



Beyond retro

Mustang GT Premium Convertible updates macho image with modern functionality

PHOTO AND STORY BY KATHY RENWALD



Kathy Renwald

Update it all you want with navigation back-up cameras and Bluetooth, do your best to make it modern, but the Ford Mustang remains a memory machine.

Behind the wheel, with a hand on the stick shift and the engine rumbling like a mustard milling machine, it bathes the brain in the pleasant haze of nostalgia.

How else do I explain ending up at the abandoned Oxford Drive-In near Woodstock, coaxing a Mustang GT Convertible into the weedy field where speakers waited to be hung on rolled down windows. The last movie to shine on the big screen was "Fifty Shades of Grey."

The \$60,298 Mustang GT Premium Convertible I tested was anything but grey. In Race Red with 19-inch rims in business black, the vibe was Look at Me. Of the muscle cars out there – the Camaro, the Dodge Challenger – the Mustang is

the best looking. It's beefy without being bloated, and has retained the expression of Mustang's past without becoming a museum piece.

To this point, you may be thinking yours truly has a sweet spot for muscle cars. I don't. When muscle cars were the rage, my heartthrob was the Volkswagen Beetle. So wasn't I surprised when the Mustang turned out to be a sweet ride.

First happy surprise? The seats. They were sculpted, supportive and comfortable on long drives. Muscle car interior design can be as attractive as a weightlifting gym, but the Mustang hit a good balance between hard-line macho and modern functionality. Some bits strive to make a retro statement

2016 Mustang GT Convertible

Base price: \$49,448
Price as tested: \$60,298
Engine type: 5.0- litre, V8
Power: 435 hp
Torque: 400 lb./ft.
Fuel consumption
City: 15.5 litres/100 km
Highway: 10.3 litres/100 km
What's best: Muscular looks, good steering and brakes, excellent seats.
What's Worst: Prefer a smoother gearbox, backseat for looks only.
What's Interesting: Soft top is multi-insulated so when the top is up, the car is quieter than you'd expect for a convertible.

like the push button starter in alarming red, and the row of toggle switches on the centre console, but radio controls are traditional knobs, a design that can't be bettered. Ford could scale back the shiny trim pieces that cause too much reflection, but overall everything functions well from the driver's seat. For front seat occupants, the cabin feels roomy, but the back seat is truly a mirage.

Strapped in for a strut through the countryside, the first thing you notice is the cruise night symphony coming from the five-litre V8. It's a lazy burble, distinctive but not annoying. The six-speed manual is

crisp, with the shifter snapping into gear smartly. It's less fluid feeling than a BMW or Audi manual, but still pleasant and precise.

The brakes are first rate, there's nothing washy-washy about them, the feeling is firm and grippy. Steering is exemplary, the weight is good, and feedback is precise. On a cruise, the Mustang finds a groove and requires little correction to hold a line, making it relaxing to drive.

Though the GT's V8 produces 435 horsepower, it's almost modest in today's power wars. It's certainly fast, but in a sensible rather than surreal way. The horsepower coupled with suspension and handling that is just a little more compliant than a fierce performance machine, made me want to cruise rather than crank it up.

Of course having the top down encourages a more languorous drive. The convertible top folds almost silently into the trunk, and then you're away to motor with the sky and the stars overhead.

Even on a cooler day, the Mustang design manages to control the wind in the cabin so that driving "topless" is still a delicious experience. Unlike some convertibles, visibility is not compromised when the top goes up, and seat height is adjustable enough that even a short person can see well from the driver's seat, including the view over the sizeable front hood of the Mustang.

At over \$60,000, the Mustang GT has a serious price tag. The most expensive option on my tester was the \$3,700 performance package, but it's the one enthusiasts will want, with improvements to chassis tuning, beefed up struts, sway bars and brakes, and 19-inch rims. These are the things that move the Mustang into the modern age without erasing the veneer of nostalgia. It's a delicate dance that Ford seems to get just right.

Kathy Renwald is an award-winning automotive writer, photographer and videographer.

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