

Road Test Comparison:

1975 MONZA TOWN COUPE AND MUSTANG II



Our annual round up of domestic cars which were unavailable for testing during the past several months.

By Herb L. Adams



Both the Chevy Monza and the Mustang II can be considered second generation sub-compacts. In 1971 Chevrolet introduced the Vega and Ford introduced the Pinto. The Monza and the Mustang II are derived from these two pioneers of American automobile history. The Monza and the Mustang II are as different as Chevrolet and Ford, but aside from the detail variations it is remarkable how really similar the two cars are. Their role in each of the manufacturer's total car offerings seems to be identical. It appears that these cars are intended for those Americans who want, or need, a small car but do not wish to endure the hardships and discomfort of a cheap car. For years Detroit has neglected this segment of the population because they were hung-up thinking that small cars had to be cheap cars. Fortunately, the European influence and customer buying trends have persuaded Detroit to look past their noses and see the real world. The results of this enlightenment are some very desirable automobiles. The Monza (2+2 and Town Coupe) and the Mustang II (Ghia and Mach I) are the types of cars that enthusiasts, as well as consumers, will find very appealing.

Our Monza Town Coupe was

equipped with the optional 350 V-8 engine (California) and automatic transmission. This power team helps to transform the basic Vega package, used on the Monza series of cars, into a quiet, responsive automobile. Although it uses many Vega components, the Monza Town Coupe has new body pieces which not only change its exterior appearance but more importantly improve its interior space utilization and increase the feeling of spaciousness. The interior decor is tasteful, but also modern and stylish. The overall effect is sporty and pleasant. It feels much bigger inside than a Vega, but the rear seat is still only good for occasional use. The front seats are comfortable and compared to a Vega they are outstanding. Apparently there is more insulation used on the Monza cars because there is a marked reduction in noise level. Even the overall vehicle structure feels more solid than a Vega, so the extra braces required for the V-8 engine have an added benefit of producing a more pleasant ride. The feeling when driving the Monza Town Coupe is that it's a big car. It has similar environmental impressions, ride, and smooth power just like most of the larger American automobiles. Much of this big car feel, in a small package, can be attributed to the V-8 engine. Americans, including myself, have been spoiled and they are accustomed to V-8 power. Chevrolet has done an excellent job of adapting the small block V-8 to the Vega chassis, but there are some design compromises that could not be solved. Our Monza Town Coupe weighed 450 pounds



ore than the Vega wagon we tested concurrently. Almost all of this added weight is on the front wheels.

Weights (pounds)	Front	Rear	Total
Vega	1480	1310	2790
Monza	1892	1348	3240

The V-8 engine weighs about 300 pounds more than the Vega four-cylinder so the extra 150 pounds can be attributed to the increased structural components required to reliably support the heavier engine. Chevrolet engineers have compensated for this added weight in most cases where the driver might notice it, but the braking performance shows that it is sometimes impossible to fool mother nature.

	Vega	Monza
1-0 Stopping Distances(feet)	109	139

We know that increased weight reduces fuel economy, so here again we just recognize the penalty of using a heavier engine. (*Motor Trend*, April, 1975).

The Monza is the "Car of the Year" and our Town Coupe version supports this rating. We can't help wonder, however, how good a car it would be if it had a lightweight aluminum V-8 engine which would give all of the advantages of a V-8 without the weight penalty associated with the existing cast iron engine. With a lighter engine, power steering would not be as necessary, so there would be an additional weight savings and, General Motors would bid, a price saving.

The performance level of our Town Coupe Monza (0-60 in 11 seconds) was not as good as the Monza 2+2 we tested in the June issue because it had air conditioning and an automatic transmission. By current standards, however, the performance was excellent. The engine is tuned to develop maximum horsepower at low speeds so there is plenty of power potential available to those who want to hop it up. The only complaints we had regarding the engine in Monza was some degree of fan noise and a fairly high numerical axle ratio. Sixty mph cruise is at 2400 rpm. With the weight of the car and the displacement of the engine, equal performance and better fuel economy would be realized if a lower numerical ratio were used on the car.

Overall the Monza Town Coupe is a very desirable car. It rides nice, handles well, is smooth and powerful, quiet and attractive. Its styling will remind some of a Mustang II but that, I guess, is a matter of opinion.

For this article we tested a total of three Mustang II vehicles in order to develop a more general appreciation of the total car and its variations. In brief the cars tested were:

MODEL	ENGINE	TRANSMISSION	A-C
GHIA	V-8	AUTO	YES
MACH I	V-8	AUTO	NO
MACH 1	V-6	MANUAL	NO

Like the Chevy Monza, the Mustang II is a second generation small car in that it has followed the Pinto in Ford's line of sub-compact cars. Ford was first to recognize that people would

buy a small car, and pay more for it, if it was more than just basic transportation. There is nothing basic about the Mustang II line of cars. They are quality built, attractive and very desirable. Of the three cars we tested, the V-8 Mach 1 would be our choice because it was a no-nonsense, exciting and comfortable car. The Ghia had air conditioning, a sun roof, and other luxury goodies but it was just a little too close to a boudoir for us to maintain our, ahem, male image. For some it might be just the ticket, although I seriously doubt that Ghia designed it. The Mach 1 with V-6 engine and standard transmission was also a pleasant vehicle, but the added power and convenience of a V-8 with automatic is hard to beat for everyday use.

As one might expect, all three of the Mustang IIs were identical in many respects. At 60 mph, on the freeway, they all develop a severe vibration which shakes the seats and the steering wheel. This condition is known to Los Angeles residents as "freeway hop" and we were a little surprised that Ford had not tuned its chassis to minimize the condition.

With the optional handling package the Mustang IIs display good handling characteristics. Ride does not seem to suffer and there is still plenty of understeer to keep novice drivers out of trouble.

Other common characteristics of the Mustang IIs are the seating position, which is comfortable in front and cramped in back. The steering wheel sits pretty far back but its position is low for a sporty feel providing you



don't have stomach muscles that interfere. The rear seat folds down to expand the trunk area and the console makes a comfortable arm rest. These features and the interior materials chosen for the upholstery and carpeting show that Ford is aware of how important creature comforts are in this type of car. One of our favorite options is the Moon Roof. Unfortunately, in one of our test cars it vibrated from the wind at about 40 mph. The noise resembled a motor boat which you know can't be following you, even down Sunset Boulevard, where just about anything can and does happen.

Ford engines have a reputation for

their excellence and both the V-6 and the V-8s we tested did nothing to change this image. As you might expect, the V-8 engine completely fills the engine compartment and it is even heavier on the front wheels than the Monza V-6. That smooth power is worth the weight however, since it has 0-60 times three seconds faster than the lighter V-6. The Ford V-8s used dual exhausts with dual catalytic converters which lends itself more to performance modifications than General Motors single system.

Ford's Mustang II (hopefully, it will be called simply "Mustang" in the future) is an excellent all around car. It

is small and in tune with our economic and energy conditions, yet it offers comfortable and stylish transportation at a reasonable price. There are enough versions that anyone should be able to find a car with the right personality, so future sales should increase.

How the Monza compares to the Mustang can be summarized in one word; *closely*. They are distinctly different cars yet they are very similar in most respects. Closeness of competition is usually an indication of a high calibre of effort and our road test comparison proved this to be true. We are pleased to see Detroit finally offer some good small cars. ■

