

MUSTANG MAKES TIME MAGAZINE

In the December 1, 1980 issue of *Time* magazine, an article appeared which begins as follows: "One of the hottest cars in the U.S. these days is neither a Japanese import nor one of Detroit's new front wheel drives. It is the Ford Mustang of the early breed: the slim, economical and sporty little models built between 1964 and 1968. Suddenly they are more sought after than any other classic."

The article, for which no credit line was given, continues, "Automen have no firm explanation for the renewed popularity of the cars, which has taken off at a gallop over the past 16 months." We would question this figure and wonder how it was arrived at, for the Mustang's revival has been aborning for some time longer than that. But for the news of its arrival to appear in a journal of such wide circulation and universal respectability is a fine thing. It is also indicative of just how big the Mustang phenomenon has become.

Time suggests that the reason might be nostalgia. And today we are saddled with fuel costs that would have been beyond a motorist's **worst** dreams in 1965 or 1968. These years were basically upbeat, happy ones for the nation and it can be no surprise that the cars summon up such pleasant memories for people who owned them at the time. But there is also a segment of Mustangomania that consists both of younger people, who could not have owned the cars when new, and of those who missed the pony's charm when it was just a colt. How does the car appeal so strongly to this group?

The answer lies in Ford history, really beginning with old Henry Ford himself.

Simplicity is the word. And it is the benchmark of the Ford automobiles that have been collectible in large numbers throughout the history of car collecting. Starting with the Model T Ford, then the Model A, and the V-8 of 1932-48. Excepting the T-Bird, which was never produced in numbers comparable to the other cars we are discussing, the Fifties was lacking in anything as popular in the collectible sense as the earlier, now-antique models. The collector car hobby was ripe for another "poor man's collector car." It was obvious as long as ten years ago that the early Mustangs were going to be that car. That it has happened, and surprised *Time* and others in the process only says that somebody wasn't watching.

The magazine praises the Mustang's durability and quotes that old hot-rodder Tex Smith, now publisher of *Car Exchange* magazine, who estimates that 300,000 to 400,000 of the 1964½-66 models might be still on the hoof. This again emphasizes the car's simple, well-developed nature. With the car basically built on the Falcon "platform," (which is an engineering term used to denote the drivetrain, floorpan, etc.) the Mustang came to the market with all the mechanical bugs and gremlins already removed. That it made such an impact was due not to any mechanical wizardry or reliability, though of course this comes into play now. What made the Mustang what it became was its styling.

Harking as it did back to the 1955-57 T-Bird, the Mustang had an almost undefinable blend of slimness and crisp,

taut lines. The high-radiator intake gave the car's frontal aspect a lively, ready-to-go quality that meshed perfectly with the Mustang name. From the kicked-up, saucy tail to the bold side "scoop" cutouts to the simple yet impressive nose, the pony was an integrated package that worked on a very high level.

The *Time* article, as welcome as it is to us all, barely acknowledged the depth of interest which exists in the car. "Many owners trade Mustang parts and stories at regional swap meets," was their comment. It was mentioned that "a number of entrepreneurs specialize in returning old models to pristine condition." No mention was made of the industry which has sprung up supplying parts and information to owners. This is where the real clue to the size of the Mustang explosion is to be found, for the Mustang is a car that is simple enough for virtually every owner to fix himself. It is the key, along with the powerfully attractive styling, to the car's continued success.

Time concludes their piece with this paragraph: "Detroit cannot keep its hands off a winner, though, and the classic Mustang died after 1968 — of obesity. Ford gradually fattened the car, boosting its size, adding 584 lbs. to its weight by 1971. Sales slowed, prompting Iacocca to confess, "The original Mustang buyer is still there, still wanting a good little car. We walked away from the market." The point here is that perhaps the manufacturers walked away from producing them. The members of this club certainly did not walk away from keeping and preserving them. And enjoying them!