



SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE

MUSTANG RACES TO ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY IN THE ULTIMATE HIGH-PERFORMANCE GIFT: THE 440-HP GT-R

BY DUTCH MANDEL, PHOTOS BY JIM FETS

MISS MANNERS MIGHT SUGGEST THE following as 40th anniversary gifts: an exotic vacation, a junket with friends, a black-tie surprise party. Then again, diamonds—always—are good, even if it's not a diamond anniversary.

If you are a car company, however, with an iconic car ingrained in multiple generations, what do you do? If you're Ford, and this week's celebratory icon is Mustang, you bestow on it power, panache and punch. Call it a high-performance makeover. Call it wishful thinking for parts buyers everywhere. Call it Mustang GT-R.

Those of an age see this pumpkin Mustang and images come to mind of the hellacious battles George Follmer and Parnelli Jones waged against Dan Gurney, Mark Donohue, Jim Hall, Peter Revson, Swede Savage and others. They also remember the cars as combatants in American production-car road racing's halcyon days. Trans-Am was at its glorious zenith in 1970, and who

could have imagined an impending fuel crisis and tightening corporate budgets would bring its nadir so quickly? Still, blazing in incandescent memory are the bright Grabber Orange Bud Moore Mustangs, grand slayers of comers from Detroit and the world.

Ford, in its almost never-ending nod to the past and in its unassailable need to reproduce exciting car after exciting car, came up with GT-R. (We keep fingers crossed these new-age doppelgängers cease before Mustang II, in Stallion trim and with Ghia vinyl landau roof, somehow rises to the show floor...)

GT-R is a nod to the past with a look to the future. Built on the much-heralded 2005 Mustang that wowed NAIAS goers and the world, the GT-R sprung from the mind and pen of senior designer Keith Rogman. But Rogman is not alone in bringing this to life, as Ford GT designer Camilo Pardo was also involved. "This is the most famous of all the [Mustang] Trans-Am cars," says Rogman, 39, whose dishwater blonde

hair and button-down shirt make him look more the preppy accountant than high-styled artist. "Besides, we love orange."

The idea behind GT-R is that Ford Racing Performance Parts is a go-fast profit center for the company, a place where parts *can* be developed in tandem with the car as it emerges from computerized data. If the Mustang, arguably one of the most tuned rides Detroit has ever created, were to go out on the track today, how would it look? This is a showcase for what Ford could do, admits Rogman, but whether the car laps tracks in its current, extreme form remains to be seen. Still, we can dream.

Let's start with what you can't see—its high-performance heart. Ford's modular 4.6-liter V8 has seen its cylinders bored out to 94 mm (instead of 90.2) to give it the near-magical 5.0-liter displacement that once defined Trans-Am eligibility. This cammer motor gets the SVT Mustang Cobra's forged crankshaft with six-bolt mains and Manley



H-Beam connecting rods, forged pistons and an 11.0:1 compression ratio. The heads have been ported, it gets high-lift cams, high-flow fuel injectors and a magnesium variable-geometry intake manifold. Other tricks: a custom oil pan and side-exit exhaust with custom headers. The four-inch-diameter chrome side pipes exiting just behind the doors are a visual marvel and gloriously trumpet the GT-R's powerful beat. During the build, the team fired the car up for us, and it was nothing short of phenomenal. Again, those of an age can envision this Grabber Orange racer sweep down the hill

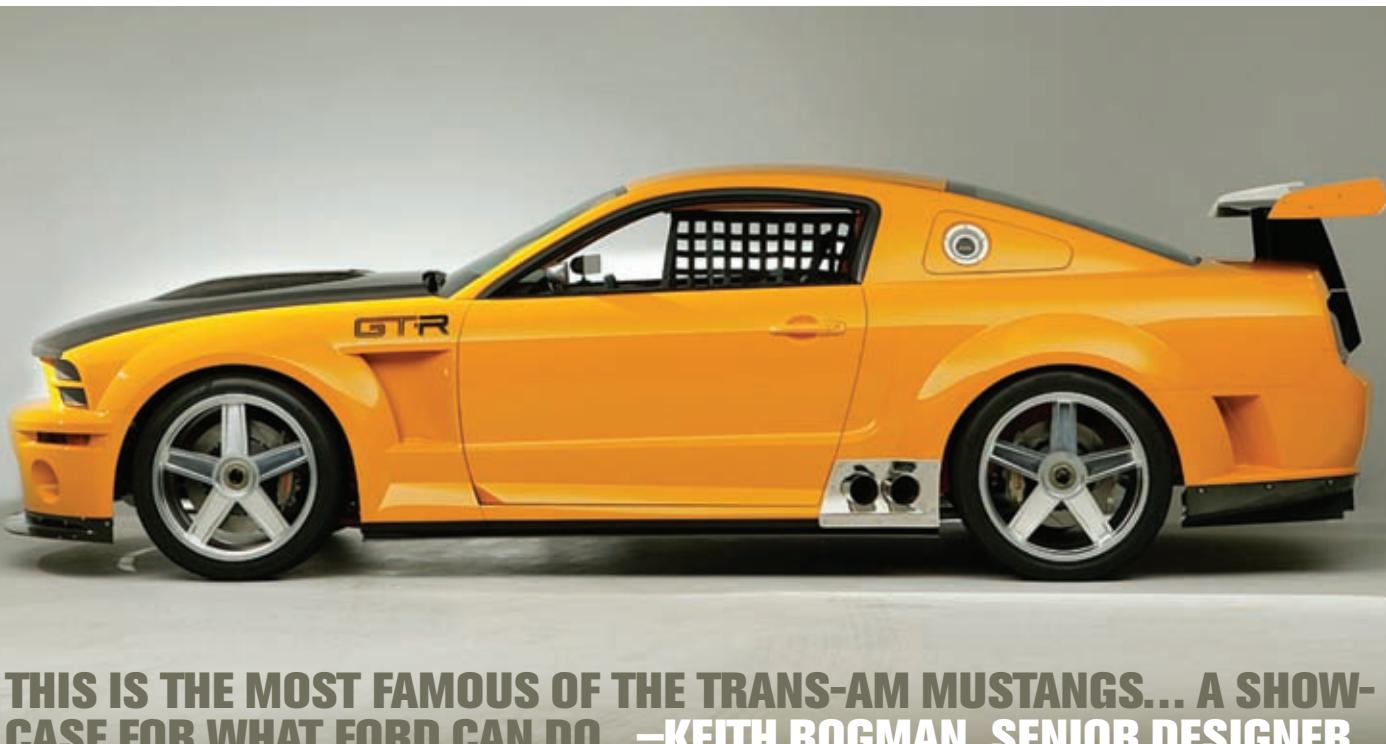
available and when. We know you can have the engine and wiring kit and all the ancillary power stuff now; all that separates you from ownership is the want, and \$15,000. And there is precedence in an intended-for-racers Mustang wearing the GT-R badge.

The engine alone is okay, but if you're going to race it, it has to stick to the track. This car will, because it is essentially a race car in show-car clothing. The production suspension geometry and mounting points remain intact, but some pieces have been swapped out to reduce weight. Some suspension pieces are made of chrome-moly

rides). The gas tank is swapped out for a racing-grade fuel cell. Whether the carbon fiber hood or the massive wheel arches are things you'll be able to buy remains to be seen. But you can bet the chassis bits and the sofa-table-sized rear spoiler, the low rear diffuser and carbon fiber front lip will be catalog items.

And the color? It is electrostatically painted just like a real car. Outside and in, like a racing machine.

"There's a hell of a lot of orange," Rogman says, with a smile. "And what's not painted gets carbon fiber."



THIS IS THE MOST FAMOUS OF THE TRANS-AM MUSTANGS... A SHOW-CASE FOR WHAT FORD CAN DO. —KEITH ROGMAN, SENIOR DESIGNER

at Lime Rock or through the Laguna cork-screw or...

This Ford Racing crate motor has found its way into everything from a 1953 F-100 pickup to, we're almost sure, a few backyard Foci. The engine produces a reliable 440 hp all day and it could, if tickled appropriately, ease out 500 (before supercharging).

Transferring power to the ground is a Ford Racing-supplied TTC T-56 six-speed transmission and heavy-duty clutch. A custom metal-composite aluminum driveshaft bolts to a race-spec diff with 4.56:1 final drive.

Before you get in a lather about pie-in-the-sky stuff you can't buy, Ford is being coy about what will—and what won't—be

tubing. The shocks, with remote reservoirs, are adjustable with coilover springs; a brace between the shock towers increases rigidity. To see underneath GT-R is a delight, as the mechanical artwork could show in a gallery.

Speed and handling are good only if you can use them properly. To go fast you must also stop well. Fortunately the Ford people get this concept. Large Brembo brakes, 14.3-inch front rotors with six-piston calipers and 13-inch, four-piston calipers out back, ease inside 20-inch Pirelli tires (275/35 fronts and stout 305/30 rears).

Inside is a roll cage that covers a single Sparco race seat and five-point harness (a passenger seat can be bolted in place for VIP

So GT-R is an amalgam, a boy racer's creation that helps to polish the luster of the Mustang anniversary. Though Ford executives use too many ifs and woulds and coulds in discussing whether this beast will see life, GT-R nudges your notions about the possibilities. This game of dangling jewelry is something we've come to expect at auto shows, but it somehow seems cruel at such a big birthday party.

How long will it take industrious aftermarket suppliers to jury-rig pieces that could resemble GT-R? Fast as you can utter four letters: SEMA. We only hope the Ford Racing Performance Parts people do the job right, first and fast. ■