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INSIDE LINE

First Drive: 2005 Ford Mustang Convertible

Pop-Top Pony

How long have the Mustang faithful waited for their moment in the sun? Well, if you consider how long it's been since the Ford Mustang convertible was completely redesigned, we're talking over a decade — and even the all-new convertible that debuted in 1994 was still based on the Fox platform, a platform that dated back to 1979. But unlike the ASC-converted coupes that sat on the Fox platform from 1983 to 1993, both the 1994 ragtop and this all-new 2005 Ford Mustang were designed as true convertibles from Day One.

This 2005 Mustang benefits from 21st-century engineering, giving it twice the torsional rigidity of the previous convertible. And because the coupe and convertible were designed simultaneously, engineers utilized similar structural designs and bracing techniques for both body styles.

This also means the Ford Mustang convertible should provide coupelike ride, handling and acceleration characteristics. As one engineer told us, "We wanted to make the coupe strong enough to be an effective convertible when the top was removed, which raised the standards for rigidity on both models."

Our brief time spent behind the wheel of a 2005 Mustang convertible in "sunny" Southern California confirmed the Ford engineer's logic. While stormy weather put a damper on our drop-top test-drive for much of the day, we did get enough seat time — with the top up and down — to revel in this latest Pony's successful transition from hardtop to fabric top.

As we've previously noted in our First Drive and Full Test of the 2005 Mustang, Ford has breathed new life into this iconic nameplate by imbuing it with supple ride quality, serene seats, confident steering and bountiful horsepower. The convertible retains these qualities while adding a convenient foldaway roof and excellent top-down air management — all without compromising the coupe's buttoned-down demeanor.

By combining a steeply raked windshield with altered rear seat backs, the Mustang convertible reduces cabin buffeting without the need of a separate wind blocker. Lowering the power top requires the release of two latches above the windshield and the push of a button just above the rearview mirror. The convertible's "z-fold" design gives the car a finished look with the top down, even before the boot is installed.

As with the coupe, the convertible comes in the choice of either a base V6 or an upscale GT with V8 power. The 4.0-liter V6 makes a respectable 210 horsepower while the 4.6-liter V8 offers up 300 hp and 320 pound-feet of torque. Both models come standard with a five-speed manual transmission but, as with the coupe, a new five-speed automatic is available for either drivetrain. Because the convertible weighs just 175 pounds more than the coupe, it offers nearly identical acceleration characteristics, meaning spirited with the V6 and neck straining with the V8.

Even in the base "Deluxe" trim the 2005 Ford Mustang V6 and Mustang GT V8 models include a glass rear window with defroster, one-touch power windows, air conditioning, cruise control and remote power door locks. Dual-stage front airbags are standard, with side airbags and an anti-theft system

optional. For a starting price of just under $25,000 for the V6 model, and just under $30,000 for the GT, the Ford Mustang convertible remains as much a bargain as the hot-selling coupe. Expect to see them in dealerships by March of 2005.

Actually, at these prices, you might not see them in Ford dealerships at all.

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- 300 horsepower in GT trim
- 0-60 in under 6 seconds
- Starts at $25,000 ($30,000 for GT)

What Works
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