

Mary Jean Wesche Receives The Lee Iacocca Award

Text by Austin C. Craig
Photo by Howard Buck

Mary Jean Wesche, *Mustang Times* talented and energetic editor, was presented the prestigious Lee Iacocca Award at the Lake Mirror Classic Auto Festival and Auction held in Lakeland, Florida, this past October. Lee Iacocca's contribution to the automotive industry spans some 50 years. During his time at the Ford Motor Company, Iacocca created many successful product, sales and marketing programs from his "56 in 56" sales drive where a customer could purchase a 1956 Ford for \$56 a month to The Ford Total Performance Program of the 1960s and, of course, the Mustang. Worried that the hot-selling Mustang was being imaged as a "secretary's car" he asked Carroll Shelby to create a performance version, the result was the 1965 GT350—a winner from the first time it turned a wheel on a race track. Since that time Lee Iacocca has demonstrated an extraordinary dedication to the classic car hobby through club participation and vehicle preservation.

Since 2006, the award is given for the dedication in perpetuating an American automotive tradition. The award celebrates auto enthusiasts on multiple levels, including character and integrity. The unique award is linked with the Iacocca Family Foundation whose mission is to find a cure for diabetes. All recipients in their way can be considered philanthropists.

Former Lee Iacocca Award recipients include Larry Dobbs, Founder of Dobbs Publishing, the first company to publish a monthly Mustang magazine; Bill Warner, noted journalist and founder of the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance and an avid car collector; Bill Dillard, one of the founders of the MCA, former President, Mustang Anniversary Show Chairman and lifelong Mustang enthusiast; and Carroll Shelby, world class race driver who created and manufactured the Cobra—the only American car to win the World Manufacturer's Championship for sports cars—and of course founder and President of Shelby American.

Mary Jean has been a Mustang and Shelby enthusiast since she witnessed the Mustang's debut in 1965. She has owned a '69 GT500 428 SCJ to enjoy with husband Ken's matching '70 GT350, and 1965 GT350. When she became pregnant with their youngest child, Ken bought her another 1969 GT500.



▲ Pictured with Mary Jean are, left to right, Donald Farr, Mustang Monthly Editor who MC'd the presentation, Rick Schmidt, President of NPD and Iacocca Award Sponsor who presented the award, Mary Jean, Stacey Heacock Weeks, and Ford Heacock III, President of Heacock Insurance Group, founder and host of the Lake Mirror Classic Auto Festival and Auction.

In 1996, Mary Jean led Mustangs Across America in the pace car, a 1996 Budget Saleen Speedster. After picking the car up at Saleen headquarters in Irvine, CA, the group met up in Las Vegas and drove to Atlanta Raceway for the 25th Anniversary of the Mustang Club of America. At the time Mary Jean was Managing Editor of *Mustang Monthly*. (In 1998, her husband purchased the Saleen for her as a birthday gift.) Her Saleen is the only registered Budget Speedster.

Today Mary Jean is the proud owner of a 2011 Shelby GT500. Husband Ken, also an avid Mustang enthusiast has a Saleen S351 coupe, the last one produced, parked next to her 1st Saleen, a 1987 coupe, in the Wesche's garage.

For a number of years Mary Jean was a Sports Car Club of America race volunteer and held the position of Chief of the Pits for a dozen years. She worked both amateur and pro SCCA and IMSA races at Daytona, Sebring, Road America, Road Atlanta, and New Orleans, among other venues.

Working at Dobbs Publishing in the circulation department, Mary Jean was promoted to managing editor of *Mustang Monthly* and later *Super Ford*. When Dobbs was sold to Petersen Publishing, she became the managing editor of both *5.0 Mustang* and *Super Ford* magazines.

In 2004 Mary Jean Wesche joined the present day Pate Media Group with circulation and marketing responsibilities. When the *Mustang Times* editor position became available in 2005, she was appointed to run the publication. For the last six years the magazine has grown due to her considerable editorial and marketing talents. Her vibrant personality is appreciated as much by advertisers and sponsors as by MCA members across the country. Ford Motor Company does not invite many, if any, club magazine editors to their long lead press conferences and new products. Mary Jean Wesche always receives an invitation to the company's key events.

Donald Farr, *Mustang Monthly* Editor and long-time friend, introduced Mary Jean while Rick Schmidt of National Parts Depot presented Mary Jean with The Lee Iacocca Award. When asked what the award meant, Mary Jean replied, "To receive this award from your peers is so heartfelt; I am so surprised and humbled by it." **MT**