

Mustang, History of a Love Affair

Fifth in a Series

by
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As the decade of the 1960's opened, Ford marketing researchers were watching several new sociological and economic developments. The growing number of young adults, the trend toward higher education and greater sophistication, the swelling affluence of the nation, plus a desire for style and sporty flair in a specialized automobile, all these factors combined to create a demand for a car that was not currently available on the market. It was obvious that no ordinary car would satisfy this new market.

About the time these factors began to emerge as significant marketing considerations, a small task force of Ford designers, engineers and product planners set down the concept of a forward-looking experimental sports car with the code name Mustang. Their concept was a pure sports car, a two-seater, designed with no thought to mass-market appeal. Research and sales experiences had already shown that a two-passenger vehicle, even a successful one, would find only a limited market in the United States.

A prototype of the Mustang exhibited at the Watkins Glen Grand Prix in the fall of 1962 created phenomenal excitement. People poured from the stands to surround the car. Subsequent showings at college campuses across the country drew crowds of enthusiastic admirers.

Ford planners now felt certain they could give the designers and engineers a clear direction. The studies that had been undertaken and the response to Mustang I indicated that the right course was to capture the flair and flavor of the Mustang in a four-seater that could be both a personal and a family car.

Time was still the critical factor. The World's Fair, which was to open in New York in April of 1964, would provide a dramatic showcase for the premiere showing of a new car. An unofficial deadline was set for the rendezvous. Less than 22 months remained in which to arrive at final engineering decisions and a final design model, to arrange for plant, equipment and supply sources, and to create advertising and promotional plans.

Marketing studies continued. When a manufacturer pioneers a major new product, the substantial risk can be minimized only by close and continuous analysis of market trends. Throughout 1962, the factors affecting buying attitudes toward a car like Mustang had been subjected to minute evaluation. Design alternatives, optimum size, performance characteristics, probable sales and the sources of those sales, came under close study. In the summer of 1962, studies were made of the influence of package sizes to determine the most efficient interior arrangement. As the interior package was redesigned, new sales volume estimate studies were made, and trends in the market were observed sharply

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.



to make sure the assumptions on which the Mustang was being created would continue to be valid.

An unprecedented crash program was undertaken to arrive at a design solution. Designers of the Corporate Projects Studio, the Ford Studio and the Lincoln-Mercury Studio were given package dimensions and were asked to engage in open competition, with an outside limit of two weeks to present clay models of their design ideas. The deadline of two weeks for a clay model was revolutionary. The challenge sent a wave of enthusiasm through the studios.

Two weeks later, seven design entries were reviewed. Several of them could have been winners in any other competition. Yet one of the seven stood out distinctly. The glances of Ford Motor Company top management came back again and again to a little white car with red wheels produced by the Ford Studio. The car was distinguished by an air of sporty poise.

Ford marketing experts invited selected groups of potential buyers to view the seven proposals. Careful readings were taken of buyer reactions, in the greatest detail possible, and a thorough analysis was made of the opinions expressed. The extremely favorable response to the Ford Studio entry confirmed the conviction of Ford planners that a car with this flavor and these features could supply what the market lacked.

The decision was made to build the Mustang. It would be a first-class product in all respects — quality, fittings, appearance and performance. A decision had been made early in the development stages to provide a wide selection of options and engines, so the Mustang could satisfy a wide variety of tastes. One added feature was the new Ford 289 cubic inch power plant, small and light with an unusually high horsepower to weight ratio achieved through thin-walled gray iron casting techniques. The luxury buyer with the means to satisfy his wishes could transform the car to his liking with a choice selection of extras. At the same time, the young buyer with limited means would be completely satisfied with his standard Mustang, because of its air of discriminating sportiness. Production commitments were made, aimed at bringing out "Job #1", the first production unit, by March 1, 1964.