

Thunder in the Afternoon

**Celebrating The Mustang
With Three Exhibition Races**

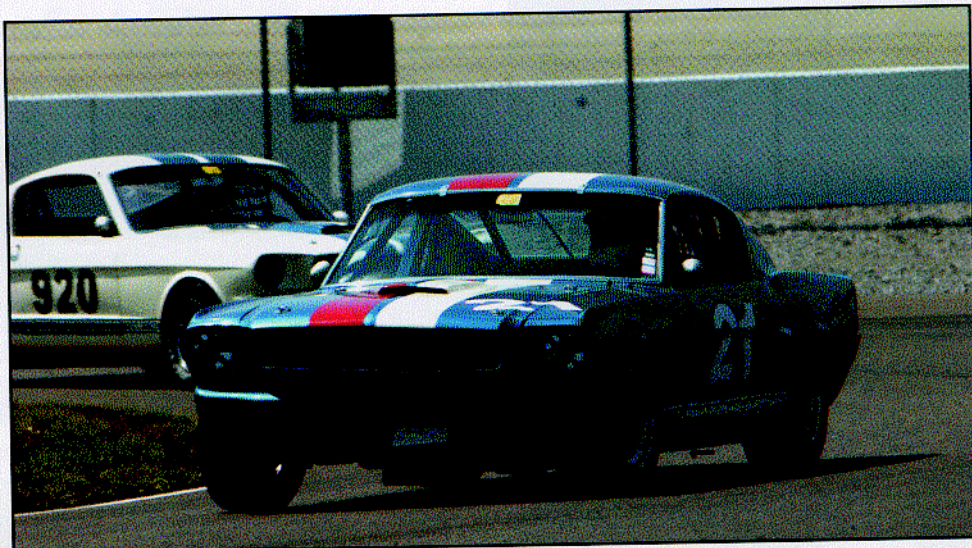
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Photos By Jerry Heasley and Josh Bolger



Enthusiasts who attended the Mustang 40th Anniversary Celebration were treated to a special Saturday afternoon with not one, but three race exhibitions that produced lots of Ford small-block thunder at the Nashville Superspeedway. As part of the open track venue, the three races featured a race for the famed Shelby GT 350, one for the Trans-Am Mustangs of the 1960s, and the Late Model Celebrity race.

Rick Kopec, the knowledgeable Shelby American enthusiast and Director of the Shelby American Automobile Club, organized the GT 350 and Trans-Am races. Rick has campaigned an original GT 350—competition model SFM5RO98—for a number of years in addition to his duties with SAAC and was the perfect choice to create such an exciting event. We were most pleased when Rick accepted the responsibility. The talented man from SAAC delivered big time! A total of 36 GT 350 and Trans-Am cars came to provide the Thunder at the Nashville Superspeedway. In comparison, during the halcyon days of the GT 350 and Trans-Am Mustang competition, people would have been lucky to see more than 10 GT 350s at the American Road Race of Champions, the Sports Car Club of America's annual world series of road racing. There were seldom more than six or eight Mustangs including the factory entries on the Trans-Am grid at each race.

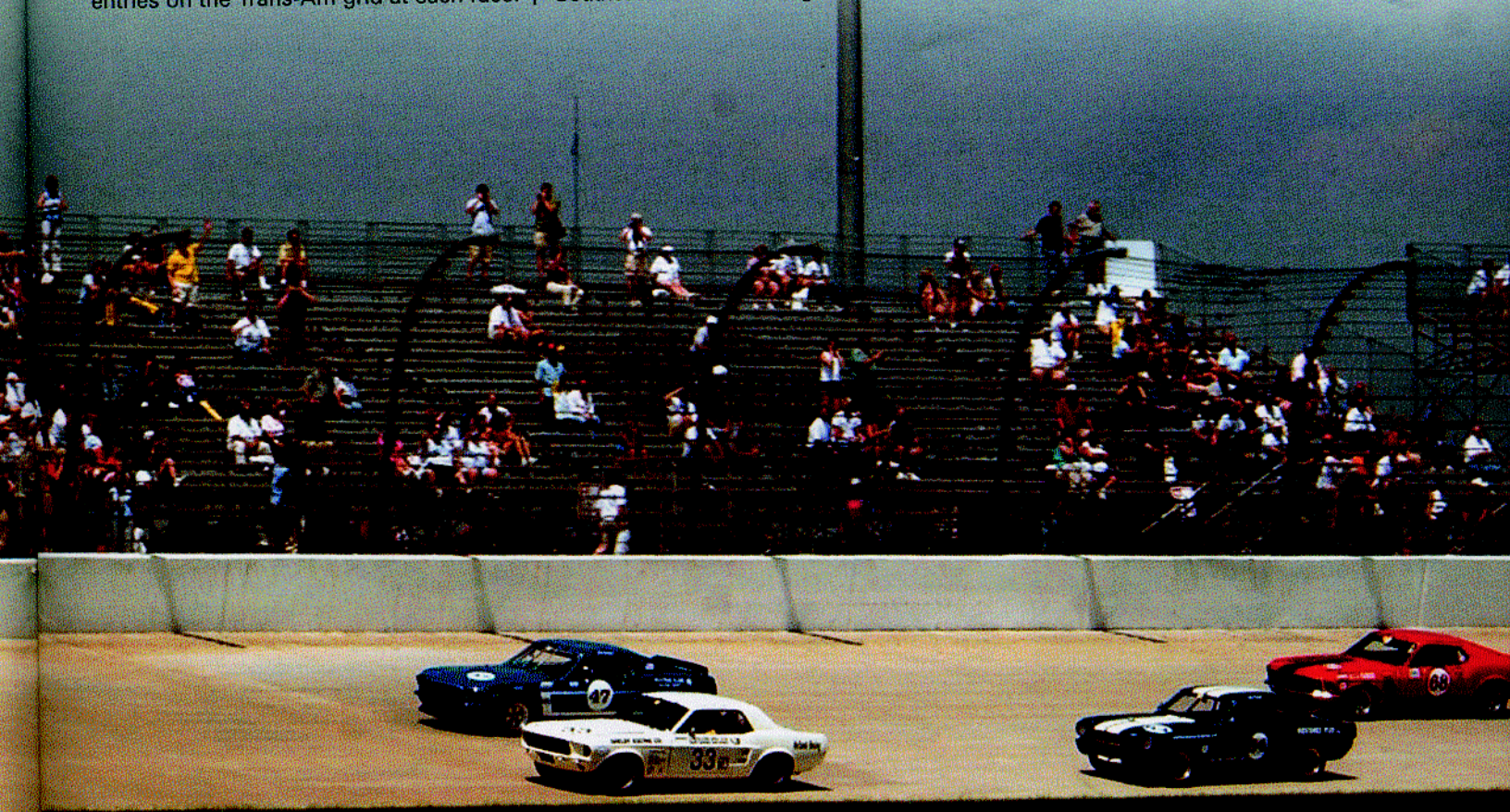


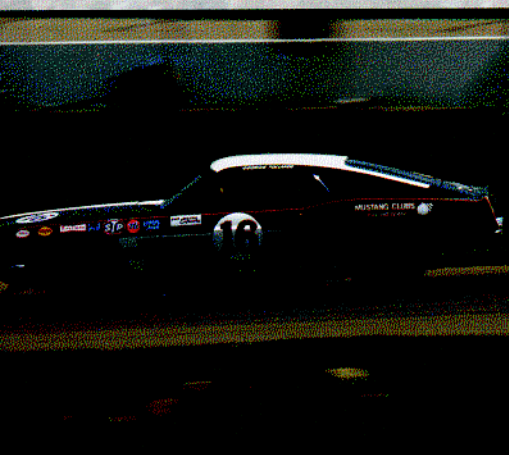
GT 350's IN ACTION

The field included some notable cars. One was the Bolus & Snopes GT 350, campaigned in the early 1970s by a group from Jackson, Mississippi, led by noted writer and the former Editor of *Car & Driver*, William Jeanes. The articles Jeanes wrote about the team entertained everyone who read the Bolus & Snopes newsletter and impressed the *Car & Driver* management enough so they offered him a job as feature editor. The team even had a mascot, a mule named Dick Johnson. The GT 350 driven by Bobby Mitchell was not a joke, however the Shelby won the 1971 and 1972 SCCA Southeast Division BP Regional

Championship, and qualified for the 1972 SCCA runoffs at Road Atlanta where it finished 5th in B Production. The team sticker, "Bolus & Snopes are good and nice" is still coveted by collectors. John Baldwin, a Lincoln - Mercury dealer from Covington, Louisiana, and an ardent Shelby enthusiast drove the car at the event.

The Edelbrock family supported the Mustang 40th Anniversary Celebration as a major sponsor. In addition, Camee and Christi, Vic Edelbrock's two daughters shipped their Shelseys in from Torrance, California. After a person spends five minutes with both of these talented individuals, they will know why Edelbrock is such an





outstanding company. The Shelbys are part of the Edelbrock Fun Team of special racecars the company displays and competes with at vintage races throughout the year.

In addition to organizing the event, Rick Kopec drove 5R098 in the race. Phil Gallant, Oceanside, California, and Pennsylvania's Ross Myers joined him in their R Models. Myers Shelby, 5R103 is the 1966 SCCA B Production National Champion piloted by Walt Hane. Tommy Thompson brought the ex-Dan Gregson Harr Ford sponsored R Model to Nashville rounding out the purpose-built Shelby American GT 350 racecars.

There were plenty of fast non-R Model GT 350s in attendance. Curt Vogt from Cobra Automotive in Connecticut brought his potent Shelby. Vogt campaigns the car in vintage competition and runs up front. With his talents, if he would have been old enough at the time, Vogt could have run the engine building and dyno operation at Shelby American along with Jack Dunn and Ryan Falconer. Chuck Bentley, also in attendance, is always fast in '65 GT 350 has consistently been one of the fastest Shelby Mustangs in vintage competition.

The GT-350 race provided everyone with the sights and sounds of the magic Mustangs from Shelby American. The GT 350 was created to give Mustang a performance image. This meant beating Chevrolet Corvette, Jaguar XKE, Ferrari and Sunbeam Tiger in SCCA B Production class racing. The GT 350s that competed in Nashville were reminiscent of the cars that won the B Production National Championships in 1965, with Jerry Titus driving the winning Shelby, 1966 Champion Walt Hane, and the 1967 winner Freddy Van Buren. A special thanks to all those who brought their Shelbys to the Mustang 40th Anniversary Celebration.

TRANS-AM MUSTANGS

The second race exhibition of the day featured the Mustang Trans-Am cars from 1966-'70. There were some beautiful examples of the Mustangs that won the SCCA Trans-Am Series Championships in 1966, 1967 and 1970. Parnelli Jones once stated that, "The Trans-Am Series (1966-'70) was the best road racing series ever run in this country." As one who was fortunate to attend a number of the Trans-Am Series races, Parnelli's words ring true.

Sales and market leadership were at stake as all the pony cars competed for wins, sales, and the championship. It is interesting to note that on the 40th Anniversary of the Mustang, none of the other Trans-Am Series competitors remain on the market. Gone are the Chevrolet

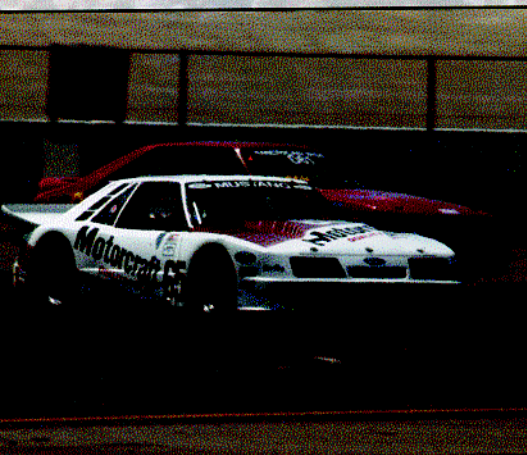
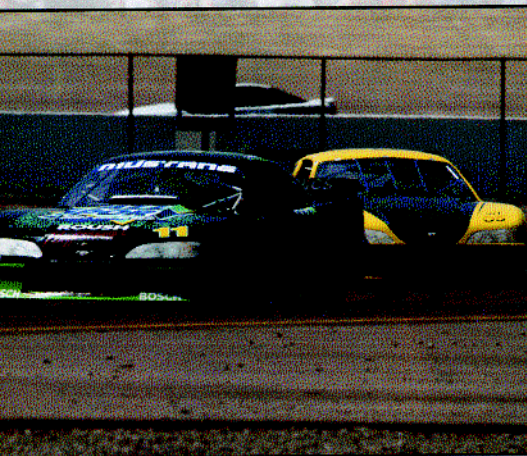
Camaro and its Z28, the Pontiac Trans Am, named for the series has passed into automotive history along with the Plymouth Barracuda, Dodge Challenger, and the American Motors Javelin. All were worthy competitors to Mustang in the series. Not only did Mustang beat them on the track; it beat them in the showroom, the ultimate measurement of success.

The field included some very notable Trans-Am Mustangs. Vic Edelbrock brought the former Parnelli Jones 1969 Boss 302. Like all the cars in the Edelbrock Fun Team, the car is in perfect shape and gives spectators a good idea of just how the Mustangs looked, sounded, and ran in 1969. Terry Bookheimer drove the ex-George Folmer 1970 Boss 302, providing everyone with a look at one of the cars that contributed to the 1970 Trans-Am Championship. J. Bittle trucked in his silver 1968 tunnelport 302 coupe from California. The car, originally campaigned by Ford engineer Ed Hinchliff, has been restored to superb condition by Bittle and the talented folks at JBA Racing in San Diego, California. The Mustang is powered by a true tunnelport that actually lives and makes big horsepower, something the 1968 engines did not do with enough regularity to win but three races that year. Gary Underwood brought the 1967 coupe, formerly owned and raced by 1967 A Sedan Champion, John McComb. The Mustang also saw action in numerous Trans-Am races, including the 1967 season finale at Kent, Washington, where Jerry Titus drove the car after his Terlingua Racing Team Mustang was damaged in a practice accident.

The sounds and speeds the Trans-Am Mustangs produced electrified the spectators. For those of us who had witnessed the series, it was yesterday once more. For everyone else, witnessing the Trans-Am Mustangs at speed was a special occasion, not soon to be forgotten. Thanks to all of the Trans-Am competitors for sharing their very special Mustangs with all of us.

LATE MODEL CELEBRITY CHALLENGE

The third race of the day was the MCA Late Model Celebrity Challenge. Organized by Scott Hoag, former program manager for the Mustang Bullitt and Mach1 programs and now president of Mustang Racing Technologies. MRT provides high-performance automotive racing and street systems for Mustangs. Hoag did his usual superb job as he recruited an all-star field of late model Mustangs. In fact, both Rick Kopec and Hoag were fortunate to have the talents of veteran MCA open track organizers, James Ray and Larry Kilgore, from the MCA North Carolina Region on hand. Ray,



Kilgore and all their people did a masterful job for the three days of open track action attended by a full house of 300 cars. The open track was sold out three months prior to the event.

The field for the A Group included full-race Trans-Am Mustangs from Roush Racing, including Tommy Kendall's 1997 record-setting Mustang. The car won 11 races in a row, an incredible feat. Larry Parker, President of Roush Performance, would handle the driving. Chris Leidenberg was behind the wheel of the former Roush IMSA 1985 Mustang. This car was one of the Roush Racing cars that won the IMSA Championship that year.

From Fort Worth, Texas, long-time Shelby and Mustang enthusiast David Fershtand came with his 1998 Trans-Am Mustang. Fershtand and his brother John, who owns a 1969 Boss 302, have campaigned Shelybs successfully for a number of years. Trans-Am hot shoe Mike Borkowski, who won the Trans-Am race that ended Tommy Kendall's streak in 1997, was entered in the Kenny Brown Speed GT Cup Mustang. Based out of Gasoline Alley in Indianapolis, Kenny Brown has built successful race and streetcars. This four-valve modular motor Mustang is the latest in a long line of fast and great-handling ponies from the talented man originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Since 1988, Steeda Autosports has built production-based "rolling test labs" to test and prove out the company's parts and equipment. Their 1995 Cobra R, the famed number 20, was the first production-based Mustang to win in IMSA competition in 20 years. The current number 20 car is a Steeda Q400R, and was driven by Steeda Driving Instructor, Charles Espenlaub. Last year, Espenlaub drove the car to an impressive showing at Sebring in the Speed GT three-hour race. He came to Nashville charged with driving duties in the Celebrity Challenge.

From Ontario, Canada, Sean Hyland brought his 2001 Grand Am Cup Mustang, complete with all the "demon tweaks" Hyland is famous for. His talent with the four-valve modular motor is well known in all series of racing. Hyland would handle the driving duties for this race.

The second group of Mustangs entered, or B Group, were the National Auto Sport Association American Iron cars. These production-based Mustangs compete all over the country with specific power-to-weight rules governing their build.

It was a star-studded field that included Robin Burnett in his Steeda-assisted Mustang; Burnett had won an American Iron race earlier this year at the Nashville

Speedway. Shannon Guderian, owner of 5.0 Restoration out of Hewitt, Texas, chose John George to pilot the 5.0 Resto 1989 Mustang. Race organizer Scott Hoag tapped *MUSCLE MUSTANG & FAST FORDS'* talented Technical Editor, Evan Smith to drive the MRT Mach 1 racer. The yellow MRT rocket features a Mach 1 powertrain, a Steeda 5 Link rear suspension, along with other bits from the MRT parts bin.

Team Mustang member Mark Wilson entered his 1993 Cobra R. In only his second year of competition, Wilson has been competitive in the American Iron class. Long-time Shelby enthusiast Gene Boccabella brought his 1995 Cobra R from Pensacola, Florida. Rounding out the field was Mike Pulte in the Classic Design Concepts Mach1 racer. For the past few years, CDC has handled the Mustang "body in white" program, resulting in racers able to purchase a Mustang body at very economical prices. Handling the driving duties for CDC was Mike Pulte, Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company Extreme Performance Manager and SCCA driving champion.

The race exhibition itself was actually two exhibitions as both the A and B Group Mustangs lit up the crowd. David Fershtand did his usual superb job of driving as he waited a few laps and took the lead from the production-based Steeda Q400R. The fact that a production car could lead the field is a tribute to the Steeda Autosports team and driver Espenlaub. On paper, this Mustang should have been way behind all the full-blown racecars. The Steeda Q finished third behind Fershtand's rocket and the Tommy Kendall Trans-Am Champion Mustang. All through the race exhibition, the Kenny Brown Mustang was right on the Steeda's bumper as Borkowski applied the pressure. In the end, Espenlaub showed why he is the Steeda Driving Instructor and a talented driver in the Grand Am Cup Series, as he stayed the course and kept his Steeda Q400R in front.

The B Group had their own exciting competition. Robin Burnett's Steeda-assisted Mustang and John George's 5.0 Restoration Parts Mustang waged a nip and tuck battle. George's Fox body nipped Burnett at the finish line by the narrowest of margins. Evan Smith followed in the MRT Mach 1 Racer. Once again, our thanks to all the entrants in the Late-Model Celebrity Challenge for providing such exciting action.

From the start of the GT 350 race exhibition, through the Trans-Am Mustangs, to the end of the Late-Model Celebrity Challenge, there was that wonderful sound of Ford small-block power, providing the thunder in the afternoon. *MT*