

I Was Born a 428 Cobra Jet ...

by Dr. James A. Smith's Mustang



My mother was the Ford assembly plant in Metuchen, New Jersey. I was scheduled to be born on April 8, 1969, but I am not sure if I was delivered then or if labor took longer than anticipated.

I was born a Mach I 428 Cobra Jet (Ram-Air) and soon realized that I could hold the road against all comers. My original owner cannot be located so little is known about my early life. My first 428 motor was swapped for a small block somewhere down the road, so times must have been hard.

Seven years ago, I was bought from Smithfield Ford in Smithfield, North Carolina, by a man who had to trailer me home because my overworked small-block had siezed. My original Silver Jade was sanded off and my exterior received coats of "baron" red paint. I was happy, however, that a dependable 302 V-8 was put under my hood to replace the dead block.

Unfortunately, that owner came down with turbo-Thunderbird fever (a highly communicative disease; it comes from visiting Ford dealer showrooms) and, in a feverish, non-thinking state, put me up for sale. I didn't mind being sold again for my new owner was starving for real power; his turbo-Bird simply did not give him the raw thrill that I could deliver.

This new owner was so excited about seeing me that, even though he

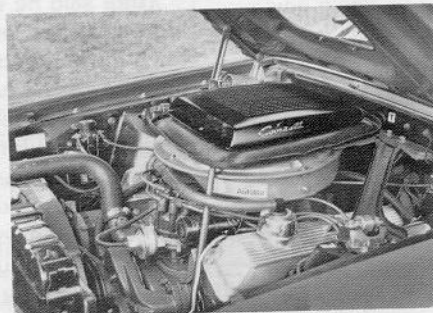
inspected me at night with only a flashlight to aid his eyes, he bought me immediately. (Looking back on that night, it was lucky for him that I was in good shape; a rusted-out wreck probably could have passed that inspection.)

My new home was a heated garage. A nice change and a good omen for my new life.

I was told that I would soon be sent away for rebuilding and refurbishing. Having heard that line before, I adopted a wait-and-see attitude. Sure enough, in November of 1985, I was sent to Carolina Mustang in Cary, North Carolina (proving that patience is a virtue, even for Mustangs).

Those guys in Cary are veterans at their specialty and it was their practiced hands that put me on the road to my new, more enjoyable life.

My front-end got a rebuild, and when I heard that a new 428 would



soon be sitting between my fenders, I was in seventh heaven! Just like old times.

I thought that my body was going to be Silver Jade again but, as soon as the red was scraped off, my owner (with some encouragement from his son) decided that a fiery red would complement my personality more than the original hue. Now that I've had time to look it over, maybe they were right.

I am still to get a new interior. It's almost a shame; there are so many interesting memories that will go out with the old one (if only I *could* talk).

The work progressed slowly and the bill is sky-high; that's the only way to do the job right. My owner kept his faith and his cool. His wife stayed calm; no doubt she understood (as wives must sometimes) that boys will be boys, no matter what age.

Even with the color change, I thought I was to emerge from the shop in somewhat original condition. When the traction bars, headers, and dual-point distributor went in, I began to understand. I was being prepared to handle stock IHRA drag racing. However, since my owner is a busy fellow, I have yet to be tried out in that environment.

The soft life is good. The miles are few so far. I'm being spoiled. I'm afraid, though, that if my muscles aren't used, they will go slack. Maybe I will get my chance to "let it all hang out" on the strip.

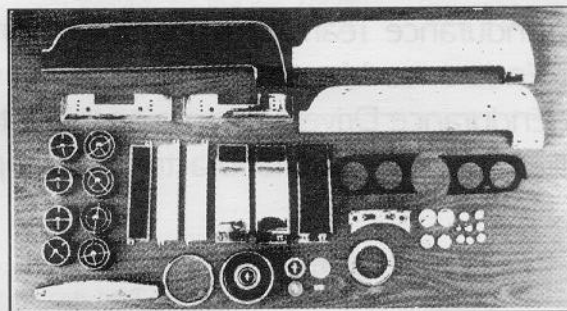
In the meantime there is a lot of big talk about a Bronco and car trailer to chauffeur me around and all that sort of thing. Maybe soon the memory of my rebuild cost will fade and credit will be good enough to start living the dream.

Not every car is given a new lease on life; I know that this time around will be easier with my new owner. Look for me at Mustang shows this spring. I'll be the '69 Mach I with the big smile on my grill. MT



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