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FORD SHELBY GT500KR LANDS STARRING ROLE ON KNIGHT RIDER

DEARBORN, Mich., December 17, 2007 – When the 2008 Ford Shelby GT500KR launches this spring don't be surprised if there's some confusion over what the letters "KR" stand for.

While the super car has been known to racing fans as "King of the Road" since 1968, it's about to star in a remake of the hit TV series *Knight Rider* making mix-ups inevitable.

"It's purely a coincidence and a nice one at that," said Al Uzielli a senior advisor, to Ford Global Brand Entertainment the Ford office in Beverly Hills which works to place Ford branded vehicles in movies, TV and other media. "Auto enthusiasts will know what KR stands for. But most viewers will probably think it means Knight Rider; at least at first."

The popular American television series which ran from 1982 to 1986 starred David Hasselhoff as Michael Knight, a kind of modern day "knight". His partner was an advanced Pontiac Trans Am with artificial intelligence. Not only could it talk, it could morph into an attack vehicle that accelerated to 300 mph, used a Turbo Boost to jump over obstacles and even drive itself.

In the new version, Hasselhoff returns, but the lead character is now Justin Bruening who plays Knight's long-lost son Michael Tracer. Replacing the Pontiac is the KR which in real-life is about to launch a 40th anniversary limited edition with an engine output estimated at 540 horsepower.

But *Knight Rider* is more than just the product integration of a Ford vehicle into a plot line; it's also a media sponsorship with commercials and promotions for Ford products interjected throughout the two hour program. If the ratings are good, NBC plans to turn the show into a weekly series this fall.

Knight Rider will provide Ford with the opportunity to showcase its new SYNC voice activated information and entertainment technology into the storyline in vehicles like the Focus and Edge. The arrangement allows NBC and Ford to co-promote both the movie and the cars at special events, in theaters, in print and on the internet.

"This is a completely car-centric show and my understanding is that NBC was heavily pursued by both GM and Chrysler," Uzielli said. "We landed it because not only did we have the perfect car, we had the right logistics. Our advertising agency Teamdetroit had strong contacts on the business side



| PRESS INFORMATION

and our team at Ford Global Brand Entertainment had a close relationship with the creative side including the new head of NBC Entertainment Ben Silverman."

For many *Knight Rider* fans the casting of the car known as KITT (Knight Industries Three Thousand) is as important as the lead character.

In the movie version, KITT's supercomputer is capable of hacking almost any system and its body – thanks to its creator's work and nanotechnology – is capable of actually shifting shape and color. Plus, its artificial intelligence makes it the ideal good cop partner: logical, precise and possessing infinite knowledge. It is the ultimate car – and someone will be willing to do anything to obtain it.

For designers, the first challenge of creating a screen version of the "King of the Road" 2008 Shelby GT500KR, was that the car isn't even on the road yet. The solution was to go to Galpin Auto Sports (GAS) who is well-known for creating one-of-a-kind vehicles in the California market.

GAS had one week to create the new KITT, and they pulled out all the stops. Six people worked full time to create the Mustang that would be sent over to Picture Car Warehouse as the father of all the KITT derivatives and stunt cars.

Not only does KITT make its appearance as a GT500KR but *Knight Rider* fans get to see KITT in three modes – *HERO*, *ATTACK* and camouflage versions.

The *HERO* is a standard 540-horsepower Shelby GT500KR and the *ATTACK* is a further modified high-speed version.

The GT500KR is built up from a Mustang GT with an automatic transmission to facilitate the driving scenes, stunts, and camera work necessary to produce the great action scenes in the movie. Stunt versions were also built for doing all of the aggressive driving maneuvers.

The *ATTACK* version was designed by Harold Belker who is also responsible for the vehicles in movies like *Batman & Robin*, *Armageddon*, *Deep Blue Sea*, *Inspector Gadget*, *Battlefield Earth*, *Spider-Man*, *Minority Report*, *XXX*, *The Cat in the Hat* and *Superman*.

Working with Belker was Ted Moser of Picture Car Warehouse and 25 automotive specialists who created six variations of the GT500KR. The *ATTACK* car features a new rear bumper cover, two-



| PRESS INFORMATION

tiered spoiler, side scoops and custom rocker panels... not to mention a completely modified interior to accommodate creative needs, shooting and post production computer graphics.

"Ford wanted to keep KITT as close to the Mustang Shelby GT500KR as possible," Belker said. "Some may say the *ATTACK* version is a little over the top, but this isn't about reinventing design language, it's about being entertaining."

By the time *Knight Rider* debuts in February, a Mustang will have already had extensive media exposure in the movie *I Am Legend* which opens December 17. Starring Will Smith, the story gives major screen time to a Ford Shelby GT500. Between the two roles, the Mustang brand is about to get three months worth of the kind of Hollywood visibility not often seen by one product – or for that matter one star.

"I don't think we've ever seen anything like this," said Cindy Stacy, senior vice president and director of national broadcast for Teamdetroit. "The important thing is that while the Mustang has a starring role in both projects, other Ford vehicles are integrated throughout the films. In fact, in *Knight Rider* I think just about every Ford vehicle is accounted for."

While some may see the timing of the two projects as pure luck, Frank Zazza, considered a legend in the product integration industry for placing products like Reese's Pieces in the movie *ET* and Junior Mints in a well known episode of *Seinfeld*, says it's more.

"You can only call it luck if you realize that being lucky is being prepared when the opportunity comes," he said. "The people at Ford were prepared and they knew how to act quickly. They have been excellent at finding quality projects and putting the right vehicles into the right parts."

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Photographs are available on www.fordpress.be

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