

Automobile

NEWS & REVIEWS CLASSIC CARS FEATURES AUTO SHOWS VIDEOS SUBSCRIBE

News / 2019 Saleen S302 Black Label Review: Eight. Hundred. Horsepower.

NEW CAR REVIEWS



2019 Saleen S302 Black Label Review: Eight. Hundred. Horsepower.

This supercharged Ford Mustang is a hell of a machine.

By: Aaron Gold | Photography by: Ed Tabaney | August 29, 2019



E

ight-hundred horsepower.

Let that figure marinate in your brain. Roll it around and taste it like fine wine.

If you don't really consider its implications, 800 is just a number, another one-up in the ever-escalating struggle for horsepower bragging rights. But it's significant, and essentially doubles the threshold for the most serious muscle cars of the 1960s and '70s. Subtract it from a base **Dodge Challenger Hellcat**, and you'll get nearly a **Chevrolet Spark**'s worth of power in change.

Eight-hundred horsepower is what you'll get should you opt for Saleen Automotive's current latest and greatest package for **the Ford Mustang GT**, the Saleen S302 Black Label. We'd call it the pinnacle of Saleen's 35-year history of tuning Mustangs were we not nearly certain something even more bonkers is just around the corner.

And this car is bonkers. Since the obvious comparison is with **Dodge's 797-hp Challenger Hellcat Redeye** (we've yet to drive **Ford's 760-hp Shelby GT500**), we'll compare away. Both cars are equally willing to stun you, but they do it in very different ways.



The Hellcat is all torque, all the time, to the point that it's nearly impossible to open the throttle wide on a public road. Floor it from a standstill and you turn the tires to butter; floor it on the move and in two seconds you're at automatic license-suspension speeds. On paper, the Saleen's 687 lb-ft splits the difference between base (656) and Redeye (707) Hellcats, but the Saleen doesn't unleash full boost unless you're high on revs and deep into the throttle.

This has the advantage of giving you better control over the power, but it also means the throttle response is ridiculously twitchy at high revs and low accelerator positions, to the point that a bumpy road can shake your foot enough to set the car porpoising rather alarmingly. Smooth progress requires shifting up early, and that puts you a gearchange away from showing off the Black Label's potential. (We suspect the throttle response is tuned to provide some protection for the Ford Coyote engine.)

But when the conditions are just right to unleash all 800 horses, the sensation can only be described with a string of expletives upon which common decency would frown. We've driven plenty of fast and loud cars, but few deliver the noise and fury of the S302 Black Label at full tilt. It's as if all the evil in the universe has been released on an unsuspecting society—but it's okay, because you're in charge.

Happier yet is the fact that you don't need to go WOT to revel in the Black Label's absurdity. Just starting the engine produces one of the best exhaust notes ever to reverberate against the walls of our El Segundo headquarters. Noisy cars, enjoyable as they are in short bursts, can wear on the nerves after a while, but we never tired of the S302's almighty rumble.

There's more to the Black Label than the powertrain. Saleen also beefs up the suspension with Racecraft springs, dampers, struts, and anti-roll bars, and a bastion of body panels massage airflow to increase downforce as well as brake and engine cooling.

We took the S302 Black Label to our favorite canyon road and cautiously ramped up our pace. It was early morning and the roads were still damp with morning dew, so we were extra cautious with the accelerator, but as we built up speed we were impressed with how well the S302 gripped the pavement, especially at the back. In other words, if you're going to drive an 800-hp car, this is the way to do it.



Now, lest you think the S302 Black Label is as tractable as a [Volkswagen Golf R](#), think again. You can't just jump in and drive fast; you need to take your time, commune with it, get used to its ways and let it get used to you. And before you manipulate any of the controls—especially in anger—you need to think carefully about what will happen next.

It's worth noting that at the same time we drove the Black Label car, we also had an S302 White Label, which combines many (but not all) of the Black Label's suspension, airflow, and interior upgrades with a non-supercharged 475-hp engine. A few people in the office have opined that the White Label is the better car to drive because you can floor the throttle with reckless abandon and not worry about disastrous consequences—in other words, it's a better way to enjoy the rest of Saleen's upgrades.

Still, the S302 Black Label reminded us of the vagaries that come with driving a tuner car. We had a couple of glitches with power delivery at full throttle. The speedometer does the opposite of many performance cars and reads a few mph low, as if the car weren't enough of a ticket magnet already. And while we can't be sure, it seemed like the gravelly noises from the supercharger became louder as our time with the car marched on. Based on experience, it's likely that the factory supercharged Shelby GT500, like the Hellcat, will be a better integrated and more holistic product **for less money**. That said, the GT500 will only come with a dual-clutch automatic, whereas the Black Label gets a six-speed manual.

[Read More](#)

[The 2020 GT500 Will Make 760 HP!](#)

[Next Mustang/Camaro/Challenger: What We Know](#)

[Massive Barn-Find Muscle-Car Collection](#)

And then there's the simple fact that 800 horses are gonna eat a lot of hay. Drive it like a sane person and the supercharged S302's fuel economy isn't too terrible, but once you tap into the boost, the fuel flow is akin to Niagara Falls. We're talking single-digit gas mileage, which means you must keep a careful eye on the fuel gauge when driving fast.

Still, the S302 Black Label is a hell of a machine, delivering a mind-bending horsepower number with all the attendant Wagnerian drama one could hope for. Some people will dismiss it as ridiculous overkill—but those people aren't driving around in 800-hp cars.





[Show more](#)

2019 Saleen S302 Black Label Specifications

ON SALE	Now
PRICE	\$78,495 (base)
ENGINE	5.0L supercharged DOHC 32-valve V-8; 800 hp @ 6,000 rpm, 687 lb-ft @ 5,200 rpm
TRANSMISSION	6-speed manual
LAYOUT	2-door, 4-passenger, front-engine, RWD coupe
EPA MILEAGE	N/A
L x W x H	188.5 x 75.9 x 54.2 in
WHEELBASE	107.1 in
WEIGHT	3,765 lb
0-60 MPH	3.7 sec
TOP SPEED	N/A



Aaron Gold [Articles from this author.](#)