



*How to create a*

# BULLITT MUSTANG

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*It took us a number of years to build our Bullitt replica, and in that time we did a lot of research, and learned a lot about what McQueen did to the two Mustangs that were used in the making of the film.*

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And that's an important point, because there were two different cars, and they weren't identical in the way they were modified.

The other point to be aware of is that, back in the sixties, film-makers had a slightly cavalier attitude to issues like continuity, as anybody who has observed the famous chase scene will know. Just how many hub-caps did the Charger lose? And how often did the protagonists pass that VW Beetle? This means that the car that appeared in one scene sometimes looked quite different to the one in the scene that followed.

All of which makes it difficult to be definitive about what a Bullitt Mustang actually is.



But, let us remember, the exercise of creating a Bullitt Mustang is just a bit of fun. There are no Bullitt Mustang concours competitions, so nobody is going to deduct points for a lack of accuracy. And, of course, originality really goes out of the window when you build a Bullitt rep.. The chances are that, in creating a Bullitt car, you will end up with a vehicle that has little in common with anything that ever came off the Ford production line.



So don't get too hung up on the detail. A Bullitt Mustang, ultimately, is whatever you want it to be.

For some, any Highland Green Fastback with a set of Torque-Thrust wheels is enough.

For others, it's got to be a '68 390GT with every possible detail correct to the McQueen car.

It's really up to you.

So, let us talk through all the things that might be done to replicate McQueen's vehicle.

The starting point should be a '68 Fastback, what is known as an 'S' code car (a 390GT). But a '67 has an identical body, so can be used if a '68 is not available.

But many of the observations we make in this guide are based on a 1968 car, so this may not always apply to a car from the previous year.

The model year for any American car of this era would have been introduced in the latter part of the previous year.

This is relevant to the Bullitt car because, in February of '68, Ford changed the reflector on the rear wings. To be correct, you need a pre-February '68 car (ie: a late '67 or January '68 build date). This reflector is squarer and fits more flush against the body than the one that replaced it.



If you have a post-Feb '68 car, the correct reflector can, of course, be cut into the bodywork for a more accurate look.

McQueen's car, as everybody knows, was a 390GT, and for accuracy this is the engine a Bullitt Mustang should also have under the bonnet.



But not everybody is a fan of the larger motor. Yes, it is more powerful. But it is heavy, and makes the car a bit of a handful to drive.

It's also incredibly thirsty on fuel, although you don't drive a sixties Mustang of any description if you're bothered about fuel economy!

Nobody really knows exactly what McQueen did to his Fords to make them go better, but it seems unlikely that he would have left them alone completely.

The standard car developed 325 hp; pundits think he probably got another 50 hp out of it, bringing the total power to somewhere around 375 hp.

Well, that's a figure that's well within the capability of a Hi-Po 302 engine.

Our car has a 302 engine that has been gently breathed on. It also runs a slightly racier cam and breathes through a set of Edelbrock headers, and so we reckon it probably develops something in the region of 300-350hp.

Of course, the sky's the limit as far as power is concerned, but power alone is not the *raison d'être* of a Bullitt car, so 500 hp really isn't necessary.

You want a car that can break traction and make a throaty roar, but you create a Bullitt car to be seen in, so flying around at three figure speeds is not really what it's all about.

The McQueen car would have featured a standard four speed box and, of course, this is an option, but here again authenticity has its cost. A four speed transmission makes the car feel very under-geared, and uncomfortably noisy on the motorway. Not that it will ever be a quiet car.

Most will prefer driving the car if it is fitted with a later T5 gearbox. It's a better box, will make the car nicer to drive, and will improve fuel consumption at motorway speeds.





The exhaust system is up to you. Different brands have different sounds, but a totally straight-through system is likely to be uncomfortably noisy. The important visual element, though, is to make sure that the pipe is cut straight where it exits beneath the rear bumper. Certainly, any fancy tips should be removed.

It's unlikely, by the way, that any Mustang will sound like the car in the film, as the engine sound was repeatedly over-dubbed from a Ford GT40!

Handling-wise, there's also a lot you can do to make a Mustang track and corner better. A brace in the engine bay can help. As do firmer anti-roll bars. But the only thing we do know about the film car is that it was fitted with upgraded Koni shock absorbers. These Koni shocks are still available, and so are an easy mod.

Braking is also the remit of the owner. McQueen's car would have had discs up front, drums at the rear.

Discs all round are clearly going to give you a greater stopping power, but a well set up disc and drum combination can also deliver sufficient levels of retardation.

So, let's go back and look at the more visual elements: the bodywork and the interior.

McQueen was, in our view, trying to create a more understated and subtle look. Ford supplied the two cars, but Steve probably wanted a more sophisticated, European style for his character (his girlfriend; after all, drove a Porsche 356), and so he set about removing as much chrome and blingy trim as he could.

Others suggest he did this to avoid reflections from the film cameras. Who knows the truth?

But remove stuff he did.



He took the Running Pony badge and the fog lights out of the front grille, leaving the car with just a pair of headlights. This required the manufacture of a replacement grille; and indeed this is what we had done for our car.

Along the flanks of the car, there are bright metal rocker panels that run along the sills between the wheels, and there are rather nasty pieces of trim in the door scallops. McQueen painted these in Highland Green, which again de-cluttered the car.

He could have removed these pieces for an even cleaner look, but time was almost certainly of the essence, and they probably didn't want to have to fill holes in the body work.

On our car we simply chose not to fit the sill covers and door ornaments. We think this gives the car the simple and clean look that McQueen was looking for. But there's no two ways about it; what we have done with our car is not correct in the eyes of the purists. We just happen to prefer it!

Some of the most distinctive features of a Bullitt car are to be found at the rear.

The rear panel was painted in a matt black, as were the rear lens surrounds. The centre of the fuel cap was also painted the same colour.

The Mustang lettering was removed from the boot lip. The reversing light was similarly deleted.

On the rear nearside wing (ie: passengers side on a lhd car) there's a radio aerial.



In some scenes of the film, the car has no door mirror. In other scenes it does.

The mirror was not a standard Ford item. It was, in all likelihood, a mirror that was picked up in a local car accessory store.

Made by a well-known American manufacturer, this round mirror was painted Highland Green, and was quite distinctive, with a multi-adjustable arm and mirror head.



It's easy to find similar body mirrors, but the correct mirrors are much harder to come across, especially here in Europe. Of course, there are probably hundreds of abused cars in the US wearing this highly sought after mirror, but finding one is another matter.

Any seller who knows what the mirror is, is going to want many hundreds of pounds for it. But there can be no doubt; the proper mirror provides a nice finishing touch.

The final external detail is the wheels. Again, one can go to great lengths to find the correct wheels. Or one can opt for a modern alternative that not many people are going to recognise as incorrect in any way.

Technically, McQueen's car wore Torque Thrust 'D' wheels. The 'D' stood for discs.

It would be very difficult, and very expensive, to source the original wheels, which is why most people make do with modern Torque Thrusts. There are, though, different spoke profiles available, so make sure you get the closest ones possible.

The wheels were painted a very dark matt grey; in fact, they're just one shade away from black. The chrome wheel caps should have any logo removed.



Off the production line, a '68 Mustang would have worn 14" x 5" wheels, although Shelby cars wore 15" wheels.

McQueen actually had a notchback Mustang that had had work done on it by Shelby. That car was fitted with Torque Thrusts, which were a favourite style of Carroll Shelby. It is probable, therefore, that McQueen decided that they would be the perfect wheel for Frank's hotted-up Mustang.

Those who spend hours studying the detail claim that the Bullitt Mustang's 15" wheels were 6" wide at the front, and 7" at the back.

We cannot be completely sure of this, but nobody will deduct points if you run 7" front and back!

The tyres, to be correct, should be Firestones. The recommended size on a 15" wheel is 225 x 60.

Some will be tempted to run lower profile tyres on larger wheels and, indeed, larger Torque-Thrusts are available. All we would say is that the car will always look a little unbalanced on the incorrect sized wheels.



So let's now move to the interior.

The film cars were fitted with what was known as the Interior Decor Group package.

This meant the car had woodgrain inserts on the dash, special door panels with courtesy lights fixed to the bottom of the door, insert trim buttons on the seats, a woodgrain roof console, bright trim on the brake and clutch, and padded trim panels.

The interior of the car was black.

McQueen also, for some reason, repositioned the rear view mirror and fixed it to the windscreen.

The biggest change to the interior, and certainly one of the most expensive things to get right these days, is the steering wheel. McQueen fitted a sportier steering wheel from a 1967 Shelby Mustang. He then had this trimmed in leather.

A '67 wheel is rarer than rocking horse droppings. If you have a '67 Shelby car without the right wheel, you'll pay almost anything to get the correct one for your car, which is why values are so high. To get an original wheel, if you can find one, you'll pay at least £5000. You'll then have to pay someone very skilled to trim it properly.





We were lucky, very lucky, and found a NOS wheel, but there can't be many more out there.

You can make do with a wheel from somebody like Grant, but there are also people who make a replica of a '68 Shelby wheel. We don't think that a '67 replica is available, but a '68 is pretty close.

So that's about it. If you follow these guidelines, you'll end up with a car that's not a million miles away from the car Frank Bullitt drove in the film.

But more importantly you'll have a car that will be the talking point wherever you drive.



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