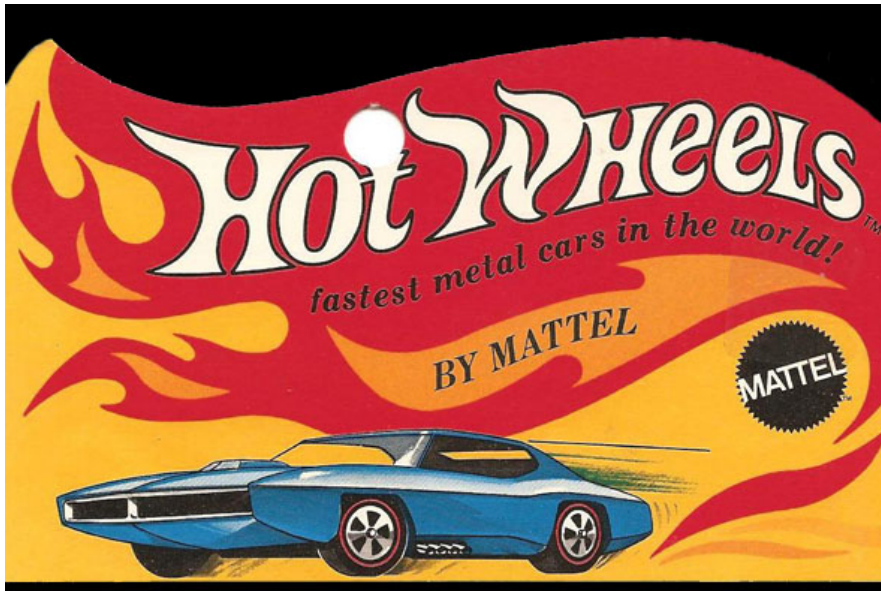


# BOLDRIDE

## Hot Wheels: Success from the Start

Posted on 24 May 2012 by [The Bold Ride Team](#)



Celebrating 10 of the coolest Hot Wheels® that have stood the test of time

If you are anything like me, your automotive passion probably started long before you could reach the pedals of your family car or darken the doors of any DMV. Cars were part of your life as soon as you left the hospital as a baby, whisked away in a vortex of new sounds and g-forces. For most children (at least most boys), a car was one of the first toys you ever got your hands on and moved along the ground, making that enjoyable “brrrrrrrooom” sound.

There is one kind of toy car that has been ubiquitous in kid’s bedrooms and toy bins for over 40 years, and has become synonymous with die-cast cars. That name is Hot Wheels. Mattel introduced these flashy, tiny, speed demons in 1968 and changed the landscape of both the toy industry and the auto industry.

We at BoldRide want to celebrate ten of the original Hot Wheels “Sweet Sixteen” that showed keen insight into the classic cars of the time. Somehow, Hot Wheels managed to pick production cars that have stood the test of time, in most cases, almost as well as the toy cars themselves.

Custom Mustang



The Custom Mustang (aka Mustang Stocker) was based of the 1967 Mustang and pointed straight at the growing world of drag racing in the late 60’s. The chrome grille and massive hood bulge broadcast the hurt that you would be in if anyone dared to challenge her at the light. She could light up the Redline rear wheels while roaring down the drag strip, spitting flames out of the quad side exhaust.

By 1967, Ford's pony car was starting the transformation from fun, carefree runabout to mighty muscle machine. Ford introduced bolder, bigger sheetmetal, a revised grille and tail panel, and a full fastback model. A new 390 cubic inch V8 was available and sounded the death toll for the aging 289 V8. More importantly, the powerful [Shelby GT500](#) was introduced alongside the [Shelby GT350](#) to give even more choices to fulfill your fantasy.

Even after all that time, the Mustang is going strong. Ford introduced the [2013 Shelby GT500](#) with the most powerful production V8 engine in history. The years have been mostly very good to the Mustang, and obviously Hot Wheels managed to back the right horse.

#### Custom Camaro

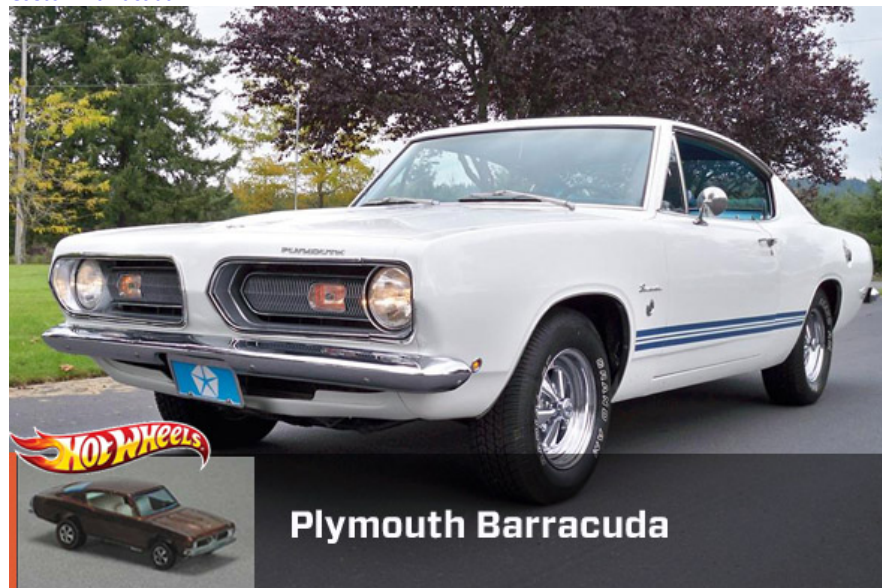


When Ford launched the Mustang in 1964, General Motors and [Chrysler](#) were quickly put on the back foot, both without a real answer to the growing pony car craze. GM got quickly to work and came out with a winner in 1967, the [Chevy Camaro](#). Harry Bradley very astutely picked both the Camaro and its sister, the [Pontiac Firebird](#) to be included in the original casting of the Hot Wheels "Sweet 16".

The Custom Camaro features a twin power bulge hood and is set up with bigger wheels out back for the classic street drag look. Available in unique colors like spectrafame blue, purple and "antifreeze" green, the car was topped with black paint to simulate a black vinyl roof. Under the working hood was a detailed V8 engine.

The Chevy Camaro ran strong from 1967 to 2002, when it ended its production. Luckily, because of high enthusiast demand for the classic first generation Camaro, [Chevy](#) wisely reintroduced a retro-designed 2010 Camaro that is currently pushing the envelope on unnecessary horsepower (see Camaro ZL-1). The more things change, the more they stay the same.

#### Custom Barracuda



As one of the fastest predatory fish in the ocean, the Barracuda makes a name for itself as a sleek-and-mean, eating machine. The Custom Barracuda, with its fastback design and big rear wheels certainly would have scared a lot of the freeway fish of the day. Really the only "pony" car competitor available in the first years of the Mustang, 1967 saw a 2nd generation of the Barracuda appear meaner than ever. With an available 383 cu. in. big block as part of the Formula S package, the [Plymouth Barracuda](#) could be had in fastback, notchback or convertible styles.

Regardless of having the shortest production life-span on our list, the Barracuda was essential in paving the way for Chrysler to heat up the pony wars with the [Dodge Challenger](#) and the Plymouth 'Cuda that came out in 1970. Since [Plymouth](#) went the way of the dodo several years ago, we'll have to assume that Hot Wheels foresaw the importance of the '67 Barracuda as it led to the great Chrysler cars that followed it.



You couldn't really have an America dream car lineup without including some version of the [Chevrolet Corvette](#). Since its introduction until today, there has been continuous production, and soon to be seven generations, of America's [sports car](#). While 1968 was only the 15th anniversary of the shark-themed ride, Hot Wheels picked a good generation to start. Known as the Mako Shark 2, its curvy fenders and long hood rolled off the assembly line from 1968 to 1982.

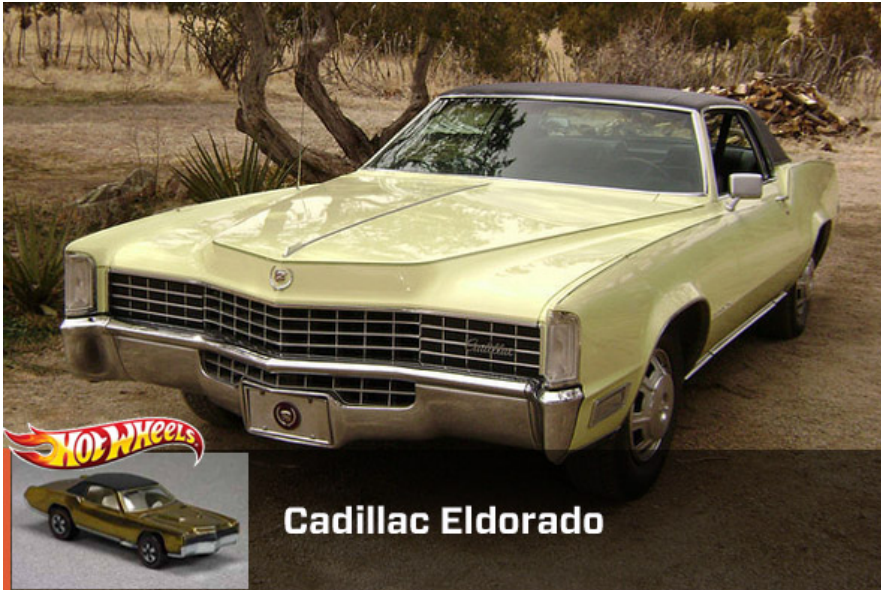
The Custom Corvette version featured some of the favorite Corvette mods and options of the time. From the big single bulge on the reverse opening hood, to the classic side exhaust, this 'Vette was made to look good and go fast. The way the Redline wheels look massive on this model emphasis how low and sleek the real car is, and kind of make it look like a modern concept or DUB custom. I'm sure playgrounds echoed with excitement every time a real, new Corvette drove by, almost as much as when someone snuck the Custom Vette to school in their pocket.

#### Custom Cougar



Since Mustang was such a hot seller, Ford looked for ways to expand on the newly created pony car market that was sweeping the nation. Enter the 1967 [Mercury Cougar](#). While mechanically similar to the Mustang, the Cougar ran on a 3-inch longer wheelbase and catered to a clientele looking for a more European and luxurious car than they might get with a 'Stang. So good was the Cougar, it was named Motor Trend's Car of the Year in 1967. You read that right. It trumped the Chevy Camaro, Pontiac Firebird, newly redesigned Plymouth Barracuda and its father, the Ford Mustang. Quite an impressive accomplishment.

The Custom Cougar must have been the GT package, which featured a 390 cu. in. engine and beefed up suspension and brakes. Offered as a coupe, to balance out the Custom Mustang's fastback, the Custom Cougar showed off its quad side exhaust, painted black vinyl roof and working, power bulge hood. Another winner in longevity, the Cougar was produced continuously for 30 years, from 1967 to 1997. Unfortunately, [Mercury](#) re-launched a watered-down compact coupe in 1999 that made a lot of us forget what a great car it started out as. Although it is not mentioned nearly as often as its pony car brethren, maybe Hot Wheels will help us remember the lead-off home run that the Mercury Cougar achieved.



When making a miniature car collection for kids to drool over, it's never a bad idea to go with a real design leader. Radically redesigned in 1967, the [Cadillac Eldorado](#) broke new ground in luxury, style and performance for personal transportation. Named after Cadillac's golden anniversary in 1952, the Eldorado exemplified the boldest approach to luxury motoring and was the styling leader for many of General Motors products during the 1950's.

What the Custom Eldorado might lose in performance, it makes up for in style. It features the fresh redesigned styling that [Cadillac](#) unleashed in 1967, which included borrowing the Oldsmobile Toronado's front engine/front-wheel drive layout. The long lines, dual power bulging hood, and black painted vinyl roof give the Caddy low and lean stance. Top that off with an in-your-face chrome front bumper, and you've got an aggressive, even mean, ride that helps you understand how the Eldorado led the way for Cadillac for almost 50 years and 11 generations.

#### Custom Firebird



Another player in the ongoing pony wars of the late 60s, the Custom Firebird brings [Pontiac](#) performance heritage to the plastic racetrack. Based on the '67 Firebird 400, it is one of only two convertibles available in the original "Sweet 16". There was an option of cream or black interior plastic depending on where the Custom Firebird was manufactured. All of them came with dual hood scoops, oversized rear wheels, quad side exhaust and a host of styling cues lifted from Pontiac's muscle hero, the [GTO](#).

Since it was kissing cousins with the Chevy Camaro, the Firebird ran from 1967 all the way to 2002 but didn't make the cut when the Camaro was revived in 2010. I guess it's kind of ironic that the Firebird didn't re-emerge when the Camaro came out of the ashes in 2010. Regardless, where would Burt Reynolds, high school tough guys, or redneck mid-life crises be without the Pontiac Firebird.



The Custom Fleetside is one of the most interesting and noteworthy cars of the Hot Wheels launch lineup. Based off of designer Harry Bradley's personal, customized 1964 [Chevy El Camino](#), it borrows the trim name from the 1960's Chevy C/K trucks with smooth sides. Bradley outfitted this model with black painted roof and tonneau cover, blacked-out front grille, and velocity stack intake poking out of the hood.

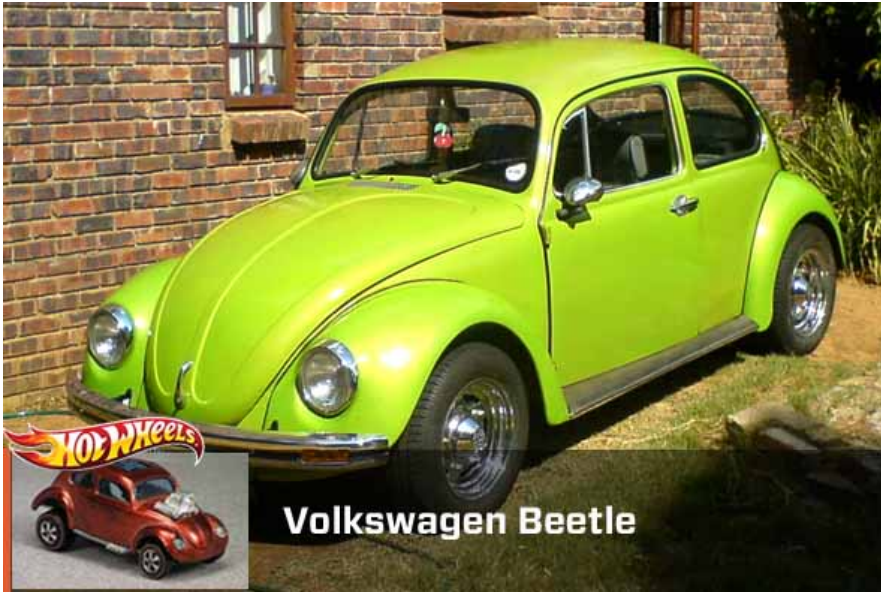
The Chevy El Camino, and its competition, the [Ford Ranchero](#), were both born from the willy outback of Australia (as a Ford and a [Holden](#), respectively). The Ranchero launched first in the U.S. in '57, and the El Camino soon followed in '59, outselling the Ranchero in its debut year. While not continuously produced, the El Camino was available in one shape or another from 1959 through 1987, and has remained a favorite of [hot rodders](#) who need to carry some tools or equipment around in style.

#### Custom T-Bird



In 1967, the fabulous [Ford Thunderbird](#) took a major turn from the smallish two seater that Ford introduced in 1955. Gone was the convertible models in this fifth generation, and in its place was an available suicide-door, 4-door model. To differentiate the T-bird from the Mustang, Ford decided to move it up-market and borrow some luxury from Lincoln's playbook. The Custom T-bird would have none of that.

The Custom T-Bird ditched its luxury in favor of a huge power bulging hood, quad side exhaust and ubiquitous, Redline mag-style wheels. The Spectraflame paint and gaping, fighter jet grille with a stretched Thunderbird emblem made sure this personal car looked as fast as it went. Produced for the majority of 50 years between 1955 and 2005, the Custom T-bird again proved Hot Wheels excellent foresight in choosing cars that remained popular and relevant.



Now this one is a little bit...different. Designed by Ira Gilford, the over-the-top dragged-out Custom Beetle is the spiritual predecessor to many maniacal Hot Wheels over the years. Less classic cool and more OMG, the Custom Beetle sported a huge, blown V8 engine towering out of the hood. It begs the question of whether there is still an air-cooled engine in the rear. If so, it sits high off the ground, lifted by a jacked-up rear and oversized wheels. Hot Wheels decided to add a cool, see-through sunroof that could be opened and shut, so you could check out the interior of this monster-motored people's car.

Produced non-stop from 1938-2003, Hot Wheels would have been amiss if they left out this phenomenally influential vehicle. While much of its rear engine inspiration came from a little-known Tatra concept, the first front engine Beetle wasn't produced until Volkswagen launch the "new" Beetle in 1998. I don't have any evidence of who was the first to pack a mighty V8 into the front of a VW Beetle, but if someone hadn't done it before Hot Wheels, you can be sure that someone would have after seeing this mental Custom Volkswagen.

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