

A MUSCLE CAR ON STEROIDS

Ford's Mustang is stampeding into Africa and it packs a punch.

BY DEREK WATTS



It is April 16th, 1964; the day before the launch of the Ford Mustang.

For three years, motoring mastermind Lee Iacocca had nurtured plans for his “baby” – a sleek and exciting sports car that would sell for less than \$2,500.

Ford runs commercials on the three major television networks at 9.30 that night.

The next morning there is a buying frenzy at showrooms around America. Ford sell 22,000 Mustangs that day and 418,812 models that year. Wilson Pickett's *Mustang Sally* adding to the equine fever.

It is one of the casebook success stories of motoring history. Forget the fact that it was based on the compact Falcon, the Mustang was to become the American standard. Once again, the production plant in Dearborn, Michigan was pushed to the limit.

On the famous date of the Soweto Uprising, June 16th, but way back in 1903, the company was founded by Henry Ford after a sequence of financial flip-flops in the evolving motoring world.

Even in those early days, the ability to optimize production under the stress of burgeoning order books became a part of the Ford work ethic.

Starting with the Model A, the designers energetically worked through the alphabet and the engineers and mechanics sweated blood to piece together 10,000 Model T Fords in 1909.

The basics of an assembly line were slowly developed and by 1920 Ford were turning out a million cars a year! From then on, assembly lines ruled. The 200 carmakers in the United States (US) were trimmed down to just 40 over the next two decades.

More than a half century after the first pony car stunned the US, the Mustang has arrived in full livery on South African soil – the first country to get the right-hand drive version.

Apart from a clichéd ride down Sunset Boulevard in a hired topless Stang more than a decade ago, I can't claim to have the stallion's blood running through my veins.

We were on a trip to interview the modest New Age guru Deepak Chopra in La Hoya and there was a certain irony in showboating in Los Angeles. It was hard to be humble when driving the new

Mustang 2.3 EcoBoost convertible around Sandton streets – especially the Race Red version with black cloth roof. Although, it does snap closed in a few seconds if you are feeling the heat of glaring motorists – possibly tinged with envy.

The Mustang has often been referred to as a muscle car, but the sixth generation would definitely be earmarked for a steroids test. Angry headlights, angry grille to host the iconic emblem, and a fastback rear that screams catch me if you can.

That galloping horse, uniquely running right to left, will not only light up your life – it will light up your feet as well. A bright image of the pony shines on to the tarmac as you open the door.



You will be greeted by a stylish black and silver interior with a clinical instrument layout and a battery of controls on the steering wheel. The class and design, dare I say it, more German than American.

The clumsy handbrake nestling by the passenger seat, however, is surely the relic of a bygone era.

The speedometer in the entry model reflects an optimistic ‘ground speed’ of 260 kilometers per hour (kph), and to get yourself in the right mode you can choose normal, sport, race or snow/wet. Pothole dodging would be useful addition in South Africa.

What you can't fault the new Mustang on is being conservative with is detailed feedback. It will tell you about every facet of that churning turbocharged engine, from inlet air temperature to the air/fuel ratio. Maybe I'm not a dyed-in-the-oil petrolhead but I can't imagine myself checking out the cylinder head temperature on the way to work.

But you are probably not all that interested in the cockpit and coachwork, or the user-friendly MyFord touchscreen, and want to know what is under that long, sleek bonnet.

Well, let's face it, most long sleek bonnets are a lie these days. With the revolution of small turbos replacing the naturally aspirated gas guzzlers with magically enhanced power and performance, you could no doubt fit most engines into the nose of an old VW Beetle.

I had a nervous feeling of anticipation before flooring the right-hand pedal of the six-gear auto. In terms of stats and performance, it does not disappoint. With faultless response you are thrust back

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into your body-hugging seat in less than the six-second mark.

It is silky smooth and doesn't drown out the infectious cacophony that is playing on the radio.

The fact is the 2.3 Eco-boost is a beautiful, stylish vehicle that is not really going to boost your pulse rate or adrenalin levels. Even the terms EcoBoost and Mustang don't really belong in the same sentence – or the same world.

Or do they?

Although we might always envisage fire-breathing V8s in the lineage of the Mustang, and the pony wars with the Chevrolet Camaro, a teensy engine is nothing new for the marque.

The Mustang II, influenced by designer Ghia in the early seventies, came out with a 2.3-liter in-line four-cylinder engine because of the fuel crisis. Not exactly an Italian Stallion! The third generation in the eighties was almost killed due to diminished sales despite (or because of) the offer of the Ford Pinto pint-sized “power” plant.



1964 Ford Mustang



Then it was back to the brawn and punch of the big guns – the 2005 fifth generation going back to the Stang shape and spirit with a four-liter basic right up to the awesome GT500 housing a monster 5.4-liter supercharged V8.

Right now, if you still have a vestige of the boy racer in you, you can opt for more ponies under the bonnet with the 5.0-liter V8 which will whisk you to 100kph in less than five seconds.

Naturally you get more of a punch in the kidneys and aural excitement than with the EcoBoost. But not, according to many scribes, matching the trembling thrills of some AMG, M and RS badges.

So, you are looking at a healthy degree of refinement since Henry cobbled together his first auto in his Detroit garage 120 years ago. It's all part of the dream of making the Mustang a world muscle car not just for red-blooded Americans – described by one hack as putting Bruce Springsteen on stage in a bespoke suit. It's also available in colors from deep impact blue to triple yellow.

By the way, that famous quote that customers can have the T in any color as long as it's black didn't apply to the early Fords. It was only after the elementary assembly lines came into operation and they found that 'Japan black' was the only paint that dried quickly enough.

While your Mustang may emanate from Flat Rock in Michigan, you are supporting a company that has massive financial interests in South Africa with plants in Port Elizabeth and Pretoria.

Now the Gauteng operation has been boosted with a \$170-million investment for local production of the Everest SUV and expansion of the all new Ranger program. Creating 1,200 much needed jobs in the process.

It might surprise you that in the incestuous modern motoring world, Ford has owned four other luxury brands – Volvo, Land Rover, Jaguar and Aston Martin.

But now the largest family-controlled business in the world is much more focused – if you'll excuse the expression. They are really built for the road ahead. Have you driven a Ford lately? 

FORD MUSTANG PRICE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Mustang 2.3 EcoBoost Fastback Manual	\$46,800 (R699,900)
Mustang 2.3 EcoBoost Fastback Auto	\$48,155 (R719,900)
Mustang 2.3 EcoBoost Convertible Auto	\$52,170 (R779,900)
Mustang 5.0 GT Fastback Manual	\$54,845 (R819,900)
Mustang 5.0 GT Fastback Auto	\$56,180 (R839,900)
Mustang 5.0 GT Convertible Auto	\$60,195 (R899,900)

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