



COPPERSTATE ROAD RALLY

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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With the threat of another long, cold Wisconsin winter looming, my fiancé, Colin and I decided to sign up for the Copperstate 1000—an early April 2008 road rally in Arizona. We figured a nice trip to the sunny, snowless desert would be well needed come early spring. Considering Winter 2008 was one of the worst Wisconsin winters in history, with near record snowfall and sub-zero temperatures, Colin and I were certainly experiencing cruising withdrawal by April.

The route promised 1,000 miles of open road, ranging from what seems like infinite flat stretches through the desolate desert where your only company are the vultures circling above, to a mountainous uphill climb rising thousands of feet in elevation one switchback at a time. So what would we choose for our chariot on this great southwestern adventure? For us it was an easy answer, our 1966 Shelby GT350, serial #2322. Certainly the Shelby was as ready as we were to stretch its legs after a long winter hibernation. And

being a Ford, barring any major engine catastrophe, there wasn't much we couldn't fix or find a part for at the local auto parts store should a problem present itself along the way.

However, in order to combat any malfunction, Colin spent the weeks before the rally prepping the car. What's the point of going on a road rally if you break down in the first 10 miles, as happened to one unlucky Corvette this year. (Insert your own Chevy joke here.) Colin did his standard pre-rally prep, consisting of an intensive bumper-to-bumper check-over using the same checklist used for our '66 GT350 vintage race car—meaning no stone (or bolt) is left unturned. But we also did some extra. Colin decided a 1,000 hard miles called for a few modifications including upper control arms, Global West boxed lower control arms, Global West rear leaf spring shackles and bushings, a Griffith aluminum radiator, special brake pads and shoes, a competition spec chassis alignment including setting corner weights, and a host of other subtle "tweaks" to prepare the car for the serious speed and distances ahead. A car that has stable fluid temperatures and components carefully selected to

work in harmony can easily survive, while one that does not will quickly be sidelined, as always happens with many ill-prepared cars on these events. The last steps were to pack the spares (as I joke Colin's spare Mustang in a box!) and, my favorite task, a thorough detailing and a fresh coat of wax.

The car was shipped and we flew out a few days later where we met our Shelby along with 75 other cars. In all, 23 marques were represented, including a 1926 Bentley Speed Six, a pair of red Bizzerrini GT's, a slue of Mercedes Benz SL Roadsters, an impressive selection of Ferraris and yes, a few other domestic cars including an original 427 Cobra. After an evening spent introducing ourselves and oohing and aahing over the other cars we headed back to the hotel for a good night's sleep in preparation for the early start and the promise of 226 sunny miles of open road ahead of us on day one of our four day adventure.

Up with the sun, we were out detailing the car one last time and chatting with local car fans gathered to send the Copperstate 1000 entrants off in a proper farewell made up of a mix of kicked up dust, waving hands and anticipatory cheers. Route book in hand,



we were excited to start our adventure. The route takes the drivers along some of the most scenic roads in Arizona. The first day is usually an easy driving day where you just get the feel for things and put some miles on the car. We headed north and up, climbing in elevation we watched as desert and

oncoming traffic, as to optimize all the fantastic switchbacks, we found it necessary to use both sides of the road. The Shelby handled the switchbacks with the surefootedness of the ponies first used to cross this terrain. The carburetor wasn't nearly as keen on the changes in elevation according to the spark plugs,

tion destination being the Bondurant School of High Performance Driving. The trip to Bondurant was like visiting a high speed theme park. We could show off our driving prowess on the go-kart track, race against the clock on the autocross course in a new Pontiac Solstice or hit the track for high speed touring in our own car. We figured the Shelby made it four days and just short of 1000 miles, why not let loose on the track as a way to put an exclamation point on the entire trip. Imagine our surprise when the organizers deemed our GT350 too fast for the "street car" group and put us out in the "race car" group. But after the initial shock, it seems that even a street Shelby can run with the best European "race" cars, though I think it has more to do with Colin's fearless driving style.

While not put out to pasture everyday, when given the chance to stretch its legs, the Shelby proved to be a champ, making light work of the 1000 mile rally. Certainly the Shelby was no more ready to head back to Wisconsin than we were. And so with reluctance and a tinge of sadness we put the Shelby on the trailer for the long, lonesome ride back home where we look forward to reuniting just in time for the start of Wisconsin car show season. **MT**



cactus evolved into snow and pine trees. Though we left Wisconsin to get away from the snow, these patches didn't seem so bad when viewed out the window of a Shelby flying by at a high rate of speed. Our destination for day one, Greer Lodge, featured luxury accommodations wrapped neatly in a rustic log cabin nestled next to a mountain stream. It was an Old West scene taken right out of a Zane Grey novel; only our trusted pony tied to the post outside was pure American metal.

Day two was easily one of the most challenging and scenic of the entire rally featuring over 400 switchbacks in the course of just over 130 miles with the only thing on either side of us being a steep rock wall on one side and an even steeper drop-off on the other. Thank goodness for nearly non-existent

but rather than re-jet for our brief stay at 9000 feet Colin improvised and tied open the 715 Holley's vacuum secondaries with a zip tie to introduce more air at cruising speeds. Problem solved! The second half of the day wasn't nearly as hard on the car or the driver, as the first leg of the journey proved to be quite the upper-body work out. I would bet the driver of the '69 Mach I, with manual drum brakes all around, probably had sore arms and feet! It's no wonder this stretch of US 191 has been deemed Route 666. Even with the sinister nickname, if you ever get the chance, I'd recommend this stretch of road to anyone with strong arms, a strong stomach and a strong sense of adventure.

Our journey through the Arizona wilderness continued over the course of the next two days with our final attrac-

