

# Living with a Legend

– Steve Sloan



## ELECTRICAL GREMLINS

When my freshly restored 1966 GT350 first came home I couldn't wait to start driving it. When I jumped in and turned the key, the engine dutifully rumbled into action and my life changed forever. What a hoot!

And yet, even in all that excitement, something stuck in the back of my mind. I had driven this car many years ago, and I thought the starter turned the engine over a little faster than what I was hearing now. Oh well, as long as it starts, I'm good. I blamed that odd feeling on the faulty memory

of a 63 year-old man who considers Sherlock Holmes his hero. You see, Holmes has a knack for observing details and understanding their meaning. A talent that I sadly lack.

In any case, I began driving the car every chance I got; several times a week when the weather permitted. The starter continued to turn slower than I remembered, but I simply ignored that. After all, the ammeter never showed discharge and the engine never failed to crank up.

Late one Saturday night, just to be

different, I decided to take a drive in the dark. Before I got to the corner stop sign I noticed the headlights were pointed all wonky. So I zipped back to the house for a quick adjustment. No matter how much I turned the adjuster screws, nothing changed. A closer inspection revealed they were stripped-out. All of them! Well, no nighttime drive tonight. I put the car back to bed in the garage and placed a quick online order for some replacements.

*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 third installment.*



By the next weekend I had the new adjusters installed and ready to test. After darkness fell I backed the car into the driveway and lowered the garage door. Then I turned on the headlights and used their pattern on the door to make some preliminary adjustments. I kept the engine off while doing this to keep the disruption to my neighbors to a minimum. Their bedroom is only about sixty-feet from where my car was sitting, and some people do actually sleep at night.

With the base line settings made, I cranked the engine and hit the road. Hmm... that starter motor sure was turning over slowly. Oh well, the engine was running and that's what counts. And the headlights were now near perfect. Certainly good enough for a half-hour drive before returning home. Oh, and this time I was out long enough to realize that the tach was unreadable in the dark. Isn't there supposed to be a light in there?

I eased back into the driveway and shut off the engine while I put the final touches on the headlight alignment. One quick trip around the block to confirm those settings and I'd call it a night. There was just one problem. Now the engine wouldn't start. Crap! It wouldn't turn over at all.

Maybe all those slow starts were trying to tell me something after all. I hooked up a battery charger and sat down to think about the situation. What would Holmes do? The ammeter had never moved into negative territory. How could the battery be discharged? But wait. Now that I thought about it, the ammeter needle had never moved at all – ever – under any circumstances. You'd think that might have told me something, but nooooo...



## QUICK AND DIRTY HEADLIGHT ALIGNMENT

### Shade Tree Mechanic Meets Ford Shop Manual

#### •Before you start:

- Check and adjust your tire pressure
- Make sure your tank is half full of gas.
- Empty the trunk of any non-everyday items.
- Bounce the car front & rear to get it to settle on its suspension.
- During the adjustment have someone sit in the driver's seat.

#### Directions:

- Best done on a flat, level surface in low light or at night.
- Pull your car as close to your garage door as you can get and still have room to squeeze yourself between it and the door.
- Turn your headlights on, high-beams.
- Use blue masking tape to mark an X on the door 2-inches below the center of each beam of light.
- Turn off your lights and move your car straight back until the front bumper is 25 feet from the door.
- Remove the body color bezel from each headlight. Notice that each bulb has a retaining ring held in place by 3 small screws. Leave those alone. Also notice 2 larger screws. The large screw on top adjusts the height of your headlight beam. The large screw on the side controls the left and right aim of your beam.
- Turn your headlights back on high. Each light beam should strike the garage door somewhere near its corresponding X.
- Use the adjusting screws to center each beam on its X.
- Turn off your lights.
- Peel the masking tape off your garage door.
- If your lights were terribly wonky when you started, you may want to go through this process again, starting at the beginning. Your X marks should be in a little more accurate position the second time around.
- Replace the headlight bezels.

#### Substitutions

- You may substitute any color tape you wish (or even chalk) to make your X's with.
- You may substitute any flat vertical surface for your garage door; any flat wall will work.



as long as the engine would start up I was blissfully ignorant of any indications that there might be trouble in paradise.

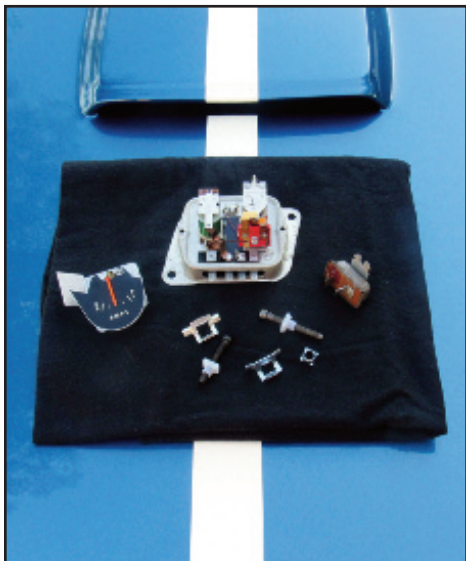
And while I was on the subject of instruments, I started wondering why the fuel, water temp and oil pressure gauges all seemed to read on the high side. Could that be a warning sign of another impending problem? I wonder.

After an hour or so of this middle of the night, front yard, mental exercise, I took off the charger, held my breath and turned the key on my downtrodden steed. The starter sprang into action and within seconds the exhaust was barking as loud as ever. What a joyous sound it was – although I'm not sure my sleeping neighbors would agree with that. I pulled the car into the garage and shut it off as quickly as I could. Then connected the charger back to the battery before closing things up for the night.

When I went inside the house I added 4 new items to my sorting-out list – low battery, non-functioning ammeter, high readings on all the other gauges, and no light in the tach. Whew! What a night.

The next morning I started on the most important item on the list – the low battery. After removing the charger I started the car and then pulled the negative battery terminal off the post. The engine died; proving that the charging system wasn't working.

Did you know that you can actu-



ally drive one of these cars with no battery? Years ago I had the battery stolen out of a 1965 Mustang with a 289 Hi-Po engine. Two sets of jumper cables connected in the usual way would not supply enough juice to start my battery-less pony car. So we pulled the other car closer until the metal bumpers touched. That would be the ground connection. Then we ran all four leads from the two jumper sets from the other car's positive battery terminal to the dangling positive cable in my car. It looked like a black spaghetti monster from hell was sprouting from under my hood and attacking the other car, but it did the trick. After getting the engine started I drove the car 10 miles home... at night... with no battery. The instruments went crazy and the lights kept going from dim to blazing bright as the engine revs decreased and increased, but I made it home all right.

Okay, back to our Shelby story. More troubleshooting led to the discovery of a defective voltage regulator. A quick call to Jim Cowles at Shelby Parts and Restoration got one headed my way, and installing it fixed the low battery problem. And guess what? Now the starter spins like crazy when I turn the key. No more slowly rolling the engine over until it finally fires up. It's amazing the difference a fully charged battery can make. Ha, Ha!

On to the next item on my list – the ammeter. "Wildman" Alan Hanna (owner of 6S126) sent me an original, loop-style ammeter, and swapping that in fixed the non-moving ammeter needle problem. Alright!

I had been giving some thought to why all the other gauges (fuel, temp and oil pressure) would be reading on the high side. Did I have three separate problems or one common problem? When looking at the electrical drawings I noticed that there was a second voltage regulator in the car whose only function appeared to be supplying a constant voltage to those three instruments. That seemed like the most logical culprit so I ordered a replacement without even performing any tests to prove my theory. And for once, I was right. Take that, Mr. Holmes! Strike another item off my



sorting-out list.

That left just one more electrical gremlin to troubleshoot – the tach face which could not be seen at night. For advice on that I called my good friend and all-around Shelby guru, Jerry Oldridge. I asked him about the easiest way to get the tach open to check out the light inside. In the course of that conversation he casually mentioned how the tachs in these cars don't light up very bright even when everything is working properly.

This prompted me to make one more test before pulling things apart. In the middle of a dark night, with the car in the garage and with all lights off and all doors closed, I turned on the Shelby headlights. Low and behold, there was a faint glow coming from the tach. The wiring and the bulb were good; it just didn't put out enough light to actually be useful. I could live with that; just another factory quirk that makes a car interesting. And I wasn't planning any drag racing with 6,000 rpm shifts at night.

Life is great when you're living with a legend... and your sorting-out list gets shorter instead of longer.



Photos by Robyn Sloan