

# TROPICAL STORM

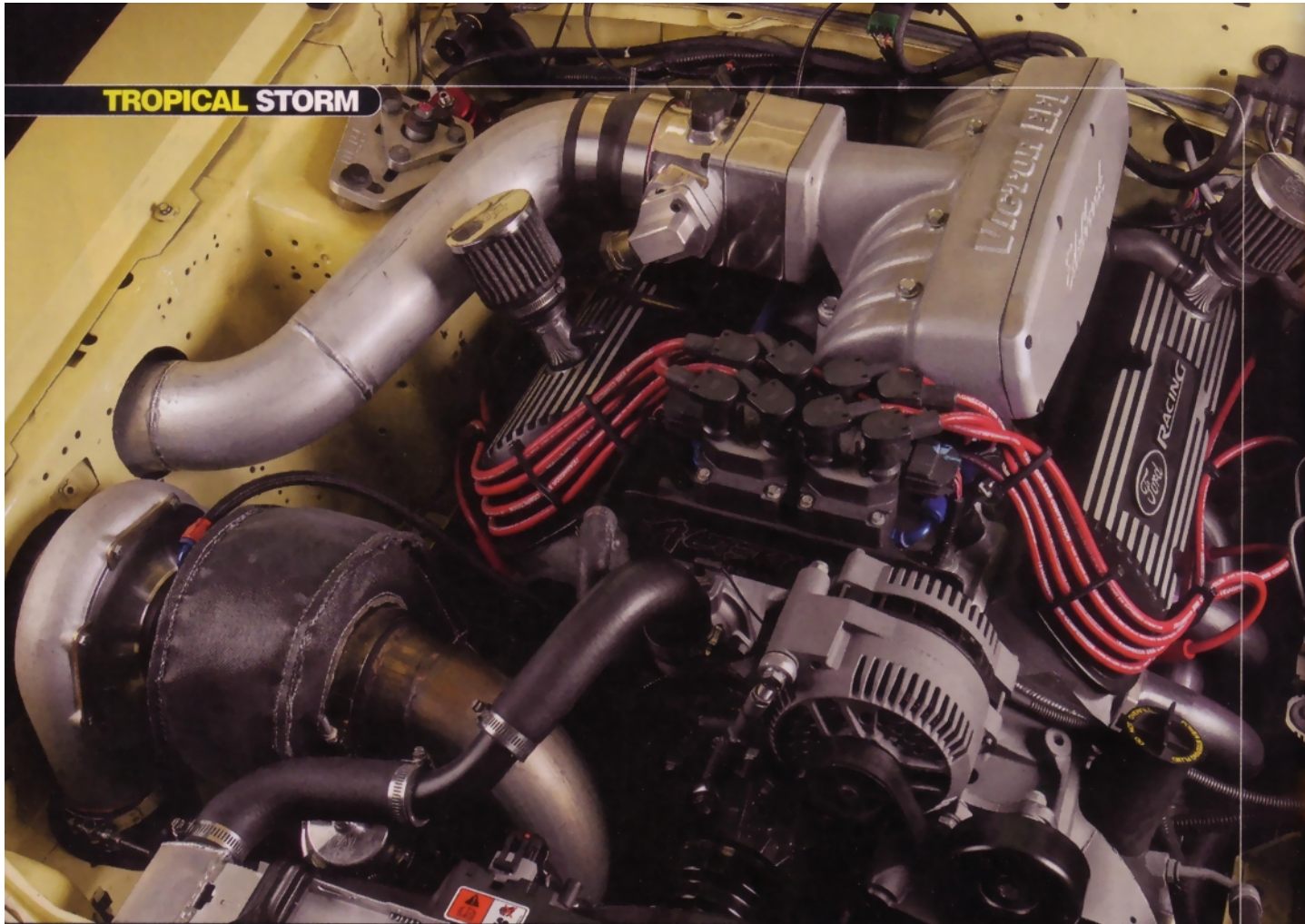
AFTER 21 YEARS, LIDIO IACOBELLI STILL USES HIS TROPICAL YELLOW COUPE TO **REMAIN A PIONEER** IN THE MUSTANG PERFORMANCE WORLD.

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**THREE HUNDRED** and ninety two inches of turbo-fed Ford iron sits under the hood and ensures pavement-melting power is available at a moment's notice.

**I**N THE spring of 1988, Lidio Iacobelli took his then-girlfriend, Lucy, to the Ford dealership to purchase a new Mustang. Although he desperately tried to talk her out of buying the yellow coupe with an AOD that she had picked out, Lucy got her way, and the order was placed for a Tropical Yellow notch with an automatic. During the debate on colors and options, however, Lidio did get his way and the car was ordered with no air conditioning. "Once the

car came in, it only took one glance to realize the uniqueness of this car," Lidio explains. "I knew this car was very different and would stick out in a crowd—but in a good way."

In 1990, Lidio opened Alternative Auto Performance as a side business while working as a new car prep technician at Troy Ford in Troy, Michigan. When the shop opened, it was not geared toward just Mustangs, as Lidio spent his nights and weekends working on just about any domestic hot rod he could get

his hands on. In short time, Lidio took his extensive knowledge of carburetors and tuning, and turned AAP into a premier performance shop. Furthermore, Lucy's Tropical Yellow Fox gave Lidio the base to learn the "new-for-the-time" EFI and to get acquainted with the modern Mustang world.

For the first few years, the car remained relatively stock, with the exception of the regular bolt-on performance parts. It also served as Lucy's daily driver, enduring the



**THE TROPICAL** Yellow hue gives Lidio's Fox a unique look, while the rear spoiler and 18-inch wheels add a sporty touch.



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harsh Michigan winters. But once Lidio and Lucy got married in 1991, he commandeered the Mustang and it hasn't seen rain or snow since.

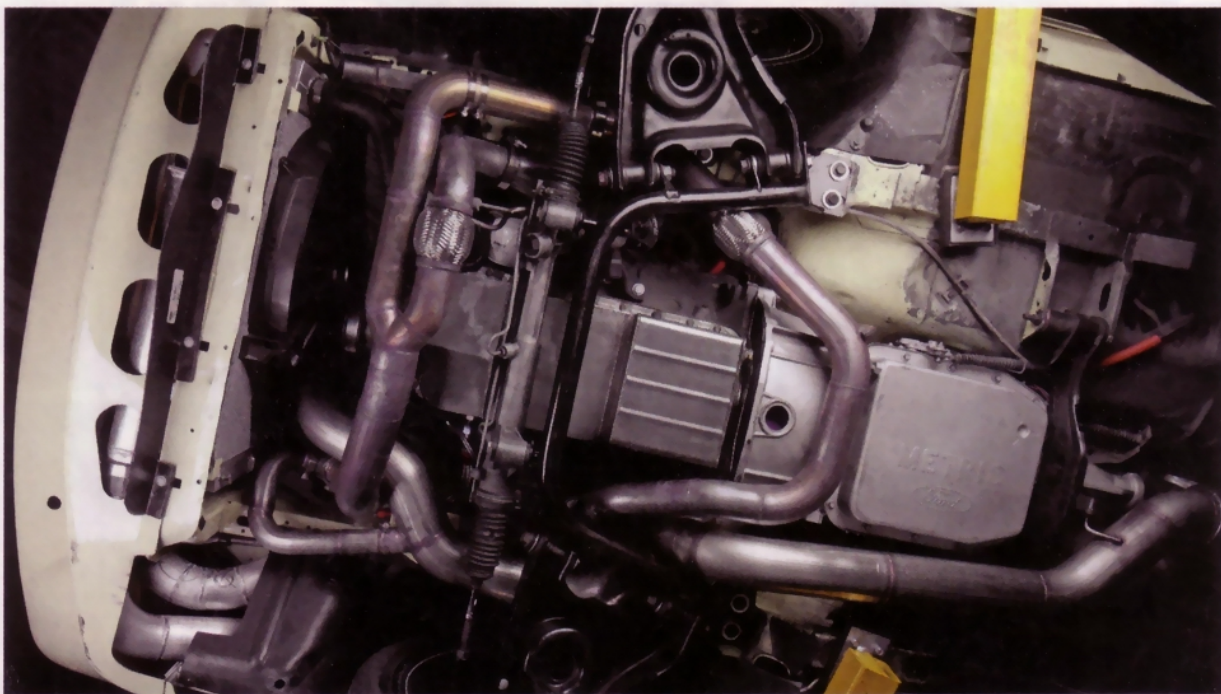
The goal throughout the early '90s wasn't to make an insane amount of power, but to use what was available to get down the track as fast as possible, and Lidio set out to put this little yellow coupe in the 12-second zone. With little knowledge of how to make the AOD work and an even more limited selection of torque converters, the decision was made to swap in a T5. In late 1992, after countless trips down the track, the mission



was accomplished. The coupe was running consistent 12.90s with nothing more than the five-speed conversion, some minor bolt-ons, and 4.10 gears.

As Alternative Auto Performance gained recognition, Lidio stepped up his game and again the coupe was his promotional tool of choice. The mostly stock 5.0L was finally cracked open and Lidio was on his way to

**LEFT:** Mickey Thompson tires wrap 18-inch TSW wheels and sit in all four corners. Thirteen-inch Cobra brakes lay in wait to bring the good times to a halt should things get out of hand.



**ONCE LIDIO** decided a turbo was the way to go, Diamond Fabrication was enlisted to build and mount the turbo system.





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**THE INTERIOR** of Lidio's LX was kept in mostly stock form. A six-point rollbar was installed to keep its occupants safe and to make it legal for the occasional trip into the 10s.

big power. "Things really started happening with the car in 1993," Lidio tells us. "The car got different cylinder heads, one of the first Vortech kits I ever worked with, and the T5 was swapped for a Tremec. We also added larger exhaust and a different intake manifold. The car ran mid-to-low-11s and started to gain a lot of recognition."

After a few years with this setup in the car, and countless transmission and clutch issues, the decision was made to switch back to an automatic, and Lidio also made the move from a 302 to a 351. This put the slick Fox into the low 10s and it even saw some open-track road racing duty.

In 1996, an ad company representing BFGoodrich approached Lidio about using his Fox in a campaign for the famed tire company. The now-famous monochromatic tire ads from the late-'90s and early '00s, which ran in just about every car magazine on the planet showcased some of the hottest cars in the hobby from that time. And with

that single side-profile photo, Lidio's Tropical Yellow coupe secured its place in the Mustang performance history books.

After 11 years it was time for a facelift. Lidio turned to Steve Mulligan for the paintwork, and a few fresh coats of Tropical Yellow restored the stock hue to like-new condition.

After the paintwork was finished, it was time for a powertrain refresh. This time Lidio started with an FRPP N351 block and filled the bores with Diamond pistons and Eagle rods, while the rotating assembly was set in motion by a Scat crankshaft. A mild hydraulic roller cam from Lunati was installed to manipulate the valves inside Trick Flow Specialties TFS-R cylinder heads.

With the heads bolted on, this 392-inch mill produced a boost-friendly 8.6:1 compression ratio. A Vortech T-trim supercharger force-fed air into the bullet through an Edelbrock Victor EFI intake manifold and a 90mm throttle body. The AOD was swapped for an AOD-E, and a Bauman Box was installed to

control the shifts. Once the build was finished and the tune was set, Lidio's Tropical Yellow coupe spun the rollers to a massive 650 rwhp. Three years later, Lidio decided to make a few new changes to his Fox. The addition of 18-inch TSW wheels and smoked headlights added some excitement, and 13-inch Cobra brakes now enable quicker stops.

In late 2006, Lidio was looking for a new twist, so he traded the Vortech for a turbo. The stroker mill and AOD-E were left alone, but a single 80mm turbo from Precision Turbo was installed, and Diamond Fabrication was enlisted to mount and plumb the turbo and intercooler.

After the Stang was completed in the fall of 2008, Lidio strapped it to the rollers once again, and with the turbo pumping out 18 pounds of boost, the end result was an astounding 843 rwhp. Being that Lidio is no dyno hero, a track test was needed to prove the LX's worth. And as expected, the big power translated into low 9-second quarter-mile times—even on the 18-inch wheels and tires. With addition of slicks and skinnies, 8.60s shouldn't be out of the question.

Even with this much horsepower on tap, and single-digit e.t.'s so easily available, this coupe is no race car—few, if any, of Lidio's rides ever have been. A lot of the early EFI Mustang performance shops ended up turning their street cars into full-tilt drag cars to prove that they could be the best. Lidio Iacobelli and Alternative Auto Performance avoided the storm that is quarter-mile competition. Instead they spent the last 21 years turning this Tropical Yellow coupe—and many other late-model Stangs—into some of the fastest, cleanest Mustangs around. **///**

