

SAAC-38

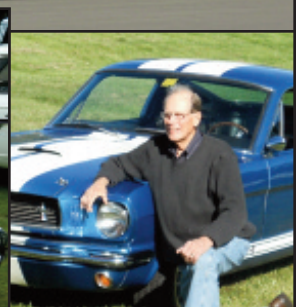
Auto Club Speedway Fontana, California July 4-5-6 2013

– Rick Kopec

Did we miss something? Here we are, pleasantly cruising along in SAAC's 38th year; the cars have never been more popular (and valuable) and we'd like to think we've done a pretty good job of making everyone in the club aware of their vivid racing and unique production history. Along the way we have invited former drivers and team members to join us. They would attend conventions when they could, and we asked them to recall what they remembered most from those days of glory. We brought the cars and they brought the memories; history came alive through their voices.

So when did we take our eye off the ball? All of a sudden some of these guys start showing up with cars of their own. Are we in some kind of parallel universe? It's mind-boggling.

Bob Bondurant, just around the corner from his 80th birthday, brought his GT40. It's an ERA replica, done up to look exactly like the Guardsman Blue MK I he drove at Daytona in February 1965. It was



a gift from his wife, Pat. Carrying the same #72. He wore his signature dark blue helmet with the white trim around the edge. He drove it in just about every open track session. How could we not ask him to use it as a pace car for the vintage races?

Peter Brock brought not one, but two Daytona Coupes. A his-and-hers matched set of Superformance cars. His was the red car he has had since new and which he has continued developing. (As the car's designer, the proper term is "developing." You or me? We'd be described as wankers "fiddling" with the car.) One of the upgrades whispered about was a modern Corvette engine and there has been whispers that

Brock went over to the Dark Side. We are monitoring him and don't think intervention is necessary just yet. His wife, Gayle, has a traditional Guardsman Blue car which was originally purchased as a project to be completed and sold, but once she started driving it she convinced Peter that it wasn't going anywhere for a while.

Bernie Kretzschmar, hired on at Shelby American in late 1964 as a fabricator and who built R-Models and Trans-Am notchbacks, created a replica of 5R001 that Jerry Titus drove and has been vintage racing it for the past ten years or so. It even carries the number 61, which was Titus' 1965 ARRC number.

A couple of years ago Chuck Cantwell, Shelby American's GT350 project engineer, could not stand on the sidelines any longer. He bought a '66 GT350 which he went through, mechanically, before putting it on the road and driving it to local events. He didn't have the car at SAAC-38 but it has been at past conventions.

Roadster and Daytona Coupe team driver Allen Grant built a replica of the yellow 289 Cobra comp car he raced in 1964 when George Lucas was his crew chief. He didn't have that car at the convention but just knowing he owned it was enough to give you something to think about.



Sharp-eyed conventioners were treated to Drew Serb's stunning restoration of CSX2409, the ex-Graham Shaw USRRC race car, "The Orange Snake." Shaw acquired the nickname "Tombstone Shaw" after flipping the Cobra end-over-end, tossing him out like a ragdoll when it was 20-feet off the ground. Shaw was hospitalized and the car was later sold and put into storage until 1996 when Serb purchased it and by 2005 it looked like it did when it was first raced. It was painted orange at the factory with yellow LeMans stripes. Because virtually no other Cobra race car was ever painted this color, many people walked right past it at the convention, assuming that an orange Cobra had to be a replica.



Was time being bent through some kind of then-and-now prism? It was too much to contemplate amid the swirl of the sights, sounds and activity of the convention. Clearly something was happening that no one could have predicted a decade ago. Maybe it was Carroll Shelby, himself, who had started it back in 1992 when he began building 427 Cobra S/Cs again. He seemed to be everywhere driving around in a bare aluminum car with #98 in the meatballs. Coincidence? We doubt it.

The convention dart was thrown at a map of the U.S. and it stuck in Southern California. Well, that's not really how it happened but it makes a nice story. We were due to bring SAAC's traveling circus back out west and we had been to Fontana twice before. Previously known as California Speedway, it is a super track originally built by Roger Penske as a CART and NASCAR venue. Located in the middle of Southern California, where the car culture took root after the war, it seemed like a can't-miss proposition. And it wasn't for the first few years; but after that they had to work to make it profitable. They set up a quarter-mile drag strip right outside the track that was popular with the locals until encroaching development put new homeowners within earshot and they lobbied to close the strip down. At the beginning of the year, when we were negotiating with the track, there was a spark of hope that the strip would be back in action. If that was the case we would plan to make use of it on Saturday. We were excited about that. Unfortunately things didn't work out and it remained a parking lot.

Speaking of parking lots, the Auto Club Speedway (recently renamed after the track's new owner) sits in the middle of a veritable sea of asphalt. It was one of the stipulations which allowed the Penske organization to build the track. Previously the property have been owned by Kaiser and was the site of one of its foundries. Once the buildings were razed, whatever chemicals might leach up from the ground had to be contained and asphaltting it over was the environmentally sound way to handle the problem.

Recent conventions have taught us a couple of things. One was that a full scheduler of concurrently-running events like the open track, vintage races and car shows caused a lot of conventioners no small amount of vitriol. No matter what they chose to do, they knew they were missing some other convention activity.



This street sign was a couple of blocks from the convention hotel. No question we were in the right place.

The past few years have also demonstrated the trend of fewer original Cobra and Shelby owners choosing to drive their cars on the open track. A lot of good reasons come to mind: the cars have gotten too valuable, owners don't want to use them up or wear them out, and we've had



Not all of the cars Galpin Ford brought were new. This '57 was especially popular and we'd be willing to bet that just about everyone who took pictures at the convention took one of this car.



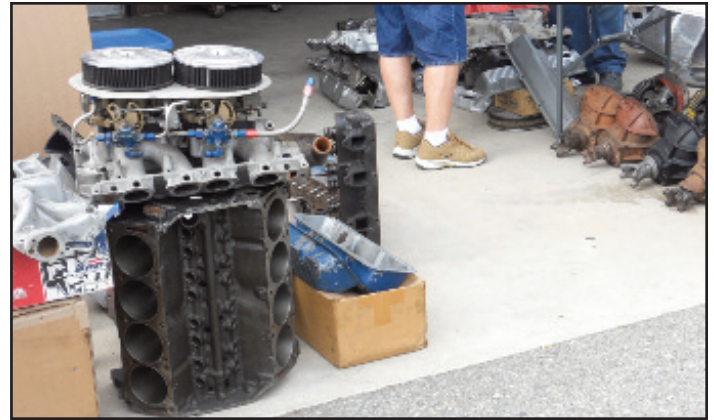
Between Hillbank Motor Sports, the Carroll Shelby Engine Company and super dealer Galpin Ford you could have spent a couple of hours looking at the cars that were on display in the manufacturer/dealer area. These companies were supporters of the Shelby American "Donkey Fund" reunion..

37 previous conventions so there is probably a touch of the “been there and done that” syndrome. Anyone who wanted to see what their car felt like on a race track has had the chance by now. Whatever the case, we scheduled two days of track time and left Saturday’s schedule clear for the car shows. Past conventions have also taught us that a lot of people like to pull up stakes and head home in the early afternoon of the final day. The Los Angeles traffic situation, alone, was a good reason to pinch the convention off early.

After a full day at the track, the convention resumed back at the Ontario Airport Hotel and Convention Center. The welcoming Meet and Greet was in full swing by 7 p.m. three or four hundred people were enjoying each other’s company.



Thursday evening “Meet The Cobra Team Members” allowed people to get autographs, take pictures and ask questions. Pictured [left to right] are: Dick Lins, Bob Bondurant, Jerry Schwarz, Chuck Cantwell, Peter Brock and Gordon Chance. As we rounded up other guys coming into the hotel they were also given seats at the table.



While not the row after row of used parts that highlighted conventions twenty-five years ago, there were a few throwbacks to the days before eBay. When was the last time you saw a pair of 289 Gurney-Weslake heads still in the box? Or someone selling five-spoke American Torque-Thrust wheels out of the trunk of their car? “Only in California” comes to mind, but that’s an over-used cliché.





Chris Brooke's dad was the original owner of 5S109 and it was the car he learned to drive in. In fact Chris had so many adventures with the car in high school that we wrote a book about them ("It's Not Your Fault Carroll Shelby," reviewed in the Winter 2013 issue (page 12).

If it seemed like there were video crews everywhere at the track, that's probably because there were at least five that we were aware of. Motor Trend's bi-weekly video show "Hot Rod Unlimited" was there with Elana Scherr doing the interviewing and commentary. You can see this on www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHpBqgXNmXY and Los Angeles TV Channel 7 did a report that was played on their 7 pm and 11 pm news. They invited everyone not aware that there were Cobras and Shelybs in their backyard to come down on Friday or Saturday to check out the action.

SAAC members John Atzbach and Mark Hovander had a crew doing video in-

terviews of former Shelby employees as part of an expansive video history of the cars, the company and the people who contributed. This is an on-going project and it will be interesting to see how it all comes together. There is a sense of urgency because the drivers, fabricators and other employees are getting older each year and as a group, their numbers are shrinking. Yahoo Autos also put together a great video. And SAAC member Manny Samaniego shot video for a convention DVD which will be available soon. It includes interviews and vintage race in-car video. We will, of course, provide details as soon as they become available.



The Kirkham brothers, Dave and Tom, deserve a lot of credit for continuing to make aluminum Cobras of all kinds—from original specs to as far out as your imagination will unwind. A lot of their cars are finding their way into vintage races because many owners of original Cobras with race history feel their cars are now too valuable to put at risk. The cars also act like magnets for those with the desire to drop in twin-Paxton 427s or other doomsday set-ups. Nobody would do that to an original Cobra. Several levels of unpainted bodies are available, from brushed to polished. They brought this Daytona Coupe which was a heart-stopper, no easy feat at a SAAC convention. It looked chrome plated.



The Shelby Engine Company in Gardena, California (we know where that is!) offers all flavors of aluminum engines and heads in FE, Windsor and 289 configurations. Pictured at the top is the 427 Hemi based on a 351 block. It pumps out 750 horsepower. Those ponies don't come cheap. Sticker price is \$44,995. The small block [center] is a 331 CID/475 h.p. with a single four-barrel and all the goodies. \$24,499. They build four versions of the Windsor engine, one in 393 CID and three 427s. The steroid version puts out 600 h.p. and will set you back \$25,699. Virtually all of these engines find homes in all manner of cars except...standard specification restorations. No surprise there. Owners of replica Cobras and modified Mustangs value state-of-the-art aluminum over 1960s retro hardware. If that's what you want, this is the place to find it.



Outside the driver's lounge, where the reunion luncheon was held are [left to right] J.W. Henderson, who ran Shelby's Goodyear racing tire distributorship; Allen Grant [back to camera] was asked to drive a Daytona Coupe after getting Carroll Shelby's attention by beating some of the factory team Cobras with an independent Cobra roadster; John Morton went to work at Shelby's as a welder and desire to be a driver. He co-drove with Ken Miles in the prototype 427 Cobra at Sebring in 1964 and went on to drive for Peter Brock's BRE Datsun team in the 1970s and is often asked to drive at vintage races. Phil Henny was a GT40 crew member in Europe and was also a driver and is now a writer, having completed several books on race cars he was involved with.

Friday's action centered around the 15th Shelby American employee reunion and the vintage races in the afternoon. Bernie Kretzschmar and Bob Shaw put together another knock-out reunion and almost 150 former drivers, crew members, fabricators, production workers and other employees attended. After a luncheon where they had an opportunity to visit and exchange memories, Shaw arranged for on-track rides for them in Cobras and Shelybs during the parade lap lunch break. After that they posed for the traditional group photo and then convention attendees swarmed them for autographs. Guys who were in their 20s, 30s and 40s in the mid-1960s are now in their 60s, 70s and 80s. A lot of them brought their grandchildren, who were surprised to see the fuss that was being made over gramps.



Where else can you bring a '68 Mustang notchback race car with an unclear history, run it on the track, and ask guys like Chuck Cantwell and Jerry Schwarz—who built cars just like it—about some of the features on your car?

Things everywhere at the track came pretty much to a stop around 2 p.m. when the vintage Trans-Am cars lumbered to the grid. Before the convention we were wondering who we should ask to drive the pace car for the vintage races. But when Bob Bondurant showed up with his ERA GT40, in 1965 Daytona livery, it was a no-brainer. He needed no instructions as he paced both races. His wife, Pat, was in the passenger seat looking every bit like the race queen. The 7-lap race was exciting, with six lead changes. Terry Underwood, at the wheel of the ex-John McComb '67 Shelby notchback held off a charge by Forrest Straight in his '70 Boss 302. Of the eleven starters four cars dropped out.

As the Trans-Am cars were in their final laps the grid was filling up with Cobras, Shelybs and Mustangs: 22 of them. The cars got sorted out fairly quickly and Scott Hackenson took the lead in his '67 Mustang notchback. He was chased by Canadian Lorne Leibel in his 289 Cobra, CSX2349. Original Cobras are become a rare sight at vintage races but Leibel drives his like it had an expiration date. On the fifth lap he got around Hackenson and held him off for the remaining laps. It



Mike Sangster [left] was one of the four guys who built R-Models and Mustang notchbacks. He has been to several previous conventions and when someone recognized him he was happy to answer, in detail, questions about how the cars were built.

was exciting racing.

On Friday night most conventioners headed back to the Ontario Airport Hotel and Convention Center for the dinner and evening program. It was a sell-out with all of the 400+ seats sold. Last year we tried an interview format with our guest speakers and it worked so well that we repeated it this year. Ron Richards invited Richard Messersmith to sit in one of the tall chairs and handed him a microphone. Not many people knew who he was, but they would quickly learn. Messersmith started racing in the early 1960s in SCCA regional events in the Chicago area. When he wanted to go faster he did what a lot of racers do: he bought a faster car. However, unlike most other racers, he was fortunate enough to have a mother of means who could buy



THE SHELBY AMERICAN EMPLOYEE REUNION



It was impossible to identify everyone in this picture because of the hats most of them were wearing, but here's a list of those attending the reunion: Michael Askins, Jack Balch, Bob and Pat Bondurant, George Boskoff, Lonnie Brannan, Peter Brock, Bert Brown, Gary Burke, Chuck Cantwell, Michael Donovan, Dick Doughty, Dennis Eshelman, Roy and Doyle Gammell, Jiggs Garcia, Allen Grant, Elmer Grimsgaard, J.L. Henderson, Phil Henny, Dave Jordan, Bruce Junor, Jere Kirkpatrick, Robert Krauss, Bernie Kretzschmar, Paul Kunyz, Dave Lamoureeux, Dick Lins, James Marietta, John Morton, Steve Nance, Wayne Pierce, Joe Raddish, Antone Robinson, Ronald Sampson, Michael Sangster, Jerry Schwarz, Gary Sigritz, Jean Stucki, Donald Thomas and Denis Walsh.

Every year former Shelby American drivers, crew members, mechanics, fabricators, production workers and their families get together for a reunion. It's almost always held in Southern California, because that's where most of the alumni settled in after their Shelby American days. A lot of them were from the L.A. area before they signed on.

When a SAAC convention is held in California we make it a point to invite the Shelby American alumni to join us. The cars make a perfect backdrop for their reunion, and it also makes a terrific addition to the convention. SAAC members and attendees have the opportunity to talk to them and get photos and autographs.

Why is it called the "Donkey Fund"? Fabricator Bernie Kretzschmar recalled that when he went to work at Shelby American they all worked long hours out in the race shop. There was always a race and never enough time in a 40-hour week to get everything done. Overtime was standard and there was a lot of dedication and pride that ensured the cars race-ready when they were loaded onto the transporter.

Kretzschmar recalled that as one of the youngest employees, when he was first called a "donkey" by one of the veterans he was offended. Then he realized that everyone in the race shop called each other "donkeys" because they all felt like beasts of burden, sometimes working from sun-up to sun-up to get the job done. Today he is one of the spark plugs behind the "Donkey Fund" which accepts contributions and disburses them where they are needed to the former Shelby employees who find themselves in need. Not all of them retired to large homes in vacation spots.

The money in the Donkey Fund is used to pay for the expenses incurred in putting on the reunion every year. It has also paid for burial expenses for individuals who were impoverished, travel expenses so some of the less fortunate alumni could attend reunions, wives who were struggling following the funeral and other miscellaneous expenses that some of these guys are too proud to ask for. Bernie Kretzschmar stays in touch with all of them and he knows who can use assistance. When Carroll Shelby was alive he customarily contributed \$10,000 every few years to keep the Donkey Fund flush.

SAAC member Bob Shaw is the other spark plug. He also handles a lot of the logistical details for every reunion. He puts together a Shelby American Directory which enables all of the alumni to keep in contact with each other. The last directory had contact information for almost 150 alumni. It also tracks those who have passed away and continually searches for those who have dropped out of sight. The directory is only sent to those in it to help maintain their privacy.

This is a worthy cause and we urge SAAC members to make a contribution. Those who do will receive one of these snazzy Donkey Fund stickers—perfect for your windshield or tool box. It's the only way you'll get one.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

It's as simple as writing a check. Make it out to the "Donkey Fund" for any amount (there is no such thing as "too small" or "too large"). The fund is administered by volunteers—there are no administration expenses.

Bernie Kretzschmar 1151 Aviemore Terrace Costa Mesa, CA 92627



him a new Cobra.

When the 427 Cobra was introduced, Messersmith had to have one. Mom wrote the check for CSX3018 and before it was delivered he flew out to Los Angeles and attended the Carroll Shelby School of High Performance Driving at Riverside. He was instructed by John Timanus and Ken Miles. Then he flew home to await delivery of #3018. He was a very entertaining speaker and everyone enjoyed his stories. *[Editor's Note: in late July Richard was involved in a single vehicle motorcycle accident, breaking almost every major bone in his body. He was put into a medically-induced coma and lasted a little over a week before succumbing to pulmonary complications. Following the convention he told his wife that coming to SAAC convention (where he took delivery of a new Kirkham 427 Cobra) was one of the best things he had ever done. We had hoped he would be able to attend future conventions. It just goes to show you how tenuous life is.]*

Other speakers to undergo our interrogation were Bernie Kretzschmar (questioned by Kopec), Chuck Cantwell (Curt Vogt) and Peter Brock. In his research for Brock's questions Kopec turned up a few photos of Brock in 1963 driving a Mercury in the NASCAR Riverside 500. Brock related that because of his knowledge of the track, he was asked to drive and was running consistently and watching faster cars and more experienced drivers dropping out one by one. He was in third place near the end when the engine blew. Brock also spoke about the new book he just com-



pleted on the Corvette Sting Ray.

Our keynote speaker was Bob Bondurant who was preparing to celebrate his 80th birthday. He brought his Guardsman

Below [left to right]: Ron Richards and Richard Messersmith, Chuck Cantwell and Curt Vogt and Peter Brock and Rick Kopec.



CURB YOUR ENTHUSIASM

Legendary Shelby cars come together for annual convention

Yahoo Autos' Open Road blog posted 8/14/13 –Andrew Comrie-Picard

Every year we get notes or e-mails from people returning from their first convention with their excit-o-meter pegged in the red. They went not knowing what to expect and were blown away by their experience. We've tried to get them to put their thoughts into words so we could include them as part of the convention report but have never been successful. Yahoo Autos writer Andrew Comrie-Picard attended SAAC-38 and posted this report. We think he got it exactly right! Thanks to Yahoo for letting us reproduce this blog.

As a rule, I don't go to enthusiast shows, whether they're car shows, dog shows, home shows or wine shows. Firstly, I don't consider myself to be an enthusiast—AKA people who only talk about one thing. Of course, enthusiast behavior isn't limited to car shows, and if I were ever invited to a Victoria's Secret show, I would certainly go—but I don't think there's a lot of talking there, despite all the enthusiasts.

Second, looking at cars is like thinking about exercising – the wrong verb with the right noun. You do exercise. And you drive cars. Looking at a bunch of stationary cars makes me weep for the cold oil, quiet gears, and non-squealing tires.

But... with every rule comes exceptions, and there are a few car shows definitely worth attending. Most have famous names: Goodwood, Monterey, Amelia Island. But another car show snuck up on me: The 38th Annual Shelby American Automobile Club National Convention. Which needs a shorter name.

There were enthusiasts of course, but nobody was all googly-eyed and drooling. Except me. I was drooling because there were more original Shelby Cobras and Mustangs than I knew existed (as the old joke goes: "only 562 were made, and all 600 are here") but all the examples were 100% genuine, and amazing.

How about a completely unrestored original 289 Cobra? How about one that the present owner bought new? How about the very one that was used in The Gumball Rally? And how about the fact that basically the only

people there were the guys that owned the cars, and me.

And Peter Brock. A guy so famous in enthusiast circles that the Shelby folks have to battle with the Datsun guys who have to arm-wrestle with the Stingray geeks to get a moment of his time. He designed the original Stingray, built the most famous BRE (Brock Racing Enterprises) Datsun 510s and 240Zs, and was Shelby American's first employee, first running the driving school, then designing the Daytona Coupe that went on to win the GT class at LeMans. Here he was just a nice, down-to-earth guy who was hanging out with a modern Daytona Coupe that he designed. And drives. Daily. Not your average enthusiast.

Which brings us to Carroll Shelby himself. If it's possible for a dead man to be somewhere, he was at the event. Although he tragically passed on last year, his legacy lives on, and he was in the conversations and thoughts of everyone at the event. He's basically immortal.

And I spent the day joyously wandering around, looking at his creations, talking with the owners, and just having a really great time.

Damn you, Carroll Shelby. You made me an enthusiast.

PS: There are other car shows worth attending, mostly because there are great cars with only casual enthusiasm: Cars and Coffee, Supercar Sundays, and Mopars at the Mansion (which nicely integrates the aforementioned Victoria's Secret show) to name a few...





Blue GT40 and he related that he kept his driving skills sharp by driving the car on the 1.6-mile school track in Phoenix, Arizona at least once a week. He has not lost his touch.

The early activity at the track on Saturday centered around the concours garage. As cars were being rolled out of their trailers the concours judges meeting was going on. It wasn't a very long meeting because almost all of the judges were veterans and they were anxious to get started. A concours car takes a team of four or five judges about an hour. Due to time constraints, each class is limited to 6 entries. Otherwise the judges would be there until after dark.

The track was in the Los Angeles area and that meant that everyone who drove there had one eye on the clock. They knew, instinctively, when the freeways started to clog and back-up and they didn't want to be part of it. The popular vote show only attracted a little more than 100 cars. That was hardly surprising. Many of the cars that could have been entered were on their way home. They wanted to get a jump on the traffic, and it was hard to blame them.

By 3 p.m. the concours was wrapping up. Cars were being put back into their trailers and people were waving good-bye. All in all, SAAC-38 was another great convention.



Aside from Pardee's 5R095, about the only time you see an R-Model anymore is at an auction.



There's just something about a 427 lightweight.



One of the things we like about Southern California Shelby owners is they are not afraid to modify their cars. After all, this is the heart of the car culture in this country. It all started here.



This was a Shelbyized Mustang but once you looked into the engine compartment that was all forgotten.

Two 427 Cobras were used in the filming of the 1967 movie "Gumball Rally." CSX3243 was one the one that had the most on-screen time.



SAAC-38 photographers: Jeff Burgy, Robert Cassling, Clarence Converse, John Guyer, Mark Janson, Seiji Kishi, Mike Mackel, Larry Quay, Dave Redman, Kuno Zimmermann.



If there was a Cobra-related warbird within 100 miles of the convention, leave it to John Guyer to find it. The Bell P-39 Airacobra was the principal American fighter in service at the beginning of the Second World War. It was innovative, in that the engine was mounted amidships, behind the pilot, driving the propeller through a long shaft. It was the first fighter to use a tricycle landing gear (instead of being a tail-dragger). The absence of an efficient turbo-supercharger limited the plane to low-altitude work. As newer and improved fighters were brought into the U.S. arsenal as the war progressed, a large number of P-39s were given to the Soviet Air Force and they racked up the highest number of kills per pilot attributed to any U.S. fighter aircraft during the war. Guyer visited the Planes of Fame air museum in Chino, California—about 10 miles from the track.

SAAC-38 CONVENTION SWAG

Ok, you weren't there. Only a handful of members go to almost every convention. But don't let that stop you from getting a SAAC-38 t-shirt or hat. Nobody will know you weren't there because attendance wasn't taken.



Quantities of everything are limited.

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