

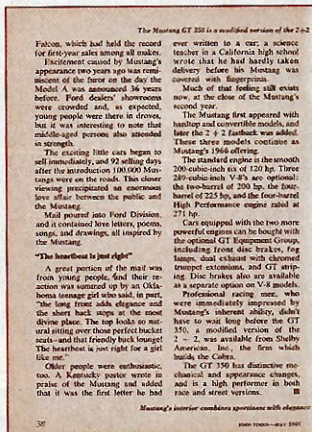
FORD TIMES - A WINDOW INTO THE BLUE OVAL

In talking with fellow enthusiasts, especially at car shows, I found that we all share a couple of fundamental similarities. For whatever reason, we all seem to have an addiction to automotive-related paper. Most of the time this manifests itself with things like window stickers, build sheets, owner's manuals, dealer brochures, and the consumer magazines like *Motor Trend*, *Hot Rod*, and others.

For those of you who are fans of the Blue Oval, I want to bring to your attention another publication, *The Ford Times*. Published continuously from 1908 until 1993, *The Ford Times* served many purposes over its illustrious history. At its start, it was a way for Ford to communicate with its workers, but over the years it evolved into a general-interest magazine focusing on travel and popular culture subjects. It was the forerunner of what today is called custom publishing or integrated marketing.

What made the publication so special is the roster of authors and artists who graced its pages. The scribes published in *The Ford Times* include William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and Ogden Nash. Some of the artists — for much of its history illustrations rather than photographs were its primary form of graphic enhancement — included Charles Harper, Arthur Barbour, and Harvey Kidder among others.

You would think that being published by Ford, its editorial slant would be pro-Ford on every page, but such was not the case, especially in its heyday in the '50s, '60s, and '70s when its circulation topped more than 2.1 million copies with a total readership estimated at over eight million readers. (As a point of comparison, the current circulation of *Motor Trend* and *Car and Driver*, the two most widely read monthly automotive publications, each hovers around 1.5 million copies each month.). While *The Ford Times* naturally featured Ford products, it was never a hard sell, even in their annual new car issues published each fall, in the good old days when the annual model change was



The Mustang GT 350 is a modified version of the 2+2 Fabian, which had held the record for first-year sales among all makes. Enthusiasm caused by Mustang's appearance two years ago was reminiscent of the furor on the day the Model A was announced 36 years before. Ford dealers showrooms were crowded and, as expected, young people were there in droves, but it was interesting to note that middle-aged persons also showed an interest.

The exciting little cars began to sell immediately and 52 selling days after the introduction 100,000 Mustangs were on the road. This clear viewing precipitated an enormous love affair between the public and the Mustang.

Mail poured into Ford Division and it contained love letters, poems, songs, and drawings, all inspired by the Mustang.

"The heartbeat is just right"

A great portion of the mail was from young people. Ford their reaction was summed up by an Oklahoma teenage girl who said, in part, "the long front ends elegance and the short back steps at the most divine place. The top looks so natural sitting over those perfect buckles and that friendly back lounge. The heartbeat is just right for a girl like me."

Other people were enthusiastic. A Kentucky pastor wrote praising the Mustang and added that it was the first letter he had ever written to a car; a science teacher in a California high school wrote that he had barely taken delivery before his Mustang was covered with fingerprints.

Mail left that feeling still exists now, at the door of the Mustang's second year.

The Mustang first appeared with hardtop and convertible models, and later the 2+2 Fastback was added. These three models constitute as Mustang's 1966 offering.

The standard engine is the smooth 200-cubic-inch six of 121 hp. Three 281-cubic-inch V-8's are optional: the two-barrel of 200 hp, the four-barrel of 225 hp, and the four-barrel High Performance engine rated at 271 hp.

Cars equipped with the two more powerful engines can be bought with the optional GT Equipment Group, including front disc brakes, fog lamps, dual exhaust with slanted trumpet extensions, and GT striping. Disc brakes also are available as a separate option on V-8 models.

Professional racing ones, who were immediately impressed by Mustang's inherent ability, doubt have to wait long before the GT 350, a modified version of the 2+2, is available from Shelby American, Inc., the firm which built the GT 350.

The GT 350 has distinctive mechanical and appearance changes, and is a high performer in both race and street versions.

Mustang's interior combines sportiness with elegance.



almost sacrosanct each September.

For those of you who love to drive our cars rather than trailer them to far-flung destinations, the credo of *The Ford Times*, "to present a view of America through the windshield," was far more important than any incremental sales increase that reading the publication would trigger. The travel element is especially interesting as the destinations profiled were almost always mainstream, much in line with Ford's own position in the marketplace, rather than exotic and expensive locations favored by contemporary travel and lifestyle publications, including those currently published by many vehicle manufacturers. For instance, over the period from 1950 to 1980, camping trips and destinations were featured many times and the promotion of Ford vehicles, especially station wagons, was almost subliminal.

Rather than selling new Fords, *The Ford Times* underlying mission was to cement Ford's relationship with its dealers and give those dealers — who paid for and sent out *The Ford Times*, typically out of local marketing budgets — a monthly opportunity to re-establish contact with past customers as well as future prospects. In this way it was a very sophisticated approach. (The back page of each issue, which was the mailing label, clearly had the sending dealer's name and address promoted very prominently. This was probably the least subliminal aspect of the entire program.)

What does all of this have to do with musclecars you ask? That's simple; in its pages, many of Ford's high-performance products, especially the Mustang, were showcased. Remember, the heyday of *The Ford Times* was during Ford's heralded Total Performance era, and it went not above crowing about their success at tracks like Daytona, Indy and LeMans or about promoting its relationship with a certain retired chicken farmer from Texas. (The introduction of the GT-350 was noted in the May 1966 issue.)

Where can you find copies of *The Ford Times*? Well the most obvious place to look is of course eBay and there you can find individual copies, most selling for five bucks or less as well as multi-issue lots, some hard-bound (throughout the '60s and '70s *The Ford Times* was published in a pocket-sized 5 x 7-inch format that Henry Ford himself favored). Antique stores and estate sales are also fertile hunting grounds for back issues that will look period correct along with the owner's manual in your glove box at shows.

The issues make fascinating reading, giving us an insight into America during a simpler era, especially the '50s, just as America was asserting itself in the aftermath of World War II. It was a time when baby boomers first looked out of the rear windows from the rear-facing third seats of many Ford station wagons, as their car-guy (and girl) sensitivities developed, and tried to convince their parents, typically Dad, that the family station wagon should be replaced by a high-performance Mustang, Fairlane, or even a 7-liter full-sized Ford. Those were wonderful times and I can only hope that they elicit equally fond memories for many of you.