

TWICE GIFTED



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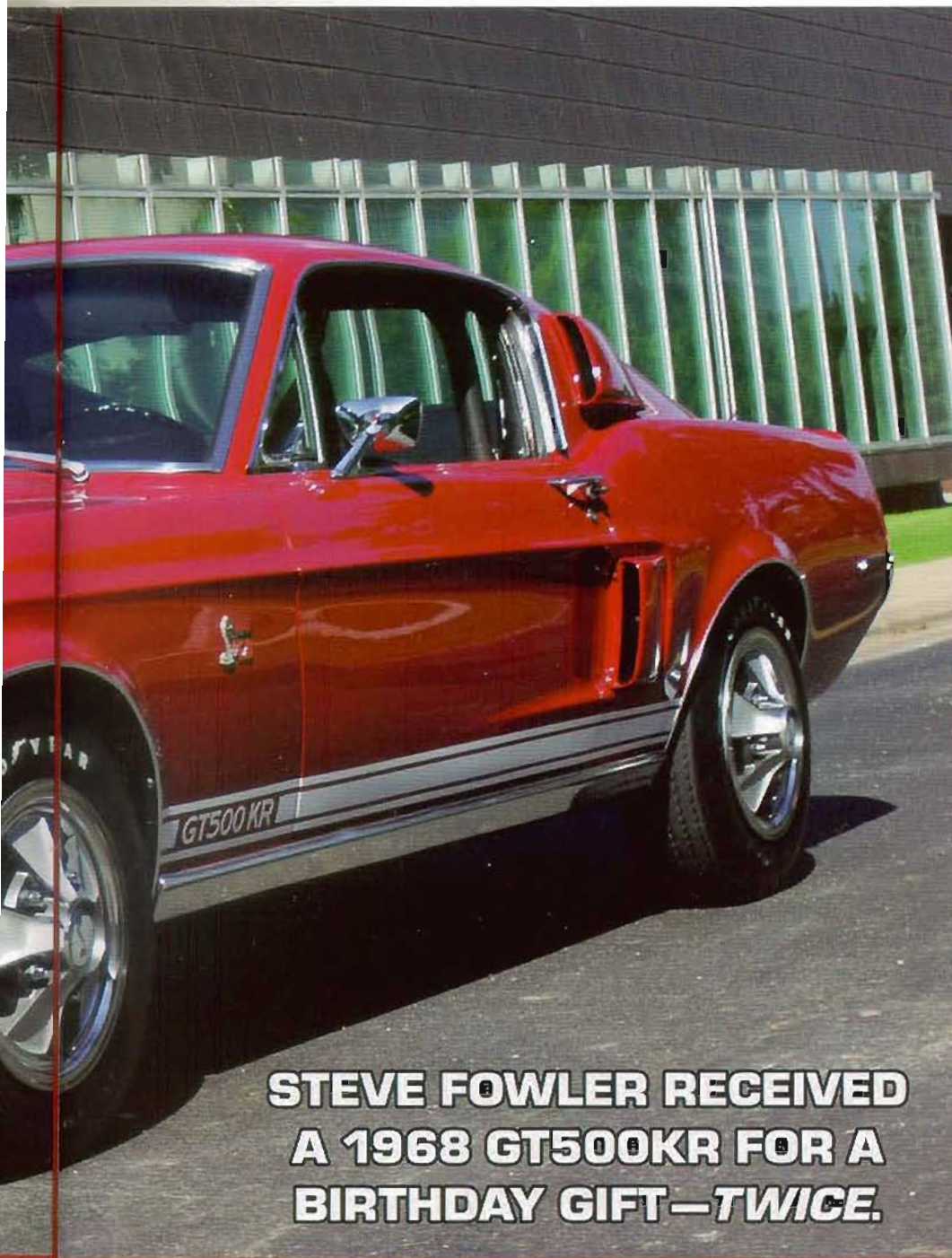
Not many people are fortunate to receive a brand new Shelby for their birthday. Well, Steve Fowler is one of those people. Steve's is such an interesting story, one of growing up as a responsible young man in a loving home. A home where his parents taught him and his brother to value all they have and appreciate life. I met Steve at the Mid-America Shelby & Ford Performance Meet in Tulsa, Oklahoma, last June, where he told me the history of his KR.

In July 1968, Steve was 15 1/2-years old and had his driving learner's permit. He had been driving for several years as their homesite was quite large and the family had equipment to maintain the

property and to farm. His father owned a trucking company. When Steve's mother needed to take the family car in to the dealership, Sanders Motor Company, for a little warranty work, she asked Steve to drive her there. They lived in Raleigh, North Carolina, and she wanted Steve to be comfortable driving in Raleigh traffic. So, as most teens would, Steve quickly agreed to drive her to town.

They planned to wait at the dealership while the work was being done, so Steve meandered around the showroom, checking out the new cars. There sat a Shelby. He had never heard of a Shelby and knew nothing about them. The sales manager of the dealership was a

good friend of his father, and was in the showroom at the time. He started to tell Steve a bit about the car, that it was the only one they'd had, how rare and powerful it was, and that it was really a race car but was legal for the street. Steve said, "I had never thought of having anything like that. As a family, we always watched 'Bonanza' on TV each Sunday night, and with Chevrolet being a sponsor, I had always seen the ads for a Corvette and had a desire for one. But, when I saw the Shelby and with my Dad being a Ford man I was too, I said to myself, 'this has got to be it.' I told my dad's friend it was too expensive and with it being as fast as was, there was absolutely no way my Dad



STEVE FOWLER RECEIVED A 1968 GT500KR FOR A BIRTHDAY GIFT—TWICE.

would ever get me something like that. He proceeded to ask me if I wanted to sit in it, and got the key so I could start it, I was just enamored with the Shelby.”

Steve’s mother had begun to wonder where he’d wandered off to, and came into the showroom to find him. He asked her if she’d look at the Shelby and she agreed. Steve told her that he would love to have the Mustang. She indicated that his dad was thinking about buying him a car but wasn’t sure about the Shelby. Being a good friend of Steve’s Dad, the salesman said he would work on Steve’s dad.

As he promised, the salesman talked to Steve’s father about the KR. He actually drove the Shelby to the father’s business to

let him take it for a test drive. The salesman decided to leave the Shelby there, but Steve’s father didn’t want it left there and asked to have the Shelby brought to their home while he considered the purchase.

Steve’s 16th birthday was on September 4, 1968, and he was really convinced his dad would buy him the 1968 GT500KR. But, his father confessed that he was afraid to buy the Shelby because it was so powerful; if anything happened to Steve while driving it, his father said he wouldn’t have been able to forgive himself. Steve recalls, “I thought OK, so be it.”

During the summer the Fowler family lived at a home on a lake. Steve met a girl who lived on the same lake, and his first

date when he got my license was with her. Steve tells the story, “I was to meet her parents at her home before we went out, but didn’t have anything to drive, so I asked my Dad what could I do. He gave me the keys to his ‘63 Thunderbird with a warning to be very careful. When I got to my date’s house, I had a message from my mother to call home. She said my father wanted me to bring his car back. Well, I asked what am I going to do now, I have a date and no car? She said, ‘well, I’m not supposed to tell you this, but your Dad wants to give you the Shelby.’ When Dad had said he wasn’t going to give me the Shelby, he returned it to the dealership. What I didn’t know was that they had taken it back to my dad’s business and locked it up.

“We went out on the date with the new Shelby. My date loved the car so much she asked her dad to get her a Shelby for her birthday. She was a little bit spoiled and would always get what she wanted. Her father was afraid to get her a KR because of the power, but he did buy her a Highland Green GT350.

We were the only two who had Shelseys in Raleigh at the time.”

Steve enjoyed driving his Shelby and was always running into people who wanted to race. His father sternly warned him that if he’d ever caught him racing, the Shelby would be history. Steve admits that he did race a 440 Daytona in Myrtle Beach in 1969. When Steve got his car up to 110mph, he pulled away, leaving the Daytona behind.

A few short years later, Steve’s father passed away suddenly from a heart attack. Steve and his brother were left to run the business. As he matured, Steve realized that the Shelby was dangerous and he could get seriously hurt. So, he decided to sell it. He scheduled an ad to run in the newspaper on a Sunday morning in August of 1973. The paper must have just been delivered when Steve says his phone began ringing off the hook. A prospective buyer came down at 9:30 on Sunday morning. The Shelby had only 46,000 miles on it, and the prospective buyer was surprised at its great condition. Steve explained that the KR was a surprise as far as the speed and power, that he’d think he was driving at a safe speed but realize that he’d been driving way too fast. When Steve told him others were coming to see the Shelby as well, the gentleman bought the Shelby right then. He informed Steve he wanted to drive the KR home and asked if it would be alright to come back to

get his car. He also said he'd been driving for 25 years and hadn't ever had a ticket. Steve asked what his plans were for the Shelby and was told it was being bought for the new owner's 16-year-old daughter. Steve suggested he reconsider, explaining again that the car was quite powerful. When the new owner came back for his car, he admitted that on his way home with the KR he got a ticket for doing 80 in a 55. He never gave the Shelby to his daughter. Within a few years, Steve lost contact of the car. He thought about trying to find the Shelby several times, but never did.

Steve decided to buy a Lincoln Mark IV to replace the Shelby and met his future wife, Beth, at the dealership when he went to order the car. She was there to pick up the Cougar her father had bought for her. They had the same salesman and got to talking. After 14 1/2 years of dating, Steve and Beth married, and Steve and his brother expanded their business.

Steve and his wife were on a business trip in New York when his brother called to say the KR was on television at the RM Auctions in Monterey, California. The resort where the Fowlers were staying didn't have a television in the guest rooms. Steve's brother told him when the auction would be replayed so they could see it. Steve and Beth went into the lounge area to watch the rerun. When the auctioneer talked about the history of the Shelby, that it was owned by Fowler Hauling, which was Steve's father's business, he stated, "We're not sure what was hauled with this Shelby, but we sure know it got there fast."

Beth had never seen the Shelby but had heard all the stories over the years. As she watched the auction on TV with him, Steve told her he'd love find the person who bought the car. But RM Auctions' personnel wouldn't divulge the information.

Steve said his wife, Beth, can find anything online. She was dubbed with the nickname "Cannon," after a television show about an ace investigator. Never one to be daunted by a challenge, Beth managed to get the KR's VIN and asked a friend in motor vehicle department to help find the car. Fortunately, the Shelby had been registered, and her friend was able to give Beth the information she needed. Beth worked on this man to sell her the car. She wanted to buy it for Steve's 54th birthday in September of 2006.

On his actual birthday, Beth told Steve that she wanted to buy the '68 Shelby for his birthday and had found the owner, but that the new owner wouldn't sell. So,



instead she presented Steve with a red 2007 GT500. He had no idea that he would soon get his original Shelby back, also.

He had sold the business, and had also battled kidney cancer two years earlier. Steve said they celebrate milestones, and 2006 was a two-year milestone. His wife wanted to celebrate and hired New York City Party Planner David Tutera to handle all the arrangements. Tutera flew to Raleigh and put together an unbelievable party for the Fowlers. Earth, Wind, and Fire was scheduled to perform but cancelled. Instead, they had KC and The Sunshine

Band perform, which Steve said was just perfect. They originally planned to have the party around the 4th of July, but decided to move the date to not interfere with people's holiday plans. They hosted the party on September 30, 2006.

A part of the event was a fireworks display. While Beth, Steve, and their guests enjoyed the fireworks, Steve heard a roar off to the side and looked over to see his brother driving the KR toward him with a huge bow on the top. "I knew every screw and nut on the car; I knew it was my car," Steve recalled. Beth had indeed convinced



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the owner to sell it and Steve's brother kept it hidden in his garage until that evening.

Steve continued, "I put the KR in the garage next to my 2007 Shelby.

"When I heard about the Super Snake package, I sent my '07 to Shelby Autos and had the 725hp package upgrade done on it. It's remarkable. I hooked up with Gary Patterson and told him about the KR, that I wanted to have the car restored. He gave me a couple of restoration shop references. I chose Jeff Yergovich of R&A Motorsports. R&A worked on the KR for nearly 18 months performing a ground-up restoration."

From the outside the Shelby looked perfect, but many details weren't original, and it needed to be repainted. Fortunately no major frame work or pulling had to be done. Steve's 1968 GT500KR had ten-spokes on it when R&A got it, but Steve stated that hub caps were original equipment on this KR. What Steve wanted was to have the car restored to its exact

condition when his father gave it to him.

R&A is known for being detail-oriented. When they handle a restoration, they go through it thoroughly. They took the KR completely apart and restored it to its currently glorious condition. They even found hub caps to finish it off.

Steve exclaimed, "I was very impressed when Jeff finished with it. R&A did a great job." The KR won the "Tri-Fecta" of distinguished judged shows in the summer of 2010. In Division II, at Mid-America in Tulsa, the KR took the highest honors; it received a Gold at the MCA Grand National in Bellevue, Washington, and also won Gold at the SAAC Convention in California. The curator of the Shelby Museum in Bolder, Colorado, asked to have the Shelby on display for the remainder of 2010.

I asked Steve what it felt like to sit in the Shelby again after all those years. He said he'd lost the concept of the KR as it had been so long. It only had 65,000 miles on the odometer, but he remembered it had

46,000 when he sold it. As he sat in the seat, he said the memories of the large steering wheel, the one outside mirror, the harnesses, it all came flooding back. And, it was still just so fast. It ran like a charm. It would run 150+mph, and it was always so strong.

Steve is a humble and highly likable gentleman. Like most of us in this hobby, he has such fond memories of his first Mustang. He credits meeting his wife because of the KR. He recounted, "The reason I met Beth is when I sold the Shelby in August of 1972, I went to the dealership to order my Lincoln and met her at the dealership. Had I not sold the KR, I'd not gone to the dealership and would never have met her."

The Fowlers celebrate two anniversaries, one on October 22nd when they first met, and then there's their wedding Anniversary, which is ironically, on April 17th. Steve and Beth Fowler have much to celebrate. **MT**

