New Ford Mustang – First Impressions

Published: March 31, 2016

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Online version: https://www.wheels-alive.co.uk/new-ford-mustang-first-impressions/



Must-Have a Mustang – Ford's New Muscle Car Muscles-In to the UK...

A new classic in its own time – driven by David Miles (Miles Better

News Agency).

Ford's latest marketing strategy is 'Un Learn' as they try to remove our preconceptions of the brand and past products. It is therefore strange and inconsistent that they have been wheeling out nostalgia as a hook to catch owners wanting Ford's latest and first ever official right hand drive Mustang muscle car.

The arrival of the sixth generation Mustang in Europe, 50 years after the original model was introduced in the US, has come about by Ford's global 'One Ford' philosophy. This allows cars from any of their global sources to be sold in any of their other markets as long as there is enough demand to make it worthwhile to produce a product fit for local conditions.

And that policy has allowed Mustang to officially come to Europe and in particular the UK which already is the largest market for Mustang sales in Europe. Mrs Chris Muirs, product marketing manager for Ford of Britain, told motoring journalists at this week's delayed press launch that already over 1,000 UK customers have received their new Mustangs and advance sales are over 3,500 units. She added, "Order one now and delivery will be in September or October." The UK press launch was delayed because production of Media test cars was delayed due to the high demand for UK customer's cars.

She added, "We can sell as many as we have customers for, there is no restriction on supply from the factory and after the initial demand has been met we expect annual UK sales to level out at between 2,500 and 3,000 units a year."

So far 80% of UK customers have ordered the Fastback two door coupe body style over the two door Convertible. Also 68% have specified the 5.0 litre, V8 416 hp petrol engine, 54% have ordered a vehicle with a manual transmission and Race Red is the most popular colour so far, accounting for 20% of sales.

Who are the UK customer's? Chris Muirs said, "They come from all walks of life, there is no particular group of people. UK customers have been waiting for this car for 50 years, they love its heritage – people just know what it is."

Part of that knowing what a Mustang is comes from the generation of models who have made around 3,000 appearances in films, most notably James Bond's Goldfinger and of course Steve McQueen's Bullitt. On Ford's latest Mustang Facebook page there have been over eight million 'likes' registered.

The new official right hand drive Mustang Fastback and Convertible models are being sold in the UK through the recently introduced 70 strong specialist Ford Stores network. These dealerships will also handle the new Ford Focus RS.

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Part of the initial demand from UK buyers comes from petrol-heads who love V8 American engines and their dramatic soundtrack, part of the desirability comes from the Mustang's legendary muscle-car history and part comes from the value for money pricing with its raw power and comprehensive specification and those make the high running costs easier to swallow.

Prices now start from £30,995 and rise to £34,995 for the Fastback coupe, and £34,495 to £38,495 for the Convertible, both with six speed manual transmissions. Both engines are available with a six speed automatic gearbox option which adds £1,500 to those prices. Both body styles are two doors and four seaters. The initial engine options for both body styles are a 5.0 litre V8 GT normally aspirated 416 hp, 530 Nm (391 lb.ft) petrol engine or a 2.3 litre, 4 cylinder, 317 hp, 432 Nm (319 lb.ft) turbocharged EcoBoost petrol unit.

Unlike its predecessors from 1964 onwards, the new sixth generation Mustang, built in the US at Ford's Flat Rock Plant Michigan, has been engineered from the start to include right-hand drive models.

American muscle cars are not known for their handling fineness for European customers – great in a straight-line but not so hot during cornering, and generally with a soft and sloppy suspension. But now Ford has grasped the bullet and decided that their models should be fit for global markets, the latest Mustang is claimed – by Ford – to be the most technically

advanced version ever.

It features a new chassis of high strength steel pressings, ultra high strength aluminium castings and steel tube laser welded components, all bonded together to improve rigidity by 28%. But it is still over 200 kg (441 lb) heavier than some of its German competitors, and it is bigger and wider than say an Audi TT or a BMW 2 Series Coupe, its potential competitors in terms of price. In terms of size and muscle-power the more expensive Audi RS7 Sportback, BMW 6 Series Coupe and Vauxhall's VXR8 Saloon are competitors.

The new Mustang has independent MacPherson struts suspension at the front and an independent rear multi-link system at the rear, instead of the archaic live axle and leaf springs system. Ford claim the handling has been developed to deliver European standards for high levels of balance, responsiveness and fun driving. Official European market models get Ford's Performance Pack as standard, which adds front strut braces, a thicker rear anti-roll bar and stiffer springs. Also the official Euro Mustangs get uprated 380 mm (15 in) front brakes with six pot callipers, a larger radiator and additional oil cooler over their American market cousins.

Similarly on-board user-friendly technology includes Ford's voice-activated connectivity system SYNC 2 that enables drivers to voice control audio, navigation, climate control and connected mobile phones. Also complying with European requirements are Selectable Drive Modes to help the Mustang's set-up match driver mood and purpose. On a twisty road, or a track day, a lift of the toggle switches quickly adjusts steering effort, engine response, transmission and electronic stability control settings to Normal, Sport+, Track or Snow/Wet settings. For V8 models there is also a 'Line Lock' launch control function which applies the front brakes allowing drivers to spin and warm up the rear tyres.

The latest Mustang retains the long bonnet and short rear deck design, with sleek front A posts, and steeply raked windscreen and rear C pillars – with no B pillars in between. There is a low roofline linking the two, with wide flanks to accommodate the significantly wider tracks. Retained is the iconic signature trapezoidal grille with the iconic galloping Mustang

pony positioned centrally within it. Beneath that is what Ford call's the 'shark-bite' front under-bumper. These official European cars also have daytime running lights integrated in the foglight housings and at the rear are 'tri-bar' LED taillights.

How does the new Mustang size-up? Well it's 4,784 mm (15.70 ft) in length, and wide at 1,918 mm (6.29 ft) with a height of 1,394 mm (4.57 ft) and a wheelbase of 2,720 mm (8.92 ft). With the front seats positioned for adult comfort, rear seat legroom is minimal. Access to the rear needs to be a stooping affair because of the coupe roofline – and watch out for those long two front doors, not good for UK side by side car parking. At the rear is a 332 litre (11.72 cu.ft) boot – not big, but who buys a Mustang for carrying luggage?

Inside it's a mix of modern and retro. There is a high level front fascia panel which flows around to the high waistline and smallish windows. There is a hefty three spoke steering wheel with some control buttons, plus two large instrument dials and an information panel viewed through the wheel. A common feature with other Ford European models is the 8.0-inch colour touchscreen, centrally positioned but low down in the fascia panel, which accommodates the infotainment functions, Ford Sync2 and rear view camera. It will house the optional sat-nav which strangely is not fitted as standard but is available as an option together with an uprated 12 speaker sound system, for £795. Beneath the screen are conventional ventilation, heater and air-con controls and beneath those are cheap looking chrome effect toggle switches, shades of old-school American car trim. The Convertible version has an electronically operated multi-layer fabric roof. The manual gear lever is a dimpled effect ball shaped knob – like a VW Golf GTi, and this provides a firm but short throw gearchange which isn't the slickest to use.

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Overall the interior is a blend of modern and old fixtures fittings and quality. It lacks the refinement in electronic driver aids such as adaptive or adjustable suspension settings, blind

spot monitoring and emergency radar braking found in premium brand European sports cars. But quite obviously it's the Mustang's heritage and the desire for being 'retro' that is appealing to die-hard UK customers.

The best selling 5.0 litre V8 petrol engine pumps out 416 hp and now has variable valve timing with four valves per cylinder, to meet EU6 emission levels. This slow revving unit provides 530 Nm (391 lb.ft) of torque at 4,250 rpm, so for racier driving full use is needed from the six speed manual gearbox, which I found better than the slow-changing six speed auto unit. The auto is ok for 'cruising' but not so great for 'bruising' fun driving. Top speed is 155 mph and zero to 62 mph takes 4.8 seconds, however the big car felt slower due to its bulk. There is still enough punch to 'kick-out' the rear driving wheels under hard acceleration, especially on wet roads. Officially the Combined Cycle fuel economy is 20.9 mpg but we achieved 24.3 mpg on the busy country roads around North Oxfordshire. Short bursts of acceleration brought the real-life figure down to 14 mpg, but overall the consumption quickly recovered to over 24 mpg as an average. The CO2 emissions are 299 g/km so VED road tax is in the maximum cost band at £1,120 for the First Year rate and then £515 for Year Two. Should a business executive get a Mustang as a company car then the Benefit-in-Kind tax is the maximum 37%. Insurance costs of course are high – being rated in Band 46E.

VERDICT

Overall the V8 Mustang provides a modern-day interpretation of yesteryear muscle car motoring. Yes you still get the burbling sound from the V8's exhaust, yes you still get a shove in the back from the acceleration from standstill and yes it handles in a more precise way similar to European branded muscle-cars. The ride is on the firm side but generally comfortable, it at least now corners well enough and the steering is well weighted. Overall in has not become too sanitised and that together with its iconic name, heritage and styling is proving so far to be a sales success.

When it comes to a choice of engines the 2.3 litre, four cylinder EcoBoost turbo petrol unit with 317 hp and 432 Nm (319 lb.ft) of torque saves the UK buyer £4,000 because of its

lower purchase price. Top speed is 145mph, zero to 62mph 5.8 seconds, 'Official' Combined fuel economy figure for the manual gearbox is 34.4 mpg, (real life on test was 22.1 mpg), CO2 emissions are 179 g/km, VED road tax is £500, reducing to £270 for Year Two, company car tax is again 37% and insurance is Band 43E. For those not interested in outright performance, but want the styling of the Fastback or Convertible Mustang bodies, this might just be the best 'cruising' choice, purely in terms of purchase and running costs. But it felt a bit weak in the engine department, it lacks the muscle of the petrol V8 and the exhaust soundtrack lacked the 'theatre' of what a Mustang should offer.

For: First and fastest official right hand drive Mustang yet, excellent value for money, high specification, retro name and styling, roomy front interior, comfortable ride, well balanced handling, high demand so far from petrol-head UK customers.

Against: Thirsty V8 engine, high running costs and taxes, feels wide on UK roads, wide-opening long doors make it difficult to park in side by side parking spaces, auto gearbox provides slow and inconsistent gearchanges, the 2.3 litre petrol engine lacks the soundtrack 'theatre' of the V8 and so it's more a cruiser than performance bruiser – but it is cheaper to buy and run.



MILESTONES AND WHEELS-ALIVE TECH. SPEC. IN BRIEF:

Ford Mustang Fastback 5.0 V8 GT Manual (best selling model).

Engine: 5.0 litre, V8, normally aspirated petrol, 421 hp, 530 Nm (391 lb.ft) of torque at 4,250rpm.

Transmission: Six speed auto with manual mode, multi-mode traction settings, rear

wheel drive.

Performance:

0-62mph: 4.8 seconds.

Top speed: 155mph.

Fuel consumption: Combined Cycle 20.9 mpg (on test over busy roads, 24.3 mpg).

Emissions and taxation: CO2, 299 g/km, VED road tax £1,120/£515, BIK company car tax 37%.

Insurance Group: 46E.

Warranty: 3 years/60,000 miles.

Dimensions/capacities: L 4,784 mm (15.70 ft), W 1,916 mm (6.29 ft), H 1,394 mm (4.57 ft), 2 doors/4 seats, 332 litres (11.72 cu.ft) boot capacity.

Price: £34,995.