

# SUPER FORD

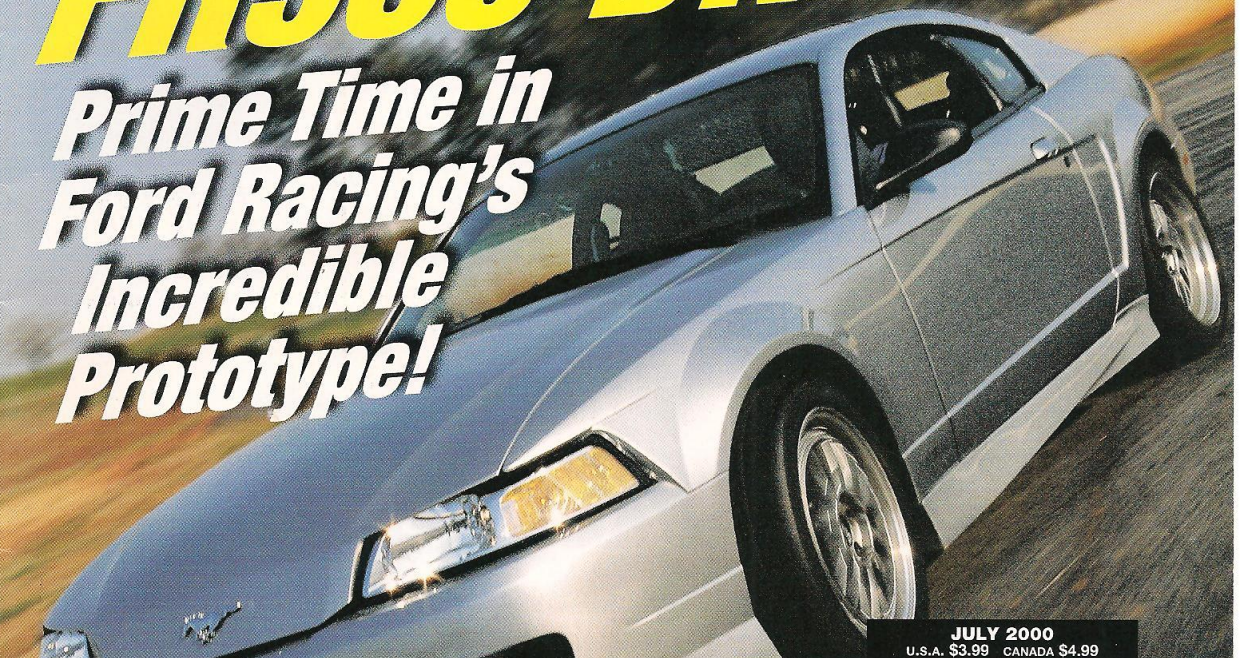
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Incredible  
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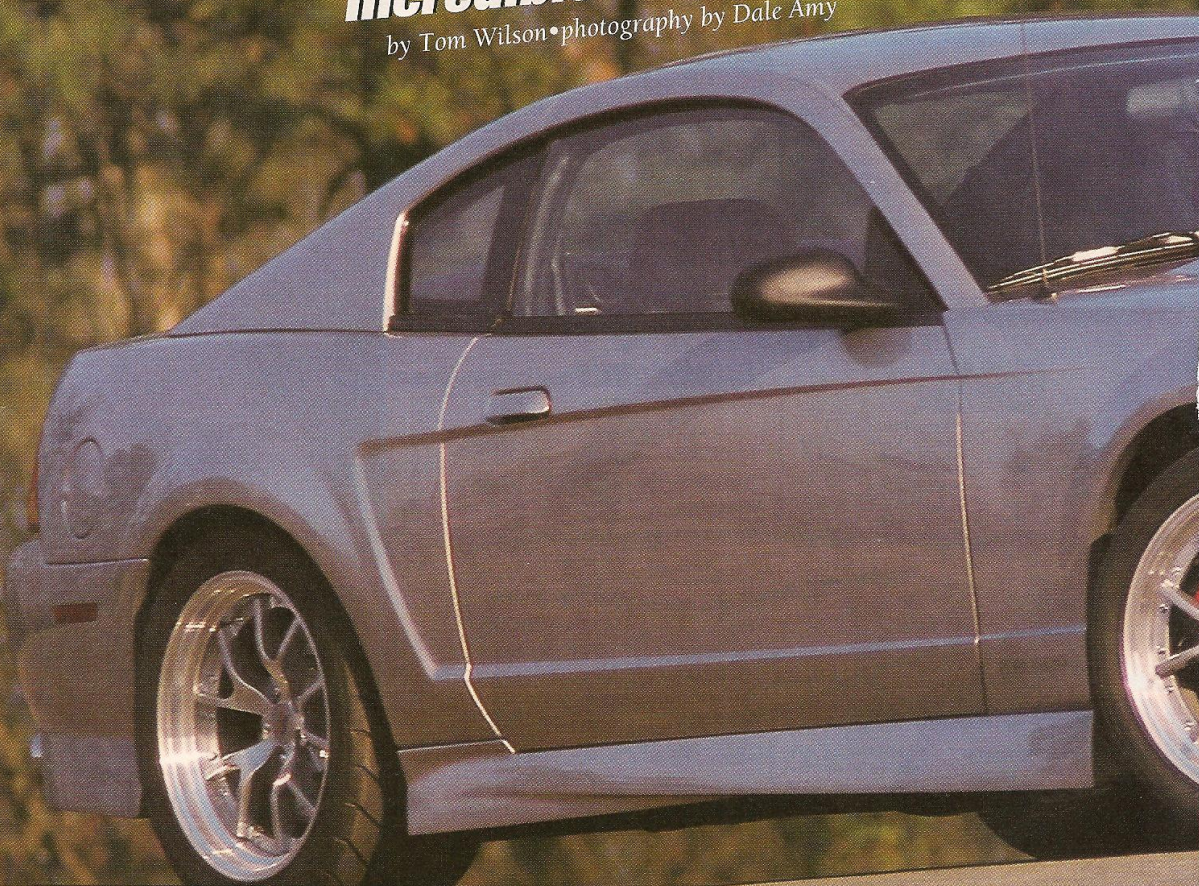
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# BALANCED PERFORMER

**Prime Time in Ford Racing's  
Incredible Prototype**

by Tom Wilson • photography by Dale Amy

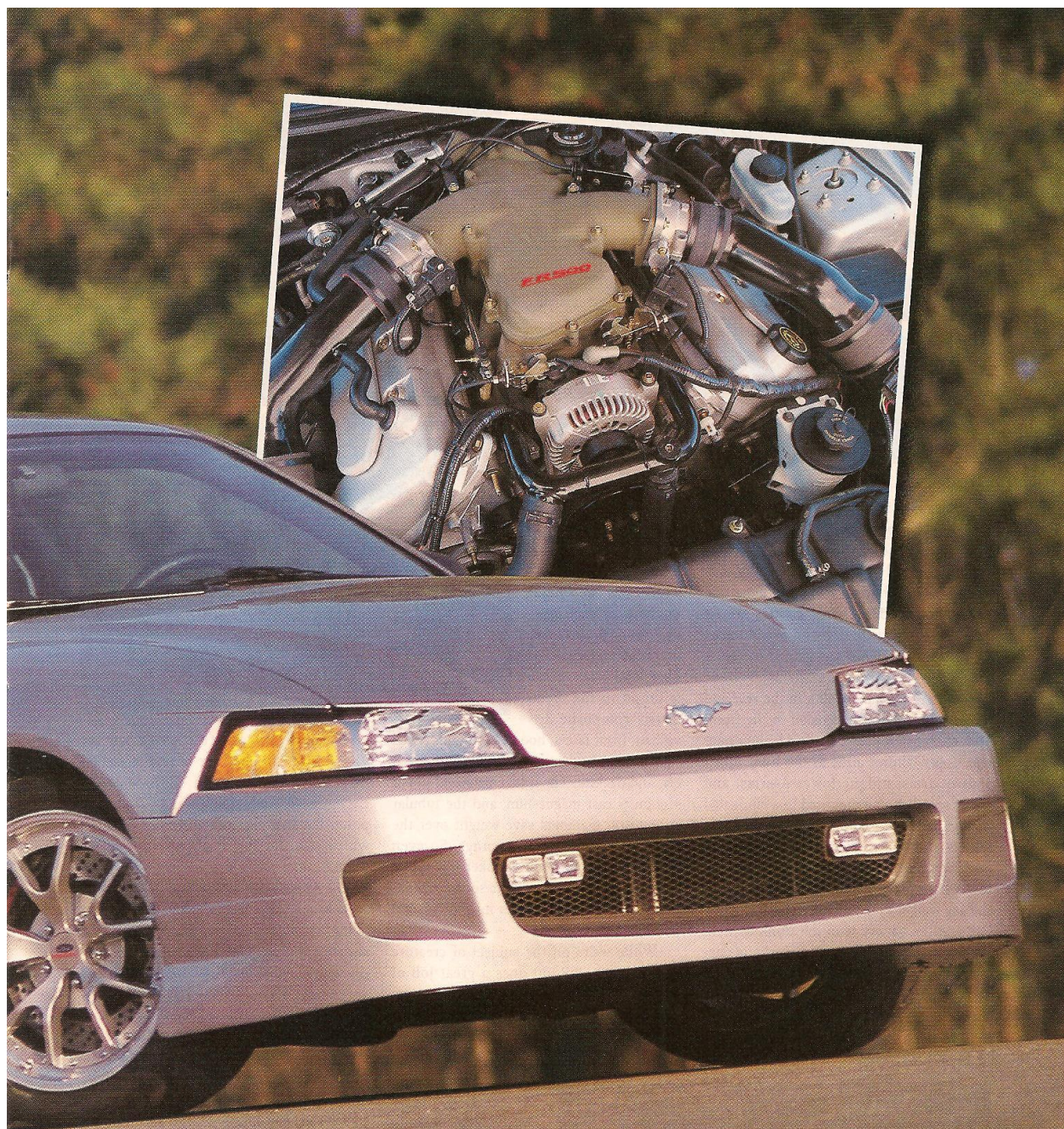


**B**alance. It's not something we traditional domestic performance enthusiasts are known for. This is the land of 800hp street 5.0 Mustangs, of the 427 Cobra, where too much tire smoke is just right, and where the factory just got around to putting disc brakes and an independent rear suspension on its highest powered sports machine.

And yet balance is the key word of some of the greatest philosophies and accomplishments. Religions of all sorts are full of it, our federal government was designed around a perpetual three-way balance of power, the GT40 sports racer of the over-the-top '60s has been heralded for its inherent balance, and now Ford has produced one of the greatest Mustangs ever. And guess what? It's a balanced car.

By balanced we mean it has abundant power—and the braking to go with it. The FR500 easily accelerates to huge speeds and has the handling to hang on to the road at those speeds. This car performs on the track as though it had been bred there (and it was), yet it also carries the comforts and refinements of a great GT car designed to make street driving a joy. Get down to the hard currency of enthusiast driving stan-





dards and the FR500 is definitely balanced. It turns into the corners with authority, wraps itself around the apex, and can be drifted out to the track's edge with the throttle under exquisite control. This is one rare Mustang.

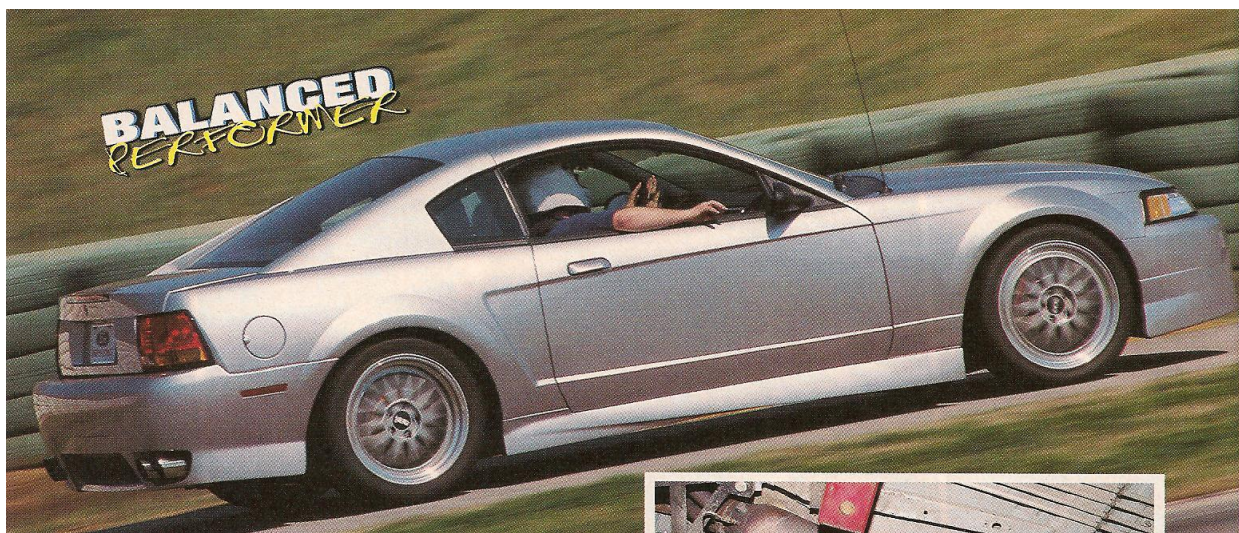
The idea of balance—of the FR500 itself—is the work of Dan Davis, head of Ford Racing. Davis has pushed the FR500 into existence as a technology demonstrator

and parts showcase that simply can't be ignored. It's also no secret that Davis is aching to bring the FR500 to market as a production car. Can he do it? No one can tell, not even the whispering walls. But if it takes place, it will require an angel high up the Ford corporate ladder. Where the car will fit into Ford's lineup is open to interpretation.

Do we hope the FR500 can be built?

Absolutely! This is simply too good of a car to shelve like a sophomore term paper. It's a car with the performance and the panache both worthy and necessary to flagship the Mustang production line—and by extension, the sophistication and technology of which Ford is capable. Furthermore, to cost-effectively manufacture the parts the FR500 is designed to develop, the economies of scale yielded by a production





program are almost mandatory. Yes, Ford, by all means build this car!

To help explain the FR500's greatness, let's examine the hardware. Even though it is not necessarily the most technically dazzling accomplishment, to us the most distinguishing FR500 characteristics are its 50-50 weight distribution and overall chassis competence. This was gained by using the IRS system from the Special Vehicle Team (SVT) Mustang Cobra in the rear and a new A-arm front suspension in the front. That suspension uses Lincoln LS aluminum rear upper control arms as the front upper control arms, unique lower A-arms, and Cobra spindles—all mounted to a fabricated K-member that extends the wheelbase 5 inches and the track by 1.1 inches. It's putting the front tires 5 inches farther toward the nose that does the big job of shifting weight to the FR500's rear haunches. Oh, and the battery is in the trunk as well.

The way that suspension works is dazzling. Penned by Jay O'Connell, late of Lincoln LS suspension fame, the FR500 has a supple gait backed by firm suspension muscle. Braking also is extraordinary, what with 14-inch, four-piston Brembos up front and

13-inch Brembo rotors and Lincoln LS single-piston calipers in back.

Furthermore, weight has been held in check by substituting money cleverly disguised as carbon fiber. The black weave is found in the metal matrix composite driveshaft, front fascia, hood (23 pounds saved right there), fenders, rocker panels, rear fascia, and decklid. The intake manifold upper section is cast magnesium, and the tubular suspension members save weight over the more typical factory stampings. So even with a multi-amp, multi-speaker JBL sound system and at least a try at sound insulation, the FR500 still comes in at just 3,450 pounds.

While we're on the subject of creature comforts, the FR500 does a great job of selling itself with a bright, inviting interior, featuring Ford Racing Performance Parts' leather front bucket seats and leather seat coverings in the rear. The slightly thicker FR500 steering wheel is fitted, and the rest is quite close to Cobra fare, albeit with some trim color changes. The tach reads to 9,000 rpm and the speedo to 200 mph. Due to their extensive track duty as development vehicles, the three FR500s extant all sport roll-bars and five-point racing harnesses.

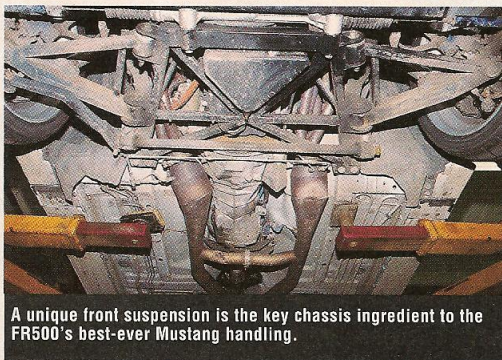


Huge airflow is a big part of getting the FR500's unique 5.0 engine to work. Special six-brick catalysts were carefully packaged to do the job with low restriction.

Of course, it's under the hood where the FR500 is due to build the most aftermarket parts heat, as it has given FRPP's modular engine man, Andy Schwartz, an expansive power-building playground. Unlike the SVT, which went for the displacement gold via the 5.4L modular's long stroke, scarily fast piston speeds, and 100-pound-heavier cast-iron block, the Cobra's 4.6 engine was Schwartz's starting point, retaining its shorter, piston-friendly stroke. The displacement is bumped to 5.0 liters using spray-bore technology—a Ford-patented technique that eliminates the need for iron cylinder liners in aluminum blocks by spraying an iron solution directly on the cylinder walls. The result is reduced weight, faster installation at the factory, better heat transfer to the cooling system, and the most telling of all—reduced cost. Word is the spray-bore machinery was being installed in Ford's Cleveland engine plant at press time, so expect to see it in a Ford near you soon.

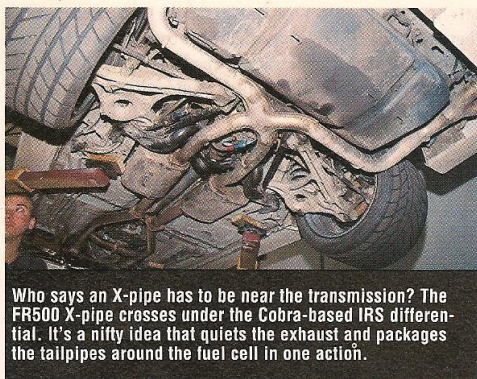
And no, you can't overbore a spray-bore block 100,000 miles from now, but you could sleeve it—ironically enough.

The stock Cobra crankshaft and rods are retained, but the 9.85:1 pistons are custom—the better to fit the FRPP Four-Valve cylinder head combustion chambers. These heads sport the expected larger valves,



A unique front suspension is the key chassis ingredient to the FR500's best-ever Mustang handling.





Who says an X-pipe has to be near the transmission? The FR500 X-pipe crosses under the Cobra-based IRS differential. It's a nifty idea that quiets the exhaust and packages the tailpipes around the fuel cell in one action.

lightly revised porting, and funny cams. Schwartz says he thinks he could emissions-certify the engine using these cams, but it wouldn't be easy.

Helping give the 5.0 modular its desired crisp throttle response—even airflow and plenty of it—is the aforementioned magnesium intake manifold, twin 70mm throttle bodies borrowed from the 5.4 Triton truck engine, twin 80mm mass air meters, and twin stock air filters. Custom headers help at the other end, and there is a passel of special supporting parts. These include a uniquely trimmed EEC V computer, a 36mm-thick radiator core, unique six-brick

Tremec T56 six-speed manual equipped with a Pro-5.0 shifter. Actually, various shifters seem to be in use, as the two FR500s we drove had different shifters. The IRS has hollow axles and special bushings, along with unique springs that lower the ride height 1 inch. The same is worked into the front suspension geometry.

Put it all together, take it to the track, and what do you have? That's the question FRPP helped us

catalytic converters, a stainless steel exhaust, a 170-lph in-tank fuel pump, and a unique oil pan to clear the relocated K-member.

In the driveline, a high-capacity, 8.5-inch, dual-disc Valeo clutch with a vented floating member is mounted to a billet steel flywheel and unique eight-bolt flexplate combination, entirely controlled by FRPP's garden-variety B302 adjustable clutch cable. The transmission is the expected

answer by inviting us along on a developmental track day at the Road Atlanta circuit. A challenging road course owned by Don Panoz, Road Atlanta is an excellent testing venue, and in a show of both confidence and openness, FRPP also brought along a Z51 suspended Corvette and a Viper coupe for comparisons.

You know we're going to say the FR500 was well-balanced, and it was. Of the three cars, it was the one that most easily moved to wherever was necessary on the racing line thanks to its sophisticated chassis. Stability was excellent, and as we searched in our bag of road-racing driving tricks, the FR500 always responded readily and linearly. There was really no comparison to a stock Mustang, except maybe the Mustang Cobra,



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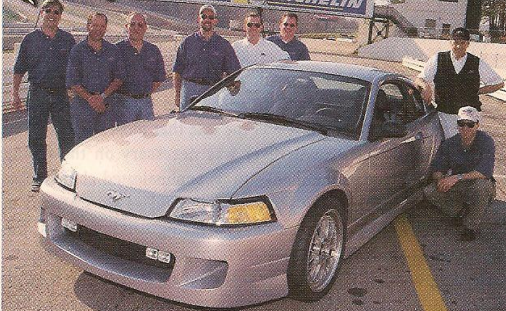
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# BALANCED PERFORMER

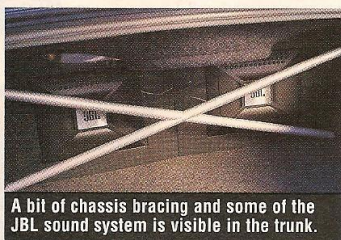


Dan Davis (black hat) and members of the FRPP team are justifiably proud of their world-class Mustang.

as the live axle Mustangs are simply too schizophrenic at the limit, and have far too much understeer built into the front end to exploit their great engines.

So where a stock Mustang would have been a what's-it-going-to-do-next white-knuckler, and the stock Cobra on hand seemed a bit soft and—get this—dull by comparison, the FR500 was all steel and nerve. We could easily pick up the front end with the throttle coming off the corners for beautifully controlled drifts, the mid-corner traction was quite high, and the control during corner entry and braking was quite good. Only at the highest speed braking—just touching 140 mph and then onto the binders at the end of the back straight—did the FR500's rear end wiggle a bit at this downhill transition. But this is simple physics working a big weight transfer situation—and without a winged aero package—to be expected from any car. It also wasn't enough to upset either the car or driver to any meaningful degree, so to heck with a wing. That's what race car homologation specials are for.

Stability was also good on the medium-speed sweepers and corner exits, allowing us to take the car right up and over the beveled curbs and play excitingly close to the grass while the FR500 humped and skittered over the small bumps leading onto the



A bit of chassis bracing and some of the JBL sound system is visible in the trunk.

throws. This really shows up when reaching for the Third- or Fifth-gear slots. Both issues can be simply cured, and FRPP was well aware of them.

As with all modulars, from the sleepest Town Car motivator to the hottest factory examples, the FR500's 5.0 is a smooth, smooth unit, but with big rpm on its mind and a broad torque band. Comparisons between the FR500 and Cobra R are inevitable—especially for us—as we drove each car within weeks of each other (it was a good month!), and we have to say the larger 5.4 R-model is easily the stronger of the two engines. Informed sources say the torquier R-engine is really around 425 hp and the smaller, less go-for-broke FR500 comes in at its rated 415 hp, or a tad more. The 5.0 seems a bit cammier, with a voluptuous idle that says performance in a silken way. As a street engine, what a rush it would be. We'd wager a hairless cam would be necessary for emissions-compliance, so we figure the 5.0 modular engine could hit the street at a true 400 hp and with plenty of around-town torque, coupled with excellent manners and sweet throttle response. Kinda makes our right foot itchy just thinking about it.

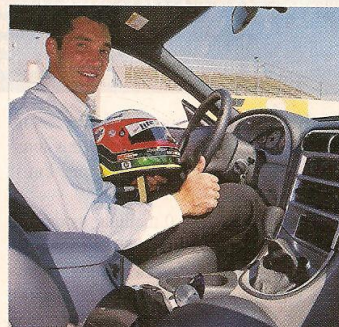
Because it was a track test, we really didn't get into the stereo, and with a helmet on, the noisy exhaust was merely fun, so we can't give you the entire story on the FR500 as a car. However, we're 99 percent certain this is the Mustang that has taken the pony-car concept to its limit. The FR500 is more pocket-exotic than a workday-commuter-and-weekend-fun-car combination. At 60 large, it would make a superb flagship for the Mustang line.

As a parts development showcase, the FR500 is showing us that the modular pro-

pit straight. That means there was just enough understeer to give us some steering feel, and balance enough through either throttle or steering to put the power down. Great stuff, this!

We could only squawk at two things, really. The seats—while easy to get in and out of—could have used a bit more lateral support for the 1g follies we were engaged in, and the shifters all proved a bit too long in the

gram has real legs under it. It can be a fabulous street engine—even with fewer horses—if necessary. The chassis bits are equally good, and in the end, the only question remaining to us real-world enthusiasts is how much those parts will cost. FRPP already has many of the engine bits in the system, which are working their way into the catalog, so don't think this is some PR exercise. I only hope the economies of scale work out.



## MAD MAX

To show us the way around Road Atlanta, CART pilot Max Papis was on hand, along with FR500 regular Rusty Wallace. Not incidentally, both could demonstrate what the FR500 could really do, which is a lot. I rode and drove with Max, and to speed up, down, and around a great track such as Road Atlanta in an FR500 with Max driving is to ride in God's own chariot. Butter smooth yet blindingly fast, Max had the formula driver's quick shifts, lightning steering response, and totally unflappable composure under death-could-be-next braking. Days later he won the CART season opener at Homestead in his Reynard-Ford. Way to go, Max!—Tom Wilson

## BY COMPARISON

It's not often we get to compare the best Fords against the best of everything else, but at Road Atlanta our hosts gave us the opportunity with a Corvette and a Viper. Pitting all-Ford against Chevy—nonsense aside—the Corvette was a real disappointment. The engine was torquey and reasonably powerful, but not exceptional in this gathering. We rated it easily Third in power.

Worse yet was the chassis—a nervous, autocrossing group of twitches and saves. Chevy relies heavily on its electronic traction control system to save the day, and while we'll bet it's a godsend in snow or ice, on dry pavement it's hopelessly aggressive—killing the fun just as it starts. With the traction control switched off, the car was far too nervous at speed. Low marks to the Vette on seating and sight picture as well. Both are cramped by the



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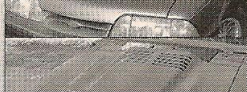
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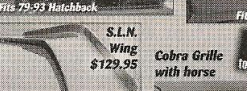
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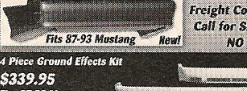
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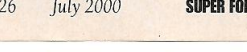
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## BALANCED PERFORMER

low posture and swept windshield.

More redeeming was the Viper. Here is the story all about power—gobs of big-block torque, and plenty of urge on top to avoid any agricultural feelings. It's really tough to beat displacement, and at 8.0 liters, the Viper has plenty going for it. The chassis was linear enough and definitely calmer than the Vette's, but not sparkling like the FR500's. It was enough, however, to combine with the big power on hand to best the FR500 in lap times

by an estimated second per lap (only casual lap times were being taken, and many variables were at work).

Viper drivers should invest in better brakes, however. With no ducting, the Viper pedal was on the floor in less than three hard laps, so there's a real problem. Much was made of the Viper's offset pedals—they're distinctly off to the left of the steering wheel. But to anyone with big-block Cobra experience they're a nonissue. Overall, the Viper is an exciting, fun, honest car, but it's missing the FR500's polish. We're glad to be with Ford.—Tom Wilson

## FR500 SPECIFICATIONS

### General

Wheelbase:	106.3 in
Length:	183.5 in
Height:	52.2 in
Track, f/r:	61.0 in/60.76 in
Curb Weight:	3,450 lbs
Weight Dist, f/r:	50/50

### Performance

0-60 mph:	4.6 sec
Quarter-mile:	12.70 sec/114 mph
Top Speed:	176 mph (estimated)

Performance numbers from FRPP on street tires

### Engine

Block:	4.6 4V cast aluminum, spray-bore liners to achieve 5.0 displacement
Bore x Stroke:	94mmx90.0mm
Displacement:	4997 cc
Compression Ratio:	9.85:1
Crankshaft:	Fully counterweighted forged steel
Rods:	Production Cobra 4.6L 4V
Pistons:	Forged aluminum, unique design
Horsepower:	415 hp at 6,800 rpm
Torque:	365 lb-ft at 4,200 rpm
Redline:	7,000 rpm (fuel shutoff at 7,200 rpm)
Cylinder Heads:	FR500 high-flow, cast aluminum, 4V/cyl, two 37mm intake valves
Camshafts:	DOHC, grinds unique to FR500
Followers:	Roller finger followers, hydraulic lash adjustment
Induction Design:	FR500 dual induction system
Air Filter:	Dual air filter assemblies with production air filters
Mass Air Sensors:	Dual 80mm mass air sensors
Throttle Bodies:	Dual 70mm throttle bodies
Intake Manifold:	Cast magnesium, variable geometry runners
Engine Management:	Unique EEC V calibration to operate FR500 dual induction system
Ignition:	Distributorless, coil-on-plug
Alternator:	Production Cobra alternator
Battery:	Trunk-mount battery system
Fuel Pump:	170-lph electronic fuel pump
Injectors:	Eight 33-lbs/hr fuel injectors
Radiator:	High fin density 36mm core radiator
Fan:	Production Cobra electric fan
Exhaust Manifolds:	High-flow stainless steel tubular headers
Catalysts:	Four high-flow metal substrate catalysts
Exhaust Pipes:	2½-in stainless steel exhaust pipes
Mufflers:	2½-in inlet/2½-in outlet low-restriction mufflers
Tailpipes:	2½-3½-in dual-tip tailpipes

### Drivetrain

Flywheel:	Unique eight-bolt flexplate/billet steel flywheel combination
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Clutch: .....8½-in dual disc with vented floater  
 Clutch Cable: .....FRPP adjustable clutch cable (PN M-7553-B302)  
 Transmission: .....Tremec T56 six-speed manual  
 Shifter: .....Pro-5.0, modified production handle  
 Driveshaft: .....Metal matrix composite, 3½-in diameter  
 U-Joints: .....Production Cobra  
 Ring-and-Pinion: .....8.8-in (PN M-4209-G410)  
 Axle Ratio: .....4.10:1  
 Differential: .....31-tooth Torsen T2R, 4.0:1 torque bias limited-slip  
 Differential Housing: .....Aluminum Cobra housing with unique FR500 locating bracket  
 Differential Cooler : ..Tilton electric pump with unique FR500 tube-style heat exchanger  
 Half-Shafts: .....FR500 51mm OD tubular half-shafts with 31-tooth stub shafts

#### Suspension

##### Front:

FR500 double A-arm front suspension utilizing a bolt-on tubular No. 2 crossmember, Lincoln LS aluminum rear upper control arms as front upper control arms, fabricated steel lower control arms, Cobra spindles, Lincoln LS-derived aluminum coilover shocks, 1½-inch diameter rearward-mounted tubular stabilizer bar, fabricated bar arms and drop links, ride height lowered 1 inch from stock.

##### Rear:

Cobra IRS with revised spring rates and shock valving, ride height lowered 1 inch from stock.

Steering Type: .....Power-assisted rack-and-pinion

Gear Ratio: .....17.25:1

Turns: .....2.4 turns lock-to-lock

#### Brakes

##### Front

Rotors: .....14x1.25-in Brembo rotors, vented, cross-drilled

Calipers: .....Four-piston Brembo calipers with FR500 caliper adapters

Cooling: .....Forced air, ducted from front fascia

##### Rear

Rotors: .....13x1.1-in Brembo rotors, vented

Calipers: .....Lincoln LS single-piston rear calipers with FR500 caliper adapters

ABS: .....Production four-channel ABS system

#### Wheels and Tires

##### Wheels

Front: .....18.0x9.0-in FR500 prototype wheels

Rear: .....18.0x10.0-in FR500 prototype wheels

##### Tires

Manufacturer: .....BFGoodrich g-force T/A KD

Size, f/r: .....265/35ZR18, 295/35ZR18

#### Body

Production '99 Mustang with FR500 carbon-fiber front fascia, hood, fenders, rocker panels, rear fascia, and decklid

Paint: .....DuPont Special Effect Silver

Head Lamps: .....Production Cobra with PIAA bulbs

Driving Lamps: .....PIAA

Interior: .....Two-tone dark charcoal/medium graphite leather, thick-rim FR500 steering wheel, 200-mph speedo, 9,000 rpm tach

Front Seats: .....Production Mustang seats with FR500 Mustang leather seat trim featuring larger, racing-style bolsters in the seat cushion and seat back

Rear Seats: .....Production Mustang with FR500 leather trim

Audio: A JBL high-performance CD audio/CD-ROM/AM/Dual FM tuner with Becker TrafficPro voice prompt navigation, one JBL GT1041 10-in subwoofer powered by a JBL BP600. One 600-watt, high-efficiency switching amplifier, two JBL 504Gti two-way midrange speakers powered by a JBL P80.4 stereo amplifier, one JBL seven-band parametric equalizer

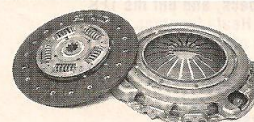
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*FR500 seat shown with optional two-tone and perforated insert.*



## **FR500** Steering Wheel

Introduced on the FR500, this steering wheel features a thicker (by 50%), racing-style rim section covered in perforated and smooth black leather.

- Direct replacement for original steering wheel in 1994-2000 Mustang
- Uses the airbag and cruise control switches originally installed on the vehicle
- Available in black only
- Part number M-3601-B



To order your Ford Racing Performance Parts catalog, send \$5.00 in U.S. funds to: Ford Motor Company, Dept. SF, P.O. Box 51394, Livonia, MI 48151

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