

# The Shelby Lone Star... Look, but Don't Touch

**S**anta Barbara by the sea, known for its cherished Spanish heritage and the ad hoc committee to Get the Oil Out (GOO), is a hundred miles and several life styles removed from L.A. It's the place where everybody would love to live . . . if they could figure out a way to commute to work. On a side street is Emilio Valsecchi's thriving Fiat dealership, by no means a big operation, but one that holds more interest for the foreign car nut than the average Fiat emporium. Besides the usual array of 124s, there's an occasional Siata V-8 or Fiat 850 OTR with 1000cc Abarth engine — a sort of liter-sized Z/28. When you're in the area, you always find time to swing by and see what's new.

The street is narrow and lined with trees, hiding the place until that last

**The saddest  
words of tongue  
or pen  
are simply  
these,**

**"It might have been."**

story and photos  
by A.B. Shuman

instant before you've gone past (just like the exits on the Merritt Parkway). Your powers of instant recognition are put to the ultimate test. You've got to make a split-second decision on whether to stop or drive on by. Our last trip down Anacapa Street almost produced a twelve-car chain-reaction pile-up.

Out there in the number one spot in the front row (next to a '68 Mercedes-Benz 280 SEL with F70 Polyglas tires) was what had to be some kind of Group 7 car. Only it had license plates. By the time we had gotten to the curb and were scrambling out of our GTO, somebody had recognized the machine as the prototype mid-engine car that Carroll Shelby had exhibited in a couple of auto shows. Emilio, who was sitting in it, had just taken it in on trade toward a new Ferrari — the kind with back seats, factory air and a 155 mph top speed, for weekend jaunts to Vegas.

A member of the California Highway Patrol, with military crewcut and precisely pressed uniform, had just wheeled his cruiser in to take a closer look at the little red car, and was nodding his head from side to side, a curious smile on his face. Emilio fired the engine, with a rap and crackle from the exhaust, causing the Highway Patrolman to look first at the Shelby, then back at his own black and white Biscayne. His thoughts were obvious.

The car was built in 1967 by John

Wyer's J.W. Automotive Engineering in England (the same group that built the GT40 Mirage and won Ford the World Manufacturers' Championship in 1968, and LeMans in '69). The chassis is made of large diameter steel tubing and closely resembles the GT40 layout, with a warmed-over single four-barrel 289 Ford filling the engine compartment. The body is made of light gauge aluminum and bears random dents and dimples—the badges of its tour on the show car circuit, where onlookers sought to caress its sensuous bulges as they would check the ripeness of a casaba melon at the market.

Because of a change in the rights to the Cobra name, Shelby had to come up with a new designation for what he hoped would be a successor to his Cobra roadsters. Tipping his black hat toward Texas, he decided on "Lone Star." The car in Valsecchi's lot bore the serial number LS-1; it was the first and only one ever built. The reason for its demise lies in the fact that despite its social amenities (emergency flasher, side marker lights, vestigial bumpers and power-operated plexiglass side windows), it's still more racer than streetster. The car is said to have been shipped to Ford for study early in its career, to be considered for possible production, but apparently it flunked its final exam.

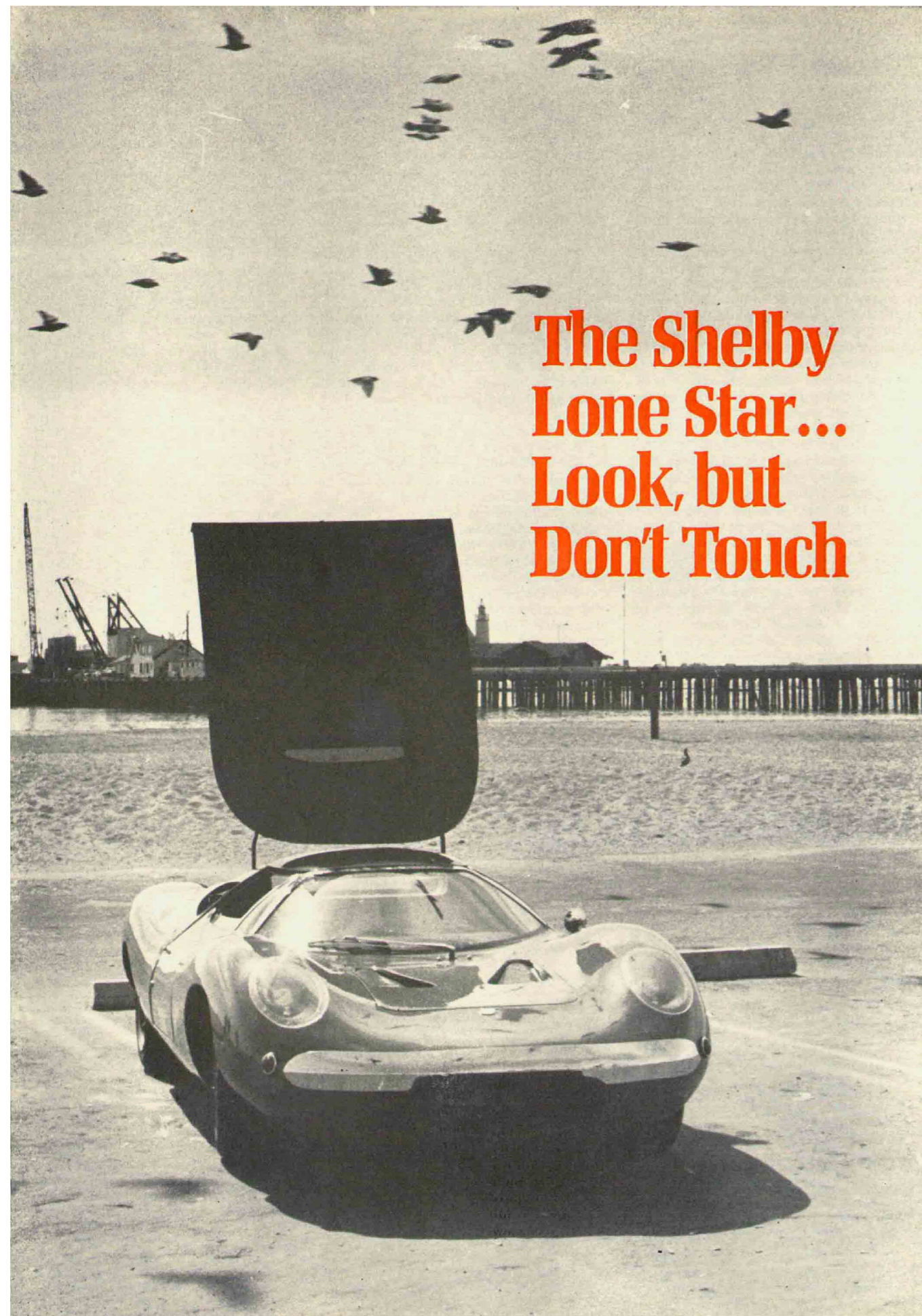
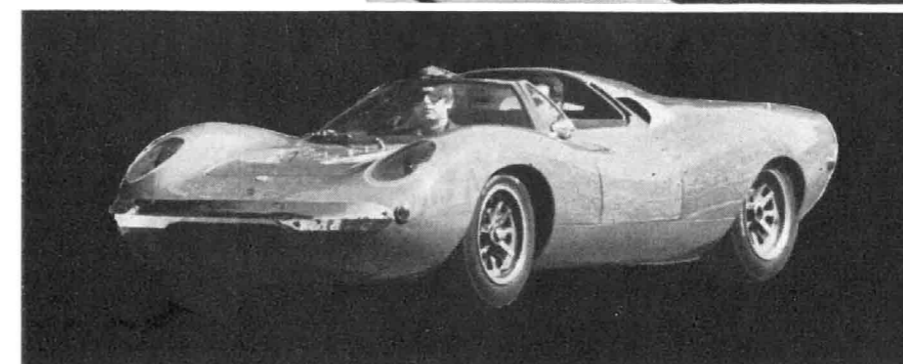
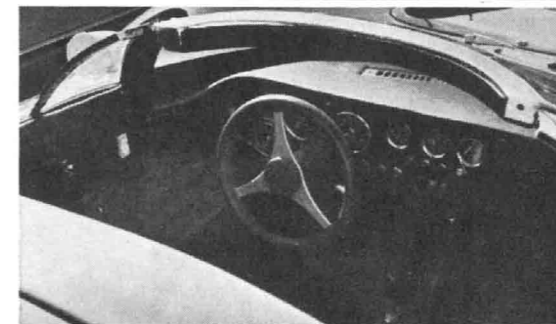
Some of the car's drawbacks become immediately apparent once you open the driver's-side door and attempt to get in. The twin side-mounted 15-gallon fuel tanks create wide gunwhales which intrude into the area generally reserved for the occupants. The cockpit itself is tiny, with floor-mounted *chaise-lounge* style seats. To get in, you must first get over the gunwhale. The most direct way is to step over, but this leaves you standing on the seat with no place to go. So, the plan is to sit on the gunwhale facing outward, draw your knees up under your chin, pivot around smartly and slip your feet under the dash. You then propel yourself on your hands down and into the seat. (The danger here is that you'll end up sitting on your hands.) The foam-padded ten-inch diameter steering wheel pivots upward at a slight angle in a token effort to aid things, but ultimately it's just a matter of blending man and machine. The seats produce a reclining posture which increases in inverse proportion to the length of the driver's legs, the tiny pedals being harbored somewhere in the shadowy darkness under the knee-cap-high dash. With the wheel in place for driving, your arms are locked in the straight-out position, roughly akin to the situation in a slingshot dragster. There is no rear view mirror, but the tiny side mirror gives good coverage of the left side engine air intake scoop. Forward visibility is good, though the front fenders seem to loom up like the walls of a canyon.

A bank of Smiths instruments line the dash: speedo, tach, oil temperature, oil pressure, water temperature and fuel quantity. The fuel gauge only shows the

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Carroll Shelby's one-off Lone Star mid-engine car was to be built as the worthy successor to the AC-bodied Cobra roadsters, but it apparently didn't make it as the proper blend of a Group 7 racer and a street machine. So now it languishes on a used car lot in Santa Barbara, looking for a very understanding person.



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## LONE STAR

continued

amount in one tank at a time, with a toggle switch to select the side you're monitoring. Likewise, the tanks are independent of each other and must also be selected. The control is located on the side of the car away from the driver, in the area of the passenger's right elbow. Right below it is the handle for the manual choke.

The clutch, brake and accelerator pedals, of course, are small, and leverage on the clutch is a little tricky, resulting in a lurch and inevitable screech from the 5.00/9.65x15 Goodyear rear tires when an initiate tries to start off from rest. The drivetrain consists of a five-speed ZF transaxle, and it occasionally locks in gear. But once you get underway things start getting better. Thanks to the light weight (about 2100 pounds), acceleration is very brisk even with the relatively mild engine. Top speed is in the neighborhood of 130 mph, a bunch less than you'd expect from the look of the package.

Cornering is quite flat, with negligible roll, due in part to the light body weight. The chassis seems to be quite flexible. It utilizes coil-shocks fore and aft, with many standard Cobra roadster parts in the front suspension. A unique feature of the rear suspension is the very long leading arms. Disc brakes are used on all four wheels. The steering, though very stiff, seems completely neutral under all conditions. There is a problem with the turning radius, however, as U-turns cannot be executed without having to back up.

The car has a small, detachable hard-top (which is carried in the fairly large trunk area behind the engine, when not in use), but even without it, wind in the cockpit doesn't seem to be a problem. There is a problem with heat though, as cockpit temperature runs around 100 degrees if you get caught in traffic. Engine water temperature, on the other hand, runs between 90 and 95 degrees C (a pair of thermostatically-operated Kenlowe electric fans being automatically switched on at 90 degrees to draw additional air past the front-mounted radiator). Oil temperature does tend to run high (100-120 degrees C), though installation of an oil cooler would undoubtedly solve this.

The lack of an oil cooler is one of the puzzling aspects of the car, for if it was meant to be a racer, it would have undoubtedly had one. Yet, there is so much about it that is strictly race car. So, where does it leave you? With a car that's completely impractical for 90 percent of your driving, but a complete blast for the other 10. /MT



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