



THE STORY leaked out in July: Ford was killing the Shelby Mustang. As deaths go, this one did not cause much of a stir. The industry still was talking about the earlier loss of the Corvair, which had gone to its grave a martyr. But the demise of the Shelby had been predicted for at least a year.

The builder, Carroll Shelby, was vacationing in Italy when the story broke and was unavailable for comment. In his place many of the corporate executives at Ford were saying, sympathetically, "What a great guy Carroll is," and one of them remarked—off the record, of course—that he was "very sorry" to see the Shelby Mustang go.

But the decision was irreversible. No more Shelby Mustangs.

Numerous 'I-told-you-so's' followed. The Shelby, most enthusiasts agreed, had been dead, or close to death, for years. Each year since its 1965 inception the Shelby had become more of a compromised car; and even by Shelby's own admission it had lost its identity as a Supercar. As the stylists heaped on more chrome, they at the same time removed more and more of the car's performance features. At the time of its death it had entered a never-never land where it had neither the luxury of, say, the Mustang Mach 1, nor the performance and handling of the Boss Mustangs.

In the beginning the Shelby Mustang may have been the definitive performance car. At the end, curiously, it did not lead in any of the areas where it had built its image. The performance standards it had set had found their way into other cars.

The first Shelby Mustang rolled off the assembly line in Los Angeles in October, 1964. It made its public debut two months later. The Shelby was an enthusiast's car. Non-enthusiasts asked, "does it eat people alive?"

The thing was a racing car in disguise. And not much of a disguise, at that. It was available in nothing but white, with blue stripes running the length of the body from hood to trunk lid—the American racing colors. The colors were the tip-off, but they were only a start. The body was a combination of lightweight steel and fiberglass, gutted of everything, including the sound-deadening undercoating material. The 289-cid V-8, a distant cousin of the small-blocks in the early Cobras, delivered 306 bhp. It would not idle below 1000 rpm, could rev to 7000, and would slam the car from a standing start to the end of a quarter-mile in 14.6 sec. It had high-compression pistons, a hot cam, high-rise manifold, and the carburetor was a massive four-barrel Holley. Also: exhaust headers, increased oil capacity, and the power was taken up by a close-

ratio, aluminum-case Warner T-10 four-speed.

Underneath, the standard Mustang front suspension had been redone by lowering the inner pivot of the upper control arm one inch to cut down on the inherent understeer of the design. The front stabilizer bar diameter was increased to an inch. The steering had also been speeded up. The rear suspension had been stiffened and steadied by adding control arms above the rear axle and bolting them to the chassis. A limited-slip differential, originally designed for trucks (which seemed appropriate), was installed in the package. Expensive, racing-type Koni shocks went on all four corners. The wheels themselves were steel or magnesium, seven inches wide and carrying racing rubber (narrower then, of course, than now). Disc brakes were up front, 10-in. drums on the rear.

Inside, the back seat had been yanked out and now the spare tire rode in its place. Most of the trunk space was taken by the oversize gas tank and the battery, which had been pried loose from the engine compartment. The seat belts were of the racing type, four inches wide.

That was the Shelby Mustang. Noisy, hard riding, with no power-assist on the brakes. It was impractical. It was very fast (35 more horsepower than the standard Mustang, 150 lb. lighter).

The only problem the enthusiast had was to locate the \$4500 needed to buy one.

You had to love fast cars to love the Shelby. It was offered in two versions—one for the street, the other for the race track. The competition version

had 20% more power and cost more. It was also that much more difficult to drive on crowded public roads than the "street" version.

There were not so many self-appointed safety critics in those days, but had there been they would not have liked the Shelby Mustang GT 350 one bit. As for the hard-core performance buffs, they rallied around the car and rhapsodized it; and none of them could remember another car quite like it, unless it was the Cobra.

Yet Shelby's Cobra roadster, introduced three years before in 1962, cannot today match the impact left by his Mustang. The Cobra won hundreds of auto races around the world (and a world championship, in 1965). The impact of the Shelby Mustang was of a different nature. The Mustang, too, won races (the national B production class championship of the Sports Car Club of America in 1965-66).

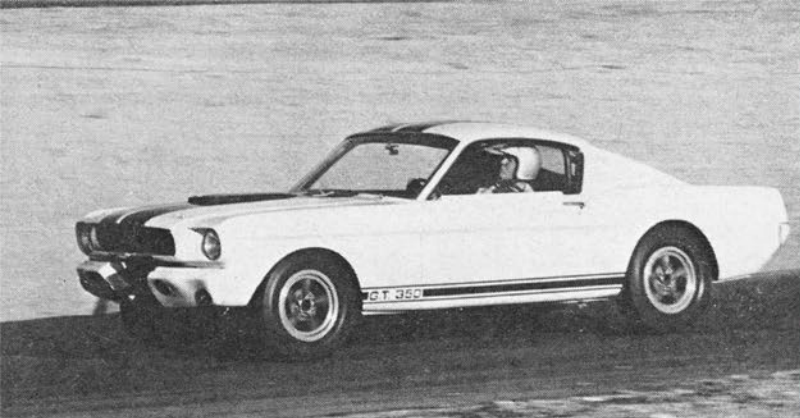
Fifty years from now—when automobiles have been banned from our highways because there is no more room—50 years from now someone will look back nostalgically at the snarling street performance cars of the late Sixties and early Seventies. When he traces their ancestry, he will find that the Shelby was the first (outside of the Corvette and the Cobra) to have really colossal power, and a handling package to match.

After the Shelby came the Z/28 Camaro, the Boss Mustang, the 'Cuda 340, the AMX. *This* was why the Shelby Mustang was important. It speeded up and influenced the development of the Ponycars and Supercars.

Yet Ford has killed the Shelby Mus-

BY JOE SCALZO, CAR LIFE FEATURE EDITOR
COLOR PHOTO BY ALICE BIXLER

What Shelby Taught Ford About Mustangs



WHAT BECAME OF THE SHELBY

Shelby

continued

1965

tant so there must be a lesson there somewhere.

The Mustang GT 350 was a car for its time. For 1965, that is. Ford was back in racing impressively, thanks to Carroll Shelby and his Cobras. Shelby was the man of the year, the ex-race driver who led Ford back to the tracks, allowing them to recapture American racing prestige in Europe. The P.R. men at Ford had a ball with Shelby, and most of the extravagant things they wrote about him were justified.

1966



The hot street car of the day was the Corvette which, like the Shelby Cobra, was thought of as a sports car. In the passenger car class, Chrysler had recently introduced the 426 street Hemi. Ford had nothing that was comparable; it had lots of hot race cars (including the Cobra), but no hot street cars.

Until the Shelby Mustang arrived.

The entire Shelby Company was always a study in improbables. Its personnel included race drivers, racing mechanics, the whole bunch of them working in a huge factory next to the Los Angeles International Airport. Inside, they built cars, real racing cars, the most exciting machinery since the days of Art Sparks and Joe Thorne. It was Ford's money they were spending, Ford's honor they were upholding. Shelby had sold Ford on the performance image three years before. The Cobra had been the result. Never a big seller (never intended to be), and outlawed from the roads in 1968 by federal regulations against such cars, the Cobra was a study in brute performance and little else.

1967



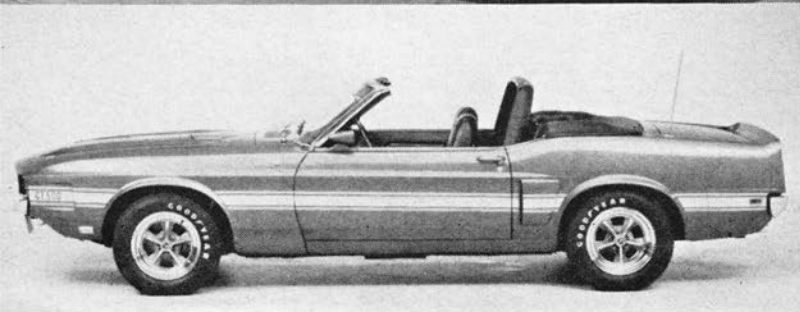
But the success of the car did wonders for Shelby's relations with Ford. In late 1964, the date when the first Shelby Mustang rolled off the assembly line, Ford okayed expansion plans for him, and doubled the factory payroll.

1968



If the Cobra was more race car than car, the original Shelby Mustang was nearly the same. Aside from the body (which Shelby and his men could not alter drastically for fear of losing the Mustang identity) the car was miles away from the original Mustang. Miles away, or years ahead. It was the styling of the original Mustang which made that car a success. Actually, the original Mustang was more styling than it was car—it was not particularly fast and did not handle well. So in building his GT 350, Shelby retained the styling, but little else.

1969



With the Mustang, Shelby saw a

way to win the B production class in road racing, previously the property of the 283 Corvettes. But the Mustang would take a lot of re-working.

Shelby worked. He and his engineer, the late Ken Miles, crawled under the car, making the suspension changes. Miles would take the car to a test track and hot lap and consult with Shelby over the findings. No performance compromises. To fit the roll bar Shelby had to tear out the insides, and he did. It was his car, just like the Cobra was his car.

When the Sports Car Club of America, sanctioning body for most of the country's road races, learned of Shelby's intentions they were suspicious. They told him he must build at least 100 examples of the car before January 1, 1965, and all of them must be certified legal for the public highway.

Shelby overcame this hurdle with ease. It was so easy for him in fact, that it gives a clear idea of the support Ford was lending him. To get the 100 Mustangs built by the deadline, Shelby asked Ford to turn over to him for a day the regular Mustang production line in San Jose, Calif. This way he got the cars he needed; and the 100 machines arrived painted white with blue stripes, sans hoods (Shelby's men would fit lightweight fiberglass ones). As for fitting all the rest of the special components, such as the cast aluminum oil sumps, Shelby's craftsmen did that as well.

The car, to SCCA's surprise (and possible dismay) was legal and it went to the races, running against the production Corvettes. It hit its target—and then some. It tore the B production class away from the Corvettes easily.

What was it like to drive the original Shelby Mustang? The loud engine noise was oppressive to all but the enthusiast. It was hot inside the car because the venting was not all it should be. During summer the high-revving engine might overheat. The limited-slip differential clanked loudly. The ride was harsh, even jarring, and the racing components behaved just like racing components.

It was too radical for the street. Still it was curiously delightful. There had never been anything quite like it before. It was fast and positive and the first American car to be that way in years.

By 1966 new-model time there was only one way to go with the Shelby. It could not be made much wilder. Therefore, its great performance had to be compromised. Comfort became a consideration. Even the enthusiast magazines had complained about the Shelby's rough street ride, and its boorish racing car manners.

Also by 1966, Ford was asserting greater control over Shelby's company, ▶

HOW MUSTANG CHANGED

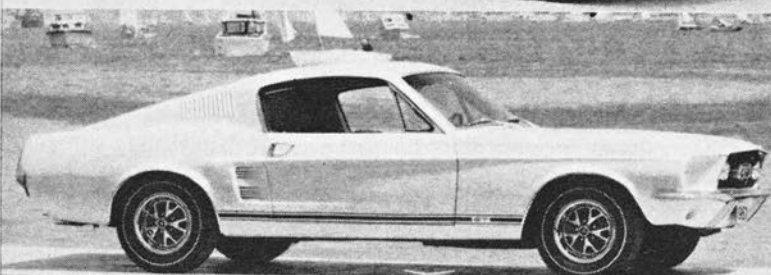
1965



1966



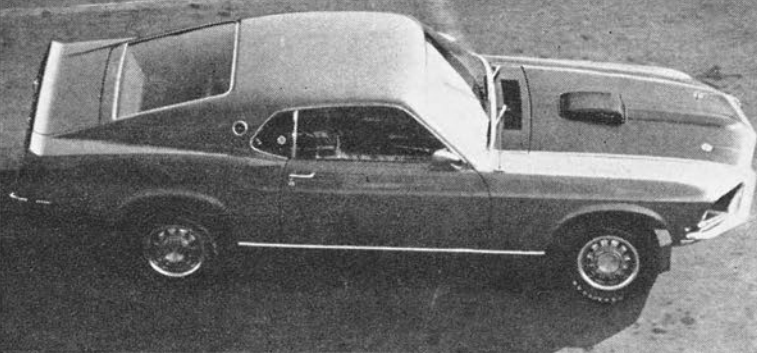
1967



1968



1969



Shelby

continued

and they were pushing his Mustang, probing for fresh ways to market it. Only 525 enthusiasts had been rabid enough to buy the original that first year. Give the car a more comfortable ride, insisted the analysts. Off came the Koni shocks, in their place going less expensive domestic models. Off came the traction bars, and the limited-slip differential, which became an option. Much of the rest of the racing equipment that had previously come standard on the car now was optional.

Styling was emphasized. The car was offered in colors other than white. A new grille went up front. A rear seat was now included. The exhaust pipes, which previously poked out the sides of the car, now exited straight out the back to reduce the noise level. The hood was no longer fiberglass, and it weighed more. A pseudo-wood-rim steering wheel was used, and the interior was standard Mustang, nothing special.

They were pushing the Shelby Mustang, looking for ways to move them. Hertz bought 1000 Shelbys, and asked that they be equipped with automatic transmissions.

Subsequent tests showed that the 1966 Shelby, though powered by the same engine, was slower through the quarter-mile than its predecessor. Yet comfort was winning out over performance, because 2500 were sold, counting the 1000 that went to Hertz.

By 1967 the Shelby Mustang was quieter, plusher, considerably less potent in performance. Ken Miles, the original designer, was dead. Ford continued to control the company and Shelby himself was preparing Trans-Am racing Mustangs. Engines in the Shelby were bigger, much bigger, at either 351 cid or 428 cid. These served to make the car heavier (curb weight of 3370 compared to 2790 in the original Shelby) and upset the weight balance (even on the original Shelby the car had only 45% of its weight on the rear).

The stylists, as opposed to the engineers, were at work. The nose was reshaped, there was a spoiler on the back. Comfort, luxury-oriented options like power steering and air conditioning were offered for the first time.

The Shelby still was the fastest Ford in the Mustang line, but standard Mustangs were coming dangerously close. Moreover, each year Ford was

working harder to improve the mediocre handling and road holding of the standard Mustangs.

This was also the year Chevrolet came out with its Z/28 Camaro, which was something like the original Shelby. It could not be called more 'refined' than the original Shelby, but at least it was less re-worked. It was a race car in street clothing like the Shelby had been, but a trifle less radical.

Shelby sales continued to climb; 3225 Shelbys sold in '67. But they were blending plushness with power; they were continuing to compromise the car, and the package was suffering. It was revealing when Carroll Shelby said, "The Shelby cars have come a long way in three years. The first GT 350 came in one style and in one color—white with blue stripes. It was closer to a race car than street vehicle."

Revealing, but a little sad, too.

An associate put it another way: "Carroll is beginning to find out that you can't make money on specialty cars like the original Mustang. They're nice and they're distinctive, but they don't sell. Or, if they do sell, not to enough people."

Therefore by 1968 the Shelby had eroded that much more. Both a convertible and a coupe were available, with the 428 Cobra Jet engine, or a 351. The Shelby was now called the GT 500-KR, the initials standing for King of the Road.

The King of the Road had problems getting its power on the ground, it was noted in a CAR LIFE road test (October, 1968). A roll bar was built into the convertible, but there were no trailing arms to limit the differential. CAR LIFE said: "Carroll Shelby might not be a prisoner in the Ford works, but every year the Shelby Mustang is a little less Shelby and a little more Mustang." It was a polite way of suggesting that the car was still slipping.

It had comfort, poor quality control (though now it was supposed to be a luxury automobile, not a racer), weak brakes, medium performance. It was not nearly so fast as the Mach 1, a car which CAR LIFE called "The First Great Mustang."

"This is the first car I built that I'm really proud of," said Shelby.

And the publicity from Ford was trumpeting the car's "NASA-type ram air system" and its chrome bumpers.

Hollywood people like Bill Cosby and Jackie Cooper bought Shelbys, but the enthusiasts ignored it.

Note, too, that Ford was at work during this time on the regular line of Mustangs. Road testers began to notice slight improvements in handling; and wide tires were having an impact on braking, cornering and ride. Ford

was to introduce two Mustangs (in the fall of 1968) that suggested the route Engineering was taking. First was a luxury Grandè, which surprisingly combined pretty good road holding qualities with applied luxury touches and a gentle ride. A second was the award-winning Mach 1 ("Best Ponycar of 1969," said CAR LIFE, September 1969). Ford aggressively went after its old Mustang bugaboo, understeer, and came close to licking it. The big Mach 1 had a 428 Cobra Jet engine that performed flawlessly for the CAR LIFE testers while turning the fastest quarter-mile elapsed time we'd ever experienced up to that point in a production car. Its improved suspension and wide tires put it in a new handling class from all previous Mustangs. (At the same time, test drives in the handsomely designed 1969 Shelbys left us remarking privately that they were *no better* than the Mach 1.)

Later in the model year Ford introduced a package with still more handling and performance potential than the Mach 1 (early production models still needed some sorting, according to our road testers). These were the Boss 429 and the Boss 302, both competition-quality Ponycars powered by engines currently dominating two vastly different areas of racing. The NASCAR star, the tunnelport 429 semi-Hemi was slightly strangled for the street to meet exhaust emission standards and to give it manners for everyday driving. Still, it was one of the great automotive bargains—a full racing engine in a car with heavy racing components.

Its stable mate, the Boss 302, had similar racing chassis components—rear anti-roll bar, strong springs, much improved front end geometry (a wider track, even) and fast, fat tires. Upon introduction, it immediately matched Camaro Z/28 standards in handling and speed—and was even better around town due to the superior low speed torque of its engine.

So this year the enthusiast bought a Mach 1 or a Boss—or a Z/28. Why spend the extra \$800 for a Shelby, when Ford had learned its lessons so soundly?

Ford asked the same question, and decided the Shelby wasn't worth the bother. Production stopped. The 800-off Shelbys left in the pipeline will be slightly modified and sold as 1970 models. When they're gone, there will be no more.

Shelby himself may lose some sleep over the matter, but he will survive. Even before the Shelby Mustang folded he had said he was interested in getting back in the car building business, to build some "real" cars again. Mid-engine sports cars, perhaps.

Who knows, he might even sell Ford on the idea. ■