



Head-turners, not cash-burners

Most of us may never have the financial resources to own the world's latest model supercars – Ferrari Enzos, Porsche 911 Turbos, and Aston Martin Superleggeras are toys that celebrities, financial traders and football stars can afford to accumulate.

Nevertheless, many of the finest examples of automotive genius are well within the means of mere mortals. Acquiring a classic car/old-timer is a matter of taste, judicious timing, and relatively modest financial outlays.

There are few more pleasurable obsessions in life than owning and driving a beast of a car. In the quest to produce the ultimate driving machine, legendary marques like Mercedes, Ferrari, Porsche, and Aston Martin have acquired mythological status in Western culture. Not only has the car become a symbol of class, style, power, and prestige, it is also a reflection of our enduring fascination with the pure pleasure of driving. The brilliant actor Anthony Hopkins has often spoken of the sublime ecstasy of driving along desert highways and through mountain

passes in Nevada and Wyoming at the wheel of a classic Thunderbird convertible or Cadillac Eldorado. He describes these journeys as a way of “revelling in the beauty of nothingness”.

Such Zen-like philosophical observations aside, there is no doubting the pure pleasure that comes with cruising along open roads at the wheel of truly glorious example of automotive engineering and styling. There is no other way of accounting for the long-standing love affair between men and their motorcars – something which confuses most women – not to mention a corresponding need for speed and testing the limits of automotive performance.

For the purposes of this article, we have selected five superb classic cars that are between 20 and 40 years old. This helps us identify those models that are easy to find online and are meant to be driven equally as much as they offer value as collectibles. (The standard definition of a classic car is one that is at least 20 years old, while strictly speaking an “old-timer” – as per EU rules – applies to cars 30 years of age and older.)

The classic/old-timer cars that feature in our survey can generally be purchased for less than \$80,000 and often for less than \$40K. Of course, one will need to accept the fact that these iconic automobiles will be more expensive to maintain given their high-performance standard and the fact that the affordable versions of these cars will have at least 130,000 kilometres of wear and tear. But if one takes the time to survey the best websites, there are often good deals to be had, especially in the current coronavirus-induced economic downturn.

So, if you're lucky enough to have some cash on hand and be otherwise financially secure, here are five magnificent driving machines for the taking. I've had the pleasure of owning and driving several of these models, and I have tried to impart some of my wisdom and experience with respect to expectations regarding the optimal purchase price range.

In all cases, I have consulted with vintage car owners and traders and every one of the following makes and models should easily hold their value – and will likely increase in price over



Cuban collectables still used on a daily basis.

the coming decade (based on the suggested purchase prices). Just like when you buy a house, you often lock in your profit going in. Patience is as important a virtue as research and judgement when it comes to owning, holding, and selling classic cars! The following five dream machines are ranked in terms of affordability.

Mercedes Benz SL 500 (1971-1989) – Target Price: \$A20,000-40,000

The Mercedes SL has long been a symbol of wealth, luxury, and classic styling. In particular, the R107-generation Mercedes SL is the car that became the go-to vehicle for corporate CEOs, wealthy country club types, and anyone seeking to project a sense of elegance and prosperity.

The image of the SL roadster was given a massive boost when the film American Gigolo featured Richard Gere cruising along the Pacific Coast Highway in California in his black Mercedes 450SL convertible in the film's opening credit sequence, accompanied by Blondie's "Call Me" song that would go on to become a hit.

There are many different engine combinations to the SL series, which was in production for 18 years before being phased out in 1989 for the next generation in the class. But most true Mercedes aficionados will choose the SL500 version with the superior 5.0 litre V8 engine over the SL450 or SL350 versions that come with a 4.5 litre V8.

What makes the SL of this era so distinctive is its dominant SL face.

Those wide-band headlamps and grooved turn indicator covers had a powerful aura. The convertible offered a superb low silhouette which made it look just as sexy with its soft top open or closed, or with its distinctive hardtop that takes only a few minutes to install for cold winter months. And the very slight inward curve of the boot lid, along with the concave hardtop, were reminiscent of the Mercedes' "Pagoda" days.

Most car experts will advise anxious collectors to buy a 1980s model with a well-maintained exterior that often corresponds to how well owners have treated this beloved Grand Touring icon. Anything between 80,000 and 150,000 km makes for a good purchase and prices will vary wildly according to condition.

Prices for this model have been increasing rapidly over the past decade and anyone who bought a model and maintained it over the years will have seen its value increase by at least 50% if not double, all things being equal. The SL series has always been manufactured to the highest standards by Mercedes Benz, who regarded it as their flagship model and invested more engineering time and energy to its fabrication than with any of its other models. Anyone who is able to buy an SL in good condition today will see it not only hold its value, but likely continue to increase over the coming decades.

Ford Mustang Original Series (1964-1973) – Target Price: \$A40,000-110,000

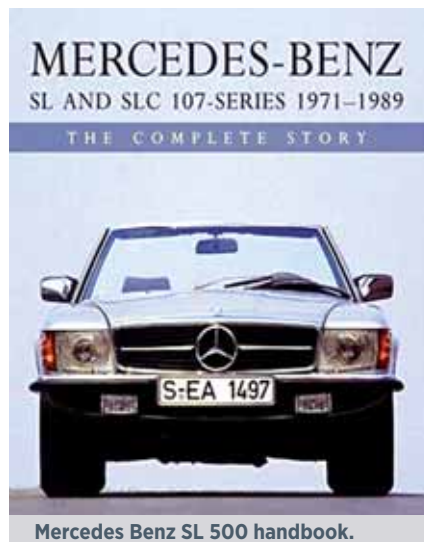
This classic American sports car was first launched on 17 April 1964 as the brainchild of then Ford VP Lee Iacocca and was an immediate critical and commercial success. The car also ushered in the era of the "muscle car", especially after Carol Shelby began racing a suped-up 350GT version of the Mustang in 1965.

But the Ford Mustang car only achieved true legendary status after the release of the film "Bullitt" in 1968. "Bullitt" became a screen classic when Steve McQueen, playing laconic San Francisco police lieutenant Frank Bullitt, took the wheel of a 1968 Ford GT 350 Mustang and began one of the great car chase sequences ever filmed. The McQueen aura attached to this Ford Mustang model endows it with the kind of awe-inspiring gravitas that few cars apart from the 1965 Aston Martin DB5 James Bond car can ever attain.

But unlike a DB5, a 1967 or 1968 Mustang is vastly more affordable – especially the convertible version – at prices starting at \$40,000. Some Coupe models are even listed at \$20,000! Although a \$40,000 Ford Mustang convertible or the higher-price "Bullitt" fastback version (I actually prefer the convertible) may not be cheap, and one can find cheaper 1966 and 1970 Mustang models at half the price, the future resale value of any 67-68 generation



Mercedes Benz SL 500 (1971-1989).



Mercedes Benz SL 500 handbook.



Mustang will be immeasurably higher.

As noted above, the legend of the Ford Mustang was born in "Bullitt", the Peter Yates cop thriller that saw Steve McQueen in pursuit of two Mafia hitmen. McQueen, who was in the process of becoming the biggest star in Hollywood, was a veteran motorcycle racer and did most of the stunt driving sequences himself while top Hollywood stunt driver Bud Ekins did the rest. In the film, McQueen drove his Mustang all out so that it screeched, bounced, and slid its way up, down, and through the hilly streets of San Francisco and then onto California's Pacific Coast Highway. It remains one of the most purely sensational visual scenes in the history of cinema and enshrined the Ford Mustang as an automotive icon.

The actual Mustang model that McQueen drove was the Shelby racing version of the 1968 Ford Mustang street car (and its 1967 predecessor). This model represented a significant upgrade on the original Mustang design. Both the body and the engine were revamped and the results were impressive.

Not only was the body widened and made longer, the grille opening

was enlarged to give the car a more menacing appearance while the rear taillight panel was made concave. In the fastback version, the roof extended all the way to the rear of the truck, which gave it a distinctive racing look.

In terms of power, though, the '67 Mustang was distinctive in that 28,800 models were produced with a powerful new 4.7 litre V8 engine that delivered 320 bhp with a Holley four-barrel carburettor that featured a cast iron intake manifold and a dual exhaust system.

Optional front and rear disc brakes came with power assist, and the '67 Mustang was the first vehicle to use a dual hydraulic system. The front suspension was also redesigned and widened to give the car an overall smoother ride.

When it comes to acquiring one of these iconic cars, one has to take care of the provenance as well as the engine specs. Most of the "Bullitt" models have had their engines replaced several times over, so the intrinsic value of the car will depend on whether the original 4.7 litre V8 comes with the body or not.

Accordingly, there is a huge variation in price when it comes to this model. The convertible version will usually sell for a minimum of \$40,000 and one can expect that the car is in a very good state in terms of exterior finishing and engine condition. Perfectly restored 67-68 Ford Mustangs, particularly the fastback "Bullitt" version, will run anywhere from \$60,000-90,000. (The much rarer Ford Shelby Mustang GT 350 model, restored to original condition, is typically offered at auction for prices in excess of \$200,000!)

In terms of ultimate enjoyment, from my personal experience, driving a 1967 or 1968 Ford Mustang convertible will offer even more pleasure than the "Bullitt" car. The styling is sleeker, and it still carries the classic aura of the Mustang brand.

In the next issue we will come back to the affordable old-timers and perhaps what your appetite - who knows?

This article was written by Jan Janssen exclusively for the National Collision Repairer in Australia.



1969 Mach1 Ford Mustang.



Steve McQueen at the wheel.



The most famous Mustang in the world is also now the most expensive Mustang ... Steve McQueen's "Bullitt" sold for a record \$3.4 million.