

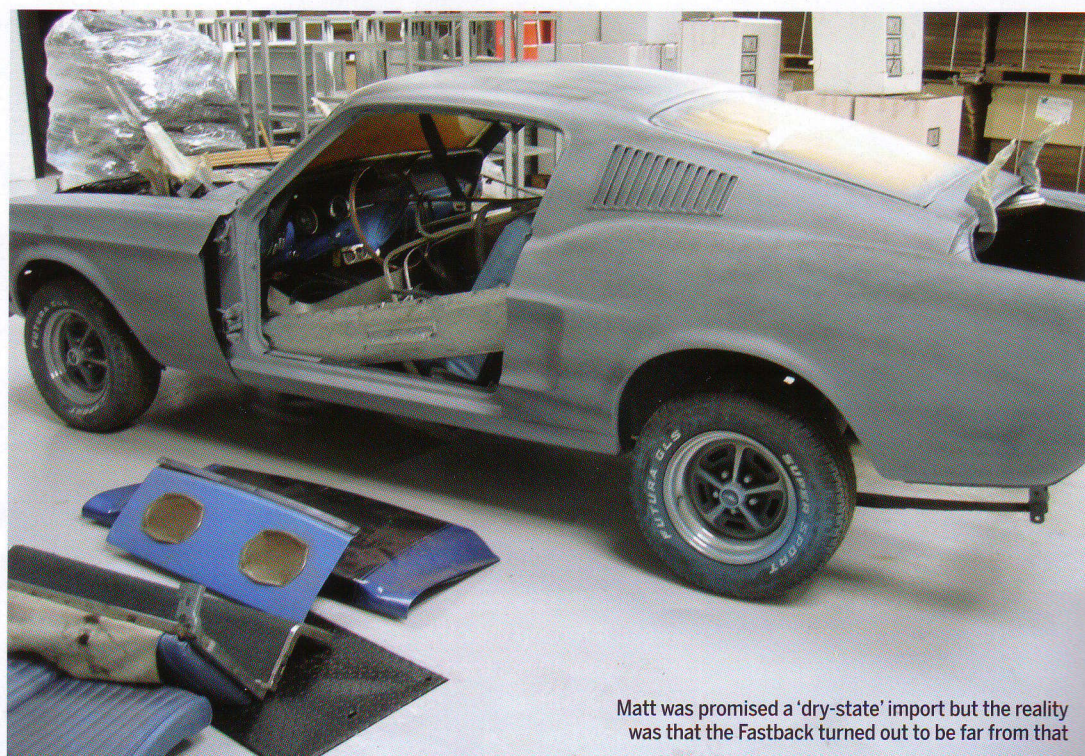


# Fastback dream realised

PART ONE OF A LOOK AT **MATT COOK'S '68 MUSTANG FASTBACK**

I GUESS you could say that I'm a "Ford enthusiast", others would say anorak or simply... car nut (screw loose, more like!). But as a psychiatrist would say, "it's probably due to his childhood."

Well ... partly right, but it all started before I was born. My family has quite a history with Ford Motor Company you could say. My parents met while both working at the Ford Motor Company plant in Daventry, sometime in the late 1970s. My great uncle John lived in Trenton, Detroit, and worked for Ford Motor Company as a tool and die maker at the Woodhaven stamping plant from the 1960s until around 1995 when he retired. My older brother Gary started his working life as an apprentice for Zenith Ford as a truck technician, so you can see Ford is kind of a family tradition. Well.... until I came along and screwed that all up and went into electronics, computers and IT ...



Matt was promised a 'dry-state' import but the reality was that the Fastback turned out to be far from that

Okay I hear you say, but why a Mustang? Why not a Lotus Cortina, Escort Mk.1 or something else like a Sierra Cosworth, RS Turbo or something more from my era? Long story ...

In April 1960, at the age of 15, my father started his first job in the parts department at one of the largest Ford main dealers in the country, Dagenham

Motors in Alperton, Wembley, earning £2.10/- a week (boy, don't I get that one rubbed in my face!). Dagenham Motors at the time was directly owned by Ford and ran a unique parts division catering for American, Australian, UK cars and trucks. During the 60s importing US models such as Galaxies and Falcons was a common and popular practice apparently.

One of the mechanics in the workshop had a thing for American cars and in particular this new model called the "Mustang". My dad remembers him vividly, a rather short, round and portly figure, but he used to be the American car specialist. He actually used to own a Mustang with a 289ci small-block V8 and 3-speed auto which my dad eventually bought from him and merrily drove around London until he got bored and sold it back to the mechanic.

Hearing my dad recount stories of that '65/'66 Wimbledon white convertible with a white roof and bright red interior simply captured my imagination as a youngster and I promised myself "One day, when I'm older."

Most kids wanted to be a rock star, an astronaut, a pilot or to own a cool car like a Ferrari or Lamborghini ... okay ... me too, but I never gave up my dream of wanting that Ford Mustang.

Fast forwards to 2005 ... I finally had the opportunity to own one thanks to my partner George. She was the one who spurred me into pursuing my dreams and continues to be a constant source of motivation and inspiration (at least that's what she calls it ... I call it nagging and dishing out orders). I grabbed the opportunity firmly with both hands and then refused to let it go!

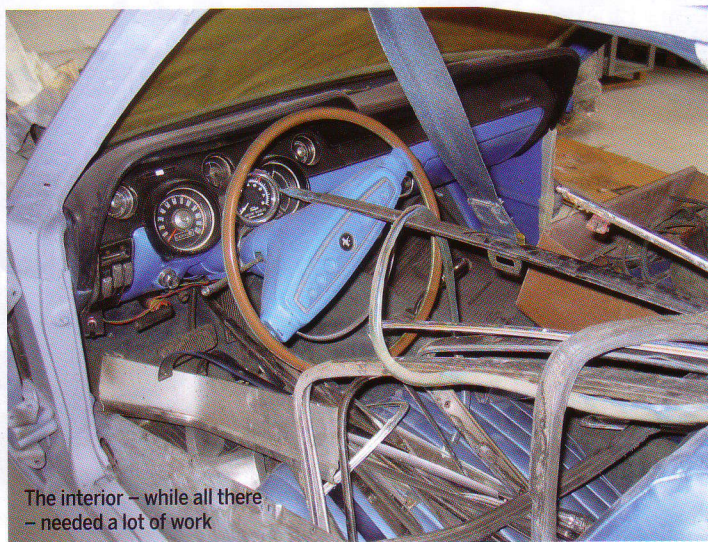


The '68 being prepped ready for its respray





Matt's stock of new parts waiting to be fitted grew progressively larger ...



The interior – while all there – needed a lot of work

After doing some research about importing American cars, I contacted a UK company who specialise in importing classic Mustangs. I phoned them and arranged to meet the proprietor and to “see what it would cost ....”

In hindsight, this was a big mistake. As soon as I arrived at their rather “rural location” I was confronted by a rather old, dilapidated looking farm building, but when I entered I saw the object of my affection ... well ... three to be exact.

A red 1969 Mach1 sporting a nice set of 15” Magnum 500s, but covered completely in a thick layer of sanding dust, just like an old “barn find” Shelby you read about in *Hemmings Muscle Machines* magazine and worth squillions of dollars. The second, a rather beautiful pale Brittany Blue 1967 convertible with a superb looking deluxe blue-on-blue interior and finally... the one, my dream car... a 1967 Fastback finished in dark blue metallic paint so deep you could swim in it and best of all, white Shelby-style “Le Mans” stripes.

It also had Torque Thrust D wheels on BF Goodrich white-letter tyres, a very clean blue-on-blue deluxe interior and a rather nice 351W engine.

You could say that car left a

lasting impression with me. If I could have traded a limb and/or a vital organ at that point for that particular fastback I would have!

Unfortunately, that car was over my budget and, in all honesty my budget at the time wouldn’t have stretched to a £5 wreck, but now I’d been foolish enough to go and see a Mustang in the flesh I had to have one, no matter what it took.

After discussing where the cars are sourced from and what options I had, I went home and was on cloud nine for at least two days. Within 48 hours I was on the phone placing my order, something I’d later come to regret dearly. But they say you can be wise with hindsight.



The original 302 was to be torn down and rebuilt – it had already been rebored once

The original brief was a ‘67/68 Fastback, which must be a V8 and must be painted Ford Imperial Blue (to match George’s Focus RS). Yes, I even converted George from her 245hp Subaru Impreza to the blue oval, and it had to have white Le Mans stripes, just like the car I’d seen.

After what turned out to be an excruciating amount of time the car finally arrived in the UK early in 2006, some eight months after it was ordered and the deposit had been paid. Not bad considering we were promised, at the point of signing on the dotted line, that it’d take a maximum of six months ...

The car was immediately shipped to the UK-based

paint shop to be stripped and painted in my desired colour combination. It took another two and a half months of chasing to actually see the car itself. By this time I was becoming rather frustrated with it all.

Finally, in April 2006, I visited the paint shop where the car had been shipped to, but luckily for me the guys there were great and knew exactly what I wanted, but I was a little disappointed at the condition of the car. It certainly wasn’t the “dry-state” rust-free core I was promised. The bodyshop had already done a fair bit of welding and preparatory work before I got to see it, so heaven knows what it was like beforehand.

Much to my frustration, another two months then went by before the car was painted and was back in the workshop for reassembly, rewiring and MOT preparation. But worst of all, I called up to see when it would be finished to find the paintshop had fallen out with the importer and had stuffed up the paint job, completely missing off the Le Mans stripes I’d asked and paid extra for!

I chose to bite my tongue and see the car and people in the flesh first and have it out with them face to face.





Finally the car was delivered and after waiting all day for the transporter to drop it off, I rushed outside to be greeted with the roar of the "289" firing into life (very loudly) and rolling off the back of the truck and I distinctly remember getting soaked by that annoying fine drizzle that gets you soaked through in no-time at all, and thinking "Oh no, my car is getting wet" ... and then thinking to myself, "I've turned into one of those people who doesn't like their car getting wet!"

I tried to pull the car onto the driveway but nearly killed myself in the process; it certainly is going to take some getting used to I thought.

Almost as excited as me, George rushed home eager to see the new member of the family and go for the first proper drive in my dream car. I had all these ideas going through my head, what will it be like? Will it drive like a boat as people often talk rubbish about with American cars? How powerful would it be? But the time had come, I had captured my pony and now I was going to try and break it in.

Starting it was somewhat of a challenge for someone who was used to having British cars with choke cables and/or modern cars with fuel injection systems, but eventually it burst into life



Makeshift respite from the elements

and I felt like every curtain in the street was twitching with people watching my every move, plus the fact that I was shaking with anxiety and excitement in equal measure. I had to take a couple of deep breaths before I had the courage to slip the shifter from Park to Reverse in order to pull out of the driveway. I was surprised at just how easily the car moved, it felt big and heavy but the steering was unnaturally light in comparison to everything else I'd driven. Shifting into Drive, I released the brake pedal and we slowly and carefully, with my heart beating quickly pulled out of our quiet cul-de-sac with the bellowing sound of the V8 reverberating off of our neighbours walls. The first thing I noticed was the sheer grunt a SBF V8 has, it's got a huge amount of torque even down as low as 1200rpm.

Continuing our very slow drive round a couple of bends until approaching a large and busy junction controlled by traffic lights, approaching slowly I gently applied the brake for a nice gradual slow-down, but remember how it was raining with that fine drizzle? The car wasn't slowing quite as I'd expected so I applied a little more pressure to the brake pedal only, to my horror, resulting in the rear wheels locking up solid and the car starting a slow slide, which had us fast approaching the stationary car in front at the junction.

I must have relaxed the pressure I was applying to the brake pedal as the skid stopped and the car violently shifted its weight as the rear tyres regained hold of the tarmac. We stopped short of the car in front by what seemed like a few millimetres. The first drive of my "dream car" was nearly my last, something was seriously wrong with the braking system and the rest of our short journey was greeted with a bit of a sour taste and some dissatisfaction. But I can say one thing ... it was an adrenaline rush, but for all the wrong reasons! To make matters worse, I got the car home and safely in the garage only to find petrol slowly dripping from the fuel sender fitting on the fuel tanks ... oh no

... what have I bought and what have I let myself in for?

After a pointless and unhelpful conversation with the importer later, I decided I'd bite the bullet and look into this stuff myself. After all, my father is a 40+ year veteran of the motor industry, my brother is a mechanic and I'm no dummy (except for letting my rose tinted glasses get the better of me when buying cars!). So I'll fix the damn thing myself ... that's where the real story begins.

Further reading and research found that not only does the car have a 302ci and not a 289ci engine as I was led to believe (the car was wearing "289" running pony fender badges at the time), it's also a numbers matching car, but worst of all I'd had it painted the wrong (ie not a factory) colour, which should have been Acapulco Blue. It turns out the car was built in December 1968 at the Dearborn plant (only a few miles from where my great uncle John lived in Detroit) as a J-code 302, C4 Auto, with a 3.00:1 axle ratio which were all present, but certainly not factory correct by a long shot.

I dug a little deeper but didn't like what I found. Obviously the brakes had issues, but I also found: Spot welded floor pan repairs, a rotten torque box poorly patched over, bitumen based underseal on the inside of the car which hid a multitude of sins and around 500 holes from sheet metal screws. It was leaking fluids, the exhaust was blowing at the manifolds and the collectors ... the list went on and on.

At that point I felt like Tom Hanks' character Walter Fielding in the film *Money Pit* ... what the hell had I let myself in for?

■ **PART TWO** of Matt's story in the next *Round Up*



Once Matt had the Fastback home, he decided to do a lot more restoration work himself