

TURNING A ROLLER



INTO REALITY

PART TWO: PARTS IS PARTS

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Photos by R&A Motorsports

I am pleased to report that since my "Mustang In Boxes" saga was first introduced to you back in the February issue of *Mustang Times*, much has happened in the restoration effort on my 1977 Mustang II Cobra II. There are two primary reasons we can report that so much progress has been made in turning this roller into reality: First and foremost, it's due to the work of R&A Motorsports in Lees Summit, MO; and secondly, it's thanks to the project management skills of Noel Jennings, R&A's marketing manager. But there are also two reasons that even more progress has not been made by now: The first is parts—or the lack thereof. And a close second is ... well, parts.

And that's my fault. Now if you are a fellow second-generation Mustang owner, then you pretty much know what I'm talking about here. But for the vast majority of folks who can't understand or appreciate the difficulty in restoring or even maintaining a 1974-1978 Mustang, then you should know that the lack of body, interior, trim, or even regular service parts is the main issue keeping more Mustang IIs

from being on the road today.

As I had explained in Part 1 of this series, I had purchased my 1977 red-on-white Cobra II several years ago from fellow MCA member Joe Rementer, who became the second owner of this very solid California car and brought it back East to his home in upstate NY. Joe had expended much effort beginning an MCA Gold-level restoration on the car. While undertaking an exhaustive parts search, Joe had some fantastic work done on the body, paint and Cobra II graphics, as well as a complete underbody restoration (right down to correct factory markings), plus new front and rear suspension and brakes.

But his project seemed to stall while hunting stock engine overhaul and service parts, especially the original emissions control system stuff, and his interest soon turned to another Mustang—this one of the 1971-'73 vintage. (Yes, those Mustangs are tough to find parts for, too, but nowhere near as difficult as the 1974-'78 models.) When Joe shopped his Cobra II project car around, I stumbled upon it online and instantly fell in love with it.

Even with the entire powertrain removed and untouched and the interior

completely gutted, the car looked really great—and it was a WAAAY better starting point for me than my own 1978 Cobra II "project car." My baby has rust, rot and body issues and looks like a reject from the next "Death Race" movie. So after months of haggling, Joe made me a deal that I couldn't refuse, and within a few weeks the car was in my garage.

And that's where it sat for more than five years. With parts of the car mostly in boxes.

I wasn't ignoring the project, mind you—I just had to take things one step at a time. First, I had to assimilate all of the great parts that Joe had amassed for the '77 with my own collection of II parts I've been collecting over about 10 years for my '78 resto. Then I had to find an engine builder who I could both trust and afford. For that I followed the advice of my old friend, Steve Anderson (of the SVT Marketing Trailer fame—does anyone remember the husband-wife team of Steve and Rita Anderson who had worked the SVT events trailer back in the day? ... Great people!)

Anyway, Steve knew longtime Ohio drag racer Jon H. Pickering, who had built more than a few winning 302s for the old Fun Ford Weekend racing series. (Jon H., his son John M., and his grandson, Josh, all raced as a family—in 5.0-liter-powered Mustang II, Maverick and Pinto race cars!) So Steve talked Jon into rebuilding my motor in his spare time. It took more than a year to finish it (but I had told him I was in no hurry) so the next summer, I headed down from Detroit to pick up the completed engine from Jon outside of Dayton, Ohio. I wasn't interested in having the same kind of emasculated 1978-vintage 302 that I have in my totally stock 1978 King Cobra to power this hot-looking '77 Cobra II, so I had Jon tweak the engine's compression, cylinder heads and camshaft, and topped it off with an aluminum intake and 650cfm Holley four-barrel carb.

And that sweet little 302 sat, wrapped in plastic, in my garage for more than a year until I came across a nice, rebuilt C4 automatic transmission to mate to it. Turns out a fellow Mustang II owner who I had met at the Carlisle All-Ford Nationals years ago, Tim Stetser, offered me an at-cost deal on his recently rebuilt C4 (after he had decided to go with a 351/AOD powertrain combo for his own award-winning Cobra II.) And so there that rebuilt engine and C-4 trans sat in my garage for

yet another year—until R&A Motorsports struck a fantastic agreement with me to finish my “car in boxes.”

R&A's first order of business was to fire up the rebuilt 302 I had hauled to their shop along with the car for a pilot test-run—this before disassembling the tin and repainting the matte-black engine to a correct Ford blue. Noel Jennings captured the test run on video and posted it on “YouTube” for me to see and hear. The only problem was that the carb was leaking, and the oil pan was so mis-shaped and dented that R&A mechanic Adam Hoaglin was concerned about oil pickup clearance problems. So they asked me for another pan. A month-long search on auction sites turned up nothing, so I was forced to scavenge the Mustang II-specific 302 oil pan off of my other Cobra II project car. Sometimes just having a very-hard-to-find part doesn't mean it is going to be useable!

Next up was the body and interior. While the paintwork was done long ago, none of the trimwork was installed, so R&A began that task, asking for the best parts I had. Turns out even my best Cobra II grille was too dingy and faded to be used, so the R&A team decided to restore it for me ... and what a difference that made! Out back, installation of the taillamps was held up until I could locate a missing rear wiring harness ... which turned up a couple of weeks later in a box that I had left sitting in my backyard shed during an “archeological dig” that I was forced to embark upon!

The work that I thought would be easiest—putting the interior back together—became quite a challenge. First, some of the interior's plastic panels were refinished, and others weren't. Worse, Noel

discovered that according to his Ford records, some of them were redone in the wrong shade of “red.” The Mustang II's 1977-78 “Deluxe Red Vinyl Interior” did, indeed, use two shades of red—a darker, almost burgundy for the dash, dashpad, side panels, and carpet, and another brighter, cherry-orange red for the headliner, door panels, and seats. (I know because that's the way it is on my factory stock '78 King Cobra with the same exact interior.)

So that meant all of the plastic interior panels, plus the dash, glovebox door, and floor console, would all have to be refinished to match. Luckily, R&A's painter, Jason McCoskey, is an expert as such work. So all of my interior pieces were prepped and taken into the R&A paint booth for color-matching. Plus, the dash had to be masked and re-shot inside the car before the carpet was installed. Next, the seats were sent out to an R&A jobber for recovering in what has to be the very last “NOS” set of factory Mustang II vinyl seat upholstery on the planet. And oh, did I tell you I forgot to bring along the door panels when I dropped off the car last fall? Yup—after finding them stashed up in my garage loft, I shipped them off to R&A via UPS. Upon inspection, Noel noted they were kind of in rough shape, so he had his R&A team restore them as well.

Just when we thought the interior could go back together, we found out that there was no glovebox insert, and worse, that not only did the AM-FM-8-Track unit not even work, but the door speakers had disintegrated from age and were useless. I found a reproduction glove box insert off eBay, and picked up a set of 5¼-inch round door speakers, but the 8-track unit was a big problem. Not willing to cut up

the dash to try and fit-in a new AM-FM-CD player, I decided to try and find a place to repair the 8-track. (After all, wife Jenny and I still have about 200 8-track tapes in a box in our basement!)

A bit of digging turned up one of the top-rated Ford radio repair places in the country. A guy named Gordon Ward who runs Wards Classic Radio Repair shop out of Huntsville, Alabama, has built a fine reputation on rebuilding these radios to better-than-new condition; so Joel sent my 8-track unit to them for repair. (Better still, I found out that Gordon can upfit most models with an iPod jack on a cord that runs to the back of the radio that you can hide underdash—with no modifying of the radio face needed!)

Again, it turned out that having the correct radio didn't mean that it would actually work. (I even had another radio from my other car that I found was bad as well!) After the interior gets done, it will be on to the installation of the powertrain. But wait: I just got another email from Noel at R&A. Turns out some of my underhood parts are either wrong or missing. Now I know R&A's owners, Jeff and Julie Yergovich, have seen this all before in the restoration business, but that's with the classic Mustangs and Shelys they are famous for. But they can't just go to their well-stocked parts bin for all the right pieces to get this Mustang II back together for me. Nope, that part of the job is up to me.

So it looks like I'll be doing some more digging again. Better stay tuned for the next installment of my “Roller to Reality” series to see if I can somehow find all the right parts to have R&A get this baby on the road in time for the summer show season! **MT**



▲ The Cobra II was delivered to R&A Motorsports just as it had left the paint shop years ago, with very little to none of the exterior trim installed.



▲ Original drab, dingy Cobra II grill had to be restored before installation with the rest of the brightwork and lamps.



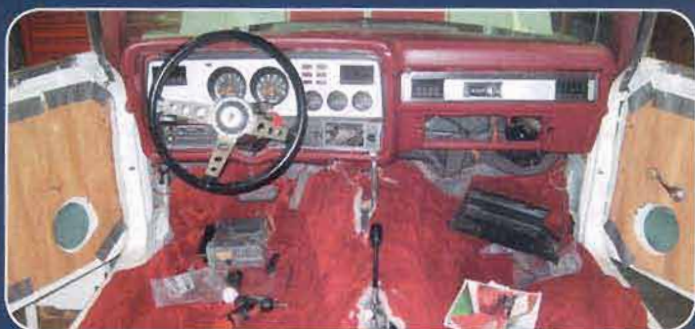
▲ While most of the interior panels were repainted in a non-correct red, while others were scuffed and faded and in need of refinishing.



▲ To make sure everything inside the car matched properly, R&A refinished the dash panel in the same dark red as the various interior panels.



▲ R&A prepped all interior panel pieces for refinishing in the correct shade of Red and painter Jason McCoskey made everything look like new.



▲ Interior reconstruction included reassembling the full dash and gauges, but work stalled when old AM-FM-8-track unit proved to be inoperable.



▲ Research showed Mustang II Deluxe interior had two shades of Red, dark for panels, carpet and dash, light for seats doors and headliner.



▲ Inside, cabin was completely gutted right to the sound-deadening on the floors, with only the dash frame, steering wheel and headliner in place.

SOURCES:

Wards Classic Car Radio Repair

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