JOHN DEMORE

Drivers' Report: Mustangs at Mosport

Some time ago, through the generosity of the Ford Motor Company of Canada and Chuck Rathgeb, boss of the fabulous Comstock Racing Team of Canada, we had the opportunity to bash around Mosport in a Tour de France Mustang and Comstock's red-hot racing Mustang.

The Tour de France machine was a veteran of not only 1200 miles of flat-out European rallying, but also of innumerable hours in the hands of enthusiast-type motoring journalists. As a result, the car was, to be charitable, clapped out—acceleration times were not much better, if any, than a hot street car. But its suspension had been worked over, and we expected better things in the handling department. Unfortunately, wear and tear had exacted a toll there too. The rear suspension lurched sideways on its mounts before and after a corner. Once centrifugal force had taken up the lateral slop, it cornered well enough, but S-bends were murder. We can't exactly say we loved the car, but considering that it and its teammates won 13 of the Tour's 17 "speed tests" and finished one-two in the sedan class, driving it was an enlightening footnote to history.

The Comstock Mustang was a prancing horse of a different color. Prepared under the ultra-liberal Canadian sedan class racing regulations, it packed a wallop like a grenade going off in your knapsack. A look under the hood (which is itself surmounted by a mean looking air scoop) revealed why: it has a full-house, 384-horsepower Cobra engine, complete with Webers, etc.

By gutting the interior and removing virtually everything that wasn't welded in place, the talented young Comstock crew chief and driver, Paul Cooke, got the weight down from about 3000 lbs. to 2520, distributed 53/47%. No fiberglass panels were used, but Cooke did lighten the front and rear lids.

On Mosport's curving, uphill straight, the car will tach its 6800 rpm red-line, 142 mph with a 3.89 rear and 6.50-15 Dunlop R6s on Halibrand 7½ x 15-inch wheels. The acceleration is explosive—at the quarter-mile drags it has clocked 12.3 seconds at 109 mph, indicating that 0-60 mph time is around four seconds flat. Lap times at Mosport are only about two seconds slower than a Cobra.

As a weapon for the sedan class, it's a little like dynamiting fish in a barrel, but Comstock will add a pair of fastbacks to the team in '65 for competition in the production sports car class. Incidentally, the Comstock sedan was the first Mustang ever raced anywhere.

As wild as the acceleration is, it's as nothing compared to the transformation in handling and braking. Like the Shelby Mustang (which the Comstock effort predates by a good six months), the Canadian car uses a one-inch front anti-sway bar, Kelsey-Hayes 11-inch front disc brakes with racing pads, a Galaxie station wagon rear axle, and wider rear brakes with metallic linings. However, there are marked differences in the suspension modifications; they work as well as—or better than—Shelby's, and are probably cheaper. Up front, in addition to changing the anti-sway bar, Cooke raised the spring rates from 270 to 440 lbs/in. and installed Armstrong adjustable shocks with suitable modifications to the shock mounts.

At the rear, the main concern was to prevent spring wind-up and axle tramp. To this end, Gabriel adjustable shocks were installed vertically (as opposed to the stock sea-legged position) with lower mounts about two inches below the rear axle. Instead of separate torque-control arms, Cooke raised the rear spring rate from 90 to 140 lbs/in. and fitted an extra half-leaf terminating in a "military wrap" (the leaf runs back from the forward pivot and wraps once around the axle). This treatment completely eliminates the stock Mustang's tendency to wander, hop, dance and pick up its inside rear wheel.

Driving the Comstock Mustang was an experience to remember. It felt like driving a big-bore modified—or a NASCAR stocker with brakes. The interior is all but gone—the only thing left was the driver's seat. The other seats, the side windows, door panels, mats, etc., had disappeared. At speed (i.e. anything over 30 mph) the Mustang strained urgently, noisily and draftily at the bit, though the suspension itself was not unduly harsh. The stock steering ratio had been retained; its response was positive but slow. As a whole the car responded instantaneously; there was enough power to steer it on the throttle, and wheelspin could get it sideways even on the shift to fourth at 113 mph.

Our only criticisms of this car, as a race car, were that the throttle and brake took too much effort, and the steering and clutch not enough—when you're driving a beast as hairy as this you want some resistance or you'll tend to overdo it. Also, the shift linkage felt a bit wobbly.

Cooke says he would, "welcome any *serious* inquiries about our mods." Given the time and the money, he might even be persuaded to work over your own Mustang. Paul may be contacted at Comstock Racing Team, 2065 Kennedy Road, Agincourt, Ontario, Canada. Oh—by the way, Comstock plans to beard the lion in its den by modifying a Shelby-modified Mustang, so don't plan on blowing off any team cars.

—*Steve Smith*