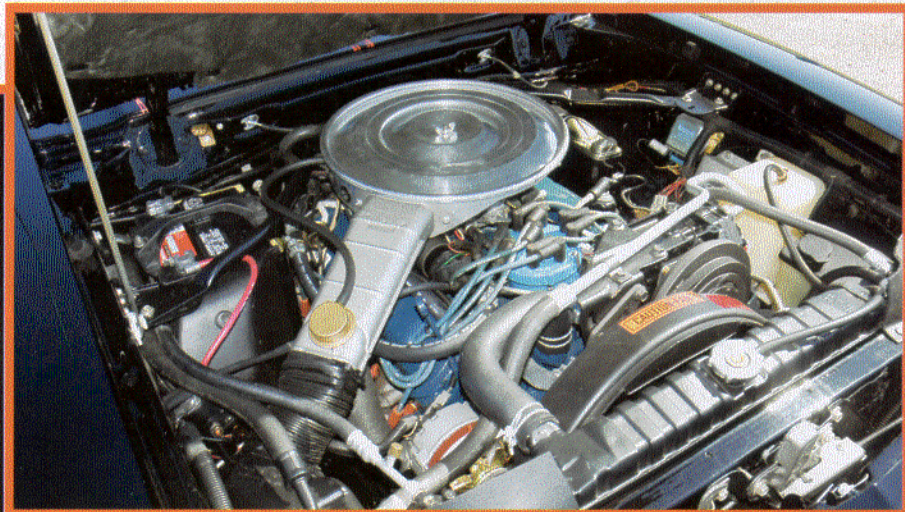


In 1984, I was 16 years old. Everyone knows what being a 16-year-old boy means. It means a driver's license. Shortly after this momentous event, my parents bought me a 1976 Mustang II Ghia. With a 302 already under the hood and a new paint job, we went through high school and college, and she is still with me today. Little did I know that 24-years later not only would I still have "Heather," but several other Mustang IIs also. Shortly after I got her in 1984, my best friend, Joe Murphy, got a 1974 Mach I. He and his father, Sam, modified it and we all started going to shows together and joined the MCA. One day in 1986, Sam bought a 1978 Mustang II King Cobra not far from our house and stored it in a shed at a friend's house waiting for the eventual restoration. I must say that I fell in love with her the first time I saw her. I already liked the Mustang IIs of course, but this car, with its t-tops, black paint and wild orange and gold stripes, was really beautiful. I made him promise that if he ever decided to sell her, that I would have first shot at her. By 1995 I had pretty much given up being able to obtain the black beauty, and so when I found a rough but complete white King Cobra sitting outside a car show for a decent price, I bought it and finally had a King. Since I didn't have a place to work on the car, I stored it at my father's house again waiting on the eventual restoration. Then came the phone call.

I was living 200 miles away in South Georgia. Sam called me one weekend, and after exchanging our usual pleasantries (we usually talked once a week or so), Sam tells me that he has found an SVO that he wants. He tells me all about his soon to be purchased vehicle, and then he asks the question that I had waited ten years to hear, "Do you still want the King Cobra?" Of course I did. We made a deal for the car then and there with the provision that he help me restore her when the time came. By this time, Sam was restoring '65 to '68 Mustangs at his shop, and managed to stay pretty busy. In November, 2000, after I had moved back home, his schedule and my finances finally aligned themselves, and we began restoring our King Cobra. Sam, along with Kenny Salter and Tommy Vincent, worked on her during the week days and then Sam, Joe, and I would work on her on weeknights and weekends. Work progressed well even though I



Text by Bill Maddox, Photos by L. Jewett





met the angel that would become my wife, Kelley, three months after we got started, and we decided to get married in April 2002. We put the Mustang on the back burner for a time while my life settled back down, but by November we were back to work.

Along the way we removed every part of the little car that could be removed. We removed, stripped, epoxy primed, painted, bagged, and tagged every part and carefully placed them in boxes to await reassembly. The motor, transmission, and rear end were all rebuilt. The body panels were all stripped, primed, blocked, painted, and hung up. We put the shell on a rotisserie, where we stripped, primed, and painted it as well. All during this process, all parts were photographed, and any factory markings that were found were duplicated. In all, it took two years to get the car restored and put back together to the point where it was time to stripe it. For this, Sam brought in a professional striper. It took seven hours to replicate the pinstriping that covers the entire car, and to install the reproduction King Cobra hood decal that easily takes up three quarters of the hood.

With only 4,971 built, the King Cobra is easily a rare Mustang. With the King Cobra package, consisting of a front air dam, hood decal with matching pinstripes, lacy spoke wheels color keyed to the stripe kit ordered, front brake cooling ducts, and a chrome exhaust extension all unique to the King Cobra plus the rally suspension package, and the 5.0 liter (the first time this designa-

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tion for the 302 was used on the Mustang engine costing a whopping \$1,277 (the most expensive option package ever offered on a Mustang up to that time), it is no wonder that so few were made. "Sammi" also came loaded with the t-roof convertible, automatic transmission, air conditioning, a full console, tinted glass, deluxe interior, and window louvers.

In May 2003, "Sammi" made her debut at the Smoky Mountain National in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. Since Kelley and I started showing "Sammi", we have added a daughter (Wendy) and a son (Luke) to our family, and enjoy attending shows as a family. Over the years we have met a lot of people from around the country and all over the world. We have even made several friends from different parts of the country that we see at shows. We never get tired of talking to people, and sharing stories about our II. Many people have not seen a Mustang II in years and some have never seen a King Cobra, and aren't aware that they even exist. Some remember a Mustang II that they had. Maybe it was their first car, or the car they dated in. A lot of the fun that I have had with "Sammi" was in doing the actual restoration and learning about the car. The rest is in sharing her with all the people who stop buy to say Hi, and talk for a few minutes about the snake that charmed me. **MT**

