

1966 Ford Mustang SCCA Group 2 Racer #12

Shelby Legend ~ Trans-Am Winner



To Sam
a fun weekend
John P. Lamb



Paul Shelby

1966 FORD MUSTANG SCCA GROUP 2 RACER #12

SHELBY LEGEND ~ TRANS-AM WINNER

BY STEPHEN COX

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You Can't Buy One of Those

On a hot summer afternoon in late August 1966, the telephone on John McComb's desk rang.

On the other end was automotive design engineer Chuck Cantwell of Carroll Shelby's legendary racing shop, calling with the surprising news that Shelby had a Mustang Group 2 racecar for sale.

McComb was delighted since his prior inquiries at Shelby had been met only by rejection. He had raced MGB sports cars for years but his first taste of Ford V-8 power came while driving Peter Talbert's notchback Group 2 Mustang earlier that summer in the Trans-Am event at St. Louis. McComb and Talbert were leading the race until an exhaust pipe came loose, forcing them to settle for third place.

But McComb was already hooked. The car was more powerful than anything he'd ever driven. He wanted one of those Mustangs.

In the summer of '66 McComb had called Shelby's racing shop to purchase his own Group 2 Mustang, only to be told by Cantwell that none were available. Only 16 would be built that year, and all were spoken for until an odd and tragic coincidence occurred.

Ford race driver Ken Miles, for whom one of the coveted Group 2 Mustangs had already been reserved, was killed in a practice crash at Riverside International Raceway on Aug. 17, 1966.

A few days later, McComb became the new owner of a Shelby-built Group 2 Mustang. It was designated chassis #12 by Shelby American. Although it would compete with various race numbers painted on its door over the years, the car would be remembered as chassis #12 of only 16 Group 2 notchbacks built in 1966, making it among the rarest Shelby Mustangs in existence.

"I'd Never Been in Anything Like This Mustang Before"

The previous winter, officials at the Sports Car Club of America had announced the formation of two new national championships for sedans. The first was to be an amateur series comprised of more than 50 events culminating in the American Road Race of Champions invitational. The second was the Trans-American Sedan Championship, later known simply as "Trans-Am."

Ford Motor Company, in the midst of its famed Total Performance Program designed to dominate every aspect of auto racing, took an immediate interest in the new series. Its Shelby Mustang GT350 was the perfect choice for competition. It was a proven, off-the-shelf racecar ready for action.

Unfortunately, it was a rear seat delete car that had already been homologated for B Production class racing. The Trans-Am series would require four seats, original glass and a steel hood. The GT350 wasn't eligible.

Ford took its problem to Carroll Shelby, whose team chose to simply re-apply most of the GT350 fastback's modifications to another model of Mustang rather than re-invent the proverbial wheel. The Mustang GT notchback was selected as the base car for the new Group 2 racer and Chuck Cantwell's team went to work.

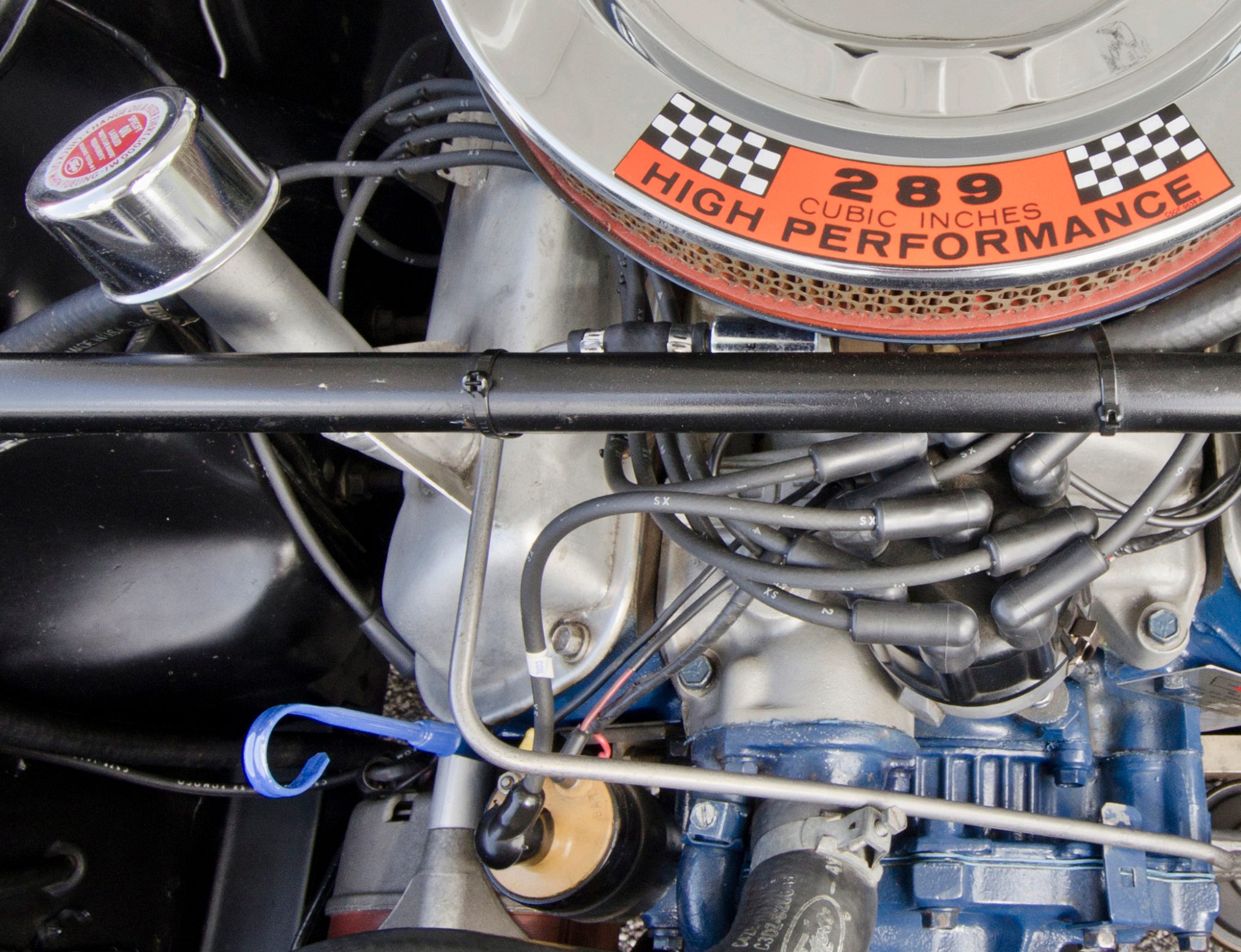
All 16 of the cars that would eventually become 1966 Group 2 notchbacks were delivered from the factory in a Wimbledon White paint scheme, with GT fog lamps and black interiors. They were equipped with 289-cubic-inch engines producing 271 horsepower, 3.89 rear end ratios and four-speed manual transmissions. And most importantly, all carried a Ford-designated vehicle identification number. Ford intended to win the Trans-Am manufacturer's title and













did not want its Mustangs mistaken as aftermarket products from Shelby American.

Once in Shelby's hands, the Group 2 notchbacks were race-prepared in virtually the same manner as the GT350R, making them mechanical mirror images. The first Group 2 car was tested at Willow Springs International Raceway and found to be nearly as quick as the GT350R despite the fact that the notchback configuration carried a significant aerodynamic penalty compared to the more slippery fastbacks.

On Monday, Aug. 29, 1966, John McComb took delivery of his new Mustang in Wichita, Kan. He raced it the following Saturday at Continental Divide Raceway in Castle Rock, Colo.

The car was fast. Too fast, it seemed, for its new owner. McComb found himself engaged in a bitter struggle with the Dodge Dart of Ron Grable – the eventual national champion – as well as with his own racecar.

The Group 2 Mustang produced far more horsepower than anything McComb had ever driven. He struggled badly in Turn 4, the slowest corner on the circuit, and failed to garner any real speed along the backstretch. He could catch Grable, but he couldn't find first gear quickly enough to pass him.

"It wasn't the car's fault, it was the driver," McComb recalled. "It was so much car for me that making the shift for the turn coming onto the straightaway, getting it down into first gear, was more than I could do."

With only two laps remaining in the event, McComb rolled the dice. He revved the engine hard in the center of Turn 4, forced the shifter down into first gear and popped the clutch at nearly 6,000 rpm's.



JOHN McCOMB
BRAD BROOKER

Mechanic
TERRY DOTY

It worked. He was finally able to tap the incredible torque of the 289 engine that produced some 370 horsepower on the dyno, thanks to additional tuning at Shelby's shop. In spite of the high revs and the less-than-graceful downshift, the engine held together.

McComb's little Mustang rocketed out of the turn like a meteoroid and sailed past Grable's Dart. He did the same thing again on the final lap and won the race by 20 car lengths.

It was an upset victory in every sense of the term, and McComb quickly sensed that bigger things were within his grasp.

Their Finest Six Hours

The next weekend John McComb was racing again. The Trans-Am Series Six-Hour Pan-American Endurance Race was to be held at Green Valley Raceway in Texas. The sanctioning body mandated a second driver for each team due to the length of the event. McComb chose veteran Brad Brooker, a successful club racer who had logged plenty of miles in the Group 2 notchback's nearly identical twin, the Shelby GT350.

Run entirely in a downpour late on Saturday evening, Sept. 10, 1966, the Pan-American race would become an epic battle that still stands as the #12 Group 2 Mustang's greatest triumph.

Built in 1959 and sold for housing development in 1983, Green Valley Raceway was a glorious tribute to the golden age of American road racing. The main straightaway, which doubled as a drag strip, offered plenty of racing room while the backstretch, which doubled as the return road for dragsters, was far too narrow. The two straights were barely 20 yards apart and – unbelievably – there was no





John McComb



guardrail separating the two.

A massive hump on the main straightaway would occasionally send the faster cars airborne. So while cars on the front stretch were lifting all four wheels off the ground, cars along the backstretch would hit blistering speeds of more than 100 miles per hour in the opposite direction just a few feet away.

The attitude of the race fans was equally liberal. Old photos still exist showing a mother and her children sitting on a picnic blanket only yards from the Green Valley track surface with no fence, rail or safety barrier to protect them from the race cars.

On the other side of the course, three inventive race fans set up shop along the fastest part of the main stretch. They parked their station wagon just yards from the track surface, erected a 6-foot construction scaffold, leaned a ladder against it and watched the weekend's activities from atop their new perch.

This was American road racing at its peak and any airfield, drag strip or country road could be turned into an instant racetrack. Such innocent enjoyment would be outlawed in later years, but in the autumn of 1966, no one worried over such things. People just showed up and watched the race as they pleased, and the sport blossomed.

McComb arrived at Green Valley Raceway to find the course lined with trees that created a haven for spectators but a constant menace for drivers. During a practice session the day before the Pan-American race, Russ Simon's Alfa Romeo went off course and wrapped itself neatly around one of them. What remained of the Alfa was slowly towed down the backstretch under a red flag, serving notice to other drivers that this track was raw and unforgiving.



McComb also found that he and other Mustang privateer teams had been unpleasantly targeted by their own manufacturer. Fearing that a private team might take the Trans-Am title, Ford directed Shelby American to prepare its latest version of the notchback Group 2 Mustang and enter it in the race to ensure that a factory-backed team clinched the title. The Ford-backed Shelby car was to be driven by Don Pike and John Timanus.

The rain was still falling when the race began on Saturday afternoon at 4 p.m. There wasn't a dry spot on the entire circuit, and the first accident occurred early in the show. Gary Dundas' Mustang got caught up in the Turn 1 spin of Ruben Novoa's Mustang, taking two Fords out of the race at once. Fortunately, the McComb/Brooker Mustang had gotten a good start and was running in third, well ahead of the wreck.

The field strung out even further after a lapped car suffered a punctured fuel tank and dumped a full load of gasoline on the back side of the course. The fuel mixed with rainwater and created a disaster area, sending six more cars off course.

By 7 p.m. the rain had become a light drizzle and cars were scurrying around the track in near darkness by the dim, yellow light of their headlamps. The track remained wet, and most competitors were still using their wipers to clear the road spray from their windshields. The crowd had thinned. Those who remained were donning jackets to stay warm.

Attrition eventually began taking its toll even among the fastest cars. The Ford-backed Shelby Mustang of Pike and Timanus was black-flagged while leading after its brake lights failed. The team lost several laps and fell out of contention, moving McComb and Brooker up to second.



JOHN McCOMB
BRAD BROOKER

McNamee
TERRY DOTY



Shortly afterward, the Plymouth Barracuda of Charlie Rainville and Bob Johnson made an unexpected pit stop to work on the throttle linkage and brake system, defaulting the lead to McComb, who had by this time distanced himself from the rest of the field.

McComb's #12 Group 2 Mustang ran solidly in the top three all day and went on to win the race by a six-lap margin over the second-place Alfa Romeo of Horst Kwech and Gus Andrey. It was a dominating win in a premier racing series against top-notch competition, including Ford's own factory-backed effort. It was considered another upset victory for McComb's Mustang, a win of sufficient importance to convince Sports Car Graphic to feature the #12 Group 2 car on the cover of their December 1966 issue.

Ford was impressed despite the fact that a privateer team had beaten its own entry. The win scored enough points to place the company in a dead heat with Plymouth for the Trans-Am manufacturer's title, which Ford would clinch a week later at Riverside, Calif.

By the end of 1966, McComb's Mustang figured prominently in American sedan racing. It earned an invitation to the 1966 American Road Race of Champions, an event reserved only for the nation's top racing teams.

But the car's legacy was already secure. The #12 Group 2 Mustang had scored surprising wins at Continental Divide and Green Valley in only its first two races. And more importantly, it had established its place in auto racing history by positioning Ford for its first Trans-Am championship.









#12 Group 2 Shelby Mustang Data Sheet

ORIGINAL DELIVERY:

Paint, Wimbledon White

Interior, Black

Engine, K-code 289 4V V8

Rear gear, 2.89 Detroit Locker

Wheels, 15x6 steel

Brakes, front disc, rear drum

Springs, heavy duty on front end

KNOWN MODIFICATIONS:

A-arms lowered 1 inch

1-inch front sway bar

GT 250 idler arms and Pitman arm

Traction bars, rear

Engine, GT 350 competition engine, Cobra aluminum intake,
Holley 715 cfm carburetor, Cobra oil pan, ported and polished heads,
balanced and blueprinted, R-model valve covers, "Tri-Y" headers,
Galaxie radiator and oil cooler

Interior, 4-point roll bar, CS gauges, 16-inch steering wheel,
competition safety harness

Stewart-Warner electric fuel pump

R-model 32-gallon fuel tank

Wheels, 15x7 American Racing magnesium 5-spoke
(requiring fender modifications)

"I Had Found a Needle in a Haystack"

John McComb ordered a new car for 1967. The choice was easy. Given his success in the 1966 Group 2 Mustang, he ordered a new notchback for 1967 to pick up where he left off with the Shelby program.

The 1967 Mustang was the model's first major redesign and the car gained both size and weight. McComb didn't care for either.

"Even though the '67 car had a wider track, it was a heavier car, so I don't really think the wider track helped," McComb said. "The '66 car was just a very reliable, quick car. I always thought the '66 car was better than the '67 anyway."

While awaiting delivery of the new car, McComb pulled his old mount out of the garage to start the new season. The 1966 car still ran strong, competing at the Daytona 300 Trans-Am race on Feb. 3, 1967 and in the 24 Hours of Daytona the following day.

In March, McComb returned to familiar grounds and took second in the amateur A/Sedan race at Green Valley, and again participated in the Trans-Am event the following day. The car's final race under McComb's ownership was the Trans-Am race at Mid-Ohio Sports Car Course on June 11th.

His new racecar became available just days later, and McComb sold the 1966 #12 Group 2 Mustang to Keith Thomas, a Kansas native who had shown considerable ability winning club races throughout the region.

Thomas campaigned the car against stiffening competition in the A/Sedan Midwest Division, ironically finishing second in the championship hunt only to John McComb's new 1967 car.

This gave the #12 Group 2 Mustang a unique place in road racing

history. Not only did it claim a share of John McComb's A/Sedan championship by scoring points for McComb early in the 1967 title chase, but it also clinched second place in the same series in the hands of Keith Thomas.

By virtue of Thomas' runner-up standing in the series, the car earned a second invitation in the American Road Race of Champions at Daytona International Speedway where it scored yet another top five finish.

Keith Thomas continued driving the #12 Group 2 Mustang in 1968 and 1969, finishing third in the series both years.

Although the car was now well past its prime, Thomas set a new A/Sedan track record while winning at Wichita's Lake Afton Raceway. He continued to rack up wins at places like Texas International Speedway, Oklahoma's War Bonnet Park and the SCCA Nationals at Salina, Kan., throughout the late '60s.

Now sporting a new livery, the car ran a limited schedule from 1971-73, after which it was retired from auto racing. The car traded hands later that year and again in 1978, each time distancing itself a bit more from its proud past while being repeatedly repainted and renumbered.

Finally, in 1984, the car came into the possession of car collector Gary Spraggins. By this time its true identity had been lost and Spraggins was unsure of its provenance. He bought the car anyway.

Spraggins recalled that the Mustang had been repainted in "school-bus yellow" with black Le Mans stripes. There were no Shelby markings to be found anywhere on the car, but still, Spraggins suspected that the vehicle might be something special. He noticed



SAAC HEADQUARTERS

22 Olmstead Road
West Redding, CT 06896
(203) 438-7370

November 12, 1984

Dear Gary:

Looks like you've found one of the original Shelby 1966 Trans-Am cars. Your car was originally sold to Turner Ford in Wichita, Kansas. I think they may still be in business and you should call them and ask if there is anyone there was involved with their racing effort back in 1966. That should give you a start on researching the car's history. I am also enclosing an article we did in the club magazine that tells almost everything that we know about these cars. I said "almost" because the only thing we have not made public is their serial numbers. The reason for this is that there are still a number of cars that have not turned up yet and we don't want to give anyone any help in counterfeiting a car. While you can't hide the serial number of your car once it is finished (restored), I would suggest that you be wary of anyone (other than another Shelby sedan owner) who asks about it. We have every number on file and we only use them to verify cars that people think may be page cars built by Shelby. Until these cars are all accounted for, we won't give any actual numbers out.

I suggest you contact some of the other owners of these cars so that they can tell you about their cars and the research they have done. I'm sure they will be happy to hear from you.

Bill Hanlon
5063 Camino Alta Mira
Castro Valley, CA 94546

Don Henderson
Box 163
77 Maple Ave. South
Burlford, Ontario
Canada N0E 1A0

Stephen Pollock
11011 Waycroft Way
Rockville, MD 20852

Best of luck with the car.
Sincerely,

Pick Kopec
National Director

COBRA ■ SHELBY ■ TIGER ■ FORD G.T.



SHELBY AMERICAN INC.
6501 W. IMPERIAL HWY.
LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90009
Telephone: 213 674-1961

DATE SHIPPED August 24, 1966

CONSIGNEE:
CITY AND STATE

DELIVER TO
ADDRESS
CITY AND STATE

Turner Ford, Inc.
1226 East Douglas
Wichita, Kansas

SHIPPER: SHELBY AMERICAN, INC. ORIGIN: LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

SAI INVOICE NUMBER	DRIVER - 1	TRUCK NO.	TRAILER NO.
	DRIVER - 2		
	DRIVER - 3		

1014

LOAD POSITION	DESCRIPTION	SAI SERIAL NUMBER	ORIGIN PLANT	RAILCAR NO.
	Group II Mustang			

C.O.D. \$ 5,406.30

CHECK
NO.

RECEIVED IN GOOD ORDER, WITH INVOICES IN SEALED ENVELOPE, EXCEPT AS NOTED BELOW:

By signing hereon the consignee acknowledges that the automobile described hereon appears to satisfy the requirements of his order, and that no damage other than that described below is apparent.

DATE _____ TIME _____
CONSIGNEE _____
REC'D. BY _____

PLEASE NOTE DAMAGE OR SHORTAGE HERE AND ON REVERSE SIDE. CLAIMS FOR SHORTAGE OR DAMAGE WILL NOT BE HONORED UNLESS NOTED AT TIME OF DELIVERY.

2 ACCOUNTING COPY

910
DELIVERY RECEIPT NUMBER
FORM 51

JOHN McCOMB
BRAD BROOKER

Mechanic
TERRY DOTY



3



3 AS

GOODYEAR

Carroll Shelby

several items that were unique to Shelby GT350R's, including the Cobra intake manifold, the Holley 715 carburetor, and the A-arms that had been relocated so as to lower the car by one inch. Mechanically, everything about the car screamed "Shelby" although no one really knew for sure.

The moment of truth came when Spraggins took the car home for a closer inspection. "When I raised the trunk lid up, of course, the inside of the trunk area was black, but you could see the Le Mans stripes overspray down in there," Spraggins remembered.

"Oh, man, I knew what those colors represented. I mean, those were Shelby cars. And I got some paint remover and lightly put it over the black Le Mans stripe on the trunk and wiped it off, and there was the prettiest blue Le Mans stripe there. It's like, oh, my gosh!"

Spraggins immediately wrote to the Shelby American Automobile Club in Connecticut, describing the car and asking if the VIN could be verified as a Shelby product. The response came on November 12th.

"Looks like you've found one of the original Shelby 1966 Trans-Am cars," the letter began. "Your car was originally sold to Turner Ford in Wichita, Kan. I think they may still be in business. . ."

The letter was signed by SAAC national director Rick Kopec. And by Carroll Shelby.

Spraggins could barely contain his enthusiasm and quickly set to work restoring the car to its original 1966 livery and condition, not realizing that an aging John McComb had also entertained the idea of finding his old racing mount. He just didn't know where to look.

"I was very excited at that time that I had found a needle in a haystack," Spraggins said. "Nobody knew anything about these cars, so in order to track down the original driver – you know, John McComb – I just started calling information in the Wichita area."



Reunion

On a hot summer afternoon in late July 1985, the telephone on John McComb's desk rang again. On the other end was car collector Gary Spraggins calling with the surprising news that McComb's famous #12 Group 2 Mustang had been found.

When McComb saw photos of the newly restored Mustang, he said, "My immediate reaction was, 'That's my car!' What a super job you have done on it."

When asked to critique the restoration and help them convert the car to its precise 1966 condition, McComb confessed to a pair of secrets that he'd kept for nearly 30 years.

"We cheated in two places on the bodywork. One was on the lower front valance where the license plate goes. We took those two little tabs off and opened it up a little. We also opened up the front fenders just a little. We rolled the inner lip around a welding rod to give it more strength for nerfing."

"We never got caught on either one."

Eventually, even Carroll Shelby was reunited with the newly restored #12 Group 2 Mustang at a car show in the mid-'90s. He recognized it instantly. "This was the last year I was really interested in racing," he lamented to Mustang Monthly.

"We had won Le Mans in '66 and then the Trans-Am series came along. A lot of our good guys had moved on to other things because we had been winning for so many years."

When it came to North American road racing, the Group 2 Mustangs were Shelby's last stand. Largely forgotten by car collectors

worldwide, these amazing racecars won the first Trans-Am title for Ford and were among the most dominant sports cars of their era. They left an indelible imprint on the American road racing scene of the 1960s.

Then they simply disappeared.

Standing at the car's freshly repainted rear fender, Shelby crossed his arms, took one last glance at the #12 Group 2 Mustang and gave a long sigh.

"After '66, we were concentrating on building volume. Unfortunately, the racing programs didn't have much priority after this."



Known Events in which the #12 Group 2 Shelby Mustang Participated

This record is based on the Shelby American World Registry, Bill Hanlon's "Shelby American History No. 50," SCCA National Events Records 1968-1978, SCCA Regional Records 1965-1969 courtesy of OldRacingCars.com, Trans-Am Series Records 1966-1970, contemporary newspaper records, as well as the recollections of former car owner Gary Spraggins and driver John McComb.

Date	Event type	Venue	City/State	Finish
9/3/66	SCCA National	Continental Divide Raceway	Castle Rock, CO	1st
9/10/66	Trans-Am	Green Valley Raceway	North Richland Hills, TX	1st
9/18/66	Trans-Am	Riverside International Raceway	Riverside, CA	4th
2/3/67	Trans-Am	Daytona International Speedway	Daytona, FL	DNF
2/4/67	24 Hours of Daytona	Daytona International Speedway	Daytona, FL	DNF
4/2/67 (also listed as March 1967)	SCCA Regional	Green Valley Raceway	North Richland Hills, TX	2nd
4/16/67	Trans-Am	Green Valley Raceway	North Richland Hills, TX	17th
6/11/67	Trans-Am	Mid Ohio Sports Car Course	Lexington, OH	11th
7/22/67 (also listed as June 1967)	SCCA National	Independence Municipal Airport	Independence, KS	2nd
8/19/67	SCCA National	Lake Afton Park	Goddard, KS	2nd
10/1/67 (also listed as September 1967)	SCCA National	Continental Divide Raceway	Castle Rock, CO	DNF
9/16/67 (also listed as October 1967)	SCCA National	Mid-America Raceways	Wentzville, MO	2nd
10/7/67	SCCA National	War Bonnet Raceway Park	Mannford, OK	2nd
11/67	AARC	Daytona International Speedway	Daytona, FL	4th
7/28/68	SCCA National	Garnett City Park	Lake Garnett, KS	2nd
8/16/68	SCCA National	Lake Afton Park	Goddard, KS	1st
5/4/69	SCCA National	Shelby County International Raceway	Lakeland, TN	1st
1969	SCCA National	Salina, KS	Venue unknown	1st
7/6/69	SCCA National	Lake Ponca Park	Ponca City, OK	2nd
7/27/69	SCCA National	Garnett City Park	Lake Garnett, KS	2nd
9/21/69	SCCA National	Mid-America Raceways	Wentzville, MO	2nd
10/12/69	SCCA National	War Bonnet Raceway Park	Mannford, OK	1st
11/69	AARC	Daytona International Speedway	Daytona, FL	DNF
9/27/70	SCCA National	Texas World Speedway	College Station, TX	1st
1971-1973	Limited schedule, details unknown			

Disclaimer: some of the original printed sources were found to be in error, and this record has been corrected with accurate information where possible. This is a partial record with known omissions and the author makes no claim to its completeness. Additions and corrections are welcomed.



JOHN MCCOMB
BRAD BROOKER

Mechanic
TERRY DOTY



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