

My 1964 1/2 Mustang

By Larry Wechsler

My Mustang convertible was built on June 26, 1964, which makes it one of the first Mustangs ever produced and one of the oldest ones still on the road. The title and registration say '65 for the model year but It is commonly referred to as a 64 1/2. There are subtle differences between the 64 1/2 and Mustangs produced after August 17, 1964 for the 1965 model year. These are mostly in the electrical system (generator vs. alternator), location of certain accessories, and several other small differences that only an aficionado would recognize. But the biggest difference is on cars with the standard V8 engine.

In '64, 28,000 convertibles were produced, of which half had 6 cylinder engines. 20% were high performance 289 V8's, of which very few still exist. My car has a 260 V8, which was the engine used in the Ford Fairlane and Falcon Sprint, and was only used in the Mustang from April until August of '64. Assuming 5% of convertibles still exist and then doing the



math, I believe that there are no more than 75 to 100 cars in similar condition to mine left, and there is a real possibility that the number is even less. In all the shows I've been to I've only seen one other like it.

I bought it in Miami in March of 1976 for \$200 and a '67 Mustang coupe that I had paid \$200 for two years before. I was 23 years old, a junior in college, and living large.

The '67 coupe was a much more comfortable car, with A/C, power steering, and a nice running 289 V8. I

bought it from a buddy of mine whom I served with in the Navy. He was getting out and going home to California and didn't want to drive it back from Virginia.

The convertible belonged to a good friend of mine who was arrested for DUI. The car was impounded and he lost his license. In Florida in 1976, you needed a safety inspection sticker every year. In order to get an inspection decal you needed to show a driver license. It just so happened that my friend lost his license in early March and the inspection sticker on the convertible expired that same month. He needed wheels, legal or not, so I took my '67 coupe in and got a new inspection sticker and we did the deal.



When I graduated from college and got my first job, I wanted a more modern car with air-

conditioning. The Mustang was now 13 years old and getting a little long in the tooth. The leaky top was not doing the carpeting any good and it continually smelled like the boys locker room back in high school. So I bought a '77 Toyota Celica. I tried to trade in my Mustang but they only wanted to give me \$100 for it so more out of defiance, I just kept it. I told myself that I would try selling it privately but I never got around to it. It wound up being the best thing I never did.

The next year I bought a house that had a garage so I put the Mustang in there and drove it on the weekends. At that time I had a boat. I pulled that 22' Thunderbird all over the Keys with my Mustang.



I never worried about hurting it, or submerging it on a boat ramp. I was happy it had a V8 engine that could yank the boat out of the water.

I had a very close friend from high school who was a paint and body man and had moved to a small town near Lakeland to start his own business. In 1979 I drove the Mustang up there and took AMTRAK back to Miami. He worked on it over the course of a year when he had time and felt like doing it and only charged me for the paint and supplies. He was the one that wanted to fix up the

car, not me. But the car was beautiful when we finally went to pick it up.

When the weather was nice we drove the Mustang on the weekends. By the early 80's people were beginning to appreciate it. In '82 we were planning a road trip in my wife's brand new car but she had an accident the week we were supposed to leave. We had another car that was maybe 3 or 4 years old but we decided to take the Mustang, all the way up through the Appalachian Mountains to New England and back down the coast.

I almost sold the car many times. It was a third car and I viewed it as a luxury, not really necessary. In 1984 I was going to replace the car I used as my daily driver. I was in my Mustang one Saturday and happened to stop at a local Ford dealer to check out the 1984 Mustangs. The owner of the dealership happened to be there and saw me drive up. He offered me a brand new Mustang convertible even up for my car, and I almost did it. My wife was the one who told me not to do it. By then it had become part of the family and I knew if I didn't do this deal, I'd probably never sell it.



We used the Mustang a lot until my first son was born in 1987. Then, we stopped driving it except for very rare occasions. Between 1987 and 2007 I put maybe 2,000 miles on it. It just sat in the garage and gathered dust. Kids climbed on it, crashed their bikes into it and played in it. I would start it up and drive it just around the neighborhood a couple of times a year.

In 2005, my oldest son was graduating high school. After years of him asking me “When are we going to fix up the Mustang,” I realized that if I didn’t do something with it soon, someone would have to pull it away with a wrecker. And thus began a long, arduous and sometimes painful journey. I began with the idea that we would spruce it up just a little, but it didn’t work out that way. I had thought it was in reasonably good shape except perhaps cosmetically but after 45 years just about everything I touched was connected to something else that had to be fixed. No manufacturer ever intended for these cars to last this long and I suppose the millionth time you roll up the window you might have to fix it! People often ask me how much it cost to restore. The truth is that I have no idea. I blew through the budget early on and just kept going. Although I probably wouldn’t have done it had I known up front what it was going to cost, having done it, whatever it cost was money well-spent. If you are reading this you are into classic cars so I don’t have to explain it.

Back in the day I did all of my own mechanical work and did a lot of paint and body work on the car. This time I did some of the mechanical work myself but I paid others to do most of it. Truthfully, it would never have been completed and it certainly wouldn’t look like it does if I had done the work myself.



Along the way lots of 1965/1966 Mustang parts, and lots of non-Mustang parts found their way onto the car because that was all that was available and I was just trying to keep it running. A lot of what I had to do to restore it was correct things that I did when I was repairing it. I bought lots of parts, many from junk yards from all over the country, to put it back in original condition as a 64 1/2 Mustang.

In the six years since the restoration was completed I’ve driven it regularly on the weekends. It gets a lot of love at car shows, but also just out and about. Someone always comes up to me and tells me that they had one or their Dad or Mom had one or they dated a guy who had one. Everybody of a certain age either had an early Mustang or knew someone who did. A couple of months ago I was buying gas and a little boy, maybe 7 or 8, pointed to it and said “Look at that Mustang, Dad!”. I’m not aware of another classic car that a 7 year old kid could identify by name.