

EVERYONE ON FORD'S
Special Vehicle Team wants
you to know that the 2011
Shelby GT500 is the fastest, quickest
production Mustang ever. They call it a
supercar for less than \$50,000. They say
it's the best Mustang ever.

Excuse me? The best? Owners of the 1966 Shelby GT350 or the 1969 Boss 302 might disagree. Then there's the original 1967 GT500, known to some as Eleanor after its starring role in *Gone in 60 Seconds*.

It's much harder to argue with the "fastest, quickest" part. The 1967 GT500 is more than a second slower to 60 mph than the 2011 and about two seconds slower through the quarter-mile. The '67's 428-cid V8 was rated at 355 hp and 420 lb-ft of torque, with 1.7 liters more displacement than the 2011. If that official 355-hp rating was conservative to fool insurers, it was also measured as SAE gross output. Under today's SAE net ratings, it's likely about 285 hp.

The 2011 GT500 makes 550 hp at 6,200 rpm. That's 10 hp more than the 2010 (peak torque holds at 510 lb-ft), but it says almost nothing about how much better the new GT500 is than its predecessor, which was substantially upgraded

from 2009. SVT might have left the biggest-swingin' Mustang alone for a year, but it didn't.

The GT500 retains the 5.4-liter supercharged V8 developed for the Ford GT, rather than adopting a variation of the new 5.0-liter engine introduced in the 2011 Mustang GT. The Shelby does get a new aluminum engine block, cast by Honsel in Germany. Steel cylinder liners are sprayed in under extreme pressure at 35,000 degrees Fahrenheit, then machined to a thickness of 150 microns. As a result, the 2011 block weighs 102 pounds less than the previous cast-iron block.

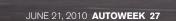
Charge cooling capacity increases 40 percent, thanks to a larger, two-layer intercooler, helping to ensure that the Roots-type supercharger gets plenty of dense, cool air under duress. Exhaust backpressure has been reduced 38 percent. The 2011 GT500 also features aerodynamic refinements that improve brake cooling, increase downforce and reduce drag, according to Ford. Other weight (and fuel) savers include an electric power-steering pump.

Bottom line: The GT500's curb weight drops 120 pounds compared with the 2010, to 3,820 pounds for the coupe. Nearly all of the reduction comes over the front axle. And for the first time, SVT offers a Performance package developed from the limited-run 2009 GT500 KR. This option adds a limited-slip differential with a shorter 3.73 gear, stiffer springs, forged wheels, Goodyear's latest-gen Eagle F1s (255/40Z-19 front, 285/35ZR-20 rear) and thinner hood stripes.

On the street, the 2011 GT500 is ticket bait, and not because it's ruggedly handsome or imposingly obvious. It's comfortably wicked fast, making it difficult for its driver to restrain the right foot. In nearly every respect, the fastest Mustang ever buries old-school pony-car shortcomings deeper in the past.

Clutch action is about right—definitely not stiff but not resistance-free mush, either. The firm, tight shifter is a single-digit salute to the pony cars of yore. Steering is the least supercarlike element in the package. It's light and not particularly quick, with a bit more wanderlust than we'd like. And we'd guess that the Performance package suspension might be a bit stiff on the Midwest's worst pavement.

Third gear will get the GT500 almost anywhere once it's rolling. The flow of torque seems almost limitless. Enthusiasts





won't be chugging around at 2,200 rpm, however. From midrange up, this Mustang sounds fantastic but never intrusive. We commend SVT for its exhaust tuning.

Ford's performance group seems particularly proud that the 2011 GT500 is the first in the CAFE era without a gas-guzzler tax (delivering 15 mpg city, 23 mpg highway, according to the EPA). Of course, top gear in the Tremec six-speed has a super-tall 0.5 ratio. It's good for fuel economy, but few enthusiasts will have the restraint to use it very often, unless the day's journey covers a few hundred miles of interstate.

Ford's track numbers speak for themselves: 0 to 60 mph, 4.2 seconds; quartermile, 12.3 seconds at 119 mph; skidpad, 1.01 g; 60 to 0 mph, 106 feet. The 2011

GT500 is more than five seconds faster than the 2010 around the full 3.2-mile circuit at Virginia International Raceway (and the 2010 was four seconds faster than its predecessor). Yet, as with the 10-hp boost in its engine, the numbers only begin to explain how much better the 2011 GT500 really is on a track.

The 2011 floats and drifts less readily than the 2010. It understeers a lot less. It's generally better balanced, and it has even more grip (thanks, presumably, to Goodyear's latest compounds or construction).

The GT500 remains a big, wide, fairly heavy machine. It takes time to get comfortable about exactly where its edges are. But it's also very predictable and manageable, even for less accomplished drivers. Momentum is not necessarily critical. The brakes are strong enough, and the torque band is so broad that it will cover up a lot of mistakes. You can mess up a corner, scrub off most of your speed and still count on the torque to get you flying again.

The 2011 GT500 is available now, starting at \$49,495 for the coupe. The Performance package adds \$3,495.

The best ever? Well, the original GT500 weighed about 450 pounds less than the 2011, but it didn't have six airbags, an ABS pump, side-intrusion beams, standard air conditioning and so on. And if you averaged 15 mpg in a '67, you were doing quite well. With inflation, the original's \$4,115 retail price adjusts to about \$30,000—the price of a standard 2011 Mustang GT.

As for value, that Mustang GT 5.0 delivers 412 higher-revving, aluminum-block hp hauling 215 fewer pounds than its big brother's supercharged engine, with still better EPA ratings (17 mpg city, 26 mpg highway). For \$20,000 less.

Could that make it better?

