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G.T. 350

A Horse of a Different STRIPE

A Shelby Racer Isn't too Different From the Street Version, Right?

By Tim Suddard
Photography by David S. Wallens

Racing into Sebring's legendary Turn 1 at more than 100 miles per hour in a race-ready Shelby Mustang is an experience that most car fanatics can only dream of. For a brief second, you feel—or at least think you feel—what it was like to be a legendary race car driver like Jerry Titus or Bob Bondurant.

The engine roar is deafening, an unhindered magnification of the near-orgasmic tone that is unique to the small-block Ford V8. To a Ford freak—or any race fan from the '60s, for that matter—this song is more melodious than Mozart, although the volume puts it more in line with a live performance by Led Zeppelin or The Who.

The experience leaves you shaking with adrenaline, and the assault's mark lingers. For hours afterward, you can't help but notice how quiet everything has become by comparison.

In the late 1960s, dreams of checkered flags and last-lap wins sent fans to select Ford dealerships where they could pick up a Shelby GT350 of their own for about \$4500. When the Shelby GT350 was unleashed on an unsuspecting public back in 1965, it was the closest thing to a street-legal race car that people had ever seen on a dealer's lot.

Carroll Shelby and his Southern California crew used a lot of basic hot rod tricks to turn the Mustang fastback into the Shelby GT350. Their recipe was simple: add more thrust, more stick and more stopping power to yield more performance—a lot more performance.

Sure it was potent, but how close was that over-the-counter Shelby GT350 to the ones we watched duke it out on track? If we liken the race cars to that wall of Marshall speakers looming large behind The Who, was the stock Shelby truly hi-fi or just another clock radio?

There's only one way to find out. And it's going to involve some seat time in a pair of Shelbys.



So, what separates a highly tuned street car from its race-ready cousin? It's more than numbers on the doors and some sticky tires, as today's vintage racer is pretty advanced—yet still doesn't lose the charms found in the stock car.



Sound Check

To see how the race Shelby compares against its street-going counterpart, we set up a little face-off at Florida's challenging and historic Sebring International Raceway—the place where so many Shelbys proved their chops. In one corner, we'd have a modern vintage racer; in the other, a nice, clean street car.

For our race car, we called Cobra Automotive of Wallingford, Conn. Curt Vogt and his brother, Carl, have risen through the ranks to become one of the nation's premier race preparers of Shelby Mustangs and AC Cobras. Their Cobra Automotive is run out of a newly renovated 12,000-square-foot building and has 15 full-time employees. They also travel to most SVRA and HSR vintage race events to provide track support for their customers.

Cobra Automotive put us in touch with one of their regular customers, John Brice of Ridgefield, Conn. Brice campaigns one of the best early Shelbys racing today. Today's vintage racer is a product of 40 years of evolution, so while it's not an exact duplicate of the Shelbys that raced back in the '60s (it does have some modern speed and safety upgrades), Brice's car is about as close as one can get without a time machine.

For the street car, Shelby American Auto Club leader Rick Kopec put us in touch with Craig Brody, a South Florida classic car and vintage guitar dealer who manages C. Brody Investment Motorcars. Brody has one of the nicest 1965 Shelby Mustangs we have ever seen. It's not 100 percent stock—the 16-inch wheels and low-profile tires are recent upgrades—but following the rationale that the Shelby was a hot car designed to be made even hotter by its owners, we felt the mild upgrades were reasonable.

Now that we had our cars and a track, it was time for some driving. Since we would be playing with machinery worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in today's crazy market,

and since our street car did not have proper safety equipment, we put away the stopwatches for this outing. The little ticking numbers on a clock inspire more risks than we were willing to take with these beautiful and valuable cars, and besides, the difference in tires alone would make lap times meaningless.

Stage Presence

Parked next to each other for photography in the paddock, our two test cars look nearly identical. Both cars

Comparisons are fun.

The dreamy cars this time are a pair of Shelbys, one race steed and one street pony. Side by side, John Brice's racer (the one without a front bumper) and Craig Brody's street machine are surprisingly similar. However, even a highly potent street car like the Shelby GT350 can't hold a candle to the unrestrained

fury of its racing counterpart, and the differences are obvious once at speed.

Owner Profile: Craig Brody

Ironically, Brody's stock 1965 street car, serial number SFM5S430, was used as a race car for the first part of its life. Gordon Collins bought the car in 1968 and started drag racing it. Brody even has a picture of the car in red, white and blue livery at the 1970 Gator Nationals drag meet in Gainesville, Fla., where it placed second in class behind the factory Ford.

After a succession of owners, the car was purchased by Brody about four years ago from Orlando Mustang for the princely sum of \$65,000. Along the way, a factory K-Code stamped engine had been reinstalled and the entire car was returned to stock 1965 specs, save for modern tires on vintage-appropriate wheels.



Car:	1965 Shelby GT350
Owner:	Craig Brody
Engine:	289-cubic-inch OHV Ford V8
Driveline:	alum.-case BorgWarner T10; Detroit Locker
Interior:	stock
Suspension:	independent with upper A-arms front, live axle rear
Brakes:	11.3-in. discs front, 10x2.5-in. drum rear
Wheels:	16x8-in. American Racing Torq-Thrust
Tires:	Bridgestone Potenza S-02
Body:	stock
Dimensions:	height, 51.2 in.; length, 181.6 in.; wheel-base, 108 in.; weight, approx. 3000 pounds



wear Wimbledon White paint, beefy five-spoke wheels and a don't-mess-with-me demeanor.

But look a little closer. The racer sits a bit lower, with big racing numbers that go a long way toward making the car look serious. By running without bumpers, it pays homage to the look that was prototyped by the super-rare, race-ready Shelby GT350R. A layer of red plastic covers the headlamps, and this low-dollar detail whispers a subtle message: This car is no longer intended for street use.

Other than these small visual clues, the cars still are surprisingly similar on the outside. But first impressions can be deceiving.

From the inside, the differences become much more apparent. The race car has a stout roll cage and a narrow race seat that surely surpasses the one fitted to the stock car. (In fact, when queried, the owner of our street Shelby says the unsupportive stock seats are one of the car's biggest letdowns.)

Naturally, the race car is thoroughly stripped down for race duty. Gone are the factory carpets, stock seats and other niceties. This helps bring down the mass to 2855 pounds, even though the cage alone accounts for 100 pounds.

The stock car is no porker, but at a little north of 3000 pounds it's just about 10 percent heavier. That extra heft makes a big difference on a race track, as it negatively impacts acceleration, braking and handling.

Lurking Backstage

Both cars are equipped with the ubiquitous 289-cubic-inch Ford V8. Carroll Shelby's original recipe for the GT350 was to start with a Ford K-Code V8 engine making 271 horsepower, and free it up with a few mods. Coaxed up to a claimed 306 horsepower, the Shelby GT350 came equipped with tubular headers, an aluminum high-rise intake manifold and a Holley four-barrel carburetor.

The engine in our race car takes things more than a bit further with in excess of 500 horses on tap thanks to the full Cobra Automotive treatment. A custom-ground camshaft, lightweight pistons and connecting

Owner Profile: John Brice

John Brice, a McDonald's restaurant franchisee from southern Connecticut, has owned his 1966 GT350 (serial number SFM6S293) for about three years. It was already a race car when he bought it, as the previous owner, James Overlin, originally prepared the car for vintage racing and ran with both the SVRA and HSR.

When Brice acquired the car, he decided to run it out of the Cobra Automotive stable. The Vogt brothers quickly realized that while the car had not been optimized, Brice had more than a little driving talent. In fact, he was fearless when thrashing his valuable GT350 at the limit. The Vogts decided to give the car the full Cobra Automotive treatment so Brice would no longer be held back by an under-prepared car.

"It's simple, raw and fun to drive," Brice says. "I put a radio and Cool Suit in this year. Bigger brakes on the front, too. It's SVRA legal as well."

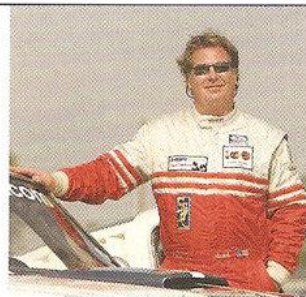
He didn't focus solely on the internals, since everyone loves a good-looking race car. Brice has given the exterior some attention as well.

"That's the old McDonald's logo, Speedee," he says, referring to the classic hamburger icon on the car. "I own five McDonald's in New York and thought it'd be appropriate."

Brakes were an early problem with the car, but some development has brought everything up to par. "The back brakes are 11x2.25-inch Cobra Automotive brakes. It can out-brake disc-brake cars. They're drums, vented with an air scoop underneath. The side vents aren't hooked up, it vents right off the

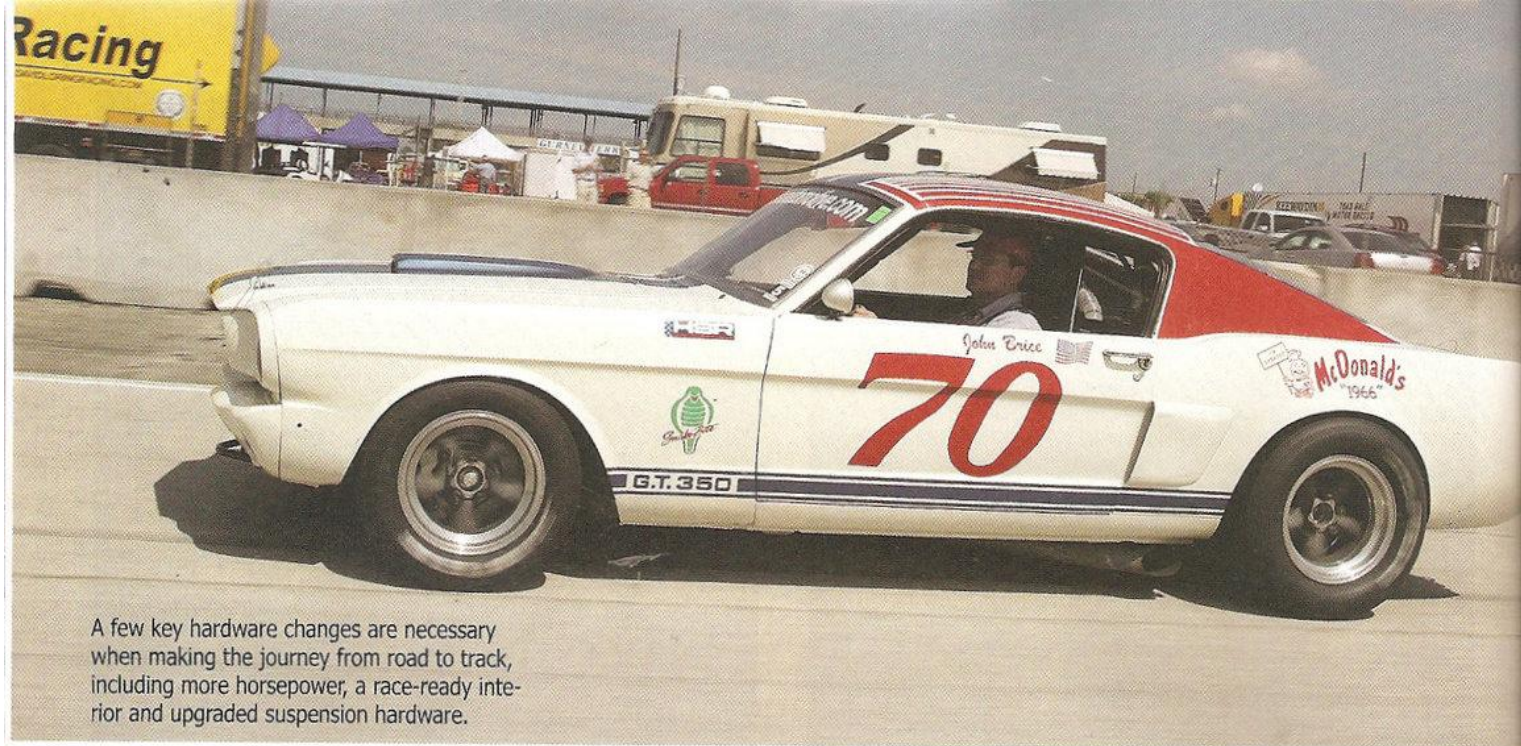
axle. It makes a huge difference in longevity. We went through shoes every weekend at first."

Brice doesn't let the oil sit too long for any one stretch. "I did over 20 events last year in the Anglo-American GT Challenge," he says of the car's HSR history. "This year, it's going to run in the Rolex Endurance Series."

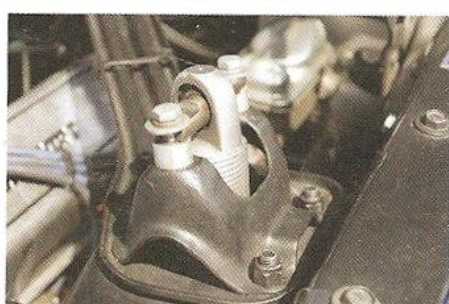


Car:	1966 Shelby GT350, runs in HSR and SVRA
Owner:	John Brice, McDonald's franchisee
Engine:	289-cubic-inch Ford V8; custom-ground camshaft; lightweight pistons and connecting rods; modified intake manifold; underdrive race pulleys
Driveline:	Jerico transmission; Cobra Automotive steering box and roller bearing steering kit
Interior:	belts; gauges; pedals; roll cage
Suspension:	independent with upper A-arms front, live axle rear; competition shocks; gusseted road race control arms; big spindle kit; billet aluminum racing hub kit; rollerized coil spring pivots; stiffer front springs; heavier rear leaf springs; adjustable front strut rods; 1.25-in. hollow front anti-roll bar; Cobra Automotive bumpsteer kit
Brakes:	12-in. Cobra Automotive discs and four-piston calipers front; 11x2.25-in. Cobra Automotive drums rear; air scoop ventilation
Wheels:	15x7-in. front; 15x8.5-in. rear
Tires:	6.00x15 front, 7.00x15 rear Goodyear Blue Streak
Body:	R-model apron, McDonald's vintage Speedee logo
Dimensions:	wheelbase, 108 in.; weight, 2855 pounds
Thanks:	Cobra Automotive





A few key hardware changes are necessary when making the journey from road to track, including more horsepower, a race-ready interior and upgraded suspension hardware.



rods, a highly modified intake manifold and under-drive race pulleys all play their part. (In modern vintage racing, one can easily spend between \$10,000 and \$25,000 on the engine alone, with the final figure depending on the sanctioning body and how badly the driver wants to run up front.)

While we expect that the race engine would come on harder in the upper rev ranges—and yes, it does—what is most impressive is the sound the race car makes. It's a boom that turns into a howl as the needle climbs the tach. It echoes mightily in the unpadded cabin. If one man's music is another man's noise, the wailing small-block Ford is a sweet sound that our ears will never tire of hearing.

Things feel different when you put the cars into gear, too. Instead of the heavier Ford "top-loader" transmission, Shelby specified an aluminum-case BorgWarner T10 in the Shelby GT350. While this transmission does not snick-snick like the one in a Miata, we find that it is surprisingly easy to shift the street Shelby. The gear change is positive and nearly effortless; it's a real joy considering the nature of the beast.

Our race car had been converted to an uncompromising Jerico racing transmission. These nearly bulletproof units offer lighter weight and multiple gear choices as well as greatly increased durability. Designed to be shifted without using the clutch, this transmission takes some getting used to, but

Preserving Provenance

The Shelby American Automobile Club was founded 31 years ago as an enthusiast organization dedicated to the preservation, care, history and enjoyment of the cars that Carroll Shelby created. In the more than three decades since, those goals have not changed.

SAAC was started when Cobras and Shelby Mustangs were not much more than used performance cars. As interest in them increased (mostly due to the club's ongoing efforts), so did their values. Although maintaining accurate historical and ownership records on each of the 1001 Cobras and 13,826 Shelby Mustangs was not one of the club's initial goals, it has taken on an increased importance each year.

Interest and enthusiasm for these cars is so high now that more people desire them than there are cars to go around. The result is a generation of look-alikes and clones, which provide many of the same visceral thrills for drivers without the provenance and, hence, without the value. SAAC maintains detailed records and assists members in telling the difference between originals and anything else—when they're worth anywhere between \$100,000 and a few million dollars, that's important.

The club publishes a large registry every 10 years or so, with the last one checking in at 1336 pages. (No, that page count is not a typo.) It is an encyclopedia of these cars and contains hundreds of pictures, factory production figures, detailed histories, serial number information, part numbers and a lot more. The next edition is scheduled for printing in about a year. It will, of course, be bigger and better than the three previous editions.

SAAC also puts on an exciting national convention each summer. (There have been 31 so far.) The club rents a major league race track—the list of past venues includes just about every one you can name—and the event rotates around the country. Typical activities include open track running for members, a judged concours, a display car show, wheel-to-wheel vintage racing, a parts swap, a literature and memorabilia show, technical seminars, ex-Cobra Team reunions and evening programs with guest speakers who are well-known racing personalities, motorsports journalists, and high-level engineers and managers from Ford. Carroll Shelby attends most conventions and enjoys posing for pictures with car owners and signing autographs.

The club has about 5000 members on its roster. While many reside in the U.S., others hail from Canada and throughout Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. SAAC publishes a glossy magazine and bimonthly newsletters that contain classified ads (these are free to members). Membership is \$47 a year.

by the end of our session we can see where it could be advantageous for racing. That said, we really like the feel of the original transmission better.

Keeping Time

All V8 Mustangs are heavy, point-and-shoot cars. Leave your finesse at home when you drive either of these beasts.

The plain-Jane Mustang was an awful car from a handling standpoint. We don't care what Lt. Frank Bullitt made the car do; in reality, when the Mustang wasn't oversteering, it understeered terribly. It was heavy in the front and light in the rear, not a great combination for world-class corner carving.

When Shelby first got forced into modifying the Mustang, he was appalled. Yes, while Shelby loved his Cobras, Ford pretty much foisted the Mustang on him. By that time, Shelby was so much into the pockets of Ford Motor Company that when they asked him to bring a little of the Shelby magic to the Mustang, he could say little else but "why, I'd love to."

One of Shelby's first modifications in creating the GT350 was to move the upper mounts of the front A-arms down about an inch to improve the roll center. From there, a 1-inch front anti-roll bar and stiffer front coil springs were substituted. Koni shocks were fitted all the way around. At the rear, stiffer leaf springs and traction bars were

added in hopes of keeping the tires attached to the pavement.

Basically, a Shelby Mustang incorporates many of the standard hot rodding tricks that are still used today to make a car get around a corner quicker. Interestingly, an independent rear suspension was tried, but it was deemed no better—at least on a smooth race track—and therefore not worth the hassle and cost to produce.

Once we climb behind the wheel of our street-going GT350, we find that even with what was considered the hot setup back in 1965, on Sebring's pavement Craig Brody's street car feels somehow disconnected. The pliable suspension bushings and relatively soft spring rates allow the car to float around the course. The ride is actually closer to that of a family sedan than a revered performance car.

The race car feels much tighter, almost like it's bolted down to the track. The driving style on the racer is point and shoot. Just like famed driver Jerry Titus demonstrated, the Shelby still heavily favors a tail-out attitude. The rear end slides around progressively, while the handling—and we use the term loosely—is bear-like, yet strangely effective. Steering takes two men and a boy, but it doesn't really matter, because you can change directions in this car more efficiently with the throttle.

While vintage race preparers can't alter basic physics and car design, today's Shelby race cars use all the modern tricks to get this

Keeping the Spirit Alive

Our Shelby test day taught us a couple of things. One was that today's vintage race cars—at least, the legal ones—are true continuations of their original designs.

Other than the Jerico transmission (which can be called a durability mod), our race Shelby seemed to be a fair representation of today's modern vintage race car. While it's impossible to keep racers from spending money and constantly upgrading and improving their cars, we were pleased to see the spirit of vintage racing alive and well at Sebring. We feared we would see fiberglass doors, rear disc brakes and some of the other modifications that are flagrantly illegal—or at least not in the spirit of vintage racing.

We also came away from that day a little bit angry. As mentioned earlier, we were running around in nearly \$1 million worth of machinery at today's prices. Yet these were the same rude, crude, basic sports cars we played around with when we were kids. Neither of them had the sophistication we tell ourselves we'd expect for this kind of money.

We're not faulting the cars for that. Rather, our anger stems from not buying them when we had the chance. Sophisticated or not, there are few cars that sound as good or are as purposeful in their beauty as an early Shelby Mustang.

The only logical anger management therapy is to take a few more laps.



While not totally stock, Craig Brody's Shelby makes a nice street cruiser. The fully upholstered interior is welcoming, while the engine is quite tractable.

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far. Cobra Automotive makes a host of trick suspension goodies to further improve early Mustangs, and John Brice's car puts them to good use. The Cobra Automotive suspension kit includes gusseted road race control arms, a big spindle kit, a billet aluminum racing hub kit, rollerized coil spring pivots, stiffer front springs, adjustable front strut rods, competition shocks, a 1.25-inch hollow front anti-roll bar and myriad of other components to improve both handling and durability.

Standing Ovation

Although popular lore puts the stock Shelby GT350 well into the realm of full race cars, we learned that a street car—even a tweaked-out, hot rod, limited-production variant—is no race car. Still, compared to its street-going peers of the 1960s, the GT350 is a real fireball, and it's impressive that a massive company like Ford had the balls to build and market a car like this.

What we found truly amazing was that even after the extra hardware and development work transformed the car we all lusted after into a timeless race winner, the Shelby GT350 remained a handful on track. We were whipped just muscling these cars around for a few hours; we can only imagine what it was like to run a GT350 in Sebring's famous 12-hour race. The true heroes are the guys who raced them for real, back in the day. But that's a story for another time.

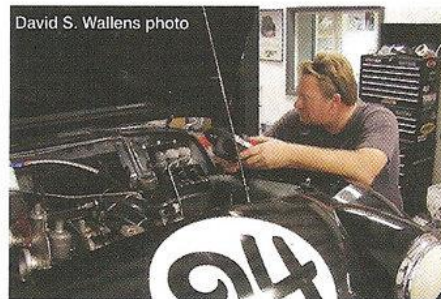


An Effective Benchmark: Our Triumph TR3

Whenever we need a point of reference on all this racing stuff, we look to our venerable Triumph TR3 that we have been racing for nearly 10 seasons with the SVRA and HSR. It's our baseline, and we can't help but weigh the driving experience in the Shelsbys against our Triumph.

Honestly, the racing Shelby and the much-modified TR3 have more in common than one might think. There are similarly crude, yet highly effective, oxcart suspensions, live axles and front-weight bias on both cars. The difference between the two is in volume: Where the TR3 hums along with the knobs set to about three, racing a Shelby at Sebring is like having the knobs turned all the way to 11.

As some would say, that's rock 'n' roll.



Sources

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(954) 646-8819
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Cobra Automotive
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www.cobraautomotive.com

Historic Sportscar Racing
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