

HIPO REUNION

Text by Dave Wallace
Photos by Mary Jean Wesche

When you acquire a terrific classic car and lack the car's history there's an unfulfilled sense of accomplishment. At least that proved to be my experience when I bought my 1965 2+2 K code back in 2004. I had been seeking an early HiPo for a couple of years and finally managed to find one through a collector car dealer. There was no history or information with the car, but I had a title and registration to begin with. Every time I opened the garage door I wondered about previous owners; were they racers, cruisers, kids, soldiers...? Did they rev it, blow it up, wreck it, or baby it? How did they come to own it, and what changed in their lives that they elected to part with such a great car?

I have an inquisitive nature and had an overwhelming desire to know the car's past. Eventually I came to recognize that this is a familiar obsession, a kind of gentle madness that grips many restorers. The Mustang was in fair shape, but it would need a lot of effort to bring it up to concours standards. Friend and fellow restorer, Charles Turner says that the cars will tell us their story as we get to know them during restoration. That's very true and uncovering that story can be an exercise in frustration, heartache, fun, and sheer joy.

If you own a classic Mustang and are seeking the car's history there's a very

good chance that persistence and luck will prevail! Thanks to the internet, the world gets smaller every day. By following every lead and using the web, the phone, and the U.S. mail I eventually succeeded in finding all of the K code's prior owners. Unearthing the car's history was only part of the fun; the real joy has come in the relationships I have been able to forge with the earlier owners. They're all car guys and knew exactly what they wanted when they bought HiPo.

The data plate listed San Jose as the assembly plant and delivery to Los Angeles. The scheduled build date was December 30, 1964, a Wednesday before



PATIENCE AND RESEARCH LINKED ALL OF THIS MUSTANG'S OWNERS

New Year's Eve. My first thought was of plant workers enjoying a bit of spiked eggnog and holiday cheer as the cars moved down the San Jose assembly line!

I took a trip to the local Department of Motor Vehicles where I obtained the Mustang's history going back 10 years, as much as the State would provide. The report showed two prior owners during that period, the dealer I bought it from and one other fellow who had the car for most of the 10 years. The web turned up a business address and phone number for the long-term owner, but trying to reach him was a frustrating dead end. For a year I called and would leave messages but, for

whatever reason, he wouldn't return my calls. During the second year I changed tactics and started sending letters with self addressed stamped envelopes in hope that he'd reply. The provenance war of attrition had begun!

During the winter I pulled the motor and driveline apart, which were all original and matching numbers, and discovered tell-tale signs of hot rodding. The lifter valley had been polished, the cylinder heads had remnants of Glyptol epoxy paint applied for oil flow, and there was a Schneider racing cam. Having owned another K code at one time I knew that hot rod parts went with the territory; the mythical HiPos were frequently modified to extract even more power. It's easy to understand why when looking at K code statistics. Of the 1.7 million Mustangs that Ford produced from 1964 to 1967 only 13,231 were K. Through the years, a lot them were used

as engine donors for race cars, Shelybys, or Cobras that scattered their motors. Today there are only 1,728 cars worldwide in the High Performance Mustang Registry, and it's rare to find one with all of the original unique K code parts. Mine still had all the K code pieces, including the VIN stamped engine and transmission, so I opted to restore the car to concours condition using NOS parts. (Special thanks to my wife, Bryan, for putting up with the restoration.)

One day in January I opened the mail box to find that one of my self-stamped envelopes had been returned! It was stuffed with parts tags, a few photos, and some notes. I took the opportunity to call the long-time owner to thank him and he finally accepted the call. He had acquired the car and performed a restoration himself, ultimately using the car as a Sunday driver. He was disenchanted with the vintage parts market and I sensed



HIPO REUNION

that it had soured him on the car, but he had still enjoyed owning the Mustang. The treasure trove of invoices and notes contained doodling, parts shopping lists, and a few names scrawled in the margins. I researched every single name, and some were dead ends, but I ultimately hit gold with the names of the second and third owners.

The name of the second owner, Dave Zalibra, was in faint pencil on the back of one of the invoices. After searching the web and making some phone calls I found Dave living in Arizona and we connected by phone. The car had originally been sold at Klem Ford, in Eagle Rock, California, and Dave had been a mechanic there in the 1950s and 1960s. He was a friend of the original owner and had advised him to purchase the High Performance package. He had advised him to keep the car simple, like good vanilla ice cream; no frills or interior options that might add weight or reduce performance. In 1969, Dave bought the car from the original owner (who has since passed away) and ended up enjoying it for many years. During that initial phone call his first question was,

"Are all the HiPo parts still on the car?" I was happy to confirm they were! We keep in touch and swap car stories by email, and he attends all kinds of car shows; I'm hoping to get him back behind the wheel at some time in the future.

Another owner was reputed to be a noted Southern California collector of GT/California Specials, but I only had his first name to work with—Ernie. The power of the internet is amazing, and I managed to find Ernie Gonzales through a series of inquiries posted on the GT/CS Forum. He bought the K code when they were relatively cheap and stored it under a carport for a couple of years before finally deciding to sell it. Ernie literally had a yard full of 10 GT/CS Mustangs and High Country Specials that were ultimately sold "en bloc" to another collector.

When the MCA announced the West Coast National in Los Angeles in August of 2009 it gave me an opportunity to bring the car back to LA. It also meant a chance to personally connect with the car's third owners, Karl Knoblauch and his father, Jules. Jules was living in Southern California within driving distance of the show and we agreed to meet there. Karl was a mechanic by trade, and had been the one that had modified the engine for drag racing in the '80s and '90s. The father and son team had fond memories of the car at Carlsbad raceway in San Diego before the track was lost to real estate development. Karl was very helpful during the restoration, and was kind enough to send me the original fan shroud.

I met Jules and his grandson, Cody, on the show field early Saturday morning. Jules pored over the Mustang recognizing every HiPo part, and regaled us with stories of father and son hot rodding. We managed to slip the car away from the show field and cruise the palm-lined boulevards of LA. As we drove along, Jules recalled a dicey quarter-mile run that nearly destroyed the car. In a moment of father-son rivalry at Carlsbad he had taken a turn at the wheel for the quarter mile. Coming out of the hole he grabbed second gear and found himself sideways, luckily recovering without damage. Sharing these stories and the experience of driving together made for a wonderful show. To top off the event, the car garnered its third gold award in the Concours Driven class at a National event.

If you're chasing your Mustang's history hang in there and you will eventually succeed. You'll be pleasantly surprised to find much in common with previous owners including the ability to appreciate a Mustang for what it was meant to be—fun! With a little luck you may be fortunate enough to have your own reunion! **MT**

Editor's Note: Dave was instrumental in helping to bring back a concours reproduction of the early HiPo Arvinode exhaust systems. See Jim Smart's article on the adventure in the July 2009 issue of Mustang Monthly and the February 2010 edition of Muscle Car Enthusiast. You can go for a road test and hear the sound on YouTube at: www.youtube.com/round2k.



HIPO REUNION

continued from page 24

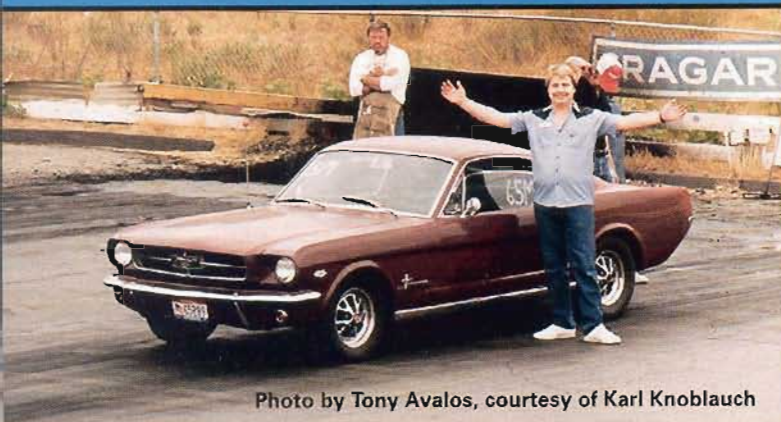


Photo by Tony Avalos, courtesy of Karl Knoblauch

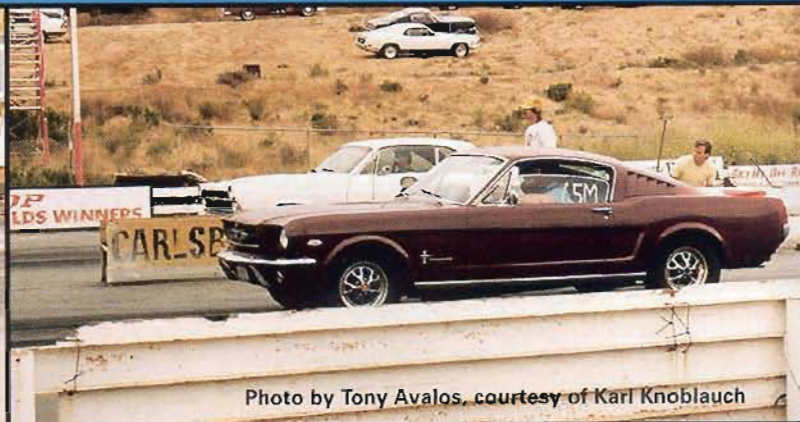


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