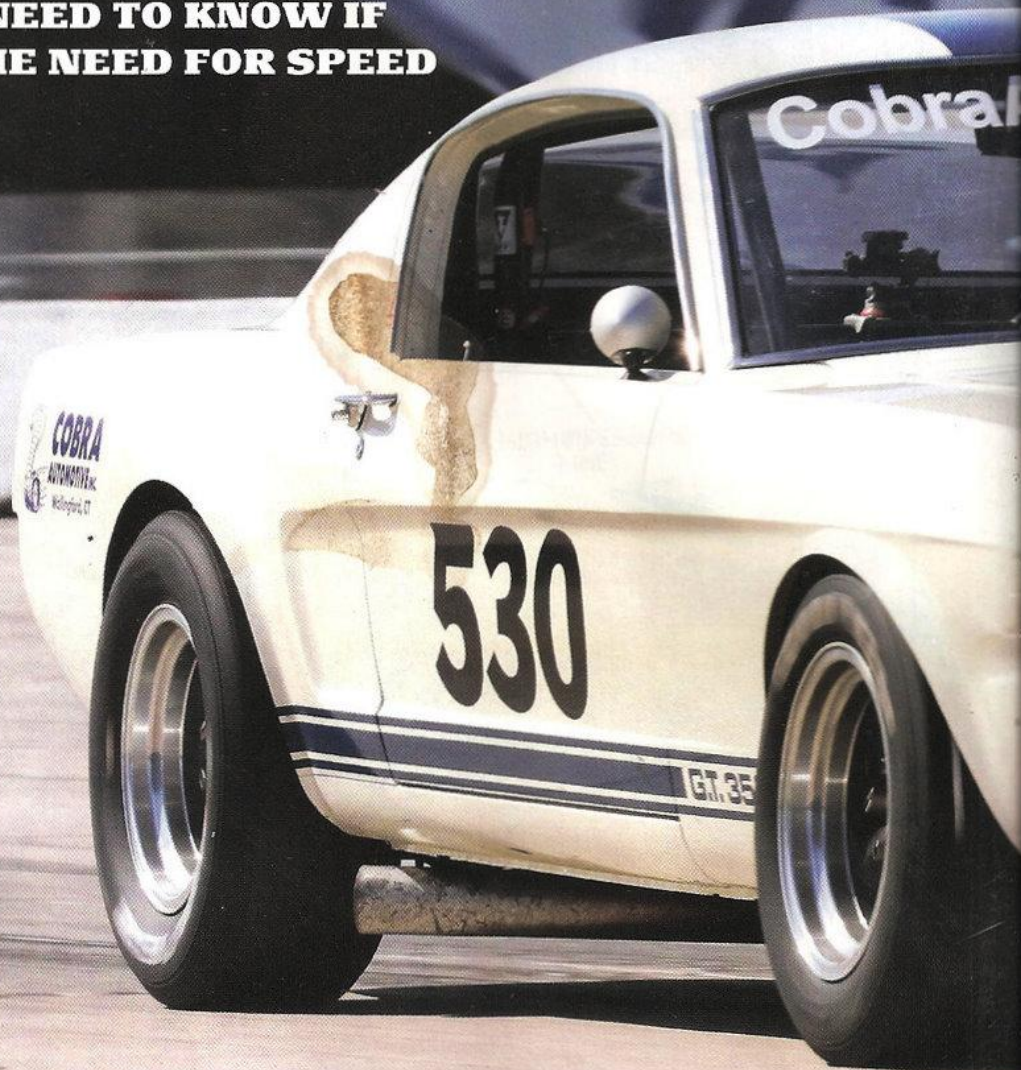


VINTAGE RACING, MUSTANG STYLE

→ **WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW IF
YOU FEEL THE NEED FOR SPEED**



Not everyone is born with the drive to really drive. For some, braking points, apexes, turn-ins, and sky-high rpm are concepts that just won't gel. No prob. Cruising, shows, day trips — there are plenty of other ways to enjoy the Mustang's many talents.

But there are those who were born with a heavy right foot, and that's just the way it is. For them, and those who like watching and just being around racing, we checked in with Curt Vogt and crew at Cobra Automotive. Curt is an accomplished, front-of-the-pack

racer with NASCAR experience.

If you've ever watched modern vintage racing, you shouldn't be surprised to learn that today's amateurs are faster on the track than the legendary drivers like Parnelli, Follmer, and Gurney were back in their heyday.

For that, you can thank technology's relentless march forward.

"They made 475 hp, maybe," says Curt, speaking of the old Trans Am cars. "We're making 560."

And that from the same cubic inches we ran back



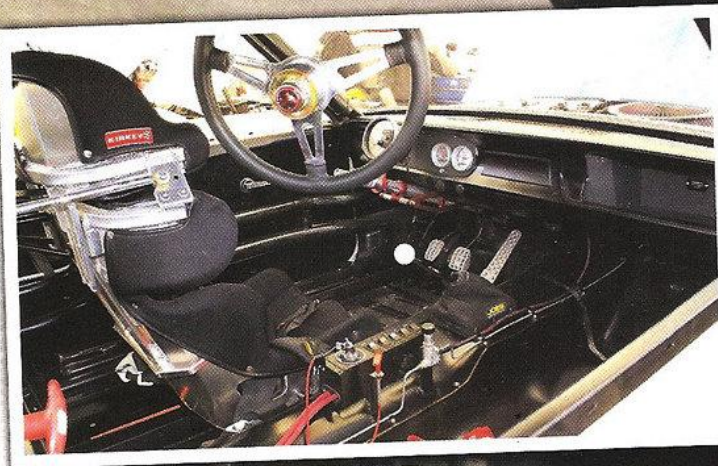
in the day. The elevated power doesn't come from any single "miracle" mod. It comes from a combination of little improvements.

"It's in the top end, flow of the cylinder heads, camshaft technology, intake manifold, and header technology," Curt says. "Our headers are hand-crafted stainless steel right out of Sprint Cup. We're running a constant 8,000-plus rpm, when in the old days, they ran a lot less. Our short-block is good for 9,000-10,000 rpm."

The improvements continue to the driveline and chassis.

"There's a huge improvement in engines; there's a huge improvement in transmissions," Curt says. "We're running clutchless Jerico transmissions, so we can shift without the clutch. We have a better understanding of handling now, and we're continually developing stuff. Some technology is falling out of NASCAR Sprint Cup or other pro-series racing and hitting our vintage cars."

But technology has its limits, thanks to the sanctioning bodies that want to make sure the vintage doesn't get lost from vintage racing. They observe varying degrees, of



strictness, with the most prestigious events being the most strict and new events offering the most latitude.

Curt elaborates, "On the West Coast — the Monterey Historics — the rules are very strict; you have to run period cylinder heads, standard rocker arms, standard cam profile, standard rim width, and so forth. They get like 500-600 entries but accept only 300. We've been to Europe, too — classic tracks like Le Mans, Nurburgring, Spa — some of the toughest races in the world. The rules are very strict. You have to run period 1965 profile Dunlops that are hard as rocks, and you have to run points ignition."

The period engineering has to hold up over the long haul, too.

"They run endurance races in Europe," Curt says. "We run sprint races over here. We do run enduros here, too, but they're not as long as the ones they run in Europe."

So club racing is a good place for the casual lead-foot to start. If that's not enough, there are plenty of events looking for participants. But be forewarned, running up front is not for the faint of wallet.

"Things have gotten more expensive," Curt says. "Entry fees for a basic race are \$400-\$500. Bobby Rahal is starting his own organization, and his is \$800-\$900 per event. Then there are hotels, transportation there and back, food — you're going to burn 40-50 gallons of race gas at \$8-\$9 per gallon, tires are \$150-\$250 apiece, brake pads or shoes. You can't do this for less than \$3,000-\$5,000 per weekend — and that's if we're not fixing anything on the motor or transmission, or fixing crash damage, or making any upgrades to the car back at the shop before or after the event."

If that's the low end, what are the front-runners spending?

"It takes a ton of money and preparation to run up front," Curt says. "There's more money in the pits at a good vintage race than there is at a NASCAR Sprint Cup race. We run hard \$35,000-\$50,000 engines.



The race budget for a weekend race is \$10,000-\$15,000 if you want to run up front. We go through two sets of tires in a weekend. We're amateur from the standpoint that we don't get paid, but we run hard. Most of the guys that do this are successful businessmen because A) they can afford it, and B) they need to get some of their frustrations out. If it's not this hobby, it's planes, golf, boating, gun collecting, or something else."

But with the sacrifice come the rewards.

"I ran a 2.215 at Sebring back in March," Curt says. "One of the other fellows in our camp ran a 2.20. I just got back from Elkhart Lake and ran 2.27 with a 289 Mustang. That's extremely fast there. I think Mark Donohue ran a 2.30 in 1970-71, so we're three seconds a lap quicker. But in all fairness, we're making more horsepower."

So don't think that vintage racing is a relaxing weekend putting around the track at a leisurely pace. It's much more intensive.

"We've had racers come into vintage racing, then leave to run some version of pro racing," Curt says. "They come back and say, 'This is just as hard, if not harder.'"

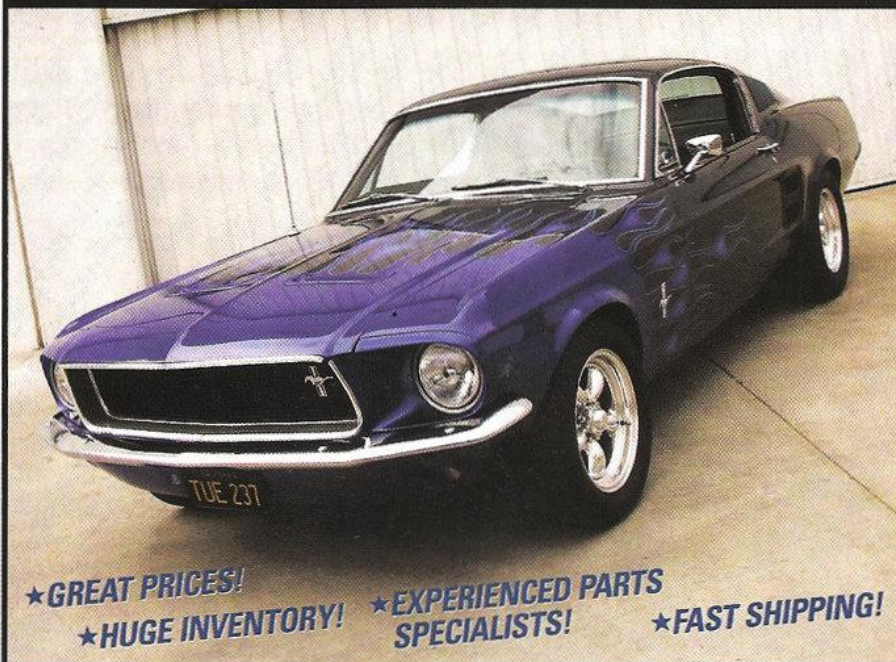
After 45 years, the Mustang still commands respect — or despair, depending on whether you're behind the wheel or behind the Mustang. **M**

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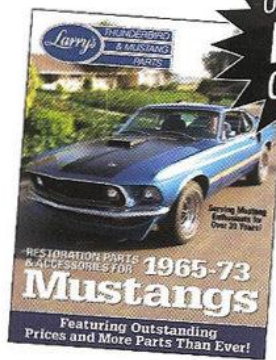
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