

The Creation of the Mustang

Graham and Debra Coombes went to the 50th Mustang Birthday Celebration in Las Vegas in April 2014. There they met Robert Fria who had written a book call Mustang Genesis, we purchased the book and Robert signed it for us. The book was about the people behind the creation of the Mustang which is full of information on how the greatest American car was made. I would like to share some of the interesting information out of this book.

Lee Iacocca had badgered Henry Ford 2nd to allow him to put together a team to produce a car that would top all Ford sales, Henry was reluctant as they had lost 250 million dollars from the Edsel sales however Henry told Lee “put together a team and show me what you come up with but if it fails your ass is gone”. Unbeknown to Henry, Lee had secretly put a team together a month earlier and was well on the way to designing a two door, 4 seated sports car for the market. Lee got two teams to make clay models; to save costs one team would put their idea on one side of the car other on the other side. After they had chosen the one most suited they then had to convince the bean counters for a budget. They were told they had to make sales of 85,000 units just to break even. Lee Iacocca was convinced they would sell 200,000 units but when sales flooded in it was more like 360,000 topping all manufactured cars sold in first year and that record still stands today, in fact it is in the Guinness Book of Records.

The first pre-production cars made on the assembly line was Monday, February 10th 1964 it was the day after most of America had watched the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show the night before. The floor pans on the car were made from modified Falcon and a number of interior parts were from 63/64 Fairlane. To keep cost to a minimum the only colours offered were Rangoon Red, Wimbledon White or Caspian Blue.

They only offered Coupe or Convertible, 260 V8 or 200 six cylinder. Robert Fria (writer of the book Mustang Genesis) owns unit number 100002 the second car off the line to have a tag number. The first one was sent to a dealership in Canada. Lee Iacocca wanted all dealerships to have cars in their showrooms prior to the launch so the first car went to the dealerships furthest away. And the story goes an over excited salesman sold it to Captain Stanley Tucker a week before the launch.

Henry Ford 2nd gave a Red Convertible to his sister (to keep under wraps) a month before releasing the cars for sale however her son, not knowing this, decided to take mums new car out to town for lunch. It was parked in a car park building when a writer for Daily News spotted the Mustang, it made front page news the next day.

In 1963 the team designing the car had to come up with some names, they narrowed it down to six: Bronco,Puma, Cheetah, Colt, Mustang and Cougar most of the team elected to go with Cougar however Lee Iacocca felt Mustang was more appropriate as he described the car “moving fast through the countryside” so it was settled, the new two door 4 seated sports car will be called The Mustang. The emblem on the front started out as a horse galloping wildly unfortunately it needed to be changed as it did not fit into the already designed corral so it was changed to a running free horse.

The marketing plan was to target college graduates, baby boomers and Vietnam vets returning and as luck would have it Americas economy was good so government had announced tax cuts, this all added to increase sales.

200 top radio disc jockeys were invited to the Dearbourn plant to test drive the new car they were each given a fact sheet and asked to ad lib on air about the car. However the main target would be The World Trade Fair, April 13th 1964 where 2000 press, radio and TV newsmen assembled to be addressed by Lee Iacocca himself, it was a success.

Lee Iacocca had achieved something no other employee of Ford had ever done yet after all that Ford never gave Lee a Mustang to own; his wife bought him one in 1966 it was a GT Fastback.

This was the beginning of what we now know as the Legend of the Mustang. In 18 months Ford had sold over one million units it took Chevrolet 40 years to sell one million of the same make and model.