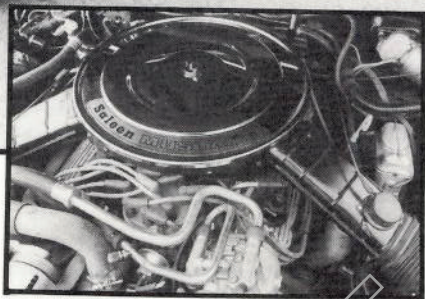
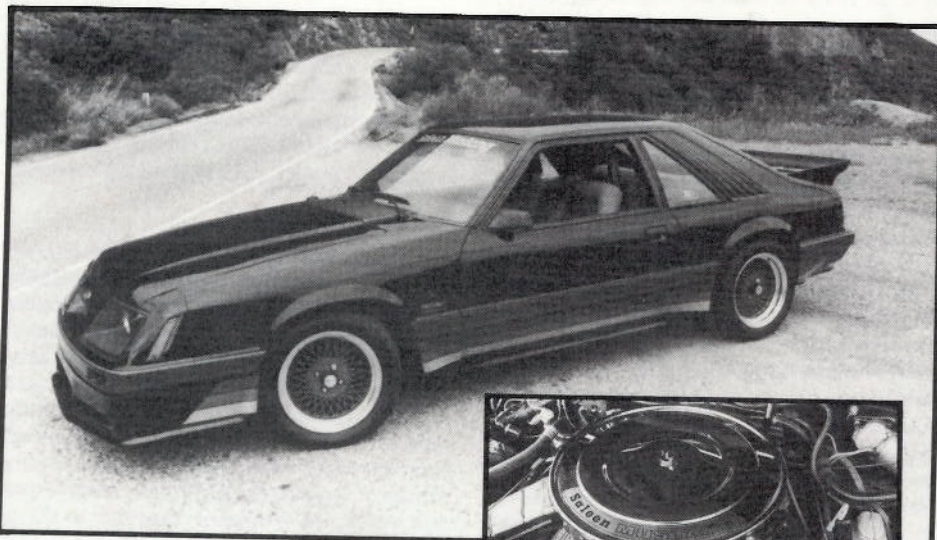


THE SCCA ROAD

SALEEN MUSTANG... A CUSTOMIZED HORSE THAT FLIES

by Don Fuller



Individualizing a car predates even the California Kustom craze, and there will always be those who want wheels different from the pack. Into this time-honored biz steps Steve Saleen, a racer of repute in SCCA Formula Atlantic and Trans-Am, among others, and now a car builder as well. His car is the Saleen Mustang, a customized horse of a definitely different breed.

Here's how it works: Saleen's crew starts with a brand-new Mustang LX (not the HO GT version, because that way Saleen avoids some GT pieces he will replace, anyway), that is specially-ordered through the dealer network and specially-built on the assembly lines to have the 5.0-liter HO V-8, five-speed, 3.08:1 limited slip diff, and suspension of the GT. Then in and on go the changes, and what emerges is the Saleen Mustang. The trick is that Saleen works only with the chassis, tires, wheels, exterior and interior. The engine and driveline, by remaining stock, remain also emissions-certifiable and therefore nicely legal—and licensable. All the changes—even the tiniest detail, like the type of adhesive used to attach a dashboard plaque, for example—are passed by corporate and engineering Ford as OK. So, not only is the car a real nice piece of work, it's entirely legal, is ordered and sold through the Ford dealer network using a bonafide order number and system, and leaves the showroom under the watchful eye of a full factory warranty. You pick your own favorite dealer. You can even find a parts replacement for, say, a damaged spoiler or a scuffed side stripe.

Down the Straights

Based on the driveline of the HO GT 5.0-liter Mustang, the Saleen version has plenty of horsepower—210, to be exact, and 265 lbs-ft of torque; this thing has tubular headers, roller cam and a big four-barrel carburetor. Also, the HO powerplant is the

same as that used in police Mustangs, so this is an engine and car combination that certain government agencies have verified will reach 60 in less than seven seconds and will make close to 140 top speed.

Around the Corners

It is under the car where Saleen's crew expends most of its harder-core effort. The Ford GT springs are about 450 lbs-in. in front and 205 in back, according to Saleen. His replacements are rated at 650 in front, 240 in the rear, and they also lower the car considerably. The front anti-rollbar goes to 1.31-inch diameter, and in both front and rear the bar bushings are urethane. Bilstein shocks are bolted in all around. To hold chassis flex better in check, an additional crossmember is installed in the area of the front control arms. The wheels are 16 x 8, made by ATS, and the tires are Fulda, 225/50VR-16. All these changes add up to a Mustang that feels, pretty much, about as close to a race car as you're going to want for street use.

On the Track

As of this writing, Saleen has delivered about 175 cars and plans to do 500 to 600 in model year 1985—his limitation is the number of HO V-8s Ford will build. Unfortunately this means he doesn't build enough to qualify for Showroom Stock, which requires 3000 copies per year. That's the bad news. The good news is in Solo II competition. The Saleen Mustang is a car to reckon with in B Street Prepared. No way, you say, that's Corvette country, and we all know the kind of cornering power the new 'Vette can generate. Oh yeah? Try on these numbers.

At the Shelby Performance Center's 200-foot skid pad recently, Rick Titus of Petersen Publications generated .87 Gs in an '85 Corvette shod with the super-sticky Goodyear Gatorback. He then went out in the Saleen Mustang with its Fulda rubber and produced—.88 G. That, folks, is impressive. Once the word got out all the car mags started yipping for a copy of Saleen's pony to test drive.

Finish Lines

Saleen has given his Mustang a fairly subdued kind of individuality. Besides the expected steering wheel and shift knob category of changes, there are also such things as new instrumentation, including a 170mph speedometer. The front spoiler and smallish side skirts aren't at all obtrusive, and the big tray over the rear deck is the most visible extra appendage. Even the graphics—an area where most producers of these things are incredibly tasteless—are well done. In fact, there are too many nice touches to cover here, and it must be said that all of Saleen's work is very well conceived, made, finished and attached. There's even a numbered dash plaque.

But the sweet part is the price, easy availability and Ford's warranty. Depending upon how heavily optioned you order the car to start with, it is possible to stay well under \$15,000. Our fully-outfitted black test car was only \$14,689, for example, and you could leave off a lot of comfort and convenience items like air conditioning and power windows. Thus, it really does go fast for not much money. It's individual and has a full warranty—and that puts it in a very select group.

If all this sounds like a good deal, contact your local Ford dealer, or: Saleen Autosports, 313 N. Lake Street, Burbank, CA 91502 (213) 849-1017. □

Tech: Saleen Mustang

Price \$14,689, as tested

Dimensions

Wheelbase, in. 100.5
Track, F/R, in. (stock) 56.6/57.0
Length, in. 179.3
Height, in. 50.0
Width, in. 69.1
Curb weight, lbs. 3200
Fuel capacity, gals. 15.4

Chassis

Suspension, F/R MacPherson struts, anti-rollbar/live axle, four-links, coil springs, anti-rollbar
Tires P225/50VR-16
Wheels 8.0 x 16 alloy
Brakes, F/R 10.1-inch diameter vented discs/9.0-inch diameter drums
Transmission Five-speed manual
Final drive ratio 3.08:1

Engine

Displacement, cubic inches 302
Bore x stroke, inches 4.00 x 3.00
Horsepower 210bhp at 4600rpm
Torque 265 lbs-ft at 3400 rpm