

Mustang, History of a Love Affair

Eighth in a Series
by
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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.

Who were these early pioneers who bought Mustangs in such volume? From the marketing viewpoint, it was essential for Ford to learn everything possible about the average Mustang buyer. Information on buyers was needed in order to gauge the full potential of the new market that had been created and to assure that the car was an enduring concept and not a passing fancy.

Statistics traced a significant picture. The average age of Mustang buyers was 31, with more than half of them in the 20 to 34 age bracket. These facts helped confirm the early predictions of market studies on the growing importance of young people as prospective buyers. On the other hand, it was reassuring to note that about 16 per cent of Mustang buyers were between 45 and 54. This was clear indication that the attraction of the car was not limited to the younger set.

As the statistics accumulated, it became apparent that more than 40 per cent of all Mustang buyers were in the \$5000 and \$10,000 income bracket, suggesting that the advertising theme of "unexpected price" had been effective. At the other end of the range, it was notable that almost 15 per cent of all buyers had incomes of \$15,000 or more per year. Clearly, something besides the low price drew these customers to the Mustang.

Nearly two-thirds of the early Mustang buyers were married, proving that the main support of the car was not coming from the young bachelors of either sex. Fifty-two per cent of all Mustang owners had some college education, and another 38 per cent were high school graduates. In other words, the Mustang was drawing its support from the segment of the population with the greatest stability, the most secure purchasing power. The future of Mustang looked bright.

In addition to learning who the Mustang buyer was and what he was like, it was important from the marketing viewpoint to ascertain exactly what he was buying. Part of the original marketing strategy had been to broaden the appeal of the car by providing a wide array of options which would make it possible for the buyer to custom-tailor his car to his individual taste. He could begin with the low-cost economy model and add the appropriate options to create the rally-type sports car or the luxury Mustang of his preference.

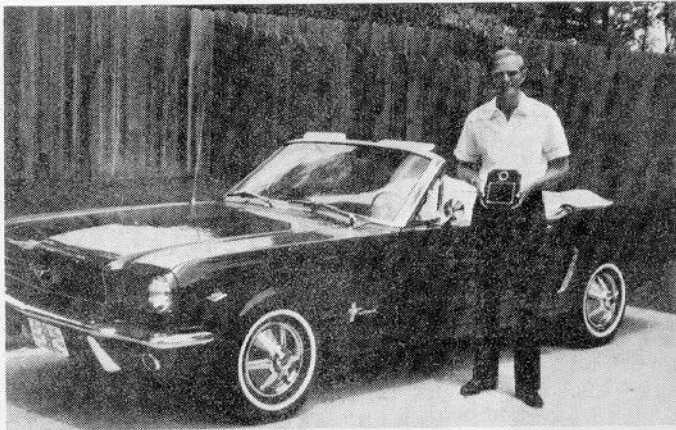
The facts showed that customers were enthusiastic about the options. Eighty-five per cent of all Mustangs sold were equipped with white sidewall tires, 80 per cent with radios, 71 per cent with eight-cylinder engines, 50 per cent with automatic transmissions, and 10 per cent with the "Rally Pack" designed specially for the customer who drove his car more "for the fun of it" than for utility.

The decision to make a variety of options available was vindicated in the marketplace. The Mustang was indeed appealing to a wide variety of owners. It was obvious that the car had aroused a strong emotional attachment in all types of car buyers, even though its original target was a particular segment of the market.

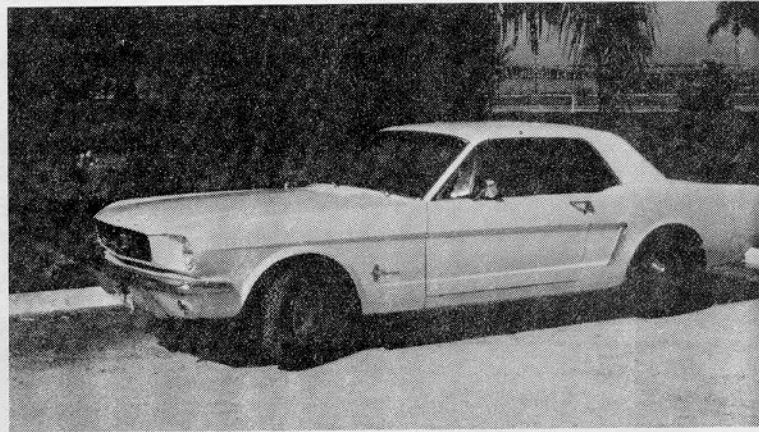
In its first years on the market, Mustang achieved 418,812 sales — an all-time industry first-year sales record. By March, 1966, the millionth Mustang had been sold. Ford Motor Company had the momentum and capitalized on it with a special Millionth Mustang Sale. This limited edition came with a 200 cu. in. six-cylinder, wire wheel covers, accent stripes, center console, engine decal, chrome air cleaner, and personalized nameplates. By November of that year, sales had passed the one-and-one quarter million mark. Mustang was an unparalleled, runaway success, becoming the third best selling car in the industry.

In the spring of 1966, Anniversary Sale advertisements asked the public: "What do you do after you build a million Mustangs? Start on the second million!" But the Mustang was already in trouble. Sales slowed, and the second million would take longer to complete than Ford anticipated.

The introduction of a successful car leaves the maker little room for complacency. Even the establishment of a new market carries no guarantee that the pioneer will continue to enjoy a hold on the market he created. Buying attitudes change. The needs and desires of car fanciers change. Competitors are studying these trends, and their designers are constantly at work to produce a model that will attract the eye and the orders of car buyers. So, in the years since the public introduction of the Mustang, the car had been modified and adapted to what Ford considered the changing market. Mustang's leadership in its class declined steadily by



Marc is shown with his 1964 Vintage Burgundy convertible which he purchased in November, 1981, from its third owner. This Mustang features white interior and top, 289, power steering, brakes and top, automatic transmission, factory air, left hand remote control mirror, standard hub-caps with spinner knock-off. At right is the Wimbledon white 1964½ coupe with which the love affair began.



Ordered on April 22, 1964, and delivered on June 18, 1964, just two days before Marc's sixteenth birthday, the Mustang is unrestored and equipped with all factory original equipment, including 170 cu. in., automatic transmission, Rally-Pac, left hand non-remote mirror and palomino interior. Thanks to Marc for his informative series of articles, concluding in this issue.

the introduction of new models, new options and increased engine displacement. With the original Mustang selling so nicely, why would anyone want to change the format? For profit, mostly. Essentially, the story of the Mustang is the story of a business investment carrying considerable elements of risk. This is the nature of any business enterprise that attempts to satisfy the wants of the buying public.

In the end, the customer must be satisfied, or he cannot be sold. At Ford Motor Company, history repeated itself. The classic Mustang died after 1968. Just as they had moved away from the two-passenger Thunderbird because of its lack of passenger and luggage room, the format of the Mustang was discarded for a larger and heavier car, adding 584 lbs. to its weight by 1971.

The final analysis shows the customer was not satisfied with the change. When he is satisfied with a product, it is because the total effort in design, engineering, production and promotion remain on target all the way. Lee Iacocca, the Mustang's chief progenitor and now chairman of Chrysler Corp., is perhaps best qualified to assess the Mustang phenomenon. He stated that "the original Mustang buyer is still there, still wanting a good little car. We walked away from the market."

It appears to be a lesson well learned. In was announced to the press on September 17, 1982 that the Flying Chicken Farmer, Carroll Shelby, the man who created the Shelby GT 350, the Cobra and the supercharged "Boss" Mustang, had been hired by Chairman Lee Iacocca to design and develop a Dodge Shelby. The specifications sound all too familiar: "appeal to drivers under 25 who are looking for their first car . . . a performance car with small engines and a price people can afford."

The Mustang is probably the most collectable car in American history. Although Mustang collectables run through the 1973 model (the down-sized Mustang II debuted in 1974), most prized are the 1964 to 1966 models according to *Car Exchange* magazine. So durable are these "square Mustangs" that automotive writer Wallace A. Wyss estimates that 300,000 to 400,000 of them, or about a third of the total built, may still be on the road.

Paramount to the Mustang success story was the formation of national /regional car clubs and the huge aftermarket industry supplying parts and restoration assistance to owners and restorers of older Mustangs. The Mustang Club of America with 61 Regional Groups in 29 states and Canada (over 4000 members) has led the way in sponsoring Mustang car shows and swap meets, stimulating Mustang part business, and the publication of a quality magazine for the club membership.

What is the explanation for the renewed popularity of the Mustang? The reason may be nostalgia — a longing for the way things were — or for the way people think they were. For the Mustang generation, these cars bring memories of a more pleasant, simpler time that makes them forget the unpleasant things, and stir dreams of an idealistic world.

I have been a Mustanger since day one. For me, my '64½ Mustang is not just another collector's car. For nineteen years it has been a practical, inexpensive and amazingly versatile car, retaining its look, fire, and flavor of a great European road car. It reflects a nostalgic outlook on life, distinctive, stylish, sporty, and discriminating. With its emblem charging across the shining honeycomb of its wide grille, it is truly a love affair that is "American as all Hell!"