

MATT'S TOP THREE

By Matt Conway

As a 23-year-old college graduate who specialized in mathematics and statistics, my life has been everything short of glamorous. I live with my two roommates in a tiny Boston apartment. I work two jobs. And every day I watch as my youth escapes me and vanishes into a sea of monotonous despair. Simply put, I feel like I've been losing a grip on my life. When I was younger I had dreams of being a paleontologist, an engineer, or even a rock star, something that would fulfill my pipe dreams of having a somewhat satisfying and most definitely interesting life. But they were exactly that, dreams. Things that would never be attainable if I never did anything about it. When I was growing up, my dad always did his best to pass on any wisdom he could, with one of those lessons being "Dreams don't become goals unless you write them down. If you ever want to stop dreaming, write it down and make it a goal. You need to be able to see it." So, for once, I took my dad's advice and wrote down three life goals. Now, I've never been a high maintenance person. Here are my top three:

1. Buy a large property and build a home on it (preferably with a scenic view)
2. Three dogs (a Bernese mountain dog, a St. Bernard, and a Rottweiler)
3. Find a classic car to work on/restore.



Melissa, the 1972 Ford Mustang's seller, listed the vehicle on Facebook Marketplace.



Given my current financial situation, purchasing any land was an absolutely no go, the down payment alone would bankrupt me. As for the dogs, my landlord is adamantly against pets. Therefore, there was only one of my goals that was potentially feasible. Finding and restoring a classic car.

Everything started on an October Monday night. I was sick as a dog lying in bed scrolling through Facebook Marketplace just looking at whatever the newest available listings were. And, I found *it*. Sitting in a backyard in Buxton, Maine, a 1972 Ford Mustang Hardtop, for \$500. Normally I would never even think to message anyone on the app. Something came over me and I decided to just ask about the car. Within a couple minutes I got a response and before I knew it, the next day I was on the road to check out the car. It was extremely spur of the moment but I figured, "What the heck, I'm probably not gonna buy it, but I'll be able to see a cool car, get a nice story, and visit Maine for the first time." Little did I know that this drive was going to be the one that would alter the course of my life as I knew it.

When I arrived at the house, Melissa, the woman who had posted the listing and who I had been speaking to over Facebook, met me at the front door. She took me to the backyard and showed me the Mustang. Melissa explained the story behind the car. She was married back in 1997 on Halloween and the Mustang was actually her first wedding anniversary present in 1998. The day that I had visited was only a few days before Halloween. Was it destiny?

I had lucked out when I arrived because Melissa had informed me that there were four other people coming to see the car between that day and the next. If I had the \$500 right there then it was mine. At that moment I had a choice, either walk away and potentially let someone scrap the car or use it for parts and know that a piece of someone's life was going to rot away or be destroyed in a scrapyard. Or, I could take some control of my life and actually do something that I wanted to do. At that moment, for the first time in a long time, I chose myself. I was now the brand-new owner of a 1972 Ford Mustang. No, it wasn't a Mach 1 or a Fastback. But I didn't care. What mattered to me was that I was going to embark on a journey that I had no clue could be as explosive as it was.

I bought the car the last Monday in October 2025, so I worked a full week and went back up on Saturday morning to see if I could get the car ready to come down to Boston. Now obviously, the car wouldn't have cost \$500 if there wasn't an issue or two that came alongside it. The first issue being that all the drum brakes had fully rusted through, meaning this car was no better than a rock unless we could free them up. It took an afternoon of air hammering, pounding it with a mallet, and praying; sure enough it got mobile. Which meant for the first time in almost 30 years, this Mustang was going for a ride. Not a long one by any means, just being towed from the backyard to the driveway, but a drive nonetheless.

Matt Conway sits in his new acquisition. Matt's car did not come with keys. But, he found a set which he was able to clean up.





Matt's 1972 Mustang restoration project is ready to head home to Boston.

The next weekend I found myself back in Maine with only one goal: getting the Mustang down to Boston. This meant a very quick trip to the local U-Haul to get a full bed to begin the trek southbound, and a lot of crossed fingers. At this point in time the most I understood about cars were brakes, due to destroying the Mustang's the weekend before. So, upon attempting to load up the car, I very quickly found out what my biggest enemy for the project was going to be, the frame rails. Not a single frame was intact because of how far etched into the dirt the car had gotten in the backyard. With them all being chewed through any large movements the car was making felt like a 50/50 chance of it holding together or ripping apart. Luckily, some eyeballing and four people pushing was enough to load the Mustang and not have it fall apart.

Once I began the drive back to Boston, the feeling of looking at the Mustang in the rearview mirror was almost indescribable. In the span of two weeks, I had fully altered the course of my life and I had no clue.



The 1972 Mustang is home!

After recruiting some friends of mine to help with the unloading process, the Mustang was officially sitting in its

temporary home in my apartment's back lot. And while not an ideal space, it was just enough for me to get started.



If you've made it this far you're probably wondering about the mention of the "Top Three" In this case, it happens to be the moniker I chose for the social media page I started, as a way to document the process and one day look back on all the progress I made. For a page called "Matt's Top 3," I never expected much from the process, but the first video somehow managed to attract an instant following. In the time between then and now, the Mustang has been cleaned, I've made some great friends and even managed to locate a parts car of the same make and year.

As lucky as I may have gotten over the past couple months, if this process has taught me anything it's that things will seldom go to plan. The snow from this past winter also brought progress to a grinding halt when I realized that getting the parts car from the bottom of Rhode Island to the top of Massachusetts was going to be essentially impossible. A lot of the restoration is hinging on moving the parts car, for obvious reasons.

Although the process has slowed and has been definitely disheartening at times, I'm just grateful I'm able to do something I didn't even know I was going to love. A vast majority of people my age couldn't care less about bringing these steel beasts back to life, which is why I think it's that much cooler. As time goes by and cars become more technical than mechanical, being able to look back one day and say I was able to rebuild one of the last true eras of cars is a feeling I simply cannot pass up.

In the meantime, keep up with me at "Matt's Top 3" on YouTube. If there are any guarantees in life, me restoring the Mustang is at the top of the list.

(Photos by Matt Conway)



Clockwise from top right: Matt has a lot of work to do! Safety first. Matt wears a respirator as he begins to clean out the interior. Matt lucked out with locating a donor car.