



Ford Australia (via State Library of NSW)

1965-66

# Homebush Mustangs



Mustang has a long history in this country, dating back to an ingenious marketing ploy in 1965 and 1966 that was more about Falcon than that first ponycar. To celebrate the return of Ford Australia-delivered Mustangs, we wind the clock back 50 years to a little known chapter in the blue oval's local history.

**T**he plan was simple: place one new Mustang into every Ford showroom across Australia. Use the car that had taken America by storm to sprinkle its magic on the upcoming, 1966-release, XR model Falcon.

Easy in theory, a nightmare in reality.

The scheme was one of those occasions when a car company's marketers forged on with a project that left the engineers cursing their interdepartmental colleagues. Converting those image-building machines to right-hand drive once they landed from the States would prove far more difficult than anyone within Ford believed.

Yet, they did it. Not quite in the numbers originally hoped for, admittedly, but in sufficient quantity to achieve the objective.

It stands as a landmark event – albeit little known – in local muscle car history. Those Ford Australia-delivered cars are known today as the 'Homebush Mustangs', as they were converted at Ford's Sydney facility, located just a stone's throw from the future site of the 2000 Olympics.

The plan was the brainchild of Ford Australia's then marketing chief Bill Bourke, an American determined to give the soon-to-be-released new Falcon the best possible chance of winning over the motoring public. Bourke was concerned that the US-styled XR model, with its short boot/long bonnet design, was so different to the cars Australians were attuned to buying that

**Main:** Possibly the only RHD 4-speed manual that rolled out of Ford's Sydney plant.

**Top:** This B/W image from inside Ford's Homebush factory shows a RHD car. Maybe Donald Johnson's? **Right:** Bill Bourke.





Ford Australia (via State Library of NSW)

Aussies would reject the new Falcon on the basis that it was too American in styling. Holden and Chrysler were offering family cars with long boots. Boot space weighed heavily in car-buying decisions at the time.

At least the XR Falcon's design was similar to Ford's new hero car and shared its six-cylinder and V8 engines. This enabled Bourke to create an emotional link between the two models.

Bourke wanted to sell Australians the idea that the entire Falcon passenger car range would soon deliver all the Mustang buyers needed.

Hence his tagline for the XR model upon its launch was "The Mustang-Bred Falcon." But first

he had to get V8 Stangs into every one of their 400 showrooms. Nowadays, marketers would label the small number of attention-grabbing Mustangs as "loss leaders".

Bourke was assured by his American colleagues that the Mustang was symmetrical and that converting LHD versions to RHD upon their arrival in Australia would be a relatively straightforward task. It was a simple matter, he was told, of swapping the instrument panel for the glovebox and switching over parts accordingly.

It was only after the first shipment of LHD 1965 models had clogged Ford's Sydney plant, that it became apparent that the reality was

something entirely different.

In mid-1965, hapless Homebush engineering staff, with little support from Broadmeadows, tore their hair out trying to solve the many engineering problems the conversion created.

It was the responsibility of Bill Tafe, then Homebush's engineering manager, to make it happen. Tafe's team had to use whatever methods they could to meet Bourke's dauntingly tight timeframe.

Tafe discovered that the Mustang dash was anything but symmetrical and would need a major rework. Rather than get his American counterparts to supply a complete new RHD dash, Tafe turned to a recently retired sheet-metal expert in Auburn, who worked out a way to re-manufacture the original dash.

Tafe's saviour was a man known only as Morrison, his first name lost in the mists of time. In a Dad's Army-style move, 'Mr Morrison', as Tafe called him, brought three of his mates out of retirement and did the dash supply job in his home workshop.

The dash proved the least of Tafe's problem as the entire firewall needed removing and either replaced or reversed in a rudimentary effort to provide a mirror image conversion.

The full story and technical breakdown of how Tafe's team overcame this and many other engineering challenges was told in-depth in issue #52 of AMC.

Due to the makeshift nature of the conversion, no two cars were exactly the same in every detail.

Ford's records indicate that the first batch, of 48 cars, was imported in early 1965. These Mustangs were fitted with 289 V8 engines, automatic transmission, front disc brakes and heavy-duty suspension. They came with low-profile tyres, two-speed windscreen wipers,





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Ford's records indicate that the first batch of 48 cars, was imported in early 1965. These Mustangs were fitted with 289 V8 engines, automatic transmission, front disc brakes and heavy-duty suspension. They came with low-profile tyres, two-speed windshield wipers,

back-up lights, wheel trims, radio, heater, bucket seats, padded instrument panel, padded sunvisors, carpet and full-length centre-consoles.

Seventeen cars were sold in July that year, 16 in August, 14 in September and one in October.

A second batch of 161 cars, all 1966 models, arrived from December 1965, with the cars progressively assembled through to September 1966. Production figures show that the following numbers were sold each month in 1966: January, 4; February, 22; March, 34; April, 26; May, 20; June, 18; July, 17; August, 19; September, 1.

The final official tally of 209 'Homebush Mustangs' falls well short of Bourke's plans for 400, but no doubt every individual car attracted the attention he envisaged.

Despite the many hurdles jumped, this story has a happy ending. The crudely converted Mustangs were eagerly snapped up by customers, as the offer of a sporty new American car was unprecedented. The success of the Mustang on Aussie racetracks played a massive part in Bourke's masterplan. In fact, Ford received a massive free kick when three of the biggest names in local motorsport – Norm Beachey, Bob Jane and Ian Geoghegan – put Mustangs on Aussie tracks in 65, with minimal assistance from Broadmeadows.

One way or another, Australians quickly got used to the long bonnet/short boot styling and Falcon began its sales surge.

The RHD conversion programme wound up when XR Falcons hit the market in September 1966. Bourke's halo car focus switched to local Falcon V8 hero models and ultimately the legendary GT-HOs.

Ford Australia's extensive muscle car heritage rightly centres around Falcons built in Melbourne. But without the Mustangs converted to RHD in Sydney 50 years ago – and Bourke's clever marketing – there's no guarantee Ford's XR model of '66 would have been a success. Had it failed, the company's performance car history may have played out entirely differently... or not at all.



Main: Two national treasures are shown here. Top left: This BW shot, sourced from the State Library of NSW, shows a Ford executive talking Miss Australia through the RHD conversion at Homebush.



### 1966 – Vintage Burgundy

Colin Falso has become the front man and focal point for Homebush Mustangs.

Not only does the Victorian own the highest-profile surviving example, his research into the topic has armed him with a wealth of knowledge. Some of this information is outlined on his 'Ford Australia Delivered Mustang 65-66' Facebook page, which also provides a point of contact for past and present owners.

Colin's 1966 RHD Mustang was the star of AMC #52's technical feature on the model and a Shannons Club TV episode. The latter can still be

found online.

The car's won plenty of awards in its time, most recently 'Best Hardtop' at the Mustang Owners Club of Victoria's annual Round Up.

Colin has owned it since the late 1980s and has completed a painstaking restoration. It's shown here with the optional Ford 'styled steel' wheels and a few other minor deviations from the Australian showroom spec.

"I love the styling, with the long bonnet. I see it as a time machine. You hop in the car, put it



in gear and you cruise around. It's easy to work on, everything is accessible and parts are easy to come by.

"No two cars of the Homebush Mustangs were the same – it might just be a sticker here or a bolt there – but it's nice to think I've got something unique."

Colin says the Homebush Mustangs are rare beasts today.

"There was a time when they weren't worth anything, so they would have been taken to the wreckers, scrapped, whatever.

"I know of about 30 that are still around, in various condition, today. Some people would have one of these cars today but be unaware it was a factory conversion from back in 1965 or '66. Then there

may be people who know what they have but have not been in touch. Hopefully this article brings out a few more."

A major breakthrough in research came when Colin found on eBay an original Ford Motor Company "Mustang 2-Door Hardtop" parts listing book. This has become his bible in verifying Homebush Mustang specifications.

### 1965 – Ivy Green

One of the very first '65 models converted to right-hand drive at Homebush is this magnificent Ivy Green example.

It was sold by Hunt Brothers of Hurstville on August 6, 1965 to Walmac Electrical Products Pty Ltd of Arncliffe.

"Since then the car has had several owners and a pampered life, with no evidence of an accident," current owner, Peter Inkster, explains.

"The car was painted in the 1980s then again in the 1990s. The owner who painted the car in the 1990s said there was a bit of rust at the bottom of the doors. Those of us who were alive and buying new cars in the 1960s know that the

first thing that happened was the car started to rust. The seats are still original on the car and have been preserved over the years by lamb's wool seat covers!

"The car has never been restored it has just been painted and never on a rotisserie. If you lift the carpets or take out the back seat the floor is covered with crud and broken up underlay from the years.

"A mate who restores Mustangs said my body panels fit better than they did on a new car."

The car currently has a C6 Windsor engine fitted and painted blue. Owner Peter has the original C5 engine that was removed from the car in the 1990s and plans to have it overhauled and reinstalled.

"I also have the original steel wheels with the Mustang wheel covers. The original AM radio has been fitted, looks good and works a treat.

"My intention is to return the car to the state it was when first sold in 1965 with no modifications or changes, just some signs of age."

It's travelled 136,000 miles in 50 years.

Peter also owns a Model T Ford, meaning his collection includes the two most important and successful models in Ford's history. Both have an Australian flavour.

"My Model T was made in 1918 at the end of WWI as a rolling chassis and exported to Australia with the body built by the Queensland Motor Corporation. The first owner was Lum Yow, a Chinese herbalist here in Adelaide. Lum prescribed a mixture for a patient that caused complications and ended up in court and in trouble with the State. So his belongings were sold at auction in 1922 including his Model T.

"The T does fit into the class of muscle car because you end up with a really big right-hand bicep from cranking the thing!"





## 1966 – Wimbledon White

Until the Wimbledon White car that appears on our cover emerged, all Ford Australia RHD converted and delivered Mustangs were thought to have automatic transmissions.

True, this example, verified as a Homebush Mustang, arrived in Australia as an auto like all the others. Everything then points to this car becoming a four-speed manual at the same time its steering wheel was shifted to the right.

As the first manual example that's popped up, the obvious explanation for its transmission is that it was a special order car for a heavyweight Ford executive, dealer or fleet customer.

Its current owner, Tony, a builder from Canberra, knows little about its early life, apart from the fact it was first registered in July 1966.

It's lived in Victoria for most of its life, before heading to the ACT 10 years ago.

"I also own a 1971 HG Monaro," Tony explains. "Ford or Holden; I enjoy both as long as they have chrome bumpers. Like everyone else into early Mustangs, I love its classic lines. The fact that it is a rare Australian right-hand drive car makes it even sweeter. This is a pony that is regularly driven and enjoyed."

That includes as a special event hire car. A big thank you to Tony, who managed to fit our photoshoot in around his work commitments – and high school formal season!



Victoria enjoyed at day at the races in Melbourne and soon found himself in the showroom of his local Ford agent.

"When I first started gathering information about the Homebush Mustangs, I spoke with a guy whose parents

owned one of these cars," Colin Falso says of the archival images shown here. "He sent me some paperwork – including the delivery invoice, certificate of registration and service receipts from Melford – and some family photos of the car parked outside a Waltons story. I've since lost contact with him, but I recall him telling me that seeing a Mustang race at Sandown Park inspired his father to visit the Ford dealer to buy their white car. He fell in love with the Mustang after seeing it race in 1966 and traded in his Falcon."

The car was purchased from Wotherspoon Motors, then Ford agent in Beaufort, Victoria, for £2915.

Somewhat appropriately for an American image car, the owner's name was Don Johnson! Anyone who saw an episode of *Miami Vice* in the mid 1980s will understand the point we're trying to make.

Anyway, Colin hopes the Aussie Donald Johnson's son sees this article and makes contact either via his 'Ford Australia Delivered Mustang 65-66' Facebook page or AMC.

**BEAUFORT**  
**J. R. WOTHERSPOON & Co.**  
 DEPARTMENTAL STORES,  
 GENERAL MERCHANTS, LICENSED GROCERS, INSURANCES.  
 29/8/65

Mr. D. Johnson,

To: 1. MUSTANG 2 Door, white, reg. No. 38965  
 Engine No. 289M10315  
 Fitted with Cruise-omatic transmission,  
 289 211707 V.8. engine,  
 Heater & Deflector - Front 100 brakes  
 Wheel covers - Back-up lights,  
 Front seat belts,  
 Radio - Full length console - Wind shield washers.  
 £2915 - -  
 Less allowance on Finance 575 - -  
 £ 2340 - -  
 £ 229 - -  
 £ 1990 - -  
 Less Deposit paid. 29 12 6 - -  
 £ 1969.12. 6

Registration and T/P Insurance.

*J.R. Wotherspoon*

**MUSTANG**

**Ford**  
 Owns  
**Service Policy**  
 Mr. D.E. JOHNSON  
 Owner's Name

Street Address

Unit Serial Number (Engine No.)  
**289M 10315**

Serial Prefix Number  
**BA07EG**

Ignition and Door Key Number  
**FE 211**

Deck Lid and Glove Compartment Key Number  
**38.9.1965.**

Delivery Date

Issued by:  
**WOTHERSPOON MOTORS 3206**  
 Ford Dealer Code Number  
**GEORGE VIC.**  
 City State

This Service Policy is valid only when properly associated and issued with a new vehicle that is sold and delivered to the above-named owner by the undersigned Ford Dealer, and is signed by said owner at the time of issuance.

*Wotherspoon*

STATE OF VICTORIA  
 MOTOR CAR REGISTRATION  
**CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF MOTOR CAR**

Vehicle No. 65  
 Make and Model FORD COUPE  
 Year 65  
 Color  
 Reg. No. 289M10315  
 Reg. Date 29 Sept. 1966  
 Reg. Fee 5.61  
 License Fee 20.18.0.  
 Total 25.79.0.

Owner's Name and Address (4 max)  
 JOHNSON, Donald E.,  
 289M10315

THIRD PARTY INSURANCE -  
 Name of Insurance Company  
 Number of "Certificates of Insurance"

Amount 1.0.0.  
 Premiums 10.7.0.  
 License Fee 4.7.0.  
 Total 16.4.0.

## Don Johnson's 'Stang

'Win on Sunday, sell on Monday' is now such an outdated motor racing cliché that it's easy to forget it once actually rang true.

Like 50 years ago, when a chap from regional