

MY GRANDFATHER'S 1969 MUSTANG

1969 Mach 1 Mustang

by Miriam Helle

The postwar boom, which began after W.W.II until the early 70's, showed an amazing economic growth. Nothing was booming more than the automobile industry. The reason behind this might possibly be because the income of the average family almost doubled between 1941 to 1969. With this increase in income, many were splurging and buying what they have always wanted to own (*Who Built America?*, 503-4).

This is exactly what my grandfather did. My grandpa worked at Youngstown Sheet and Tube from 1960 until the late 70's when the mill closed its doors for good. It was during this period when he purchased a 1969 Mach 1 Mustang. Although he put in a lot of hard hours at the mill, he always had time for his "toy." When he was playing around in the garage with this vehicle he had no worries. All of the mill problems he might have had were where they belonged, at the mill.



After having a few other jobs, in 1994 he retired. It was in this year when he decided to sell his "toy" to get a few extra dollars to head into a relaxing retirement. My dad then decided to purchase this car from him.

When he bought this car, I remember thinking to myself, why in the world do we need this car just sit in our garage? Then again it had sentimental value to him and he was the one making the purchase, not me. He explained to me that during the 60's when the mills in the area were booming that the workers made very good wages and many workers rewarded themselves with a muscle car. My dad has worked in the mill atmosphere for 29 years now and is a huge car enthusiast. When he works on cars, goes to car shows, or just reads about them, it takes him into a little world of his own where he has nothing to do except learn more about his hobby. Currently, he is working at the mill six days a week and on his only day off there is only one place you can find both my grandpa and him, in our garage fidgeting on cars.

For so many years these two men found their escape through the Mach 1 Mustang. When I look at this vehicle, I see the working class aspect of the car. They both worked very hard to earn enough money to buy such a fascinating vehicle, but yet every time they look at it they are reminded of what they had to do to earn such a car, work at the mill.

One of the biggest events each year for the two of them is the Hot Rod Super nationals that take place in Boardman every summer. Usually the event is sometime in June and for the people not living in Youngstown, Ohio, it is an absolute madhouse!!! There is a car show for all hot rods at the Canfield Fair Grounds during the day and then during the evening hours the cars go up and down the busiest street Boardman has to offer, Route 224. It is bumper to bumper traffic from approximately 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. My father and grandpa wouldn't miss this spectacular for the world. They meet old friends that they used to work with at the mill, who also spent some money on themselves by investing in a muscle car. Most of the cars at this showing are owned by older gentlemen. Most of the men who own these vehicles are of the middle upper class, who got this rank by beginning in the steel mills.

Now that you know the background of this 1969 Cobra Jet Mach 1 Mustang in my family, let me give a general idea of why my grandpa would have chosen such a machine!



On April 17, 1964, at the New York Worlds Fair, the Ford Mustang was revealed to the public. The car sold for around \$2400. What surprised many was who was buying these cars. They included: college students, senior citizens, and businessmen and women (*The Complete Book of Mustang*, 7). When such a variety of people are driving this muscle car it proved to be a car with a purpose, a show of class.

The Mach 1 Mustang, which was introduced in 1969, was an ultra-high performance driving machine. The cost of such an automobile was in the low \$3000 range. Today, of course, \$3000 for a new car is very cheap, but back then money was very hard to come by. Many were willing to pay this price for the prestige of such a car. In the 1950's, it was said, "If you had a fast carboy were a Big Man" (*Who Built America?*, 504). The Mustang had much emphasis on performance, with a 13.5-second quarter mile; this car made people feel like a "Big Man."

The advertisement for the Mustang is what I believe the Mustang means to my family. From a 1965 ad reads the following: "Somehow Mustang's sensationally sophisticated looks, its standard-equipment luxuries made everyday cares fade far, far into the background" (Stern, 115). When I saw this ad it instantly made me realize that this is the exact reason why this car has been in my family for years now.

I believe that this advertisement says it all. The Mustang's job was to take worries away, bottom line. When the mills shut down, so did many members of the community. When the mills were here they paid very reasonable wages so that workers could had some extra money to buy items that made them feel good in society, for my family this is what the Mustang did. The mills were once a great opportunity for the city of Youngstown, but now they are gone. Fortunately, we have the Mach 1 Mustang in our garage to remind my grandpa and my dad of what the steel mills of Youngstown, Ohio contributed to their lives.

References:

- The Complete Book of Mustang*. Publications International, Ltd., 1989.
- Stern, Jane and Michael. *Auto Ads*. New York: Random House, 1978.
- Who Built America?* New York: Pantheon Books, 1992.