

2010 Mustang gets 'freshening' of design, interior improvements

by Mark_Maynard

The young, muscular man had stopped to check out the 2010 Mustang GT test car, painted Sunset Gold and optioned with the panorama glass roof. It was still about three months before the 2010 would be on sale and few had been seen on streets, but much has been written about it in magazines.

The 2010 Ford Mustang will hit the market this spring sporting a significant "freshening" of exterior design and interior improvements. Photo courtesy of Ford Motor Co) SPECS BOX

2010 Ford Mustang GT Premium

Body style: Compact, four-passenger, rear-wheel-drive coupe or convertible

Engine: aluminum, SOHC 4.6-liter V-8, with three valves per cylinder and variable camshaft timing

Horsepower: 315 at 5,750 rpm

Torque: 325 foot-pounds at 4,500 rpm

Transmission: five-speed manual or optional five-speed automatic

EPA fuel economy estimates: 15 mpg city, 23 highway (15/23 manual); 87 octane recommended

Trunk space: 13.4 cubic feet

Length/wheelbase: 188.1/107.1 inches

Curb weight: 3,454 pounds (3,401 manual)

FEATURES

Standard equipment includes: remote locking, LED three-blink sequential taillamps, body-color exterior mirrors, fog lamps

Safety features include: front and side air bags, front belt pretensioners, AdvanceTrac with electronic stability control and all-speed traction control, anti-lock brakes

CHASSIS

Brakes: four-wheel power discs with optional four-sensor, four-channel anti-lock braking system; 12-inch front discs, 12.4-inch rear

Steering: power-assisted rack and pinion; 37.7-foot turning circle

Suspension: front MacPherson struts with tubular stabilizer bar; rear, three-link solid axle with coil springs, Panhard rod and solid stabilizer bar

Tires and wheels: P235/55ZR 17-inch Performance A/S on steel wheels; optional P235/50ZR 18-inch polished aluminum wheels or 18-inch premium aluminum wheels

PRICING

Base: \$31,845, including \$850 freight charge; price as tested, \$39,480

Options on test car: five-speed automatic transmission, \$995; 19-inch painted wheels, \$695; glass roof, \$1,995; HID headlights, \$525; Security Package, \$395; Comfort Group, \$595; electronics package, includes navigation system and dual-zone air conditioning, \$2,195; rearview camera, \$240

Where assembled: Flat Rock, Mich. I introduced myself and volunteered some observations about the 2010 model, comparing it with the new Camaro. A logical association, I thought, because both cars will go on sale at about the same time this spring. April 17 marks the Mustang's debut in 1964.

Among my bullet points:

â€” Mustang has a solid rear axle. The Camaro has an independent, multilink rear suspension.

â€” Mustang has a five-speed manual or a five-speed automatic transmission. The Camaro has a six-speed manual or six-speed automatic with sport mode and steering wheel paddle shifters.

â€” The Mustang V-6 has 210 horsepower. The Camaro V-6 will have 300-plus, or about the same as or more than the Mustang GT V-8.

I didn't intend for my words to come off as "Nyah, nyah, nyah," but they might have.

"You're an auto writer?" said the young man in loud tones. "You are the DEVIL!"

Then he caught a breath, jammed a full clip in the chamber and pulled the trigger on a barrage that went something like: "You go ahead and tach up that Camaro to 4,500 rpm and when you dump the clutch and splatter the rear end all over the blacktop, don't come crying to me."

His words didn't stumble or stray, each one a shiny hollow-point bullet aimed at the heart.

But I winged him on the horsepower.

"That's why mine has a supercharger," he said, and our conversation was over.

The 2010 Mustang looks like a complete redesign, but it is a significant "freshening" of exterior design and interior improvements.

By making such cost-effective changes to the 2010 Mustang, Ford also will hold the line on pricing. While the entry-level Camaro starts at about \$23,000, a comparable Mustang will start at \$21,845. The Mustang GT (V-8) starts at \$28,845. The GT Premium test car was almost \$40,000 with nearly all available options.

The Premium package, \$3,000 and available for V-6 or V-8, adds such extras as Sirius satellite radio, ambient lighting (foot wells, door sills and more), satin aluminum instrument panel trim, upgraded interior trim and Shaker 500 audio system. If this Mustang is your dream car, you will want this package.

PERFORMANCE

The V-6 is a fit package with 210 hp and 240 foot-pounds of torque. Four wheel disc brakes — 11.8-inch at the rear - are very capable. But ABS is optional on both models.

Horsepower for the GT is up by five, but curb weight is also up a few pounds, so it's probably a wash in feel of acceleration force.

The 315-horsepower at 5,750 rpm isn't as important as the 325 foot-pounds of torque at 4,500 rpm. Put your foot down and this pony car pulls at the reins. It wants to run.

The five-speed automatic transmission works smoothly enough, but it doesn't offer a manual-shift mode or steering wheel shift buttons. I use this shift function, but not everyone does.

Ford was still sweating the fuel-economy numbers at the end of January, but it expects the Mustang V-6 to beat the Challenger V-6, which is rated 17/25. The Camaro V-6 was hoping to be certified for 27 mpg highway.

SOLID REAR WHAT?

The improved ride quality between an '09 and the 2010 Mustang is instantly noted in a test drive.

But, OK, if you are going to drag-race your Mustang, you might not want an independent rear suspension. An independent rear end costs more and weighs more, but if you drive your Mustang the way most people do, the IRS can be smoother riding. The Mustang's solid rear axle still gives an occasional clunk over bumps, but there is a minimum of head toss over speed bumps or when pulling into driveways.

The 33.4-foot turning circle of the V-6 is a proud accomplishment, and the GT is no Bigfoot at 37.7 feet. The Honda S2000 roadster is almost 26 inches shorter, but it has a turning circle of 35.4 feet.

Inside, there is noticeable refinement in good-looking dashboard plastic and other soft-touch materials. Assembly and alignment of panels and trim pieces are accurate to within fractions of millimeters, Ford says.

The dashboard design still has some influence from the 1960s. Lighted gauges are a modern adaptation, but the half arc of the 140-mph speedometer is packed with hash marks for speeds. It's a guess to find 25 mph.

Ford's Sync system for voice-activated phone and audio controls continues to get easier to use.

The ride height is comfortable for old guys and the cabin has less wind noise at speed than before. But it's still not quiet — there's plenty of good sound to be heard from the V-8 and the ring of the pipes.

Sightlines are good over the "powerdome" hood and over the shoulder, aided by little corner windows.

The panoramic glass roof, \$1,995, is unique — and not available on Camaro. The tinted, reflective glass keeps the cabin cooler on hot days than a steel roof; air-conditioning energy is 20 percent more efficient. A manually operated roller blind controls the amount of light in the cabin, and a layer of sound-absorbent vinyl is sandwiched in the special glass to trim noise, vibration and harshness.

The roof is a pricey option and one that has to be seen to be appreciated — or rejected.

For everything Mustang isn't, it does the important things very well. It is comfortable, easy to live with and it gets the blood pumping. Ford has tended to this enduring piece of history and continues to make it better.

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