

THE 1966 MUSTANG

by Rick Feibusch

The Mustang was an instant hit, By the end of the first model year and a half (they were introduced in mid-1964) Mustangs had proven to be the perfect car for well over a half-a-million people. In fact, if one was considering buying a car at the time and didn't need a six passenger sedan or a wagon, a Mustang was probably near the top of the list. There was a hardtop, a convertible and a new fastback coupe with a fold down rear seat. The car could be ordered as a six cylinder econo-car, an easy to drive shop-hopper with power steering and brakes, a rip-snortin' street scraper, or any combination thereof. And the price was only a little more than a deluxe compact.

For 1966 there were few changes. The grille was cleaned up a bit and the funny little chrome "scoop" screwed to the back of the side depression on cars that weren't equipped with pin-striping, made way for a three-pronged spear thingie. The hotter standard V-8 dropped to 210 h.p. though you still could order the 271 horse, solid-lifter performance mill.

The big news for '66 was a disc brake option and the GT package. The Mustang GT versions contained all of the performance options available as well as some nifty stripes down the sides, fog lights up front and louvered exhaust ports in the rear pan. Options were the 271 motor and the first series of styled steel wheels (like those on the feature car).

Considered by some collectors as the last REAL Mustang, the '66 has the same trim profile and simple design features of the original car. Each year that passed from 1967 on found the Mustang bigger and styled more radically until it was replaced by the smaller Mustang II in 1974.

DRIVING THE 1966 MUSTANG

This particular car came equipped with the 200 h.p. 289, two barrel V-8, Cruis-a-matic, power steering and standard drum brakes. Since over half of the Mustangs came with similar options, this car is perfect for a "Behind The Wheel" test car.

This was the first time I had been behind the wheel of one of these since high school. I was surprised to find it so comfortable to sit in and easy to drive. Considering that the seatback rake has no adjustment and there is no tilt wheel, I fit just great. The wheel is at just the right angle and the left arm naturally falls comfortably on the window sill. You still have to reach for the key slot and to adjust the radio, but everything else is right there.

A twist of the key brings the growly 289 to life. These little mills rev quite freely and will zip right up to red line before you know it. A four barrel speeds things up a bit, but the standard 2V version is plenty fast enough. Click the floor mounted, T-handle shifter into drive and we're off in a flash. These mid-'60s Cruis-o-matics have two drive positions.

One gives you all three gears, the other only the top two. I'm not exactly sure what the two-speed mode is for, though a friend from the east said something about snow and slush. We Californians usually used all three . . .waa-hoo!

By today's standards these cars are real snappy. Lots of bottom end oomph and just about when you're about to run out of valve train - wham - there's the next gear. And yes, I know there are a bunch of engineering types that can show me facts and figures proving that a late model 16-valve twin-cammer will blow a 200 horse Mustang away but I'd swear the 'Stang is faster!

On the road this pony feels OK. The Mustang has a lower center of gravity than its compact contemporaries so it stays pretty flat in corners, yet isn't too stiff to provide a fairly smooth ride. Remember that this isn't a restored car, It's an old original with new shocks and front end bushings. The wider wheels and Dunlop radials might have helped too. Very impressive.

Convertibles from this era tend to shake, rattle and roll as they get up in age. This Mustang had recent attention and a number of rubber seals replaced so it felt tight and relatively rattle free. On the down side were the standard drum brakes. They stopped the car, but they needed a good push and took their time about it. One could learn to use them safely but I'd opt for a set of power discs.

Though this is too valuable a car to subject to the rigors of everyday traffic, it would be perfectly suitable and completely enjoyable to use as a daily driver. Just another case of not being able to have your cake and eat it too.