

The increasing availability of late-model Mustang performance and appearance parts has inspired more than excited curbside chatter and hot street jousting. It has created a broad new industry, with pockets of inspiration cropping up in many areas of the country. With a plethora of parts, paints and race-proven theories to pick from, a growing number of aftermarket concerns have begun to produce their own vision of what the 5.0L HO Mustangs ought to be. ASC McLaren and Saleen Autosports were the first companies to offer new modified production Mustangs to the public in the early- and mid-'80s. Today you can add Auto Kraft of Lincoln, Nebraska, to the growing list of businesses turning stock 5.0Ls into custom-built performers.

Doug Kielian, owner of Auto Kraft, has dabbled in the automotive profession since his early teen years. As a young lad he

George Barber ordered his Auto Kraft Grabber GT to perfection.

article by Rob Reaser
photographs by Tom Corcoran

learned the art of fender bending and paint application, and eventually graduated to the more demanding skills of sheetmetal fabrication.

Following the inevitable progression of his automotive career, Kielian opened his own auto body shop with a focus on restoring and repairing vintage and late-model Fords. Doug's abilities caught the attention of Mustang tuner Kenny Brown, and soon Kenny contracted with Kielian to do the body and paint work on both the short wheelbase late model Thunderbirds and the Kenny Brown Outlaw Mustangs.

Now Doug is creating his own custom-built late-model 5.0Ls. Miami, Florida, resident George Barber is the happy recipient of the tenth Auto Kraft conversion car, and his blue and white striped hatchback #010 boasts a long list of both high-performance parts and body, paint and decal treatments, many of which are unique to Auto Kraft products. Barber's custom pony began life as a



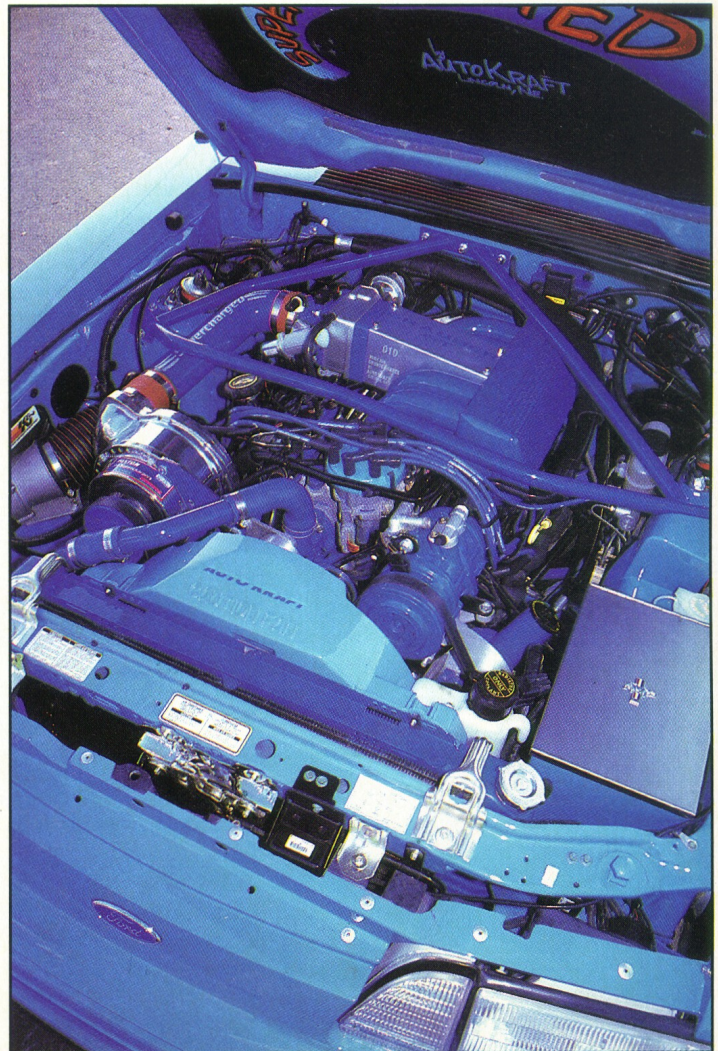
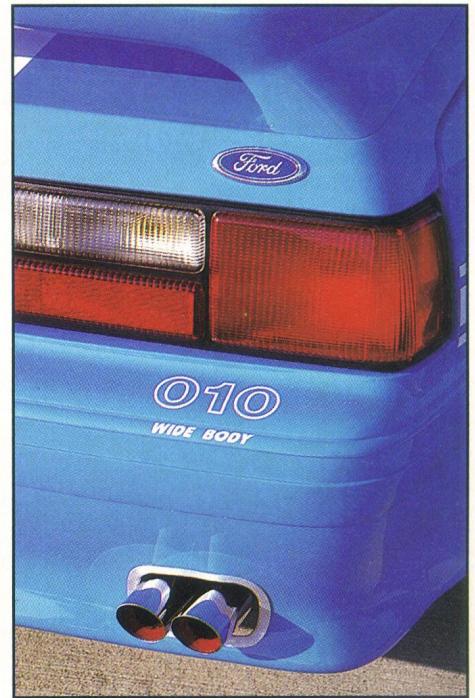
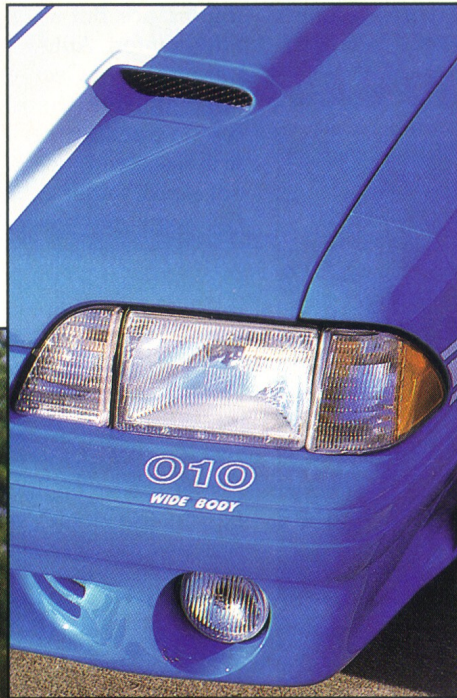
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no-mileage '91 GT and, with suggestions from Kielian, George was able to develop a performance and appearance package to suit his driving pleasure.

Special body work is the hallmark of any Auto Kraft conversion, and Barber's car is no exception. One of the first steps in producing the "wide body" GT was to flare the fenders by two inches. Aside from its sporty looks, the enlarged sheetmetal also makes room for hefty 17x8.5 ROH wheels. To make full use of the accompanying ZR 245-40 (front) and ZR 285-35 (rear) Goodyear rubber, urethane bushings, Motorsport variable rate springs, a lower chassis brace, subframe connectors, a strut tower brace and a six-point roll cage were pinned along the Mustang's chassis.

Matching the ground-hugging suspension to enhanced 5.0L fire-power fell to the

able wrench of Paul Brown. Paul pulled the stock 302 and treated it to one of the finest combinations of street-legal performance parts available. Situated between the GT-40 upper and lower intake manifolds and the K&N Air filter is a 77mm MAF sensor, Paxton supercharger, and a 77mm throttle body. Motorsport 1.72 rockers sit atop port-matched polished heads, which are fitted with



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1-5/8 inch Motorsport headers. A high-volume fuel pump supplies ample juice to the high-output engine while a heavy-duty four-core radiator keeps the internals at a comfortable operating temperature. Bringing up the rear is a Borla stainless steel exhaust system accented with Hedman exhaust tips and custom valence trim.

The majority of Kielian's work is with late-model Mustangs, but Doug doesn't forget his roots. One of his favorite lacquers

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is vintage Grabber Blue, a color introduced with the fighting Boss 302s. To complement the striking hue of Barber's 5.0L, the Auto Kraft folks applied a white SAAC Mustang stripe kit, along with a modified ground effect package, Cervini's Ram Air fiberglass hood, window tinting by Craig Pete, LX Mustang taillights, underbody detailing, and special Auto Kraft decals.

Body sculpturing, then performance, is Kielian's order of importance. But when it comes time for interior styling and driving comfort, Auto Kraft Mustangs run with the best. The stand-out feature of George Barber's #010 GT is its exquisite leather appointments. Doug's brother, Kevin, gets credit for the custom-tailored leather seats, leather door panels, brake handle, arm rests, and the leather boot which wraps around the Hurst adjustable shifter. Custom Monogramming stitched the "Grabber GT" logo onto the seatbacks.

When Kielian notified George a few months ago that his car had reached final assembly, Barber hitched his trailer and quickly arrived in Nebraska for the pick-up. Once back in the warm, Florida sunshine, George entered his new prize in the '93 World of Wheels show in Miami, where it hit big with the show attendees and took top honors in the modified class.

As modified Mustangs go, the performance, handling and styling upgrades of George Barber's '91 Auto Kraft GT creates applause both on the street and on the showfield. But, from the beginning, George's main concern for his one-of-a-kind creation was that the Grabber Blue 5.0L please one particular Mustang

fan. And George is pleased. The success of an owner's planning and a carbuilder's excellence is certified by a quick, hot-looking Mustang cruising the balmy South Florida coast.

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