The front end on the 2013 Mustang Boss 302 offers a more powerful design with a more prominent grille. A more powerful splitter and functional hood extractors add to that look.

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Ford's perennially popular Mustang is available in multiple variants. I recently drove the GT, which features its 5.0-liter V8 and manual transmission. The Boss 302, however, is an even mightier beast, and relates back directly to the 1969-70 model Boss 302.

The original car was designed to compete in the SCCA Trans-Am racing series, where it battled Chevy Camaros, AMC Javelins, Plymouth Barracudas and Pontiac Firebirds. There were around 7,000 copies sold to buyers who wanted the 428 Cobra Jet engine and other high-performance upgrades.

The Boss 302 returned for 2012. I sampled a 2013 Grabber Blue example. Like the 1970 model, it featured the reflective "hockey stick" graphic along the side and Boss 302 logos. And like the original car, it offered many performance upgrades over the GT model.

To start, its 5.0-liter V8 is pumped up to 444 horsepower from the GT's already formidable 412. There are 380 lb.-ft. of torque to go with that. I regret I was unable to put it on the racetrack to see what it would do. I had to settle for the occasional trip up an onramp to the freeway.

EPA numbers are 15 City, 26 Highway — averaging 19. I averaged 15.8 mpg, admittedly, in much too much commute traffic. The Green Vehicle Guide numbers are 6 for Air Pollution and 4 for Greenhouse Gas — not bad considering the enormous power the 5.0-liter generates.

The close-ratio six-speed manual was fun to use — although commuting with it was sometimes tiresome. But controlling that much power is a rare treat, and the ball shift knob lent a feeling of what the old car would have been. The clutch is strengthened in case you take the car on the racetrack.

Speaking of racetracks, the Laguna Seca model of the Boss 302 further improves the car with Recaro sport seats, a Torsen limited-slip differential, revised suspension rates and a larger rear stabilizer (than the standard Boss 302). You can order your Laguna Seca in School Bus Yellow with Sterling Gray accents — an homage to Parnelli Jones' 1970 Trans-Am winning car.

Every Boss 302 has numerous handling improvements, including higher-rate coil springs in each corner, stiffer suspension bushings and a larger rear stabilizer bar. The front splitter and rear pedestal spoiler not only harken back to the original but provide added downforce and grip.

The model gets special lightweight 19-inch alloy wheels in macho black. They are a half inch wider in back than in front, and wear Pirelli PZero summer tires configured for each end. Behind these wheels are Brembo brakes with four-piston front calipers and 14-inch discs up front; in back, the pad compound is fortified. Top this off with vented brake shields and tuned anti-lock braking and you should be fine on the racetrack, if you're lucky enough to visit one. And when you're there, you can remove the front fog-lamp covers for extra front brake cooling.

Regardless of all of these physical upgrades, the Boss 302 is still a Mustang, and it remains a somewhat impractical combination of 3,600 pounds of bulk and shortage of useful hauling capacity. Of course, nobody buys a car like this because of its value in helping friends move or carrying lumber from the yard. The satisfaction comes from the strong, solid, rapid response you get when you press the gas or shift a gear.

Over many years and generations of Mustangs, Ford designers have refined the look of the interior to feel historically authentic while being very much a part of today's world. For 2013, Ford's voice-activated SYNC system has been integrated in. The dash doesn't display as much at a time as you get in, say, the brand-new Fusion, but you can integrate with your music player or phone in a way drivers of the '70 model could only imagine (and probably wouldn't). The 180-mph speedometer and 9K tachometer aid the driver's high-speed fantasizing.

One high-tech feature sure to please modern motorists is Track Apps, which uses a 4.2-inch screen to monitor performance measures such as g-forces, acceleration times (quarter mile and 0-60), and braking times.

What does all this cost? The base price is $42,400, plus $795 in delivery charges. My tester had $1,995 worth of options, including the Recaro seats and limited-slip differential that you'd get with the Laguna Seca model. If you want this kind of motorized entertainment and presentation, that number will not deter you from heading down to your local Ford store.

The Boss 302 does rumble loudly when you start it. My wife heard it in the back of the house when I turned the key in the driveway up front at 6:45 a.m. My neighbors were surely glad to see it go.