

GENUINE FORD PEOPLE INTERVIEW

Cobra Automotive's Curt Vogt, Wallingford, Connecticut

BY BOB McCLURG

Whenever we're talking with owners about Shelby Mustangs, Cobras in particular, Curt Vogt's name always seems to come up. He's an acknowledged expert in the arcane science that collector car restoration has become, especially when it comes to Shelbys. Just who is this man whom our readers praise, and whom we so often recommend for answers to those questions for which we have none? During the holidays in December 1999, I had the rare opportunity to sit down with Vogt, for our GENUINE FORD PEOPLE INTERVIEW. Ladies and gentleman, presenting Cobra Automotive's Curt Vogt!

MI: Curt, I guess the beginning is usually the best place to start. Where were you born?

VOGT: I was born August 8, 1959 in Hackensack, New Jersey, in 1966, at age seven, my family and I moved to Connecticut.

MI: Have you always had a love for all things mechanical?

VOGT: You might say that I come from a long line of inventors and tinkerers.

MI: How so?

VOGT: My father Richard Vogt was both an engineer and a tool and die maker. He had some very interesting jobs. One time he worked for the Good Humor Ice Cream Company. While he was employed with Good Humor he invented the X-15 Rocket Pop as well as the Twin Pop. Of course, when you're a kid growing up in the early '60s, that certainly qualifies for major bragging rights!



Cobra Automotive in Wallingford, CT has about 12,000 square feet and a staff of 12 full-time employees. Vogt has put together a one-stop performance restoration shop for Shelby Mustang and Cobra enthusiasts who only want the very best.



Says Curt Vogt, "Cobra Automotive has been awesome. It has helped put my name on the map and enabled me to do what I enjoy doing the most—playing with cars." You can check out Cobra Automotive on the internet at www.cobraautomotive.com.

My father also worked on the first ballpoint pen which would write upside down. He was also the Plant Manager at the Stanley (Tool) Works. As a hobby he was a gunsmith, and often built guns as a sideline. He also built miniature steam engines and things like that. My grandfather Richard Carl Vogt, held several patents in the 1930s having to do with household hardware and appliances. My grandfather used to make all my father's toys—his bicycles, his toy trains, and other things.

MI: So you come by your mechanical aptitude naturally?

VOGT: Yes, pretty much so. You might say I grew up around machinery. There was a full machine shop in our cellar. Bridgeports, lathes, honing machines, you name it! At a young age when other kids were involved with academics or sports, I was in the basement making things.

MI: What were some of the things you made?

VOGT: Typically it would be items like hand-made model airplanes. When I was young, I was very interested in WW I biplanes. I made my own pellet guns as well as repaired the pellet guns of all the neighborhood kids. Of course every once in a while there would be an "explosive device" or two [laughing] made. My older brother Carl and I used to make all sorts of cool stuff.



Vogt has owned and vintage raced three Shelby R-Models. Here's SFM-5R635 in action at Lime Rock Park. This car was one of five R-Models shipped to Peru in 1965. In the late '80s, it was retrieved by Curt and restored to its former splendor.

MI: When did you become involved in cars?

VOGT: First of all, I came from a family of Ford lovers. My father had LTD Country Squire and Galaxie station wagons throughout our entire life. So you might say I was a "Ford Man" from Day One.

My older brother Carl used to build model cars. I remember we used to listen to those cardboard records they would put in the model car kits of the "Mongoose" and the "Snake." When he was old enough to get his driver's license he had a series of Mustangs. He had a 1968 351-W four-speed notchback Mustang as his first car. Obviously, the 351-W engine was not at all original. Then he stepped into a 1967 390 GT Mustang fastback. All of his friends had Boss 302s, Z-28 Camaros and Mach-1s. At fourteen years old, I can remember being pushed into the back seat (from lateral g-forces) whenever we went for a fast ride. So when it came time for me to get my first car it was naturally a Ford.

MI: And that was?

VOGT: I instinctively knew I wanted a Mustang. I joined the Shelby American Automobile Club in 1975-76. Believe it or not, my first car was a 1968 Shelby GT-500KR convertible, purchased when I was just 17 years old.

MI: Wow! That's some car!

VOGT: Well, I decided I wanted to "shoot for the moon." I knew I would probably put a fair amount of money into my first car, so I wanted an investment. Besides joining the Shelby American Automobile Club, I also checked the classifieds in the local swap papers and tried to track down every lead I could. Finally I purchased my first automobile, a dark green 1968 Shelby KR convertible with automatic—for the sum of \$1,900!

At the time, I had two jobs. One was mowing lawns, the other was washing dishes. I washed dishes at the local steak house seven nights a week while I was a senior in high school to pay for that car. I paid the KR off in a matter of six months.

MI: Did you restore the Shelby?

VOGT: No. I did all the usual things you did to Shelbys in the 1970s when the cars weren't worth much. I immediately pulled the engine out, and installed a 427 solid lifter cam with three deuces and headers.

Remember, at that time you could buy a nice Mach 1 for a thousand dollars, and a Shelby for two thousand dollars. We worked on that car through my senior year in high school. However, by the time I was 19 I also had a 1965 Shelby GT350. Since I was never much of a "ragtop guy," I ended up selling the KR before I ever got a chance to drive it. I did fire it up once, but never drove it, and never completed the paint and bodywork.

MI: If only foresight had been 20/20!

VOGT: Yes! To this very day, I know where that car is. I would like to buy it back, just for the sake of me being able to say that I still own my first car.

MI: So your initial involvement with Shelby is what became the foundation for Cobra Automotive?

VOGT: More or less. My brother and I used to sell cars and parts. We bought Hi Po 289s and 427s for \$250, fixed them up and sold them. I remember selling a 1966 Shelby for \$500 and a 1964 Ford Thunderbolt for \$350! We bought and sold A LOT of cars!

When we weren't fixing up Mustangs, we were out at the race-tracks. We went to the stock car races on Saturday night. We went to the drags on Sunday, and we went to the road races at places like Lime Rock Park in Sharon, Conn. on the three-day weekends. All we did was eat, sleep and breathe cars.

MI: And you don't do that now?

VOGT: It was a little different then. For example, on my high school graduation night, I spent until 4 a.m. at the machine shop putting a Cobra Jet short-block together for my KR convertible. My paycheck at the restaurant was fictitiously made out to "Shelby Vogt," my nickname. There was this quotation in my high school yearbook under my picture that said, "Death to Chevys!" "Baseball, apple pie and Ford!" I was one of the only Mustang guys in the entire high school. Everyone else was either a Chevy or a Mopar enthusiast.

MI: When did Cobra Automotive formally come about?

VOGT: Cobra Automotive was first founded in 1979. When I



From engine building to sheetmetal restoration, Cobra Automotive does it all. "Somebody will bring in his car, either a shell, or a rolling wreck, and we'll hand them back a beautiful, well-oiled machine," says Vogt.

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For a brief period in 1982, Vogt went Busch Grand National racing. "I bought a car from the late Davey Allison. I went to Dover, Delaware, shook Davey's hand, handed him a check for my "brand-new" Texaco Havoline #28 Thunderbird and went stock car racing."

was 19 years old, I had purchased a Sunbeam Tiger "Powered by Ford" oil pan. While I had this oil pan (Curt eventually traded it for a Paxton supercharger), I noticed that it generated a lot of interest. It was very rare and people wanted to buy it. So, prior to getting rid of it I said to myself, "Why not see about getting some more of these made?"

Since this was a casting, I took the pan to Bridgeport, Conn. where there were a lot of foundries. I finally I ended up at Peerless Aluminum Foundry where they took my oil pan and wrote me a \$3,975 quote for pattern making and tooling. At the time, that was about \$103 per casting. I went to the bank and took out a loan for two thousand dollars with a friend I was renting a house with. We went together and started Cobra Automotive to manufacture aluminum oil pans.

Within six months, we re-manufactured the (289) Cobra open letter finned aluminum valve cover. I remember we used to drill the holes and sand the fins using a cheap drill press in the cellar of the house I had rented. I guess you could say that Cobra Automotive started out of the basement of a rented house in Orange, Conn.

MI: And you were off and running?

VOGT: Uh, yes, and no! During the next couple of years, we manufactured a few more items. But in reality, the business, which was part time, sort of stagnated. Eventually I bought my partner out. He wasn't nearly as enthusiastic about the hobby. For the next couple of years, I ran Cobra Automotive as a sideline while I retained a full time job working as a motorcycle parts and accessories salesman for a large east coast motorcycle distributorship selling to the motorcycle trade on the east coast. Then in 1984 I decided that it was time to get serious about Cobra Automotive. I didn't want to be in the motorcycle parts business anymore, and went into working at building Cobra Automotive up into a viable business enterprise full time.

MI: So what was your first "real" shop?

VOGT: In 1984, I "graduated" up from the basement to an extended 1-bay garage shop here in Wallingford. At that point in time, I also remanufactured the 1969 Shelby exhaust collector and the 1969 Shelby front bumper.

As Cobra Automotive progressed, I was starting to replicate more intricate items with my advancing knowledge of tool and die making. One good example was the 427 Ford fender "flags" for Galaxies and Thunderbolts. I also found the original manufacturer for the 289 Hi-Po fan, and re-introduced that part. During that time, I had replicated the 427 FE chrome vent roof valve cover, an item that proved to be quite popular. However, by 1986 I was again beginning to realize that I wasn't really getting anywhere. I was the chief cook and bottle washer. Once again, while keeping Cobra Automotive going as a sideline, I took a full-time job, this time in the tool and die business as a pattern and mold maker at A&H Pattern (Anderson & Hull) in Bridgeport, CT. That job lasted from 1986 to 1992.

MI: And Cobra Automotive went back to being a part time gig?

VOGT: When I went to work for A&H, I basically closed up the Wallingford location and brought everything in house at A&H Pattern. For the time being, we did all the manufacturing there and kind of incorporated it into A&H's daily business routine. Not only did we market those products through A&H, we also started to manufacture other products like R-Model radio block off plates, and other parts which we manufactured out of plastics. We also remanufactured the lightweight aluminum scatter shields for the Ford Galaxies and Thunderbolts. We replicated the big-block Cobra "T" oil pan. We made a host of other products.

Over the years, Vogt has done it all. In 1986 he took in the infamous Al Joniec owned and driven Bat Car 1965 Holman & Moody-built S/XS Mustang in trade for one of his R-Models. "When I got the car it was a clapped-out, warped and twisted old fiberglass Mustang." Vogt and the Super Stang Shop's Randy DeLisio restored the car, seen here in the pits at Raceway Park, Englishtown, N.J.



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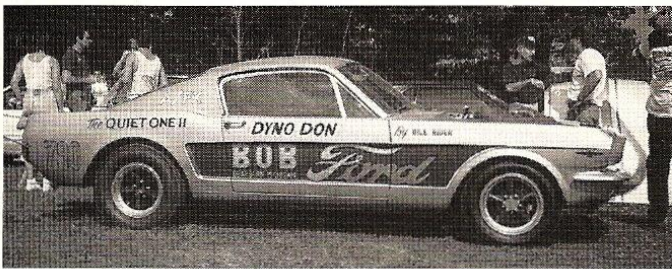
MI: And not all of the items you mentioned were for Mustangs or Shelbys?

VOGT: No. By 1986 the musclecar business was taking off, so I started collecting and working on cars again. The buying and selling part only financed the personal cars which I wanted to own.

MI: For instance?

VOGT: I've owned 10 1963 1/2 lightweight Ford Galaxies. I owned three 1964 Ford Thunderbolts. I've owned two A/FX Mustangs, two Ford funny cars, two Shelby R-Models and a total of 35 Shelby Mustangs.

MI: And this all leads us back to Cobra Automotive again?



In a tale akin to an Indiana Jones adventure, Vogt unearthed the former Dyno Don 1965 427 SOHC Mustang. Under wraps for years in a Brooklyn garage, Vogt restored and vintage raced the A/FXer prior to its sale in the early '90s.

VOGT: In the beginning, I was paying someone else to restore these cars. I was providing the engines, transmissions, rear ends and drivetrains. As I became more deeply involved, it became apparent that there was a market for that kind of work, and people started to come to me to find out if I would work on their vehicles. In 1989, while still with the pattern making firm, I hired an employee. We started working on customer cars out of a 2-bay garage in New Haven, Conn. and business was progressively growing.

That lasted until 1992 when it became apparent that it was time to start Cobra Automotive back up again full time. In 1991 I had a 1,000 square foot rented location in North Haven which grew to 4,000 square feet by the end of 1992. My last shop was 6,800 square feet, and by 1993 I had three or four full time employees. Today we have 12,000-square feet, located at #37 Warehouse Point Road, Dept. MI, Wallingford, CT 06492, 203-284-3863. We employ approximately 12 employees.

MI: So today Cobra Automotive is a full service shop?

VOGT: Yes, through selling restored cars of our own, we had customers who wanted us to work on other automobiles they owned. In 1989, I got into vintage racing. That started attracting customers and additional business. So we started doing vintage racing restorations as well as race car preparation.

MI: You had mentioned that you were heavily involved in vintage racing?

VOGT: My vintage racing career was very active from 1989 to 1996. At the time, I owned three Shelby R-Models and developed quite a few products to go along with these cars, products that directly related to vintage racing. The vintage racing experience greatly helped with our customer restorations. It enabled us to get into a car and test drive it. Then to actually be able to recommend and install a product that really works. If you're into the Ford performance end of things, Cobra Automotive is your "one stop special interest Ford shop!"

MI: And we hear that you plan on letting the entire world know that fact soon.

VOGT: This year, hopefully, Cobra Automotive is going to let the entire country know exactly who we are and what we have accomplished. This will be done through magazine articles, our web site at www.cobraautomotive.com and a fully illustrated cata-

logue we're producing. We want to take an active role in letting everyone in the country know that when it comes to classic Mustangs, Shelys, Cobras and special interest Ford products, we're one of the best kept secrets around. I think there's a big need for a leader in the vintage racing industry and we want it to be us!

MI: That's exciting.

VOGT: We intend to offer a complete line of products and technical services for both the open track racer and the high performance street enthusiast. Remember, what we learned in racing can be backed off a notch and used on the street. We're the guys who make it work. Somebody will bring in either a shell or a rolling wreck, and we'll hand him back a beautiful, well oiled machine!

MI: And speaking of "beautiful, well-oiled machines," you've had yourself a few special interest Fords that are more than slightly noteworthy.

VOGT: Yes. In 1982, I went Busch Grand National racing for awhile. I bought a car from the late Davey Allison. I went to Dover, Delaware, shook Davey's hand, handed him a check for my "brand-new" Texaco Havoline #28 Thunderbird and went stock car racing.

MI: How well did you do?

VOGT: Not as well as I had hoped, but at least I can say I've been on track wheel-to-wheel with Dale Earnheart. I finished on the lead lap with Kenny Schraeder at Lime Rock. I've drag raced, road raced and raced stock cars—I've done a little bit of everything!

MI: Let's talk about some of the historically significant Mustangs you've owned.

VOGT: When I was younger, I was totally infatuated with owning my own R-Model Mustang. I've owned two, SFM-5R536, SFM-5R530. I bought my first R-Model in 1985 at 25 years old, for \$25,000. I had just gotten married and with \$25,000 in your pocket you should be thinking of buying a house. Not me. My new wife didn't understand it, but I bought the R-Model anyway.

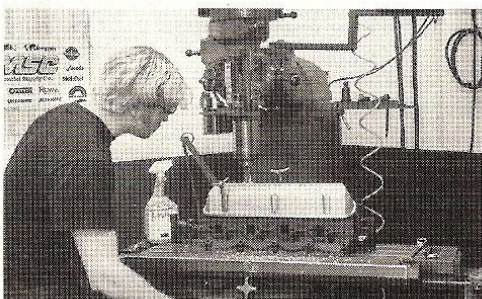
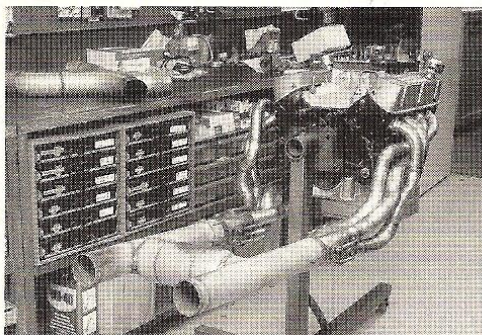
In 1986 I became aware that it was going to cost me a lot of money to restore. I sold it to a fellow in Maryland and moved in entirely another direction. I took in trade an old A/FX Mustang. It was Al Joniec's infamous Bat Car.

MI: Yeah, tell us all about that car!

VOGT: I've owned quite a few 427 SOHC "cammer" engines over the years. In the course of things, I put one into a lightweight Ford Galaxie. To me, they are the "ultimate" Ford racing engine! And you might say that in this world, there are two "ultimate" Mustangs—an R-Model Shelby and a Holman & Moody 427 SOHC 1965 A/FX Mustang!

In 1986, I became infatuated with the idea of owning a 427 SOHC hemi A/FX Mustang complete with "teardrop hood." To me, that kind of car is "pure sex." Anyhow, in 1965 Ford contracted

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"The vintage racing experience has greatly helped us with our customer restorations. It has also enabled us to develop quite a few products to go along with these cars. Products which directly relate to vintage racing." Shown are Cobra Automotive's new full length, adjustable collector headers with 2-inch crossover pipe and a Cobra Automotive technician milling a pair of "Cobra, Powered by Ford" finned-aluminum valve covers.

for awhile with the 427 Hi Riser and did very well with it. Then he was given a 427 cammer.

In late 1965, Joniec painted the car to look like the Batmobile and called it the Bat Car. It still had the short, 108-inch wheelbase. In 1966 Joniec wrecked the car and took the opportunity to have its wheelbase stretched like the new 1966 long wheelbase cars. Joniec ran it with the new wheelbase in NHRA competition and kept it all the way through 1968. In the process, he flocked the car in fuzzy blue and renamed it the Hairy One. In late '68, he traded the car to Drake Viscone at Carmel Ford for a '69 Thunderbird. Then it was passed around and ended up in Pennsylvania. I took it in trade—valued at \$7,000—when I sold my R-Model. I still have pictures of it as a clapped-out, warped and twisted old fiberglass Mustang.

MI: That's where your association with the Super Stang Shops Randy DeLisio came in?

VOGT: "Yes. I brought the car to the Super Stang Shop in Lyons, New York, and DeLisio restored the body for me. Joniec still lived in Granby, Conn. I befriended him and he came down and gave me all of his old pictures and old cammer parts. I restored it exactly the way Al campaigned it. Each injector tube was anodized a different color with words like Zowie! Zap! and Pow! on the stacks. Jim Deist of Deist Safety made the orange and white parachute complete with bats on it. We restored everything on that car the way it was when Al Joniec campaigned it in its heyday.

MI: But that was just your first A/FX Mustang?

Holman & Moody to build 10 A/FX Mustangs. Seven received the 427 SOHC engine and the other three got 427 Hi Riser engines. In 1965, Al Joniec got one of the 427 Hi Riser cars when he worked for Al Swensen Ford in New Jersey. It was white, painted like a Shelby with blue stripes

because, at the time, Al Swensen Ford was a Shelby dealer.

Joniec campaigned the car

VOGT: Yes! In the meantime I had acquired a second A/FX Mustang. It was the Bob Ford Mustang that had been driven by Len Richter, Jerry Harvey and Dyno Don Nicholson. You may recall that this car lost the final in A/FX to Tasca Ford's Bill Lawton at the 1965 NHRA Winternationals when it snapped an axle on the starting line. In 1966, this car, which was gold and blue, resurfaced with Jerry Harvey driving it in A/FX at the '66 NHRA Winternationals—he won the A/FX class with it. You may also remember that in '69 Dyno Don Nicholson campaigned the very same car in A/MP and won both the NHRA Springnationals at Dallas, Texas and the NHRA U.S. Nationals at Indianapolis with it. Nicholson also ran the car heads-up and it won quite a few "pre-Pro Stock" match races in the summer of 1969. In fact, this very car was in the NHRA record books every year from '65 to '69. This was probably one of the most famous, if not the most famous 1965 A/FX Mustang of all time.

MI: We understand finding it was a lot like an Indiana Jones adventure.

VOGT: Everyone in the vintage car hobby had known that I was looking for this one. I heard from Drake Viscone that there was a Mustang that'd been driven by Dyno Don sitting in a garage in New York City. However, the story goes that in late '69 Nicholson sold it right off the drag strip at Raceway Park for cash to some black street racers from New York City.

I would go to swap meets and hear people tell me about an old Mustang that Nicholson had. "I remember seeing it run, blah, blah, blah!" I thought to myself, "Wait a minute! Nicholson drove Mercurys. He didn't drive a Mustang. Or, did he?" Finally a buddy of mine from Pennsylvania named Tony Conover, who owned Nicholson's '65 A/FX Mercury Comet, set me straight. Nicholson campaigned a '65 A/FX Mustang in between his leaving the AA/Fuel Funny Car class and entering the new NHRA/AHRA Pro Stock classes that formed at the beginning of 1970.

I started actively looking for it. I would run across various street racers who'd seen the car run at street racing havens like Ozone Park and South Conduit. Places like that. The more I heard about the car, the more I wanted to find it. I mean, I wanted that car real bad!

MI: Bit hard by the bug, eh?

VOGT: Yes, I had owned Al Joniec's Bat Car. But it wasn't a short wheelbase A/FX Mustang anymore. It was a stretched wheelbase 427 wedge car. It wasn't a "virgin" 1965 427 SOHC A/FX Mustang. There were only seven built and I wanted to own one! Anyhow, one day Drake Viscone called me up. Drake knew that I had just restored the Bat Car and that I was the first one in the country to get a correctly restored lightweight Galaxie featured in a national magazine. He said, "Hey, what about an A/FX Mustang? Are you interested?" I said yeah!

He said, "I know where there's one in the city. It's buried so deep (Viscone wouldn't say which borough) that you ain't never going to find it by yourself." I said, "Well, I'm interested in it. I

would love to have it! I'll pay you for the information.' Then he said, "Nah, you ain't gettin' the car. A friend of mine is interested in it. I'm goin' to help him get it!"

At that point I told myself I would find that car! So, I got on the horn and started calling every street racer, speed shop and machine shop in New Jersey, New York, Long Island included, and Connecticut. After months of calling people—these are older black street racers who were parts managers at Chevrolet dealerships, and things like that—no one would talk to me because they didn't know me. Finally one day, I picked up the phone and called former AA/GS great Jack Merkel who I had come to know when I worked at my last motorcycle parts job in Haupaug, Long Island. I said, 'Jack, I'm looking for an old A/FX Mustang which Dyno Don Nicholson used to own. I understand it's somewhere in the city!' Jack said, "Yeah, I know that car! I know the guy who painted it once. His name is Lucky Harris!" I said, 'Do you know how to get a hold of him?' He says, "Yeah. As a matter of fact, he's got a motor sittin' right here." Then he proceeded to give me Lucky Harris' telephone number.

MI: At that point, you must have been salivating!

VOGT: [laughing] Lucky Harris was from Queens. His real name was Larry Schumacher. These guys all had street racer nicknames. Lucky was an older guy who had "been around." One day I got on the horn with him. I asked him about the Dyno Don Nicholson Mustang. He said, 'Yeah, yeah, I remember that car. I painted that car. Yeah, I know where that car is at!'

It would take awhile before I could get Lucky to open up to me. Conversations went back and forth, back and forth. Called 'em, called 'em, called 'em! If there were 365 days out of a year, I must have called Lucky Harris 300 times! 'Did you find my car? Where is it? When are we going over to get it?'

Through one of our conversations, I finally found out the name of the guy in Brooklyn who owned the car. His name was Tab. He was evidently into something big at one time. But he was dead now. They also called him Camrod. Guys named Jesse, Three-Notes and Rags were all his buddies. I went looking for these guys, and couldn't find anybody. The funny thing was there was this motorcycle distributorship in the city called Camrod Motors, and it had to have something do with that guy. But nobody knew nuthin'.

Al Joniec told me that he used to deal with these guys. They would come down to Philadelphia and either bring the car or the motor and have him do work on it when they were actively street racing. They would pay him in frozen money wrapped in tin foil to either rebuild the motor or tune the car. Al remembered Tab whose real name was Talmadge Van Landingham. Anyhow, through Lucky we find this guy named Tex in Brooklyn who supposedly now owns the car. Lucky has never seen the car in Tex's possession, yet we're talking real money here. Things are starting to get a little scary. I'm up to ten grand, twelve grand for a car nobody has ever seen.

I find out that Lucky has a flatbed that he used to use to go pick up insurance wrecks with so I tell him to go get the car. Finally I tell Lucky I'll pay him \$5,000 to go get it. One day in June 1988 I get a phone call and Lucky says, 'Let's go!' I leave all my stuff at A&H Pattern and drive down to New York City with \$17,000 cash

to meet this black guy who I had never met before! When I get there, Lucky throws me in a van with a friend of his named Bobby and Lucky takes off in his rollback. I give Lucky \$10,000 cash and we follow him into Brooklyn. I'm sitting in the van one-half a block away for two to three hours witnessing this whole thing. Lucky's over there trying to negotiate the deal with Tex. But Tex isn't there yet, so he's negotiating the deal with Tex's wife.

MI: That must have been nerve-wracking.

VOGT: [Smiling] If you've never been to Brooklyn, they have all these little Mom and Pop automotive repair places, and they're usually changing oil on cars out in the streets. Some of them also have these little single pool table speakeasies above the garages where they have a few pinball machines and a dry bar to hang out at. Anyhow, Lucky is waiting for Tex to come back and he's talking to Tex's wife who's also working on some car out in the street. Finally this huge black guy with a gigantic gold thing around his neck that says TEX pulls up out front. Now Tex is some 66 years old. At that point, I have yet to meet him.

Lucky comes back. It seems Tex doesn't want to sell the Mustang. I notice there's a whole scene developing with Tex and his wife, arguing out on the street about selling the car. Two or three hours go by. Frustrated, we all take off and meet a few blocks away. Under different circumstances, things could have gone real, real bad. But these are cool guys. They're in their 50s, and 60s. They used to be serious about street racing back in the '60s, and '70s. They've made their money and had their fun. Now they're just kicked back.

Anyhow, Lucky gives me my ten grand back and says, "I can't buy the car. The man won't sell me the car today!" I give Lucky two grand more and tell him to go back and try to buy the car for twelve grand. He says he can't do it, gives me my money back and I go back home empty handed.

MI: Talk about high anxiety!

VOGT: It gets even better! Two weeks later I get another phone call. It's June 13th and 93 degrees out. I go back down there again and hook up with Lucky. This time we go straight down there and proceed to buy the car.

MI: You must have been beside yourself with anticipation.

VOGT: I had waited long enough. I could wait a little longer. Believe it or not, the Mustang was sitting right under our very noses in a garage exactly where Bobby and I had been parked two weeks before! When the deal finally went down, we opened up this door to a garage that could've held twenty cars. It was very dark inside. But way, way in the back sat this primer gray Mustang. I still have pictures of me and Lucky standing in front of it. The moment I touched it, I knew it was Dyno Don's 1965 A/FX Mustang.

MI: Was there any other proof of authenticity?

VOGT: When I raised the hood, there was a Holman & Moody

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tag primered over with the VIN number on it, 5F09K387. However, before we bought the car, we had to go up stairs to Tex's speakeasy and have a drink to seal the deal. Then we loaded the car up and took off.

MI: Immediately back to Connecticut, right?

VOGT: The story gets better! After we took off, Lucky had to show me and the car off to all his buddies. Here we've got this fancy Ford F-350 rollback, we're driving around all over Brooklyn and everywhere else with this old primered Mustang on the back of it. We stopped at speed shops, bars, you name it. We stopped at three or four places before we got out of the city. I remember on the way back to Queens, we stopped at a watermelon and Pepsi stand! Here's this 40-foot rig which would put most rigs to shame, parked in front of a little old watermelon and Pepsi stand. However, there's a line of Mercedes parked across the street! And you know who was there? Tab was there! He wasn't dead after all! Lucky was so proud that he had found the car. I paid him his five grand and he towed the thing up to my house.

MI: How complete was the car?

VOGT: Very complete. It still had the original parachute that said Ford on it. The pull ring for the 'chute and the original stickers were still on the driver's window. You pulled the seat cover off and it said Len Richter in Magic Marker on the aluminum bucket seat when he was fitted into the car in 1965. On June 13, 1988 I took pictures of myself and the Mustang sitting in my driveway.

MI: How long did it take to restore?

VOGT: Believe it or not, I'd originally intended on driving it on the street. When I first got it, I spray-bombed it with red spray paint. I installed a 410 Mercury motor, added a steel hood and took it over to the motor vehicle bureau and registered it for the street! Then I sent it to Randy's to have it ripped apart and restored so I could drive it on the street.

MI: But that's not what actually happened.

VOGT: Eventually I realized just how valuable it was. You may remember back in late '65 when the A/FX class was getting out of hand? First came the altered wheelbase Plymouths and Dodges. Then the Mercury team altered the wheelbases on its Comets. Then everybody else joined in. In '66 the Mustang guys moved the rear wheels of the A/FX Mustangs forward some 5 percent, to comply with the '66 A/FX rules. Holman & Moody converted both my car and the Les Ritchey car to 1966 A/FX standards. They altered the wheelbases. The side windows went from glass to the R-Model side windows. They went from bucket seats in '65 to aluminum bucket seats in '66.

In actuality, my car had some stretched car features but it was carried out on a short wheelbase car. When mine was redone by



And of course, his expertise gained over years of working with Ford and Shelby products makes him a highly sought after source for fellow enthusiasts. He's never too busy to take a call and help out someone seeking information.

Holman & Moody in 1966, they gave it a Holman & Moody tag, C6HM-100DR70. I restored the car back to 1966 standards because it's the only surviving 1965 A/FX Mustang left that was updated to 1966 A/FX configuration.

MI: How long did you keep the car after its restoration?

VOGT: Not long enough. I had taken on a partner in the project and eventually sold it. We restored this car perfectly. We dynoed the motor. We located all the correct pieces absent since the end of 1965. I remember buying a set of A/FX Mustang seats from some guy walking around at the big Ford Performance Club of America swap meet in Columbus, Ohio. I don't know how I bumped into him, but I did. I even went to the extent of repickling the cammer valve covers so that everything would be perfect. After all, I literally put my life on the line to get this car, so why not?

MI: You actually raced the car, right?

VOGT: Yes, prior to selling the car, I vintage raced it at Milan Dragway twice. I raced it at Rockingham, N.C. at Frank Spittles vintage '65 Mustang A/FX Reunion in 1990. I raced the car up at Epping, New Hampshire that same year. The fastest I ran was 11.20 at 121.50 mph, but it was easily capable of low 10s.

MI: Let's talk about what Curt Vogt is doing today.

VOGT: I intend on building up an R-Model Shelby-type race car in the very near future for vintage racing. As far as the business goes, Cobra Automotive has been awesome. It has helped us put our name on the map. It has enabled me to do what I enjoy the most—race and be involved with high performance Ford products. But, more importantly, I want Cobra Automotive to become a haven of high performance for those Shelby Mustang and Cobra enthusiasts out there who are serious enough to only want only the very, very best! 🐎