

# The History of Classic American Muscle Cars



Muscle cars and pony cars are known for their intense engines, rear-wheel drive, relatively lightweight bodies, high performance, and drag racing abilities. They gained immense popularity in the 1960s and have since been a staple for car enthusiasts. The history of classic American muscle cars such as the Ford Mustang, Dodge Challenger, and Chevrolet Camaro involves various upgrades, body changes, and other redesigns to ensure optimal performance.

## Ford Mustang

The first generation of Mustangs emerged in 1965. These models sold for \$2,368 and used components similar to those of other Ford cars. The interior, chassis, suspension, and drivetrain all derived from the Falcon and Fairlane. Since its release, the Mustang has undergone several upgrades, and with each upgrade came a different nickname. For example, from 1979 to 1993, the name "Fox" or "Fox Body" was used for the chassis. The fourth generation (1994 to 2004) used the name "SN95" to refer to Specialty North American Market Projection #95, which was redesigned for a more modern look. The fourth generation also saw the "New Edge," which featured the addition of a slimmer body, sharper images, an engine upgrade, and new interior features for a performance increase. From 2005 to 2014, the fifth generation of Mustangs took on the "S197" name for Sport #197, in which the model got a total redesign for a retro-futuristic appeal similar to that of the 1964 to 1970 models. This generation featured a wider body and a curved dash. Finally, today's sixth-generation model is referred to as the "S550" or Sport #550, in which sharper lines, new curves, and a retro finish make it appear more aggressive.

## Dodge Challenger

The first generation of Challengers launched in 1970. They were designed similarly to the Plymouth

Barracuda. Created to compete against other muscle cars of the era, such as the Ford Mustang and the Pontiac Firebird, the Challenger offered a longer wheelbase, larger dimensions, and a luxurious interior. Since then, the Challenger has undergone different series and upgrades to compete with other makes. In the 1970s and 1980s, it was designed similarly to the Mitsubishi Sapporo, becoming taller, wider, and longer than the previous generation. It retained the frameless hardtop but used a smaller engine. The third and current generation went back to its signature sporty image and refocused its performance with V6 and V8 engines. The Hellcat and other special editions of the Challenger proved to be popular models throughout the generation.

## Chevrolet Camaro

The Chevrolet (Chevy) Camaro debuted in 1967 as a response to the Ford Mustang. Available as a coupe or a convertible, the Camaro also emerged as a sporty alternative to the declining Chevy Corvair, which was exemplified in the book *Unsafe at Any Speed* for its unsafe features. Its slim design changed through the generations. The second generation (1970 to 1981) underwent cosmetic changes but kept a body structure, subframe, suspension, and leaf springs similar to the previous generation. The third generation Camaro (1982 to 1992) was redesigned to feature modern fuel injections, a four-speed automatic transmissions, a five-speed manual transmission, 14- to 16"-wheels, and a four-cylinder engine under a hatchback body. The fourth generation (1993 to 2002) retained similar characteristics to the first model, with a coupe body and 2+2 seating as well as rear-wheel drive and a V6 or V8 engine. The fifth and sixth generations underwent a complete design change similar to the first-generation sleek body and frame.