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'05 Hot Drives: Ford Mustang Gt

Old Glory: America's favorite ponycar earns back its stripes

From the November, 2004 issue of Motor Trend

Only in America could an econobox in fancy dress named for a wild horse become the must-have machine of an entire generation. Where else could a musclecar's sales rise as its powertrain and chassis were emasculated (mid-1970s)? And in what other land could a manufacturer lie about a car's engine size in bright chrome numerals for 14 years and even fudge power output a couple times along the way without sales tanking?

Nevertheless, two-and-a-half decades, two Corvettes, and five presidents later, Ford has finally done the honorable thing and foaled a brand-new pony. It showed it off, talked about it, and at long last tossed us the keys for a chaperoned drive across Michigan to Gingerman Raceway. But mere subjective impressions gleaned on a carefully orchestrated launch seemed like a bun without the beef, so we managed to lasso a stray 'Stang and hook it to our gear for an exclusive first test (see sidebar).



Is this [Mustang](#) worthy of the loyalty the brand has always enjoyed?

A quantum improvement is noticeable from 10 feet away, and it's not just the fab retro/modern styling. All the panel gaps, surface alignment, and detailing on these salable early production cars look Japan tight and orderly. Interior craftsmanship is similarly first-rate, with real aluminum on the steering wheel and dash (on cars with the optional appearance package) and a chic, woven headliner.

After just a few Michigan potholes, one wonders if Ford's modest structural improvement figures are overly conservative. The body feels snare-drum tight, attenuating impacts instantly. The extra rigidity coupled with the revised suspension allowed Ford to tighten up the shock valving and roll control without ruining the ride, which is slightly busy but never uncomfortably harsh. Bend the GT into a set of esses and two more contrasts between new and old come into focus: The seats actually restrain the occupants so the steering wheel rim and grab handles don't have to, and the steering responds way more quickly. The ratio is actually a fraction slower (15.7:1 versus 15.0:1), but there's so much less slop just off center that it feels more precise and nimble. And the steering feel is free of the increasingly unwelcome electronic tailoring of the ratio or effort.

Dump the clutch at half-throttle, and the [Mustang](#) GT paints two beautiful, unbroken black stripes--even with the traction control on. The system can tell drag racing from snow slippage and stands aside to prevent the indignation of an electronically aborted stoplight stampede. This year the system is also tuned to permit a bit of wheelspin-induced oversteer when driving aggressively on dry pavement. You'll want to switch the traction control off to wring the most out of this chassis on a closed track, but when switched on for responsible public-road driving, the extra latitude the system affords is welcome.

At the racetrack, the Mustang truly showed us what it's made of--and that is to say, slightly lesser stuff than similarly priced sporty cars like the [Nissan 350Z](#) and [Mazda RX-8](#). Oh, the lusty V-8 pulls stronger out of every corner, but the car carries more weight over its (all-season) front tires, so it pushes more than those cars and seems less eager to rotate without brutish steering and throttle inputs. And while MacPherson struts can be made to work magic on a Bavarian budget, this humble horse falls short of world-class chassis poise in bumpy turns, where the front end chatters a bit and the heavy hardware out back can be felt moving around more than one would like. The GT's larger four-wheel-disc brakes boast 18-percent-more swept area and feel terrific on the road, but two hard laps at the track caused them to fade disconcertingly. All that said, the new car felt quicker and easier to pilot smoothly around the track than its glue-factory-bound predecessor, and most of these issues fade in importance once you drive off the track.

A Less Hurtful Hertz

by Frank Markus

More than two-thirds of [Mustang](#) buyers will pass on the macadam-melting GT. Happily, the new rental-grade 'Stang is much less of a penalty box. Its SOHC 4.0-liter V-6 is borrowed from the [Explorer](#) and tuned with a new intake and camshaft to make 202 horsepower and 235 pound-feet. That's only nine more horses and 10-pound-feet-more torque than its pushrod 3.8-liter forebear produced, but the 90 percent of base-car buyers opting for the five-speed automatic transmission will sense a much quicker acceleration. Relative to the old four-speed, the overall gearing is 36 percent shorter in first and around 50 percent shorter in the next three gears, so there's a lot more torque multiplication on hand at every speed in every gear. (The same is true of GT automatics.)

No 2004 V-6 Mustang was available for direct comparison, but our sense is that the team managed to preserve much of the old 90-degree 3.8-liter engine's coarseness and thrash. Probably, it's a big improvement, but no blindfolded passenger will ever mistake this for a Japanese six--unless perhaps the car is traversing a concrete freeway at 70 mph and tire noise is drowning out the engine. Saddle sores are something to watch out for after 100 miles in the base seat (a similar stint in the GT provoked no such grumblings).

Like the GT, the new V-6 Mustang wears slightly taller and narrower tires this year (215/65R16 versus 225/55R16), though overall handling is expected to improve. Relative to the GT, the V-6 rolls more, understeers more, and is resistant to steering with the throttle. But the best thing is that the base car is in no way visually emasculated. You can't order the GT's grille-mounted foglights or 17-inch wheels, but the 16s fill the wheelwells nicely, and a rear spoiler is optional, as are all the GT's interior dress-up bits.

'60s style '60s rear axle

by Frank Markus

The last largely new car introduced in this country with a live rear axle was the 1993 Camaro. Has [Ford](#) taken this retro thing too far? Forget all that guff about drag-racing customers demanding a live axle, this setup's a cost-cutter. Ford chose to invest more heavily in powertrain upgrades, and only the live axle can be built cheaply enough to sell in a \$20,000 V-6 car and yet strongly enough to withstand 300 horsepower in a \$30,000 one.

All that said, the geometry of the new axle is far more efficient, which allowed weight to be pulled out of the links and springs and reapplied to reinforcing the axle and differential so it can better withstand aftermarket tuning (the engineers will admit to 20-percent overdesign, so beware of torque claims above 378 pound-feet). The front and rear suspensions are designed to control lateral (cornering) forces with one set of bushings and longitudinal (ride) inputs with a different set of more compliant bushings, improving both ride and handling. The new L-shaped front control arm even allows a sharper steering angle, so U-turns require less real estate.

Exclusive First Track Test

We've got the numbers...and they're good

--Chris Walton

Don't ask us how, but we had our way with a [2005 Mustang](#) GT five-speed automatic just long enough to gather real test numbers and send this pony back to the barn wet. To say we're pleased with the results would be like saying it'd be cool to have Jay Leno's garage keys for a day.

Here's the deal from our man behind the wheel: From a stop, the [2005 GT](#) launches with unexpected ferocity at under two seconds to 30 mph. Normally, this kind of urgent getaway is reserved for cars with clutch pedals and DIY gear boxes. Using a brake-torquing technique at just over 2000 rpm, the new Pirelli tires favor a liberal amount of wheelspin, easily modulated with the throttle. The P Zero Neros hook up more readily than the Goodyear Eagles on previous Mustangs, which tend to alternately spin in vain or bog-'n'-go depending on launch rpm. The new engine revs quickly past the indicated 6000-rpm redline and shifts just shy of the "real" 6200 limit. First, second, and third gears are tightly spaced and snap off upshifts nearly as rapidly as a Mercedes AMG SpeedShift automatic. Fourth and fifth gears, however, are performance-sucking black holes slowing the otherwise energetic acceleration curve.

The 2005 GT is quicker than all but the current supercharged SVT Cobra, and, even so, only by a 0.2-to-0.3-second margin. With a 5.1-second run to 60 mph, the new [Mustang](#) outruns a comparable 1999-2004 GT four-speed automatic by nearly a full second. A same-gen five-speed manual GT managed only a 5.4-second 0-to-60, and an automatic Mach 1 mustered a 5.6-second best. Similar story in the quarter mile: The new car's 13.6-second time is about a half to a full second better. The new car's 99.9-mph speed at the end of the quarter mile is just shy where most current-gen Mustangs run. We suspect the new car's deep, high-fuel-mileage fourth and fifth gears are to blame.

What would a manual trans GT be good for? Estimates on automatic-to-stick-shift conversion factors vary, but this auto's close 1-2-3 gearing keeps the engine boiling, so the difference may not be as much as you might think. It's safe to say a self-shifting GT is a sub-five-second runner, likely in the 4.8-to-4.9-second range.

In the slalom, the new Mustang feels altogether more precise, predictable, and stable than the car it replaces. The firmer platform is better suited to allowing the suspension and tires to do their jobs more effectively. Where the old car slides as a whole past each cone (unpredictably at that), the 2005 bites hard on initial turn-in, transfers weight in the blink of an eye, and manages rear roll-steer far better. Just a hint of opposite-direction wheel input brings the rear end back in line with an authoritative snap ready for the next cone. The best run was over 66 mph, better than any previous Mustang except the race-ready Cobra R of 2000. In typical Mustang fashion, the new car lapses into terminal understeer in the slower-speed skidpad test, but still managed a Cobra-like 0.84g orbit.

2005 Ford Mustang GT	
Powertrain/Chassis	
Drivetrain layout	Front engine, RWD
Engine type	90* V-8, alum block and heads
Valve gear	SOHC, 3 valves/cyl,variable
Bore x stroke, in/mm	3.55 x 3.54 / 90.2 x 90.0
Displacement, ci/cc	280.8 / 4601
Compression ratio	9.8:1
Max SAE net horsepower	300 @ 6000 rpm
Max SAE net torque, lb-ft	315 @ 4500 rpm
Specific output, hp/liter	65.2
Weight to power, lb/hp	11.7
Redline, rpm	6000
Transmission	5-speed auto
Axle/final-drive ratio:1	3.31 / 2.35
Suspension, front; rear	Struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar; live axle, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Brakes, f;r	12.4-in vented disc; 11.8-in vented disc, ABS
Wheels	17 x 8.0, cast aluminum
Tires	235/55WR-17 Pirelli P Zero Nero
Dimensions	
Wheelbase, in	107.1
Track, f/r, in	62.3 / 62.5
Length, in	187.6
Width, in	73.9
Height, in	54.5
Turning circle, ft	38.0
Curb weight, lb	3520
Weight dist, f/r, %	54 / 46
Seating capacity, persons	4
Headroom, f/r, in	38.6 / 35.0
Legroom, f/r, in	42.7 / 31.0
Shoulder room, f/r, in	55.4 / 53.3
Cargo vol, cu ft	12.3
TEST DATA	
Acceleration, sec to mph	
0-30	1.9
0-40	2.8
0-50	3.8
0-60	5.1
0-70	6.8
0-80	8.6
0-90	11.0
0-100	13.7
1/4 mile, sec @ mph	13.6 @ 99.9
Braking, 100-0 mph, ft	361
Braking, 60-0 mph, ft	120
600-ft slalom, avg mph	66.1
200-ft skidpad, avg g	0.84
MT figure-8, sec @ avg g	26.61 @ 0.67
Top-gear rpm @ 60 mph	1900
Consumer Info	
Base price	\$25,000 (est)

Price as tested	\$26,000 (est)
Stability/traction	control No / yes
Airbags	Dual front
Basic warranty	3 yrs/36,000 miles
Powertrain warranty	3 yrs/36,000 miles
Roadside-assist period	3 yrs/36,000 miles
Fuel capacity, gal	16.0
EPA mpg, city/hwy	18/26 (est)
Range, miles, city/hwy	288/416 (est)
Recommended fuel	Unleaded regular

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