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Review: 2005 Ford Mustang

An American musclecar legend reborn

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Although all new from the tires up, the current car is unmistakably a [Mustang](#), adopting design elements, silhouette, and spirit from 40 years of legendary predecessors. True to form, the car comes in two body styles, coupe and convertible. There are two series, the six-cylinder base model and the V-8-powered GT, each offered in Deluxe and Premium trim levels. While the real magic lies in the GT, the more affordable base car regularly outsells that car. Changes are minor for 2006, with special-edition "Bullitt" and Mach 1 variants looming on the horizon.

There's no mistaking the Mustang for any other car, with its long-hood/short-deck layout, 1967-inspired front clip, galloping-horse badge, '60s-style side scoops, and three-element taillamps. The car has an aggressive stance, made stronger by wheels pushed to the corners in a six-inch wheelbase increase over the previous model's. The GT has a bit more exterior eye candy, but buyers of the base car who check the right option boxes can get most of those same items--and they can even get one the GT doesn't offer: a stripe along the lower body with "Mustang" spelled out in it, just like on the 1960s cars.

Like the exterior, the Mustang's interior has touches of neo-1960s styling, particularly the angular, twin-cove dashboard, the large, three-spoke steering wheel, and the chrome-rimmed gauges, with their long, thin numerals. But the cabin also has modern elements as well, with lots of available brushed metal trim. The interior is stylish overall, but hard, cheap-feeling plastic is plentiful. One unique feature is the optional instrument-panel lighting, which can be changed from the typical green to any one of a whole rainbow of colors.

The main safety story here is an all-new unibody construction that's better able to absorb and redirect energy than the '04 model. Safety features are rather limited, with anti-lock brakes and all-speed traction control being optional on V-6 cars, standard on GT models. Front-seat side-mounted airbags are optional on all Mustangs. These features are all worth considering, especially on car likely to inspire performance-oriented driving. Stability control would have been a welcomed feature, given the propensity of the live-axle rear suspension and eight-cylinder power to cause oversteer. Without this extra protection, judicious throttle application is required in the rain. The new [Mustang](#) has earned high marks from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, with five stars for the driver and passenger front crash test, four stars for side impact, and five stars for rollover.

The base car's 4.0-liter/210-horse SOHC V-6 is a major improvement over the older model's six-cylinder engine, touting 23 more horsepower. Even with those gains, though, the Mustang really comes to life in GT form, with an all-aluminum, 4.6-liter/300-horse V-8--tremendous output for a car at this price and more than double the power of the 289-cubic-inch V-8 found in the classic 1964 model. Both modern engines can be mated either to a five-speed manual transmission or a five-speed automatic. While we wish there was an available six-speed manual, credit is due to the automatic transmission for matching the manual's performance.

For those who are attracted by the rich history and retro-themed exterior but are wondering about the overall package, we can confirm that new [Mustang](#) is not just a show pony--there's real substance behind the style. Unlike Mustangs past, the six-cylinder base car is now a pleasant driver, even if it is more of a cruiser than a hard-charging sports car. The GT is truly fast, but it isn't a finesse machine. The convertible--which is available in either series--is a great way to go topless. Cost of Ownership varies widely depending on model and trim level, so it's crucial to check the latest IntelliChoice ratings before you buy.

[Ford](#) has successfully captured the magic that is "Mustang" in the all-new model, improving performance and refinement, yet retaining an attainable purchase price. The modern incarnation of the original pony car, the new [Ford Mustang](#) is pure American muscle, and it begs to be flexed.

What's HOT:

- + Bargain price
- + Retro good looks
- + Strong performance

What's NOT:

- GT noise intrusion
- Tight rear seat and trunk
- Stiff ride over bad roads

The only change of any significance for 2006 is the addition of a Pony package for the base car. The package goes a long way toward making the base car look like the more expensive GT, adding foglamps in the front grille, 17-inch wheels (though not the same ones as on the GT), a rear spoiler, and a stripe along the lower body, as well as anti-lock brakes, traction control, and pony-logo floor mats. The GT rolls into 2006 with new optional 18-inch wheels, in two different styles.

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