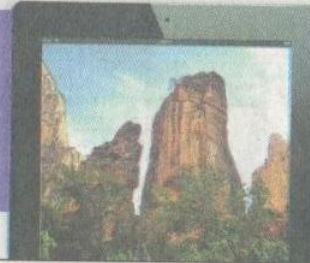


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BLUE-LIGHT SPECIAL

Enthusiast restores state patrol Mustang



Bobby Edwards made a deal with the Georgia State Patrol: If the agency would let him, he would restore its 1991 Mustang, the last Mustang the agency owned. MARK DAVIS / MRDAVIS@AJC.COM

A year of work, \$5,000 in donated parts has car ready to roar again.

By Mark Davis
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Bobby Edwards should have known better when he eyed that forlorn Mustang. He knew his weakness for Ford's signature fun car. But still.

There he stood in the parking lot, looking at a worn-out '91 Mustang that bore the colors of the Georgia State Patrol. He looked at the rust spots, the places where the sun had cracked the dash and faded the interior. *With a new*

back seat; maybe a replacement steering wheel; sanding the rust spots ...

That was a year ago. Now, he's restored a Mustang made specifically for the state police – bright-blue and gray, with lettering on fenders as bold as the car itself. The state let him borrow the car until it shone like it was 1991 again. All it took to make the car look new was about \$5,000 in donated parts and a free paint job worth several thousand more.

Oh, and the hours. They were on the house, too. How much time did he spend on this cruiser? Edwards just rolled his eyes. "I'd work on it every spare minute I got."

On Friday, the Floyd Coun-

ty body-shop manager took the machine back to the Georgia State Patrol. The agency, which retired it 13 years ago, plans to use it in parades, festivals and other gatherings where people peer at old cars.

Here's how the case went down:

A longtime Mustang enthusiast – it's part affection, part affliction – Edwards, 45, began acquiring and restoring police Mustangs five years ago. He's part of an active community of gearheads: Word gets around when a cop Mustang turns up.

To understand the fascination with these police

Mustang continued on D5

Mustang

continued from D1

Mustangs, it helps to understand their background: They're called SSPs, meaning Special Service Package. They had some features civilian Mustangs lacked, such as coolers for oil and automatic transmission fluid, reinforced floor pans and heavy-duty alternators. The cars were designed to last, and, when necessary, be driven hard. From 1982-1993, the production life span of the SSP, Ford built about 15,000. The Georgia patrol bought about 300, using them primarily for traffic enforcement.

When he heard about a Mustang gathering rust at the GSP's complex on Confederate Avenue in Atlanta, Edwards had to see it. Patrol officials told him to come on. This was September 2013.

The car was on the edge of a parking lot. The tires were flat. The dash was faded and cracked. Molding had fallen off the doors. The headliner was ratty. The car, an official told him, was the only Mustang the patrol still had. It had been used in parades until the fuel pump went bad.

"After that," he said, "they (GSP) moved it from one place in the parking lot to another, using a forklift."



Ford Motor Co. made about 15,000 Mustangs for law enforcement agencies. The Georgia State Patrol bought about 300 over a decade. This 1991 model is the only one that still belongs to the agency.

The Mustang should have been auctioned years ago, but there it sat. Edwards, who only wanted to look at the car, came away convinced he could make it look new.

He wrote a letter to the state patrol, detailing his plans to fix the car and return it. He made a comparable pitch to his wife. Both authorities said OK.

On Oct. 3, 2013, the state delivered the car to his shop 50 miles northwest of Atlanta. Edwards took a close look at the car, then contacted Gregg Henderson, a fellow SSP enthusiast who lives in Macon.

They got on computer mes-

sage boards that cater to Mustang cop-car enthusiasts.

Did anyone have spare molding to donate? A couple of blue Ford emblems they no longer needed? Engine hoses that were cluttering the shop? Henderson agreed to get the parts if Edwards would put them on the car.

"Everybody donated," said Edwards. "Packages were arriving left and right."

Now, a tired old car looks as if it's ready to prowls the interstates again.

On a recent sprint along a Floyd County roadway, the car's 5.0-liter engine hummed



Mustang enthusiasts donated replacement parts, and it took Bobby Edwards a year to finish his restoration for the Georgia State Patrol. He returned the vehicle on Friday. MARK DAVIS PHOTOS / MRDAVIS@AJC.COM

like it was in a showroom. Its 15-inch tires grabbed the blacktop. It ran like its namesake.

State officials are delighted with what Edwards has done.

Jim Bigler, fleet manager of the state Department of Public Safety, promised that the car won't return to the spot it held before Edwards came along.

It's going in a warehouse alongside a '37 Ford V-8 (the year the patrol debuted), a 2012 Charger (75th anniversary of the GSP) and a '67 Fairlane (just because it's cool), all state pa-

trol cars.

"We're excited about it," he said. "There's talk all over town about that Mustang." Troopers, he said, are lining up to drive the Mustang in case a parade breaks out.

Does Edwards suffer post-resto depression? He says no. After all, he owns eight police Mustangs.

Is that a fleet? A herd?

"I used to fear these cars," said Edwards, who had a lead foot in his younger years. "I guess fear has turned to love."