

HOW TO SPRAY FACTORY-CORRECT PAINT



Mustang

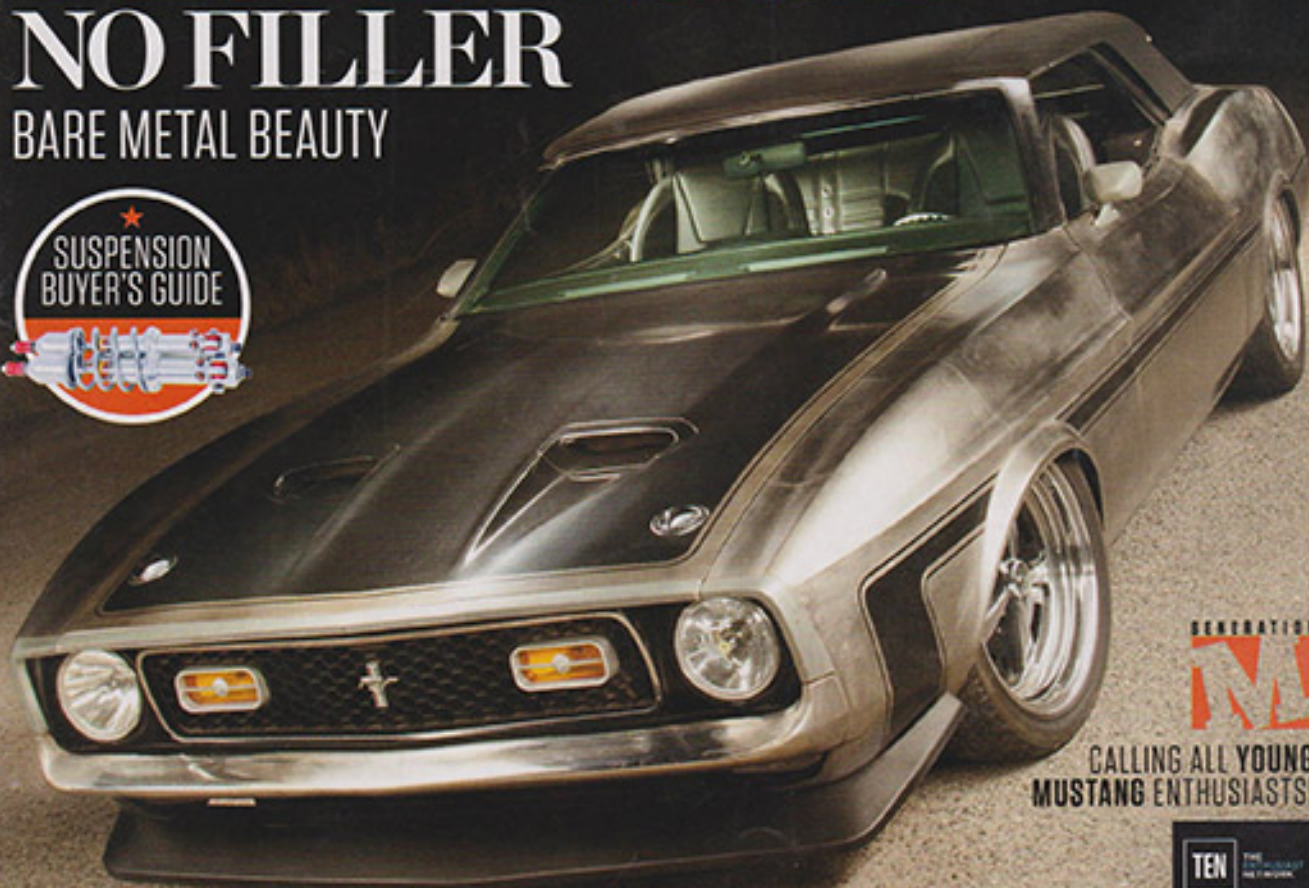
MONTHLY

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TEN

TOP STORIES BARN FIND: '68 HERTZ SHELBY • THE BEST 1970 BOSS 429 • REAL-WORLD BUILD



There really isn't anything unique about getting screwed on a transaction. It happens to all of us at one point or another. Only the details differ.

In Lyle Vass' case, the 1971 Mustang convertible that he bought was missing a lot more than he anticipated. Specifically it lacked most of the metal from its quarters, floor, and cowl. "I started cutting, and when I was done only the top, windshield frame, rockers, trunk lid, and rear

framerrails were left," he says.

But just because we all get screwed at one point doesn't mean we deal with it in the same way. Vass has an extensive fabrication background, the consequence of growing up in his dad's restoration and body shop. "The school bus would drop me off at my dad's shop," he says. He also recognized the silver lining that this dark cloud presented: the opportunity to do whatever he wanted.

In no particular order he fabricated a chromoly

inner structure to restore much of the strength lost by removing the top of a unit-construction vehicle. Since he basically started from scratch he took the opportunity to raise the front crossmember an inch and fabricate flat floors the same distance higher. And that was just the start. Read on for what he did from front to back.

In 1971 Ford widened the Mustang's nose, diminishing the car's aggressive look. To restore it, Vass narrowed and dropped the core support

and front of the Mach I hood a scant inch and modified the fenders to match. He also eliminated the seam from the fenders to the chin panel, making the nose assembly a one-piece affair. The nose now comes in from the bottom, so Vass cut off the fender-mounting lips and welded in new ones lower to meet the bottom sides of the inner fender panels.

Naturally Vass had to narrow the bumper, but he took things a step further. He trimmed the backside so the bumper now follows

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the nose cutline, a job that required filling the gap in the fender. He also thinned the bumper's cross-section so it barely protrudes from the nose. That, along with eliminating the front license-plate notch, makes the bumper appear more like a body part than a protective component.

The biggest challenge was the thing that made the car unique, its top. "It folds down between the wheelwells and on top of them," says Vass. He couldn't just tub the wells to fit wider tires. "I had to

widen the car." He went $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches per side. "I built the quarter-panels, but the wheels looked too far forward without the marker lights." His solution? "I had to move the rear wheels back 2 inches." He hid most of the quarter-panels' increased width by using narrower wheel lips from a 1970 Mach I.

Manufacturing impositions at the time rendered the rear of all Mustangs a mess of gaps and arbitrary cutlines. Vass thinned the bumper as he did with the front

and extended the bumper ends upward to meet the fillers. He also extended the quarter-panels below the bumper to align the seams with the trunk sides. That meant fabricating a new tail pan that he extended toward the axle as a belly pan of sorts. Now get this: The roll pan mounts from inside the trunk rather than from under the car. Modified Shelby exhaust tips sprout from that pan and fit in a modified notch in the bumper. The license plate swings down from an electric hinge just ahead of

those tips. Acrylic Concepts in Calgary made the taillight lenses. Vass had to make the entire trunk from scratch, and because the tail pan comes in from the trunk he modified the tank to mount higher and from the top. Fabricated inner trunk panels conceal two Air Zenith compressors, their tank, and the battery.

Back up front, Vass smoothed the inner fenders and cowl, shaping the latter for vents and wiper arms. A puzzle of hand-fabricated panels conceals the core support and engine. The car

Masterpiece in Metal

Lyle Vass' 1971 Mustang convertible. All killer, no filler



began life as a no-option 302 specimen, but Vass had Deltech in Calgary machine and build a Cleveland. Flat-top pistons and Edelbrock Performer RPM heads give it 11.5:1 static compression ratio. Vass doesn't know the specs on the roller-tappet cam, but the combo produced 485 lb-ft torque

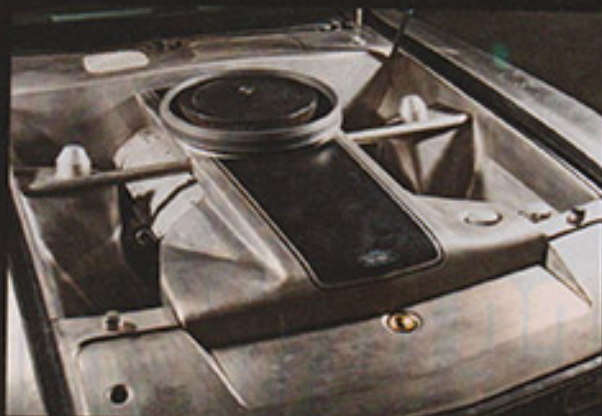
and 550 hp with a 750-cfm Holley on an Edelbrock Air Gap manifold.

A McLeod clutch couples the engine to a World Class T-5 prepped by Astro Performance. Even though Vass mounted the drivetrain $\frac{3}{4}$ inch higher than stock, he still had to shave the bellhousing for

clearance. The Sanderson FC4 headers that pass the transmission lead to 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch stainless pipes that Vass made from mandrel bends and Flowmaster Super 44 series mufflers. An aluminum Driveshaft Systems driveshaft transfers power to a 4.11:1 cog on an Auburn locking

gear carrier. The Ford 9-inch housing is two inches narrower to use Mercury Comet shafts.

Vass fabricated a torque-arm suspension similar to an F-body GM to locate the rear axle. A pair of double-adjustable RideTech Shockwaves suspend the car. A Chassis

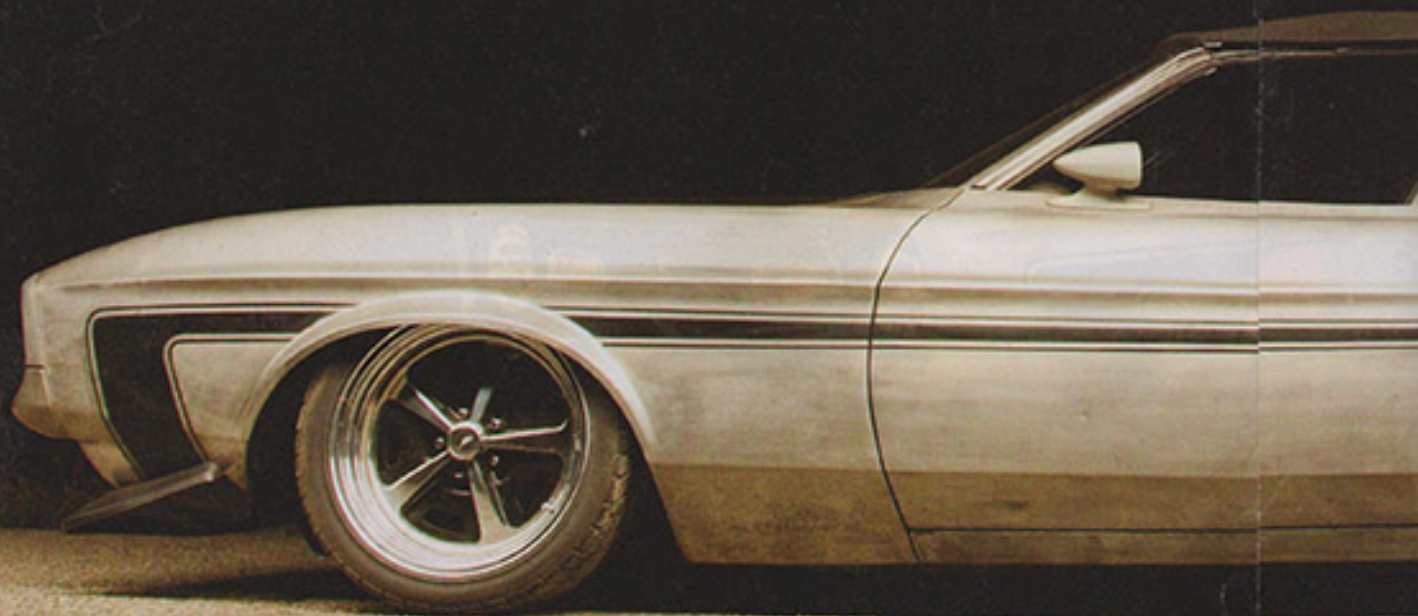


■ The engine cover doubles as the base for the ram-air kit. Though really cool, it either hides or steals the thunder from other features like a handmade serpentine system and uncannily smooth inner fender panels and a strut brace. The fenders actually mount from the inner fender panels' lower sides, making the engine compartment that much cleaner.



■ Lyle Vass made his own pedal assembly to relocate the brake and clutch master cylinders under the cowl. Their reservoirs mount in the cowl, concealed by a custom panel. A pair of handmade hinges and Fox-body Mustang struts support the hood when open.

■ Another fill mounted the ram-air hood



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■ Ordinarily the front bumper extends a few inches into the fender, but Voss trimmed it so the outline followed the same line as the nose trim. He also shaved the front marker lights and drew the hockey stripes a bit wider and at an angle to match the nose outline.



■ Mustang hood locks mount on top of a flat panel, but Voss integrated them as if they were part of the car's original design rather than a bolt-on accessory. He did that by recessing the area immediately around the lock handles, something that makes them look more intentional.

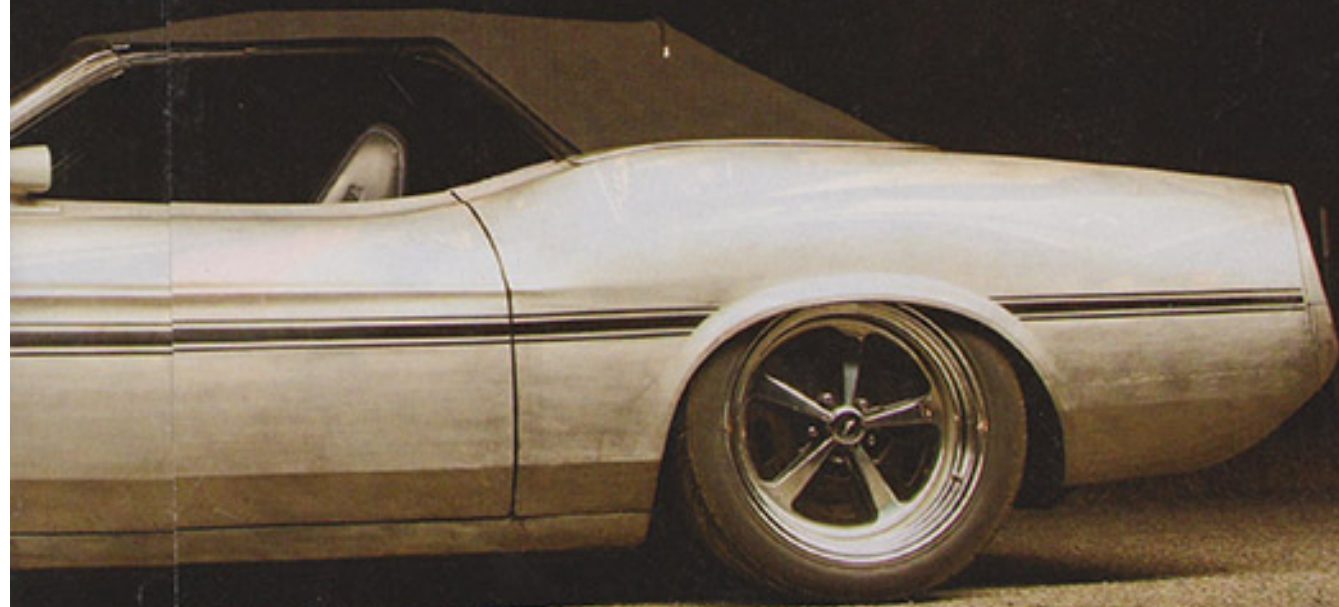


■ Another filler panel conceals the core support and directs air to the radiator. Voss mounted the hood strips in it as well as relieved it for the VW center hood latch and the ram-air hood lock pins.



■ Scott Drake's electro-luminescent gauge package gives the interior an almost spaceship quality. Though the car rolled off the line as a bare-bones model, Voss equipped it with a factory tilt column and later the Forever Sharp steering wheel.

master
a custom
e hood



Engineering anti-roll bar for a GM Advanced Design pickup induces a little bit of oversteer. The front suspension consists of Chris Alston's Chassisworks control arms that Vass modified for another pair of RideTech Shockwaves. He also fitted a Baer Brakes bumpsteer elimination kit. Baer also made the 14-inch rotors and four-pot calipers that mount to the front. The rear sports a set of Lincoln Mark V discs. Bolted to those binders are 18x8 and 18x10 Wheel Vintiques Magnum wheels. Vass shaved the sidewalls off a set of P245/40ZR18 and P275/40ZR18 BFGoodrich KDWs.

The interior remains largely stock. Steve Ottens at Old Iron Customs and Upholstery in Strathmore,

Alberta, made carpets to fit the flat floor and raised tunnel. The stock seats wear TMI foam and Sport XR covers. Vass kept the dash's shape but relocated the switches to its underside and replaced the gauge panel with a Scott Drake electroluminescent panel. Visits to swap meets



turned up the tilt column and the Forever Sharp half-wrap steering wheel. We all get a lemon once in a while, but Vass pressed his into one of the sweetest glasses of lemonade. But that's only the half of it. "This car also started my business," he tells us. "When friends saw what I

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We all get a lemon once in a while, but Vass pressed his into one of the sweetest glasses of lemonade. But that's only the half of it. "This car also started my business," he tells us.

"When friends saw what I

was building they began asking me to work on their cars."

The prospect of a kid on the way and a job that took him away from home for weeks or even months at a time made the decision to go into business for himself easier. "When my son was born I quit my job and started building cars full-time." In fact, his decision to forego paint kind of testifies to his skills. And the fact that the car remains visually appealing after eight years says something about his eye.

You can find Vass at his Strathmore, Alberta, shop, Rods n Restos. We suggest looking him up if you ever bite off more than you can chew. He has a certain touch when it comes to redeeming lost causes.



MASTERPIECE IN METAL { 1971 MUSTANG CONVERTIBLE }



■ The trunk fins do more than look pretty; they conceal the tank, which mounts higher than stock due to the rear roll pan/exhaust design. The air tanks live in the quarter panels, and two Air Zenith pumps mount in the tail panel.



■ The trunk lid also bears its own concealment panel. Barely visible at the top of the photo (look closely) is the third brake light.



■ You'd be hard pressed to know it, but the seat frames are actually stock Ford parts. The TMI XR-series covers and foam pads fully hide their origins, though.



■ Vass dispensed with the rear roll pan for a belly pan that extends towards the rear axle. A bead formed in the pan, and a notch out of the bumper frames a narrowed Shelby exhaust tip. Rather than mount the flip cap fuel door flush as Ford did, Vass recessed it as he did with the hood locks.



■ The wheels are probably the only things Vass didn't modify. They're Wheel Vintiques Magnums in 16x8 and 16x10. He did buff the P245/40ZR18 and P275/40ZR18 BF Goodrich KDW sidewalls smooth, though.

