

2002 Ford Bullitt Mustang

Bullitt: The Man, the Movie, the Mustang

BY MARK VAUGHN



The Bullitt Mustang, a limited-edition piece paying homage to the 1968 fastback Mustang that starred, along with Steve McQueen, in the 1968 Hollywood movie of the same name, features a lot of cosmetic touches both inside and out. But it's not all looks, as the Bullitt is positioned between the Mustang GT and the SVT Cobra, with enough performance packed in beneath the hood to keep your interest.



You could always tell the bad guys in the cowboy movies because they wore black hats. In *Bullitt*, they drive a black Dodge Charger. They drive it well, but not as well as Steve McQueen drives his green Mustang fastback.

In one of the landmark chase scenes in movie history, leaping and crashing so fast through the streets of San Francisco that the Charger loses five hubcaps, McQueen finally nerfs the bad guys off the road straight into an Army munitions depot located on top of a gas station in front of a dynamite factory. Everything blows up—bad guys, Charger, everything.

in a glorious Hollywood fireball of justice. Despite this triumph, McQueen lets loose only the subtlest of emotions, a barely perceptible half-grin as he skids to a stop. McQueen is our kind of guy.

Yes, it is politically incorrect to say so, but *Bullitt*, heck, any Steve McQueen movie, is a guy movie. It has everything guys want: minimal dialogue, lots of car stuff and bad guys who always get what's coming to them. It's as good for what's not in it as for what is: There is no discussion of anyone's feelings, no soft mood lighting and there are no scenes shot at sunset. One of the first lines in the

movie, spoken by Bullitt to his partner, is, "Why don't you just relax and have your orange juice and shut up, Delgetti!" A perfect guy way to communicate!

We recently watched *Bullitt*, McQueen's 1968 detective movie, four times and liked it better each time. There's Robert Duvall (Robert Duvall!) playing a bit part as a cab driver; Robert Vaughn, the quintessential cool conniver playing the evil city attorney Walter Chalmers; Norman Fell, who would later go on to fame as Mr. Roper from the great TV drama *Three's Company*, playing the collaborative Capt. Baker; and, best of all, there is a very

young Jacqueline Bisset playing... hey, does it matter what she's playing?

So when Ford was casting about for "ways to keep the Mustang exciting," someone came across

Now you can be Lt. Frank Bullitt. Or at least you can drive his car.

Bullitt. Ford also considered bringing back other great Mustangs like the Boss, Mach 1, California Special, Kansas City Twister, Cobra Jet and even some of the Shelbys. But the Bullitt Mustang won out because it was fairly simple and inexpensive to do—there will only be 6500 and only this year, so maybe the others will appear later. But one argument against them was that they would have cost more money and challenged the Mustang hierarchy. People would expect a Boss or a Mach 1 to perform better than an SVT. Ford couldn't have that, at least not without spending piles of cash on it and possibly upsetting the guys at SVT.

So: "It's not about replacing or trying to substitute the SVT Cobra in any way," said Bullitt project manager Scott Hoag. "[The Bullitt] slots between a Mustang GT and the SVT Cobra."

The original car from the movie *Bullitt* was actually two 1968 Mustang fastbacks prepped by Southern California sports car racing hero Max Balchowsky of Ol' Yaller fame. For the car to sustain the rigors of filming, Balchowsky added stronger springs and shocks, some bracing for the fenders and did some tuning of the 390-cid V8.

For this generation Bullitt Mustang, Ford went a little further. The Bullitt debuted at the 2000 L.A. auto show as a concept car and arrived in showrooms 16 months later, last April. The 2001 Bullitt starts as a Mustang GT and gets more power and better handling.

Ford Racing provides a cast aluminum intake manifold with smoother-flowing, larger-diameter runners than those in the Mustang GT's plastic intake manifold. That gives the Bullitt

more low-end torque and a broader power curve. A new throttle body allows for quicker response and increased peak flow. Underdrive pulleys on the alternator and water pump sap less energy from the 4.6-liter V8. And a tuned exhaust not only increases flow by 20 percent but also gives the Bullitt a distinctive exhaust note similar to the one heard so clearly in the movie (*Bullitt* was nominated for an Academy Award for sound).

Contrary to an early Ford marketing brochure sent to

dealers touting 275 hp and 315 lb-ft of torque for the Bullitt, the improvements actually only increased peak horsepower from 260 to 265 and torque from 302 lb-ft to 305. A new 11-inch flywheel and clutch assembly allow the five-speed manual transmission to handle the extra torque and to reduce clutch pedal efforts. The pedals themselves have a drilled stainless-steel racing look McQueen probably would have loved.

Like the movie car, the Bullitt Mustang's suspen-

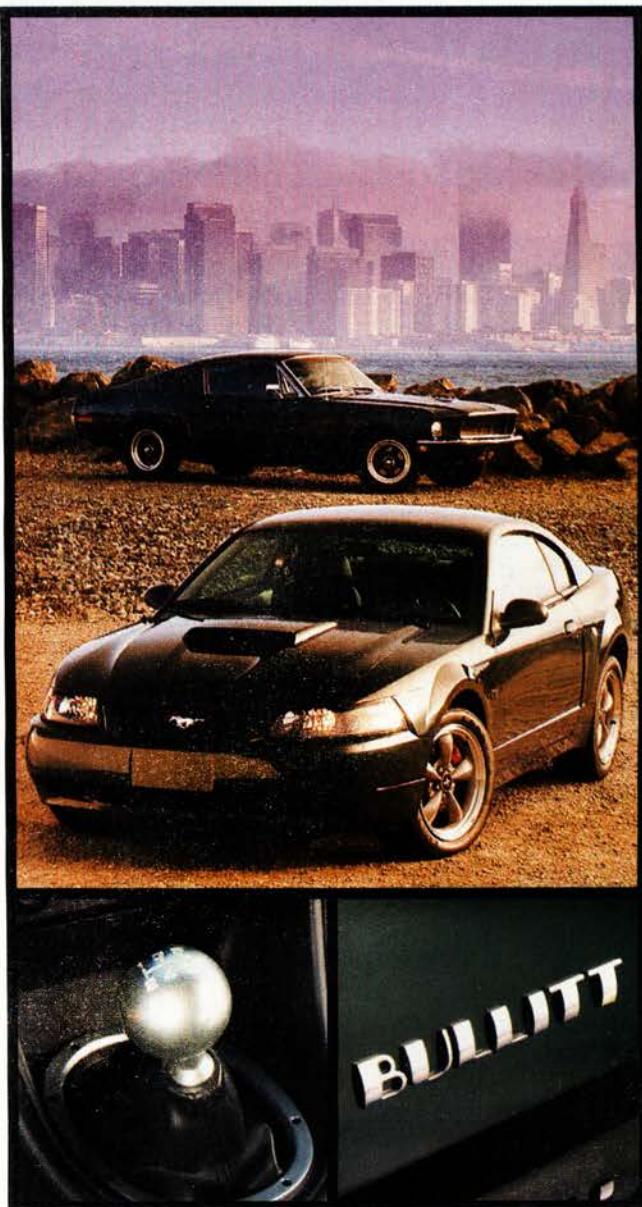
sion is also beefed up with stiffer springs (30 percent stiffer in front and 19 percent in the rear). Shocks are stiffer, too, revalved Tokicos. Antiroll bars are thicker in front and thinner in back for better balance. The frame is stiffened with subframe connectors. The disc brakes are not only bigger front and rear, but get something Balchowsky couldn't have imagined in the '60s: ABS and traction control.

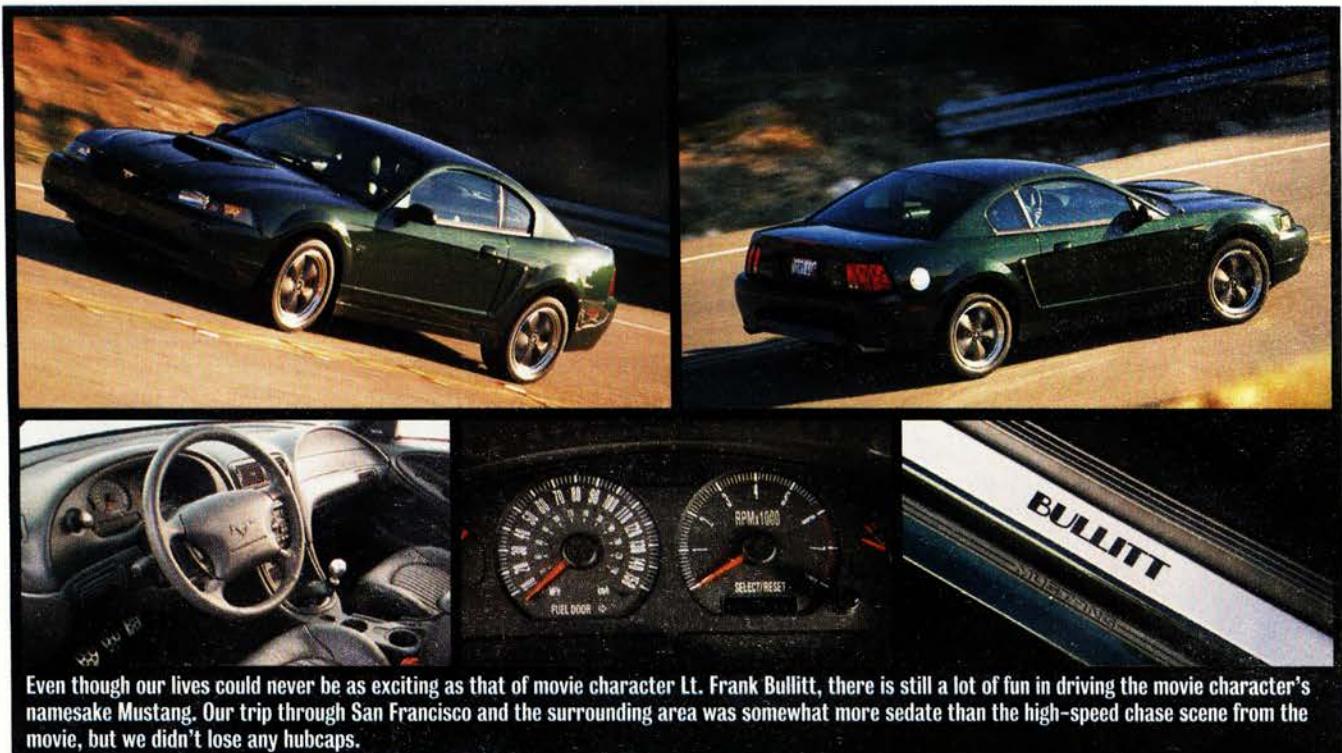
A host of Bullitt cosmetic touches round it off, everything from unique side scoops, wheels and C-pillars to Bullitt leather seats and doorsills. There are even two color choices in addition to the dark highland green of the original: true blue and black. But get the green. It's enough to make you go looking for Chargers.

The Bullitt coupe stickers for \$26,830. That's \$3,600 more than the GT. It's been in showrooms since mid-April, but Ford recently invited us up to San Francisco to follow the same route seen in the movie. This would be like tracing history.

We had prepped for the assignment by renting *Bullitt* and watching it over and over until we had the best lines memorized—Bullitt: "Look Chalmers, let's understand each other, I don't like you." Chalmers: "Come on now, don't be naive lieutenant, we both know how careers are made; integrity is something you sell to the public." Bullitt: "You sell whatever you want but don't sell it here tonight."

How could you not love dialogue like that? From the foul deeds of Chicago gang turncoat Johnny Ross to the testy interaction between Bullitt and





Even though our lives could never be as exciting as that of movie character Lt. Frank Bullitt, there is still a lot of fun in driving the movie character's namesake Mustang. Our trip through San Francisco and the surrounding area was somewhat more sedate than the high-speed chase scene from the movie, but we didn't lose any hubcaps.

Chalmers, the movie would be a guy-type joy even without the chase scene.

Ah, the chase scene. It starts when the mob hit men tail Bullitt hoping he'll lead them to Ross. Our hero sees them across an intersection, they follow him slowly, he shakes them, then—what the?—the hit men see the fast-back in their own rearview mirror. There's a quick shot of the Charger driver buckling his lap belt and then the chase is on.

Rear-wheel tires squeal through open differentials; in-car shots show the Charger and the fastback launching over hills and sliding around corners; the Charger whacks a parked Ford, one hubcap flies off, then a second and a third; the Charger forces a motorcyclist to set his bike down on the pavement, Bullitt swerves to avoid the biker and slides off the road; the Charger driver gives a smirk, thinking Bullitt has been lost, but no, there he is again! Realizing they

can't shake their pursuer, the Charger passenger, an emotionless, reptilian killer, loads the Winchester pump and fires out the rear left-side window at Bullitt; Bullitt bangs fenders, the Charger flies off the road, loses two more hubcaps and crashes into that monstrous fireball.

In all, the chase scene is only eight minutes long, but it is so well edited it seems longer (the movie won an Academy Award for editing).

Our drive, meanwhile, would be considerably more sedate than the movie version. We pulled out from the Fog City Diner, not far from the Hotel Daniels where the character Ross, or the character we think is Ross at the beginning of the movie, gets whacked. We headed up California Street to the Mark Hopkins hotel, where "Ross" asked for a message at the beginning of the movie. (There was no message. Strange, maybe something was up; maybe the mob was going to kill

him!) The Mark Hopkins is still there, much as it looked in the movie.

From the driver's seat the Bullitt feels tighter than the regular GT. There is less body roll, sharper turn-in and better acceleration from almost any speed. It's fun. Even the exhaust note sounds more meaty. It feels like the Mustang in the movie looks.

We turned right onto Taylor Street where the chase scene flew by 33 years before; right onto Larkin Street where several Charger hubcaps were lost and where the Charger hit the Ford; down Laguna Street and Marina Boulevard, scene of more high-speed pursuit.

It was a drive through movie history but, sadly, the real world wasn't nearly as thrilling as the movie. After leaving San Francisco, the drive route took us south out of town and down the leisurely California coast to Santa Cruz where we switched to different Ford products with

their own distinct styles and histories (see "Thunderbird Flies Again," AW, May 28). And that was it. Even with the car, our lives could never be as exciting, or as vital as that of Lt. Frank Bullitt. We knew this for sure when we turned it back in.

When Lt. Bullitt got back to the station house after the chase, his captain, played with perfect stoic reserve by actor Simon Oakland, said to Bullitt, "What the hell is going on here? A high-speed pursuit, two men killed, an officer in the hospital, a witness almost murdered? Now I want to know what's happening and I want to know NOW!"

When we turned our Bullitt Mustang back over to the nice young PR lady from Ford, she didn't want to know "what the hell was going on" and she certainly didn't want to know "NOW!" She didn't say anything at all like that.

She asked us if we wanted any bottled water. ■