and guided Donald's own expert story-digging at Ford all around Dearborn to help him add the real inside story of the 2012 Boss 302's development to his already superb history of the original on these very pages. Even after he had finished his manuscript, there were more mountains to climb. For one, a mis-posting on a big bookseller's web site had prematurely announced the book, and incorrectly named me as co-author—and even used the wrong title!

Once I survived that "leak," I got to work with Mr. Matus on getting some preliminary information updated in the copy, plus trying to get the title and cover artwork changed to more accurately reflect the book's actual content. The original title was something like *"Boss Mustang: The Return of the Baddest Mustang of All Time"* with a cover shot of the new Laguna Seca Edition Boss 302. Our issue with those choices was that the words had centered only on the new car and not the rest of the book, which was Don's coveted Boss 302 history. And by using only an image of the 2012 Boss 302 on the cover, it made the effort appear as if it was just a "launch book" for the new car—and did not pay homage to the 1969-70 Boss 302 heritage or Trans Am racing legacy.

As you might expect, Donald felt the same way, and—working together with Motorbooks International—we came up with some solutions that addressed all of our concerns. Although the overall Boss 302 book project took a huge investment of time and effort by everyone directly involved and did not happen as quickly as we all had hoped, you'll soon discover that the result is well worth the wait. The amount of passion and energy required to complete this sort of historical placeholder explains why we don't see a new collector book appear every time Ford unveils a notable Mustang. (We didn't see a book to support the launch of the 2001 Bullitt, the 2003 Mach 1, the 2007 GT500, or the 2008 Bullitt, for example.) So when one of these comes along, conventional wisdom says to grab one while you can.

As it turns out, Donald Farr has produced a wonderful account of the amazing story behind the new Boss 302, so my original goal as a "Maverick Committee" member has officially been met. What's more, Donald has also masterfully recreated the magical content on the original Boss 302s that made his first Boss book so desirable. Together, we have a brand-new Boss 302 Mustang "bible" for all of us to treasure. And the best thing about it is, the cost of a brand-new copy is a mere fraction of what I'd pay for one of Donald's old books. Cha-Ching!

Thanks, Donald! I'll be thrilled to finally add a Donald Farr Boss 302 book to my Mustang library!

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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