

# Mustang, History of a Love Affair

## Second in a Series

by  
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### THE EFFECT OF THE IMPORTED CAR

Our taste in cars since World War II has been subject to revolution after revolution. And though Detroit is sometimes reluctant to admit it, the father of these revolutions is the European small car.

In case you think that imported cars have always been a factor in the American Market, it is worth noting that in 1954, almost a decade after the end of World War II, the total sales of new foreign cars in the U.S. was 32,400. Even Volkswagen sold only a few more than 6000 cars in the U.S. in 1954. Yet just five years later, in 1959, the trickle of imported cars had swollen to a torrent. When the statistics had been totaled at the end of 1959, Detroit was flabbergasted to discover that 614,000 foreign cars had been sold right here in our own back yard. One out of every ten new cars sold here in 1959 was a visitor from abroad!

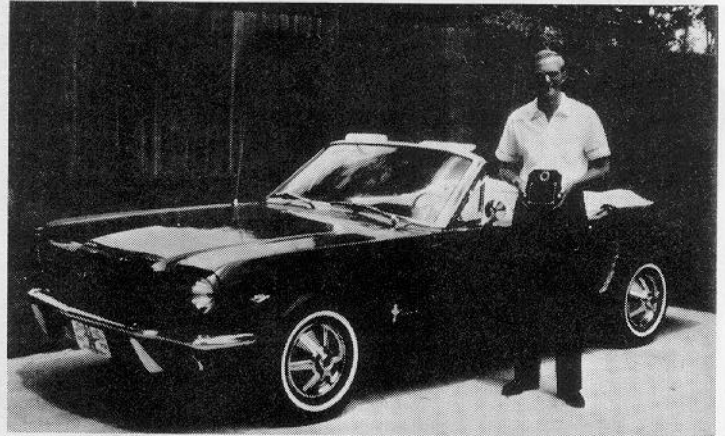
The real significance of the encroachment of the imported car on the American scene did not lie in its size or its technical features or its speed or its economy. The real significance was that the foreign car was a habit-breaker. It proved to American drivers that there was another way of automotive life. That cars could be small as well as big. That they could have two seats as well as four. That they could be rear-engined as well as front-engined. That, indeed, variety could be as exciting in cars as in women. And variety was the single quality most lacking in American cars right up until the end of the 1950's.

Doubt it? Then try this test question. "What 1955 American car had a wheelbase of 114" or better, was available with either a 6 cylinder or a V-8 water-cooled engine located up front, had drum brakes, non-independent rear end, and room for five or six passengers? With only a few minor exceptions, the answer is all of them. Variety? It was all in the sheet metal. And it had been there for so long that a whole generation of Americans believed that was the only place it could be.

Enter the Volkswagen. Air-cooled. Rear-engined, with superb traction and simplicity. The MGA, a two seater sports car that looked like a fast car should, out-handled any current American car and was even comfortable! The Saab — three cylinders and front wheel drive. The Dauphine, water cooled in line rear engine plus four doors. And on and on and on.

Prodded by a 10% sales loss to these upstart foreigners, it didn't take American manufacturers long to catch on. They looked at the imports, and saw that they had one common denominator: small size. And they reacted vigorously, with the compacts: Falcon, Corvair and Valiant. Two or three feet shorter than the full-sized sedan, smaller engined, yet lively enough for American highways. More economical to run and, often as not, more practical to drive.

Research of data from "Mustang Guide", by Bill Stone, published by the Benson Printing Co. 1965; and "The Mustang Story" by the Ford Motor Company, Educational Affairs Department, number 5.



The compacts stemmed the foreign car flood. Detroit breathed a sign of relief. It had recaptured its own market. And then, a very interesting thing happened. The compacts began to grow. A little in size . . . and a lot in personality.

GM saw it happen most dramatically with the Corvair. The Corvair was introduced as a bread and butter compact. Low powered, economical and easy, if not very exciting, to drive. At first, there was a whole flock of plain Jane Corvairs: two and four door sedans, a station wagon. And then, way up at the top of the line, a dolled-up Corvair was introduced: the Monza. It could be had with more power, a jazzy bucket seated vinyl interior, a sports car type four speed shift.

It wasn't long before the one Corvair you couldn't get your hands on was the Monza. The waiting list was just too long. The Monza, perhaps more than any car, proved that compacts were good, but sporty compacts were even better.

A sports, high performance flavor began to drift into big and small American cars alike. Ford dropped bucket seats into the Falcon. V-8 engines, too. Some Fords got vinyl-covered roofs and four-speed floor shifts. But right up until April, 1964, Ford had no car designed from the ground up as a sports car. A re-touched Falcon is, after all, a re-touched Falcon.

Then came the Mustang. Long, low hood, chopped off tail. Racy lines and a bucket seated vinyl interior that was even racier. Floor mounted shift — manual or automatic (you couldn't buy a Mustang with a column shift). And a list of engine and transmission and handling options that turn this sportster from a mild-mannered around town car to a fire-breathing sports car.

Did Ford have a winner? They did — and it didn't take very long to prove it. By mid-September, 1964, just five months after its World's Fair debut, the Mustang had leaped into the incredible position of being America's third-largest selling make — second only to Chevrolet and Ford!