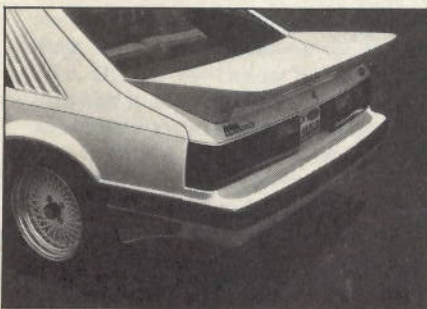


Improving the Breed:

SALEEN MUSTANG

Penny-pinching ponycar



PHOTOS BY RON HUSSEY

The Saleen Mustang turned heads everywhere. Rear spoiler appears oversized but makes its point in this car's category where performance is as much pizzazz as punch.



AFTERMARKET TUNERS CAN be regarded as being one of two basic types. The first (closer to the original definition) has grease under his fingernails and lives solely for performance. The second is more artist than engineer and tends to produce some of the better pearlescent paint jobs and genuine reptile skin interiors, if sometimes rear wings capable of back-flipping Formula 1 cars.

Steve Saleen is a tuner who marries these characteristics with minimal acrimony. However, he remains different in that he shuns pricey European finery, specializing in Ford Mustangs, an undertaking akin to designer bowling shirts, perhaps, but likewise one with certain practical implications.

The key here is the collaboration of the Ford Motor Co in Saleen's endeavor. Ford supplies special-order Mustangs—fitted with the GT's 5.0-liter engine, dash and seats but otherwise in less-costly LX trim—to Saleen customers exclusively.

When the car arrives, it's hurried off to Saleen Autosport's shop (315 N. Lake St., Burbank, Calif. 91502; 213 849-1017) where he adds special front and rear coil springs, Bilstein gas-pressurized front struts and rear shocks, urethane front anti-roll bar bushings, a chassis stiffener between the front strut towers, Hayashi alloy wheels (16 x 7-in.), Fulda P225/60VR-16 tires and a 4-spoke steering wheel. His background includes racing in the Trans-Am series—which is where he acquired the grease under his fingernails.

Cosmetic changes include an obligatory

big rear wing, front air dam, rocker panel flares, chrome air cleaner cover, test-their-legality-at-your-own-risk plexiglass headlight covers, and an attention-getting paint scheme. The bargain character of the car precludes any reptile skins, thank heavens, but we did count a rather large number of Saleen stickers and plaques on the car, though many of them appeared to be easily removable.

The performance numbers speak for

themselves. Subjectively, the highlights are (compared with GTs of recent memory) improved agility, a suspension that's firm but not excessively so, terrific ultimate grip and improved off-the-line acceleration we can only attribute to better control of the live axle.

In all, it's an excellent buy at \$14,795, even when compared with the production GT (\$10,598), which is a very good buy these days.

SPECIFICATIONS

	Saleen Mustang	Mustang GT 1985		
			PERFORMANCE	
			Acceleration	
			Time to distance, sec:	
			0-1320 ft (¼ mi) 15.8 15.9	
			Speed at end of ¼ mi, mph 91.0 91.0	
			Time to speed, sec:	
			0-30 mph 2.5 2.7	
			0-60 mph 7.0 7.2	
			0-80 mph 12.0 12.3	
			Braking	
			Minimum stopping distances, ft:	
			From 60 mph 163 151	
			From 80 mph 274 271	
			Control in panic stop very good	
			Handling	
			Lateral accel, 100-ft radius, g 0.87 0.79	
			Speed thru 700-ft slalom, mph 60.0 60.9	
			Interior noise	
			Max, 1st gear 78 81	
			Constant 70 mph 76 76	
			Fuel economy, mpg est 15.5	
			¹Price as tested includes Mustang LX (\$10,500 FOB Detroit), Saleen conversion (\$4295)	
			²Single entry indicates specifications are identical	
GENERAL				
Weight dist (with driver), f/r, %	59/41 ²			
Wheelbase, in.	100.5			
Length	179.3			
Width	69.1			
Height	52.1			
Suspension, f/r	MacPherson struts/live axle			
Brake system, f/r	vented discs/drums			
Wheels	Hayashi, std alloy, 16 x 7	15 x 7		
Tires	Fulda, Goodyear, P225/60VR-16	P225/60VR-15		
Steering type	rack & pinion, pwr assist			
Engine type	ohv V-8			
Displacement, cc	4942			
Bhp @ rpm, SAE net	210 @ 4600			
Torque @ rpm, lb-ft	265 @ 3400			
Transmission	5-sp M			