

A GT350 SAGA

Text and Photos by Robert Parsons

My path to a 2011 Shelby GT350 is an interesting one. I have owned, restored, and raced many German cars over the years. My love of great cars, however, has no boundaries. This saga began about one year ago when I could no longer resist the burning desire to own a Mustang. The fifth generation Mustang piqued my

interest for years and I could not pass a Ford dealer without slowing down to take a look at the pony cars. With the facelift for the 2010 model year combined with the 5.4 liter Shelby badged GT500, I could no longer suppress the burning desire for this modern muscle car. In early November 2009, I began looking for the exact car that I wanted. It had to be a Kona blue with white stripes convertible with HID's and Navigation. For weeks, I looked and there were

many GT500's available but not so many 'verts and none that matched my criteria. Searching Cars.com on Thanksgiving weekend 2009, I noticed the exact car I wanted at Brandon Ford in Tampa, FL. I began calling the dealership around 8am Monday morning and finally had someone pick up and I asked for a salesperson. A young man answered the phone and I promptly told him that I had found a car on the Cars.com website but that the car was not listed



on Brandon Ford's website or on Ford's online inventory search. He assured me that they still had the car and that they had "hid" the car from other Ford dealers to avoid being bombarded with dealer inquiries. A deal was quickly made and my next call was to a lifelong friend who was more than happy to hop on a plane with me at 5am, December 4th to Tampa. The car was such a blast to drive, show and enjoy that I quickly found myself driving it every chance I could.

The GT500 was so good that I started doing some research on the 2011 Mustang GT with the new 5.0 liter Coyote engine. Just days before the club visited the Philly Auto Show to inspect the new model, Shelby American debuted their 2011 GT350 based on the new Mustang GT. On January 18th, 2010, the GT350 made its public debut at the Barrett-

Jackson Auction in Scottsdale, Arizona. Now my mind really went spinning. Since I had sold my race car a few years back and really missed high speed driving and some of my friends from the track, I thought a properly prepped Mustang could be a fantastic dual purpose car. I could drive it on the street and take it to Watkins Glen, Virginia International and other road courses and burn a few hot laps. It would also be fun if I could beat up on some of my German car buddies in some American Iron. Remember, I have only owned the GT500 for about 6 weeks and the car was so good and so much fun to drive that I'm actually contemplating getting another Mustang. My wife, Sharon, who is always supportive of all my 4-wheeled obsessions was quickly on board for the new car but made me promise that

a period-correct color 1965 Mustang Convertible would someday make its way into her garage stall. Her brief experience with the GT500 was also very positive and the GT350 was really an easy "sell."

On January 25th, I contacted Shelby American to place my deposit on a 2011 GT350. The deposit was the easiest part of the process. First, I needed to acquire a 2011 Mustang GT ordered the correct way and have it shipped to Las Vegas as soon as possible. Shelby would be producing cars in the order that the donor cars arrived in Las Vegas and not the order that the deposits were received. Therefore, it was vital to not just get a car but to get it there before the huge deluge of donor cars arrived. Shelby mandated the car be a 2011 GT in Performance White (other colors will





be available in 2012), be a 6-speed manual transmission, not have the rear spoiler, have the 3.73 limited slip along with a few other details. After contacting several dealers inquiring about their already spoken for allocations as well as pricing, I was pleased to make a deal in January with Sloan Ford in Exton, PA. Salesman Frank Kurko and General Manager Bill Mack could not have been more helpful in the process. In addition to a fair deal, I would get the first allocated car built for Sloan. Now it was time to hurry up and wait! While I waited, my son Dominic and I took the GT500 to Hermann, MO, for the 2010 Shelbyfest. It is a great event and I hope to make it there again next year—and it is only 1,800 miles round trip! Frank at Sloan Ford would give me weekly updates on the status of the GT's progress. Production began on the GT April 20th and was ready for shipping May 3rd. The car boarded Canadian National Railways on May 8th and was delivered to Shelby American in Las Vegas on May 26th. During this time, I paid Sloan Ford the balance due on the car after trading in my truck (and selling my Harley). I also had to have the car insured and registered in May. Shelby American required that proof of ownership be given to them before any work would commence on the car.

Once the car finally arrived at Shelby, I thought things would be smooth sailing. Boy, was I mistaken. My original sales contract stated that the building of the cars would take about 30-60 days after the donor car arrived in Las Vegas. Since my car arrived May 26th, I started planning on a late July delivery of the car which would still be in time to get her to a few tracks this season. I will state that the availability of details regarding the GT350 program itself and the exact status of my car from May to July were nearly non-existent. I finally received an email from Shelby on July 12th

that my car build would begin shortly. My shortly and their shortly were completely different. Before I knew it, July had come and gone and not only did I not have my car, no one had taken delivery of their GT350 yet. Finally after a heated email to the head of the sales department and the President of the company, I did get a phone call explaining the issues. And there were plenty of issues! It was now August and there were many supplier issues including getting enough wheels from Cragar, tires from Goodyear, and hoods and front/rear fascia's from a Tier 1 Ford supplier. Then the truth finally began circulating—they still had not received EPA certification from Ford for the supercharger and therefore no cars could be delivered yet. During the same phone call, it was confirmed that my donor car was the 21st car delivered to Shelby and that there were currently 130-plus donor cars in Las Vegas waiting to be transformed. While Shelby did try to get other things accomplished on the cars (paint, interiors, suspensions, brakes, etc) while awaiting certification, it was becoming clear that I was going to miss the majority of this year's driving season. When by September not a single car was delivered, more frustration set in. About this time I learned that there was going to be a 624hp pulley/tune option for the supercharged cars in addition to the base 525hp car. The excitement of higher hp tune helped my sanity through most of September—but barely. The first 4 cars were loaded on transporters October 8th. Now that I knew cars were being delivered, I began an email and phone call campaign to determine when my car would be finished. On October 20th, I finally got a delivery date of Friday, November 12th.

Now that a date was confirmed, I could begin making plans for my 11 year old daughter Amelia and me to fly to Las Vegas to take delivery and drive the car home. My goal was to take 7-8 days

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continued from page 34



to take in some of the sights and create a trip my daughter and I would always remember. We flew out on Thursday, November 11th and grabbed a taxi to take us to our hotel so we could get a good night's sleep prior to our 9am museum tour and delivery on the 12th. We quickly realized there was something going on at our hotel. Our hotel was hosting the Latin Grammy Awards that very night. Needless to say, we were quite under dressed and the music played deep into the night. Friday morning, Shelby American had arranged for a car to pick us up at the hotel and take us to the museum. Upon arrival, we were greeted by many Shelby employees including the production manager, the office manager and the sales manager (who was on the receiving end of many of my heated emails). As part of the museum delivery process, Amelia and I received some nice gifts from the museum store but the nicest part of the delivery process was that Shelby American had their staff photographer take pictures of us taking delivery of the car. Our smiles (especially mine) say it all. We enjoyed the red-carpet treatment from everyone and were quickly on our way.

I had on many occasions informed Amelia that our 3,000-plus-mile journey home was going to be long at times but we were going to sprinkle in some great experiences. Amelia has shown an early interest in architecture so I thought I would try and expose her to some architectural and engineering points of interest. Our journey included stops at the Hoover Dam, the Grand Canyon, Albuquerque,

Memphis, The Biltmore Estate, and Fallingwater. In total, we drove 3,079 miles from Las Vegas to West Brandywine, PA. We made it home Friday, November 18th without a single incident and not one snowflake encountered.

My first impressions with the car are positive. I ordered the 624hp tune supercharged GT350 with the following options: painted stripes, watts link, high performance cooling package, and rear brake upgrade. The rear upgrade is overkill for the street. I will re-evaluate after the first track session. The fit and finish are excellent. The 3.73 takes some getting used to but I'm getting used to it. Clutch is good. Suspension is excellent and the steering is precise. The exhaust by Borla is exceptional. It might actually be better to be behind the car instead of behind the wheel. Shifter is good but I will upgrade it to a Ford Racing short shift when they become available. I'm already looking forward to next year's track and show season. Is it spring yet?

One of my first orders of business after cleaning the car from the long trip and giving friends and family a "quick" ride was to bring the car to Sloan Ford. I cannot express how fantastic the folks at Sloan have been in the whole process from ordering the car to finally getting the car inspected after I got her home. I would also like to thank the Valley Forge Mustang Club for making me feel so welcome in the events I attended this year and the continuous support I received on the forum during the long wait for the car to be delivered. **MT**