

2012 Mustang V6 Coupe

The Pony Car *LIVES!*

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Only with a more mature writer do you really get your money's worth when it comes to historical perspective. And it is because I actually remember when the original "Pony" car surged on to the American culture in 1964, as a 1964 ½ model, that this 2012 car is really, really special. While the 2012 car is quite a bit larger and heavier than the original Pony/Mustang, it has to be considered in the same family, with the same mandate and purpose in life. Ok - at 3453 lbs, we'll grant that this is an American Quarter horse version of a Pony. Not that of an Arabian thoroughbred. Delicate or stealth this car is not. But refined, crisp, and a gas to drive, it is.



A word about the Pony car moniker. In my humble opinion, the term has been overused, as the Mustang began life as a lithe, compact sporty car the likes of which a fellow named Carroll Shelby showed interest in. But as time went on, the Pony became a horse, then well, we won't go there (you pick the farm animal)....just know that Carroll began withdrawing his enthusiasm about the same time the American public did. And when one adds the energy crisis, and the fact the Detroit engineers were ill-prepared for it, the Mustang was debased in to a strange creation called the Mustang II – not really a Mustang, or Pony, at all.

In the eighties, and the "Fox" body, there were signs of hope for the return of the Pony – then the 5.0 LX model brought some grass roots drivers back. Followed by improving but still limited Mustangs through the nineties. Then the 2003 Mustang Cobra appeared and the Pony was alive once again, albeit a bit pudgy and slightly disappointing – hope sprang eternal. In 2005, the jump to the retro/modern Mustang changed everything. But there was a choice – the aluminum V8, a very large Pony with very good but not spectacular performance. All the while, the more "Pony-ish" V6 models toiled in Hertz parking lots and were abused by high school juniors – not creating much stir at all. So it's been a long wait, but worth it. The new V6, with 300 HP and 280 ft. lbs. of torque in the newest, most beautiful, stiffest chassis Mustang brings the Pony out to play once again.

The V6 coupe is tight as a drum, quiet as a church before sunrise, and goes really, really well. The V6 with the 6 speed transmission is a delight to drive. The car literally makes me shake my head, as this was the car I wanted to buy when I graduated from college in 1974....but no, I was forced to buy the more sporty feeling Capri V6 from the Mercury dealer!

The week spent in this Mustang was a ton of fun, and reassured me that Ford is on the right track. This is a model that, with all the hype around the new 5.0 GT, and Boss, could have been forgotten (by the way these cars are definitely horses, not ponies). But the fundamental concept of the Mustang – Pony – was that of a sporty, not muscular car. So the V6 serves this DNA nobly. The 3.8 liter V6 engine, getting 18 city/ 31 mpg highway, is a champ. Quiet – I'd like some more bark from the exhaust as it really is reserved. But it pulls all you need to feel like you have an entirely respectable sports coupe that can hold its own, maybe not in a drag race, but in everyday life in the fast lane.

The interior is still a bit retro – and I'd like to see them migrate from this to a more modern layout... The steering wheel is unnecessarily large (and please let it be telescoping!), but the seats are subtly much better than in the past. While these seats look very stock, as I drove the Stang hard, I found that my entire upper back found a home as I pressed in to the seat, and the upper section took my entire torso in. No fancy bolsters for the kidneys, but at least I felt like I was wrapped and settled in, and could push the car without wrestling to stay put.

And wrestling we did! Our test car had the very good V6 Performance Package option that, at a reasonable price of \$1995, is a no-brainer purchase. With upgraded suspension components throughout, and 19" wheels, this would be the Pony to buy if you really wanted a Pony. The car, even in a couple of quick laps at Thunderhill, rapidly came up on a well-driven stock Audi S4 and presented itself for a point-by. Bone stock, nice, heavy wheels and all – the car is quick and predictable. Yes, of course there is too much body lean. But once ready for it, I could use it to transfer weight smoothly from side to side and nose to tail without any fear of bottoming. Is it a track day car? Well, actually – I say yes. Certainly an upgrade of brake pads would be in order. But with its summer-only Pirelli rubber from the factory, and very few options, this is a great road car, with a small but useable back seat – large trunk and capability for the track – at \$26,000 retail!! This is the same price range as the VW GTI, another very good and sporty car. But the comparison is interesting, isn't it? Depending on what flavor of ice cream you eat, the Mustang could be considered a SMOKIN DEAL.

The nit-pick list is short. I'd want to upgrade the sound system but it requires an option package that jumps the price, so I'd probably avoid that. The exhaust, once again, is actually too quiet, but I'm sure that's out of respect to its less enthusiastic customer that will surely buy this car and not complain.

Simply put: Welcome back – Pony car. Thanks to Fomoco for creating this icon – and to the American public for patiently waiting its return. Better late than never!