



MUSTANG DRIVER Shows You How To:



BUY Right!

STOP THINKING OF CLASSIC MUSTANGS AS A FINANCIAL INVESTMENT. INSTEAD, THINK OF THEM AS AN INVESTMENT IN YOURSELF



TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY JIM SMART

DO YOU REMEMBER THE DAY WHEN WE BOUGHT CLASSIC CARS FOR FUN AND NOSTALGIA? WE BOUGHT THEM TO DRIVE AND ENJOY. WE PURCHASED THEM TO RESTORE AND MAKE LIKE NEW AGAIN. WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE VALUE OF OUR OWN HAPPINESS? HAPPINESS IS A VALUE YOU CAN ENJOY RIGHT AWAY, SO WHY WAIT? WE'VE STOPPED LEARNING HOW TO HAVE FUN WITH CLASSIC MUSTANGS AND

INSTEAD, CONCERNED OURSELVES WITH THEIR WORTH WHEN IT'S TIME TO SELL. FORGET ABOUT IT. EAT DESSERT FIRST.

Buying a classic Mustang isn't what it was 30 years ago. In those days, we bought classic Mustangs cheap, restored them, had fun with them, and played with them in our garages and driveways. And when they were finished, we cruised all the popular spots and took them to shows. We also drove them to work, school, and for weekend getaways.

We've forgotten how to have fun with classic Mustangs because our vision has become clouded by auction blocks and the warped, delusional perception of a Mustang's value. Your humble six or V-8, run-of-the-mill Mustang hardtop is not worth \$35,000 anymore because this is not the 1990s. That's the bad news if you're selling one and the good news if you are buying and your expectations are reasonable.

By the same token you're not going to get into a Boss 302, Hi-Po GT, Shelby GT500, Saleen, or an SVO for chump change. These rare and desirable high-end rides will always hold their value and do not come cheap, even in the worst of times. But there are nicely restored Mustang drivers you can get into for reasonable money. And on the other hoof, a high-end restomod with a Coyote engine, six-speed, and expensive underpinnings will cost you plenty.

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ABOVE LEFT Few things excite the senses more than a hot Mustang muscle car. But don't let that get in the way of common sense. This '68 1/2 Cobra Jet fastback looks like a nice enough car, but look at the quarter panel replacement. It is not a full quarter panel, but instead a repair panel. Is the engine a real CJ and is it matching numbers? Because muscle cars often have a history of blown engines and accidents, they mandate your close attention as a buyer. Believe nothing and check everything. **ABOVE RIGHT** There are Mustang buys all over the place, which makes them plentiful and gives you options. There are a lot of misconceptions when it comes to sale cars. On the windshield it says "Florida Car", which doesn't always mean rust and damage free. Anywhere you have a lot of rain and high humidity you are going to have rust. Not all California cars are rust free either, because California has a lot of coastline and salty air.



When you are buying from a private seller, you have more options in learning about the car. Respectfully ask questions and seek truth. Car projects make excellent buys if everything is there and the car has good bones.

Before you click on the classifieds and begin canvassing the continent for your dream ride, first come to grips with how much you have to spend and what's realistic for your budget. Most importantly, remain within your budget. Do let your eyes and dreams get larger than your wallet.

The Chase

Few things are more thrilling than the excitement of looking for a Mustang. But don't let the chase and adrenaline get in the way of common sense. Exercise caution and really think it through before handing the seller a deposit. In your search for a classic Mustang, it is wiser to slow your pace and study the prospect in great detail. We can tell you from 40 years of Mustang-buying experience,

never judge a ride by its appearance. Look beneath the surface and get into detail. We have witnessed seemingly perfect specimens which seemed like good prospects but, with a little research, wound up being the worst possible choices. Fake GTs. Bogus Bosses. Rebodyed Shelsbys. Front or rear clips. Altered vehicle identification numbers. Bait and switch. You name it. This is why you must examine every detail. And if you encounter a seller who won't allow a detailed inspection by a trusted technician of your choice, move on.

Trust, But Verify

Evaluating a prospect takes getting past surface detail. Does the car have good bones? Put the car up on a lift and look around underneath with a bright flashlight. If there's a mountain of undercoating, chances are quite good the seller is hiding something. Examine structural members like frame rails and caps, the floor pan, torque boxes, trunk pan, shock towers and aprons, and rocker panels. All of the factory seams should be intact and spot-welded. If you have floor pan seams where there are not ordinarily floor pan seams, the car has suffered from rust or accident repair.

Gain access to a Ford factory Shop Manual that has body dimensions and measure a prospective buy as the manual suggests. These measurements help determine if the car has accident damage or not. Visual inspection of all major structural elements, inner fender aprons, and the radiator support is imperative. If the car has had a frontal collision, it will be apparent in the sheet metal and welding technique. The entire frontend assembly ahead of the firewall was spot welded at the factory. If you



Beware of what you cannot see. This was a floor pan completely covered by carpet. With the carpet removed, it was a shocker. Rust repair is acceptable if the repairs were performed properly. All sheet metal replacement should be performed at the factory seams, not a cut and slice job performed with a cutting torch.

see wire-feed or stick welding evidence, best to move on. Ideally, you will invest in a Mustang that has never been smashed or experienced extensive rust repair. Rust-free is hard to find, especially if you live in the north and east.

Engine & Driveline

Examination should always include the engine and driveline. Engine inspection should include a visual for leaks, cracks, and bad seals. You need both a compression and cylinder leak-down test. A compression test tells only a partial story. A leak-down test with compressed air demonstrates the cylinder's ability to hold working compression versus static compression.

What does the coolant look like and does it have a healthy ethylene-glycol mix with

BE METHODICAL IN YOUR SEARCH FOR THAT MUSTANG DREAM CAR. SURFACE DETAIL MAKES FOR GREAT EYEWASH, BUT IT'S WHAT'S BENEATH THE BRIGHT RED PAINT AND GT GRAPHICS THAT COUNTS. STRUCTURAL DAMAGE, RUST, AND UNRELIABLE MECHANICALS CAN TAKE AWAY FROM BEAUTY IN SHORT ORDER. THE CAR MUST RUN AS GOOD AS IT LOOKS.



Most classic Mustangs have had new suspensions by now, but not all of them. On the surface, a prospective buy may appear neat as a pin. Beneath the fresh paint and original demeanor, it may be unsafe.



There are smoking deals on buckets of rust, but most of the time they're never a good deal at any price – including free. Severe accident damage and rust-through are rarely a good idea even if it's a high-end Boss, Shelby, or GT. Labor and material rates at most reputable body shops make rust buckets and totals a bad idea. You can spend \$40,000 trying to save a \$20,000 car.

water? If it is 100-percent water, count on unacceptable levels of cooling system corrosion and expense. What does the engine oil look like? Is it dirty? Does it smell? If both, the engine likely has excessive piston ring blow-by and either high mileage or poor maintenance.

Automatic transmission fluid should be pink or, at the worst, pink with a hint of brown. Any browning of automatic transmission fluid means burned clutches and bands from slippage. Manual transmissions should shift smoothly with crisp clutch operation. Any chatter or slippage indicates poor adjustment or a bad clutch.

With the removable carrier 8- and 9-inch differentials, checking fluid isn't easy. In fact, these rear ends are typically "life of the rear end fluid" because lube is hard to change. In any case, examine fluid cleanliness and quantity. Hit the



Classic 1965-70 Mustang Bendix power steering is notorious for leakage. Rare is the ride that does not leak. Most of the time, leaks are caused by poor fitting seating. Power ram and control valve leakage are less common.

road and listen to the rear end. Bad axle bearings will be a steady groaning with wheel rotation. Ring and pinion issues will waver in noise as you lean on the throttle and back off.

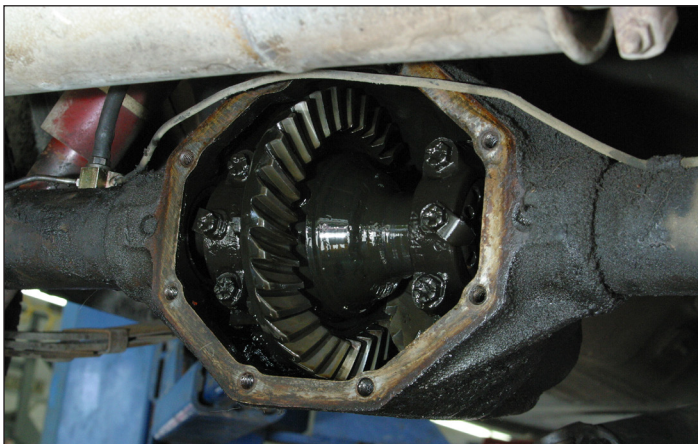
CONSULT WITH A REPUTABLE RESTORATION TECHNICIAN AND HAVE THEM INSPECT ANY MUSTANG YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT BUYING. A LOT DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU ARE BUYING THE CAR FOR. IF YOU'RE BUYING A CAR TO DRIVE RIGHT AWAY, YOU WANT ONE THAT'S MECHANICALLY SOUND. BRAKES, SUSPENSION, AND STEERING MUST BE IRONCLAD. THIS IS WHERE A GOOD TECHNICIAN COMES IN HANDY. YOU WANT SOLID GOLD ELECTRICS WITH ALL LIGHTS FUNCTIONING, HEATING AND AIR CONDITIONING WORKING, SOUND SYSTEM PERFORMING, AND THE REST OF IT.

Pinion bearing noise will be in rhythm with the driveshaft, which turns faster than the wheels. A chirping or chatter as you tip in on the throttle is typically universal joints.

You want crisp, solid braking void of pull and a spongy pedal. Steering should feel confident and sure. Power steering should operate quietly and with smoothness. As you navigate the bumps and chuck holes, the suspension should be free of clunking and squeaking. Jounce should be smooth and predictable.

Engine Check List

Mustang engines tend to be involved forms of propulsion. Any Mustang you're considering should get a thorough check-up including compression and cylinder leak-down tests. Physical examination should include leaks and cracks. If the seller claims it is a matching number engine, it needs to be proven via Ford casting numbers and date codes. You will want to examine the fuel system for leaks of any



Check condition of differential fluid and listen for noise. Gently lean on the gas and back off listening to the driveline. Lean into the corners and listen for axle bearing noise.

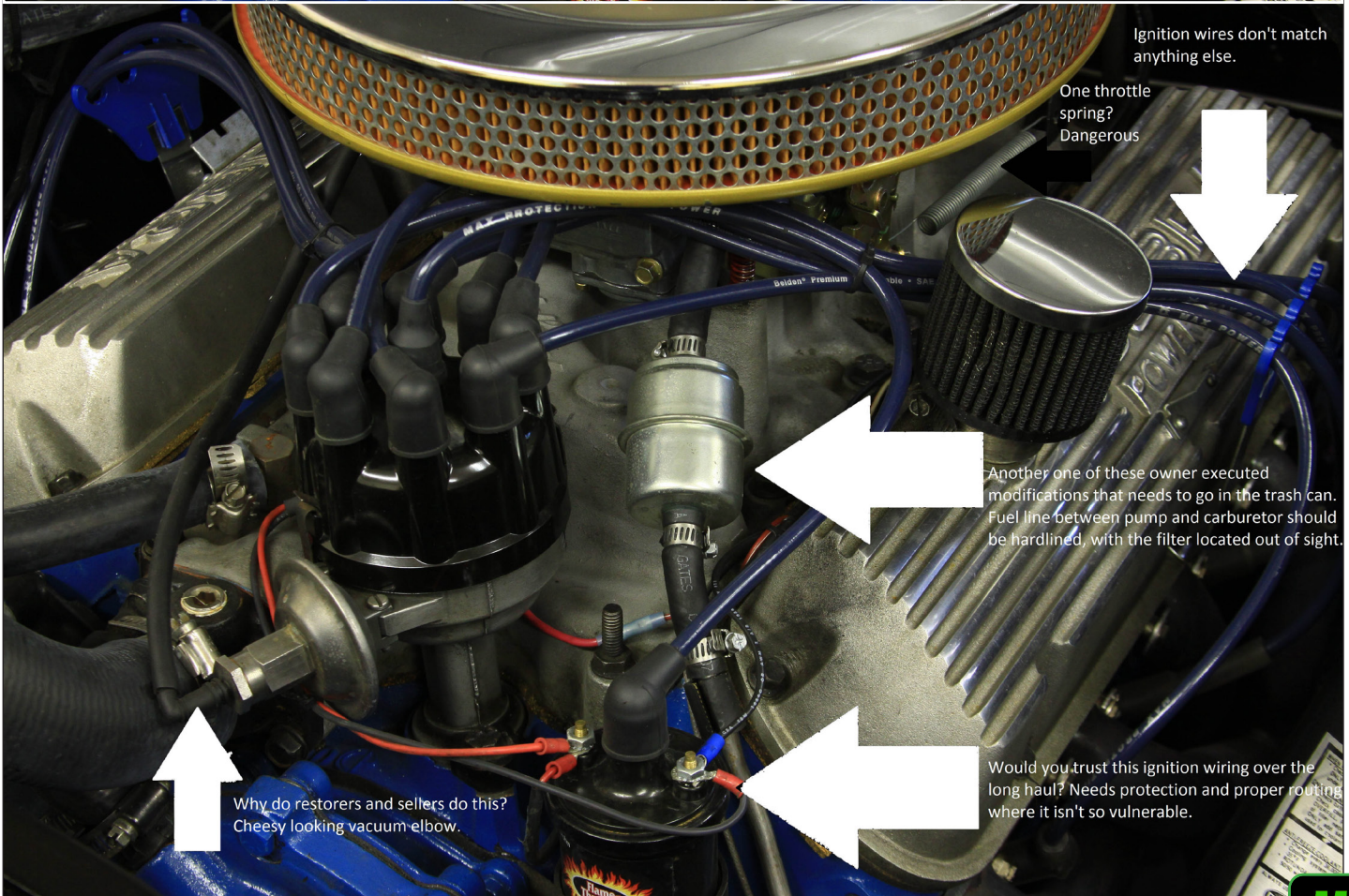
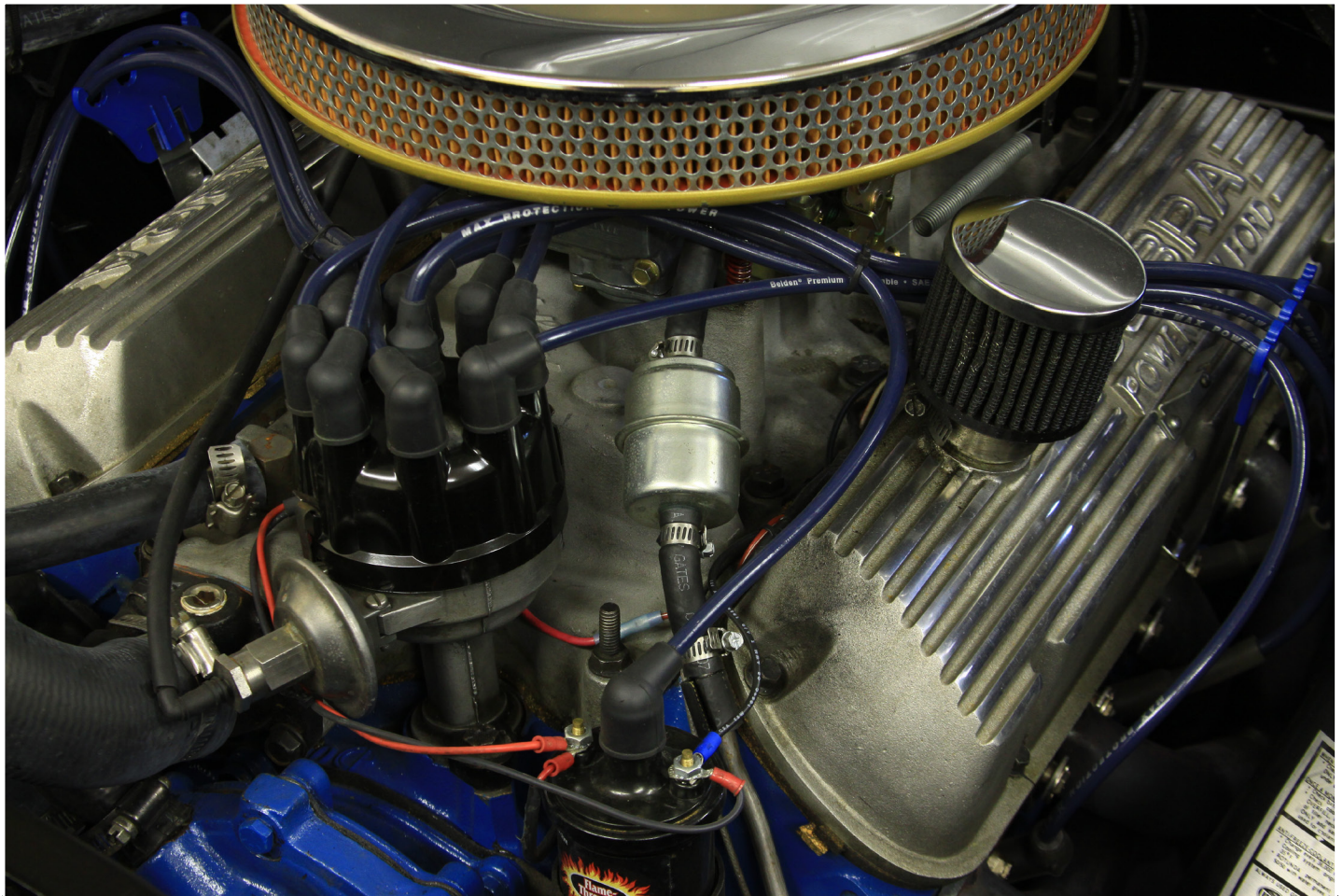


The engine should be free of weepage and leaks that leave spots on the driveway. Excessive silicone sealer like this at gaskets and seals indicates some form of chronic leakage. This is a poor fix with too much silicone.



Another example of poor repair and execution. Check out this ignition wire with virtually no insulation. This would cause a misfire because the wire will arc to ground. A rough running engine can mean ignition troubles or fuel system issues. Yesterday's carburetors do not like today's fuels, which damage older fuel systems. Watch out for leaky carburetors, deteriorated rubber fuel hoses, and more. The only fuel hose you should ever use on a classic Mustang is high-pressure fuel injection hose in the interest of safety. Nothing less is safe. Be watchful for hoses used as vacuum hoses that are not designed for vacuum use.

kind. Low pressure fuel system hoses are no longer safe to use due to the harsh nature of today's fuels. High pressure fuel injection hose is your best choice and is much safer. Examine cooling system hoses, coolant condition, water pump seal, fan, and coolant flow. Run the engine with the radiator cap off and observe coolant flow. There should be aggressive coolant flow when the thermostat opens. Coolant should be clean and the color of antifreeze (red or green). Block freeze plugs should be free of corrosion and leakage. The exhaust system should be free of leaks and rattles.



Ignition wires don't match anything else.

One throttle spring?
Dangerous

Another one of these owner executed modifications that needs to go in the trash can. Fuel line between pump and carburetor should be hardlined, with the filter located out of sight.

Why do restorers and sellers do this? Cheesy looking vacuum elbow.

Would you trust this ignition wiring over the long haul? Needs protection and proper routing where it isn't so vulnerable.

ENGINE CHECK LIST

- EXAMINE ENGINE FOR LEAKS – OIL, COOLANT, INTAKE MANIFOLD VACUUM LEAKS, AND FUEL LEAKAGE
- COOLING SYSTEM FUNCTION – COOLANT COLOR AND CONDITION, FLOW, LEAKS
- EXHAUST MANIFOLDS/HEADERS AND EXHAUST SYSTEM FOR LEAKS AND RATTLES
- COMPRESSION TEST WITH ENGINE HOT
- CYLINDER LEAKDOWN TEST – ENGINE COLD AND HOT
- CHECK OIL CONDITION
- LOOK AT FORD CASTING NUMBERS AND DATE CODES
- INSPECT HARMONIC DAMPENER

TRANSMISSION CHECK LIST

- LEAKAGE
- FLUID CONDITION – AUTOMATICS SHOULD BE PINK AND CLEAN
- MANUAL AND KICKDOWN LINKAGE ADJUSTMENT
- DRIVESHAFT AND UNIVERSAL JOINT CONDITION
- IS IT THE CORRECT TRANSMISSION? CHECK IDENTIFICATION PLATE AND CASTING CODES



Of course, every restorer works hardest on the interior because that's what people see most. However, you want a fully functional interior with easy window, door, and lock operation. Does the shifter operate smoothly? Do all of the instruments work properly? What about the radio and sound system? Does it feel good to sit in?



Original, unmolested classic Mustangs are the ones we dream of finding. They are rare – yet still out there in wait. This '67 GTA hardtop is an untouched original. Expect high prices on survivor cars like this one. This one is Beige Mist, an extremely rare '67 color with the Parchment standard interior. It has never been wrecked and is void of rust.



This is the kind of work you can get into if you buy a rust-bucket or a total. Terry Simpson at The Restomod Shop is a seasoned metalsmith and restoration engineer. He can literally build a new Mustang body from scratch. All it takes is a blank check, time, and customer commitment. Restoration does not come cheap, even if you start with a perfect body and do most of it yourself.

Should I Invest In A 1979-04?

Classic Mustang die-hards may not agree, but 1979-93 Fox body and 1994-05 SN-95 Mustangs have become collectible classics because they are now beyond 20-years old. They're collectible for the same reasons classic Mustangs were — a youthful, nostalgic emotion that takes us back to our youth.

The most desirable Fox and SN-95 Mustangs are the rarest with the most power on tap — the GT and GT Turbo, Saleens, SVOs, and the '93 SVT Cobra. However, there are those of us who got started in 5.0L LX notchbacks and convertibles. We love 1983-04 convertibles for their raw sex-appeal and that timeless Mustang Sally passion. Regardless of what you have in mind, all the same rules apply. Don't get saddled with a bad buy.

Know What You're Getting Into

A full-scale restoration looks easy in your mind. The more rare your project, the harder it is to find the right parts. One good example is a 1984-86 Mustang SVO. Parts are virtually non-existent. The same can be said for classic Shelby's and Fox body Saleens.

This is why you must size up a buy before buying. Be

honest with yourself and know your limitations. Restoration and car building is not easy and it is surely expensive. You are wise to seek out completed restorations and restomods. The work is already complete and the seller takes the losses.

Restomods

Modified Mustangs, known as restomods, require a different approach for buyers because no two are the same. Some restomods are little more than a stocker with bolt-on doo-dads while others are extreme, custom-built cars requiring a trained eye and a lot of experience. If you're looking at an extreme restomod, the seller must provide a list of every modification and address it in great detail. You do not want to own a Mustang you do not understand.

Do you want a restomod for cruising and cross-country driving, or do you want a radical performer? Radical restomods make lousy daily-drivers and commuters. They can get temperamental with a lumpy idle in traffic and poor fuel economy on the open road. Be absolutely sure of what you want before laying down the cash.

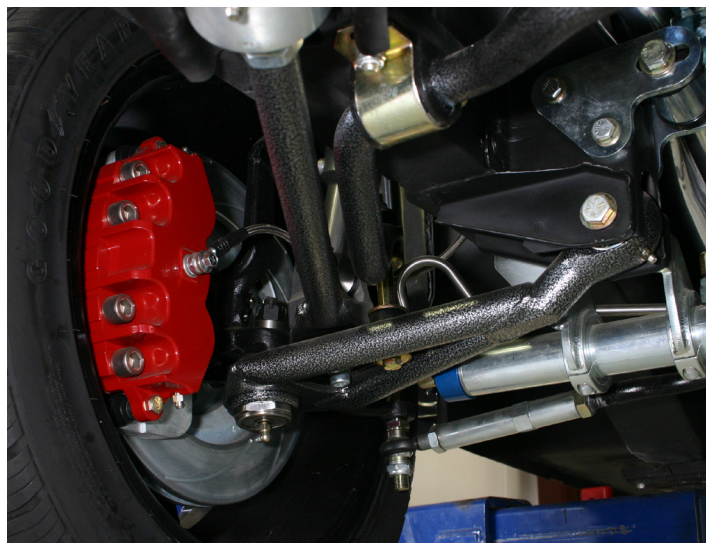
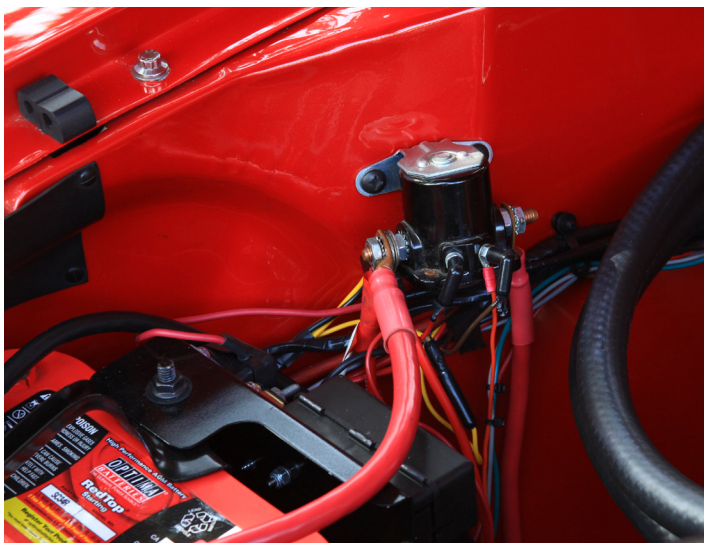
Some extreme restomods are so contemporary in demeanor they make great open road rides because they



If your search for a classic Mustang includes restomods, think about what you want the car to do before buying. A good many are great drivers and are user friendly. Other are too radical for daily use. So choose wisely. This custom built '66 Mustang restomod hardtop belongs to Doug Selleck. It is a very civilized 351W stroker cruiser with a lot of torque on tap. Inside, all the comforts of a new car. It is stable and well balanced. A real pleasure to drive. And this is the kind of restomod you'd want sporting great looks and a user friendly demeanor.



ABOVE LEFT Inside, Selleck's restomod yields the features we like in a tastefully modified classic. The steering wheel feels good to hold in your hands. Everything is easy to see and operate. **ABOVE RIGHT** Although this 351W Windsor stroker looks complex and involved, it is easy to service and tune. If you're opting for a carbureted restomod, it's like the good old days of automotive maintenance. If it quits, there isn't a computer to deal with. Everything here has been tastefully and methodically thought out for fierce reliability.



ABOVE LEFT This is what we mean by methodically executed. A restomod buy should be neat and orderly in its approach. Heavy duty battery cables, wiring routed neatly and protected with conduit. What's more, complete circuit protection that ensure electrical system shutdown if there's a short circuit or overload. **ABOVE RIGHT** A good restomod isn't just about paint and groovy wheels. It is about the complete package where engine, driveline, brakes and suspension complement each other. All the power in the world is dangerous without good brakes and suspension dovetailed into driving ability.

have all of the modern amenities including climate control, sound system, cruise control, comfortable seating, high tech suspension, fuel injection, and more. Some have Ford's 5.0L Coyote with a six-speed, while others are fitted with more conservative 5.0L SEFI engines with AODs and TKO five-speeds.

When you look at a restomod, explore all points and make a determination of what you want and what you will accept. Resist being so taken with a prospective buy that you lose sight of what it would be like to live with.

Our point with all of this is pay close attention to detail and don't let your emotions get the best of you. Bad purchases are made when buyers get in a hurry and don't think. Once you have ascertained you've found the car you want, don't forget that title search and owner history where possible. Although it may seem impossible, stolen vehicles are purchased all the time by unsuspecting buyers. And the collector car market is ripe for the sting with stolen and reserialized cars. So, watch yourself and most importantly — have fun!