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## First Test: 2008 Ford Mustang Bullitt

**Bullitt Reloaded: Chad McQueen takes to the streets of San Francisco in the reborn version of his father's green machine**

From the January, 2008 issue of Motor Trend

The chase scene from the 1968 Steve McQueen flick, "Bullitt," was, is, and remains the most iconic ever filmed. There've been some valiant challengers: the late John Frankenheimer's heart-pounding work through the streets of Paris in "Ronin"; making Minis fly in "The Italian Job" (the original and the remake); some intense, authentic action in the recent Bourne movies. But when the lists are made and the bets are laid down, "Bullitt" comes out on top. Every time.

Ford's global V.P. of design, J Mays, knows how to mine a car company's past in search of future product. Mays was involved when VW recast the old Beetle into the New Beetle. And it's due to him, along with other like-minded designers, that the current Mustang exhibits so many styling cues from the 1965-1970 models. Mays and Ford chief designer Doug Gaffka wowed us in 2000 with the Mustang Bullitt Concept. That project was immediately greenlighted for production as a 2001-only model, of which 5582 were sold.

It's time to whip up another batch of Highland Green Metallic paint. "Don't compare the 2008 Bullitt with the 2001, however," says Gaffka. "While the concept is somewhat the same, the 1999-2004 body style had little in common with the look of the 1968 fastback. What we've tried to accomplish with the new one is a genuine modern-day version of the original. The design cues had to be absolutely authentic."

There's no question the current Mustang lends itself to the Bullitt treatment. There's not a stitch of chrome to be found. As with the movie car, all the emblems, including the horsy in the grille, were stripped off. Only a subtle, circular badge between the taillights proclaims it's a Ford Bullitt. A concession to the 1968's chrome bumper is a satin-finished bezel that helps define the grille opening. "Otherwise" Gaffka notes, "it just looked like a black hole."

Another liberty is the real aluminum instrument panel inserts. While not an original movie car cue, the machined-turned IP exhibits a wonderful period look and brightens up the otherwise dark gray cabin. The shifter ball is machined aluminum, and satin-finished scuff plates, shifter surround, and pedal bezels remind you what brand of Mustang you're sitting in. The seats are similar to those in the upmarket GT500. A new-for-2008 interior touch is an LED ambient lighting system that allows you to select eight different colors to light up your cupholders and the front footwells—a \$295 gimmick we're not sure Lt. Frank Bullitt would care much about.

"This is one we're really proud of," notes Paul Randle, Mustang's chief nameplate engineer. "Among the naturally aspirated cars, it's the real enthusiast's model." Randle's team works closely with the Ford Racing parts folks, so it's no surprise the new strut-tower brace, which holds a Bullitt ID badge and serial number, as well as the cold air intake system, comes from Ford Racing. The strut, shock, and spring tuning is sportier than the GT's, but not to the level of FR's aftermarket package. "We wanted it to be aggressive, but still friendly enough to be a daily driver."

The X-pipe is new, as are the mufflers. "We listened to a lot of Mustangs, and the movie soundtrack, and went after just the right sound," Randle continues. More power comes in the form of dual-strategy engine-management mapping that uses knock-sensor technology to adjust for regular or premium-grade fuel. A heavier front crank damper allows the engine to rev freer and 250 rpm higher; redline is now 6500 rpm. The rearend ratio was changed from the GT's standard 3.31:1 to a stouter 3.73:1. Perfect for launching up the hills of San Francisco.

"I was only about 10 years old when 'Bullitt' was made, but I remember that Mustang fastback." Chad McQueen is the amalgam of his strong-featured, light-haired, steely-eyed father and his petite, dark-skinned, exotic-looking mother, Neile Adams. As much the car, motorcycle, and motorsport zealot his dad was, Chad has raced in the Rolex Grand-Am series, run the Baja 1000, desert-raced dirt bikes, and won an SCCA championship.

He's driving the Bullitt Mustang on Guadalupe Canyon Parkway about 10 miles south of San Francisco proper, where the final portions of that famous chase scene were filmed. It's at the base of this road the mayhem ended, as the bad guys' Charger lost a fiery argument with a gas station. "It looks the same" Chad exclaims. "There's where the Charger bounced between the guardrail and that truck. Ford has really done a good job here. It looks just right, and sounds bitchin'. Well damped. Pretty torquey, too. This car really feels like a modern 1968."

Indeed it does. The shorter rear-axle ratios help the launch, and the revised intake, exhaust, and engine management systems beef up midrange torque and top-end power. The extra 250 revs are much appreciated. Zero-to-60 takes 5.0 seconds, as opposed to 5.1 to 5.2 for the variety of GTs we've tested, but it feels even stronger than that. Switch off the traction control, and fish-tailing burnouts are easy. McQueen would like that, we're sure.

Where the Bullitt really shines is chassis balance. Ford has had several model years to fiddle with spring rates, damping, tire sizes, anti-roll bars, and other chassis tuneables. But Randle's team has nailed this aspect of the car's persona. The steering is more responsive than the standard GTs. In spite of its live axle, this Mustang doesn't get too riled up over mid-corner bumps. The ride quality is firm without jarring. There's adequate compliance, but it's never mushy, and body motions are well controlled. The Bullitt isn't a lightweight toss-around toy, but rides and handles with a sophistication usually reserved for higher-priced Euro toys.

If there's any area where the Bullitt misfires, it's the tires. We understand the choice of BFGoodrich g-Force T/A mud and snow rubber as an all-weather solution, but they go up in smoke too easily. That means less grip on the skidpad and through our figure-eight test and the need for a tender right foot on the dragstrip. Grippier and/or wider performance compound tires would drop accel times and improve handling numbers. Braking distances are too long as well. While the carbon-metallic front pads proved fade resistant—as they heated up, stopping distances improved an average of two feet over each of five consecutive runs—the 127-foot 60-to-0 number isn't up to snuff for a modern musclecar. Stickier rubber would have made the difference here, too.

Why do people care about this movie, the its hero car, and Steve McQueen? "Mostly, because the chase was so good," says Chad. "There was no computer-generated stuff. They shot it all, right here. The rest of it? I can't explain it. My dad left his mark. It's just cool to be back here in the new version of his car, 40 years after the fact."

The 2008 Mustang Bullitt is well conceived, designed, engineered, and ready to rock. It's crisper, sharper, and a bit quicker than a standard GT. Though not as fast as a GT500, it's better balanced and less expensive. The Green Machine has a classy, stealth look, and a heritage all its own. Ford plans 7000 Bullitts for the U.S. market, and it's likely to be the last special edition dedicated to the movie and the man. Translation: Future collectible.

What would Steve say? According to Chad, "He'd dig it." So do we.

### McQueen's Machines: More than Mustangs

Steve McQueen owned dozens of great cars and more than 200 motorcycles in his life. He worked automobiles and motorcycles into his films and enjoyed a



more than respectable racing career. Here are a few nuggets from McQueen's metaphorical garage.

#### [Porsche 908](#)

This Porsche 908 Spyder is the only car McQueen owned and raced, and that figured into one of his films. Purchased by his Solar Productions company, he ran the 908 at [Sebring](#) in 1970, nearly pulling a Cinderella win against faster, factory efforts. It was later converted to a camera car for the filming of "Le Mans."  
Photo: Harry Hurst

#### **1969 Porsche 911S**

This isn't the car that character Michael Delaney drove in "Le Mans," but clearly inspired it. McQueen purchased this 1969 911S new in late 1968 and owned it until his passing in 1980. It was the first of his three 911s painted the non-metallic slate gray color he's often associated with. It's still in the family-and not for sale.

Photo: Matt Stone

#### **1957 Ford Truck**

Later in life, McQueen took to driving old pickups, whether it was near the airplane hanger in Santa Paula, around his property in Idaho, or to the best restaurant in Beverly Hills. This well-trashed 1957 Ford was among the most charming. But the beard, hat, and can of beer still couldn't hide those piercing blue eyes.

Photo: Barbara Minty McQueen

#### [Lotus 11](#) and [1957 Jaguar XK-SS](#)

A rare snap showing the acting icon with two rare British machines. In the foreground is his Lotus 11, the first pure sports racer he owned. Behind is his 1957 Jaguar XK-SS, one of 16, and a car for which wife Neile Adams McQueen recalls paying \$5000, not long after the couple moved to Los Angeles from New York.  
Photo: Chad McQueen collection

#### **1967 Mini Cooper**

"In the 1960s, you just weren't a movie star until you owned a [Ferrari](#) and a Mini," according to Hollywood paint and body wizard Lee Brown. McQueen bought the car new in 1967 and had Brown change the color from British Racing Green to metallic gold, among other custom touches.

Photo: Lee Brown collection

#### **Ferrari 275 GTS/4 NART Spyder**

McQueen owned three Ferraris. Besides a 1963 Lusso (Motor Trend Classic, Issue 2), he had a 275 GTS, and this one-of-10 275 GTS/4 NART Spyder. This isn't the same NART that appeared in McQueen's flick, "The Thomas Crown Affair," but there's little doubt McQueen's exposure to it prompted this purchase.

Photo: Chuck Queener

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