

MT road tests two cars and one proverb

Mustang vs Mustang

by Tony Swan

PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR AND RON HUSSEY

“They just don't build 'em like they used to.” You've certainly heard the line before, and the odds are you've even said it yourself. Moreover, it's true: They *don't* build 'em like they used to. But we aren't at all convinced that this is necessarily a bad thing.

True, the raw horsepower derby is over, thanks to emissions regulations, safety concerns, and most of all the price of a gallon of fuel. But as a substitute we have engines that are substantially more efficient and suspensions that are infinitely more sophisticated.

True, package sizes, of necessity, are becoming steadily smaller. But this trend is producing a new school of automotive design dedicated to creating exteriors that reflect the efficiencies they embrace.

True, sheet metal is of a thinner gauge and the use of plastics is at an all-time high. But attention to corrosion resistance has never been better, current plastics technology

is outstripping metallurgy, and quality has become the No. 1 priority of an increasingly competitive industry.

Against this backdrop, the old lament for a fondly—if inaccurately—remembered day in car manufacturing seems especially misplaced to us. So we decided to put it to the test.

Here's the deal. Beginning with this issue, watch *MT* for a continuing series of “They Don't Build 'Em Like They Used To” road tests. Were yesterday's cars really made better? Are the cars of today really such frail, anemic, faceless little crackerboxes, costing more and delivering less?

To kick off the series, we pitted a Mustang original against a 1980 edition. This confrontation gave us the critical elements we seek in this series: A legendary ancestor vs. its supposedly emasculated offspring. We plan more bizarre matchups in future issues. And we'd be happy to hear your suggestions along these lines.

**“They
don't
build 'em
like they
used to”
ROAD
TEST**



**"They
don't
build 'em
like they
used to"
ROAD
TEST**

Mustang '66

Let's begin by making one rather obvious observation: 14 years is a long time. And even though cars on the West Coast tend to wear their years better than those living in climates that include winter, they still get old. Older, in fact, in some ways, particularly in Southern California, where mileage accumulates at about 1.5 times the national average.

All of this is by way of leading up to the apologies for our original-edition Mustang, which happens to belong to your narrator. Although the sheet metal follows, more or less, the lines originally laid down for it, there are plenty of minor nicks, blemishes, and dings. A new front bumper and lower splash panel are high on the restoration docket, and the buff-colored Pony interior has a bad case of liver spots. In short, this is far from a 100-point car. But it is basically original, and this is what made it a likely candidate for this test. It's been repainted, without much attention to detail work but at least in the original metallic forest green. And at some point in its recent past the engine's had a thorough going over, bottom end and top.

Aside from these updates, the car remains in a state of original sin. Everything works, with varying degrees of efficiency, and performance is surprisingly good.

The car was purchased from a young Orange County couple. It was driven largely by the wife, who said she "liked the power but wanted to buy a VW camper." Which tells you something about their priorities regarding restoration, purity, and automotive enthusiasm in general.

A set of reasonably good chain-store glass-belted radials adorns the 14-inch wheels. As nearly as we can tell, the car has put some 167,000 miles behind it, which is a noteworthy achievement. Nevertheless, this 1966 Mustang is very much in the mainstream of such cars hereabouts. There are literally thousands of these things still riding the freeways, some better, some worse. Not too surprising, when you consider the original Mustang's popularity—1,288,557 sold before there was any kind of sheet metal change at all, for 1967.

A reasonably good '64-'66 hardtop, such as this one, will fetch anything from \$1500 on up today, and nice convertibles are easily worth \$5000. Our '66 test car cost about \$3300 new. We can only wonder if the current Mustang—which bases at over \$4000—will have such staying power in the marketplace, or whether there will be such a big pool of them to draw on another 14 years down the pike. It should be a pretty good-sized pool initially. In 1979, Ford rolled 480,083 Mustangs and Capris off the assembly lines. That's not as hot as the first full year of original Mustang production—559,441 in 1965—but impressive nevertheless.

Inside, old Mustang '66 still has a few things going for it. The bucket seats, for all their years of service, are actually more comfortable than those in the new car. Not only does the upholstery material (vinyl in both cars) breathe better, but the angle of the seatback seems to have been designed for human backs—something we wish we could say for the seatbacks in Mustang '80. However, neither car has adjustable seatbacks, and rear seat leg room is a grim joke in both cars—some things *never* change.

Our '66 Mustang scores a big plus for front seat leg room; the '80 version keeps the driver jammed up against the steering wheel.

Luggage space is skimpy in both cars, thus preserving another Mustang tradition.

When it comes to riding comfort, Mustang '80 wins hands down, partly because Mustang '66 is wearing mystery shocks of indeterminate age, but more because the older car was equipped at the outset with stiffer suspension and limited travel to augment its sporty feeling.

There isn't much to choose in terms of the braking capabilities of both cars, although the distinction between capability and actuality for our Mustang '66 is vast. The test figures reflect our test of a similarly equipped Mustang back in '66; the pads in our test '66 were past any sort of meaningful comparison.



'66 Mustang



Mustang '80

"They don't build 'em like they used to"
ROAD TEST

Introduced in late 1978, the current Mustang quickly makes us forget about Mustang II, Ford's homely successor to the original Mustang series. The new Mustangs are cars of style and elegance, very much in touch with the times.

Our test car, a Ghia model, was equipped with Ford's new 255-cubic-inch V-8 mated to a super-smooth 3-speed automatic and tall rear end intended to keep rpm low and

gas mileage high. While this combination, complicated by catalytic converter and EGR, has the predictable side effect of holding the car back a bit—18.5 seconds at 76.7 mph in the quarter compared to 17.9/78.5 for our '66—it achieves the priority goal: improved gas mileage.

Mustang '80, which rates at only 18 mpg in the EPA book, achieved 24.3 mpg on the 73-mile *MT* test loop. Mustang '66 scored only 16.4. In two weeks of take-no-prisoners commuting on the L.A. freeway system (minimum 100 miles round trip daily), the current Mustang never dipped below 20 mpg, while the '66 Mustang never got higher than 16.

More than any other statistic, these mpg numbers reflect the priorities of the manufacturer then vs. now. In 1966, OPEC was still a couple of Mideast wars away from realizing its true horsepower, and a gallon of premium (which is what the 289 prefers) cost around 35-40 cents. We stood in gleeful anticipation at the threshold of the Pony Car era, and fuel economy was something we mentioned only in passing. Thus, yesterday's Mustang embodied only two design priorities: flash and go-power.

The Mustang of today, which must respond to those same priorities and many more, is a long-legged loper that gobbles up freeways at 70 mph without working up a sweat or stabbing its owner too hard in the pocketbook.

With one major reservation, it is also a more comfortable car than the original Mustang. The suspension is set up soft for smooth cruising, and the suspension compliance simply erases all the small bumps one encounters on freeways and boulevards. Big bumps—chuck holes, intersection drain channels, and the like—are a different matter. It's easier than it should be to get the car to bottom out.

On the other hand, Mustang '66 leaves much to be desired in virtually all categories of ride quality, although it gets around corners with somewhat less body roll.

Mustang '80 tends to be mushy when the going gets hard and will plow when pushed. Mustang '66, in contrast, is only too happy to hang its tail out at the slightest provocation. The nice thing about Mustang '80 in this department is that handling is something you have some choice about at the factory level. Ford offers three suspension packages for its current Mustangs, with the top-of-the-line TRX setup making the car substantially firmer.

Both cars feature power steering, with rack and pinion on the 1980 model. Feel is indifferent in both cars, with the performance edge going to Mustang '80 for quickness (3.1 turns lock to lock vs. 3.7). The new car's smaller-diameter sports steering wheel is also an improvement over the huge wood-rim wheel in Mustang '66.

Except for the tachometer on the '80, instrumentation on the two cars is virtually identical—centrally mounted speedo flanked by ammeter, oil pressure, temp, and fuel gauges. We give both dash panels good marks for cosmetics, although the climate controls on the new car are more comprehensive.

Perhaps more significant than cockpit content, for the purposes of this comparison, is the way everything blends together. There is more of a sense of unitized design and less of randomly assembled componentry in these third-generation Mustangs. Aside from one strange color choice in our test car's interior decor, the inside and outside of Mustang '80 reflected quality in terms of fit, finish, workmanship, and materials. Although this particular car has a long way to go before it equals the endurance of our '66, it had already seen almost 10,000 miles of service by the time we picked it up. Nevertheless, everything was still tight, and aside from a little buzz in the shifter in certain rpm ranges, no rattles had emerged anywhere.



'80 Mustang



Mustang vs Mustang

Do They Or Don't They?

The answer, at least for this take, is still no; they don't build 'em like they used to. They build 'em different. Certainly as well. Probably even better. But definitely different.

Mustang '66 is one of those automotive immortals that's earned a special niche. It is a car of distinctive character that wound up becoming the blueprint for the whole muscle-car era. And it was produced in a manufacturing community blithely free of today's frequently conflicting regulations.

Mustang '80 is also a car of distinctive character, an achievement made more remarkable in view of the restrictions mentioned above. It is a car that is contemporary in every sense and perhaps suffers from this in contrast to its ancestor. In an age of behemoths and excess, it wasn't particularly difficult for something as trim as the original

Mustang to stand out from the crowd. But in the age of the Big Shrink, it is much more difficult for a designer to achieve something truly striking.

Thus, we are comparing not only two cars but two eras. On a straight point-for-point comparison, each contender scores. You might even call Round One of this series a draw.

But in the perspective of today's world, the 1966 Mustang is essentially an anachronism—a collector's item.

Of course they don't build 'em like they used to. Even if building 'em just as they did in 1966 was a good thing—which is about as logical as saying that we've pushed the frontiers of science far enough—even if they wanted to build 'em like they used to, there's this problem: They're not allowed to. MT

ROAD TEST DATA

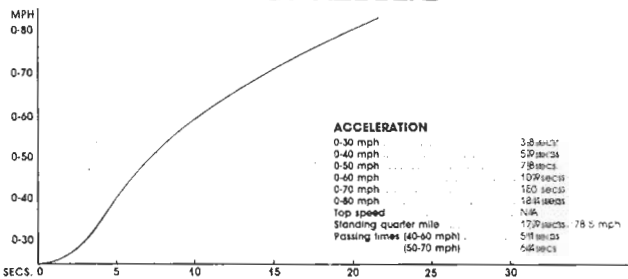


1966 Mustang

SPECIFICATIONS

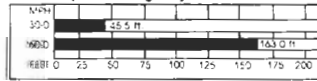
GENERAL	Front-engine, rear-drive, 4-door, 2-door coupe	Ground clearance	N/A
Vehicle type	33272	Max. load length w/rear seats folded down	N/A
Price as delivered, 1966	29500 w/8 power steering, disc front brakes, 3-speed automatic, A/C, tinted glass, AM radio	Curb weight	2960 lbs
Options on test car		Weight distribution, F/R	N/A
Price as tested	\$1500	CAPACITIES	
ENGINE		Fuel capacity	16.0 gals
Type	V-8, cast iron heads and block	Crankcase	5 gals
Bore & stroke	4.3 x 2.87 in. 101 cc x 72.9 mm	Cooling system	N/A
Displacement	289 cu in. 4737 cc	Trunk capacity	N/A
Compression ratio	8.5:1	SUSPENSION	
Fuel system	4-bar carburetor	Front	Independent, ball joints, upper A-arms, coil springs
Recommended fuel	86 premium	Rear	Live axle, semi-elliptic leaf springs, tube shocks
Emission control	N/A	STEERING	
Valve gear	OHV	Type	Recirculating ball and nut
Horsepower (SAE net)	225 at 4600 rpm	Turns lock-to-lock	3.9
Torque (lb.-ft., SAE net)	305 at 3200 rpm	Tuning circle, curb-to-curb	33.9 ft
Power-to-weight ratio	13.2 lb./hp	BRAKES	
DRIVETRAIN		Front	10.0 in. discs
Transmission	3-speed automatic	Rear	10.0 in. drums
Final drive ratio	3.0:1	WHEELS AND TIRES	
DIMENSIONS		Wheel size	14 x 6
Wheelbase	108.0 in.	Wheel type	Stamped steel
Track, F/R	56.0/56.0 in.	Tire make and size	Continental RR-7, 14
Length	181.4 in.	Tire type	Discs/elliptic leaf
Width	69.2 in.	Recommended pressure (psi), F/R	30/30
Height	51.5 in.		

TEST RESULTS



FUEL CONSUMPTION	
EPA City	N/A
MT 73-mile test loop	17.3 mpg
SPEEDOMETER	
Indicated	30 40 50 60
Actual mph	28.5 39.5 49.2 59.0

BRAKING (1966 test figures)

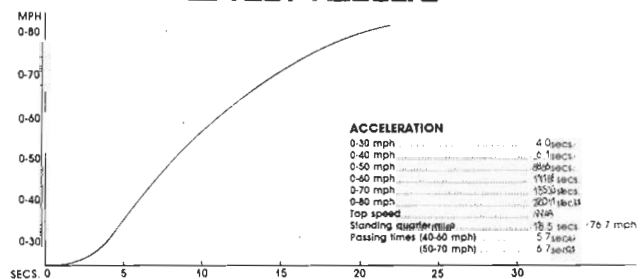


1980 Mustang

SPECIFICATIONS

GENERAL	Front-engine, rear-drive, 4-door, 2-door coupe	Length	179.1 in.
Vehicle type	33084	Width	69.1 in.
Base price	26043	Height	51.1 in.
Options on test car	GMF package, 3-speed V-8, power steering, power brakes, A/C, AM/FM stereo, rear window wiper, interior door lock group, tinted glass, steel wheel covers	Ground clearance	N/A
Price as tested	\$6043	Max. load length w/rear seats folded down	63.0 in.
ENGINE		Curb weight	2750.4 lb.
Type	V-8, cast iron heads and block, 5 main bearings, 3.88 x 3.0 in. 96.5 x 76.2 mm	Weight distribution, F/R	56/44
Bore & stroke	2.65 cu in. 4300 cc 8.8:1	CAPACITIES	
Displacement	230.0 cu in. 3769 cc	Fuel capacity	12.5 gals
Compression ratio	9.0	Crankcase	5 gals
Fuel system	3-way carburetor	Cooling system	14.3 gals
Recommended fuel	89 unleaded	Trunk capacity	N/A
Emission control	3-way catalyst, air injection, 3.0R carb	SUSPENSION	
Valve gear	1.78 in. 2.00 in. 1.98 in. 2.00 in.	Front	Independent, torsion bar
Horsepower (SAE net)	108 at 3000 rpm	Rear	Independent, torsion bar
Torque (lb.-ft., SAE net)	108 at 2500 rpm	Dimension strat. coil spring link stabilizer bar	14.3 gals
Power-to-weight ratio	23.75 lb./hp	Live axle, coil spring, 4-way link control arms, stabilizer bar	3.0
DRIVETRAIN		STEERING	
Transmission	3-speed automatic	Type	Track and pinion
Final drive ratio	2.65:1	Turns lock-to-lock	3.9
DIMENSIONS		Tuning circle, curb-to-curb	35.5 ft
Wheelbase	103.0 in.	BRAKES	
Track, F/R	56.0/56.0 in.	Front	9.3 in. disc, power assist
		Rear	9.3 in. drums
		WHEELS AND TIRES	
		Wheel size	14 x 6
		Wheel type	Stamped, 5-spoke steel
		Tire make and size	Firestone 721
		Tire type	Disc/steer
		Recommended pressure (psi), F/R	25/25

TEST RESULTS



FUEL CONSUMPTION	
EPA City	18 mpg
MT 73-mile test loop	24.3 mpg
SPEEDOMETER	
Indicated	30 40 50 60
Actual mph	28.5 39.5 49.2 59.0

BRAKING

