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## IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT: 2006 Mustang GT



By Katherine Giles

In choosing the car for this month's column, I decided to check out the recent trend among American automakers of resurrecting the muscle cars of the 1960s: The revamped Ford Mustang, which debuted in 2005, or the 2006 Dodge Charger.

I conducted exhaustive research until I finally came to this conclusion: in *Bullitt*, Steve McQueen drives a Mustang and the bad guys drive a Charger. The bad guys die in a fiery crash after a spectacular car chase in San Francisco. And Steve McQueen goes on to solve

his case without batting a blue eye or wrinkling his turtleneck. So I'll have what he's driving, please.

My salesman Bob wisely gives me the technical overview of the GT while we're still on the lot of Lou Sobh Ford. He details how the classic body design was revived without sacrificing modern safety standards. He cranks the engine and tells me how hard the engineers worked to capture the signature growl of the V8. He points out the blacked-out front grill—just like the one on Frank Bullitt's racing-green Fastback GT.

The interior is refreshingly uncluttered, with only the stan-

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dard knobs and buttons (though the satin-aluminum air vents and gearshift are particularly cool). Airbags, cup holders, CD player—each interior element fulfills its design purpose of comfort and convenience. But ultimately they're irrelevant to the essence of this car. It's the drive that matters, and it's finally time to begin.

I buckle my seatbelt, settle into my leather seat with a wriggle, and aim the car at the exit. Pulling onto Scott Boulevard, there's nothing left to do but smash the accelerator to the floor and let the 300 horses under the hood out for a run.

Well...it's really more of a jog. It's Decatur, after all, on a Sunday afternoon, and I'm not, in fact, Steve McQueen. I can't throw traffic laws to the wind and rip up the streets of the city in pursuit of

justice. Despite these limitations, I enjoy the car thoroughly. The GT's power and ride are pitch-perfect.

I can feel the road beneath me and detect the rumble of the engine, but I rest comfortably in my seat and have no trouble hearing the radio. I easily roar past a Jeep Cherokee on North Druid Hills (though I don't think she knew we were racing). The Mustang takes the curves without missing a beat, leaning effortlessly into them, and the powerful rear-wheel drive eliminates any drag during acceleration.

Eventually, I have to relinquish my tester. I'm not happy about it. If this had been one of those test-drives made without the salesman, I might not have come back. At least not before I found some empty stretch of road to tear up. Back on the lot, I

go through the motions: check the trunk, pop the hood, inquire about fuel efficiency (no, it's not great).

It all seems so mundane now. The engine has been shut off, the car isn't running, and that means the Mustang GT isn't doing what it should. It's built for driving, for chasing gangsters, outrunning hitmen...OK, maybe just taking a few laps around I-285.

Should you be lucky enough to land in the driver's seat, here's to miles of open road and no speed traps. **N**

**Change tray rating: Like McQueen himself, it's attractive, lean, mean, and very, very cool.**

