



by Lee Mathias

Careful inspection of a Mustang is essential whether you are planning to purchase or restore the car. The condition of the body and undercarriage is the most critical area. Since the Mustang is a unibody (no frame) design, rust in structural areas not only affects the resale value, it also affects the safe operation of the car today. The condition of the unibody structure is the most important area to inspect carefully.

It is impossible to completely remove rust without cutting out the damaged area and replacing it with new metal. Rust can, however, be retarded and prevented from spreading. If you are anticipating a top dollar car, a good solid unibody will greatly reduce the cost of restoration, as well as insuring a top dollar car years from now.

Rust can be easily covered with fiberglass, body putty (bondo), and a myriad of creative methods to make a car appear new. Small brown dots showing through the paint are an easy giveaway to problems underneath. Large blisters or bubbles in the paint point to bigger trouble underneath. A smooth shiny fresh paint job is a clue to probe deeply for hidden damage, probably more reason than any other to look closely. Get under the car — a little dirt on your clothes now could save you a costly mistake.

Mustangs generally rust from the inside out. By the time rust is evident the damage already has a good start. When the Mustangs were built, factory caulking was applied over bare metal, then the cars were painted. Over the years, moisture under this caulk has rusted the bare metal causing the caulk to pop off, exposing the surface to even more damage. The easiest place to check for this is under the rear seat and around the inside of the trunk. Several of the key rust areas are formed due to years of accumulation of dust and dirt packed into small crevices and exposed to moisture. The lower rear corner of the front fender near the rocker panel, the lower front corner of the doors, and over the rear wheel openings are the most common problem areas.

Check the DSO on the door tag of the Mustang to see where it was delivered new. Be suspicious of northern cars and those from coastal areas. Northern cars rust badly underneath due to road salt, while coastal cars rust in areas where dew carries salt air into the body seams. A car that has been parked under trees or parked outside for long periods is a prime candidate for cowl rust. This is easily spotted as wet carpet in the front, which leads to floorboard rust. Highly desirable are Mustangs from the desert southwest. Remember, Ford only intended these cars to be driven for a few years, and some are twenty years old!

A car that has been previously wrecked will usually rust in the damaged area. Body shops usually repair the outside of the car, paint it, and collect. Accidents knock factory caulk and paint off the inside of the damaged areas. Years later, the car will begin to show rust in these areas. If any welding is done and not treated, it will also begin to show rust later. Rust in only one area of a car can usually be attributed to an earlier accident.

The first step in restoring a Mustang is to evaluate the project expense against the current value of the car, as well as the estimated future value. The *Mustang Value Guide* or *Blue Book* are excellent sources of information. Take the value of the basic car, add the options, and you have the approximate

resale value on today's market. Now for the hard part. Estimate the cost of repairs — interior, exterior, and mechanical. Professional help is invaluable at this point. It is very easy to tie up more money in a Mustang than it will ever be worth. Choose the car to purchase or restore carefully.

(Lee Mathias is the owner of Mustang Farm, a Mustang restoration shop in Kennesaw, Georgia. Lee has been involved with Mustangs since the beginning. He currently owns a 1965 Shelby GT350 and a 1966 Shelby GT350 race car, which he races in Vintage events. — Editor) **MT**

## Students Learn the Art of Restoration

Paul Wasser is an avid Mustang fan as well as the Director of the Vermilion Occupational Technical Education Center located in Danville, Illinois. Students from eight area high schools attend the center for training in auto body work and mechanics resulting in 50 to 55 students in the auto body program and another 50 to 55 students in the mechanics program.

Recently the students undertook the challenge of restoring a 1970 Mustang fastback donated to the center. The mechanics class started the process by replacing the engine, conditioning the brakes and exhaust system, and converting back to the original automatic transmission.

The auto body class then stripped the paint, installed patch panels in the rear quarters and freshened up the interior. The combined efforts of four adults in an auto restoration class produced the final touch with the application of fresh exterior paint.

When the project was completed, the car was sold at sealed bid with the profits shared by both programs. Although the car was not restored to original condition, the project was an excellent learning experience for the Mustang restorers of the future. **MT**