# Living with a Legend

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## The Texas Awl Bidness

*– Steve Sloan*

Being born and raised in Texas I've always wanted to own a horse and an oil well. Little did I know I'd get close to both goals in the form of a car. The horse part is easy to explain – Shelby "Mustang," but the oil part will take a little longer.

If you've been following this series of articles you know that I love DRIVING my 1966 GT350. And I do that every chance I get. As a matter of fact, the only time I get frustrated with the car is when something happens that keeps me off the road. Windows won't roll up? Trunk leaks? Gauges a little wonky? Minor sorting out issues. No big deal. I'll fix them when I have time. At least I can still drive the car.

But, as with all cars I suspect, there did come a day when something more serious happened. I was returning home from an afternoon drive when I noticed the oil pressure gauge was reading low. Previously the needle had been showing about a 70% deflection. Now it showed about 10%. Ouch! I wasn't sure what that would be in psi, but I knew it wasn't good.

Well, at least it wasn't zero. And I was close to home. So I babied the car through the last few blocks and shut it off as soon as I had it in the garage.

Did I really have low oil pressure or was the gauge lying to me? I didn't have a test gauge, but I knew someone who did – Bruce Siegel at SureFire Mustang Restorations. A phone call got him headed my way, and a quick check showed my dash gauge was telling the truth – I really did have low oil pressure – 6psi at idle and around 16 to 18psi at 3,000 rpm. Crap!

Bruce informed me the car could actually be driven like this, but not hard and not very far. We agreed that the next time we got several days of predicted good weather I would drive the car to his shop and he'd find and fix the problem. The next few weeks looked like rain every day, but that couldn't go on forever.

While waiting for the weather to clear, I would run the engine at least once a week to keep the battery charged. And guess what? The third time I did that I watched in amazement as the oil pressure gauge kept climbing until it showed about a 70% deflection. What? I have a self-healing engine?!?! In my whole life I had never heard of such a thing, but there was the evidence staring me right in the face.

*The details of 6S087's 36-year rebirth were covered in the Winter, 2017 issue. Once the car was finished, Steve Sloan began picking up where he left off in 1979, when he bought the car. After being without it for more than three and-a-half decades, it was time to get reacquainted. He became, in effect, a new owner and experienced most of the first-time adventures that a new Shelby owner might typically encounter. This is the eleventh installment.*

The weather wasn't perfect, but I hadn't driven my car for 3 weeks, so out on the road I went. And the oil pressure stayed good for the whole two-hour drive. Yee Ha!!!

Over the next few months I watched that gauge like a hawk, but the reading stayed perfect. As time passed I gained confidence that the problem was really gone. I couldn't explain it, but have learned over the years that if something's not broken, don't try to fix it.

About a year later I received an invitation to attend a Houston area Shelby owners get together. It would be on a Saturday afternoon at a shopping mall that was a 50-minute freeway drive from my house. I asked my buddy, Al, if he'd like to ride shotgun and he jumped at the chance. So on the appointed day, we fired up Casper and hit the road. [*Casper is Al's nickname for my car.*]

We had a nice ride to the event and totally enjoyed meeting the other owners and seeing their cars. I didn't count them, but I'm guessing there were somewhere between 30 and 40 cars in attendance – everything from replica 427 Cobras to real Shelby Mustangs of almost every year. It was organized by Tommy McCurdy and partially hosted by Baker Street Pub & Grill, which came in handy when my stomach demanded some attention later in the day.

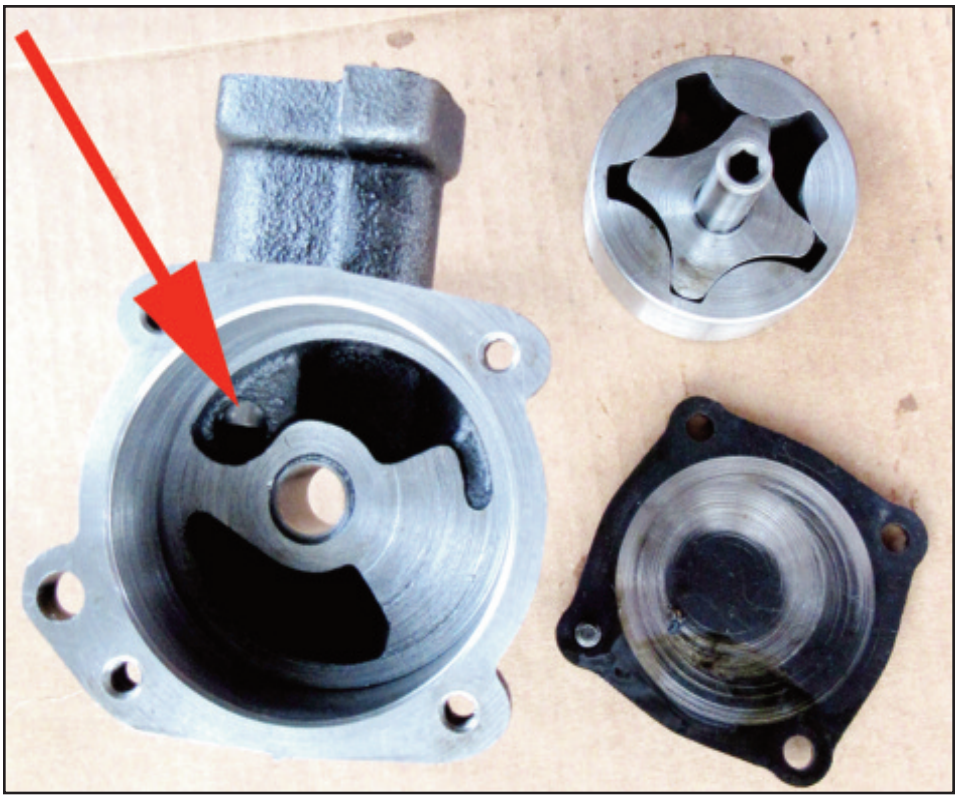
Of particular interest to me was 6S194, owned by Bob Leimone; Tommy's father-in-law. There weren't many carryovers made, so to see another one in person is a real treat for me. And while Bob's car is gorgeous, it's set up to be driven; not displayed under glass. Right up my alley.

Late in the day another fairly unique car showed up – a black 1966 GT350 with white side stripes and no LeMans stripes – absolutely stunning! When is the last time you saw one of those pull in off the street? It turned out to be 6S2353, driven by owner Darrell Smith. People seemed to appreciate the rarity of having two carryovers and that black, stripeless GT350 at the event and demanded a group photo op. We lined the cars up in front of the host pub and everyone snapped away. You can easily spot my 6S087 in the picture – it's the one parked crooked. Obviously, I'm not the world's best backer-upper.

After that, things started winding down. Al and I stayed a little longer to watch as some of the other cars were fired up and driven off. It was a thrill to see – and hear – such automotive wildlife heading back out into its natural habitat – the road. No trailer queens here. We took our turn in the exit parade and headed back home. But we hadn't gotten very far when…

Oops! My oil pressure gauge was reading LOW again! Yep, just like it had about a year before. Only this time I was 40 miles from home. Well, when this happened before, Bruce told me that the car could be driven like that; just not driven hard. So I made the decision to keep going and see if we could get home.

I kept a close watch on the water temperature gauge for any sign of overheating, and Al and I both strained our ears listening for any unusual sounds from the engine that might signal impending disaster. Of course that was wasted effort considering the roaring blast of my low restriction exhaust, but we tried anyway. And, miraculously, we made it to the refuge of my garage with no problems. Whew!



Considering my previous experience with this issue, I fully expected the pressure to return to normal after a few weeks, but it was not to be. This time something was really broken. But what? What would cause the oil pressure to be good for months, then go low for a few weeks, then be good for a year, then go low again? Hmmm…

Eureka! I had an idea. What if there was a pop-off valve in the oil pump, and that valve was getting stuck open at times? That could explain this problem, right? Good oil pressure when the valve was closed, and low oil pressure when the valve stuck open – allowing most of the oil to be routed back into the pan instead of the engine. That made sense in my head, but to be honest, I had no idea if there was such a thing designed into the pump. I was just guessing. A few calls to some more knowledgeable friends confirmed that there really was such a thing; only they called it a pressure relief valve.

With the existence of that valve established, I became convinced that was my problem. So convinced that I ordered a new pump and set up an appointment with Bruce to make the replacement. I hate to admit it, but at 66 years old, I'm no longer thrilled by the prospect of scooting around on my back on a concrete floor under my car in a cramped garage. In any case, Bruce made the swap and that did fix the problem. YES!

And just for fun he pulled the old oil pump apart far enough to actually see the stuck pressure relief valve. What a hoot! If you've been waiting to call me a genius, this is your chance – it might be your only chance so don't miss it. Ha, ha!

I may own a Shelby Mustang instead of a four-legged steed, and my claim to being a "Texas Oil Man" based on this experience may be a little tenuous, but at this age it's as close as I'm going to get, so I'll take it.

Life is good when you're living with a legend… and burning rubber again.