

ELECTRONICALLY
REPRINTED FROM

JULY 2006 AUTOMOBILEMAG.COM

Automobile

MUSCLE RULES AGAIN

- ▶ BEHIND THE MEGABUCK PRICES
- ▶ AN INSIDER'S BUYING SECRETS
- ▶ 17 CARS FOR EVERY BUDGET



SHELBY GT500

DRIVEN FINALLY, THE
MUSTANG WE'VE BEEN
WAITING FOR

SHELBY GT500



HOLY The GT500 is the Mustang that
kick-starts your inner hooligan.
500 hp can do that to you.
SHELBY!

BY DON SHERMAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW YEADON



The classic tunes still rock when Carroll Shelby grooves the melody and Ford's SVT garage band hammers out the rhythm. The group's latest riff is a pair of Ford Shelby GT500s—one coupe, one convertible—capable of rattling root beer mugs on cruise night and spanking Chevrolet Corvettes on the drag strip. They're classic muscle cars from the eight-track era tuned up for another go: bragging rights to 500 hp, room for double dating, and the security blanket of a full factory warranty.

Thanks to lessons learned during Ford's GT supercar project, the power comes easily. As we reported a year ago, one howling super-

charger, four whirring camshafts, thirty-two valves, and 5.4 liters of ripping V-8 are jammed beneath the Shelby's humped-up aluminum hood. Unfortunately, those waiting patiently for the GT500 will be digging deeper into their pockets than we previously forecast. Part of Ford's Way Forward belt tightening is a Special Vehicle Team responsible for earning its keep. Although complete pricing hasn't yet been announced, the base Shelby GT500 coupe starts at \$41,950, and the droptop should cost about \$46,000, including gas-guzzler taxes.

If 500 hp for \$42,000 sounds to you like a half-priced BMW M5, we need to revisit the inner workings of a muscle car. Sacred blueprints from the 1960s are honored here, so alterations to the basic Mustang are inten-

tionally modest in scope. The chassis still rides on struts up front and a solid axle in back. Take solace in smoky burnouts and the towering trophies you'll haul home every Saturday night from your local drag strip.

One fundamental muscle car requirement is looking hot with the hood open or closed. Here, the Shelby GT500 sets new standards. The chintzy plastic "beauty" cover that manufacturers habitually deploy over a messy engine bay thankfully is absent. In its place is a massive Roots-type Eaton supercharger standing tall for all to admire. The cylinder-head covers are genuine finned-aluminum castings sporting "powered by SVT" identification. The heads themselves are the exact same free-breathing, four-valve, twin-cam components that help the Ford GT's V-8 wring out 550 hp.



CRANK UP THE BIG V-8, CLICK THE SIX-SPEED INTO FIRST,

The skunk stripes are standard, but both the top decorations and the side stickums can be deleted. Above right: Leather is standard, and a two-tone treatment is optional. Below: Crested San Francisco intersections with wheels in flight is Mustang SOP.





cherries in a Vegas slot machine. Those serious about speeding should select the evil black or super stealthy alloy (charcoal bordering on black) monotone exterior hues.

The interior is more grown-up. The steering wheel reach is a touch long, and the front seats' lower bolsters are too squishy for optimum lateral support, but there is convincing evidence that designers used this opportunity to improve on the already smart Mustang cockpit. The funky Falcon-esque gauge numerals have been replaced by contemporary scale markings that are more legible. The tach has been relocated to the right side of the cluster to tighten shift-hand-to-redline-monitoring-eye coordination. The dial rings are matte-finished instead of blindingly bright chrome. A nice grade of leather upholstery accented by red stitching is standard. Take

AND A TOUCH OF THE GAS WILL ROCK YOU BACK TO 1968.

The only scrimping is buried deep in the engine bay. The block is an iron casting that has served faithfully under the hoods of countless Ford pickups and SUVs. SVT engineers also spared the expense and complexity of the Ford GT's dry-sump lubrication system, although they did at least fill their 5.4-liter, long-stroke cylinder case with premium moving parts: the steel crankshaft, I-beam-section connecting rods, and aluminum pistons are all forged components. The engine delivers its 500 hp at 6000 rpm. The broad torque curve peaks with 480 lb-ft at 4500 rpm.

The shark mouth feeding the hungry engine is opened wide enough to ingest roadkill. Twin hood vents, a horizontal splitter attached to the front air dam, and a rear spoiler help reduce aerodynamic lift. Goodyear Eagle F1 Supercar tires—255/45WR-18 in front, 285/40WR-18 in back—mounted to 9.5-inch-wide, cast aluminum wheels inspired by the Ford GT's optional forged rims provide an appropriately meaty stance. Four-piston Brembo calipers clamping fourteen-inch rotors peek through the front wheel spokes.

To prevent onlookers from confusing this with an ordinary 'Stang, there's a liberal sprinkling from Ford's jewelry box. We counted seven snake emblems, seven SVT logos, four GT500 badges, three Shelby escutcheons, and two Ford ovals adorning interior and exterior surfaces. In lieu of a Mustang badge, there's a silk-screened horse galloping across the windshield. Le Mans-style skunk stripes are exclusive to the coupe. If that's too over-the-top for your tastes, you can delete them. Choosing the delete option is a smart move, because the white-striped red coupe we drove on back roads in Northern California popped up on law enforcement radar more vividly than three

your pick between an all-charcoal coloring or the striking two-tone treatment with red center panels on the doors and seats surrounded by charcoal borders.

Only three options are offered: Sirius satellite radio, a Shaker 1000 sound system, and a premium interior package. As the name boasts, the audio gear pumps 1000 watts through ten speakers and can play AM, FM, MP3, or CD source material (the last via a six-disc changer). The upgraded trim adds stitched leather covers for the top of the instrument panel, the armrests, and the center console, plus an electrochromatic rearview mirror and aluminum pedal covers.

Crank up the big V-8, click the faithful Tremec six-speed into first, and one touch of the gas is all it takes to rock you back to 1968, when a Shelby GT500KR (King of the Road) Mustang cost \$4473. Back then, the 7.0-liter Cobra Jet V-8 delivered a bazookalike torque hit without waiting for the tach needle to climb the dial. Today, an even more forceful smack is provided by a medium-size V-8 pressurized to 9.0 psi by the belt-driven blower.

Unless you've got the Shaker cranked up with Bob Seger hammering out "Old Time Rock & Roll," there's no escaping the sound track revolution. Thanks to the government's pass-by noise standards, heavy exhaust rumble is a thing of the past. Instead of the horny honk of the Cobra Jet's Holley four-barrel sucking holes in the ozone layer, you get a blower serenade with the level of whine directly proportional to the engine's rpm. Chief engineer Jay O'Connell acknowledges that resonance chambers capable of quieting the yowl were considered but rejected because of the void they left in the Shelby GT500's character.

SVT chassis engineers had their work cut

SHELBY GT500

out dealing with the extra 340 pounds heaped onto the front tires. The added weight and stiff-sidewall tires collaborate to provide crisp on-center steering feel and sharp initial response. Since a complete overhaul of the suspension systems was out of the question, the SVT crew focused on retuning every bushing, damper calibration, bar size, and spring rate for this new assignment. What they achieved is commendable: a cornering limit boosted from the Mustang GT's 0.87 g to the GT500's world-class 0.95 g without trashing the ride or bombarding the cockpit with road noise.

A ballerina's balance is too much to expect of any true muscle car, so there is ample understeer when the Goodyears slide. However, a few laps circulating California Speedway's tight road course revealed a strategy that

Of course, there's a reason why few live axles have made the trip to the twenty-first century via automobile. Try as engineers might to make them behave, the unsprung weight issue eventually creeps out of its hiding place. The Shelby GT500 behaves while attacking smooth road courses, and it's a model of deportment on the drag strip, but one circumstance does hitch its stride: Steer smoothly into a fast bend, and all systems feel nicely poised until you encounter a significant heave in the road. When hundreds of pounds of unsprung mass are so excited, the rear axle momentarily loses track of what it was doing. There's a wonky feeling that must be addressed with steering corrections. Because of its Achilles' heel, the musclebound Mustang is unlikely to pose any serious threat to BMW's eminence.



THE GT500 BEHAVES WHILE ATTACKING SMOOTH ROADS

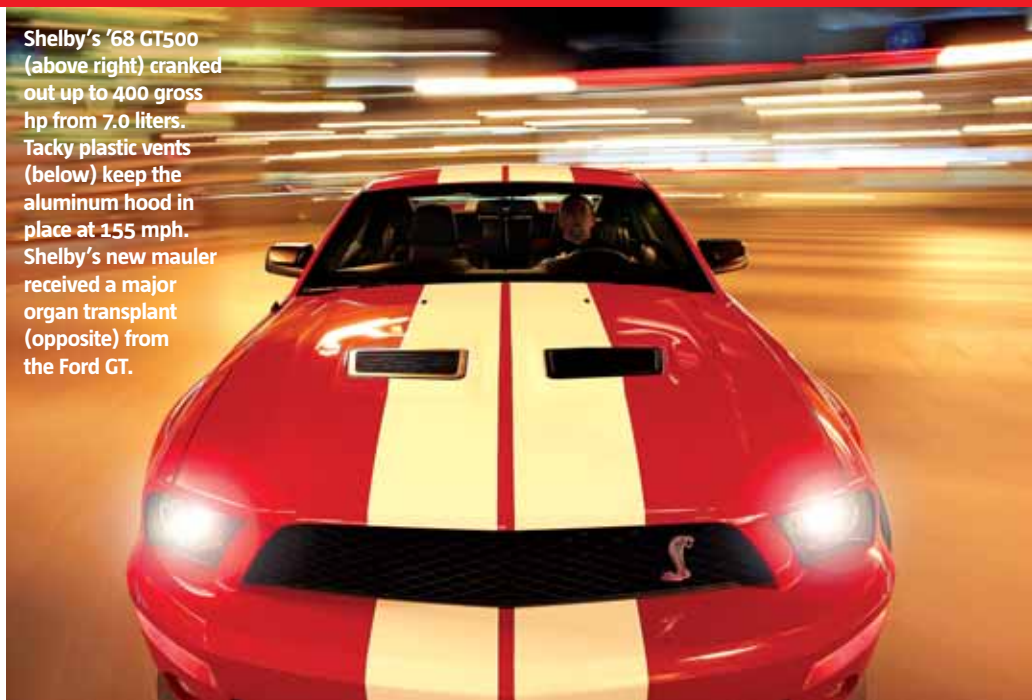
keeps the Shelby from tripping over its front feet: complete the hard braking with the steering dead straight, turn in gently, then add throttle well before the apex to encourage the rear tires to shoulder their share of the load. Plan B is to hurl the car into the bend, adding full throttle to hang the tail out. That works, but it's neither the tidy nor the quick way around any corner.

The rear axle behaves surprisingly well on a smooth road by obediently following the front end's lead until you get frisky with the throttle. When hammered by the full dint of engine torque during a sprint to the 155 mph speed limiter, the rear suspension is even more impressive. One lateral (Panhard rod) and three trailing links locate the axle securely without allowing windup, power hop, or the other hindrances some of us remember from our ill-spent drag-racing days.

Since there is no camber or toe change in back, you can burn rubber with this car more proficiently than the Goodyear factory's incinerator. With or without an aggressive clutch engagement, the rear tires melt in first gear on demand. Since this is a favorite pastime for the muscle car afflicted, O'Connell specified a driveline durability test requirement of 1000 drag-strip starts without cracks or failures.

Two launch modes are available. Switch off the traction control and modulate the throttle like a man, or let smart electronics minimize the wheel spin. With practice, you might be able to match the chips, but beating them is nigh impossible. Our best run hauled us to 60 mph in 4.9 seconds and through the quarter-mile in 13.1 seconds at a heady 115 mph. No stock Cobra Jet could touch those figures. Nor could any Mustang built in 1968 match the Shelby GT500's 155 mph without shedding body parts or achieving flight.

Shelby's '68 GT500 (above right) cranked out up to 400 gross hp from 7.0 liters. Tacky plastic vents (below) keep the aluminum hood in place at 155 mph. Shelby's new mauler received a major organ transplant (opposite) from the Ford GT.



ALL THE OTHER PRETTY HORSES

MUSTANG



The poverty pony, the base 'Stang starts at \$19,835. The 210-hp V-6 isn't bad, but the looks are plain.

PONY PACKAGE



Lower body stripes, seventeen-inch wheels, and foglights do a lot to dress up the base car.



Of course, the truly faithful don't give a hoot about unsprung weight or BMWs. In their eyes, the Shelby GT500 is the muscle car's second coming, a viable heir to the Ford GT's throne, and convincing evidence that SVT is here to stay. A few are putting their money where their heart lives by paying West Coast dealers \$25,000 extra just to be first in line.

Their passion is understandable. The original muscle cars were one-trick ponies that ran out of options at the end of the quarter mile. This new one goes fast, stops well, corners hard enough to scare dates, and should be comfortable to live with on a daily basis. But best of all, the Ford Shelby GT500 makes Chevy and Dodge fans purple with envy. ■



AND IS A MODEL OF DEPARTMENT ON THE DRAG STRIP.



FORD SHELBY GT500

THE NUMBERS

Price (base/as tested)	\$41,950/\$45,000, est.
Engine	Supercharged & intercooled 5.4-liter DOHC 32-valve V-8
Power	500 hp @ 6000 rpm
Torque	480 lb-ft @ 4500 rpm
Peak boost	9.0 psi
Redline	6250 rpm
0-60 mph	4.9 sec
0-100 mph	10.4 sec
0-120 mph	14.7 sec
0-140 mph	21.8 sec
1/4-mile	13.1 sec @ 115 mph
30-70 mph passing	3.6 sec
Peak g	0.64 g
Cornering l/r	0.95/0.95 g
Braking, 70-0 mph	169 ft
Mph in gears	(1) 49, (2) 81, (3) 110, (4) 145, (5) 155, (6) 155
Weight	3893 lb
Weight dist. f/r	57.8/42.2%

STAMPEDE



Another V-6 package, limited to 500 cars for Oklahoma and Texas. Adds hood stripes but not horns.

GT



Serious Mustangs start here. Seventeen-inch wheels and dual antiroll bars join the 300-hp V-8.

GT/CALIFORNIA SPECIAL



Spiffs up the GT with side stripes, fender scoops, and revised lower bodywork. Available nationwide.

SHELBY GT-H



Adds 25 hp and a stiffer suspension—and an automatic. Rent it for about \$125 a day.