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What "60 Minutes" didn't tell you about the Audi 5000

CAR DRIVER

JUNE 1987 • \$2.95

Best American GT

Camaro vs. Mustang vs. Firebird



PROOF THAT FUN CAN BE A SERIOUS DESIGN OBJECTIVE.

This is a car designed for the driver who puts a high priority on performance. The accelerator is your direct connection to the most powerful engine offered in a Ford car—the 5.0L EFI 225 hp V-8.

A word about packaging.

Design elements such as the long hood, deep air dam and aero headlamps combine to improve directional air flow for better stability underway. We've also given hatchback models a bigger rear spoiler to help keep the wheels firmly on the road. Obviously, this car was designed to be a performance machine—not just look like one.

An inside like the outside.

Pleasing to look at, but all business. In a sense, the Mustang GT driver wears this car rather than just sits in it. The articulated seat comes with a power lumbar support plus adjustable thigh and side bolsters to give you an excellent "fit." The analog instruments and well-located controls are just what you'd expect in a performance car of this caliber.

New 6-Year/60,000-Mile Powertrain Warranty.

Ford now covers all new 1987 cars with a 6-year/60,000-mile warranty on major powertrain components. Restrictions and deductible apply. New, longer corrosion warranty coverage for body panel rust-through is

6 years/100,000 miles. Also, participating Ford Dealers stand behind their customer paid work with a free Lifetime Service Guarantee. It's good for as long as you own your Ford car. Ask to see the limited warranty and the service guarantee when you visit your Ford Dealer.

Ford. Best-built American cars... six years running.

For the past six consecutive years, Ford quality has led all other American car companies. This is based on an average of owner-reported problems in the first three months of service on '86 models, and in a six-month period on '81-'85 models designed and built in North America.

Ford Mustang GT. One of *Car and Driver's* Ten Best cars for 1987.

The performance oriented Mustang GT received this honor together with the much-celebrated Ford Taurus. Which makes Ford the only name to appear twice on the Ten Best list.

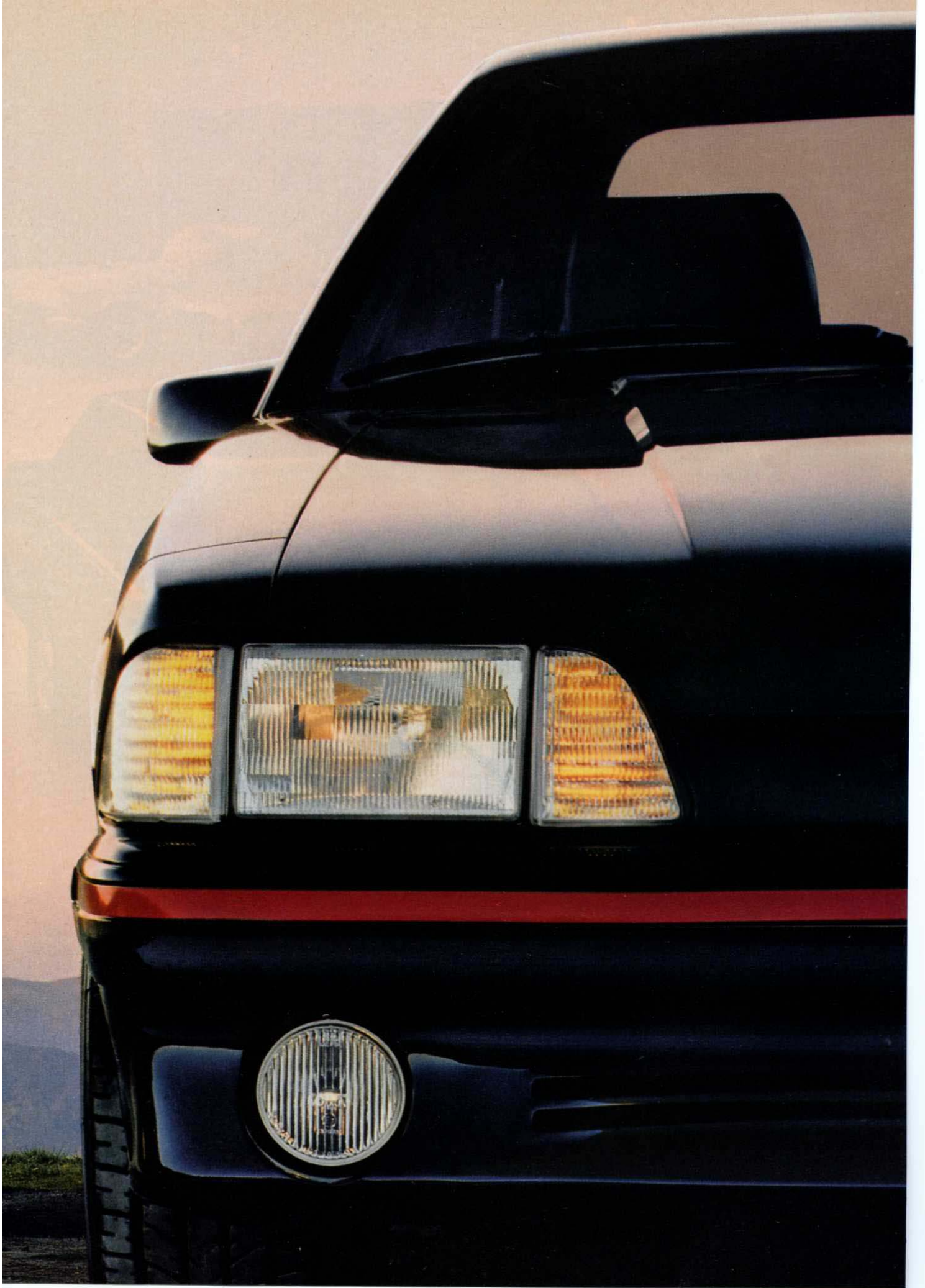
Buy or lease a new Mustang GT at your Ford Dealer.

FORD MUSTANG GT

Have you driven a Ford...lately?



Buckle up—together we can save lives.



The Best American GT

Camaro versus Mustang versus Firebird—and don't spare the brass knuckles.

• If you think you've seen this show before, sit back, relax, and don't touch that dial. This is no rerun. Just because you *can* tell the players without a score card doesn't mean you're in for a sleeper. Sparks will fly and spirits will be tested. This is the Celtics versus the Lakers, Army versus Navy, and McEnroe versus just

about anybody. Natural enemies have come together again, and they are packing brass knuckles.

Welcome to *Car and Driver's* annual smoke-'em, slide-'em, rev-'em, go-for-the-jugular American GT comparison test. If you were with us last July, you saw a production-line 4.9-liter Mustang LX whip a prototype 5.7-liter Corvette-engined Camaro IROC-Z upside the head. But that was last year. This is 1987, and it's a whole new street fight.

Only three agitators qualify for this all-American, V-8-powered, rear-





wheel-driven group: the Chevrolet Camaro, the Ford Mustang, and the Pontiac Firebird. You either like these descendants of the original pony cars or you're out of luck, because there are no alternatives. Everything else in this price-and-performance range has a distinctly different flavor.

The faces in this league are pretty much the same as they've been for several years, but in engineering terms there's been a whole lotta shakin' goin' on. The competition in the pony-car ranks is so keen that yearly improvement has become essential to survival. In 1987 alone, this titanic trio offers one new cost-cutter performance model, three new or improved powertrain combinations, one completely redesigned interior, and one freshened exterior. There are detail improvements as well.

Corporate ego gets much of the credit for this. The Camaro, the Mustang, and the Firebird are high-visibility image leaders, and they have youthful, loyal followings to satisfy. They compete not only in the showroom but also on the street and on the track—and every pony-car engineer worth his bonus wants his brand out front. The Camaro troops feel the same gut rivalry with the Firebird engineers as they do with the Mustang boys.

We know that for a fact, because we invited an engineer from each division to take part in this test. Our instructions were simple: bring the best *all-around* GT your company can muster. For the sake of equality we specified three-door body styles, but the drivetrains, suspensions, and complements of options were left up to the manufacturer.

GM and Ford mailed us three engineers—all named Jim—and a trio of the most closely matched performance machines America has ever produced.

Chevrolet anted up a white Camaro IROC-Z and engineering jack-of-all-trades Jim Hall. Hall (no relation to the Chaparral-driving Texan) is an old friend, having done time on the editorial staffs of *Road Test* and *Motor Trend* before deciding to go respectable.

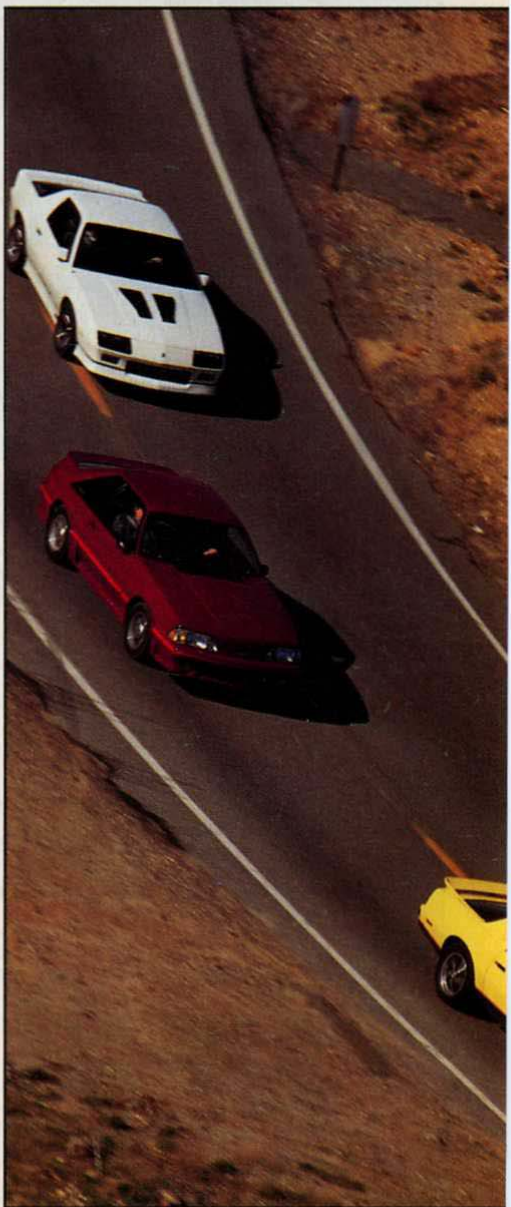
Ford supplied a hot red Mustang in full GT regalia and Jim Kennedy, manager of Mustang development. Kennedy has been ramrodding the aggressive Mustang rejuvenation program since 1982. Just to make sure his days are full, Ford has also put him in charge of the development of the 1989 Thunderbird.

Pontiac sent us a canary-yellow Firebird Formula and hard-charging F-car product-engineering manager Jim Lyons to chaperon it. Lyons's long list of credits includes a central role in the nurturing of the trend-setting 6000STE.

As usual, we ran the contestants through the full battery of *C/D* performance tests, but we can't emphasize strongly enough that this is *not* a simple comparison of objective test-track numbers. Cold, hard performance data don't tell you anything about the quality of the driving experience. A skidpad number can't reveal how much satisfaction a car delivers on a mountain road; a 0-to-60 time offers no insight into an engine's refinement in the daily stop-and-go.

No, this is a contest of all-around prowess, focusing on the sum total of pleasure each car delivers in the full range of driving situations—from freeway cruising to autocross flogging. The performance numbers in our data panel are only part of the big picture.

Most important are the subjective impressions we gleaned from our long hours in the saddle. Three *C/D* scribes took part in this test, and our judgments in ten indi-



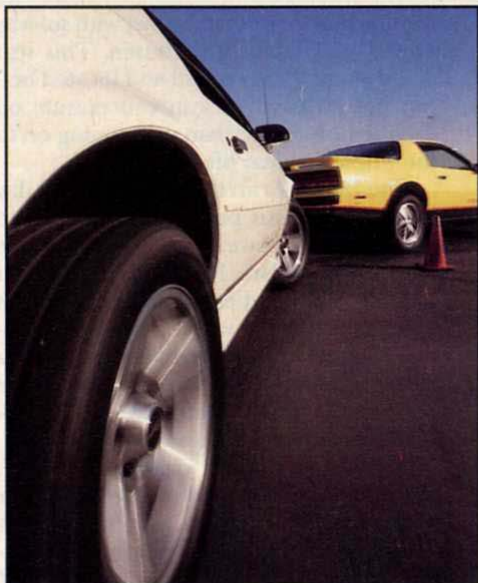


vidual categories are summed up in the Editors' Ratings box. Please note that the Overall Rating scores are not averages of the totals in the nine other categories but independent judgments, with each participant voting his heart.

In addition, we asked our guest engineers to evaluate the three cars in the same ten categories, then tabulated their votes in the Engineers' Ratings box. So that they could pass judgment free from the pressures of corporate politics, we granted them anonymity here. However, their votes did not contribute to the determination of the winner; we deserve all the credit—or blame—for the final results. We also invited the three Jims to write counterpoints, with attribution.

To gather the all-important seat-of-the-pants impressions, we embarked on a two-

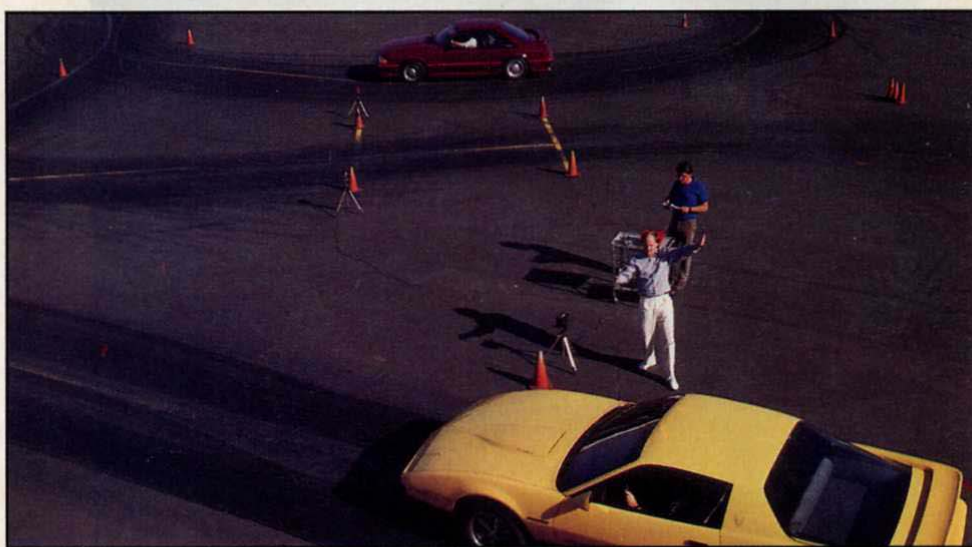
Vital Statistics		price, base/as tested	engine		SAE net power/torque		transmission/ gear ratios: 1/ axle ratio: 1		curb weight, lb	
	CHEVROLET CAMARO IROC-Z	\$12,819/\$18,083	V-8, 305 cu in (5001cc), iron block and heads, GM-Chevrolet electronic engine-control system with port fuel injection		215 bhp @ 4400 rpm/ 295 lb-ft @ 3200 rpm		5-speed/ 2.95, 1.94, 1.34, 1.00, 0.63/ 3.45, limited slip		3400	
	FORD MUSTANG GT	\$12,106/\$14,432	V-8, 302 cu in (4942cc), iron block and heads, Ford EEC-IV engine-control system with port fuel injection		225 bhp @ 4000 rpm/ 300 lb-ft @ 3200 rpm		5-speed/ 3.35, 1.93, 1.29, 1.00, 0.68/ 3.08, limited slip		3300	
	PONTIAC FIREBIRD FORMULA	\$10,359/\$13,542	V-8, 305 cu in (5001cc), iron block and heads, GM-Chevrolet electronic engine-control system with port fuel injection		205 bhp @ 4400 rpm/ 285 lb-ft @ 3200 rpm		5-speed/ 2.95, 1.94, 1.34, 1.00, 0.63/ 3.45, limited slip		3340	
C/D Test Results			acceleration, sec					top speed, mph	braking, 70-0 mph, ft	roadholding, 300-ft skidpad, g
	0-30 mph	0-60 mph	0-100 mph	1/4-mile	top gear, 30-50 mph	top gear, 50-70 mph				
	CHEVROLET CAMARO IROC-Z	2.2	7.1	20.1	15.2 @ 90 mph	11.4	11.7	135	196	0.85
	FORD MUSTANG GT	2.2	6.3	17.8	14.7 @ 94 mph	10.7	11.4	137	200	0.82
	PONTIAC FIREBIRD FORMULA	2.3	7.4	20.8	15.3 @ 89 mph	11.1	11.5	134	204	0.86



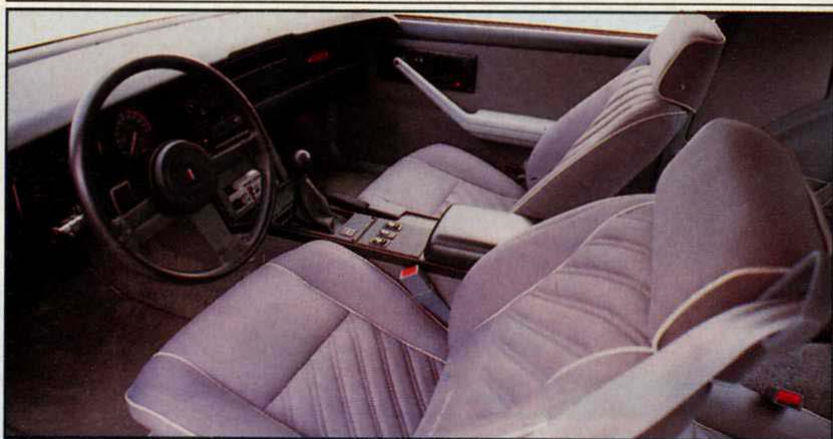
day, 400-mile drive from Los Angeles to the desert community of Palm Springs and back. The route traversed some of Southern California's most challenging two-lane blacktop, including our old favorite, the Ortega Highway (State Route 74 from San Juan Capistrano to Lake Elsinore), and California 243 through Idyllwild and up to Banning.

We finished with an afternoon of autocross competition at the Chrysler Shelby California Development Center in Santa Fe Springs, where the three Bondurant-trained engineers fought the *C/D* editors tooth and nail for fast time of day. (Weaced them in two cars, they beat us in one.)

The three editors and the three engineers named Jim all came to one conclusion: picking the best American GT is tougher than choosing between love and



weight distribution, % F/R	dimensions, in				fuel tank, gal	suspension		brakes, F/R	tires
	wheel- base	length	width	height		front	rear		
57.1/42.9	101.0	192.0	72.8	50.3	15.5	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	rigid axle, 2 trailing links, Panhard rod, torque arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	vented disc/vented disc	Goodyear Eagle VR50, P245/50VR-16
55.4/44.6	100.5	179.6	69.1	52.1	15.4	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	rigid axle, 4 trailing links, 2 leading hydraulic links, coil springs, anti-roll bar	vented disc/drum	Goodyear Eagle VR60, P225/60VR-15
55.4/44.6	101.0	190.5	72.4	49.7	15.5	ind, strut located by a control arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	rigid axle, 2 trailing links, Panhard rod, torque arm, coil springs, anti-roll bar	vented disc/vented disc	Goodyear Eagle VR50, P245/50VR-16
maneuverability, 000-ft slalom, mph	road horsepower @ 50 mph	interior sound level, dBA				fuel economy, mpg			autocross course, sec
		idle	full throttle	70-mph cruising	70-mph coasting	EPA city	EPA hwy	C/D 400- mile trip	
64.8	15.5	57	81	73	72	16	26	13	26.9
64.9	16.0	49	79	71	70	16	24	14	26.4
65.8	15.0	55	79	73	71	16	26	14	26.4



CAMARO IROC-Z



MUSTANG GT



FIREBIRD FORMULA

money. In fact, this was the closest-fought comparison test in recent *C/D* history.

But enough tension already. From the bottom, the finishers are . . .

Chevrolet Camaro IROC-Z Third Place

This test is a good-news, bad-news situation for the IROC-Z. The bad news is that last year's bridesmaid has fallen to third-place status. The good news is that it's a significantly improved automobile.

In choosing its contender for this test, Chevrolet eliminated two of the major annoyances we noted last year simply by skipping over its most potent engine—the 220-hp, 5.7-liter Corvette V-8—in favor of its port-fuel-injected 5.0-liter V-8. The bigger motor makes for a quicker car, but you pay two penalties for the extra kick.

The four-speed automatic that you must take in the bargain thumps you in the back with every shift like a long-lost army buddy. And on the freeway, the exhaust system throbs like a B-29.

The smaller engine is a 215-hp gem that's happy right up to its 5500-rpm redline. Previously it was bolted only to an automatic, but now a slick five-speed is available. The manual gives an enthusiast the control he needs, and it's always a pleasure to stir. What's more, the 5.0-liter never assaults your ears on the highway. This is a fast combination, too—0 to 60 in just 7.1 seconds, a top speed of 135 mph—so you shouldn't miss the heavy-breather Corvette engine at all.

Chevrolet addressed another of the complaints we made last year by leaving the IROC's base seat at home. This time,

the upgraded optional bucket with six-way power adjustment was chosen. This seat could stand to be shaped and located better, but at least you can concentrate on driving now rather than on hanging on to the wheel for dear life.

The IROC-Z can thread needles all day long. The chassis puts every last pony to the ground, no sweat—and it can handle any move you dare. It's only when you get *way* out there, where your passenger is pie-eyed and rigid with fear, that you notice a slight two-step when you turn into a corner. The tail feints just enough to make you wonder what's gonna happen next—but nothing bad ever does.

Another important change for 1987, the addition of two more degrees of caster in the front suspension, pays major dividends on the highway. Before, straight-line tracking was iffy. Now the IROC-Z rolls down the road as if in its own special groove. (The Firebird benefits from this improvement as well.)

With so little to criticize about the IROC-Z, why did it finish third? Well, all other things being equal, value becomes an important consideration. The IROC-Z can hang in there on the road, but it gets smoked off at the loan officer's desk. Our admittedly loaded test car stickered at \$18,083, more than 25 percent higher than the two other contestants. Yes, judicious options selection could prune the cost some, but the IROC-Z is clearly the premium-price car in this trio. When you pay more, you ought to get more.

Pontiac Firebird Formula Second Place

That this car is the meat in our muscle-car sandwich is something of an accomplishment: the Firebird wasn't even in the running last time around. In the past we've been content to let Chevy carry the GM flag into battle, because the Camaro Z28 and the Firebird Trans Am were so similar. This time, we're glad we extended a third invitation.

The new Formula is a Firebird with a difference. Pontiac has arranged things so you can order most of the go-fast, feel-good pieces that pump up the IROC-Z without having to pay for the Trans Am's expensive gingerbread.

Transforming a Formula from a ballerina into a middle linebacker is a simple matter of checking a few boxes on the options sheet. The WS6 suspension, sixteen-inch alloy wheels, and fat Goodyear gatorbacks are all part of a package that also includes full instrumentation, a rear wing, and a swollen hood. Add the LB9 port-fuel-injected 5.0-liter V-8 (the 5.7-liter V-8 is also on the docket, but Pontiac passed on that option for this test), rear disc brakes, and a limited-slip differential and you've built an econo-bullet faster

COUNTERPOINT: THE ENGINEERS

• If the adage about survival of the fittest is correct when it comes to cars, the Camaro, Mustang, and Firebird have some of the hardest automotive genes in the business. These suckers have fought off corporate purges the way social diseases resist penicillin. And since it evolved into its current form, the Camaro has been the fittest of the trioka. All three move along well enough to get whoever's behind the wheel thrown into the local pokey in any of the 48 contiguous states. But the Camaro and Firebird are clearly superior when it comes to handling and braking.

Although the IROC and Formula are alike as cousins, Chevy's finely honed edge gets the nod. However, if you aren't able to detect the precise edge of the IROC's handling, your choice will end up being one of folded sheetmetal. As for the Mustang, what can I say? It's the best damn Fairmont ever built.

—Jim Hall, Chevrolet Engineering

"Your evaluation results must be in by five p.m.!" Five minutes left and I'm not through yet. Bet I can clip a tenth off my autocross time. Come on, Ceppos, just one more shot at it? Thus ended two days of driving and having a heck of a good time doing it.

Good numbers are not enough to win this test. The Mustang GT did well on the numbers, but after driving the competitors I knew it was going to be a close race. These cars are all good performers and fun to drive. The Mustang GT is best for powertrain, seating, and ride. The Trans Am and Camaro excel in handling and looks.

to its rivals on the slalom course. Like the Camaro, the Formula could use more steering feel, but unlike its brother, it never threatens to kick its tail out when you boil into a tight back-road bend.

You also notice the Formula's slight power deficit relative to the Chevy. A more restrictive air cleaner, necessitated by the Firebird's lower hood, trims 10 hp off the top of the power curve, leaving you with 205. The Formula is only a tick slower than the IROC-Z, but its engine gasps through the last few hundred rpm, making it seem less enthusiastic than it is.

Inside, the Formula is as plain as vanilla pudding. Plastic plugs dot the dash, attesting to the options you didn't select. The three-spoke wheel looks cheap, the upholstery is simple, and the seats are only adequate. But if you can accept the rigors of economical living and focus on the Formula's dynamic pleasures, its advantage is clear. Where the Camaro stumbles, the Formula forges ahead.

Participating in a shoot-out means: easy driving, photos, quick driving, photos, slow driving, photos, driving at the limit, photos, holding on, photos, riding in the back seat with Sherman driving, no photos, answering to the wrong "Hey, Jim," meeting deadlines, more photos. For the three Jims, it's who wins that counts; for the editors, it's the amalgamation of facts, enthusiasm, opinions, humor, and art into a meaningful report. I appreciate that task a little more now, particularly the photos.

—Jim Kennedy, Ford Engineering

Apple pie and Miller beer aren't this American. Twenty-five years later, the muscle car has reached maturity. These cars all burn rubber about as well as any '64 GTO, but today's shifter still works after days of abuse, and there's an extra gear for cruising back home. Unlike 1964, these cars will stop again and again... and go around a corner pulling the side of your face off. All three are durable, go-like-hell cars that are easy to drive to work tomorrow, especially if you want to leave late and get there early.

The Mustang has bigger rear seats and a stronger motor, with the penalty (or advantage) of looking like a hopped-up small sedan. The GM cars are sleeker and more secure at speed, particularly the Pontiac.

Imports just can't compete in this market—they don't understand it—and no all-new domestic V-8 rear-drivers are coming, either. It doesn't get any better than this.

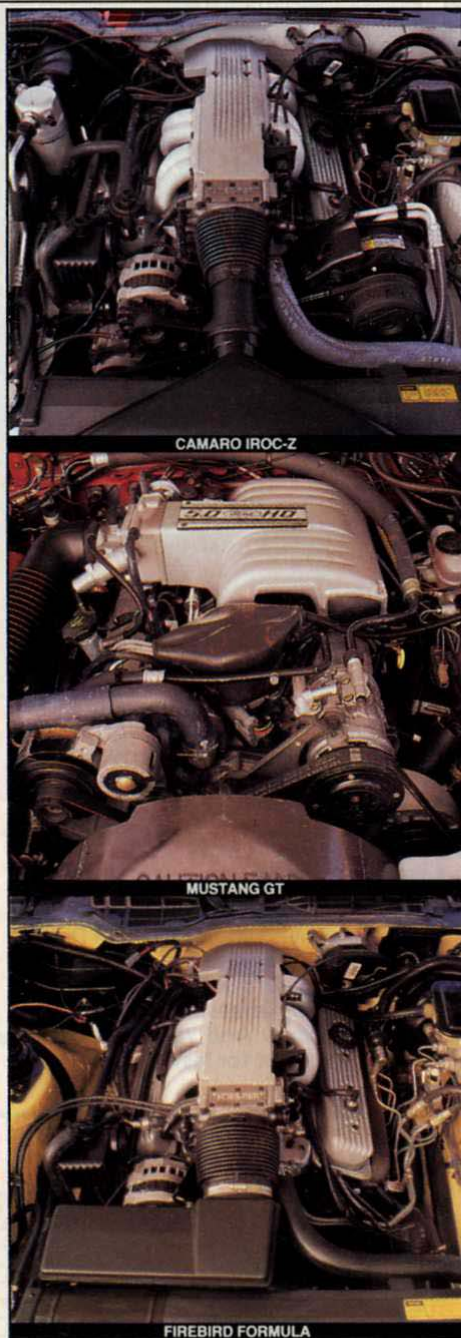
—Jim Lyons, Pontiac Engineering

Ford Mustang GT First Place

There is blood in the street, and some of it is the Mustang's. The battle for the GT crown was so brutal, the winner was roughed up almost as badly as the losers.

As you can see from the Editors' Ratings box, the GT was anything but dominant. It usually proved to be strong where the others were weak, but it had several chinks in its armor as well.

There was no controversy about the GT's powerplant: all six judges awarded it the maximum number of points. You could fall for this car for its engine alone. For 1987 Ford squeezed another 25 hp out of its port-fuel-injected 4.9-liter V-8, bringing the total to 225. Thanks to all that hoof power, the GT explodes out of the hole and doesn't look back until it reaches 137 mph. Sixty mph flashes by in just 6.3 seconds, and the quarter-mile is digested in 14.7 seconds at 94 mph.



than you can say, "Sorry, Officer." A strip-per Formula like our test car (which had an AM/FM/cassette deck but no A/C) comes in a whopping \$4500 below a full-boat IROC-Z—and at least as much under a 5.7-liter Trans Am GTA.

Where the Pontiac and the Chevy differ is in their detail tuning. The Formula lacks several structural aids that the Camaro group feels are indispensable—including a front brace nicknamed the "wonder-bar." The Pontiac is fitted with slightly fatter anti-roll bars and different shocks with special calibrations.

These are differences you can feel. We preferred the Formula's ride to those of its competitors in most circumstances, and in the two-lane flog it indeed felt like a *formula* car: tied down tight, with nary a false move in its repertoire. It was also superior



The three Jims: Lyons, Hall, and Kennedy played hooky to dodge pylons with C/D regulars.

When you throttle back, the driveline shows itself to be a class act. It's flexible around town and puts out a smooth, expensive-sounding hum on the freeway. In this test, it had no peer.

The rest of the GT's road manners aren't quite so flawless. Most of the time, it's a sweet car to drive. All the controls have a silky, perfectly weighted feel, the steering is dead-nuts accurate, and the ride motions are the most supple and fluid available in this group. New lower control arms from the Lincoln Continental add a half-inch to the front-suspension travel, larger front brakes enhance high-speed safety, and additional front caster results in first-rate highway tracking. As a switch-

back thrill ride, though, the GT falls a stride or two behind the GM products. Its softer suspension calibrations let it bob and nose-dive when you force the g-loads into no man's land, and its smaller tires give up earlier.

But this performance needs to be put into perspective. By any measure, the GT is a thoroughly scintillating vehicle for hammering two-lane roads into submission. There are precious few cars that can stay with it over any kind of road. And in the autocross, the Mustang tied the IROC and hounded the first-place Formula for fast time. Besides, whatever the GT lacks in absolute handling, it more than makes up for elsewhere.

Man does not live by performance alone, after all—and in the GT he doesn't have to. The Mustang edges ahead as soon as you pull the door open. As in the past, there is room enough in back to carry a pair of life-sized adults, at least on a cross-town trip. The surgeon general would recommend against that in either of the GM rockets.

This year, there is even more good news inside the Mustang: a long-needed interior redesign. The new digs, complete with a fully up-to-date instrument panel, are as Teutonic and ergonomically correct as almost anything from the Fatherland. The improved front buckets offer adjustable lower side bolsters and a power lumbar support and are the most comfortable in this group. Our GT was also equipped with every amenity worth having. In sum, the GT's accommodations are leagues ahead of the GM cars'.

None of this would be exceptional at the IROC-Z's eighteen-grand price, but our test Mustang's sticker was barely higher than the beefed-up Formula's. And if you have some trouble with the GT's new boy-racer bodywork—as we do—Ford has a solution: order an LX. It looks like last year's GT, has all the essential pieces, and will even save you a few bucks.

It's almost ironic that the battle between America's three premier GTs is decided as much by value, driver comfort, and ergonomics as by horsepower and handling—but that only underscores how terrifically competitive this segment has become. Even though we've crowned only one winner, buying into this class is in fact a no-lose proposition. This time around, the Mustang takes the checker by the thickness of a license plate. But if two engineers named Jim have their way, it's going to be different next year.

—Rich Ceppos

Engineers' Ratings		engine	transmission	brakes	handling	ergonomics	comfort	ride	value	fun to drive	overall rating
	CHEVROLET CAMARO IROC-Z	13	13	11	13	9	10	10	10	13	11
	FORD MUSTANG GT	15	13	11	10	12	11	13	15	12	12
	PONTIAC FIREBIRD FORMULA	13	13	11	14	10	10	11	15	14	12
Editors' Ratings		engine	transmission	brakes	handling	ergonomics	comfort	ride	value	fun to drive	OVERALL RATING
	CHEVROLET CAMARO IROC-Z	12	14	11	12	10	10	11	8	13	11
	FORD MUSTANG GT	15	13	11	11	13	13	12	14	13	14
	PONTIAC FIREBIRD FORMULA	12	15	10	14	11	10	13	13	14	13

For each chart, three voters rated the cars in each of ten categories on a 1-to-5 scale (5 being best). The numbers above are the simple additions of those scores. (For example, if all three editors gave ratings of 5 to a car's brakes, it would earn a total of 15 points—the maximum possible—in the lower chart.) The points in the Overall Rating column were assigned in the same fashion; they are not averages or summations of the other scores.