

INSIDE LINE

Follow-Up Test: 2008 Ford Mustang Bullitt

Media Player

- **2008 Ford Mustang Bullitt Track Video**

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40 Years of Badass Subtlety

Ford doesn't build Mustangs to fly. That was true back in 1968 when Steve McQueen sent a GT 390 soaring over the hills of San Francisco in *Bullitt*. And it's true of the new 315-horsepower 2008 Mustang Bullitt.

We jumped it anyway. Not because we wanted to, but because we had to. It's a Mustang Bullitt, and that means it's gotta fly.

Wheels up. First you hear the suspension droop. Then the engine slows to an idle as you instinctively take your foot off the accelerator. And just as the car reaches the apogee of its trajectory, everything in the cockpit experiences weightlessness — you feel that in the pit of your stomach.

But what really stretches out the moment is the anticipation, the fact that every muscle in your body has tensed tight and the dead silence.

After all, there's nothing to fear from the air time. It's landing that's hard. Will it land on its crankcase? Will it break open like a dropped cantaloupe? Will the tires blow? Hey, just how high up is this thing anyhow? The people down there look like ants.... Ah geez, this is gonna hurt.

But hey, the GT 390 did OK 40 years ago. So this new Mustang Bullitt ought to land just fine. Right? Right.

Addition Through Subtraction

When McQueen picked the GT 390 as his co-star, he made it meaner by ripping the running horse and driving lights out of its grille and throwing on a set of American Racing Torq-Thrust wheels. McQueen even added a few dents to his Mustang's bodywork for an added dose of realism. Ford used a similar minimalist formula when it created its [first Bullitt tribute Mustang](#) back in 2001. And since it worked back then, it should work this time, too, although Ford opted not to add McQueen's cop car battle scars.

So to aesthetically transform the [2008 Mustang GT](#) into a Bullitt, Ford started by leaving off all the "GT" badges and excising the standard rear wing from the deck lid. Then up front it installed a new black mesh grille without driving lights or a horse. Out back there are unique stainless-steel exhaust tips, and the fake fuel filler between the taillights is a new design incorporating a gun site and the word "Bullitt" in the same art deco lettering Warner Brothers used on some posters for the film.

A set of 18-inch wheels styled to look like Torq-Thrusts hold the 2008 Mustang Bullitt up on P235/50ZR18 BFGoodrich G-Force T/A KDWS all-season performance tires. While the wheels have their own unique satin finish on the Bullitt, similar wheels are offered on the regular Mustang GT along with the same BFG rubber.

However, to get the most from those tires, the shocks and springs are retuned, and there's a strut tower brace spanning the engine bay. Carbon front brake pads are fitted to reduce brake fade. The suspension has also been lowered by just 6mm, which means the Bullitt's ride height is somewhere between a stock GT's and a [Shelby GT's](#).

Addition Through Addition

Inside the 2008 Mustang Bullitt, you settle into a driver seat that's been swiped from the [GT500](#) — it's the kind of thickly upholstered, leather-covered La-Z-Boy version of a Recaro. The three-spoke steering wheel is out of the GT500, too, and has the Bullitt logo on its airbag cover.

But the most stunning interior element is the engine-turned-aluminum panel that covers the sweep of the dashboard. It alone makes the car seem \$5,000 more expensive. Beyond that, it's complemented by aluminum pedal covers and an aluminum shift knob ball.

Of the 7,000 Bullitts Ford plans to build during 2008, a few will be painted black, but the vast majority will be painted the same "Highland Green" as McQueen's original — as they should be.

With its clean nose and flat deck, the new Mustang Bullitt is *too* plain for many people — a Mustang just doesn't seem like a performance car to them if there isn't a scoop or spoiler on it. But for those of

us who've outgrown those juvenile obsessions, this is the best-looking and most subdued Mustang currently available. And it would be even better without that jokey fake gas cap and if the blister antenna for the satellite radio moved off the deck lid and onto the roof's trailing edge.

But the looks have to back up some substance. After all, wearing a blue turtleneck and houndstooth tweed sport jacket doesn't make you Steve McQueen.

Better Breathing, Better Sounding, Better Power

To punch the output of the Mustang GT's 4.6-liter, SOHC, three-valve V8 from its usual 300 to 315 hp, Ford employed a series of tricks both obvious and subtle.

A new cold-air induction system that features an open-element air cleaner isolated from engine heat in its own sealed box just behind the left front headlight is the most obvious modification. And it's matched to a revised exhaust system tuned to reproduce the voice of McQueen's GT 390 (or at least what's on the movie's soundtrack). That's the obvious stuff.

The subtle stuff starts with revised programming of the engine control computer. First the redline has been bumped up 250 revs to 6,500 rpm. Second, a "dual knock" strategy in the fuel map and ignition programming allows the engine to run on either regular or premium fuel — with the V8 making the same peak power either way, but with a slightly more generous torque curve when burning the good stuff. Add in some revisions to the throttle's responsiveness and the result is an engine that actually feels more eager and more capable than the addition of just 5 percent more horsepower would suggest.

Ford backs that muscle with the Tremec five-speed manual transmission (no automatic will be offered) and the usual 8.8-inch rear end packed with a set of short 3.73:1 gears. (The GT runs a 3.55:1 set with the manual transmission.)

Drive It Like a Movie Star

The 2008 Mustang Bullitt uses those short gears to rip to 60 mph in just 5.2 seconds. That's a stunning 0.7-second better than the [2005 Mustang GT](#). And the Bullitt's 13.8 seconds to 102.1-mph quarter-mile performance is the best we've yet recorded for a production three-valve Mustang. The Bullitt's powertrain feels even more powerful than it is, and the shifter is among the very best on any car at any price.

If only the chassis had limits to match. The all-season BFG tires just don't offer the grip the car deserves; the 0.84g skid pad performance and 67.2-mph trip through the slalom are both good for a Mustang, but modest for a performance car. The ABS-controlled four-wheel disc brakes, which resist fade rather well, also feel limited by the tires, and stopping from 60 mph took a so-so 122 feet.

In the interest of highway ride and daily usability, the Mustang Bullitt is relatively softly sprung (softer than a Shelby GT) with a determined and persistent understeer and somewhat indistinct steering. Yes, that understeer can be overcome with the application of power, but that makes this a high-effort vehicle with which to attack a racetrack or, for that matter, to pursue an aggressively driven [Dodge Charger](#).

It's better than the GT in every way — but it's still a Mustang, with all the ability and limits that come with that. With the massive advantage of being a bargain.

Soft Landing

In *Bullitt*, you can see McQueen's GT 390 come down from one of those jumps and smack its oil pan hard enough to nearly send the air cleaner up through the hood. Fortunately, the *Inside Line* preproduction Bullitt never suffered such abuse — its landing was much softer. Gentle, even. No one

was hurt. Swear to God.

And when the new Ford Mustang Bullitt goes on sale some time during the first quarter of 2008 with a base price near \$31,000, it's unlikely many buyers will go out and test their suspension that way. But like Steve McQueen's original, there's every reason to believe that the new car can take it — hard landing or soft.

Now we sit and wait for the Dodge Charger *Dukes of Hazzard* Edition. Anybody think Dodge will have the guts to put the stars and bars on the roof?

Speed Read

Featured Specs

- 315-horsepower V8
- 18-inch wheels
- 3.73:1 final-drive ratio
- Five-speed manual transmission
- Engine-turned dash

What Works

Great-looking, great-sounding and satisfyingly quick. Fantastic shifter. Comfortable ride, easygoing road manners.

What Needs Work

Uninspired steering response, determined to understeer, needs manhandling to go truly fast, some cheap interior materials, and thirsty.

Bottom Line

Looks the part and drives the part.

Specs & Performance

Vehicle

Model year	2008
Make	Ford
Model	Mustang
Style	Bullitt
Base MSRP	\$31,000 (estimated)
Options on test vehicle	None
As-tested MSRP	\$33,000 (estimated)

Drivetrain

Drive type	Rear-wheel drive
Engine type	V8
Displacement (cc/cu-in)	4,606cc (281 cu-in)
Block/head material	Aluminum/Aluminum
Valvetrain	Single overhead camshaft
Compression ratio (x:1)	9.8
Redline (rpm)	6,500
Horsepower (hp @ rpm)	315 @ 6,000
Torque (lb-ft @ rpm)	320 @ 4,500
Transmission type	5-speed manual
Transmission and axle ratios (x:1)	3.73

Chassis

Suspension, front	MacPherson strut
Suspension, rear	Solid live axle
Steering type	Power-steering
Steering ratio (x:1)	15.7
Tire brand	BF Goodrich
Tire model	G-Force T/A KDWS
Tire type	All-season
Tire size, front	P235/50ZR18
Tire size, rear	P235/50ZR18
Wheel size	18-by-8.0
Wheel material	Painted alloy
Brakes, front	Ventilated disc
Brakes, rear	Ventilated disc

Track Test Results

0-45 mph (sec.)	3.5
0-60 mph (sec.)	5.2
0-75 mph (sec.)	7.7
1/4-mile (sec. @ mph)	13.8 @ 102.1
Braking, 30-0 mph (ft.)	30
60-0 mph (ft.)	122
Slalom, 6 x 100 ft. (mph)	67.2
Skid pad, 200-ft. diameter (lateral g)	0.84
Sound level @ idle (dB)	50.7
@ Full throttle (dB)	82.3
@ 70 mph cruise (dB)	70.3

Test Driver Ratings & Comments

Shifter feels great, like it

Acceleration comments	was made for banging gears. Quickest of many near-stock iteration of new Mustangs we've tested. Right sound and feel for a muscle car.
Braking rating	Very Good
Braking comments	Pedal feels good and doesn't lack confidence until brake pounding gets severe. Will eventually fade.
Handling rating	Very Good
Handling comments	Takes much coaxing to provoke lurid powerslides on the skid pad. Natural cornering attitude is understeer. In the slalom it's very quick for a Mustang. Quick turn-in response, yet it has relatively low limits. Predictable, textbook rear-wheel drive.

Testing Conditions

Elevation (ft.)	421
Temperature (°F)	69
Wind (mph, direction)	6-8 mph Tail

Fuel Consumption

EPA fuel economy (mpg)	15 city/23 highway
Edmunds observed (mpg)	16.7
Fuel tank capacity (U.S. gal.)	16.0

Dimensions & Capacities

Curb weight, mfr. claim (lbs.)	3,356
Curb weight, as tested	

(lbs.)	3,531
Weight distribution, as tested, f/r (%)	54/46
Length (in.)	187.6
Width (in.)	74.0
Height (in.)	54.5
Wheelbase (in.)	107.1
Track, front (in.)	62.3
Track, rear (in.)	62.5
Turning circle (ft.)	37.7
Legroom, front (in.)	42.7
Legroom, rear (in.)	31.0
Legroom, 3rd row (in.)	Not available
Headroom, front (in.)	38.6
Headroom, rear (in.)	35.0
Headroom, 3rd row (in.)	Not available
Shoulder room, front (in.)	55.4
Shoulder room, rear (in.)	53.3
Shoulder room, 3rd row (in.)	Not available
Seating capacity	4
Cargo volume (cu-ft)	13.0
Max. cargo volume, seats folded (cu-ft)	Not available

Warranty

Bumper-to-bumper	3 years/36,000 miles
Powertrain	5 years/60,000 miles
Corrosion	5 years/Unlimited miles
Roadside assistance	5 years/60,000 miles
Free scheduled maintenance	Not available

Safety

Front airbags	Standard
Side airbags	Standard dual front
Head airbags	Not available
Knee airbags	Not available
Antilock brakes	4-wheel ABS
Electronic brake enhancements	Electronic brakeforce distribution
Traction control	Standard
Stability control	Not available
Rollover protection	Not available
Tire-pressure monitoring system	Tire-pressure monitoring system
Emergency assistance system	Not available
NHTSA crash test, driver	5 stars
NHTSA crash test, passenger	5 stars
NHTSA crash test, side front	5 stars
NHTSA crash test, side rear	4 stars
NHTSA rollover resistance	5 stars

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