

Text and Photography  
by Eric Rickman

**"Y**ou get what you pay for," is an axiom that has stood the test of time. Detroit builds cars ranging from econo-boxes to limos, always within parameters that are a compromise between cost and desired product.

The Ford Motor Company has stretched this compromise pretty far toward the ideal end of the scale with their 5-liter GT Mustang. It is a lot of car for the money.

Steve Saleen of Saleen Autosport (Dept. HRM, 313 North Lake St., Burbank, CA 91502; 213/849-1017) has taken the additional step needed to "improve the breed" and make a

# SALEEN SOLUTION

GIVING AN EXTRA KICK TO SECOND-  
AND THIRD-GENERATION PONIES



real thoroughbred racer out of this little colt. Steve has not only succeeded in making the pony look better, but he's made it handle better too, yet kept it in a competitive price range with other stock GTs on the market.

Cosmetically, Steve has improved the little GT with the addition of a redesigned airdam up front, ground effects-type skirts at the sides, and a lower valance in the rear. A spoiler with the DOT-required "third eye" stop light has been added over the rear deck hatch. The use of Saleen color-coordinated graphics further enhance the car's overall appearance.

The use of shorter, heavier coil springs with "tailored" spring rates has lowered the car about 1½ inches despite the addition of the

one-inch-larger 16x7-inch Riken "waffle" alloy wheels shod with General XP2000V-225/50 radial tires. Lowering the car serves to reduce the undercar air turbulence (i.e., drag).

All the aerodynamic trim is injection molded polyurethane, which is much more flexible than the commonly used fiberglass which tends to shatter on impact. Trim pieces are secured at the ends inside the wheelwells by sheetmetal screws and held to the body by 3M double-faced adhesive tape over their length—a unique but practical method that avoids butchering the body. The spoiler is bolted to the rear deck, as it generates a good deal of downforce at speed, enhancing the car's stability. All items are held to Ford's tolerances.

To improve the handling, Steve has installed Koni shocks and front struts re-valved to his specs to dampen the ride, in addition to the "designed rate" coil springs, resulting in true "sports car" ride and handling. Ford's 1.30-inch stabilizer bar is retained, with the substitution of Saleen graphite-impregnated urethane mounting bushings to free up the bar's action and absorb some of the running gear noise. Wheel alignment in high-speed cornering is retained by the use of a Koni upper tower control yoke. The use of the yoke, in addition to an engine compartment cross brace, increased the car's cornering ability just over two seconds on a 20-second slalom course.

Right out of the gate this pony is



# SALEEN

pretty close to a thoroughbred in stock form. This is attested to by the fact that the California Highway Patrol uses this little runner as its designated freeway pursuit vehicle. With a *Motor Trend* magazine road test top speed of 139+ mph and 0-to-60mph in 6.0 seconds, it would behoove you to think twice before trying to out-run it. As a quarter-horse, it covers the distance in 14.64 seconds, showing 92+ mph at the finish line.

It is quite evident that the engine and drivetrain don't need any help. The 200hp H.O. engine in the Saleen Mustang is coupled to a 5-speed transmission in combination with Ford's 3.08:1 Traction Lok rearend to produce an almost ideal package. On special order you can get Ford's automatic overdrive transmission which features an electric clutch that locks up in high gear over 35 mph to eliminate transmission slippage. By not altering the engine or drivetrain, the Saleen retains Ford's EPA certification requirements and warranty program.

Ford approves of the Saleen Mustang to the extent that they have accepted Steve into their dealer's purchase program. Steve is only the second "privateer" to be thus honored. Carroll Shelby was the first. Remember him?

With Ford's acceptance, Steve is able to order cars built to his specifications. The Saleen is actually a stock Mustang on an LX chassis instead of the GT chassis, equipped with the aforementioned engine and drivetrain. Some GT hardware is included, such as the quick-ratio steering, sport seats, the GT instrument cluster upgraded with Saleen graphics and a 170mph speedo, and a left side "dead-pedal." Steve hasn't neglected the creature comforts while concentrating on performance, though. The cockpit is fancied up a bit with a Kenwood KRC-6000 sound system, a leather-wrapped Momo steering wheel, and a deluxe Escort radar warning receiver.

Being a road racer, it wasn't long before Steve realized he had a real winner in his stable which prompted him to field a two-car racing team with General Tires sponsorship. The cars are entered in the SCCA Escort endurance stock class racing series. In the stock GT class, the Saleen runs against ZX Turbos, Pontiac Trans Ams, IROC Camaros, Mustang GTs, Mazdas, and Porsche 944s.

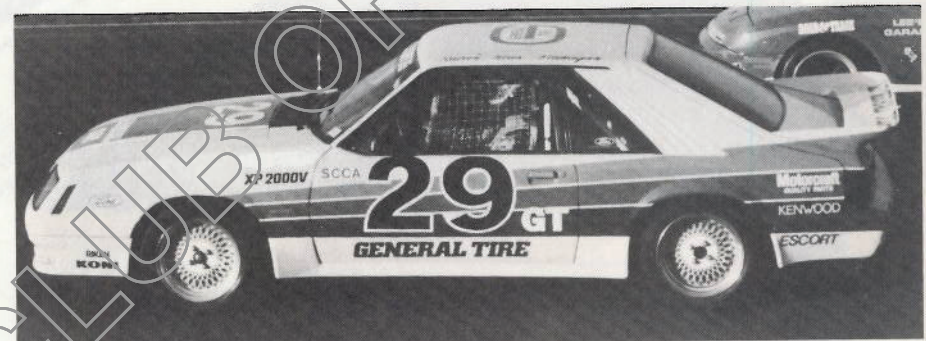
Steve's cars have won a 24-hour enduro after setting track records during qualifying and starting on the pole. This was the first win of its kind for Fords! The car has proven to be one of the quickest on the track, with the only competition coming from the 944 Porsches with their larger gas



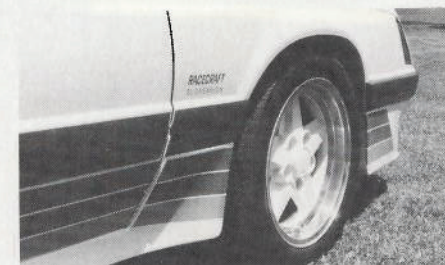
Color-coordinated graphics add a pleasing touch to the car's overall appearance. These are stepped blue tone panels on a white car. Ronal wheels are painted to match individual paint schemes.



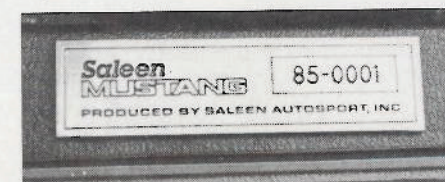
Ronal IROC-style alloy wheels are another dress-up item. Clear Lexan headlight shields are available to improve aerodynamics. Shorter springs lower the car 1/2 inches to reduce under-car air turbulence and drag.



With the addition of a rollcage and decals, your Saleen Mustang will be as race-ready as this one from Steve's two-car racing stable. His cars have set many qualifying records.



Ground effects trim not only looks good, but serves the useful purpose of smoothing airflow and shielding tire splash.



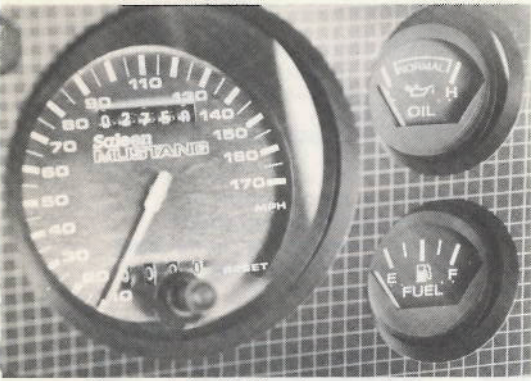
Each car is serialized and registered with this signature plate. Numbers are stamped elsewhere on frame and body too. This is the first car produced in '85.

## Saleen MUSTANG

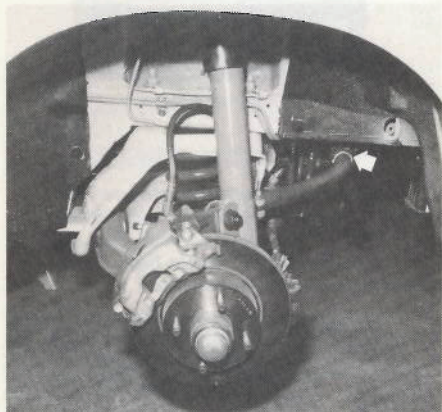
The use of Saleen Signature jewelry to replace the Mustang marques has been done very tastefully throughout the car.



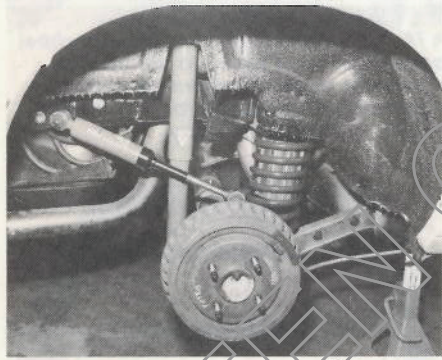
Saleen's lower rear valance reduces airstream updraft from under the car with accompanying dirt and moisture. Spoiler is bolted to rear deck to provide stabilizing downforce at speed.



The updated 170mph speedo is available separately, or as part of a complete Saleen Signature Instrument cluster.



Front strut, spring and stabilizer mounting bushing (arrow) have been replaced. A simple job with a pair of jacks, one under the body, the other to raise and lower the A-arm.



Rear suspension mods are another straightforward parts-swapping job. Koni shocks are re-valved to Saleen specs to tailor the handling. Horizontal shock prevents wheelhop.

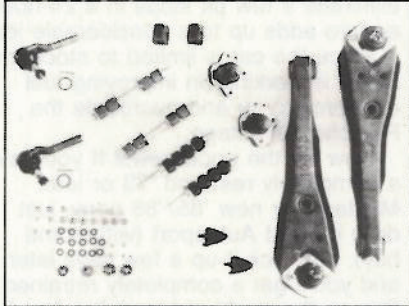


This is only half-a-lot of cars already sold, with a waiting list backlogged. Steve's production is limited by his allotment from Ford. Starting with 50 in '84, and just over 200 in '85, his target is 1000 per year. Still limited production.

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# SALEEN

tanks and smaller engines. We're talking about 21.12-gallon tanks versus the Mustang's 15.4-gallon tank. Not to mention the Porsche engine, which at 2.5 liters is one-half the displacement of the Mustang engine, a four-banger against a V8. With equally matched machines, being able to eliminate a few pit stops in a 24-hour endurance adds up to a considerable lead.

Since the car is limited to stock trim, Steve is working on improving fuel economy to try and overcome the Porsche advantage.

Now for the good news! If you have a completely restored '73 or later Mustang, or new '85/'86 pony, just drop it off at Autosport (with some hay), and pick it up a few days later and you'll get a completely retrained Saleen thoroughbred, serialized and registered in Steve's stud book. Steve adds additional serial numbers to Ford's ID numbers and records them for later authentication of your car. You get a certified copy of your pony's bloodlines.

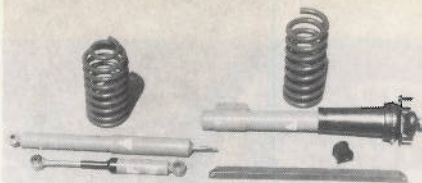
Clubs are already forming, and it looks like this bangtail will surely become a collectors' item. Limited production will ensure its scarcity in about 20 or 30 years. Certified registration will discourage unscrupulous parties from trying to create a phony pony Saleen from an early Mustang—a not-unheard-of practice in today's market.

If you can't spring for the \$4000 to \$5000 it takes to have Steve retrain your Mustang, all the parts and pieces are available to enable you to do it yourself. Kits are available for each stage of the conversion.

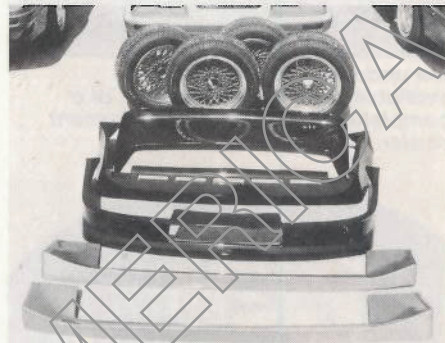
The cosmetic package has all the exterior trim parts, including wheels and tires, to improve both appearance and aerodynamics. The suspension package provides the springs, shocks, braces and bushings to make the car handle properly. Finally, there are the interior items: Kenwood 6000 radio and speakers, Momo steering wheel, sports seats, 170mph speedo, and Saleen instrument cluster, plus a much needed Escort radar detector.

The best part of this deal is the fact that you can buy the packages a piece at a time as your budget permits. D-I-Y cars will not be registered, however. Steve is committed to keeping all the items in stock for seven years to meet Ford's parts availability requirements.

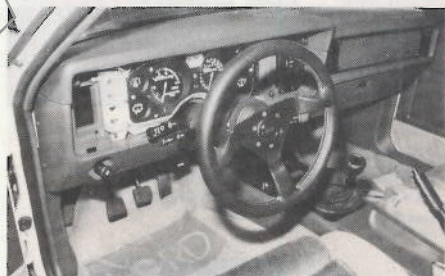
If you have the hay, just contact your nearest Ford/Saleen dealer and ride one of these beauties right out of the stable for \$14,000 to \$16,000. Compare these prices against other GT cars—IROC Camaros, ZX Turbos, not to mention Porsches—that go for a bit more. Plug these numbers into your dollar vs. performance/pleasure formula and you will see that it is the best ride for the money. *SM*



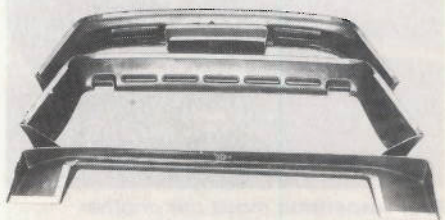
Basic suspension mods consist of replacing springs, struts and shocks. "Designed rate" springs are shorter and heavier than stock. This is a set for one side, front right, rear left.



Die-cast polyurethane pieces are used to improve aerodynamics. Riken 16x7 "waif" wheels are mounted with General 225VR50 HP radial tires. Other combinations are available.



A Momo leather-wrapped steering wheel adds a luxurious touch to the interior. Note easy access to instrument cluster which can be swapped for a complete Saleen Signature assembly.



Installation is simplified by Saleen's use of 3M double-faced adhesive tape to secure aerodynamic trim. Sheetmetal screws are used only at the ends within the wheelwells.



Autosport is able to turn out two-to-three cars per day in this small area of the Saleen shop. Production will increase as Ford's allotment increases. Parts swapping and installation is relatively easy for the do-it-yourself builder.

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