

TECHTIPS: Ford Mustang and Shelby

Practical advice from
some friends in the field.



First or Second Generation? The early 1965-'66 Mustangs and Shelbys have historically been more popular for restorers, but lately the 1967-'68 second-generation Shelbys have hit their stride. I think they're a prettier design, but they are harder to restore.

The later cars have a lot more fiberglass body panels, and even when they were new there were plenty of wavy panels and mismatched paint. The bodies were painted in enamel at the Ford plant and shipped to California, where the fiberglass portions—painted with lacquer—were bolted on. It was a recipe for lots of warranty claims then and a lot of restoration headaches now. The later cars also have a much fancier interior, and that Deluxe interior trim is a little harder to restore correctly.

Trick Ponies: All the shiny and trick new stuff isn't the answer—we've done concours and hold track records at race tracks around the country using nearly stock suspension components. Although it's a common belief that Mustangs don't handle in stock form, we vintage race and have to use factory-type suspension components—and they work just fine.

The real trick is to make sure that you're using NOS-equivalent suspension components, not some of the new stuff that's made overseas. For example, many of the new control arms that you can buy have pressed-in ball joints, not spot-welded or riveted ones. That's a recipe for disaster on the track.

Ride 'Em, Cowboy: To make our cars handle, we've got a pretty simple recipe: Koni shocks like the ones Shelbys originally came with, slightly larger anti-roll bars, and high-quality urethane bushings. I also add urethane shackle/leaf spring bushings to firm up the handling.

Personally, I don't like the feel of the rack-and-pinion conversions. They seem to transmit a lot of vibrations to the driver and tend to be oversensitive to road irregularities.

Rustangs: The nickname "Rustang" came about for a reason. The unibody construction was manufactured with a lot of overlapping body panels that were spot welded together. Those lap joints are breeding grounds for rust, especially when salt spray gets trapped in those crevices.

Rust in the rear quarter panels, doors and front fenders is pretty common, but steer clear of cars that have rust in the front and rear frame rails. You

really have a bad car when the rust gets to the front frame rails and shock towers. There's a cavity below the upper A-arm in the frame rail tray area that is particularly difficult to fix—and at that point you'll need to decide if you want to spend \$10,000 or more to fix the rust correctly.

New Old Stock: While it seems as though you can buy just about any part for a Mustang new off the shelf—including complete unibodies—there's a big problem with quality from some of the manufacturers. Reproduction exterior panels are typically low-quality.

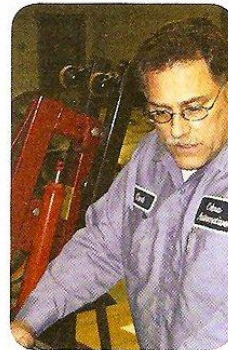
You should look for NOS (new old stock) parts instead or, at the very least, parts that were manufactured on the original Ford tooling. Of course, NOS parts aren't cheap. A reproduction battery tray can be found online for under \$20, but it will be flimsy and will take a lot of work to make right. A good Shelby restoration deserves a NOS tray, and that's going to set you back close to \$500 if you can find one.

Reproduction windshield trim pieces are particularly bad. They're typically made from a softer material that doesn't retain its shape. You're better off spending \$12 to 15 a linear foot to restore the original pieces.

There is one exception to the rule of low-quality new parts: the more recent Dynacorn replacement body panels. Since the company is building complete bodies, they've had to be more careful about creating panels that fit together correctly without requiring a bunch of metalwork.

Seals: Windshield seals are another problem area. A combination of thinner replacement windshield glass and low-quality seals will make for a leaking windshield every time. Thankfully, there are some good seal manufacturers out there—Steele Rubber Products, for example.

Whoa, Pony! To make our Mustangs and Shelbys work on track, we upgrade the front brakes to those from the Lincoln and Thunderbird. That gets us 11.87-inch rotors versus the stock 11.3-inch rotors. The rear drums are sourced from a Ford pickup truck and are 11 inches versus the stock 10-inch drums.



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Rust: The floors are prone to rust, which is a messy job to repair. However, the area below the cowl vent is possibly the most involved repair. The car must essentially be dismantled in front of the windshield. It's time-consuming, it's complicated and it's expensive—and if the job is done incorrectly, the fenders and doors will never fit correctly again.

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