

2008 Roush Trak Pak Mustang

The Driver's Muscle Car

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For: The Wheel



Photo: Murphy Karges

Once in a very long while, a car comes along that stands out – breaking new ground, going beyond paradigms, taking chances, and it becomes important to our passionate hobby. We believe that the Roush Trak Pak is a car that meets these lofty goals in achieving a benchmark status. Most Mustang owners would tell you that the Roush name is strong – they've made Roush versions of Mustangs at all levels – for those who want the show, to those who want the go. But convincing the world, and even the Mustang community that their cars are real drivers' cars, translated – sports cars, has been tough. Part of this is because a base V6 Mustang today really is more of a commuter car with sporty looks than a sporting car. Put the GT package into the Mustang and you have a boulevard performer that makes good power, sounds great, and satisfies the novices. But put to the test in our performance driving environment, it's quickly discovered that there are several limitations....The grins enjoyed by Mustang owners on the first lap of their first advanced driving program with us, frequently become frowns as the compromises of the stock car become evident when they go faster. The car is heavy, the stock tires and suspension will trend toward a strong understeering personality. And the brakes – after a few hot laps, will abandon the spirited driver who intends to use them on a frequent basis. Are there ways to get around these limitations? Absolutely. The Mustang GT is one of the most upgraded cars out there, with hundreds of firms selling bits and pieces to address the owner's goals. Brake kits, spring kits, blowers, headers, you know the drill. And, for many owners, doing one's own enhancements to their car earns sweat equity and helps them reflect their personality. However, we have seen our share of self-tuners get in trouble – not realizing that one thing leads to another. The blower sounds cheap, but it needs to be sold with a brake kit and

isn't. Suspensions are almost impossible to get right for the bolt on guy or gal. Is the new suspension kit going to be too stiff? Too soft? Too low? Too high? How much in labor is it really going to cost once the alignment is done and redone? I went down this path with a sweet 89 Carrera and turned a car that my wife loved to drive into a snarling beast that was frankly too tweaked to be appreciated on the street.

Over the years, Roush has addressed a number of these issues, as they've introduced Stages I, II, III, and the current 427R option packages and we'll say they've done well in achieving success at the relative goals of these packages – word is that Roush Performance had a banner year in 2007 so they definitely are doing things right. But for the serious track driver, even the Stage III, with all of its power, brake, and handling prowess, remained a project to be finished for regular track activity. Currently, less than 1% of Mustang owners track their cars, so why would Roush invest the engineering talent, R&D budget, time, and management energy in a limited - production, niche-specific car? Your assumption is as good as mine. One thing that is very clear – the Trak Pak is a message: Roush Mustangs are meant to be driven – and they want Roushes on the tracks around the country. Not just to the drive in, or the Wednesday night drags, but with the now well-established track stars – the Evo, Sti, Cayman S and Carrera S, Corvette, M3/5, RS4/6, S2000, and several others, depending on level of after-market prep. The Trak Pak may just sound the best of all of these great cars, and performs fender to fender (however, this is not a race) with them while besting many.

The Trak Pak, first of all breaks new ground by providing front camber plates from the factory. For SCCA enthusiasts and others, this is a very big deal. Camber plates are a huge step in converting an understeering street car into a car that will actually turn and rotate. Roush has found an elegant solution to their installation. Most camber plates are welded into the top of the shock tower after some ugly cutting of sheet metal. This obviously would not do from a manufacturer like Roush. Rather, they've found a way to install the plates under the shock tower, allowing the tower bolts to serve two purposes: one to hold the shock assembly in place, and two to loosen and allow in and out movement along the axis provided by the plates, without changing other alignment specs, simply using a 1/2 " socket or box wrench. Imagine being able to bring a portable jack along, lift up the front corner, loosen four bolts, make the adjustment with a large screwdriver, re-tighten the bolts – repeat on the opposite side, and virtually change the personality of your car's handling? The range of the adjustment is from zero negative camber to 3 degrees. This is a huge deal. But Roush was not done. For more serious set up work before your track day, put the car on an alignment rack and corner weight your car, lowering or raising each corner to have right height, turn-in and balance set to a specific track. Use the C wrench provided by Roush to turn the collars on the coilover shocks and voila! Your Mustang is now a track fiend. Yes, we just said it – the Trak Pak comes WITH coilovers and camber plates – for the club racer, this is just short of an improved touring package from the factory!! But wait there's more – for your drive to the track, you can grab the allen wrench that is provided and take three minutes to go into the trunk and under the hood to soften your shock rebound. Arrive at the track, and take them all back to stiffer settings, meant for the ideal, smooth surface of a road course. This is in addition to adjustable sway bars, which should hopefully be "set it and forget it" settings. So there you have it – a suspension that can do a track makeover from street to track settings with the result being a big car that handles with the best of them....no, better than all but just the very top of the performance line.

Let's do a summary of what is included in the Trak Pak package:

- Base Mustang GT with the Roush 427R package (see www.roushperf.com)
- 4.6 aluminum, three valves per cylinder V8
- Roush Intercooled Supercharger – engine produces 435HP with 400 lb ft of torque
- Reflashed ECM
- Roush low restriction dual exhaust
- Short shift kit with stock Tremec 5-speed
- Three gauge dash cluster: water/oil temperature, supercharger boost – plus shift light
- Trak Pak suspension package:
 - Adjustable rebound/coilover shocks/struts
 - Performance springs
 - Performance bushings in most key locations
 - Front camber plates
 - Strut bar
 - Adjustable sway bars
- Six piston front brake calipers with ducting - slotted rotors front/rear
- Trak Pak comes with stock brake pads installed and Hawk race pads in the trunk
- Eaton True-Track Torsten style limited differential
- 18 X 9 lightweight forged alloy wheels with 275/40X18 BFG TA high performance radials
- Adjustable carbon fiber race wing (this is a serious wing)
- Splitter below front fascia

So – while we must disclose that Roush has sponsored Hooked On Driving events, so this article is being written by an admitted friend of Roush Performance – we know that anything that's said here that doesn't hold up to scrutiny will get us in big trouble. But we must ask those knowledgeable in tuner upgrades: "Is this not an incredible package that looks similar to building a Touring or IT car?" At \$60K sticker price, it's a long way from the GT it began life as at around \$30K. But you run the numbers – include installation labor AND the R&D to be certain that these components are working together in an integrated way. We think you'll see that the package adds up admirably, and that you and I trying to do this might have some more fun along the way, but would take a year of schlepping the car around and possibly ending up with an even larger VISA bill when all was said and done.

So the curiosity must be building? How does this bad boy drive? Here's a long term test summary in a small amount of space. First, the Trak Pak is a high impact machine. You'll wake the neighbors if you start it too early. It will set off the alarm on the Porsche next to you in the parking lot. Yet, we think they nailed the exhaust note and volume...just enough to be sweet music, muted enough to allow the blower whine to emanate properly, and in general create a stir without being arrested. The gearbox with the short shift kit is the bomb – maybe not quick enough for exclusive use at the dragstrip, but very short, very positive, click, click shifts to inspire confidence that a miss just won't happen. A caveat would be that it seemed just a bit cold natured and operated more freely after the first few shifts in the morning. Seating and steering reflects the limitations of the Mustang platform. The seat needs more bolstering to be serious, and the wheel is too big and needs a telescoping feature. The miss here is Roush, in their re-

stitching the original upholstery, could have easily used a non-skin, Alcantara-like material in the center section....an easy way to improve butt grip in the turns. Our main negative here was the steering wheel being a bit too far down on the knees for slick heel/toe. After a bit though, we forgot about this and once again adapted. The gauge pod is very cool, however it needs a more “factory” installation, as this was cause for a bad rattle that was fixed under warranty.

On the road the Trak Pak immediately asserts its personality. The name of the car is not the road pak, or the street pak....This is a car to be driven with a purpose, and we’d suspect most would be disappointed to plan a daily commute in this car – no we’re sure of it. This is a fun-to-drive car meant to be driven in fun-to-drive places. Canyon cruising, rallyes, autocrosses, car club breakfasts, show and shines, and banquets, 4th of July parades, brief weekend getaways, AND the TRACK. Put bluntly, the Trak Pak is a firm ride that will wear you out if you try the run to Grant’s Pass. While you will appreciate its thoroughbred feel, your backside will say take me to the track!!



Photo by: Dito Milian

At the track? Another story. Man, does this car go. And stop. And turn. And shift. The Trak Pak is a romping good time for any driver with a heartbeat. We had the chance to wire up a GPS system on the car and without an engineer to interpret our findings we’ll conservatively report what we in our test at Thunderhill Raceway: over 1.1 g’s, 105mph in turn 8 (this was a solo run with controls in place), 130mph on the main straight, excellent brakes without fade (we suggest larger rotors in back – we worked them pretty hard) and a lap time that places the car somewhere between T1 and T2 class racer if any credit is given for the fact that the Trak Pak had true street tires. From a driver’s perspective, it takes a few laps to get settled in with the size of the Mustang...she’s tall and long. But after about 6 laps, the car’s personality begins to take over and the very crisp turn in, lack of dive and roll, and awesome power become the dominant sensations. This is a relatively large car that is simply a joy to drive fast. We commented to the engineers that the car was a bit tight on high speed turns – a bit of a surprise. And were told (this unfortunately was later) that the wing was set for Gingerman Raceway, a much tighter track.

The wing was carrying almost 15 degrees and was clearly affecting the balance of the car at higher speeds. We have no doubt that with the wing dropped to 5 degrees or less, the Trak Pak will rotate more seriously at speed. Keep in mind that we were doing 105 at turn 8, so the car is real quick – and could well be quicker. What would it be like with Hoosiers or the like? By then it would be time to put the cage in and numbers on, cuz that's all it would need to be an all-out race car. One thing that must be commented on again – the sound of this car. The combination of exhaust note and supercharger whine drew a crowd to the pit wall on every lap by...this car sounds just awesome. NOTE: How does an auto journalist talk about exhibition of speed and remain credible as a conservative influence? Oh well...this car does great burnouts without any of the wheel hop issues that some other Mustangs suffer...just too much fun...in a safe environment of course.

There are 100 Trak Paks in the U.S. production currently and most are sold. We think that Roush should up this number and let the cat out of the bag – while its not going to take out the independent rear suspension, two-seat, more expensive Corvette Z06, or the even more expensive Porsche Twin Turbo, the Roush Trak Pak will hold its own with in a crowd of very lofty performers. In fact, there is an argument, with just a few more minor tweaks for durability in a race situation, the Trak Pak could make a stand as an SCCA T1 screamer – running credibly with the non-Z06 Vette and Viper. And what's more – the R&D done on this car is now available in component form. Already have a Mustang GT, or know where you could buy one cheap? ALL of these parts are now available on the Roush website with a mere swipe of a card. One at a time, or the whole kit – you'll be on your way to driving the most serious Roush Mustang ever built. But don't buy this car if you want a car for show. The Roush Trak Pak Mustang is a true muscle car for serious drivers only – no boulevard cruisers need apply.