

More On:

Mustang/Capri

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This may persuade more people to buy the Capri since some consumers are reticent to buy any import car because of the possibility of higher parts prices.

How do the new Mustang and Capri stack up against each other? Either way you can't lose. In addition to an impressive list of standard equipment, Ford has made available almost every conceivable option.

Standard equipment list on the base Mustang is lengthy: Wheel covers, high-back bucket seats, interior door trim and cut-pile carpeting, deluxe steering wheel, luggage compartment mat and insulation, cigarette lighter, steering-column-mounted high beam, turn signal, and wiper/washer controls and full instrumentation....and that means a tachometer, trip odometer and temperature, ammeter and oil gauges.

The instrument panel and pseudo-woodgrain fascia are similar in design to the Fairmont/Zephyr panel. The gauges are easy to read with the larger tachometer and speedometer surrounded by the four secondary gauges.

The base three-door Capri's list of standard equipment runs nearly identical to the Mustang. Both cars feature what Ford calls "Command Position Seating," which combined with the car's low

beltline and large expanses of glass, greatly improves visibility at all points.

In addition to precise rack-and-pinion steering, the Mustang/Capri also can be ordered with optional variable-ratio power steering. Introduced on 1978 Fairmont and Zephyr models, the unit uses a variable-ratio rack which decreases the steering ratio as the steering wheel is turned off-center. The high on-center ratio provides good straightline stability while the off-center turning ratio eases parking and tight maneuvers by accelerating the rate at which the wheels turn in proportion to steering wheel movement. In use, it is difficult for the driver to notice any difference in the power unit but steering was positive with good road feedback.

The next step up for the Mustang buyer is the Ghia model, available in both two- and three-door body styles. The Ghia is also the next highest trim model for the Capri. Ghia-level appointments include BR78x14 tires on turbine-style wheels, dual color-keyed remote control outside "sport" mirrors, pinstriping, low-back bucket seats, higher-level door trim and carpeting, carpeted luggage compartment (Mustang two-door), courtesy lighting, pivotal map light and the premium sound system.

The "ultra-fidelity" sound system, new for '79 and available with most radios,



Jim Pogue Photos

This Capri three-door is a five-liter with the TRX wheel, tire and suspension package.

uses a high-energy amplifier to boost total radio output to 24 watts. A power amp on/off pull switch is placed below and to the right of the steering wheel column.

Other options? Name it and Ford has probably made it available. A few examples: Moonroof, tilt steering wheel, speed control, power door locks, rear window defogger and rear window washer/wiper. An all-new option for '79 on both cars is a console incorporating an LED graphic driver warning system. Lights placed appropriately on a small silhouette of a car warn the driver if any of five systems have failed or need attention. Next to the display is a quartz-crystal digital clock with three pushbuttons for time, date and elapsed time.

But the biggest news in the Mustang and Capri option department—what the enthusiasts have been hearing about for some time now—is the new turbocharged 2.3-liter engine. It's available on all Capri and Mustang models and is standard equipment on the Mustang Cobra.

Ford engineers used a single wastegate-controlled Garrett AiResearch turbo unit, modified to their specs, to produce a maximum boost of six pounds per square inch. Should the wastegate malfunction and boost go beyond six psi, a red light on the left side of the instrument panel and buzzer will warn the driver.

To curb detonation caused by higher cylinder temperatures created by the boosted compression, Ford designed two separate spark retardation points into the Mustang/Capri electronic ignition. Timing is retarded six degrees when boost reaches one psi then retarded another six degrees when boost hits four psi.

The engine's head gasket, pistons and rings, main bearings, rod bearings, oil and water pumps, lubrication system, radiator and intake manifold were strengthened to accept the higher loads of a turbocharged engine.

Ford claims that in preliminary testing the turbocharger boosted the engine's output to 150 horsepower, an increase of more than 45% over the normally aspirated

2.3-liter (140cid) engine. By comparison, the 1978 version of the 2.3-liter engine yielded 88 horsepower, while the 1978 302cid V8 powerplant was rated at 139 horsepower.

In acceleration tests, Ford said the turbocharged Mustang sped from 0-55 in just over eight seconds. Because the turbo is only at work during high-speed or high-load conditions, there is an advantage in fuel economy. Ford officials have quoted an average mpg figure in the mid 20s.

The turbocharged 2.3 liter engine is available with only one transmission—Ford's new-for-'79 wide-ratio four-speed overdrive manual box.

The 2.3-liter normally-aspirated four is standard on all but the Mustang Cobra model and the Capri Turbo R5 sport package. There are two other engine options—the 5.0-liter (302cid) V8 and the 2.5-liter (171cid) V6. A new feature on the 302 worth noting is the new single V-ribbed accessory drive belt. One belt drives the fan/water pump, alternator, a secondary air pump and the air conditioning compressor and power steering pump (if installed). It is compact, lightweight and easy to service.

Ford engineers didn't stop in the engine compartment, though, when they were tuning the Mustang/Capri performance level. Two optional suspension packages are offered, each designed to work best with one particular set of tires.

The intermediate setup is the Handling Suspension, which can be ordered only with 14-inch radial-ply tires. It includes different spring rates and shock valving, stiffer front suspension bushings and upper arm rear suspension bushings and a rear half-inch stabilizer bar (0.56-inch wide bar with the 2.8-liter engine).

Top-of-the-line suspension for the Mustang/Capri is the TRX handling package, which is included with the optional low-profile, wide-aspect Michelin 190/65R 390 TRX tires and sharp 150 TR 390 forged-aluminum wheels. The TRX suspension includes unique shock valving and increased spring rates, a larger front stabilizer bar and rear stabilizer bar.



The meeting of young and the old—the 1965 and the 1979 Mustang.

Pony Car Battle Resumes

There's a real war shaping up in the domestic sporty car market.

Ford Motor Co. has admitted that the sporty car market is the place to be in 1979 with its hot new Mustang/Capri models. The cars, available with more performance-oriented equipment than ever before, will finally give Ford Motor Co. a tough challenger to pit against the undisputed kings of the affordable sporty car bracket, the Firebird and Camaro.

The original '65 Mustang virtually gave birth to the concept of the affordable domestic sporty car. It started the Mustang Generation and created the term, "Pony Car." But evolution of the car took it farther and farther away from the performance angle. The final body style, the 1973 model, was never as exciting or successful as the earlier models.

Meanwhile, emphasis on sporty performance cars was dropping. Casualties were high—the Javelin, AMX, Barracuda and Challenger were either discontinued or changed into a shadow of their former selves. Camaro and Firebird were nearly dropped from the General Motors lineup but the two cars suddenly enjoyed a dramatic sales increase, starting in 1974. Mustang sales increased, too, but not at

the same speed as the Camaro/Firebird.

Although they were slow in coming, the new Ford Mustang (and Capri) have what it takes to be a top challenger in the sporty market. In addition to the new turbocharged 2.3-liter engine, Ford also has made available two optional suspensions packages for the car.

Ford's move with the Mustang/Capri is more evidence that car companies are serious about selling enthusiasts a product that's more than flashy stripes and stickers. A good example is this comment made by William Bourke, executive vice president of Ford's North American Automotive Operations, "The new Capri and Mustang will be the best handling cars Ford has ever produced in this country—period. Not only that, but they can run, absolutely stock, with the best of them."

It soon may be General Motors' turn to play catch-up with its Camaro/Firebird lines. Sources say those two cars are due for an all-new smaller and lighter body in the 1982 model year. The standard engine will probably be a V6 with the 305cid V8 offered as the largest displacement powerplant.

The battle for the enthusiast dollar seems to be starting in earnest.



Not forgetting the enthusiast corner of the market, Mercury included an RS model Capri in its lineup.