

WILD WILD HORSES

Ask any local who ever yearned for a raw rear-driven slice of the American dream, and one response comes up: Left-Hand Drive. Steve Smith finds that has all changed, with a few Ts & Cs, of course

PHOTOGRAPHY: JON IVINS

FORTOO LONG South Africans have been denied some of the great character cars of the motoring world, all because the Yanks drive on the wrong side of the road. But now a company in Durban is righting those lefts.

It's a menacing car, this Mustang. Like nothing anything else I've driven before, no matter how fast or how powerful. It's raw, it's on the edge and it's intimidating the hell out of me. But I also can't remember when last I enjoyed driving this much.

The sun has just risen, glinting off the Indian Ocean, as we burble along the embankment, the V8 barely ticking over in fourth gear. As I approach a traffic light I gear down to third, the incredibly short and precise gearshift adding to the moment. The light turns green and I accelerate, still in third but barely moving. Instead of hiccupping, the V8 picks up the slack and begins to howl, the blower wheezing in the background and the speedo needle heading quickly to 60mph, past it, and on to 90. We hit a minor pothole in a corner and the solid rear axle gives a shudder, bumping the rear out of line and reminding me that this is no sterile German automobile.

What this is, is a 2009 Ford Mustang GT Coupe, modified and, more importantly, converted to right-hand drive. It's street legal too, and driving the Durban boulevards, drawing crowds and giving its driver an immoderate amount of pleasure. In the States there's a Mustang on every corner. A Mustang is a standard 21st birthday present for the middle-class, and they're no more prestigious than a Golf GTI here in South Africa. After driving this one, that's hard to fathom.

But because they're only built in left-hand drive, they've never been officially imported into South Africa. And that means that a Mustang driving along the streets of Durban draws more glances than would a Porsche, Ferrari, Aston or Lambo.

This particular little wild pony started off as a stock standard, 4.6-litre, Grabber Orange GT Coupe. It was bought new in the States and then shipped to Manchester, England, for a few mods.

There it was lowered by 40mm, given black 20-inch Antera rims (with a little pony in the centre), an intercooled Paxton supercharger, a Roush airdam/bumper (to house the inter-

cooler), a Hurst gearshift and short-throw linkage, and SLP dual exhausts. So what started out as a 300hp grand tourer was now putting out 500hp, or 373kW. Torque hasn't been measured yet, but Ivor Lee reckons it must be close to 700Nm.

Ivor is the man behind the steering wheel of this particular Mustang, and the man you've got to call if you're after one for yourself. A former mechanic and current car wholesaler, Ivor has had a lifelong passion for the cars, ever since seeing a Mach 1 Mustang, also orange, in the 1974 movie *Crazy Mary, Dirty Larry*. He decided then and there, at the age of 10 or 11, that he would one day own an orange Ford Mustang.

This lifelong dream eventually led Ivor to partner up with Jürgen Himpel of Greymarkets, a German company that specialises in supplying Ford Mustangs to those parts of the world that aren't its natural habitat. The result is that an experienced Mustang supplier is now offering the latest vehicles for sale locally.

The Grabber Orange Mustang GT I drove that morning is the first vehicle the two have imported to South Africa, and they are using



Hard to imagine why they called it Grabber Orange. Some serious ponies lurking on the grille and under the hood, with the original 4.6-litre supercharged to 373kW. Pro right-hooker conversion makes it street legal



it as a demonstrator to create a stir and drum up business. Potential buyers can have a look at it and, if they speak nicely to Ivor, take it for a spin before making up their minds.

Having done just that, I asked Ivor to give me the lowdown on what it takes to buy a vehicle from him, what Mustangs are available, what the legal technicalities are, the kind of money involved and the time period it takes to complete the transaction.

'The first thing you need to know is that this isn't a case of buyers having to choose from whatever stock we happen to have,' says Ivor. 'The law stipulates that the vehicles have to be brand new, so we source them from dealers in the States. A customer chooses the exact vehicle in the exact colour, trim and spec that he wants. We buy that vehicle in the US, put it in the buyer's name, and import it.'

Because the cars have to be brand new, almost all of the cars imported from now on will be 2010 models, which means a 5.0-litre V8 powerplant, supercharged in certain models. They still have the same classic good looks and offer a very similar drive, but they're that

little bit quicker. Ivor does know of a particular limited-edition 2009 Shelby GT500KR (for King of the Road) that is still available brand-new somewhere in North America, for the right buyer. Dark metallic blue with silver stripes and producing 403kW, it would be one of a kind in South Africa.

A Shelby GT500 that produces 403kW straight from the factory will set you back R1.2 million

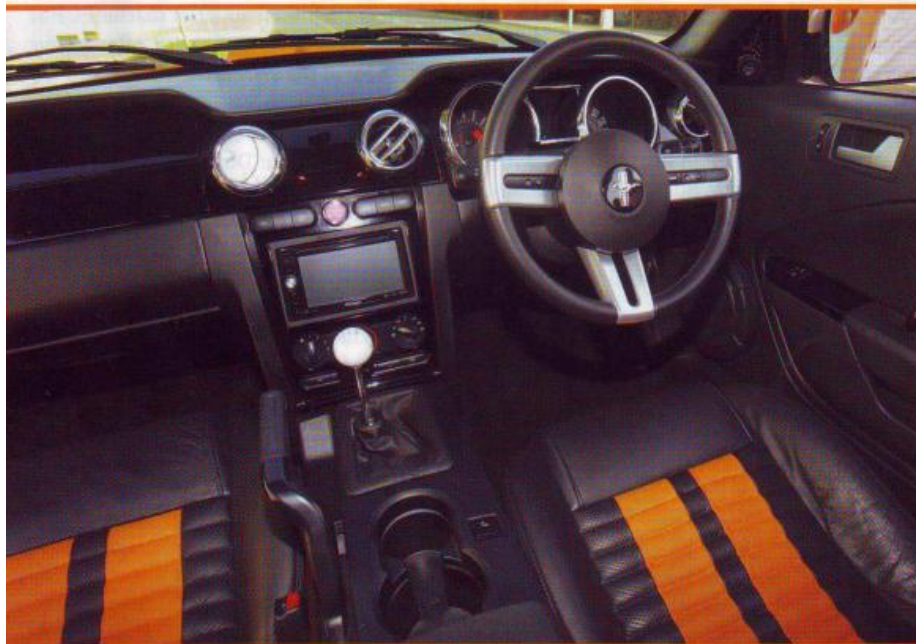
'When a vehicle lands in South Africa we take it through all of the necessary channels, get it cleared, and convert it into right-hand drive. We can also arrange for any modifications to be done locally. There are excellent craftsmen here who do work that is just as good as that

done overseas, and it's a lot cheaper to get done here,' says Ivor.

'You see, when a car is imported it's subject to duties of 43%. That includes all the modifications or "improvements" that have already been done. But car parts and accessories are only subject to a 17% tax. So the thing to do is to import the Mustang and the accessories, and have all the work done locally.'

Speaking of money, the shipping, import duties, conversion, and all the red tape cost a fair bit. A standard GT Coupe Premium from Ivor costs in the region of R750 000, while the vehicle I drove would command R900 000, including all the modifications. A Shelby GT500, the supercharged thoroughbred of the Mustang stable that produces 403kW from the factory, will set you back just over R1.2-million.

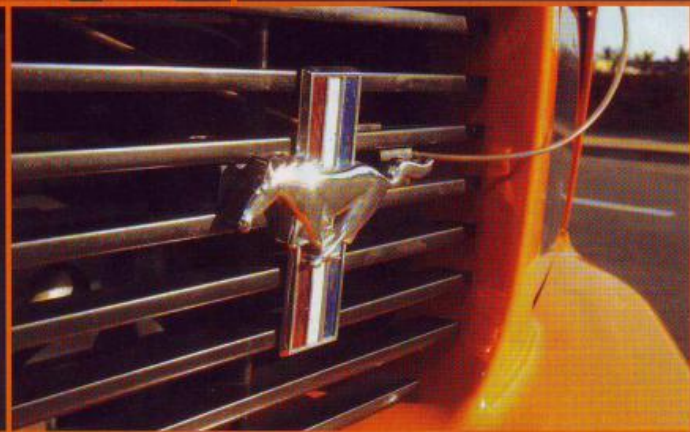
One of the reasons why the vehicles have to be imported in the buyer's name is because Jürgen and Ivor haven't had the Mustangs homologated. 'It just doesn't make sense,' says Ivor. 'To get the Mustang homologated we have to hand a brand new, converted car over to SABS. Then they drive it into a wall! I can't



FORD MUSTANG GT COUPE

PRICE | R750 000 (std) to R900 000 (modified)
ENGINE | 4601cc, 24v V8, Paxton supercharger, 373kW @ 6000rpm, 680Nm @ 5000rpm (est)
TRANSMISSION | Five-speed auto, RWD
SUSPENSION | MacPherson struts front, three-link live rear axle with coil springs
WEIGHT/MADE FROM | 1860kg/steel
LENGTH/WIDTH/HEIGHT | 4775/1877/1356mm
PERFORMANCE | 4.5sec 0-100kph, 250kph (est) 13.4ℓ/100km (est), N/A g/km CO₂

It's all pretty basic in here, just as they like it Stateside. You might expect more plush for not much change from a million bucks, but the drive and the attention are going to be worth every bit of the outlay



bring myself to do it. We've already thrown a ton of brass at this project, and another bar or more doesn't make sense.'

There is another downside of this. You have to be pretty sure you do want a Mustang, because once you've paid your money and the car has arrived, it's yours for a minimum of 24 months. One of the stipulations set out by Customs is that ownership is non-transferable for a period of two years.

This is also why Ivor and Jürgen ask for a hefty deposit. 'We need to buy the car, register it in the buyer's name, and ship it to South Africa. If the car gets here and the buyer changes his mind, we can't just sell it to someone else. So we need a deposit of R400 000 to pay our initial costs, and to make sure that the buyer is serious.'

The cars arrive with the steering wheel still on the wrong side of the dash. Once the paperwork is taken care of at Customs, the car is taken to Amanzimtoti where the conversion is done. 'Converting the vehicle isn't as easy as just moving the steering wheel. A new dash is built locally, which meant a fair bit of research

and development, and the pedals and aircon all have to be swapped around. It's time-consuming work, especially because we get it done right,' says Ivor. The entire process does take time, and customers will have to wait about five months in total for their vehicle, after ordering it.

Once you've paid your money and the car has arrived it's yours for a minimum of two years

The biggest drawback with buying a right-hand-drive Mustang of your own is that it comes with no backup. Despite being brand-new, there is no warranty, no service plan, nothing. That was made void the moment the decision was made to convert it.

We take the car for another drive after a cup of coffee, heading out of Durban on a road with a few hills and a serious case of the bends. Accelerating up a steep hill is effortless, that supercharged torque making gear changes almost pointless. I change gear anyway, upping the revs and the level of that glorious sound. At the top of the hill we're flying, and the great thing is that it feels like it. That's the real joy of driving a Mustang: in a time of efficiency and a world of fast cars, the Mustang retains a purity of spirit and an undiluted character. When you're driving fast, it feels like you're driving fast, and it sounds like you're driving fast. When you push it around a corner, your heart beats a little faster and the odd hair rises on the back of your neck. The Mustang might be a well-sorted sports car, but it's constantly reminding you that there's a lot of power under the hood, and few electronic gizmos to save your ass if you cross the edge.

Comparing the Mustang with other locally available vehicles isn't easy. For similar money you could buy a BMW M3. It's sensational and it's a V8, but it also looks very similar to ▶

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the normal sedan that spawned it and is, truth be told, lost in a crowd. You could opt for a Chev Lumina and save yourself some cash, but then you're driving either a sedan or a bakkie, and a lot of people wouldn't look twice at the vehicle. SLK55AMG? Hairdressers? There really isn't anything that can be directly compared with the V8-powered, attention-grabbing, raw Mustang.

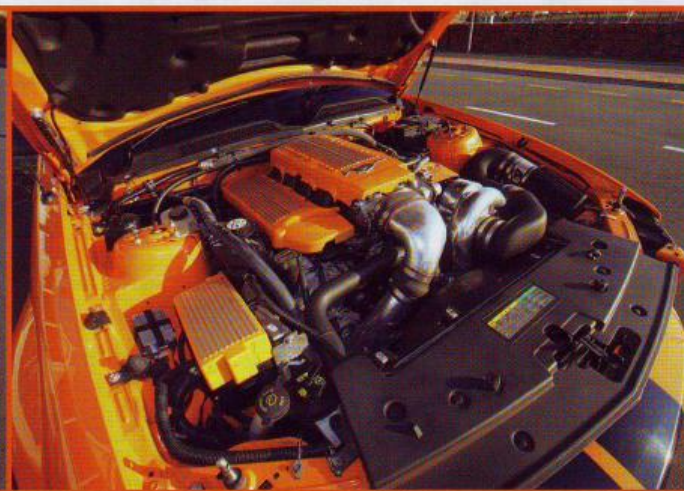
It might sound ridiculous, but I keep on thinking of a Lotus Elise. Both offer huge amounts of driver involvement and enjoyment, but for different reasons. Where an Elise is

educated and refined, the Mustang is wild and a little crass. Where the Elise is all about precision, the Mustang is all about power, constantly suggesting that it wouldn't mind resting for a moment with its wheels in the air, perhaps in that ditch over there, or with its nose in that tree. While the Lotus is constantly giving you little hints about what you should be doing, the brawny Mustang is smacking the back of your head and calling you a dumbass.

Yes, for R750 000 and up you can choose from any number of incredible vehicles, some

of which are definitely superior machines. But I doubt whether any of them offer better experiences of the visceral sort.

But before you phone Ivor and make that R400 000 deposit into his bank account, ask yourself this question: 'Do I want to be famous?' If you hesitate, then it might be wise to pass: if you drive a Grabber Orange Ford Mustang, people will look and people will crowd, and you will have to live with it. People at robots will first want to chat, and then want to dice. There's no fading into the background behind the wheel of this car... **12**



Do you see subtle? Did anyone mention subtle? There's no retiring into the background here. Importer Ivor Lee teamed up with German Company Greymarkets to share the Mustang mystique in SA