

SADDLE UP TO THE BEST PONY EVER



THIS HORSE WANTS TO—BEGS TO— BE RIDDEN HARD.

Words by Brian Griebenow
Photos by Mike Parker

There are a few things I can surmise about you, dear reader. My first assumption is that you appreciate automobiles that are a cut above in performance, styling, and character. Second, since you have dipped into this particular piece, you are curious about the Shelby GT350 Mustang and you might even be wondering if it's the car you should buy.

Yes. It is.

My apologies for the concise spoiler, but the Shelby GT350 Mustang...let's just call it the GT350 from here on out...is simply that good.

YES. IT IS.



In creating the GT350, Ford properly tended to all aspects of the Mustang, from styling to engine to chassis, to provide a truly special performance variant. Designers handled the styling tweaks with elegant restraint. At first glance, any onlooker will recognize the car as a Mustang. But let those eyes linger and subtle GT350 specific nuances come to the surface, all of which have been executed beautifully. Taken as a whole, the overall styling treatment, while subdued, manages to give the GT350 a look that sets it apart as a distinctly different, and angrier beast.



Climbing inside requires hitching each thigh up and over a rigid hip bolster before settling down into the ultra-firm Recaro seat. With extreme bolstering covered in a grippy fabric combined into a firm shape seemingly carved out of white pine, these are serious seats that scream, "You are implanted in this seat, sucker!" There's a handsome steering wheel covered in micro suede. Round gauges and, in our test car, the absence of a touch screen are welcome and appropriate here. Overall, this cabin provides a no-nonsense look. Simple and sane!

On the dashboard a red "start"

button awaits a poke from the driver's finger. That button is directly wired to a sleeping monster that lives under the hood. Let's discuss that monster for a moment. It is a new 5.2-liter, naturally aspirated V8 code named "Voodoo", and it was developed for use only in this car. I'll spare you all the mechanical details here, but one component worthy of mention is its flat-plane crankshaft. Flat-plane cranks offer some benefits over the cross-plane style cranks found in virtually all other American V8 engines, such as: 1) better exhaust scavenging and 2) lower mass. Efficiencies gained with



this unique crank allow for a free-revving engine with a screaming high redline...8200 in this case. Tip your eyeballs up and meditate on that for a moment. A 5.2-liter V8, happy to zing past 8 grand!

I was fortunate to spend a warm sunny day at the helm of a just-broken-in 2016 GT350...on real roads, with an empty passenger seat. While I did not get the car on a race-track, I did put it through its paces on every type of road I would likely encounter if the GT350 were my daily driver. Here's another spoiler...it was an epic day.

The Deep Impact Blue car on these pages was my companion that day. The car had a single option, the Track Pack. A \$6500 option, the Track Pack adds MagneRide suspen-





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sion, heavier duty front springs, a strut tower brace and additional coolers for engine oil, transmission and differential. The magnetically controlled dampers in the MagneRide suspension allow for driver selectable modes (Normal, Sport, Weather, Track, Drag) but more importantly, they constantly adapt to the driving conditions. The result is a car eminently planted without being a kidney buster. MagneRide is such a crucial ingredient of the GT350's special wonderfulness that it should have been standard equipment. And by golly, starting with the 2017 models it is.

When I first laid my eyes on the GT350 I knew I would love it. I settled deeply into the Recaro seat, pushed the red button, and the very angry monster growled to life. In 'Normal' mode at start-up, the sound is authoritative but not overly loud. The sound is good, but has a tone suggesting this is a very loud thing with a rag unpleasantly stuffed in its mouth. The subtlety



feels artificial and a little uncomfortable. Of the two modes—normal & sport—the distinct impression is that sport is the as-designed mode and normal is the afterthought meant to pass drive-by noise regulations.

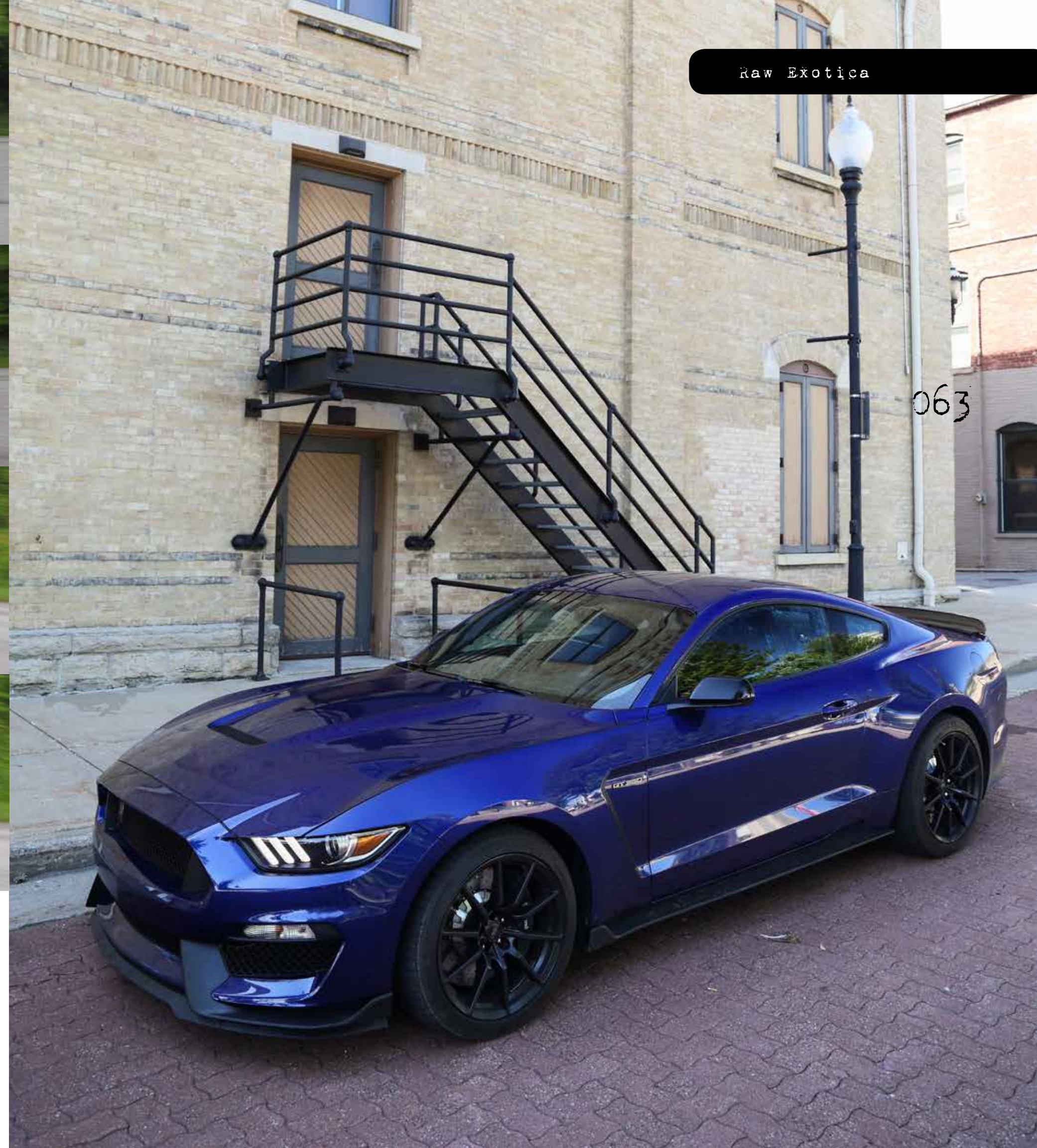
No worries, I simply opted for Sport mode, which removes the gag and frees perhaps the most incredible exhaust note I've ever heard from a street-legal production car. A tap of my right toe elicits raucous bumbles, crackles and pops...oh my. This may well be the loudest stock exhaust system ever. Sport mode also brings tighter steering, snappier throttle response, and firmer dampers.

The first leg of my journey stretched the GT350's legs on 70 mph freeways. Miles of straight ahead cruising do not really require Recaro seats, fat Michelin Pilot Super Sport tires, 526 hp, or a flat-plane crank. But the cruise doesn't really suffer much from the tightly wound nature of this track-day special either. That insane exhaust note mellows at cruise to a

barely audible tone. The MagneRide dampers do a commendable job of keeping the ride non-abusive. I opted for 'Normal' mode while cruising, although I could barely detect a difference from mode to mode. There are no 'Sloppy' or 'Cushy' modes and the ride was always firm and the steering always crisp...exactly as it should be!

Thank you Ford! I will say that road noise is somewhat intrusive and the seats do pinch the hips a bit after a few hours.

Once off the freeway and onto county roads I found myself smiling at every corner. Steering, regardless of mode, is instantly responsive. While steering heft and turn-in immediacy





are excellent, there is a little lack of communication with the pavement, isolation all too common with today's electric steering systems. Cornering grip is impressive. I kept convincing myself to enter turns 5 mph faster than my intuition suggested and the reward was consistently easy corner carving. The brakes are on par with the rest of the package. Of course I felt zero fade on this public road adventure, but I suspect these brakes would

provide reasonably fade-free performance on track days as well.

So how about that 526 hp engine with its fancy-plane-crank? This is where I expect a divided camp among Mustang fans. A late-model Mustang GT driver who is used to the Coyote 5.0 engine can be forgiven for wondering, "Where's the extra hundred horses?" Well, I'm here to tell you, those extra horses are waiting at the far East end of the tachometer. This new

Voodoo 5.2 builds power all the way up to 7500 rpm where it finally reaches its 526 hp peak. That's well beyond the redline of the Mustang GT. This horse wants to—begs to—be ridden hard. Shift from gear to gear at 4000 rpm and you'll wonder what all the fuss is about. Convince yourself it's OK to wind this V8 out to 8000+ rpm and you will be handsomely rewarded. Me? I chose the reward with every possible shift I could! And the wonderful



thing is, this engine never felt abused when pushed to that range. Rather, it communicates an ever-increasing enthusiasm all the way up to its lofty power peak. It is as if wringing it out to 8 grand is somehow a mutually satisfying experience. The very first time I... we...made that jump to light speed, I'm pretty sure the GT350 asked if it was good for me too. And indeed, it was very good.

That divided camp? You'll find me on the side where all thumbs are up regarding the GT350's rev-happy engine. On the other side, with downturned thumbs, I believe you'll find the torque mongers—those who prize a good smoky burnout above a balanced and engaging driving experience. A truly satisfied owner of a previous gen Shelby GT500, or Dodge Hellcat for that matter, may not appreciate the power curve of the new GT350. Supercharged beasts lay all their cards on the table right up front. Stomp your right foot in a GT500 and you will get an instant WAHOO wallop. The thrill happens RIGHT NOW. Drop the hammer in the GT350 and you'll get a more genteel shove into your seat, followed by a surge that rises steadily with the tachometer. Both styles of power delivery are thrilling, but not everyone is willing to wring out the thrill. If it is a big smoky burnout you

THE GT350 IS
TIGHT,
TOSSABLE,
AND

PERFECTLY RESPONSIVE.





want, you can always hold the revs and dump the clutch.

Those county roads I was driving led eventually to Twisted Tarmac Scenic Drive. OK, that's not a real name. But it is a real road with miles of seemingly endless twists through a beautiful forest. I could tell you where, but it doesn't matter. I am sure there is one like it within a few hours of wherever you are. You just have to find it. This road pulled it all together for me. I had already learned to appreciate the thrill the GT350's engine offers, especially above 4000 rpm. And the cornering capability of the chassis had become

obvious as well. What Twisted Tarmac Scenic Drive provided was the perfect opportunity to make it all gel.

My first pass along those several miles of tight undulating turns was done in 'Sport' mode, easy on the throttle, comfortable shift points. It was a beautiful drive, smooth and enjoyable, set to a deep throaty soundtrack. It was so darn nice that I turned around to enjoy the reverse trip. Once familiar with the lay of the road, I decided to exercise the car in its preferred half of the tach. Opting for 'Track' mode, I made two more passes never falling below 4000 rpm.



Resisting my natural urge to upshift changed the character of the GT350. Every corner exit was a slingshot. Every throttle jab received an instant, urgent response. Driven on a twisty road...or a track...and kept in that oh-so-sweet 4000-8000 rpm range, the GT350 is tight, tossable, and immediately responsive.

Later that evening, cruising through town after dinner, I heard

the distinctive WHEE-PFF of a blow-off valve. Checking my mirror revealed a car making its way through traffic to advance on me. Eventually the Mitsubishi EVO managed to get next to me. "Nice car!" came the yell. Pulling beside me at the next light, the two guys in the EVO gushed about how fantastic the GT350 sounds. Ah yes, those sounds. That crazy exhaust note thrilled me within 30 seconds of my

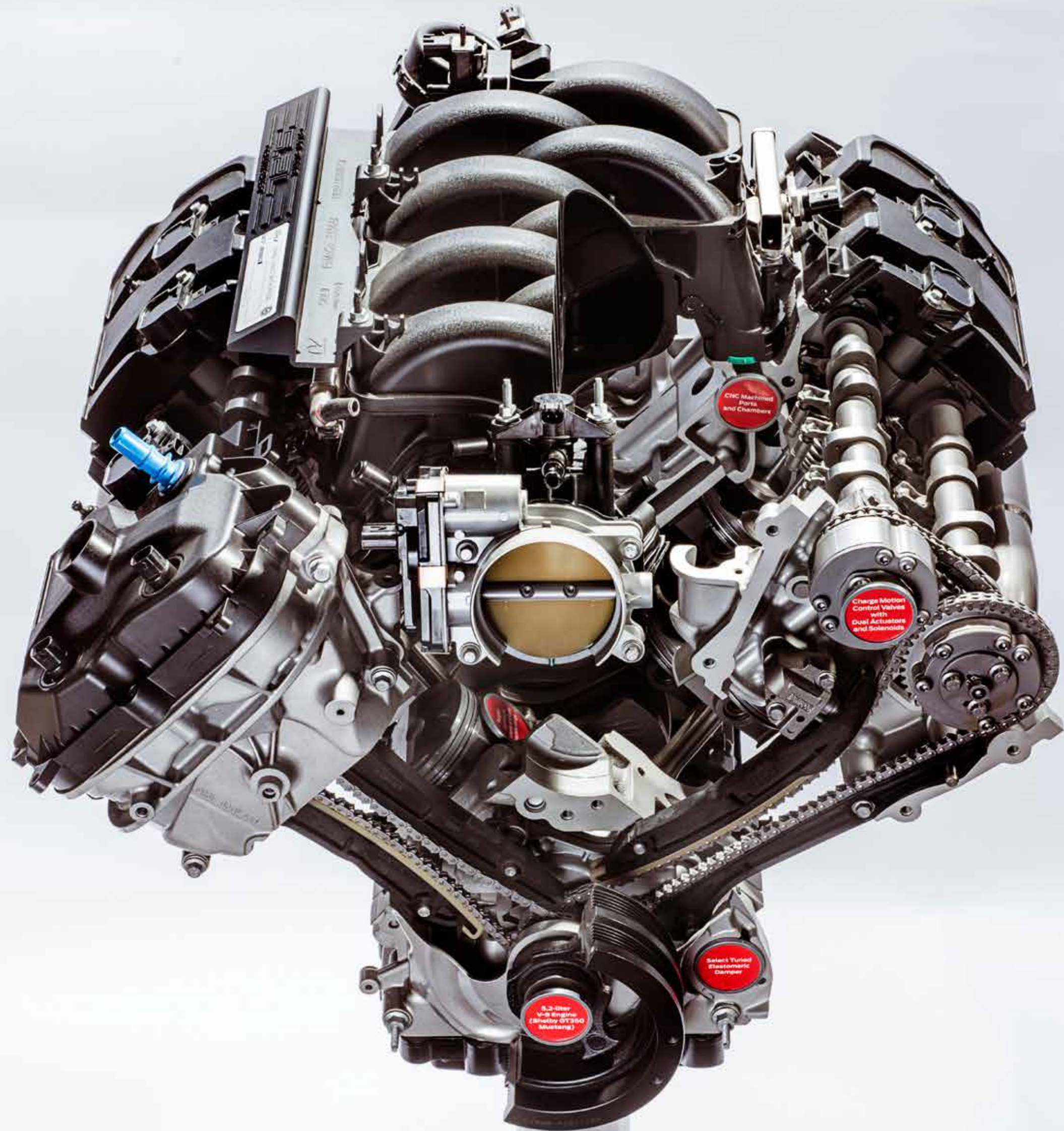
first flip to 'Sport' mode. After a solid day of driving, I'm not sure I would ever tire of it...very loud and even more fabulous. Apparently even the Turbo-4 crowd can dig the sound of this V8.

But: there was something that didn't occur to me until after many hours of driving. That's why I hesitate to even mention it. But here goes. Plastic. Hard plastic. There's a fair amount of it in the cockpit of the Shel-

by GT350 Mustang. When I did notice it, especially along the tops of the door panels, it was a reminder to me that this is a Mustang I'm driving. It's not a high-dollar European sports car. But I think the inclusion of some flimsy trim is less important than the fact that I was surprised by it. Surprised because the top shelf experience I had driving the GT350 suggested this is a very special car.

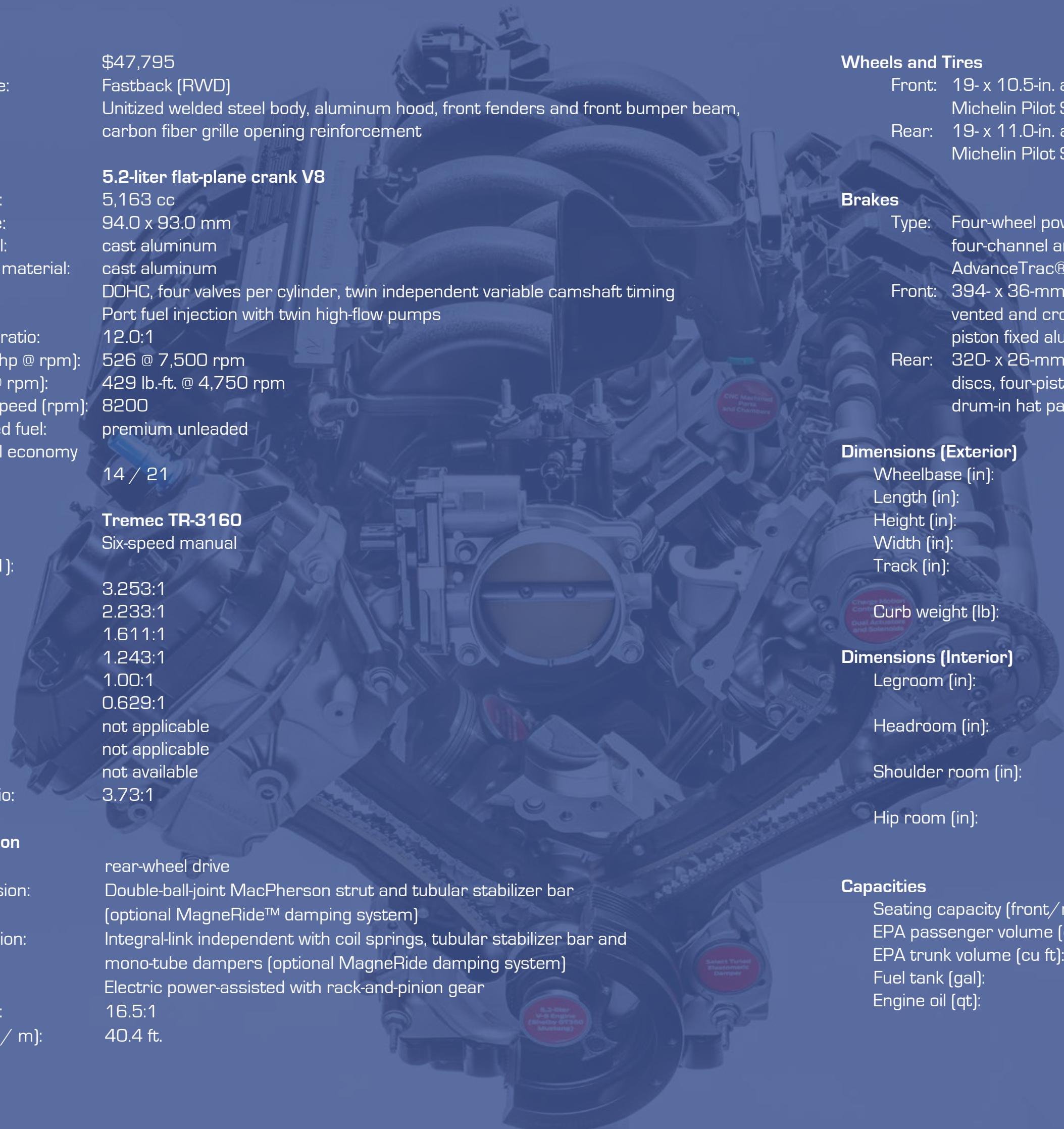
And sooooo it is!





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Specs



Base Price: \$47,795
 Body style / driveline: Fastback (RWD)
 Construction: Unitized welded steel body, aluminum hood, front fenders and front bumper beam, carbon fiber grille opening reinforcement

Engine
5.2-liter flat-plane crank V8
 Displacement: 5,163 cc
 Bore & stroke: 94.0 x 93.0 mm
 Block material: cast aluminum
 Cylinder head material: cast aluminum
 Valvetrain: DOHC, four valves per cylinder, twin independent variable camshaft timing
 Fuel delivery: Port fuel injection with twin high-flow pumps
 Compression ratio: 12.0:1
 Horsepower (hp @ rpm): 526 @ 7,500 rpm
 Torque (lb-ft @ rpm): 429 lb-ft. @ 4,750 rpm
 Max. engine speed (rpm): 8200
 Recommended fuel: premium unleaded
 Estimated fuel economy (city / hwy): 14 / 21

Transmission
Tremec TR-3160
 Type: Six-speed manual
 Gear ratios (:1):
 First: 3.253:1
 Second: 2.233:1
 Third: 1.611:1
 Fourth: 1.243:1
 Fifth: 1.00:1
 Sixth: 0.629:1
 Seventh: not applicable
 Eighth: not applicable
 Reverse: not available
 Final drive ratio: 3.73:1

Chassis / Suspension
 Configuration: rear-wheel drive
 Front suspension: Double-ball-joint MacPherson strut and tubular stabilizer bar (optional MagneRide™ damping system)
 Rear suspension: Integral-link independent with coil springs, tubular stabilizer bar and mono-tube dampers (optional MagneRide damping system)
 Steering type: Electric power-assisted with rack-and-pinion gear
 Steering ratio: 16.5:1
 Turn circle (ft / m): 40.4 ft.

Wheels and Tires
 Front: 19- x 10.5-in. aluminum alloy, Michelin Pilot Super Sport 295/35ZR19
 Rear: 19- x 11.0-in. aluminum alloy, Michelin Pilot Super Sport 305/35ZR19

Brakes
 Type: Four-wheel power discs with four-sensor, four-channel antilock braking system and AdvanceTrac® electronic stability control
 Front: 394- x 36-mm aluminum hat, floating-type vented and cross-drilled discs, Brembo six-piston fixed aluminum calipers
 Rear: 320- x 26-mm vented discs and cross-drilled discs, four-piston fixed aluminum calipers, drum-in hat parking brake

Dimensions (Exterior)
 Wheelbase (in): 107.1
 Length (in): 188.9
 Height (in): 54.2
 Width (in): 75.9
 Track (in): front: 63.3 rear: 63.7
 Curb weight (lb): 3,760

Dimensions (Interior)
 Legroom (in): front: 44.5 rear: 29.0
 Headroom (in): front: 37.6 rear: 34.8
 Shoulder room (in): front: 56.3 rear: 52.2
 Hip room (in): front: 54.9 rear: 47.4

Capacities
 Seating capacity (front/rear): 2 front / 2 rear
 EPA passenger volume (cu ft): 84.5
 EPA trunk volume (cu ft): 13.5
 Fuel tank (gal): 16
 Engine oil (qt): 10 (5W-50, 7,500-mile service interval, 5,000-mile for heavy use)