Head To Head: 2006 Ford Mustang Convertible Vs. 2006 Pontiac G6 Convertible

Folding steel is hot, but does this signal the death knell for the venerable cloth-topped convertible?

From the August, 2006 issue of Motor Trend

Convertibles are cool. For the first six months. Then you get over looking good in the sunshine and start worrying about melanomas. The wind noise starts to bug you on the freeway. And you get sick of looking for parking spots under a streetlight so some punk doesn't turn your canvas top into something that looks like it was styled by Vivienne Westwood with a carving knife. You start wishing you'd bought a coupe. Then, early on a perfect summer's morning redolent with the smell of fresh mown hay, you fall in love all over again with the idea of top-down motoring. Damn!

A folding hardtop-convertible when you want it, coupe when you don't-sounds like the best of both worlds, and you won't be surprised to learn the idea's been around for a long time: Peugeot introduced the concept way back in 1934, the Ford Skyliner was a game attempt in the 1950s, and Mitsubishi also tried it with the 3000GT Spyder in 1995 and 1996. But it was Mercedes-Benz's SLK roadster that proved the engineering had finally caught up to the dream.

Now everyone seems to be offering the automotive equivalent of the Holy Grail: lucky European buyers can buy cc-coupe cabriolet-versions of modestly priced Renaults, Peugeots, Opels, and Fords; Volvo's c70 and Volkswagen's Eos have joined the fray; and Chrysler and Mazda have promised similar treatments to the Sebring convertible and MX-5 Miata. But does this mean saying so long to the ragtop?

To find out, we brought together Ford's Mustang convertible, one of the old-school softtops, and Pontiac's new G6 convertible, with its new-think folding hardtop, to judge them on their merits as blue-sky sportsters.

Apart from their lids, the most obvious distinction between the two, on the scales and the road, is the power-to-weight ratio. The Mustang is 200 pounds lighter than the G6 and boasts an edge in horsepower and torque, translating to faster acceleration and sprightlier behavior in the twisties. Although the Mustang's raucous, shuddering, 210-horsepower v-6 under the hood sounds and feels like it belongs in a John Deere tractor, it pulled the car through the quarter mile in 15.5seconds at 89.9 mph and helped us record a credible 0-to-60-mph time of 7.3 seconds. The 240 pound-feet of torque peaks at a fairly low 3500 rpm. Just as well-this is one engine you don't want to rev.

By contrast the G6's v-6 is so docile it almost seems asleep. Rated at 201 horsepower, with less torque-221 pound-feet-it mustered a relatively lackluster quarter-mile run of 16.5 seconds at 84.6 mph, and it was slower to 60 mph by almost a second and a half. At least the Pontiac's powerplant was smoother and quieter than the Mustang's engine, though it makes do with a four speed automatic transmission against the Mustang's five-speeder.

A quicker steering ratio and better weight distribution contribute greatly to the Mustang's more athletic demeanor. While the Mustang is quite capable at carving up canyon roads, the G6's more sedate character and heavily weighted front end is better suited to leisurely tours through the countryside. The Pontiac's steering feels heavy at parking speeds, but it's well weighted when speeds pick up and turns the car into a corner with a good degree of accuracy. in comparison, the Ford's steering feels light, but it's no less precise when hustling through apexes.

Each car's top mechanism operates at the push of a button located high up below the rearview mirror. The G6 roof locks into the windshield header automatically, while Mustang's two manual latches require a strong wrist: The Pontiac's top requires two separate jabs of the button to close, taking about 30 seconds. After a couple days spent raising and lowering the roofs, we wanted those buttons placed somewhere lower in the dash panel for easier access. Worse, the Pontiac's switch felt cheap in comparison with the expensive technology of the folding roof. Not only did one of our testers break a fingernail when using it, but one of our more thumb-heavy staffers managed to shove it right through its mounting.

As you'd expect, the Pontiac's hardtop, developed by Karmann, is better at keeping noise levels down, and it offers superior protection against outside objects penetrating to the interior. But an annoying creaking from the area around the left front latch quickly became an irritating counterpoint to an otherwise relaxing drive. Improvements to the Mustang's top have reduced noise to acceptable levels, and it sports a reasonably large glass backlight to provide adequate visibility to the rear. The Mustang also has a clear advantage in trunk space. Its new Z-fold top fits neatly flush with the rear deck and doesn't intrude upon the car's 9.7 cubic feet of luggage room. Because the Pontiac's folding roof, the largest in the industry, needs more space when lowered, the G6's trunk shrinks from 5.8 cubic feet to only 1.8. Pack light if you plan on tripping with the top down.

If there's not much room in the G6 for hauling stuff, there's plenty of interior space. With a wheelbase as long as that of a Mercedes-Benz E-class, it offers almost four inches more rear legroom than the Mustang and, when the top is up, 1.4 inches more rear headroom. Still, with its deeply sculpted rear buckets, the Mustang is a not uncomfortable place for passengers up to six feet tall.

Of the nearly eight million Mustangs sold since 1965, almost a million have been convertibles, but the latest version, introduced in the spring of 2005, is the best yet. The new G6 also is far better than its predecessor. But it's the fun factor in convertible driving that most sways our opinion. Open-top driving is supposed to put a smile on your face and leave you unconcerned about the few strands of hair blown behind in the breeze. This time, old school wins.

Topical Applications
Traditional folding soft top or a newfangled folding hardtop? Each has its obvious advantages (and disadvantages), but in the case of our Mustang and G6, we probed deeper into two areas to get a better handle on both.

Interior noise: You expect a solid top to be quieter, but how much? We exposed both cars to 80 dBA of white noise (measured at the driver's seat with the tops down). Erected, the Mustang's top resisted 17 dBA of it, suppressing its cabin noise to 63 dBA. The G6 did substantially better, blocking 27 dBA, lowering the cacophony to 53. A 10 dBA difference is significant.

Operation time: Raising the Mustang's lid required about 14 seconds, plus about six seconds for the manual latches. Say, 20 seconds total. Lowering needed about the same time, so the whole cycle-top down to up and back again-is a 40-second investment. By contrast, the G6 struggles for 41 seconds to raise plus 37 to lower for a one-minute, 18-second cycle. That's 38 long extra seconds of watching raindrops fall waiting for the Pontiac's top to rise.
-Kim Reynolds

1ST Place
Ford Mustang V6 Convertible
Retro styling done right inside and out-and full of fun. Just needs a refined engine.

2ND Place

Pontiac G6 convertible
Tightly spun cocoon of metal with lots of interior room, but lacks trunk space and an involving powerplant.

	2006 FORD MUSTANG	2006 PONTIAC G6
POWERTRAIN/CHASSIS		
DRIVETRAIN LAYOUT	Front engine, RWD	Front engine, FWD
ENGINE TYPE	60 V-6, iron block/alum heads	60 V-6, iron block/alum heads
VALVETRAIN	SOHC, 2 valves/cyl	OHV, 2 valves/cyl
DISPLACEMENT	244.7 cu in/4009cc	213.4 cu in/3498cc
COMPRESSION RATIO	9.7:1	9.8:1
POWER (SAE NET)	210 hp @ 5250 rpm	201 hp @ 5800 rpm*
TORQUE (SAE NET)	240 lb-ft @ 3500 rpm	221 lb-ft @ 3800 rpm*
REDLINE	5750 rpm	5800 rpm
WEIGHT TO POWER	17.3 lb/hp	19.0 lb/hp
TRANSMISSION	5-speed automatic	4-speed automatic
AXLE/FINAL-DRIVE RATIOS	3.31:1/2.35:1	3.29:1/2.24:1
SUSPENSION, FRONT; REAR	Struts, coil springs, anti-rollbar; live axle, coil springs,anti-roll bar	Struts, coil springs, anti-rollbar; multilink, coil springs,anti-roll bar
STEERING RATIO	15.6:1	16.2:1
TURNS LOCK-TO-LOCK	2.8	2.8
BRAKES, F;R	11.5-in vented disc; 11.8-in vented disc, ABS	11.7 in vented disc; 10.6 in disc, ABS
WHEELS, F;R	16 x 7.0 in, cast aluminum	18 x 6.0 in, cast aluminum
TIRES, F;R	P215/65R16 96T, BFGoodrich Traction T/A Spec	P225/50R18 94T, Goodyear Eagle LS
DIMENSIONS		
WHEELBASE	107.0 in	112.3 in
TRACK, F/R	62.8/63.0 in	59.8/60.4 in
LENGTH x WIDTH x HEIGHT	187.6 x 73.8 x 54.4 in	189.0 x 70.6 x 57.0 in
TURNING CIRCLE	33.4 ft	40.3 ft
CURB WEIGHT	3625 lb	3825 lb
WEIGHT DISTRIBUTION, F/R	52/48%	58/42%
SEATING CAPACITY	4	4
HEADROOM	38.6/34.7 in	38.4/36.1 in
LEGROOM	42.7/30.3 in	42.2/34.2 in
SHOULDER	53.4/53.4 in	54.0/44.8 in
CARGO VOLUME	9.7 cu ft	5.8/1.8 cu ft (top up/down)
TEST DATA		
ACCELERATION TO MPH		
0-30	2.4 sec	2.9 sec
0-40	3.7	4.3
0-50	5.2	6.3
0-60	7.3	8.7
0-70	9.4	11.4
0-80	12.1	14.4
0-90	15.5	19.2
0-100	20.2	-
PASSING, 45-65 MPH	3.8	4.7
QUARTER MILE	15.5 sec @ 89.9 mph	16.5 sec @ 84.6 mph
BRAKING, 60-0 MPH	125 ft	120 ft
LATERAL ACCELERATION	0.75 g avg	0.79 g avg
MT FIGURE EIGHT	29.1 sec @ 0.56 g avg	28.8 sec @ 0.55 g avg
TOP-GEAR REVS @ 60 MPH @	1850 rpm	1750 rpm
CONSUMER INFO		
BASE PRICE	$25,635	$28,490
PRICE AS TESTED	$27,595	$29,300
STABILITY/TRACTION CONTROL	No/yes	No/yes
AIRBAGS	Dual front	Dual front, front side
BASIC WARRANTY	3 yrs/36,000 miles	3 yrs/36,000 miles
POWERTRAIN WARRANTY	3 yrs/36,000 miles	3 yrs/36,000 miles
ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE	3 yrs/36,000 miles	3 yrs/36,000 miles
FUEL CAPACITY	15.7 gal	16.4 gal
EPA CITY/HWY ECON	19/25 mpg	19/27 mpg
RECOMMENDED FUEL	Regular	Regular