

# SONNY'S '66



## BATON ROUGE MUSTANGERS HELP A FRIEND!

Text By Gene (Gino) Millspaugh  
Photos courtesy of Baton Rouge Mustangers

**T**he Baton Rouge Mustangers were fortunate when Francis (Sonny) and Alene Vicknair joined their club in 1986. They immediately became stalwart members, giving much more than gaining from the club. They jumped into the middle of assisting the planning, organizing, and conducting club shows and other club activities. The club soon became acquainted with their dedication to the Mustang hobby, and became dependent upon them as the club's Cajun cooks. They became regulars at Regional events—preparing gumbo, jambalaya, salads, and many other culinary items to feed show participants. Upon arriving at the registration table at the shows, Out-of-town Mustangers were greeted by the Vicknairs, and invariably asked if Sonny had the pots 'a-goin'. The feeding line formed quickly when the time-to-eat announcement interrupted the tremendous collection of '60's music being played over the sound system, both provided by the Vicknairs.

Sonny and Alene served as club board members for 20 years and hosted many club activities at their home. Even-

tually, they moved to New Roads, LA, where Sonny had his dream Mustang and electronics shop built. That 40-mile trip from Baton Rouge did nothing to deter members when it came time to assemble at the Vicknairs' shop, especially when the Christmas Party came around, which was always at the Vicknairs'. Sonny and Alene also did not miss a monthly club or board meeting. They were always there for everyone else.

Since day one of the club meetings, all attending are asked to introduce themselves and tell of their current Mustangs. Sonny, owner of his father's 1966 Coupe, always announced that the '66 Coupe was in the garage, in pieces, and under restoration. It became practice that all attending applauded—that recognition being afforded only to the Vicknairs—accompanied by (respectful) goading to "get it finished" or "when will it be on the road?"

Sonny disassembled the Coupe in 1988, starting a slow, drawn-out rebuild, in a very narrow one-car garage where the body became the resting spot for boxes of parts and dust. Obligations of raising a fine family took precedence over the restoration effort. Finally, in 1995, their New Roads homestead and garage was ready to receive the "project." Sonny busied himself with upgrad-

ing the suspension and brake system with Granada discs, etc. The 289 V8 and C-4 transmission were rebuilt sometime around 1998. In 2005, several club members decided it was time to install the drive train as a one-day club activity. With that done, everyone expected Sonny to finish the rest.

Unfortunately for Sonny and Alene, the onset of Alzheimer's came unexpectedly. Thus the task became overwhelming for him.

At one of the club's activities, Alene lamented that she was sorry Sonny would never see or ride in his restored Mustang. Soon, that lament became fuel for several club members who volunteered to put the '66 Coupe together for him. As usual, lack of knowledge does not stand in the way of snap decisions. The first survey to determine what needed to be done resulted in moving the Coupe to another club member's business in Baton Rouge, to save commute time for those working on the restoration. The overly optimistic estimated date of completion soon expired and only the replacement of the driver's floor pan was done.

One often-repeated quote, "The camel is the result of a committee design of a horse," precisely describes the case of Sonny's Coupe. So, as the oldest



## DISASSEMBLE AND RESTORE



Rouge Mustanger I exclaimed, "Enough. If it's going to be done right, it will be done right—at my home." So, the second move for the 1966 was a trip to the stall at my home. In my home garage, the restoration took on a serious tone. As self-appointed manager, I formalized the plan and reconstruction activities.

Placing great value on my friendship and respect for Sonny, it was an easy decision to make to see the restoration come to fruition. Regardless of having done nine restorations (six of which were Concours) for myself, having owned early Mustangs since 1964 totaling 53 1971's and earlier, being one of the original MCA Gold Card Judges, and having extensive knowledge of the components of a 1966, the evident challenge came close to becoming overwhelming for me. After an inventory of remnants of Sonny's disassembly, I developed a list of items needed to rebuild his Pony. (I thank God for the invention of the computer.) The goal was to the best job with the least outlay.

Having a sizeable accumulation of NOS and "experienced" 1965-66 parts, I decided to donate whatever I had that was needed to minimize the restoration cost. Many others had made unacceptable offers to buy individual parts, which I refused. Rather than give them away to parts bandits, I hung on to them. With this project, I rationalized that a gift to my friend was worth much more to me than letting them go for a bargain-basement price. Then I hoped that some others may understand the need and purpose of the project and may have some useable parts just lying around. So, I decided to solicit help. Five club members came through with 10 needed items. I decided to expand my solicitation to outside the club and found two major contributors to support the project. Joe Hebert of Ascension Pony Parts opened his doors for anything he had to assist. Fifteen otherwise obtainable parts, plus many pieces of hardware and fasteners, came from Joe. All it took was an e-mail or telephone plea, and a trip to pick up the parts. After some refinishing, the "experienced" parts found a new life.

Long time friends, Don and Tot Buck, came to the rescue when the first local one-time good painting deal collapsed. Don, who is the owner and operator of North Shore Mustang Restorations near Covington, LA, made arrangements for the exterior body painting with Mike Ebert, who also lives near Covington.

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## PAINT • PREP • RESTORE



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Don picked up the coupe in Baton Rouge, transported it to his shop and subsequently to Mike's shop for considerable body prep and painting. Mike took on the project with enthusiasm to help this worthwhile, close-to-charity effort, shutting his otherwise income-producing work aside. He produced one gorgeous base-coat, clear coat Vintage Burgundy 1966 coupe. Don Buck gathered the body; hood, deck lid and doors then assembled them at his shop. He then made another 75-mile trip to Gino's delivering the Mustang with all the other painted sheet metal. The cost of the paint job came to materials and nominal payment for a helper! The transportation and Don's efforts were gratis. Besides that, Don decided that the body quarter trim, hood molding, and rocker panel moldings had to be new, and he installed both as a gift. These are true, not-out-for-profit friends.

During the time the painting was taking place, the majority of new and reusable parts needs were filled by purchases and donations. Free freight and volume discounts were used to minimize costs. The parts were gathered in Gino's garage with the overflow filling one bedroom and spilling into a second. Vent window units, heater box, under dash a/c unit, steering column, instrument cluster, and the AM radio were all disassembled, refurbished, and refinished. The A/C system received new R134a components. The only parts not replaced are the under dash case, face-plate, and switches. A functional (Phoenix) AM radio arose from the ashes.

Just prior to the Mustang being delivered, Mickey Graphia provided assembly room and graciously assumed the care and storage of Gino's 1973 Convertible. With the working problem solved, upon arrival the 1966 immediately went up on jack stands. The next phase was the interior. The painted surfaces were refinished to original colors, which were actually three different shades of red. All the wiring was either replaced with new or inspected and re-wrapped, tested wires. A group of helpers arrived to install the windshield and rear glass. Thereafter, on-call assistance fell on club members Kerry Hicks and Dale Broussard. Not once did Kerry and Dale not show up for an evening of "fun" as they gave freely of their weekends to help this project to completion. They are both multi-talented.

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## PAINT AND FINISH



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The windshield and rear window trim pieces underwent rehab with Jim Fredyer, who spent several hours at the polishing wheels at his home. The interior, except for the seat frames, seat belts, and one door window crank handle was completely redone with all new components. Like the passenger compartment, the trunk has new underlayment and is lined with the correct mat.

In the engine compartment, the Ford 411 carburetor gave its last backfire and died. In went an Edelbrock 1406, an easy bolt-in performer. Classic Air's R134a Sanded compressor added new life to the a/c system. Ignition is now much improved with the installation of a Pertronix unit, and in the distributor, an original yellow top Ford coil provides the spark.

The history of the shock absorbers is unknown. But a few test-drives made it apparent that the shocks and sway bar links had not survived the 21-years off the road. All were replaced. Although the 15-year-old tires rolled less than one mile, new P205/70R14 BFG T/As were mounted for safety and riding comfort. The wheels are dressed with donated 1966 spinner covers.

During this process, 86 purchases ranging from one to 52 items were made, 153 parts were donated, more than 600 digital documentation photos were taken, and time cards totaled 614-plus man hours. Elapsed rebuild time came to one year, seven months and 10 days. As we all know, restorations are truly never finished, therefore the books on this one are still open.

The presentation of Sonny's 1966 Restored Mustang came about at the club's 2008 Christmas party, which was held at Jim Freyder's dream garage. The Mustang was positioned prior to the beginning of the evening underneath a white cover. Sonny and Alene were surprised during an unveiling ceremony. There wasn't a dry eye in the room. The best news was that Sonny's condition had stabilized to the point where he will be able to spend many hours being chauffeured by Alene in his finally restored '66.

There are without a doubt many more Mustang activities, which provide more satisfaction and gratification than washing, waxing, and detailing your Mustang for trophies. Helping friends and others tops my list! **MT**

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## REASSEMBLY





# THE PRESENTATION



*(L-R) Gino Millspaugh, Kerry Hicks, Alene and Sonny Vicknair in front of Sonny's '66, completely restored and ready for Alene to chauffeur Sonny to club events.*