A photograph of a yellow Fox-body Ford Mustang driving on a track. The car is seen from a front-three-quarter angle, moving towards the right. The driver is visible through the windshield. The background shows a green field and trees under a clear sky. The car has a sleek, aerodynamic design with a prominent front grille and headlights. The wheels are blurred, suggesting motion.

LIDIO IACOBELLI'S TROPICAL YELLOW NOTCH HAS  
BEEN **ON THE LEADING EDGE OF MUSTANG**  
**PERFORMANCE** FOR NEARLY 20 YEARS

FOX-BODY

**FORERUNNER**



## FOX-BODY FORERUNNER

LIDIO IACOBELLI'S '88 MUSTANG LX 5.0L COUPE

Story by **Barry Kluczyk**  
Photos by **Tracey Stocker**

**Y**ou may not recognize Lidio Iacobelli's yellow Fox body at a glance, but if you've followed the whole 5.0L Mustang movement since it began in the early 1990s, it should be a familiar sight. Starting in 1993, it's been featured in whole or in part in numerous tech story articles and, in 1997, it was featured in one of those distinctive BFGoodrich "color" ads that spawned countless posters, T-shirts and more.

To say this LX notch has been around the block a few times is an understatement, but Iacobelli—who runs Detroit-area Alternative Auto Performance ([www.alternativeauto.com](http://www.alternativeauto.com))—has continually improved its performance and advanced 5.0L technology. The car's latest setup is the reason we've revisited this pioneering Pony car, as Iacobelli swapped his beloved supercharger setup for a single, intercooled turbo system.



still running an 8.8-inch axle and AOD-E auto trans too. "It's not a race car at all; it's a street car," he says. "It comes out of the hole on motor and the turbo kicks in when rolling. It's a pretty easy launch; it did only a 1.62-second 60-foot time on the 9.30 pass."

To be accurate, the Tropical Yellow '88

### THE RESULT OF THE NEW COMBINATION HAS BEEN A STUNNING 9.30 E.T. AT A WHOPPING 155 MPH

The result of the new combination has been a stunning 9.30 e.t. at a whopping 155 mph. That was accomplished on the same, 18-inch street rubber seen in the accompanying photos. He couldn't help but notice our raised eyebrow and the "yeah . . . sure you did" tone in our voice after laying those numbers on us. "That's the reaction I get from everyone who wasn't at the track that day," he says. "But it's true. With slicks and front runners, it's probably got 8.80s in it."

That's crazy performance from a car whose chassis work includes a six-point rollbar and some fabricated frame connectors. The car is

Mustang that Iacobelli has flogged for the last two decades isn't his. It belongs to his wife, Lucy. "She bought it new when we were dating and drove it daily until we got married in 1991; it has about 44,000 miles on it and the first 30,000 or so came from her," he says. "Then, after we got married, I more or less took it over—but the title is still in her name." After the Mustang became family property, he ripped out the original AOD transmission and swapped in a T5. After promptly destroying it, he tried a Tremec transmission, before settling on the AOD-E that had been in the car for about 11 years.



Surprisingly, there have only been a couple of engines in the car over the years. Iacobelli stuck with the original 5.0L for years, and had great success with a succession of Vortech centrifugal blowers: A-trim, S-trim, SQ . . . you name it. "There was a Vortech in one form or another on it from 1993 through 2006," he says. "I had great success with them and I can't remember how many we installed on customer cars, so we knew them inside and out."

In 1999, Iacobelli took the LX off the road for a couple of years for a complete refresh. The body was resprayed by Steve Mulligan in the original Tropical Yellow (it is one of only 46 5.0L notches made that year in the color), but with an extra dose of clear for a richer look. The only exterior mods are smoked headlamp and taillamp lenses; a low-profile cowl hood from HO Fibertrends; and a feature car rear spoiler. The interior is essentially stock, too, apart from the six-point 'cage and the obligatory A-pillar gauge pod.

The current engine, however, is anything but factory-original. Between the strut towers resides a 392-inch stroked Windsor that used the classic SVO four-bolt block as its foundation. The only mods to it include Cleveland-size main journals. Anchoring the rotating assembly in the block is a low-dough, cast Scat crankshaft that Iacobelli has used for about 11 years, including those various supercharged combinations. "It's not exotic, but it's durable," he says.





Iacobelli sprang for forged rods and pistons, as well as a set of Twisted Wedge-R Windsor-style heads (2.125-inch intake valves and 1.625-inch exhaust valves). Those high flow heads are fed with assistance from a Lunati hydraulic roller camshaft with 0.560-inch lift, 232/242 degrees duration, and a boost-compatible 114-degree lobe separation angle.

Straddling the heads is an Edelbrock Victor EFI 5.8L intake manifold that's fed a steady diet of pressurized air at up to 22 psi. That boost is



## THE DETAILS

Lidjo Iacobelli's  
'88 Mustang LX 5.0L Coupe

### ENGINE

392ci Windsor small-block  
SVO four-bolt block with Cleveland-size main journals  
4.030-inch bore  
3.850-inch stroke  
Scat cast crankshaft  
Eagle forged I-beam rods  
Diamond forged pistons  
8.6:1 compression ratio  
Lunati hydraulic roller camshaft, 232/242 degrees duration; 0.560/0.560-inch lift, 114-degree centerline  
Trick Flow-R aluminum cylinder heads  
1.7-ratio aluminum roller rocker arms  
Edelbrock Victor EFI 5.8L intake manifold  
83-lb/hr fuel injectors  
80mm turbocharger from Precision Turbo  
Custom plumbing by Diamond Fabrication  
Approximately 22 pounds of boost  
Air-to-air charge cooler  
Ford EDIS-8 distributorless ignition with Explorer V-8 crank trigger  
MSD DIS-4 ignition box  
F.A.S.T. engine management system  
Seven-quart Canton oil pan  
785 rear-wheel horsepower

### TRANSMISSION

Ford AOD-E  
Converted to 4R70W specs, with 2.84 First gear  
3,500-rpm stall torque converter  
Baumannator control box

### REAREND

8.8-inch axle  
Eaton Posi differential  
Moser 31-spline axles  
3.55 gears

generated by an 80mm turbocharger from Precision Turbo. It's plumbing—including to and from the air-to-air intercooler—was custom-fabricated by Warren, Michigan-based Diamond Fabrication. Interestingly, the turbo is neither mounted to the exhaust manifold or, like many race cars, to the chassis; it's mounted on a custom bracket that attaches to the right-side cylinder head. Diamond Fabrication also created the custom, 1.75-inch



### EXHAUST

Custom stainless headers from Diamond Fabrication; 1.75-inch primaries  
Custom exhaust from Diamond Fabrication; 3.5-inch single tube from the turbo system, splitting into dual, 3-inch outlets from the exhaust manifolds  
Twin Flowmaster two-chamber mufflers

### SUSPENSION

Front: QA1 tubular K-member with Griggs coilover kit, SN-95 spindles, Tokico shocks  
Rear: Stock, with Koni shocks

### BRAKES

Front: Baer 13-inch disc, two-piston caliper  
Rear: Baer drag kit, 10.5-inch rotor, single-piston caliper

### WHEELS

Front: TSW Vortex, Hyper-Silver, 18x9  
Rear: TSW Vortex, Hyper-Silver, 18x10 (custom widened)

### TIRES

Front: BFGoodrich G-Force Sport, P275/35ZR18  
Rear: BFGoodrich Drag Radial, P305/35ZR18

### INTERIOR

Stock interior with replacement carpet, A-pillar gauge pod with Auto Meter boost and fuel pressure gauges, six-point rollbar

### EXTERIOR

Repainted original Tropical Yellow with additional clear coat, HO Fibertrends 1.5-inch fiberglass cowl hood, '92-'93 "feature car"-type rear spoiler, smoked headlamp and taillight lenses

headers that flow from the turbo system and, ultimately, to a pair of Flowmaster mufflers.

Iacobelli also got creative with the ignition system, scrapping the conventional distributor for the crank-triggered EDIS-8 system used on early-'90s Fords equipped with the 4.6L engine. The distributorless system looks exotic and has proven extremely reliable, but Iacobelli is philosophical about its performance capability. It's been firing the engine for more than a decade. "It's not really any better or worse than a conventional distributor, but I did it to prove a point years ago," he says. "It works great and I've had no problems with it."

A crank trigger from a 5.0L Explorer is used and the engine control system is from F.A.S.T. There's also an MSD DIS-4 ignition box wired up. On the fueling side, a Weldon pump supplies a set of 83-lb/hr injectors. All told, the hair-dried Windsor engine puts down about 785 horsepower to the tire. It's not a pump-gas combination, either; it sips only Turbo Blue.

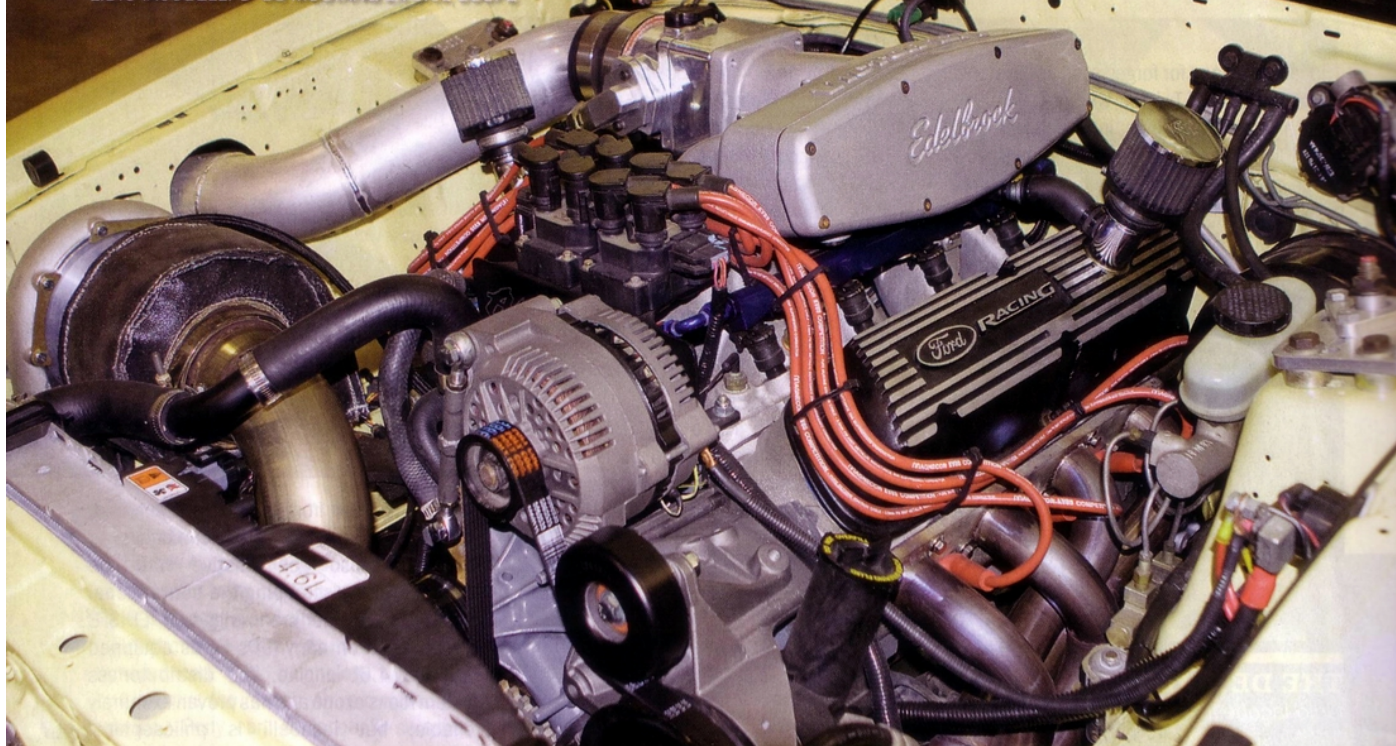
The engine's torque is channeled through a beefed up AOD-E featuring a 3,500 rpm stall converter and Baumannator control box, through an FRPP aluminum driveshaft, and finally to the factory 8.8-inch rearend. It's been upgraded with an Eaton Posi and Moser axles, along with street-friendly 3.55 gears. There's not much else to tell about the car's combination. It rides on big (for a Fox-body) 18-inch TSW wheels that were all 9-inches wide when delivered, but Iacobelli had the rears widened to 10 inches. The front rubber is BFG G-force P275/35ZR18, and rears are 305/35-series drag radials.

We've watched many other cars come and go from Iacobelli's possession, but his yellow LX is linked to him like Silver to the Lone Ranger; or maybe K.I.T.T. to Michael Knight (which predates Iacobelli's "partnership" by only a few years). He's done a remarkable job at keeping the car fresh, current, and most importantly, blazingly quick. Indeed, this forerunner of the 5.0 movement remains at the forefront of performance.



## FOX-BODY FORERUNNER

LIDIO IACOBELLI'S '88 MUSTANG LX 5.0L COUPE



## 20 YEARS OF MUSTANG TUNING

Twenty years is a long time in any business. In the feast-or-famine world of performance car tuning, it's just about a lifetime. At 42, Lidio Iacobelli could hardly be considered old, but he's a granddaddy when it comes to Mustang tuning. He opened the doors to Alternative Auto Performance back in 1990. At the time, the 5.0L Mustang thing was in its infancy, as it took a few years for enthusiasts and the aftermarket parts industry to find one another. So, Iacobelli worked solo in his Mt. Clemens, Michigan, shop, doing performance work on all types of cars. But he was always a Blue Oval guy, having quit his job as a driveability technician at a Ford dealership to launch his business.

By the mid-1990s, the Mustang movement was in full swing and a reputation for precise, done-right-the-first-time tuning brought a steady



Ubly Dragway, in the "thumb" area of Michigan, was—and continues to be—a regular haunt for Iacobelli and his LX. This wheels-up photo was from the early '90s.

stream of 5.0L Mustangs to his shop door. Since then, Alternative Auto has been primarily a Mustang tuning house, although Lightnings, Marauders, and others add spice to the mix. "The business evolved with the popularity of the Mustang," he says. "It didn't necessarily go looking for it at first, but it was clear we were doing some things that people wanted and appreciated, so that's where it went."

Tuning for Iacobelli was a self-taught art that he embraced and approached analytically. As the customers lined up, Iacobelli grew the business by bringing on additional technicians. There are three wrench turners in the shop currently, including engine builder Mark Smielewski, who's been at the shop since 1996, as well as Jake Meisel and Shawn Stager.

"Quality tuning has really been the key to our success," says Iacobelli. "I think we've always been on top of the latest technologies, but tuning the cars so our customers get the performance they expect without driveability

problems was instrumental. I drive every car before we hand the keys back to the customer, because I want to make sure it's right."

Alternative Auto outgrew its shop several times, expanding to take up more units in its original industrial park location to its current, 7,400-sq-ft facility in Chesterfield Township, at the northeastern edge of the metropolitan Detroit area. There's also an ever-present work ethic in the shop that we don't often see in other shops—and believe us, we've seen many a talented tuner close his doors because he couldn't keep the wrenches spinning efficiently. The atmosphere at Alternative Auto is friendly and cordial, but definitely all-business; it's not a hang-out for the technicians' buddies.

Iacobelli's combination of quality and workplace professionalism has created a well-respected, prosperous business that has outlasted most of the competition—and it's poised to continue doing so for the next 20 years. **MM&P**



Here's the LX fresh from the dealership in 1988 and just prior to its inaugural trip to the drag-strip. Check out the Granada in the driveway, along with the neighbor's Chevette. Aren't you glad it's not the 1980s any longer?