

## ***INSIDE LINE***

# **Full Test: 2005 Ford Mustang**

Back in the Saddle Again

For those of you impatient types who don't like wading through paragraph after paragraph of background and history just to get to the nitty-gritty details, we're going to cut to the chase. The 2005 Mustang is not only a shining example of everything a pony car is supposed to be, it's one of the best all-new American cars on the road today. At a time when the automotive marketplace is flooded with hundreds of vehicles that cater to every little societal niche, the new Mustang manages to accomplish something most vehicles (and automakers) could never dream of: the perfect blend of comfort, value, performance and style.

Looking back four decades, one wonders if Ford executives had any clue what they were getting into when the first Mustang concepts started coming together under the watchful eye of a young executive named Lee Iacocca. On April 17, 1964, the Ford Motor Company unveiled its latest creation at the New York World's Fair to a television audience of nearly 29 million people. The sporty little coupe called Mustang was actually based on leftover Falcon underpinnings, but the styling was all new and designed specifically to appeal to the massive wave of young people approaching driving age around the country. The concept behind the car was simple. The maturing baby boomer generation was young, hip and looking to spend its hard-earned money on an affordable and practical car that also offered exciting looks and racy performance. The Mustang was intended to fill that need, loaded with cool features like standard bucket seats, a floor shifter, available V8 power, nimble road manners, seating for four and a price tag around \$2,500.

With 40 years' worth of heritage and millions of rabid fans hanging in the balance, Ford engineers and stylists were under a fair bit of pressure when they sat down to design the first all-new Mustang in a quarter century. The venerable "Fox" platform that debuted under the Mustang in 1978 was adequate when Jimmy Carter was president, but it had grown stale and dated in the subsequent decades, even as the exterior packaging was redesigned in 1987, 1994 and 1999. Initial rumors had the new car based on a modified version of the platform used for the [Lincoln LS](#), but Ford engineers quickly realized that while certain components could be used, the basic chassis design would have to be all new in order to provide the handling dynamics the Mustang is known for.

The latest Mustang uses an all-new MacPherson strut front suspension design combined with performance-tuned rack and pinion steering. The setup provides absolutely stellar driving dynamics, while the large front and rear anti-sway bars tame body roll to an absolute minimum. We were skeptical about Ford's use of a solid "live" axle out back rather than developing a more advanced independent rear suspension setup, but the reality is that most would-be buyers don't want to pay for all that extra technology. And when one balances the '05 Mustang's low cost and excellent ride and handling ability with the lack of cutting-edge technology, it appears that Ford made the right decision. After all, the company will have plenty of opportunities to showcase new high-zoot suspension setups in the forthcoming (and significantly more expensive) SVT Cobra.

Along with the revised suspension, there's a new set of disc brakes up front with rotors that are 14-percent larger than the binders found on the '04 model. In addition, big two-piston calipers drastically improve both braking performance and feel.

Of course no true muscle car is worth its weight in burnt rubber without a big motor backing things up, so a revised version of Ford's 4.6-liter V8 resides underneath the Mustang GT's ultralong hood. When the original two-valve, single-overhead cam 4.6 debuted in the '96 Mustang, it wasn't much to write home about, as the small engine didn't offer enough power and the exhaust note was less than impressive. Subsequent versions of the 4.6 in the Cobra and Mach 1 proved that the new engine could make decent power, but it required high engine speeds that were very un-muscle-carlike.

Ford's in-house gearheads knew they had to get things right for '05, so they started with a lightweight aluminum block that saves about 75 pounds over the previous cast-iron model, then fitted it with new three-valve cylinder heads that strike a balance between low-end torque and the high-end horsepower of the Cobra and Mach 1 engines. Lastly, new tuned-length manifolds dump into a true dual exhaust system that manages to optimize power and bellow out the throaty roar we expect from a Mustang. All that development work adds up to a refined yet raucous engine that cranks out 300 horsepower and 320 pound-feet of torque — a 40-horse bump over last year's model.

Six-cylinder Mustangs get a new heart as well, as the tired, old 3.8-liter V6 has finally been ditched in favor of a new 4.0-liter SOHC V6 that offers a hearty 210 hp and 240 lb-ft of torque — similar numbers to the original 289 V8 that powered the first Mustang back in '65. No matter which engine you choose, a five-speed manual transmission is standard and a new close-ratio five-speed automatic is optional. Both transmissions have been matched to the broad power bands of the new engines, and when combined with the car's refined and well-balanced chassis, the overall package is taut and muscular without sacrificing comfort or ride quality.

Speaking of muscle, there is no mistaking the '60s throwback styling for anything but pure, unfiltered Mustang. The long hood, short rear deck and fastback roofline are all directly influenced by the original '65, but an amalgam of different early Mustang cues are present. The wide grille opening and quad headlights are reminiscent of 1967-'69 models, while the small quarter windows appear to be lifted directly from the '66 Shelby GT350. A large, sweeping C-shaped cove is carved into the doors in reference to the 1965-'68 models, and large triple-bar taillights out back could just as easily be mounted on a '70 Mach 1. Standard wheels on the GT are 17-inch painted alloy five-spokes that look like the American Racing "Torque Thrust" design made popular in the Steve McQueen movie, *Bullitt*, and brought back on the 2002-2003 special-edition Mustang of the same name. The optional bright machined alloy wheels are a more modern split-spoke design. Ford claims it's going for a "modern heritage" look, and we'd say it got it right on.

Step into the coupe's wide-open interior and the nostalgia continues, from the twin-pod gauge cluster that looks like it was lifted straight out of a '67 to the triple-spoke steering wheel that is one of the best-looking airbag-equipped wheels we've seen. The font on the gauges reeks of old-school style, yet in an interestingly modern twist, the new car is available with an optional "My Color" package that allows the driver to customize the dash lighting with more than 125 different color backgrounds. The center stack is clean and uncluttered, although the radio seems a little drab when compared to the rest of the flashy interior. The manual transmission is actuated by a short-throw shifter that is easily within reach of the driver compared to the clunky and frankly ridiculous unit found in the '04 model. Automatic-equipped cars have a large T-handle shifter styled after the original chrome shifters found in the old-school 'Stangs.

Front bucket seats are large and extremely supportive, with base models utilizing cloth upholstery stitched in a "pony" pattern reminiscent of an optional interior package on 1965 models. The available leather trim is soft and supple with woven center sections for increased ventilation. Thanks to the '05 model's extra girth, occupants enjoy an extra 1.8 inches of additional shoulder room and half an inch more headroom. This may not sound like much, but taller drivers who were uncomfortable in previous

Mustangs will notice the difference immediately as it feels like a much more spacious car.

Other notable interior features include dual, one-touch power up-and-down windows; steering wheel-mounted cruise control; optional 500- and 1,000-watt stereo systems that include in-dash six-disc CD changers and MP3 capability; twin 12-volt power outlets; and even an optional interior appearance package that adds real aluminum panels across the width of the dashboard, à la '67 Shelby GT500. The overall design and build quality of the interior are outstanding, especially when compared to the previous-model Mustang. Some of the materials are a little hard for our taste, especially the stylishly sculpted but rock-solid plastic dash, and as great as the radio sounds, it lacks a little something in the looks department. But overall, the interior is as supportive and comfortable as it is attractive, and for that we give Ford two big thumbs-up.

So now that we've given you an in-depth look at the technical side of the new Mustang, you're probably wondering how it drives. In a word: thrilling. America's first pony car was never meant to be a full-blown sports car, and anyone looking for a vehicle of that description won't be happy with the new Mustang. However, this new car perfectly fills the shoes left behind by the storied Boss 302, Mach 1, Barracuda, Chevelle SS and other icons of the bygone muscle car era. Big enough to hold a family of four, small enough to toss through the tightest canyon you can snake your way into and practically dripping with raw power, nostalgia and bravado, the new Mustang emulates all the divine qualities of owning and driving a piece of classic Detroit iron. And it offers all that while still providing all the comfort, convenience and reliability of a brand-new car.

Settle into the thickly padded and extremely supportive high-back bucket seat, adjust the leather and aluminum steering wheel to the perfect height and survey your surroundings. Two large chrome-plated bezels in the dash place the speedo and tach front and center, right where they need to be. Despite the car's high beltline and sloping rear window, visibility is still excellent, and the broad expanse of aluminum trim makes you feel like the pilot of a full-tilt racer. Twist the key and the V8 snarls to life, and oh, what a sound it is. Ford somehow managed to duplicate the rippling growl of an aftermarket exhaust system without the resonance and annoying staccato those systems are known for. Shoot a quick rev and the engine rips out a bark, making bystanders spin around so fast they'll probably suffer from whiplash. If you don't like getting stared at, don't drive this car...it gets more attention than Lady Godiva riding bareback down Fifth Avenue.

The clutch pedal is smooth and light without feeling soft or numb. In fact, the clutch is so silky and easy to feel that we didn't mind driving the car in bumper-to-bumper L.A. rush-hour traffic. Now that's a strong statement. The shifter is equally excellent. Ford must have taken a cue from all the short-throw aftermarket shifters that cropped up for the previous-generation Mustang, as the gear selector on this car is fat, round and extremely tight. Shifts can be accomplished with a quick flick of the wrist, and the knob itself was well within reach and comfortable to hold. We don't even mind that the tranny only offered five forward gears, as this is, after all, a relatively inexpensive car. Our only real complaint was that it was occasionally difficult to get the shifter into first gear without coming to a complete stop, but that is a minor squawk that really didn't affect the driving dynamics.

Other details that impressed us while driving around town included the deep and well-placed cupholders and the extremely functional yet attractive round-shutter climate control vents.

Once the car is rolling, it's an absolute blast. The steering feel is perfectly balanced and heavy enough to offer excellent feedback and confidence-inspiring control. The suspension felt nimble and tight, and while a few of our non-performance-oriented passengers complained that the ride was a bit harsh, we thought it was perfect. Going into tight corners, the Mustang hunkers down and exhibits the slightest hint of oversteer, a refreshing improvement over the understeer-prone '04 model. The handling and

steering feel are so impressive, in fact, that several road test editors that drove the car back-to-back with the new ['05 Corvette](#) felt that while the 'Vette is a bit faster in terms of actual performance numbers, the Mustang is actually more fun to drive.

Tickle the accelerator and the three-valve V8 exhibits the torque-laden punch it was designed for, and the motor happily revs straight to its 6,000-rpm redline. The faster the car goes, the better the engine sounds, but the car doesn't feel quite as fast as we expected it to. We managed to eek out a few high-5-second 0-60 times, but we have a feeling that if the engine was allowed a break-in period and the weather cooled off a bit, we could probably get it into the mid-5s. Add a few aftermarket speed parts and 4-second sprints are easily within reach, especially now that the chassis is as advanced as the engine. Overall, once we settled into the perforated leather seat and cranked the V8 to life, we were instantly transformed into stoplight hooligans, revving the engine and ripping around corners with reckless abandon.

If there is such a thing as a fountain of youth, this is it. Any true American iron enthusiast will feel like they're a kid living in the glory days of the late '60s muscle car wars all over again. The best part is, the 2005 Mustang doesn't ask you to sacrifice comfort or reliability in the name of speed and style. You get top-notch handling, a roomy and stylish interior, 300 rip-snorting horsepower and loads of attitude, all for about the same price as a sensible [Honda Accord](#). Forget import cars with big exhaust tips and overpriced sports cars with tiny high-revving engines. The muscle car is back, and the golden age of performance is right now.

#### Stereo Evaluation

#### **System Score:** 8.0

**Components:** Our test vehicle came with the 500-watt "Shaker500" sound system, which is manufactured for Ford by Audiofile. The head unit is fairly utilitarian-looking, but the readout is easy to see and understand and the controls are well within reach from the driver seat. The in-dash six-disc CD player is a nice feature, and MP3 capability makes it possible to burn a few CDs and have hours of listening time. Our only real complaint about the head unit was the lack of a proper radio tuning knob, instead we found two tuning buttons that were a little difficult to identify. Four midrange speakers are accompanied by a huge 10-inch subwoofer in each door.

**Performance:** The system performed quite well, whether we were listening to talk radio, classical music or (most appropriately) blasting Lynyrd Skynyrd. A few years ago the thought of a factory 500-watt stereo in a sub-\$30K car was laughable, but Ford has managed to take the wind out of aftermarket stereo company sales by offering a bevy of high-quality sound systems built to suit your taste and wallet. Even at the highest volume settings we were impressed by the system's clarity — we hardly noticed any bass distortion at all. Of course the optional Shaker1000 system (which includes two more giant subs in the trunk) would sound even better, but we were more than impressed with both the system and the car's outstanding acoustics that no doubt contributed to the clear sound.

**Best Feature:** The giant subwoofers in the doors that threaten to overpower the throaty roar of the V8 under the hood.

**Worst Feature:** The boring-looking head unit, which works fine but looks like it was lifted straight out of an F-150 (probably because it was).

**Conclusion:** The best sound system on this car is the rumbling hunk of aluminum under the hood, but for those who prefer the sound of an amped system pumping out crystal-clear sound, the Shaker500 is a

solid choice. However, if we were ordering this car, it probably wouldn't hurt to come up with the extra coin for the Shaker1000, which benefits from an extra amp and two more subs in the trunk for maximum earth-shaking sound. — *Dan Kahn*

## Second Opinions

### **Editor in Chief Karl Brauer says:**

While almost all-new cars are at least adequate, and most are quite good, it's a rare occasion when I drive a new car and feel tempted to use the word "perfect." Though the new Mustang still isn't perfect, it perfectly addresses the needs of the 21st-century Mustang buyer. First, it looks stunning. You can grouse about relying on retro design all you want, but if a classic car shape has already proven timeless, and if a modern iteration of said design can work as well as the new Mustang does, why fight it? Porsche certainly doesn't, and the 911 is all the better for it.

Second, it offers an incredible driving experience for a \$25,000 sport coupe (or \$19,000 in the case of the base model). The steering is light and offers a fast ratio, yet it provides solid feedback as to what the front tires are doing. The ride is comfortable when cruising, yet well controlled around corners, or when driving through the slalom at our test facility. Then there's the sound, which is as close to hot-rod heaven as any sub-\$100,000 car I've driven with a stock exhaust system. And in case any of you forgot, this car has 300 horsepower. At \$25,000, the 2005 Mustang officially unseats the Corvette as the ultimate performance-car bargain.

Sure, I'd like to see slightly higher-quality materials and I'm not totally sold on the "My Color" gauge cluster (it seems like one of those things that will be really cool...for about 10 minutes). But it also has one-touch up-and-down windows, comfortable seating and Pirelli PZero tires as standard equipment. The only drawback to driving this car is that it makes me wonder why the hell I would ever buy another 35-year-old muscle car. This one goes, stops, looks, sounds and handles far better than most of them while offering a full warranty and 21st-century safety technology. These days a new Mustang even costs less than most of them, too.

### **Road Test Editor Brian Moody says:**

*Wow!* What an impressive car. This is the car we always knew Ford could build. It's great-looking, the ride is excellent, the engine sounds terrific, the transmission is actually fun and the clutch engagement is effortless without being too light. I've always been more of a GM fan, so the Mustang to me has typically been second-rate, but there is just no denying the new Mustang is a very well-sorted car.

I can't believe how quiet it is inside at highway speeds. Sure, the engine makes itself known when you get into the throttle, but the interior is almost serene at cruising speeds. There is a little wind noise around 65-70 mph, but that seems to be coming from the silly and utterly unnecessary rear spoiler. And when you do romp on the gas, the sound is smile-inducing, addictive and reassuringly authoritative.

I drove the new 2005 Corvette the same day I drove the Mustang and I like the Mustang *much* better. The interior is nearly perfect — the adjustable gauge colors are a nice touch. My only complaints are that the stereo is so-so and the "hey, look at me, I'm 16 again" spoiler. Still, the new Mustang is a car anyone would be proud to own. It's also a car Ford should be proud to seal with the blue oval and a car I'd be more than proud to park in my own garage.

## Consumer Commentary

"The car sounds great even at idle, and punching this thing is a pure adrenaline rush. It pushes hard, but is very confident. **The looks are striking, especially with the red leather interior, and I always get**

**thumbs-up from people I pass by.** Even in the parking lot, tons of people come to look at the car. This car is really impressive. I have the manual, and it is very forgiving. The seats are VERY comfortable, the My Color feature is cool, and the Shaker500 system sounds great. MPG isn't that great, but you can't expect much for a car with this much grunt. **I wouldn't trade it for anything.**" — *Oatmeal, Oct. 27, 2004*

**"This car is so much fun to ride and I've had strangers stop me on the street to ask about it.** It gets a LOT of looks! The V6 offers great acceleration and the automatic shifting is excellent. Has overdrive, but doesn't need it...even when already traveling over 65 mph. **No changes needed really. The car's excellent.**" — *karen928, Oct. 25, 2004*

**"This car is the true essence of the American pony. The engine runs superbly with each start and the deep purr of the engine just makes you want to spontaneously floor it,** and the exceptional 200-plus hp makes it a solid opportunity to do so. Yes, the backseats aren't very comfortable, but the Mustang backseats were really always a joke. The car is very fun to drive and hasn't failed me...yet." — *aolduecemaster, Oct. 20, 2004*

## Speed Read

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### Featured Specs

- Powerful 300-horse V8
- Razor-sharp handling
- Timeless lines and a rockin' stereo

### What Works

Timeless lines, gorgeous interior design, comfortable front seats, powerful engine, surefooted suspension, glorious exhaust note and an affordable price tag.

### What Needs Work

Some mediocre interior materials, cramped backseat.

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### Bottom Line

The 2005 Mustang manages to achieve something very rare in the automotive realm: the perfect blend

## Specs & Performance

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### Vehicle

|                |             |
|----------------|-------------|
| Model year     | 2005        |
| Make           | Ford        |
| Model          | Mustang     |
| Style          | GT          |
| Base MSRP      | \$25,706.00 |
| As-tested MSRP | \$27,395.00 |

### Drivetrain

|                         |                |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Drive type              | RWD            |
| Engine type             | V8             |
| Displacement (cc/cu-in) | 4.6            |
| Horsepower (hp @ rpm)   | 300@5750       |
| Torque (lb-ft @ rpm)    | 320@4500       |
| Transmission type       | 5-speed manual |

### Chassis

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Suspension, front | MacPherson Strut<br>Independent w/<br>stabilizer bar |
|-------------------|--|

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of style, performance, comfort and fun.

|                  |                             |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Suspension, rear | Live axle w/ stabilizer bar |
| Steering type    | Power rack and pinion       |
| Tire brand       | Pirelli                     |
| Tire model       | Pzero Nero                  |
| Tire size, front | P235/55ZR17                 |
| Tire size, rear  | P235/55ZR17                 |
| Brakes, front    | 4-wheel disc w/ ABS         |

### Track Test Results

|                           |              |
|---------------------------|--------------|
| 0-45 mph (sec.)           | 4.1          |
| 0-60 mph (sec.)           | 5.9          |
| 0-75 mph (sec.)           | 8.6          |
| 1/4-mile (sec. @ mph)     | 14.13@101.00 |
| Braking, 30-0 mph (ft.)   | 30.31        |
| 60-0 mph (ft.)            | 124.62       |
| Slalom, 6 x 100 ft. (mph) | 63.6         |
| Sound level @ idle (dB)   | 52           |
| @ Full throttle (dB)      | 79           |
| @ 70 mph cruise (dB)      | 73           |

### Test Driver Ratings & Comments

Accelerating was a bit tricky, as traction can be a real problem in this car when you launch it off the line. It seems like you can get a good feel for getting it off the line after a few runs by letting out the clutch around 2,500 rpm and then slamming on the gas. Our times got slower and slower throughout the day, and we have a feeling that might be due to the fact

that the ambient temperature was rising and so was the temperature of the car. The shifter isn't totally inspiring, as the throws are relatively short but third gear doesn't engage very positively, we missed the shift a few times. With that said, the car exhibits impressive performance considering its \$25,000 price tag, and it certainly makes all the right noises.

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Acceleration comments

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Braking rating

Good

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Braking comments

The Mustang feels about how you'd expect under heavy braking, with slight front end dive and some noticeable ABS vibration through the pedal but almost no noise. The pedal is nice and progressive and it stopped straight and true without any pull or other misbehavior. There was a bit of fade on each run, and just enough dive that it earned a good rating. If the car had less fade it would have earned an excellent, because the feel was so confidence inspiring.

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Handling rating

Excellent

The most amazing thing about the Mustang in the slalom is the level of grip from the tires, which make it very easy to toss around corners at a high rate of speed, especially for a car priced in the mid twenties. The difference between turning the traction control on and off was virtually

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Handling comments | <p>impossible to determine because the suspension and tires gripped so well that there was never a need for the traction control to come in. Steering is excellent in terms of ratio, feedback and feel, and while the car had a bit of body movement it wasn't enough to slow it down in the slalom. It will be interesting to see what they do with the suspension on the Shelby and Cobra versions, I'm sure they'll tighten things up a little bit but as is and totally stock the GT's capabilities in terms of slalom speed and stability is excellent.</p> |
|-------------------|---|

### Testing Conditions

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Elevation (ft.) | 0 |
|-----------------|---|

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Temperature (°F) | 0 |
|------------------|---|

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Wind (mph, direction) | 0 |
|-----------------------|---|

### Fuel Consumption

|                        |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| EPA fuel economy (mpg) | 17 City 25 Highway |
|------------------------|--------------------|

|                        |       |
|------------------------|-------|
| Edmunds observed (mpg) | 17.44 |
|------------------------|-------|

|                                |    |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Fuel tank capacity (U.S. gal.) | 16 |
|--------------------------------|----|

### Dimensions & Capacities

|                                |      |
|--------------------------------|------|
| Curb weight, mfr. claim (lbs.) | 3450 |
|--------------------------------|------|

|              |       |
|--------------|-------|
| Length (in.) | 187.6 |
|--------------|-------|

|             |    |
|-------------|----|
| Width (in.) | 74 |
|-------------|----|

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| Height (in.)                            | 54.5         |
| Wheelbase (in.)                         | 107.1        |
| Legroom, front (in.)                    | 42.7         |
| Legroom, rear (in.)                     | 31           |
| Headroom, front (in.)                   | 38.6         |
| Headroom, rear (in.)                    | 35           |
| Seating capacity                        | 4            |
| Cargo volume (cu-ft)                    | 12.3 cu. ft. |
| Max. cargo volume, seats folded (cu-ft) | 12.3 cu. ft. |

### Warranty

|                            |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Bumper-to-bumper           | 3 years / 36,000 miles    |
| Powertrain                 | 3 years / 36,000 miles    |
| Corrosion                  | 5 years / unlimited miles |
| Roadside assistance        | 3 years / 36,000 miles    |
| Free scheduled maintenance | Not Available             |

### Safety

|                               |               |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Front airbags                 | Standard      |
| Side airbags                  | Optional      |
| Head airbags                  | Not Available |
| Antilock brakes               | Standard      |
| Electronic brake enhancements | Not Available |
| Traction control              | Standard      |
| Stability control             | Not Available |
| Rollover protection           | Not Available |
| Emergency assistance system   | Not Available |
| NHTSA crash test, driver      | Not tested    |

|                                |            |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| NHTSA crash test,<br>passenger | Not tested |
|--------------------------------|------------|

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|                                 |            |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| NHTSA crash test, side<br>front | Not tested |
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|                                |            |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| NHTSA crash test, side<br>rear | Not tested |
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|------------------------------|------------|
| NHTSA rollover<br>resistance | Not tested |
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