

It's  
10:00.

# Do You Know Where Your Mustang Is?

by Andy King

**C**ool! Looks like a 1992 or '93 red Saleen convertible just up ahead. I hadn't noticed it around before but maybe it's new to the area. I pulled up along side and gave it a little closer inspection. It looks like it has all the right components, but I need to get a closer look.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Andy King and I'm a sergeant with the Houston Police Department. More importantly for this incident I am a Saleen enthusiast and an MCA judge (member #36846) for the Saleen classes.

This story begins with the sighting of this particular car on a Thursday afternoon in the middle of October. I was on my way back from the police garage and spotted this convertible occupied by a young lady and her small daughter. It was lucky that they had to stop for a red light so I was able to get a better look at the car as I pulled along side them. I looked it over quickly observing that it appeared to be an authentic Saleen with four-wheel disc brakes, five-lug wheels, and Recaro seats with matching door panels. I could just make out the edge of the console identification plaque but I was at the wrong angle to read the number.

I rolled down my window and asked the young lady if it was a real Saleen. She glanced over and nervously replied no. Just then the light turned green and she left, leaving me curious as to what I had seen and her uncomfortable answer.

I had already mentally noted the license plate number and quickly entered it into the mobile computer terminal mounted in my car. The registration information indicated a salvage title. I wrote down the vehicle identification number so I could do a little further investigating as this was getting more suspicious all the time. I

also noted that the address shown on the registration was in the general direction of the lady's travel.

After a quick call to Liz Summar at Team Saleen, I learned that the VIN on the registration for this particular car had never been assigned to a Saleen Mustang. This definitely called for a more in-depth examination. Accompanied by a few of the officers in my squad we went to the address listed on the registration. We located the car parked in the driveway of the residence.

The actual owner, the woman's husband, came out and we had a very interesting conversation about the car. He explained how fascinated he had always been with the Saleen Mustangs but was unable to afford his own. He went on to tell me how he had really researched the cars and had built his own replica. This all sounded pretty good and would normally be a good explanation, but some of my officers had already told me that this guy had been arrested a number of times as a juvenile for auto theft. Sorry, but I just wasn't buying this fairy tale.

I got a chance to see the console plaque while we were walking around the car. It bore the number 93-0055. This was very interesting since Saleen enthusiasts know how difficult these are to obtain as Saleen takes the security of our cars very seriously. Upon questioning the console plaque, he advised that he had a trophy shop make it based on a picture in one of Saleen's catalogs. Again a nice try, but it appeared far too authentic to be a simple reproduction.

Another call to Liz, without whose help none of this would have been possible, revealed that the #93-0055 car had been sold in Houston, but was originally a red 1993 hatchback. Well

this destroyed my first theory that this was a stolen Saleen convertible and that the VIN tags had been switched. Time to dig a little deeper.

This was an excellent "replica". The brakes of course were switched to four-wheel discs, the Recaro seats were upholstered in the correct fabric as were the matching door panels. Even the wheels were correct -- 17-inch Sterns as used on the '93s. It had the Saleen speedometer and tachometer faces but there was a problem here. The odometer showed very high mileage for a car that was "built" only a month before. One item that lent further confusion to the proceedings was the presence of the California District Sales Office code on the door tag. This still led me to believe that the car was or had been a real Saleen at one time, especially since I located the holes in the fire wall where the Saleen/VIN tag appeared to have been mounted.

Time for another phone call. This one to Stu Akers of Team Saleen Research in Indianapolis, Indiana. Stu, who is also an MCA gold card judge, and I discussed this car at length. I asked him to measure the spacing on the rivet holes on one of his cars to verify the width. Wouldn't you know, the spacing was correct on this supposed Saleen! The explanation I received? "I guessed! Are they really that close?"

Unfortunately this investigation was over for the present. This particular car was clear except for all the discrepancies I couldn't prove at the moment. Adding to the difficulty of this situation was the fact that the owner of the authentic Saleen had not registered his car with Team Saleen when it was originally purchased.

I left the man's house congratulating him on a job well done and

instructed him to refer any other police officers to me if he were stopped in the future and had any problems at all. He was of course quite pleased and appeared very at ease. This was the effect I was trying to obtain. I knew there was something wrong, I just needed more time to prove it and didn't want to scare him into destroying anything until I could figure this mystery out.

Once again I was compelled to call Team Saleen. Liz checked further for me and found that the #93-0055 car had a number of unique and special options which included a 3.55 gear and Vortech supercharger. Well guess what? The kid's car had a supercharger, and more importantly, it had a groove worn in it from a strut tower brace. This was really beginning to be fun. I knew I was going to get this guy but I needed just one more piece to complete the puzzle. Once again Liz supplied me with what I needed - the last six numbers of the VIN, which is all the VIN information that Saleen records.

This was all I needed to find the original owner. Using the mobile computer in my car again, I sat back and created the complete VIN. This required correctly matching the recorded VIN for all 17 characters as recorded on the registration and title. This wasn't very difficult to do, just time consuming. I knew the majority of the characters off the top of my head. It was built on an LX as were most Saleens, so I had the body code. The only thing I was missing was the random check digit listed as a part of the number. This took five attempts before I was successful.

The original owner was located just west of the Houston city limits or in this case about 45 miles away. The phone number was unlisted. However, a call to the Sheriff's Department netted a unit visiting the address I had for the owner. Less than 20 minutes later I received a call from him. I asked if he owned a red Saleen Mustang and he told me that he had. I asked him to elaborate on the "had" part and he explained that his car #93-0055 had been stolen six weeks earlier and recovered as a stripped shell.

Alright I had this guy now. I proceeded back to the original location after asking the original owner if he would be willing to identify what was left of his car. He was more than happy to cooperate.

Unfortunately the car was gone when I arrived back at the kid's house. I hoped they weren't out cutting up the car. My luck changed, however. As I was leaving the subdivision the car returned. I pulled back in the driveway and struck up another conversation with the young man. This time, however, as I was walking around and admiring his car I worked myself up to his front porch where I stood looking down on him and cutting him off from an escape into the house as I waited for another unit to arrive. I felt better doing it this way since he had been known to carry not only knives but also pistols.

As a unit pulled up I announced that despite all his hard work and "alleged" research I was convinced that the parts he had were from a stolen vehicle. He of course denied it and claimed he had receipts from Saleen for all the parts. This would mean that he had paperwork documenting the purchase of nearly \$11,000 worth of correct parts to convert this car. Did I mention that he is under 21 years of age and doesn't have a job. Those are facts that made his fairy tales all the more difficult to swallow. Anyone who has a Saleen is proud of the fact that they have a unique car, and part of owning a unique car is the price you pay for exclusivity. That required a job or benefactor, and he had neither.

I informed him we were towing the car. We also placed him and his wife under arrest since they had both been observed driving the car. I noticed that the console tag was now missing. The wife claimed she had thrown it out the window just a short time earlier.

He signed a consent to search his residence which saved us from having to obtain a search warrant. With the assistance of investigators from the Auto Theft Division we spent nearly three hours searching the home. The inside of the house resembled a salvage yard. We found parts from four

different stolen Mustangs which included interior parts, doors from two different cars, and a complete engine sitting on the garage floor. A more thorough search located the missing strut tower brace from #93-0055, its original side skirts, and over 30 other car accessories most of which were car stereos. The only receipts we found were from purchases made by his victims. Not only had he relieved them of their parts but also the paperwork to document a legitimate purchase.

The fake Saleen convertible was towed downtown and examined on a lift. It was found to have a stolen transmission as well as the rear axle assembly from our missing Saleen. It also had a stolen radio and perhaps stolen body parts as the VIN tags were missing from both front fenders and doors.

The original owner of #93-0055 identified the parts on this vehicle as coming from his car. These included the exterior pieces, wheels, tires, brakes, and interior parts. Remember the odometer and the mileage? It was less than 200 miles above the reading when the car was stolen.

The young man was filed on for numerous felony charges, his adult start to a criminal record. These included Theft by Receiving, Auto Theft, and Possession of Stolen Property.

*Mr. King ends his story by encouraging all Saleen owners to register their vehicles with Team Saleen. We would like to take that one step further.*

*There are numerous registries in the works today covering a vast array of Mustangs. Some are mentioned from time to time in this publication as well as several newsstand Mustang magazines. If you own a Mustang that would possibly fit into any known registry category, by all means take the time to supply registry officials with all pertinent information on your vehicle. Many of these organizations keep very detailed records as to colors, equipment, etc.*

*You never know when you may be faced with a situation similar to the one described here.* Editor