

FREE SAMPLE

The opening pages of

1971 Ford Mustang Restoration Guide

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RESTORATIONESSENTIALS

1971 Ford Mustang Restoration Guide

Model Year 1971 — The Redesign Year

The complete factory-correct restoration reference for the first year of the redesigned Mustang: VIN and door-label decoding, every engine from the 250 six to the Boss 351 and 429 Cobra Jet, transmissions, axles, paint and trim codes, production data, casting and date codes, torque specs, rust-prone areas, and a step-by-step restoration sequence.

KEY SPECS AT A GLANCE

Wheelbase	109.0 inches (redesigned body, one inch longer than 1970)
Bodies	Hardtop, SportsRoof, Convertible, Grande, Mach 1
Engines	250 I6, 302-2V, 351C-2V, 351C-4V, 351CJ, Boss 351, 429CJ/SCJ
Ratings	SAE gross — the last full gross-rated Mustang year
Total built	149,678
Rarest regular engine	Boss 351 (R-code): 1,806 built — final year

A factory-correct restoration reference — specifications verified against period Ford documentation and established marque references.

1. Ford in 1971: The End of the Performance Decade

By 1971 the Ford Motor Company was a very different animal than the one that launched the Mustang in 1964. The pony car's first full year had delivered a staggering 559,451 cars on top of the 121,538 early 1964½ units, and Ford had ridden that wave through the rest of the decade. But the market of 1971 was not the market of 1965. Insurance surcharges on performance cars, tightening federal emissions rules, rising gasoline prices, and a buyer shift toward personal-luxury coupes had all eaten into the Mustang's share. Ford's answer was a full redesign: a bigger, wider, longer Mustang aimed at comfort as much as speed.

Henry Ford II still ran the company, and Lee Iacocca — the Mustang's original champion — was president, but the era of the total-performance marketing machine was winding down. Ford's 1971 engineering budget went into clean-air compliance and the new-for-1971 body shell rather than into the racing programs of the late 1960s. The Boss 302 was gone, Trans-Am homologation was over, and NASCAR's aero wars were cooling. What performance remained in the 1971 lineup was concentrated in two cars: the new Boss 351, the last Boss Mustang ever offered, and the big-block 429 Cobra Jet.

One more piece of context matters for restorers. In 1971 the industry still rated engines under the SAE gross standard — bare engine on a dyno, no accessories, no air cleaner, no full exhaust. Gross ratings made for flattering brochure numbers and they also make 1971 the last year whose advertised horsepower can be fairly compared only to 1970 and earlier. Starting in 1972, Ford published SAE net ratings (engine as installed, with accessories), and the numbers dropped sharply without any single engine necessarily getting weaker. This guide labels every rating as gross or net so you never compare the two systems by accident.

2. Mustang History: From Pony Car to Personal Luxury

The Mustang story starts in 1964, when Iacocca's team packaged Falcon mechanicals in a long-hood, short-deck body and created the pony-car segment overnight. The first generation ran from 1964½ through 1966 on a 108-inch wheelbase, grew slightly and gained the big-block 390 in 1967, then was substantially reworked for 1969–1970 with a wider track and the Boss program. By 1970 the Mustang was selling roughly 190,000 cars a year — healthy, but far from the 1966 peak of over 600,000.

For 1971 Ford invested in a clean-sheet redesign under design chief Larry Shinoda's influence and the production studio: the body grew nearly four inches in length and over two inches in width, the wheelbase stretched to 109 inches, and the styling went low and wide with a long, nearly flat fastback roofline on the SportsRoof. The convertible and the hardtop carried the same

architecture. It was a deliberate move upmarket — Ford was chasing buyers who might otherwise shop a personal-luxury coupe — and it defined the Mustang for the next three model years.

The 1971 model lineup also reorganized the nameplates. The SportsRoof body became the performance canvas, the Grande became the luxury hardtop, and the Mach 1 became a distinct model with its own VIN body code (05) for the first time. Engine choices spanned seven distinct V8 and six-cylinder combinations, the widest spread of any Mustang year, because 1971 straddled two eras: the high-compression, gross-rated performance era that was ending, and the emissions era that was beginning.

3. What Makes 1971 Unique

The 1971 Mustang is the first year of the 1971–1973 body generation, and first years always matter in restoration: one-year-only parts are the hardest to find and the easiest to get wrong. Here is what separates 1971 from every other Mustang.

1. The redesigned body — 109-inch wheelbase

The 1971 redesign added an inch to the wheelbase (108 to 109 inches), roughly four inches of overall length (to 189.5 inches), and about two inches of width (to 74.1 inches) versus the 1970 car. Front and rear track widened to 61.5 and 61.0 inches. Sheet metal is 1971–1973-generation specific — no 1970 panel fits — but within the generation there are 1971-only details to watch: the grille texture, the standard front bumper and its guards, and early-production trim pieces changed during the year.

2. Five bodies, and the Mach 1 becomes its own model

1971 offered the hardtop (VIN body 01), SportsRoof (02), convertible (03), the new luxury-trimmed Grande (04), and the Mach 1 (05). The Mach 1's promotion to a standalone model code matters at purchase time: a true 1971 Mach 1 carries 05 in the third and fourth VIN positions, not a SportsRoof with bolted-on stripes. Standard Mach 1 equipment included the color-keyed urethane front bumper, NASA-style hood scoops, competition suspension, and the distinctive honeycomb rear panel treatment with the pop-open fuel cap.

3. Vinyl roof — a first for the Mustang

1971 was the first year a vinyl roof was offered on the Mustang, available on the hardtop and the Grande. The option defined the personal-luxury direction Ford was pushing. From a restoration standpoint, vinyl roofs trap moisture against the roof panel: when evaluating a car, probe the roof rails, drip rails, and the sail-panel area carefully, and budget for roof-panel work under any tired