

INSIDE LINE

Long-Term Test: 2005 Ford Mustang

Introduction

The first few weeks with any hot new muscle car are pretty predictable. You take the long way to work, run errands for stuff you don't even need and perform gratuitous burnouts at every opportunity.

But when the smoke clears, is owning a car like the Mustang worth it? Can you commute in it? Can you stuff groceries in the trunk? Is it good for anything else other than annoying your neighbors and dusting off the remnants of the local Camaro club?

Those are the questions we've been asking for the last two months and we have yet to find an answer we didn't like. Whether it's pulling diaper run duty or inching through L.A. traffic, we have yet to grow tired of the Mustang's V8 rumble, its 300 horsepower or its sweet shifting five-speed.

Another slice of satisfaction stems from our Mustang's price — just \$24,995 in GT Deluxe trim. For a couple grand less than a stripped down Mitsubishi Evo RS, our Mustang is equipped with a power driver's seat, antilock brakes, traction control, air conditioning and a CD player. It also rides on a set of 17-inch, cast aluminum wheels that are dead ringers for American Racing's classic Torq-Thrust D's made famous by Steve McQueen's Mustang in the cinematic masterpiece Bullitt.

The rest of the car's style isn't lost on us either. With its retro profile, signature rear quarter windows, and radial gauges this Mustang borrows heavily from the past. Since McQueen's ride was without a rear spoiler we ordered ours without one too. Not everybody on staff is sold on its throwback looks, but we've seen enough jealous glances to know it's a shape that resonates.

It's a drive that resonates too, from the engine that Editor in Chief Karl Brauer called, "the single most compelling aspect of this car" to the quick steering that allows you to pitch it through corners like there's a black '68 Charger filling your rearview mirror.

Its straight axle rear suspension can be a little clumsy on the highway and there's too much body roll for our tastes, but as one of our editors noted after a long drive, "It doesn't beat you up like the older GTs. I could drive this car everyday." Our first suggested upgrade? Replace the all-season Pirelli 235/55R17 PZero Nero tires that give up way too easily with a real set of sticky summer tires.

Even without the right rubber this Mustang can still post respectable numbers in a straight line. We clocked a 5.7 second 0-to-60 time and 14.3 seconds through the quarter mile. It can hold its own around a road course too, but like the previous model it feels big and heavy and the brakes fade quickly.

We didn't order any interior upgrades so our GT's interior has all the warmth of a DMV waiting room. There's cheap black plastic from top to bottom and the steering wheel wears an even more unappealing coat of textured rubber. A few weeks of driving around in this black hole and the upgrade package that adds metallic accents and soft touch trim starts looking like a very reasonable expense.

So the cabin looks like a typical muscle car, so what. The cut rate appearance fades from memory as soon as you hear the perfectly tuned exhaust note and grab rubber going into second for the first time.

After two months we have yet to grow tired of either, and a choppy ride on the way to work or lack of grocery hooks isn't likely to change that.

Current Odometer: 2,814

Best Fuel Economy: 22.4 mpg

Worst Fuel Economy: 10.3 mpg

Average Fuel Economy (over the life of the vehicle): 17.7 mpg

Body Repair Costs: \$0

Maintenance Costs: \$0

Problems: None

April 2005

Last year's Mustang was fun for an afternoon. After a few hours of enduring its awkward driving position and squirrely back end, that Honda Accord down the street started looking really tempting.

But it would take more than a mild-mannered family sedan to lure us out of our 2005 Ford Mustang GT. After five months, the fun still outweighs most of the hassles along the way. One of these hassles is the plastic-lined interior, which sucks some of the flavor out of an otherwise personable car.

"I wasn't expecting much when I saw the cheapo pony-print upholstery in our GT Deluxe," Senior Content Editor Erin Riches admitted. "But once I sat down, I really liked the ergonomics. The driver seat puts you in the proper position to drive the car, work the shifter and operate the controls. Sightlines are excellent for a muscle car, thanks to the power seat-height adjustment, the modestly sized C-pillars and our car's lack of a spoiler. The seats are well shaped and supportive; I spent hours in the driver seat and never once felt uncomfortable. This is pretty incredible for a \$25K coupe and it certainly got me in the mood to drive."

Others weren't as ecstatic, as Editorial Director Kevin Smith noted that "uninviting details" got in the way of his enjoyment. He writes, "Specifically, the steering wheel spokes, right where I'd like my thumbs to rest happily, are hard, coarse-textured and square-edged. Why is that? And if I grab the shifter 'from the knob down,' as I do, I crush my little finger against the console cutout engaging third. Why is that? Lots of surfaces are kind of hard and cheap, and it takes a little edge off my enthusiasm."

Hit-or-miss attention to detail is turning out to be a trend in the Mustang. "On one hand, you've got a totally unexpected feature like fully automatic windows that go up and down with one touch," said Erin.

"On the other hand, you've got an easy-entry feature on the passenger side that almost never works. The seat never wanted to slide forward on its track, so it was always a pain to retrieve stuff from the back. On one lone occasion, it slid forward abruptly, smashing my thumb."

Her annoyance was fleeting. "For the driver of average skill, the Mustang is a blast to throw around on twisty roads with light traffic, and I did my share of that," Erin noted. "It's a blunt instrument compared to a [Mazda RX-8](#) or [Nissan 350Z](#), but is nonetheless eager to show its driver a good time."

"Overall, it's great fun to drive, with lusty power and noise to match," Kevin agreed. "Handling is decent, stable yet pretty maneuverable, and ride comfort is entirely acceptable. And it looks great."

It does look great. And if you're single and female, it's definitely not a bad place to be, Erin found, as even our silver Mustang draws men like flies. While swatting them aside, she became smitten with the

GT's short clutch stroke. "I started creating opportunities to downshift while cruising around in the city just so I could work the pedals and hear the exhaust note," she said.

Of course, this along with the frequent stops and starts that come with urban living drove down her gas mileage, which was usually only 14-15 mpg. Other editors consistently turned in 18-mpg tanks. The Mustang is rated a decent 17 city/25 highway, but clearly this isn't a car for an environmentalist.

But it may be just the car for some of our staffers. "Like the [Ford Focus](#), this Mustang GT feels like more than the sum of its parts," Erin wrote in the log. "Surprising performance for the money and it's so easy for the average driver to extract. At the same time, the car is so docile on the freeway. Now why can't Ford build a midsize family sedan like this?"

Current Odometer: 6,312

Best Fuel Economy: 25.9 mpg

Worst Fuel Economy: 12.1 mpg

Average Fuel Economy (over the life of the vehicle): 17.6 mpg

Body Repair Costs: None

Maintenance Costs: None

Problems: None

July 2005

As ownership of our Mustang GT moves beyond the honeymoon stages, our staffers' level of enthusiasm remains high. Whether it was a seasoned car tester or our diligent production editor, everyone who took the reins this quarter felt like Seabiscuit's jockey.

Road Test Editor John DiPietro enjoyed his time in the saddle. "Ford nailed all the important things in the new Mustang. The powertrain, suspension, ergonomics and, of course, styling are all well sorted and strong. The new 'Stang is fast, handles well, looks dynamite and is comfortable enough to serve as a daily driver.

"The aggressive but not overbearing exhaust note adds to the thrill when you're ripping through the gears, yet it settles down nicely when you're in cruise mode on the interstate. The gearshift location is ideal for a wide range of drivers and all the driver/mechanical interfaces have a firm, precise feel. It's evident that Ford diligently did its homework in all the major subjects."

However, like other staffers, John was dismayed with the hard-plastic surfaces and mismatched textures in the cabin. "Although the interior is improved greatly in the area of ergonomics, it still needs a healthy dose of refinement. Just look at the center stack where smooth plastic trim joins that with a pebble grain texture — it makes it look like a preproduction car. And why did they even bother with those tiny door pockets? About all you can fit in them is a Chapstick.

"I have to agree with our Editorial Director Kevin Smith about the steering wheel's spokes having an unfriendly, coarse texture right where you rest your hands. Ford does offer a fix in the form of either the optional Interior Upgrade Package or Interior Sport Appearance Package, which both provide a leather-wrapped wheel with satin aluminum spokes."

John still made it clear that he'd gladly allow these minor grievances in exchange for the Mustang's lovable character. "If I didn't have this gig and had to go out and buy a car, it would be a new Mustang GT, hands down. The performance, comfort, style and safety (traction control and ABS come standard) that this car provides for \$25 grand are incredible. It can even carry a decent amount of cargo if you flip

the rear seats down."

Production Editor Caroline Pardia was in John's camp, as her notes indicated. "I really missed the Mustang when it was in the body shop after an accident. And when it finally returned, I jumped at the chance to drive it again...because I needed a good workout. It's a muscle car in the truest sense, in that you really need to have muscles to pilot it.

"This isn't a complaint, it's praise. It's what makes the Mustang a satisfying ride to me. Our GT is fun to carve canyons with and push to extra-legal speeds. She's for those who love to drive, for those who get a thrill with each determined upshift and for those turned on by the roar of an engine. If you want a plush and comfortable ride for around-town driving, look elsewhere. But if you want a good old-fashioned muscle car because, to you, driving is a passion, you really should try a Mustang."

So what's this mention of a body shop? Yes, our beloved pony was injured. When you're in a city such as L.A. that's overcrowded with inept drivers, it's only a matter of time before something happens. Well, something happened to our Mustang midway through this quarter when its right-rear quarter was "branded" by another car.

While Senior Editor Scott Oldham was making a left turn at an intersection (on a green arrow), another driver decided to take a "right on red" without making sure it was clear first. The end result was nearly \$3,700 worth of damage and a five-week stay at the body shop (they had to wait for a back-ordered part to come in). On the upside, when we finally got the Mustang back, it was hard to tell it had ever been hit.

Now with our Mustang safe and sound back in our corral, opportunities abound for others to fall in love with our filly.

Current Odometer: 7,954

Best Fuel Economy: 16.5 mpg

Worst Fuel Economy: 13.0 mpg

Average Fuel Economy (over the life of the vehicle): 17.8 mpg

Body Repair Costs: \$3,651.67

Maintenance Costs: None

Problems: None

Wrap-Up

[Why We Bought It](#)

[How It Drove](#)

[Inside the Cabin](#)

[Summing Up](#)

[Changes to the Mustang since 2005](#)

[Ups and Downs](#)

[Recalls and Problem History](#)

[Dealer Service Reviews](#)

[What Consumers Say](#)

Why We Bought It

Sure, it looks hot, and it's probably loads of fun to drive, but is it practical? It sounds like a concern your mother would have. But believe it or not, it was this kind of responsible thinking that was behind

our acquisition of that most irresponsible-seeming of vehicles, the revamped-for-2005 Ford Mustang.

The original Mustang ruled. There's no other way to describe the impact it made when it debuted in 1964. It's easy to see why. Chock-full of bravado, the car was fearless and heroic, a must-have slice of affordable Americana.

It was this spirit that Ford hoped to recapture with the car's 2005 roof-to-rubber redesign. The new Mustang's canted nose, humongous grille and circular headlights pay homage to the '67 to '69 ponies, while its side sculpting and fastback roofline are a nod to the '64 to '66 models. Inside the cabin, retro styling cues like a dual-hooded dash and a gigantic speedo and tach build on these themes.

Enticing changes have also taken place beneath the skin. The 2005 Mustang gets a couple of powerful new engines, and a crisp new suspension that promises sportier ride quality and handling.

All this, and a near bargain-basement price. Our pony, in GT Deluxe trim, set us back just \$24,995. For thousands less than a stripped [Mitsubishi Evo RS](#), our Mustang is decked with a power driver seat, antilock brakes, traction control, air conditioning, and a CD player.

We were fairly certain that our Mustang would be a distinguished companion when it came to giddy burnouts. But how would our affordable coupe fare in everyday use? During its year with us, we pushed and prodded our pony to determine if it was a sensible ride for city living.

How It Drove

Unequivocally, our Mustang GT was an enthusiast's dream. It's hard to argue with the delicious rumble of a 300-horsepower V8, or the neck-snapping thrust of 320 pound-feet of torque.

Editor in Chief Karl Brauer called our Mustang's engine the "single most compelling aspect of this car," and the rest of our staff tended to agree. "The torque is out of this world," raved Content Editor Warren Clarke. "This car has the type of acceleration that kicks testosterone into overdrive. There's enough throaty horsepower on tap to make even the most indifferent driver behave like a drooling enthusiast."

The praise didn't stop there. "Overall, it's great fun to drive, with lusty power and noise to match," said Editorial Director Kevin Smith. "Handling is decent, stable yet pretty maneuverable, and ride comfort is entirely acceptable." Senior Content Editor Erin Riches found the Mustang "a blast to throw around on twisty roads with light traffic."

Road Test Editor John DiPietro deemed the Mustang a standout. "Ford nailed all the important things. The powertrain and suspension are well sorted and strong. The aggressive but not overbearing exhaust note adds to the thrill when you're ripping through the gears, yet it settles down nicely when you're in cruise mode on the interstate. The new 'Stang is fast, handles well, and is comfortable enough to serve as a daily driver."

John wasn't the only staff member to remark on the coupe's comfort. After a long road trip, another editor reported, "It doesn't beat you up like the older GTs. I could drive this car every day."

We did have a bone or two to pick. The car's straight axle rear suspension drew some heat for being relatively stiff around town. And our coupe also exhibited a bit too much body roll for some tastes. The stock tires don't provide much grip either. A stickier set of rubber would go a long way toward making this car a more serious threat to the [350Zs](#) of the world.

But overall, our editors loved being behind the wheel of our 'Stang — so much so that it was sorely missed while it was out getting body work to repair the consequences of a minor fender bender (the car was in the shop for nearly five weeks while we waited for a back-ordered part to arrive).

Inside the Cabin

No interior upgrades were ordered, so, like macrobiotics or Mies Van Der Rohe architecture, our Mustang's cabin was decidedly austere. Hard black plastic was the order of the day, and the steering wheel was swathed in coarse rubber that offered all the gentle give of a linoleum floor.

Kevin found the cabin's "uninviting details" a real buzz kill. "Specifically, the steering wheel spokes, right where I'd like my thumbs to rest happily, are hard, coarse-textured and square-edged. And if I grab the shifter 'from the knob down,' as I do, I crush my little finger against the console cutout engaging third. Lots of surfaces are kind of hard and cheap, and it takes a little edge off my enthusiasm."

John agreed, saying the Mustang's cabin "needs a healthy dose of refinement. Just look at the center stack where smooth plastic trim joins that with a pebble grain texture — it makes it look like a preproduction car. And why did they even bother with those tiny door pockets? About all you can fit in them is a Chapstick."

However, the cabin scored points for smart ergonomics. "I wasn't expecting much when I saw the cheapo pony-print upholstery in our GT Deluxe," revealed Erin. "But once I sat down, I really liked the ergonomics. The driver seat puts you in the proper position to drive the car, work the shifter and operate the controls.

"Sightlines are excellent for a muscle car, thanks to the power seat-height adjustment, the modestly sized C-pillars and our car's lack of a spoiler. The seats are well shaped and supportive; I spent hours in the driver seat and never once felt uncomfortable. This is pretty incredible for a \$25K coupe and it certainly got me in the mood to drive."

The Mustang also shone when it comes to utility. John was impressed with the coupe's hauling capacity, and reported that "it can carry a decent amount of cargo if you flip the rear seats down."

Summing Up

The Mustang came under fire for having a suspension that sometimes felt stiffer than we'd have liked. Some also felt it had a bit too much body roll. But overall, we loved driving our rev-happy coupe, thanks largely to its outstanding torque and acceleration.

The car's cabin was a mixed bag. Our GT's interior was devoid of upgrades. With its hard surfaces and lack of adornment, most of our editors felt it could use some refinement.

We were, however, impressed with the cabin's comfort and ergonomics. Our editors lauded the car's supportive seats and driver-friendly layout.

Is the Mustang an acceptable coupe for urban travel? You bet. For the most part, our editors found it comfortable around town. And its flexible interior was able to accommodate all the cargo we threw its way.

If you think driving should be a source of enjoyment, and are looking for a coupe that's both sane and

fun, consider the Mustang. For the money, you'd be hard-pressed to find a more satisfying ride.

True Market Value at service end: \$22,504

Depreciation: \$2,491 or 10% of original paid price

Final Odometer Reading: 15,571

Best Fuel Economy: 25.9 mpg

Worst Fuel Economy: 10.3 mpg

Average Fuel Economy: 17.5 mpg

Total Body Repair Costs: \$3,651.57

Total Routine Maintenance Costs (over 12 months): \$155.22

Additional Maintenance Costs: None

Warranty Repairs: 1

Non-Warranty Repairs: None

Scheduled Dealer Visits: 2

Unscheduled Dealer Visits: 1

Days Out of Service: 35

Breakdowns Stranding Driver: None

Changes to the Mustang since 2005

V6 models are now available with the Pony Package, which includes an upgraded suspension, 17-inch wheels, ABS, traction control, foglamps and unique trim. The GT now comes with two additional wheel options, both 18 inches in size. An additional darker aluminum interior trim upgrade package is now available.

Ups and Downs

Ups: Ferocious 300-horsepower engine, handsome looks, seductive exhaust note, reasonably comfortable around town, pleasing ergonomics.

Downs: Unrefined cabin, stiff suspension, some body roll.

The Bottom Line: The 2005 Mustang is a compelling blend of the wild and the tame. It's savage enough to be a blast on the twisties, yet docile enough for city living.

Recalls and Problem History

Recalls:

No recalls were posted.

Problem History:

1. We noticed a) a creaking noise coming from the right front suspension when turning the vehicle, and b) a vibration coming from the transmission when rolling on throttle in 4th gear. Ford corrected the "creaking noise" by replacing both front upper strut bearing assemblies and installing lower spring seat isolators on both springs. However, the dealership was unable to duplicate the problem we'd experienced regarding transmission vibration, so that issue was not corrected.

Dealer Service Reviews

Santa Monica Ford in Santa Monica, Calif.

March 2005

We took the Mustang in for an oil change. Service was satisfactory.

August 2005

We took the Mustang in to correct a creaking noise coming from its right suspension, and to investigate a vibration that occasionally emanated from the transmission. Service was satisfactory.

October 2005

We took the Mustang in for an oil change and tire rotation. Service was satisfactory.

What Consumers Say

"This is a great car, and lots of fun to drive. First sports car I've ever had, and let me tell you, it is very powerful. You really have to use the cruise control to maintain legal speed. You don't feel like you're speeding. I have the Red Fire Red with standard 17-inch wheels, standard interior with Shaker 500 system, which sounds great. I have 6,300 miles on it, and I have not had any problems with it. Lots of people come up to me and want to look at and hear the machine. Gas mileage is not too good, but reasonable. One minute negative is that the amplifier gets very hot with the windows down and you can feel it in your legs." — *Bernie, October 8, 2005*

"I first read about the car last year and it reminded me of my '69. Five months and 9,000 miles later, it is my dream car, offering the distinction of my '69 with today's comfort and safety. **The five-speed manual isn't the smoothest around, but get it — an easy drop down to 4th and I am gone in traffic. Handling is spot on; I love taking curves in this thing. With upgrades, great interior/exterior styling cues; hardly a day goes by without a look, smile or comment.** Averaging 23-26 mpg. The stereo sounds great and I can drive for hours either on cruise control or through traffic with a wide smile. Trunk holds golf bag, softball bags and groceries with ease, but not for a family of four." — *California Tom, September 21, 2005*

"I have had my 2005 GT for three months and 6,500 miles, and man, what a ride. This is my fourth Mustang, having had a '67, '69 and '74, this is by far the best. **I live on the north coast of California, and the roads here are built for this car, lots of curves and twists along Highway 101 and through the redwoods put this car to the test and man, what a ride.** I recently took a trip to San Francisco and got 23 miles to a gallon, and I was not driving slow. **In and out of traffic the car is a blast to drive and it does get a lot of looks and thumbs-up from folks along the way. Would recommend this car to anyone who takes pleasure in driving.**" — *Sandman, September 21, 2005*

"Simply the best car I have ever owned and the most fun to drive. Bought it in Dec. '05; was a head turner then, and is a head turner now. Ford got it right." — *Pony Man, September 14, 2005*

"The new Ford Mustang is an awesome car. I really like the exterior looks and the feel of the car when you drive it. **The car is really great for a single person, but it is a tight squeeze for a family. The front of the car is very roomy, although the rear seat does not have much room. I was willing to deal with the size although I have a family just because I loved the looks of the car. Overall I am happy and very pleased with the performance of my new Mustang.** The inside of the car is pretty small but that was a sacrifice I was willing to make to own a car I love." — *Becky, August 30, 2005*

terms of the Visitor Agreement at www.edmunds.com/help/about/visitoragreement.html.