

What made the Mustang so popular? A simple six-word sentence that will take a page just to begin to answer.

First of all, we need to look to the past. The 1955-57 Ford Thunderbird deserves a lot of the credit for pioneering the long hood, short deck look that is part and parcel of the Mustang's famous styling. In fact, the Mustang can be considered to be Ford's answer to a multitude of letters begging the company to reintroduce that or a similar car. The problem with the Thunderbird was that being a two-passenger car limited its volume. This is why it existed as a two-seater for just three years. When Ford introduced the four-passenger T-Bird, the car's sales nearly trebled.

Secondly, we need to understand that Korean war supply problems kept the auto makers in this country in fits for most of the fifties. Even if a car as enormously appealing as the Mustang had been produced, say, in the late fifties, it is probable that the material for the production of 418,812 cars in the first year (which is what the Mustang achieved in its first twelve months) simply would not have been available.

As a third point, we need to know that the demographics of the car buying population had changed enormously. No longer was the average car buyer a family man in his forties with a couple of children; Mr. Average was now considerably younger, with fewer children, due to the tremendous number of "war babies" then reaching car buying age. These children of parents who had lived through the hell that was the Second World War were precisely the market toward which the Mustang was aimed. Gary Witzenburg, in "Mustang! The Complete History of America's Pioneer Ponycar" states Ford market researchers discovered that "The fifteen-to-twenty-nine age group was

predicted to grow nearly forty percent between 1960 and 1970; while the thirty-to-thirty-nine category would fall by almost nine percent." This careful targeting of the Mustang's market is one of the major reasons for its phenomenal success.

Another major reason was the car's price. Manufacturers normally test tentative designs in "clinics" using the general public. Participants are asked to rank certain cars which they view and to suggest what they would expect to pay for them. We'll quote Witzenburg again: "The subjects of this [particular] study were fifty-two couples with pre-teen children who owned a single standard-size car — not likely prospects for a small, sporty car. They were shown the [Mustang] in small groups in the Ford Styling showroom, and their reactions were enthusiastic, but most said the car was impractical for them as family people. Asked what they thought the price of such a car might be, the couples overestimated by \$1000 or more. When they were told that the price would be about \$2380 or even lower, a strange transformation took place in their attitudes. They went back and looked again, and they began to think of reasons why the car might be practical for them after all."

In fact, the Mustang came in slightly under the price target and this allowed the engineers to raise the car's base trim to a higher level. The result was a base car that was not the stripped unit that most maker's base models were (and are!). Said Lee Iacocca, who essentially put his job on the line to see the Mustang produced, "One thing we decided in the beginning was that the car would never have little hubcaps . . . it would have full wheel covers, a paint stripe . . . that sort of thing all was to be stan-

dard . . . We didn't put that much in it . . . bucket seats, carpeting, wheel covers . . . a few cues like that, and people said, 'My God, that car's equipped!'"

Iacocca also initiated the concept of the adaptable Mustang. Ford's first ads even touted the car as "designed to be designed by you. You can make your Mustang into a luxury or high performance car by selecting from a large but reasonably priced group of options." This, of course, allowed the Mustang to appeal to the largest possible group, from teenagers hell-bent for leather and horsepower, to single working girls looking for a bit of flash and a lot of economy, to retirees seeking a few last years of style and comfort.

The car's marketing was excellent, too, with the introduction coming during the 1964 New York World's Fair. On the night of April 16, 1964, Ford bought all the commercial time on all three networks from 9:30 to 10:00 pm to introduce the Mustang to the American public, a technique which is called "four-walling" in the advertising business. This guaranteed that no one would miss seeing or hearing about this exciting new car.

All of these things help explain why the Mustang was the overwhelming success that it turned out to be. But we feel that it couldn't have made it unless it was a good, no — excellent car in its own right. Iacocca has said, "That was the magic of this car . . . If you can turn everybody on, then you really have a success. Who could not like the style for its day? It stood out, yet it was everyman's car." We can only add that it still stands out as the best car from the sixties decade.

What made the Mustang so popular? The same things that make it popular today!

