

Did You Know...

An Article by Larry Pinette

Mustang Retractable Hardtop

The first retractable hardtop for Ford was designed by Ben J. Smith in 1966. Ford assigned the task of designing it to Ben, as a future production option for their red hot selling Mustang. Ben was no amateur when it came to building retractable hardtops for cars. In fact, Ben left General Motors in the early 50's to specifically work for Ford Motor Company on their retractable project. Little did Ben know at that time that he would work for Ford until he retired some 40 years later.

The first retractable he designed was for the Continental Mark II for production in 1956. This production did not work out as the Mark II was already an expensive car and the cost would make it even more expensive.

Rather than scrap the project, Ford started looking for another vehicle to adapt the hardtop to. They decided on the Fairlane which was built from 1957 to 1959, and was known as the Skyliner. And the rest they say is history.

Let's jump ahead to 1966 when Ford decided to build a retractable Mustang. Ford spent a lot of money to build the prototype for it. Ben said the Mustang Retractable was "One sweetheart of a car." And he always regretted not being able to get it into production. When Ben reported to Ford that it would not be feasible to motorize the top, Ford cancelled the project. The retractable prototype disappeared; supposedly it was scrapped or destroyed.

After Ben retired, he remembered building the Mustang Retractable with such affection. He decided to build one for himself. Instead of using a convertible, as the original was, he used a 1966 Coupe. Ben said people went wild over the Retractable. So Ben developed and marketed the Retractable Kit. The kit was available up until a few years ago when the molds were lost.

So now a new chapter in the Retractable Hardtop Mustang saga is about to be written. Mustang Plus is having a new top mold built and the kit should be available again soon.