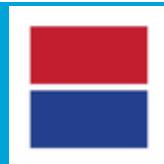


1969 Ford Mustang Boss 302

Ford's answer to the Z/28 rates an A. It's easily the best Mustang yet—and that includes all the Shelbys and Mach 1's.



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BENYAS-KAUFMAN

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The test questions have all been asked and it's time for the Ford Motor Company to hand in its paper. Passing or failing will be determined, as much as anything, by the way the Mustang Boss 302 maintains its dignity on Ford's handling course, a serpentine stretch of asphalt in the middle of what could pass for one of Dearborn's golf courses. And right there it is, parked, or rather poised, at the entrance to the track—Ford's answer to **the Z/28**. The mood is tense. Matt Donner, principal engineer in charge of Mustang/Cougar ride and handling, waits, anxious to have the Cobra Jet Mach 1 blot removed from the record or at least superseded by something a bit more meritorious.

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KERIAN

Two slightly worn crash helmets are produced from the back seat, one for Donner and one for our technical editor, doing nothing, to dilute the battle-to-the-death atmosphere that strengthens as the moment for the shoot-out approaches. The Mustang doesn't help much either, sitting there like a cocked .357 Magnum ready to do its specialty with no more than a nudge. Donner assumes his battle station behind the wheel. We will judge the first round from the passenger side. Seat belts; click. Shoulder belts; click. Key in the slot, turn . . . and the Boss 302 awakes with undisguised belligerence. Nose out on the track, first gear, second, third and a low anguished moan from the fat Goodyears as the Mustang threads into the first turn. Two necks strain to keep their heavy, helmeted heads balanced on their respective shoulders. Into the next turn, a tight 200-foot radius left hander, tail hung out and the inside front wheels clipping the grass at the apex. Left turn, right turn, lap after lap at exhilarating speeds—Donner is submitting his homework in a most convincing fashion.

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Our turn. Easy at first, remembering the **beak-heavy Mach 1** that plowed straight on with its front tires smoking if you tried to hurry. But the Boss 302 is another kind of Mustang. It simply drives around the turns with a kind of detachment never before experienced in a street car wearing Ford emblems. Faster and faster, but its composure never slips. Adjust the line with the steering wheel or with the throttle or both. Hang the tail way out with a quick flick of the wheel and a legful of gas. Do whatever you like and the car complies with the accuracy of your shadow. Very simply, the Boss 302 is unshakable. Maneuvers that had been highly unsettling in previous Mustangs have a recreational air about them in the Boss 302. The car understeers, but not much—it has just exactly the right balance to allow you to drive instead of plow through a turn. The steering responds to corrections right up until you chicken out, and the car's attitude in a turn is extraordinarily sensitive to power. This is not to say that you spin out if you dip too deeply into the gas, but rather that you can order up and sustain any drift angle you like. Even better, the handling characteristics remain the same whether you're cornering at six- or nine-tenths of the car's ability. Without a doubt the Boss 302 is the best handling Ford ever to come out of Dearborn and may just be the new standard by which everything from Detroit must be judged.

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While we're all reeling from this unexpected development perhaps we should retrace our steps back to the beginning and examine Ford's motives for such an advancement. You see, there is this thing called the youth market which appears to have an insatiable appetite for wildly trimmed performance cars and can summon up the cash, or at least the monthly payments, to indulge itself. Chevrolet has always been particularly sensitive to these youthful demands.

When Ford discovered that Chevy sold 7,000 Z/28 Camaros in 1968, and the marketing demographers predicted that up to 20,000 might be sold in 1969, there was no choice but hoist the bugle and blow the charge. Not only was Chevrolet selling cars to customers who might have bought an equivalent Mustang if it was available, but Chevy was also achieving a fantastic reputation every time the David-like Z/28 dusted off somebody's, and maybe one of Ford's, Goliaths. It's not that Chevrolet had created a particularly conspicuous automobile, but the Z/28's combination of endearing mechanical presence and sparkling performance had made it *the* car for those in the know.

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Specifications

PRICE AS TESTED: \$3958.43

Displacement: 302 cu in

Power: 290 hp @ 5800 rpm

Torque: 290 lb-ft @ 4300 rpm

TRANSMISSION: 4-speed manual

DIMENSIONS:

Wheelbase: 108.0 in

Length: 187.4 in

Width: 71.3 in **Height:** 49.2 in

Curb weight: 3387 lb

C/D TEST RESULTS:

Zero to 60 mph: 6.0 sec*

Zero to 100 mph: 15.2 sec*

Standing 1/4-mile: 14.57 sec @ 97.57 mph

**Speed time data calculated from information supplied by the Ford Motor Company*