

49 Years of Mustang Proves Universal Appeal of an Icon

by Irena Granaas

The Mustang, Ford's iconic muscle car, celebrated its 49th birthday April 17.

On that same day, another milestone took place: The one millionth Flat Rock Assembly Plant-built Mustang rolled off the line. The car has been built exclusively at Flat Rock since 2004.

From the time the car debuted in April 1964, Ford plants have produced more than 8.5 million Mustangs.

The celebration was marked by Raj Nair, group vice president for Global Product Development, who rode off the line in a Ruby Red 2014 Mustang convertible at the Flat Rock Assembly Plant.

"Mustang is one of the most beloved nameplates in the industry with fans around the world and throughout Ford Motor Company," said Nair. "The team here at Flat Rock Assembly has built an outstanding reputation for quality while producing one million Mustangs over the last nine years – and we expect them to continue that for many years to come."

Ford Product Communications Manager Craig Daitch said there's a reason why people never seem to tire of this American classic muscle car.

"I think what makes the Mustang special is it's been adopted by the people. It really has been a car that has been developed and designed by the people – our customers have always been our first priority with the Mustang," he said.

"When you're in continuous production for 50 years, you tend to accrue not just original customers and fans, but the next generations of customers and fans."

Starting from the Mustang's instantly recognizable body shape, curves and distinctive taillights, Daitch noted the car comes with powertrain packages to suit just about everybody, from the thrifty commuter whose V6 Mustang gets 31 mpg while generating more than 300 horsepower, all the way to someone who loves the high performance of a 5.8-liter supercharged V8 under the hood of the Mustang GT500.

"While there are certain variances in performance, there's no question there's an underlying strand of DNA that makes the Mustang unique," Daitch said.

The official 50th birthday of the Mustang is April 17, 2014. Ford is not saying if there will be any special celebrations, commemorations or promotions at that time.

But one thing's almost certain – the Flat Rock Assembly Plant will continue to turn out Mustangs on demand, even as it gears up to add a production shift that will make the Ford Fusion later this year.

Also fondly known as the Pony car, Mustang was assembled near Ford's home base in Dearborn, at the famous Rouge factory, for four decades before the company moved production to Flat Rock in 2004.

After its introduction in 1964, the car proved to be more popular than expected, which led to Ford adding production capacity outside Michigan.

By 1965, plants in Metuchen, N.J., and San Jose, Calif., also were pumping out Mustangs to meet demand. Less than two years later, on March 2, 1966, the one millionth Mustang came off the line in Dearborn, and now



Flat Rock Assembly employee Ed Salna pilots the 1 millionth plant-built Mustang with Raj Nair, group vice president for product development.

the count has reached 8.5 million.

The Flat Rock plant has been producing vehicles since 1987, when it opened as Mazda Motor Manufacturing USA and built the Mazda MX-6. By 1992, Ford purchased a 50 percent share in the plant, now called AutoAlliance International.

Products built at Flat Rock over the years include the Mazda 626, Mazda6, Mercury Cougar and Ford Probe.

Over the past year, the Flat Rock plant has undergone a significant transformation, said Plant Manger Tim Young.

"We've invested \$555 million, including a state-of-the-art, fully flexible body shop and an upgraded paint shop to make sure we're continuing to build the best of the best for the next one million Mustangs," he said.

Agreeing that the muscle car segment in America is a very competitive one, Daitch said that has Ford engineers and designers continually challenged in order to keep Mustang on the cutting edge. He added that the car isn't just special to buyers and fans outside of the company.

2013's Car Sales Looking Strong

Through the first three weeks of April 2013, new-car sales are on pace to remain above a 15-million-unit annual selling pace for the sixth consecutive month, according to Kelley Blue Book www.kbb.com.

KBB projects light vehicle sales to surpass 1.3 million units by month-end, which is an 11.4 percent annual gain, equaling a SAAR of 15.3 million.

The KBB report points out that sales are driven by many factors, including low interest rates and more favorable credit conditions, high used-car trade-in values, and fresh redesigns.

"Ford is poised to post significant gains, with an increase of 15.3 percent because of strong demand for the Fusion and Focus, both of which improved sales by more than 20 percent in the first quarter," said Alec Gutierrez, market analyst of automotive insights at KKB.

"Consumer demand for new vehicles is strong, which is evident in the strength of the retail market."

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GM Foundation Donates \$100,000 To Red Cross for Disaster Aid

The General Motors Foundation is providing a \$100,000 grant to the American Red Cross to aid emergency management officials with relief efforts, to help provide shelter and meals to those in need, and help the organization prepare for and respond to disasters in Texas.

"The recent events in Boston and West, Texas, and the severe flooding impacting many Midwestern states remind us that disasters can happen at any time and it is critical that the Red Cross have the funds to help communities prepare and respond," said David Staszak, divisional vice president of Development for the American Red Cross.

Annually, the Red Cross responds to more than 4,000 disasters in the state of Texas, assisting nearly 6,000 families.

While headquartered in Detroit, GM has a significant presence in Texas.

"As home to our Arlington assembly plant, we count many Texans as family, friends and neighbors and want to help them in this time of great need," said Selim Bingol, vice president, GM Global Communications and Public Policy and chairman of the GM Foundation.

"All of us extend our condo-

lences to those affected by the West, Texas, tragedy. We hope that partnering with the Red Cross will help build more resilient communities across the state."

Since 2004, the GM Foundation has provided more than \$7 million to global disaster relief efforts within the United States. In Texas, the GM Foundation last year provided nearly half-a-million dollars to colleges, non-profit organizations and students across Texas through its Plant City Grants, Buick Achievers Scholarship Program and University Grants initiatives.

Throughout 2013, team GM Cares volunteers will help with neighborhood revitalization efforts in Arlington and Austin as part of the GM Foundation's \$1 million grant to Habitat for Humanity International announced in January.

The GM Foundation is a member of the American Red Cross Disaster Responder Program and helps to ensure that the Red Cross has funds on hand to provide immediate relief when disaster strikes.

Anyone interested in providing support to the disaster relief efforts can visit www.redcross.org for more information or call 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767).

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