



Song of Muscle

Ford's newest Mustang GT is a lone traditional holdout

by JIM PICKERING

THE AMERICAN MUSCLE car world is in the midst of an existential crisis. Camaro is gone, victim of Chevrolet's evaluation of "portfolio offerings for progress toward our EV future and sales demand." Dodge's old Charger and Challenger are out now, too, and so is Mopar boss and muscle true believer Tim Kuniskis, freshly retired after years of being a driving force behind the Hellcat and Demon. It's a new world of silent EV performance — or at least, that's the suggestion and/or hope coming from most corners of the new car scene. Even Corvette is now available as an amped-up E-Ray.

What a world.

Ford's approach has been different. We have this new 5.0-L-powered Mustang as proof.

For all the hand-wringing that came about when Mustang's totem was plastered on the Mach E electric crossover a few years back, the move now makes sense. Ford's been able to leverage their production of the little electric Mach E into a continued push for go-fast V8 power in cars such as this new 5.0. The emissions offset provided by producing the EV is keeping the old-school Mustang tradition alive — and it's going to stay that way, says Ford boss Jim Farley: "If we're the only one on the planet making a

V8 affordable sports car for everyone in the world, so be it," he told *Motor1*.

Building on the name

Tradition is indeed kicking here — it's unmistakable as it burbles to life through quad tipped-stainless pipes. The engineers at Ford took the lead on blending heritage with performance in all Mustangs since the S197 launched in 2005, and this new seventh-gen Mustang still looks the part — updated but still unmistakable — sporting LED headlights and taillights that are more evolutionary than revolutionary. But it's not just glimpses of Steve McQueen between the lines here: there's



Fox body lineage too.

The GT's 5.0-L Coyote is all business — this is a rev-happy 485-hp V8 that is available with active exhaust that switches between morning commute and track night at the touch of a button. If you're like me, it's track night all the time, with burly snaps and crackles echoing off all your neighbor's houses at 8 a.m. just because

you can. When fitted with the 6-speed manual, it'll rev-match on its own while downshifting, too. Useful and flagrant: a third pedal that advertises. Clutch operation is smooth and light, and the short factory shifter gets the job done. Next to it is a lever-actuated electric park brake that will first confuse and then irritate the hooners. At least it looks right.



Some traditions have been left behind — the most notable being earlier-gen squat-happy rear suspension under power. Some of the old cars felt very 1970s in their sky-ground-sky-ground view out the windshield while rowing through the gears. Chalk some of the improvement up to available Magneride dampening that makes this new car handle a lot better than the exit bystanders at Cars & Coffee will expect. It stops great, too, thanks to Brembo halters that give positive, solid feedback and performance. It's as fun to drive as it looks, and yes, the overall experience — and the audible commentary from the outside world — gets better with the top down.

New tech

Inside, the dash is all customizable screen — or at least two-thirds of it is — and it's well designed. There's some reliance on menus and submenus that takes a little getting used to,

RATINGS

HIGH POINT: Bellowing V8 and a third pedal.

LOW POINT: Price to play, at least as equipped.

FINAL WORD: Tradition shines through in this V8 four-seater.

DRIVABILITY: ★★★★★

FUN FACTOR/APPEARANCE: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

but that's progress for you. The important bits — all the turn-it-up options for steering feel, exhaust, suspension and more — are accessible from the steering wheel. But the feel and execution is nice overall, thanks to a thick, squared-off wheel and soft leather. It's a good place to spend time, and you can get four inside pretty comfortably if they're not too tall.

If all this sounds like fun, it is, but you pay for the experience. This Mustang GT's base is \$44k, but my Premium drop-top tester came to rest at \$62k. Yes, that's a lot of money for this car as equipped, but this is also a lot of car in a market where old-school swagger is waning.

Considering all that, this car stands out a bit more than the Mustangs that came before. My wife said this Race Red convertible looked like a "mid-life crisis on wheels," while the neighborhood 8-year-olds called it out by name — with deep reverence — as they walked past it on their way to school. So while this car is a generational improvement in most every category, in some important ways, things are the same as they have always been for Mustang — and I can't help but feel that it means more now than ever. ∞