

# Helpful Tool: Master Parts Catalog

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I recently started one of my days by going through a 16-page list of NOS Ford parts that someone sent me with items they wanted to sell. A good day. The list was nicely detailed with Ford part numbers, but it took some time to go through it to pick all the items I wanted to buy to put on my shelves for future restorations. Which made me think of the Ford part numbering system, a language that is completely unique to Ford and to those people who are navigating through a restoration or trying to purchase parts. To understand its use and background helps with this important tool.

The Ford Master Parts Catalog (also known as the MPC) is considered by many as the bible when it comes to looking up Ford parts. But it still surprises me how many people don't know about it, or understand it, or use it. So what is it?

Typically, the MPC is a massive piece of documentation—about 6,000 pages depending on the edition. These are the books that were used at the parts counter at every

Ford-Lincoln-Mercury dealership with the purpose of helping the dealer find and purchase parts for customer vehicles. The MPC came in two flavors—one set for trucks and the other for cars. For our purposes, we would look at the one for cars. Until about 1948, a parts catalog was compiled every year for each individual car or truck. In 1949, Ford started issuing a book that covered all the different models, calling it the Master Parts Catalog. They covered a range of years; for example, 1949-64, 1965-72, 1973-79, 1980-89, etc. They were never written or intended for general public use, but they can be found for sale today on the Internet or at swap meets.

The MPC is actually split into two main sections. One is the part numbers and the other is the illustrations. So for almost all of the parts sections, there is a corresponding section with illustrations, which are particularly useful when you don't know the exact part number or you're looking for a part that is mounted adjacent to another piece on a car.

The dealer would always purchase from Ford the latest MPC for their parts department (they were not free for the dealer) so they could help the shop and customer locate the latest and correct parts. Typically, the MPC was released twice a year so updated information was available to everyone. If there were a lot of changes, they would release a new edition more often. As an example, when looking for a MPC, you can find one printed in June 1970 and then another in December 1970. These would cover the most recent parts and changes. The interesting thing for collectors today is that a typical Ford

dealer would throw away the older edition and replace it with the new one. Why would anyone want to keep this old information and all that extra paperwork? But if you are lucky, you will find one today that was saved.

As a final run of the printed edition of the 1965-72 MPC, there was one that was released in 1975. This is by far the most common one that you will find today for first generation Mustangs. But it also contains a lot of parts that were replaced or obsolete, so it misses information you can find in a 1970 printed edition. And, as hard as it is for people to understand, there are actually mistakes in the MPC.

Starting about late 1967 and early 1968, Ford released the MPC on the latest and greatest technology of the time—microfiche. These small index cards were used on a special microfiche reader that took the condensed miniature view of the pages and enlarged them on a screen for the reader. The microfiche system was much easier to ship and store so many dealers started using it. At the time, the microfiche reader cost about \$1,000 (quite expensive for the day), but it saved on storage, counter space, and—for some people—time looking up parts. You can still find these today as they came in the same editions as the printed versions.

The general concept of the MPC is still in use today at all dealerships, although it is all done through a computer now which can instantly look up inventory and availability. The technology has changed but the system is still in place.

So, going back to my list of NOS parts, I just need to figure out the difference between a D0ZZ-16856-A and a D0DZ-16856-A. My MPC should answer that real quick. Happy hunting out there.

