

Refined to be not too refined

BY JOE SAGE

It's been (surprisingly) almost three years since a Ford Mustang has graced our fleet, though this is still the gen-six model, with a number of revisions and enhancements for 2018. Fundamentals remain largely the same: there are 310-hp 2.3L EcoBoost 4-cylinder models and 460-hp 5.0L V8 GT models. Already living on borrowed time for several years, the V6 is no longer available.

Ours here is the GT, the 5-liter V8, bearing the notable addition of Drag Strip mode, which makes this the fastest Mustang ever, capable of hitting 60 mph in under four seconds (which Ford proudly notes is faster than a base Porsche 911). This capability comes from a number of underlying factors: the engine has been recalibrated for more power and torque; the automatic is a quick-shifting 10-speed (as on our sample); and the Performance Package (also on our sample) includes Michelin Pilot Sport 4S tires for increased traction. If you prefer to pit your own wits against the driveline, there is still a 6-speed manual available.

One of the biggest changes when this generation arrived in 2015 was the departure of the long-standing live rear axle (which could give it squirrelly tail end hop considered unwelcome by some, or

essential to the Mustang's soul by others), with fully independent suspension now at all four corners of all Mustangs (perhaps blasphemous to loose-tail traditionalists). For 2018, there are new shocks, stabilizer bars and rear cross-axis joint, all aimed at delivering Mustang's traditionally lively performance with a higher level of control. We had driven the new Mustang GT on track just a week prior (see Texas Auto Roundup in this issue), where we found it so lively we actually backed off from Sport Plus mode to Normal to keep it tamer. If you want a wild ride, you can certainly still dial it in.

The 10-speed auto has a notably firm feel, with solid engagement as you run through the gears (as also through the PND5 lever positions). Shifts are smooth, well spaced and nicely defined—as you work your way quickly through the first several gears, even the most committed manual driver may admit to themselves that they'd never make that many shifts that smoothly with a manual.

The car corners well, but we noted a surprising large turning circle. We also noted that while hot cars always bring out the boy racers, rather than a competitive set our GT largely inspired challenges from a "me too" set of other Mustangs.

The V8 delivers glorious sound effects, making this one of those cars you will drive with the windows down in any weather, just to hear that rumble and roar reflect off the concrete. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

ENGINE / DRIVETRAIN	5.0L Ti-VCT V8 / RWD
HP/TORQUE	(93-oct) 460 hp / 420 lb-ft
TRANSMISSION	10-spd auto (6-spd man available)
0-TO-60 MPH	Drag Strip mode: under 4 sec
STEERING	selectable-effort electronic power
SUSPENSION	F: double-ball-joint MacPherson strut, new shocks, stblzr bar; R: integral-link indep, hi-pre mod-tune, alum rear knuckles, cross-axis rear joint, stblzr bar. Avail MagneRide damping systems
BRAKES	four-wheel disc / ABS
WHEELS/TIRES	19" black alum / F 255 R 275/40R19
LENGTH / WHEELBASE	188.5 in / 107.1 in
TURNING CIRCLE	37.8 ft
HEADRM/LEGRM (F/R)	H 37.6/34.8 L 45.1/29.0 in
CARGO / FUEL TANK / WEIGHT	13.5 cf / 17 gal / 3705 lb
FUEL / MPG	(auto-reg) 16/25/19 (city/hwy/comb) (man-prem) 14/21/16 (city/hwy/comb)

BASE PRICE	\$39,190
10-SPD AUTO TRANS	1595
401A PACKAGE: 12" LCD MyColor cluster, premier trim w color accents, heated wheel, voice-activ touchscreen nav	2200
SAFE & SMART PKG: Adaptive cruise, blind spot info, cross-traffic alert, fwd collision warning & brake support	1495
ENH SECURITY PKG: Active anti-theft, wheel lock kit	395
ACTIVE VALVE PERFORMANCE EXHAUST	895
SHAKER PRO AUDIO SYSTEM: premium 12-spkr	895
GT PERFORMANCE PKG: 19x9 fr 19x9.5 rear ebony black-painted alum wheels, 25/40R19 fr 275/40R19 rear summer-only tires; Brembo six-piston front calipers w larger rotors; heavy-duty front springs; upsized rear sway bar; K-brace; silver-painted strut tower brace; Torsen differential w 3.55 rear axle (auto); special chassis tune; special EPAS, ABS and stability control tune; larger radiator; engine-spun alum instrument panel; oil pressure & vacuum gauge pack; performance rear wing	3995
MAGNERIDE DAMPING SYSTEM	1695
DESTINATION CHARGE	900
TOTAL	\$53,255

