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MUSTANG TIMES

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THE LAST GSP SSP

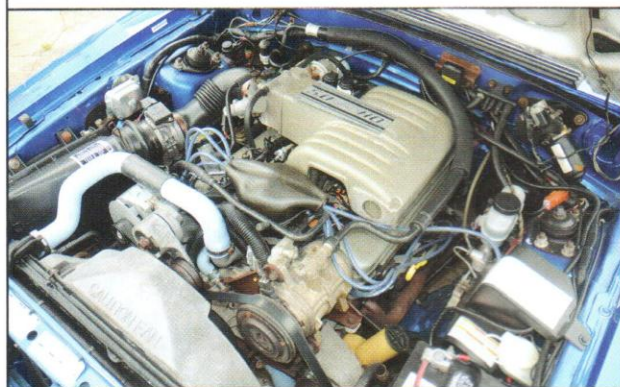
Bobby Edwards restored the Georgia State Patrol's last remaining 5.0-liter Mustang

By Donald Farr
Photos by Keith Keplinger

“**T**he Georgia State Patrol has been a big part of my life and that Mustang was a big part of my career,” says Lt. J. Don Stultz, who spent 10 of his 35 years with the GSP patrolling northwest Georgia in a blue and gray 1991 Mustang with the Special Service Package (SSP). By the time the 5.0-liter LX hardtop, unit 1235, was officially retired in 2001, it was the final SSP Mustang in service with the GSP. Last year, Mustang SSP enthusiast Bobby Edwards restored the Mustang so it could be preserved along with other historic vehicles at GSP headquarters.

If you're thinking that 10 years was a long time for an SSP Mustang to remain in service, you'd be correct. Stultz says the average duty cycle of a GSP Mustang was only four years. However, Stultz enjoyed his Mustang so much that he meticulously maintained the car, even waxing the exterior and shampooing the interior. Realizing that maintenance costs would hasten the GSP's decision to retire the 5.0-liter hardtop, Stultz began taking care of replacement items himself. He even reupholstered the driver's seat, which was well-worn after years of sliding his six-foot-something frame in and out for traffic stops and accident investigations.





A Mustang fan since getting his first ride in a Mustang—a white 1969 Mach 1, he recalls fondly—Stultz was elated when the GSP acquired its first batch of Mustangs in 1983. “The Mustangs were brought in to use as a tool to prevent high-speed pursuits,” Stultz says, noting that their ability to accelerate allowed them to quickly catch-up with speeders. Stultz drove a four-speed 1983 SSP Mustang for a brief time, then got a long-term Mustang of his own in 1988 before later swapping it for the 1991 model. Between 1991 and 2001, Stultz was assigned to patrol several areas around northern Georgia, including Canton, Calhoun, Dalton, and his hometown of LaFayette. He frequently worked Interstates 75, 24, and 59.

“The 1991 Mustang was my favorite patrol car of all-time,” says Stultz, who put 135,000 miles on the odometer over the ten years. “The 5.0-liter Mustangs were the premier law enforcement vehicle at the time.” Between 1983 and 1988-1992, the GSP took delivery of 310 SSP Mustangs.

Stultz notes that, like all GSP patrol cars, his Mustang was carefully maintained by both in-house mechanics and through relationships with local Ford dealership service departments. Oil changes were made every 3,000 miles and Stultz was required to fill out daily and monthly logs detailing mileage and maintenance, all hand-written at the time. Stultz says his Mustang was never damaged in an accident, and he refused to idle the engine while working an accident scene or handling paperwork. “I didn’t think it was good for the engine,” Stultz says. “I’d rather sit there sweating than leave the engine running for A/C. I figured the better care you take of the machine, the better care it will take of you.”

When the GSP finally retired Stultz’s Mustang in 2001, it

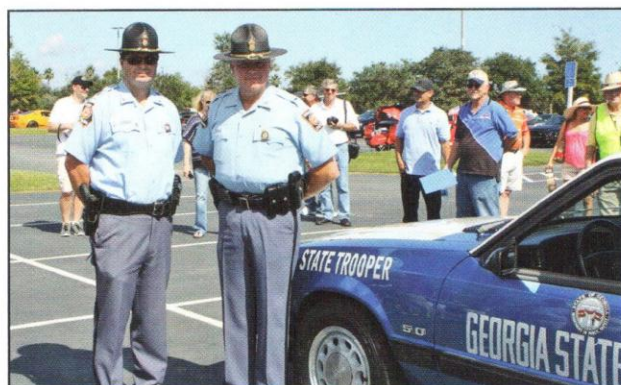
remained with the department for use at parades and other promotional purposes. The fuel pump eventually failed and the Mustang was moved, by forklift, to an outside storage area where the sun damaged the paint and faded the interior. That's when Bobby Edwards entered the picture.

A long-time Mustang SSP fan who has eight GSP Mustangs in his own collection, Edwards heard about the Mustang languishing at GSP headquarters and, in September 2013, stopped by to take photos for documentation purposes. Someone mentioned that it would be great to restore the last Mustang in the GSP fleet. Edwards, who operates Candy Apple Customs III body shop in Rockmart, Georgia, raised his hand.

"It was pretty rough, just sitting there on flat tires rusting away," Edwards recalls. "It had dents and dings, some made by the fork lift, but most of the SSP parts and GSP equipment were still there."

Edwards spent a year restoring the Mustang, volunteering his own time and labor for the body work and paint. Fellow SSP enthusiast Gregg Henderson helped track down parts, with most coming from www.sspmustang.org and www.specialservicemustang.net forum members who donated needed replacement items, including an original but low-mileage exhaust system. Attesting to the 5.0-liter's durability, the 23 year-old, 135,000-mile engine was simply cleaned and treated to a tune-up by the GSP.

On October 10, 2014, the restored 1991 SSP Mustang was officially "re-delivered" to the GSP during a ceremony at the MCA's Mustangs in Historic Savannah National show. Lt. Don Stultz was there, standing proudly by the Mustang that served him so well for 10 years. Today, the Mustang joins other historic GSP vehicles, including a 1937 Ford V8 from the GSP's first year in existence and a 1967 Fairlane, at GSP headquarters near Atlanta. No longer stored outside, the Mustang has returned to duty as a parade and promotional vehicle. **MT**



Lt. Don Stultz (R), along with Troop I commander Capt. W.W. Hitchens (L), took delivery of the restored 1991 GSP Mustang at a ceremony during the MCA's Mustangs in Historic Savannah National show last year.

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