

DRIVE BUYS / By Jonathan Welsh

Adding Muscle to a Mainstay

WHEN TIM LUPSKI heard Ford planned to build a 500-horsepower version of its Mustang, he put down \$1,500 to reserve one—and was willing to pay \$12,000 above the \$48,000 sticker price. That was a year ago.

But as the delivery date approached, the Mustang Shelby

**FORD  
SHELBY GT500**

GT500's price kept rising, says Mr. Lupski, a systems analyst for an electric utility. By early June, he adds, the dealer slapped a \$25,000 premium onto the price, bringing the total tab to about \$73,000. That is when he decided to take back his deposit and pass on the new vehicle.

Fast, limited-production cars—from the Chevrolet SSR convertible pickup truck to the exotic two-seat Lamborghini Gallardo—often have such premiums attached to their retail prices by dealers when they first arrive in showrooms. But the GT500 is based on Ford's bread-and-butter muscle car, the Mustang GT, which can be had for \$25,000. We wondered if such a car could be dressed up enough to justify the base price of \$40,930 (\$45,755 for the convertible), much less a huge markup.

From the outside, the GT500 is definitely more of an attention-getter than everyday Mustangs are. Our white test car had stripes almost everywhere we looked—stretching across its hood, roof and rear deck, plus more on the lower



**Earning its stripes?**

*The Shelby GT500 has the looks and power of a road warrior, but it comes up a bit short in terms of agility.*

edge of its flanks. The larger grille and more angular headlight frames of its modified front end make the car look like it is snarling. And then there are the sculpted cobra emblems on the front fenders and grille. Our 2-year-old loved those emblems, though he initially called them "worms."

**An Attention-Getter**

Style changes are far less pronounced inside the GT, however. While the cabin is attractive and comfortable, it is made up of the same hard, cheap-feeling plastic used in garden-variety Mustangs. It also has the same half-powered, half-manual adjustments for the driver's seat that have annoyed us in other Mustangs. The bottom seat

cushion moves back and up and down electrically, but a clunky lever controls reclining. We prefer all manual or all power.

But what we really wanted to see was how it felt to drive this souped-up Mustang. Despite a beefy eight-cylinder engine, it seemed pretty tame as we drove through the city and suburbs on errands. We expected a stiff clutch that would make stop-and-go driving tiring, but found the lightly sprung pedal easy to use.

Pressing the throttle aggressively, however, brings out the beast in the Shelby Mustang. Its supercharger, a device that pumps extra air and fuel into

the engine, emits a whining sound, and the rear tires chirp as they fight for traction. The car surges forward with a roar and reaches 60 miles an hour in about 4½ seconds. Brute power and straight-line speed help the new Mustang feel like its 1960s ancestors.

**Cornering Problems**

That old-time feel wasn't so effective when the GT500 had to handle corners. Its solid rear axle keeps it from hugging the road like such high-powered rivals as the Chevrolet Corvette and BMW M3, which have independent rear suspensions. And while the Mustang handled crisply on smooth surfaces, it felt nervous as its rear end skittered over midcorner bumps.

We think its 3,900-pound weight, which seems excessive, also hurt its overall agility.

Those price premiums for the GT500 probably won't last, but even without them the car costs nearly as much as the Corvette and M3, which have a more refined feel on the road and better interior appointments. While driving the Mustang was enjoyable, its price seemed out of line and would be hard to justify, even for buyers who are shopping strictly for a fun, fast car.

*Jonathan Welsh answers questions about automobiles in "Me and My Car," a column in Wednesday's Personal Journal section. Email questions to mecar@wsj.com*

  
OWNER'S MANUAL

**Performance Anxiety**

Here's how the Ford Shelby GT500 compares with other modern-day muscle cars.

MAKE/MODEL	BASE PRICE	ENGINE/HORSEPOWER	ACCELERATION 0-60 MPH (SEC.)	WEIGHT (POUNDS)	EPA MILEAGE (CITY/HIGHWAY)
<b>Ford Shelby GT500</b>	\$40,930	V8/500	4.5	3,920	15/21
<b>Chevrolet Corvette</b>	\$43,690	V8/400	4.2	3,179	18/28
<b>Dodge Charger SRT8</b>	\$35,320	V8/425	5.2	4,160	14/20
<b>Pontiac GTO</b>	\$31,290	V8/400	5.0	3,725	17/25
<b>BMW M3</b>	\$48,900	6-cyl./333	4.8	3,415	16/24

**Backseat Driver**

Here's what we liked—and didn't—about the Ford Shelby GT500.

	WHAT WORKS	WHAT DOESN'T
<b>The Outside</b>	More impressive than its speed, Mustang's alloy wheels are among the prettiest we've seen.	Wing-like spoiler blocked our rear view and made us think the trunk was open.
<b>The Inside</b>	Dashboard's charcoal-gray plastic panels and chrome-rimmed gauges recall earlier Mustangs.	For the extra money, we think Ford could've found better-feeling, higher-quality materials.
<b>Under the Hood</b>	Supercharger force-feeds fuel into the V8 engine, helping to generate 500 horsepower.	Under heavy acceleration the mechanically busy motor whined more than roared.
<b>Behind the Wheel</b>	Despite its power, the Shelby was pleasantly tame to drive around town and in traffic.	When driving quickly through tight turns, the car feels heavy and just a bit clumsy.
<b>Over the Top</b>	Rear-seat access is surprisingly easy for a two-door. There's plenty of room for a child seat.	We wonder how the smallish Mustang's weight climbed to nearly two performance-sapping tons.

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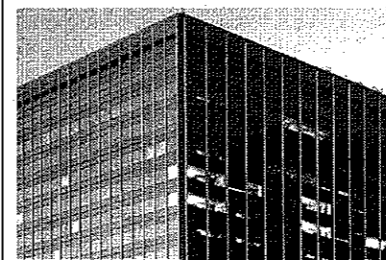
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