

WE GET SOME AIR IN A MUSTANG CONVERTIBLE

IT takes just a few rays of sunshine to make us all wish we had a convertible.

I've just gone topless for a week and suddenly the world became a more enjoyable place to drive in.

In a country where the only thing you can guarantee is rain, our love affair with soft-tops remains one of motoring's more irrational trends.

But having the roof down while cruising across the British countryside on a sunny day remains one of driving's great pleasures.

It's pure escapism – and you get a suntan thrown in.

I smiled as I saw families driving in people carriers and saloons with the windows down, sweltering in an early burst of English summer.

Driving a convertible gives you a sense of freedom while everyone else seems like a prisoner, captured inside their tin cans.

Exclusive

And a new generation of powered hoods has removed the one niggle of soft-top motoring, getting soaked when the weather changes as you race to get the hood up.

There is also more choice than ever before, with a new breed of affordable coupé-cabriolets tempting even more Brits to convert.

Soft-top sales soared again last year, up by more than 20,000 to 116,828. That made the UK the highest market in Europe after Germany.

But if you want a convertible to really stand out from the crowd, get behind the wheel of a Ford Mustang. You will be driving something more exclusive than a Ferrari in the UK and that guarantees just as much attention.

The Mustang is an American icon, it's like the MG is to England – the affordable sports car (with a much more rosy future, sadly).

It may not be the fastest or most stylish convertible but it has charac-

ter by the bucketload. The Mustang is a soft top with attitude. Its styling is unashamedly retro – a throw-back to America's big and brassy era of muscle cars for macho drivers who want to be noticed.

Even if you are unsure about the styling, you will love the sound of the 4.6-litre V8 engine as it rumbles and roars like a lion on the prowl.

An American V8 thumping out 300bhp is a sound to savour, so good in fact that I never actually found out if the music system was decent or not.

Yet, for such a big beast, the Mustang handles surprisingly nimbly and feels rock-solid on the open road.

The interior is a lot like the exterior – not very subtle and very much in-your-face, with plenty of chrome and mock aluminium on the dash and around the instruments.

And red leather seats, colour co-ordinated with the doors, make the Mustang a blinging place to sit.

It is also comfortable in the front – but space is tight for rear-seat passengers, so small children are best-suited to sitting there.

The electric hood is a lazy affair and looks a bit cheap and nasty compared to Europe's finest, but the Mustang really is best with the hood down.

Considering what you get, the Mustang is a bit of a bargain at £33,500 for a car that will get you all that attention and has so much power on tap.

UK-based American Car Imports have left-hand drive Mustang convertibles available now. Log on to www.american-carimports.com to find out more.

● **FANCY** a soft top but not importing? Don't worry, below we pick out some of our other favourite soft-top buys and, right, we look at the best deals for used convertibles we found in Auto Trader.

KEN GIBSON

