Distinguishing itself

BY JOE SAGE

There is much buzz right now about Ford re-entering the sedan market, in response to high purchase and fuel prices, both. Some rumors have them bringing back a prior model. Others suggest they may create a new four-door sedan bearing, yep, the Mustang badge. This is pertinent here, as it echoes (seemingly inevitable) debate in some traditional circles on whether Mach-E is really a Mustang, not so much because it's an EV, as because of its bulky shape and four doors.

A similar dynamic springs to mind as the California Special name has been picked up from Mustang's long heritage and applied here.

The Mach-E lineup's variables are many, including trim levels, a wide range of power, FWD-RWD-eAWD drivetrains and more, with some years having as many as nine basic builds before even getting to packages. (Of note here, the lineup even included a California Route 1 version at one point.)

The Mach-E lineup now comprises four trim levels, two with a choice of RWD or eAWD, for a total of six. There are then significant add-on layers available, the California Special Package driven here being a case in point.

The first Mustang California Special was created in 1968, built atop the GT (and also known as GT/CS). Those classics, while carrying strong performance and lifestyle vibes, were basically cosmetic—stripes, badges, sometimes Shelby style cues via fiberglass scoops and spoilers. (A rare few were built atop performance powertrains.)

Today's Mach-E GT California Special is similarly built atop the Mach-E GT, including its same enhanced powertrain, suspension, brakes and other GT cues. EVs in general already distinguish themselves considerably by performance and lifestyle, leaving the California Special build differentiated largely by details (stripes, logos, wheels, spoiler, etc.). These are what makes it Special. (As for what makes it California, that is pure heritage.)

The California Special package itself ($2495) adds specific 20-in wheels, spoiler and stripes, as well as other style and feature points. A GT Performance & Handling Package on ours ($1995, see inclusions in sidebar) is available on any GT and not part of making this a California Special.

The drive is as you would expect from a top-spec EV, this one highly variable in both power and brakes, depending upon mode and regen settings. There were times it could feel hesitant, mixed in with an overall feel of considerable potency.

If there's one feature we do not care for, it's the electric door operation, often uncertain, with a tiny, awkward physical handle as backup. It suggests the California Special term has changed with the times—now less Surf City, more Silicon Valley.

Maybe that's intentional. Like the state for which it's named, the California Special has changed and changed again over the years. Between its catchy name and an ever-evolving set of distinguishing features, it has always been special and desirable (as the classics still are, at auction). Time will tell whether this follows suit. That makes this branding exercise a solid and defensible choice. But all of that probably overthinks it—basically this is still just for fun, fun, fun. ■

OUR BUILD

BASE PRICE	**$53,395**
CALIFORNIA SPECIAL PKG: 20-in gray wheel w aero cover and logo, Calif Special hood stripe, rear spoiler	**2495**
PAINT: Glacier Gray Metallic Tri-Coast	995
GT PERFORMANCE & HANDLING PACK: MagneRide damping system, MME GT performance upgrade	1995
TECHNOLOGY PKG	incl on GT
TIRES: 245/45R20 summer tires	300
PANORAMIC ROOF PKG	1875
FRUNK	495
FAST CHARGING ADAPTER (NACS)	200
MOBILE POWER CORD	500
TIRE SEALANT & INFLATOR KIT	145
BLUECRUISE (w one-year plan)	745
SIRIUSXM (w three-year plan)	300
DESTINATION CHARGE	2045
TOTAL	**$65,485**

Our sticker price above; current pricing in chart at right.

SPECIFICATIONS

Manufacturer specs limited; some 3rd-party info below.

ASSEMBLY	Cuautitlán Izcalli, Mexico
ROWS/SEATS	two / five
ELEC MOTORS	dual eMotor (rear/upgraded front)
BATTERY	Extended Range (usable capacity 91kWh)
HP/TORQUE	(GT/eAWD/Perf Pack) 480 hp / 700 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	single speed
DRIVETRAIN	eAWD
MODES	Unbridle +Ext, Engage, Whisper; 1-pedal
SUSPENSION	(ours w GT Performance & Handling Pkg)
F/R:	MagneRide® Damping System front & rear
STEERING	elec pwr-asst, speed-sensitive
BRAKES	"power 4-wheel disc w ABS"
WHEELS	20-in gray wheel w aero cover & logo
TIRES	245/45R20 summer tires
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	187.0 / 118.0 in
GROUND CLEARANCE	(3rd party info): 5.7 in
TURNING CIRCLE	(3rd party info): 39.7 ft
HEADROOM (F/R)	38.9 / 38.2 in
LEGROOM (F/R)	43.3 / 38.1 in
CARGO CAPACITY	29.7 / 59.5 cu.ft
FRUNK CAPACITY	2.6 cu.ft
WEIGHT	(3rd party info): up pto 4890 lb
TOW CAPACITY	(3rd party info): ±2200 lb (w pkg)
CHARGING SPEED	240V: 9.9 hrs
	Fast Charge: 3rd party info varies tremendously)
RANGE	280 miles / 91 kWh Ext Range 300 miles
MPG	(MPGe) 95/85/90 (city/hwy/comb)

2026 FORD MUSTANG MACH-E LINEUP

	RWD	eAWD
Select	**$38,290**	**$41,290**
Premium	**41,090**	**44,090**
GT	▼ **53,890**	
Rally	**57,690**	