

The original was the wildest. I saw it for the first time at Shelby's old plant on West Imperial Highway—the converted North American Aviation factory that huddled alongside the main runway of the Los Angeles International Airport. It was sitting on the broad concrete apron in the bright coastal sunshine, nearly buried in the blast of intercontinental jet liners straining for lift, and somehow it looked tough enough so that all that deafening sound could have been belching from the twin exhaust pipes that jutted from beneath its rocker panels.

The first Shelby American GT 350 was some kind of a nasty car; loaded to the window sills with performance and a brand of visceral excitement that had been missing in American cars since the original Stutz Bearcat.

In those days all GT 350s were painted white, with a pair of blue stripes the width of stairway runners covering them from stem to stern. The exhaust was loud enough to scramble the driver's brains and the ride harsh enough to congeal his kidneys in a single afternoon, but it would accelerate, brake and corner with a nimbleness that nothing on these shores besides a Corvette could match. My buddy Steve Smith described that first Shelby GT 350 as "a brand new, clapped-out racing car," and he was right. It rattled and it growled and it wouldn't idle below 1000 rpm and steering the thing was like an expensive course in isometrics. When you cut around a tight corner at slow speeds the ratchet-type, limited-slip differential would lock up the inside rear wheel and the tire would yelp and screech like a wounded puppy. And once it was straightened out, the differential would unlock with a great metallic clank that sounded as if the entire rear end of the car had fallen onto the pavement. It was fitted with enormous traction arms that probed into the space where the rear seat was supposed to be (which had been removed anyway in favor of better torque control and additional space for a fat spare tire).

The first Shelby GT 350 carried probably the hairiest engine ever loaded into a street automobile from Ford. It was a modified version of the tough little solid lifter, 289 cu. in., 271-hp "High Performance" engine FoMoCo marketed in those days—fitted with a high-riser intake manifold, tubular headers, a bigger sump, and a special 4-barrel carburetor. Right out the door, with its fiberglass hood and aluminum 4-speed transmission, the GT 350 weighed just over 3000 pounds, developed 306 horsepower at 6000 rpm and would crank up to 60 mph in 6.5 seconds and run the quarter-mile in 14.9 seconds at 95 mph. Curiously, that is about equal to today's out-of-the-box Camaro Z/28 (more on that later).

For another \$1500 beyond the \$4500 list price, you could have a complete road racing package that would set you up for the Sports Car Club of America's

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN SENZER



SHELBY GT350

VIEWPOINT: BROCK YATES

B-production competition class, and for that relatively modest price you had yourself a winner. (It won the class championship in 1965 and 1966.) In all, that first GT 350 was a delightfully untamed automobile, although in our first road test of the machine, *C/D* warned: "In all honesty, it cannot be said that the Mustang GT 350 is the sort of a car a sane man would enjoy driving at all times and under all conditions."

Indeed that was the case. Sanity prevailed for the most part in the marketplace and relatively few GT 350s were sold that first year (1965), although the few that did reach the streets were invaluable in boosting Ford's image as a company deeply committed to performance. The following year Shelby sold a bunch of 350s to the Hertz car rental people (designated 350Hs and uniformly decorated in black with gold stripes) and the rear seat, plus a few other amenities reappeared. But it remained, again in *C/D*'s words, "a guts sports car, with hair on its chest—all the way down to its navel." By then Shelby-American was in its decline; moving daily toward complete domination by Ford and an effort by the Dearborn product planners and stylists to turn the fantastically saleable brand names "Cobra" and "Shelby GT 350" into merchandise with sales appeal. The 1967 model year was the last for the 306-hp High-Riser and also marked the end of that wonderful bulge-body, Anglo-American roadster known as the Cobra.

By 1968, they were fooling with airplanes on West Imperial Boulevard again, and the brilliant crew that had developed the Cobra and the original GT 350 were for the most part scattered around the racing community. Only a tiny nucleus remained with ol' Shelby himself as he launched into the construction of the ill-fated Shelby-Wallis Indianapolis turbines. Back in Dearborn, the "Cobra" and "GT 350" were amalgamated into a single nameplate that was affixed to slightly-modified Mustang coupes carrying 302 cu. in. V-8s (with a blower optional) and the powerful Le Mans and Daytona winning 427. But, as they say in the men's room, the handwriting was on the wall, and the "Cobra GT 350" was headed for a niche in the Ford lineup of performance cars, so that the fabled combination of names could be marketed to a larger segment of the market.

And so we come to the 1969 edition of the Shelby GT 350; a garter snake in Cobra skin, affixed with dozens of name plates reading "Shelby," "Shelby-American," "Cobra" and "GT 350," as if to constantly re-assure the owner that he is driving the real thing and not a neatly decorated Mustang (which he is). The new Shelby is indeed a looker—low and long; covered with scoops and slots and nasty, high-powered curves. It is a truly imposing machine, in appearance at least, and I personally can't think of an automobile that makes a statement about performance

in sheet metal and fiberglass any better than the current edition of the GT 350.

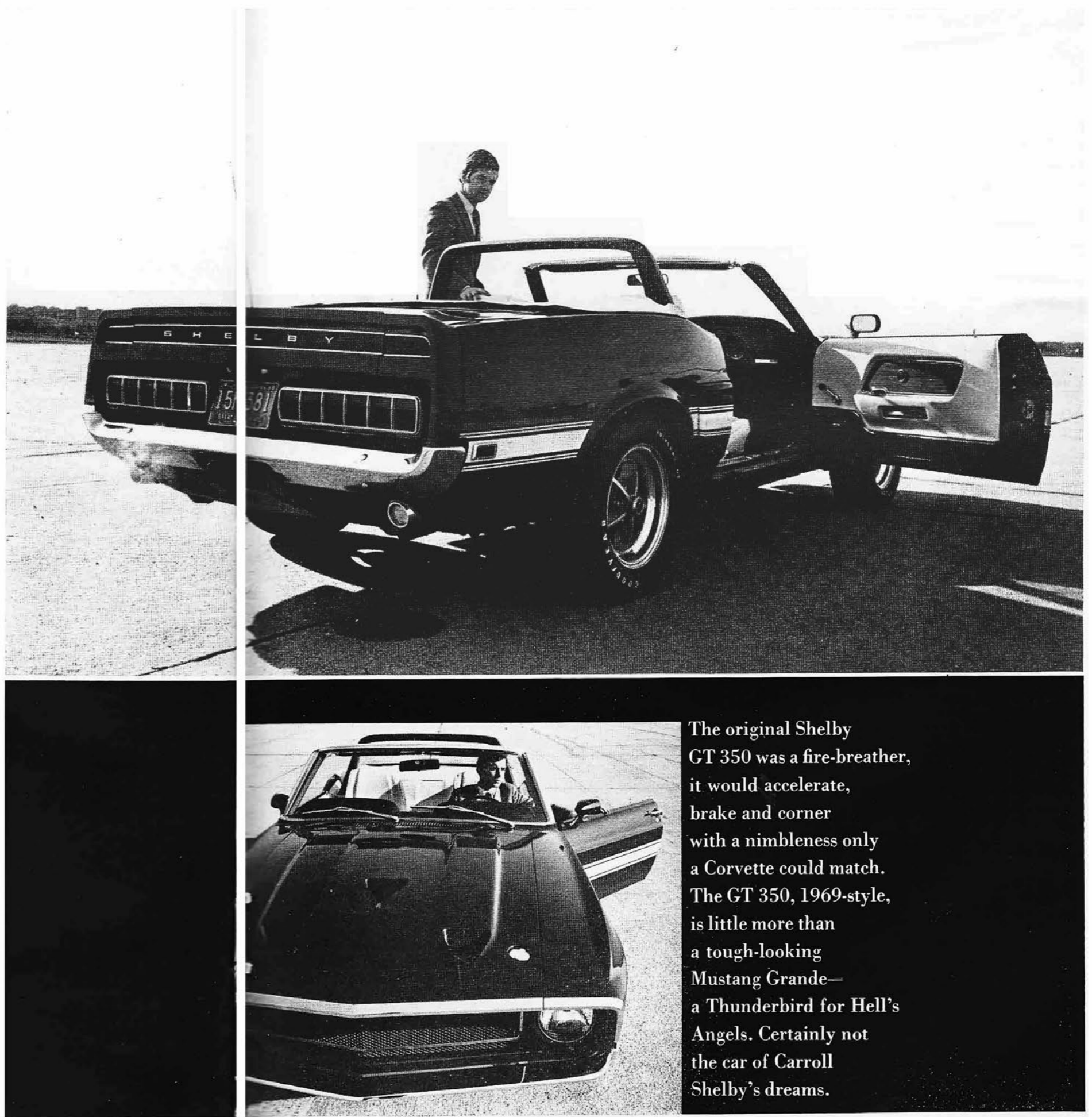
Our test car—a pre-production prototype, by the way—was a convertible, complete with a luminous side stripe and enough racing car plumage to put a P4 Ferrari to shame. The front of the car, viewed dead-on, looks amazingly like a Trans-Am Camaro, fitted as it is with a nearly bumperless nosepiece and single headlamps (which we found to be dangerously devoid of lumens). Clustered beneath the grille is a pair of Lucas driving lights, controlled by a toggle switch on the console, that would be of great benefit if they are not aimed a yard in front of the car, as on our test car.

The fiberglass hood has five—count 'em, five—NASA-type hood scoops, all functional. Four of them merely open into the engine compartment, while the fifth provides a ram-air effect for the carburetor. Along the leading edge of the front fenders are two more scoops to provide air to the excellent disc brakes, while another pair are mounted on the rear fenders to offer similar cooling for the rear brakes. These latter two were not functional on our prototype and their benefit cannot be judged, however they did manage to get plugged to the gills with snow and ice. Much of this plumage, including the spoiler and the entire rear deck, plus the front hood and fenders, is made of fiberglass. Some of it did not fit particularly well, but one can only hope this will be corrected.

Noise levels and ventilation were as good as any. The high lip on the dash, plus the low windshield and the general shrouding of the convertible top made front and rear-quarter visibility quite limited, but this deficiency was partly made up for by the extremely readable instruments and accessible controls. The high-back seats are a trifle upright and have no adjustment for rake (why is it that no American cars have decent seat-back adjustments—if they have any at all—when they are standard on all middle- and high-priced European cars?).

Whereas the old Shelbys were great short-haul machines, capable of eye-popping bursts of speed, the new car is a sort of baby Thunderbird—a Turnpike Cruiser with slots—that handles itself with great aplomb on freeways but is nearly useless on anything but smooth surfaces. Because its 351 cubic inch engine is smaller and lighter than the great lump of iron that composes the 428 used in the Mach 1 (*C/D*, November) the Shelby is innocent of the gross understeer and traction troubles we experienced in that particular Mustang variation, but that is not to say the Shelby is without fault. The flexible convertible chassis, coupled with strange compliance characteristics in the front suspension caused the front wheels to individually steer their way over bumps and deviations on a rough road surface. This means

(Continued on page 84)



The original Shelby GT 350 was a fire-breather, it would accelerate, brake and corner with a nimbleness only a Corvette could match. The GT 350, 1969-style, is little more than a tough-looking Mustang Grande—a Thunderbird for Hell's Angels. Certainly not the car of Carroll Shelby's dreams.

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ADVERTISERS' INDEX

FEBRUARY 1969

CAR and DRIVER

Advertiser	Page
American Carry-Products, Inc.	42
American Motors Corporation	46, 47
American Racing Equipment	83
Autogear	71
Autolite Spark Plugs	3rd Cover
BMW, Hoffman Motors Corporation	15
Bap-Geon	16, 17
British Leyland Motors, Inc.	15, 23
Cartridge Tape Club of America	21
Champion Spark Plug Company	30
Chevrolet Motors	2nd Cover
Clymer Publications, Floyd	9
Eastman Kodak Company	19
Edelbrock Equipment Company	8
Exhaust Equipment Engineering	83
Fiberfab	18
Fisher Products	29
Ford Motor Company	36, 37
Foreign Car Specialties	83
Formula 1 Enterprises, Inc.	83
Geon-Bap	16, 17
Gumout Division, Pennsylvania Refining Company	8
Haan, Inc., Vilem B.	38, 39
Iskenderian, Ed	12
Judson Research & Mfg. Co.	9
King Motoring Specialties	2
Konner Chevrolet, Malcolm	2
Lincoln-Mercury Division	4th Cover
M G Mitten	10, 11
MacMillan Company, The	6
Meyers & Company, B. F.	2
Muntz Stereo-Pak, Inc.	59
Norelco	7
North American School of Drafting	83
Oldsmobile Division	5
Porsche of America Corp.	35
Quaker State Oil Refining Corporation	14
Saab Motors, Inc.	13
Scorpion Motor Company	20
Shelby Automotive, Inc.	40, 41
Sperex Corporation	84
Standard-Triumph Motor Co., Inc.	23
Toyota Motor Distributors, Inc.	3
Valvoline Oil Company	75
Wilco	24

TRIUMPH TR6

(Continued from page 27)

yellow with the matte black posterior attractive?

It is enormously reassuring to spend time with the TR6. If nothing else, it is a reminder that Triumph—much like Nuffield used to be—is venturesome. Suddenly, through the uniformly gray layers of yesterday, the TR6 is able to remind you that alongside the TR-2/3 series there was a Doretti: an envelope-bodied, space frame car which the company named after its Southern California distributor, Dorothy Dean, and which was a bold effort to create a specific car for a specific market.

You think of Competitions Director Kas Kastner and his unceasing effort to make a better car through racing and testing, and racing and testing some more. And who spends his time at the factory preaching the gospel of performance and what is needed along the Oregon Trail. It occurs to you that on the East Coast, Bob Tullius has respond-

ed to Kastner's inspiration with a remarkably effective P.R.-through-performance program which has had a very clear impact on local dealers.

Somewhere in Triumph there seems to be a certain willingness to accept fresh ideas. It is the kind of flexibility upon which BLMC must depend in its effort to regain a handsome portion of the U.S. market. It is the kind of flexibility Triumph has served notice it is prepared to offer.

The future of the British automobile in this country—we have said with some frequency—lies with the British industry's success in developing and selling luxury and sports cars. Personal cars. Cars of character and increasing refinement.

It is with relief and pleasure that we commend the TR6 to your attention as just such a car. And we further presume to recommend to BLMC that the TR6 is the perfect base for a new and vigorous start on these barbaric shores. ●

SHELBY GT 350

(Continued from page 62)

(or at least seems to the driver) that each front wheel is steering individually, making the car hunt and weave in such a manner as to border on the uncontrollable. Couple this to excessively stiff shock absorbers and you get a machine that bucks and weaves down a secondary road like a berserk go-kart. We found the Shelby hard to love on any kind of surface except dead smooth—under those circumstances it is a stable machine.

If you should be attracted to the Shelby by a combination of its dazzling looks, pleasant interior and the general aura of its name, do not, I repeat, do not, try to race anybody with it. This is to say that the car we tested was a tame tabby, to say the least. Our car was equipped with the manually-shiftable 3-speed Ford automatic transmission, which might have cut its performance slightly, but it was decidedly sluggish in comparison with many of today's so-called performance cars. Using 6000 rpm as a shift point, 0-60 times were an adequate 7.0- to 7.5-seconds, but acceleration seemed to tail off badly at higher speed ranges. Although no quarter-mile times were taken, all of us on the staff agreed we would be willing to bet a substantial amount of money that the 3600-pound, 290-hp machine we drove would not break 15.5 seconds in the quarter without considerable tweaking. It is not a hot machine, and is probably not intended to be, regardless of the implication of devices like aluminum intake manifolds, ram-air carburetion and a lovely, burbling exhaust note.

So what do we have in the Shelby Cobra GT 350, 1969 style? Certainly not what Carroll Shelby and his gang of merry men dreamed up five models previously. It is really a dolled-up version of the new

Mustang Grande—a baby 'Bird, as we said before. This is a curious duplication of effort, it seems, because the heritage of the GT 350 is performance, and it is difficult to understand why the Ford marketing experts failed to exploit its reputation.

If Ford had carried the GT 350 through its logical evolution, it would today be a Dearborn version of the Camaro Z/28. In fact, the Z/28, *not* the Shelby, is the rightful ancestor to the first GT 350, and that seems a bit of a shame from Ford's viewpoint. As you recall, Chevy brought out the Z/28 to make a race car legal for Trans-Am racing. However, it was so hot almost from the moment it hit the stands that it is on its way to becoming legendary among *both* the drag racing and the sports car sets. The GT 350 should be the same thing; the basis for a hot road racing and drag racing machine that the public can buy for about \$4500. (*Exactly* what it was in the beginning, ironically). In that context, the grand reputation of Shelby American and its fire-breathing cars would be exploited to the fullest by the men in Dearborn.

This rather obvious revelation came to me as I rolled the Shelby through a small town in Upstate New York—an area where a Cobra or a GT 350 is as rare as a subway token. The striking looks of the machine quickly attracted the hot-car set including the driver of a bright green Z/28 (one of *two* in this tiny town of 4500). He made a couple of passes past the gas station where I was filling up, obviously trying to lure me out for a quick show-down. I just sat there, saving myself some unneeded embarrassment.

I could only comfort myself by thinking that if it had been three years earlier, I'd have had a chance.

Somehow, that doesn't make sense. ●