

Mustang Dark Horse: Unbridled Muscle

Track-Focused Pony Car Blends Sinister Style With V8 Thrill

By Derek Price
CARGAZING.COM

After experiencing the new 2024 Ford Mustang GT last week, I wasn't sure how much more impressive the track-focused Dark Horse variant could be.

But as I discovered during a week behind the wheel, this wild pony's subtle enhancements add up to a uniquely thrilling package that distills the essence of Mustang performance.

At first glance, the Dark Horse doesn't look dramatically different from the already aggressive GT. Unique visual cues like darkened headlights, a gloss black grille with trapezoidal nostrils, and menacing "fanged" front bumper signal this Mustang's more sinister intentions.

The optional Race Rad paint on my tester perfectly complemented the car's aesthetic.

Slipping into the Dark Horse's cockpit reveals an interior that blends sporting purpose with surprising comfort. The available Recaro sport seats in my test car struck an ideal balance between supportive bolstering and supple cushioning, making them impressively livable for daily driving duties. Contrasting stitching and seatbelts add a welcome pop of color to the otherwise dark cabin.

But the real magic hap-



With its gloss black grille, darkened headlights and aggressive front splitter, the 2024 Ford Mustang Dark Horse has a menacing presence that hints at its track-honed performance.

pens when you summon the Dark Horse's 500-horsepower 5.0-liter V8 to life. While only 14 horses stronger than the standard GT's engine, the Dark Horse's specially modified Coyote V8 feels utterly unhinged in its ferocity.

A unique dual-throttle-body intake and other enhancements help it breathe deeper and rev more eagerly.

Paired with the slick-shifting Tremec six-speed manual transmission in my tester, the Dark Horse's V8 delivers a lively, engaging experience that rewards drivers. The 3D-printed titanium shift ball feels purposeful in your palm, and the manual's pre-

cise action encourages frequent gear changes to keep the engine in its sweet spot.

The Dark Horse's track-tuned chassis is equally impressive, with standard MagneRide shocks that stiffen the ride without completely sacrificing compliance. The available Handling Package adds goodies like Pirelli Trofeo tires and aerodynamic tweaks to further sharpen responses. Even without it, the base Dark Horse feels nimbler and more composed than the already capable Mustang GT.

That said, during spirited street driving, it was difficult to discern a massive performance delta between the two. The Dark Horse's

upgraded brakes and tires surely pay dividends during hot laps, but for most buyers, the \$10,000 premium over a well-optioned GT may be hard to justify.

Moreover, the Dark Horse can't completely escape the inherent limitations of the Mustang's platform. It's heavy, definitely designed to be more of a muscle car than a sports car, and in some ways sacrifices styling over comfort and outward visibility.

But to get hung up on practicality is to miss the point of the Dark Horse entirely. This is a Mustang distilled to its purest form, an unabashedly meaty machine that prioritizes

driver involvement and raw thrills over cornering speed. Its raucous exhaust note and wild styling are an assault on the senses in the best possible way.

The Dark Horse represents the zenith of the Mustang's old-school formula before electrification and fuel-economy concerns inevitably take hold.

It's a fitting evolution of the iconic V8 pony car, one that embraces its muscle car-roots while offering modern refinement to make it livable as a daily driver.

For diehard Ford fans and weekend track warriors, that's more than enough to justify the Dark Horse's price tag.

AT A GLANCE

What was tested?

2024 Ford Mustang Dark Horse (\$58,935).
Options: Premium paint (\$295), security package (\$500), Recaro sport seats (\$1,995). Price as tested (including \$1,595 destination charge): \$63,320

By The Numbers

Wheelbase: 107 in.
Length: 189.4 in.
Width: 81.9 in.
Height: 55 in.
Engine: 5.0-liter V8 (500 horsepower, 418 ft. lbs. torque)

Transmission:
Six-speed manual
Fuel economy: 14 city, 22 highway

RATINGS

Style: 10
Performance: 9
Price: 3
Handling: 5
Ride: 7
Comfort: 6
Quality: 7
Overall: 9

Why buy it? The 2024 Ford Mustang Dark Horse elevates the iconic pony car's track-focused formula with a specially tuned V8, sinister styling and performance upgrades that make it the most capable 5.0-liter Mustang ever built for the street.

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But the real magic happens when you summon the Dark Horse's 500-horsepower 5.0-liter



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A CLOSER LOOK



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FACTS, FIGURES AND RATINGS

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