

When you are into Mustang, there are many ways to go, as has been the case since day one. In the current core Ford lineup (bearing in mind Mustang is also a widely adapted basis for many third parties), there are fundamentally three builds—the most affordable and fuel-economical 315-hp EcoBoost 4-cylinders at the base; in the middle, the most powerful GT ever, with 480 horsepower via the ever-popular 5.0-liter (302) Coyote V8; and at the top a 500-hp 5.0-liter V8 Dark Horse. Each also has a Premium version, so that makes six. There is also a semi-separate California Special version (officially a package) of the GT Premium, making seven. Most are available as a fastback (also called coupe or even fastback coupe), while only some are also available as a convertible. An exception to all of the above is the California Special, this time around convertible-only. All this adds up to ten versions (see chart at lower right).

The one we're driving here sits in a sweet spot right about in the middle—an upper GT (Premium), with 96 percent the horsepower of a Dark Horse at 74 percent the price. Ours also adds active valve exhaust for \$1225, nudging horsepower up to 486 (97 percent the power at 76 percent the price).

The gen-seven Mustang dawns for model year 2024, but first appeared in Arizona a year ago, as VIN 001 was auctioned off at Barrett-Jackson in January 2023 (raising \$565,000 for charity).

Despite this passage of time, our sample was a pre-production unit, as supply chain constraints still impact the entire industry.

Ours adds a variety of desirable packages and options (some options only available with the packages), bringing total cost into Dark Horse territory. But of course you can option up a Dark Horse, too.

A manual transmission relies upon a parking brake more than an automatic, and the new 6MT

Mustang features what looks like a conventional cable-pull handle in the console, but is in fact an electronic unit that functions by touch for parking, while also able to unlock a set of capabilities emulating hydraulic drift braking. This and our build's GT Performance Package are track-oriented, for which we'll have to wait for a dedicated event.

Most any manual transmission takes a moment of adjustment, till you get your seat and leg play just right. In this, however, the clutch and transmission were smooth as can be from the get-go, no adjustment needed. It is ready to rock. And from surface streets to freeways, we were happy as can be. In tight traffic, we had the power and precision handling needed to tuck ourselves into any perfect spot. As noted at the time: sweet.

Mustang's change from decades of solid rear axle (in almost all cases) to independent rear suspension is most welcome. Note that this does not

remove all the lively involvement this rear-driver is known for, but does (along with electronics) keep it well controlled. You will want to play with its selectable-effort power steering to get your perfect combo. (You will also want to keep your tires up to date, if your routine use is aggressive.)

A traditional gasoline V8 pony car doesn't seem to beg electronics, but the Mustang has plenty, some of which are pretty cool. One such is a powertrain feature used for electronically setting quiet times—say you head out to work early every day and want to give the neighbors a break, you can permanently set a quiet time range and forget it, reverting to maximum effect the rest of the time.

We're not particularly fans of blip-shifting a.k.a. rev-matching—a setup to adjust RPMs during a shift to smooth out the transition—though we see their purpose for easing a new manual-shift driver into the game (and that we always support), and it is increasingly included on the sadly small number of remaining manual transmissions. We always turn it off. (Fans of the feature may have differing

opinions.) In this car, however, it was generally quite smooth, even when on (an exception being coming to a stop, when you don't even need it with clutch already depressed, giving a strong double blip that may just draw unwanted attention).

Mustang's 2024 lineup and price walk are quite an accomplishment, spanning a more than twofold price range, more than 50 percent power climb and two basic body types (though not always). The Premium level of each still avoids overlap, even helping you avoid the torment of creating your own overlap by optioning them up (although you still can—on any). Bottom line is that the GT Premium V8 is only \$9,600 more than an EcoBoost four-cylinder Mustang (itself quite compelling in its own right), while over \$16,000 less than a Dark Horse. And again, GT Premium offers a ragtop if so inclined. The Dark Horse has its own gotta-have-it factors, as any top-of-the-line build should.

But sitting in front of us all, clear as a bell, is the sweet spot occupied by the new—and most powerful ever—Mustang GT. ■

Ford uses our sample's color, Vapor Blue Metallic, in a great many of their own promotional photos for the new model. Arguably more grey than blue, it looks Navy ship-like in the sun and extra rich in the rain. By any measure, it's certainly a benchmark paint color.

# Sweet.

BY JOE SAGE



## SPECIFICATIONS\*

\*As a pre-production unit, only preliminary technical specs were available—no horsepower, torque, fuel requirement or fuel capacity, no ground clearance or turning circle, and so on. We dug into the consumer site and did other general research to gather some of the specs presented here.

ASSEMBLY ..... Flat Rock, Michigan  
 ENGINE ..... 5.0L DOHC V8, naturally aspirated w dual air boxes & throttle bodies, TI-VCT dual port fuel dir inj, distributor-less w coil-on-plug, cast alum block/heads w plasma transfer wire arc cyl liners, steel oil pan  
 HP/TORQUE ..... 480 hp / 415 lb-ft (ours w active exhaust) 486 hp / 418 lb-ft  
 COMPRESSION RATIO ..... 12:1  
 TRANSMISSION ..... Getrag MT-82 6-spd man  
 DRIVETRAIN ..... RWD, 3.55 limited slip diff  
 SUSPENSION ..... fully unitized steel chassis w fully indep front/rear susp & perimeter subframe, tower-to-tower brace and K-brace w Performance Pkg; F: double-ball-joint MacPherson strut, alum control arms, opt MagneRide dampers, 33.3mm stblzr bar; R: integral-link indep w coils, opt MagneRide dampers, 24mm stblzr bar  
 STEERING ..... selectable-effort elec pwr asst, normal, comfort, sport modes  
 BRAKES ..... F: 352 x 32mm vented, four-piston fixed caliper; R: 350 x 26mm vented, single-piston floating  
 WHEELS ..... (Perf Pkg) F: 319x9.0; R: 19x9.5  
 TIRES ..... F: 255/40R19, R: 275/49R19, Y-rated summer-only  
 LENGTH / WHEELBASE ..... 189.4 / 107.0 in  
 GROUND CLEARANCE ..... na  
 TURNING CIRCLE ..... na  
 HEADROOM (F/R) ..... 37.6 / 34.8 in  
 LEGROOM (F/R) ..... 44.5 / 29.0 in  
 CARGO CAPACITY ..... 13.3 cu.ft  
 WEIGHT ..... na  
 FUEL / CAPACITY ..... 93 oct unl / 16.0 gal  
 MPG ..... 14/23/17 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE ..... \$46,015  
 GT PERFORMANCE PKG: track-focused incl front tower brace, Torsen limited slip diff, wider rear wheels, upsized Brembo brakes, cooling brake ducts, aux engine oil cooler. (Pkg also allows opt Recaro seats, MagneRide active suspension, active exhaust.) ..... 4995  
 NITE PONY PKG: black wheels, badges, mirror caps, roof as applicable, headlamp bezels, rear spoiler ..... 1195  
 GT PREMIUM HIGH EQUIPMENT GROUP 401A: B&O audio, illum door sill plates, premium trim w color accents, security pkg, Ford Co-Pilot360™ Assist, memory driver seat & side mirrors w integrated turn signals ..... 2900  
 ACTIVE VALVE EXHAUST ..... 1225  
 MAGNERIDE DAMPING SYSTEM ..... 1750  
 FLOOR MATS: premium floor liners front/rear w carpeted mats ..... 200  
 DESTINATION CHARGE ..... 1595

TOTAL ..... \$59,875  
 Prices increased w gas guzzler tax; see below.

## 2024 FORD MUSTANG LINEUP

	Fastback	Convertible
EcoBoost	\$30,920	\$39,020
EcoBoost Premium	36,445	41,945
GT	42,495	---
GT Premium	47,015	52,515
+ GT California Special Pkg		+1,995
Dark Horse	59,270	---
Dark Horse Premium	63,265	---