The front end of the 2013 Mustang GT offers a more aggressive design with a significantly more prominent grille.

By Steve Schaefer

San Leandro Times

The Ford Mustang is now a classic model, known to all from its 48-year history of giving affordable power and motoring amusement to a vast number of folks. As the fabled car

approaches its half-century mark, new designs are being teased to avid readers. Meanwhile, the current car is probably the best Mustang ever.

If you’re a true enthusiast and have the means, you can pick the mighty Boss 302 (nostalgically named and appreciated) or the $54,000 Shelby 500 road-going beast. However, even the “regular” Mustang coupe and convertible feature a strong 3.7-liter V6 that puts out 305 horsepower and 280 lb.-ft. of torque. Not bad, although the V6 model weighs in at 3,500 pounds.

My tester, however, was the 2013 Mustang GT, with its 5.0-liter V8, through the optional six-speed automatic transmission. Although a six-speed manual is standard, this automatic has a button on the shifter to allow manual gear selection (clutchless, of course). You can hold in the gear you want up to the redline, so it’s up to you how you treat your engine and the other motorists.

I didn’t use the manual shifting, as it wasn’t really a benefit in my typical driving. I did, however, at the urging of my enthusiastic neighbor, Mike, take a ride out on the nice, curving back roads in my community. The car sticks great in the turns, powers out effortlessly, and provides a surprisingly stable ride while it’s doing it. And the V8 is well mannered and less macho than you might expect.

Fuel economy is decent, considering the level of performance. The EPA awards the Mustang an

average mpg of 20 (18 City, 25 Highway). I got 18.3 mpg, including my backroad antics, stop-and-go commuting, and occasional ventures past 65 mph on the freeway when it wasn't gridlocked. The car's window sticker gives an Air Pollution rating of 6 and a Greenhouse Gas rating of 5. That's right in the middle for a car that is much more fun and energetic than the average Camry or Accord.

My Sterling Gray Metallic test car had the California Special package, which, for $1,995, adds custom mats, side and hood stripes, side scoops and a pedestal rear spoiler. That spoiler looks good and may have some modest effect at speeds over 100 mph (not attempted), but it does obscure the bottom half of any car behind you. The original 1960's California Special featured T-bird taillamps and striping and badging too, and is a collector's item today.

The Mustang's history began with Lee Iacocca's genius transformation of the Ford Falcon economy compact into a sporty car for everyone. It went through the "dressed up Pinto" phase before landing on Ford's midsize platform as a 1979 model. In the 1990s it regained some of its classic styling, and the latest car is perhaps the best looking ever. It's all there — the long hood, short deck, side scoops, triple taillamps, and good-looking wheels. Of course, there's the horse in the grille, too, although my car had the logo tucked into the driver-side corner.