Living with a Legend

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The First Cruise

– Steve Sloan

One of the things I've always wanted to do with my 1966 GT350 is go on a cruise with other classic cars and owners. I'm unaware of any events like that in the Houston area and a crowded, organized, highly structured affair isn't what I had in mind anyway. Just a few gear-heads out for fun is more my style. With that in mind, as soon as my car came home from restoration I started looking for other classic car owners with a similar desire.

If you read the article about my restoration back in the 2017 Winter issue, you may recall the school district police being mentioned when my car was delivered. For those who missed that article, a short recap:

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 fifth installment.

The designated drop-off spot for the transport driver delivering my freshly restored car was a local high school. When I arrived I saw a police cruiser and officer, and thought I was getting a ticket – before even starting up the engine! That wasn't the case.

The officer was from the school district police and he just wanted to look at the car. His boss was there (the school district's Chief of Police) and offered to have this officer escort me home, but I politely declined. In the process I discovered that the Chief owned a 1965 GTO. How cool! We exchanged contact information with a promise to trade rides some day. His name is Stewart Russell and he has two sons who are also auto enthusiasts.

Fast forward to a sunny Saturday morning a few months later. We finally touched base to trade rides. I drove to Chief Russell's house with a friend of mine, Al Ybarra. Al is the one who nicknamed my GT350 Casper, as in "Casper the Ghost." He says it's white and so fast that it will disappear in front of your eyes. Ha, ha! You gotta love a guy like that.

We started out with Stewart giving me and Al a ride in his amazing GTO. Now I don't want to get Stewart in trouble so I'm going to word this carefully. If you ever thought that police could take liberties with speed

that mere mortals can't, you're right. Our ride was quite "brisk" to say the least. After that I gave Shelby rides to Stewart's two sons (one at a time – no rear seat belts). By the way, if you didn't already know it, giving rides to young people is one of the most enjoyable things you can do with a Shelby. Sadly, our time ran out before Stewart got his turn in Casper, but that was okay. It just gave us an excuse to set up another ride in the future.

Around this time I also met a guy named Jeff Heep who was cruising down my street one day when I had my car out of the garage. He happened to be driving his 2014 Shelby GT500 at the time. Yee Ha! He was instantly added to my list of guys who were interested in a cruise someday.

To round out the players I added Mario Salinas, owner of a 1965 Chevy Impala SS. Yes, I know what you're thinking – another brand-X car. But I don't care. While I prefer Shelbys, I appreciate any great car. And those round red taillights emerging from the back of that white car like a jet fighter's afterburners is a beautiful sight. Like me, Mario works for "Ma Bell," and, like the other guys in this story, he expressed an interest in a classic car cruise.

So the stage was set. I had four potential cars and all I needed was a destination and good weather. All of us live in Pasadena, on the southeast side of Houston. So continuing to the southeast would take us even further from the traffic madness of that big city. But you can't go too far in that direction before you come to water – a little thing called the Gulf of Mexico. With that in mind, a coastal location sounded like fun. I knew a nice, open, low traffic route to the Seabrook/Kemah area so that became the destination.

I picked a date and started calling the guys to see who could make it. Unbelievably, they all had that morning free. So around 8a.m. on a Saturday in March, my neighbors got a wakeup call as the classic beauties started rumbling up to my house. I know many of you consider summer your driving season, but it's just the opposite down here. Prime driving time is from around October in the Fall until April in the Spring. The rest of the year is almost unbearably hot and muggy. In any case, our group had assembled – Stewart and his two boys in his '65 GTO, Mario in his '65 Impala SS, and Jeff in his 2014 GT500. Throw in my '66 GT350 (with Al riding shotgun) and we were ready to roll.

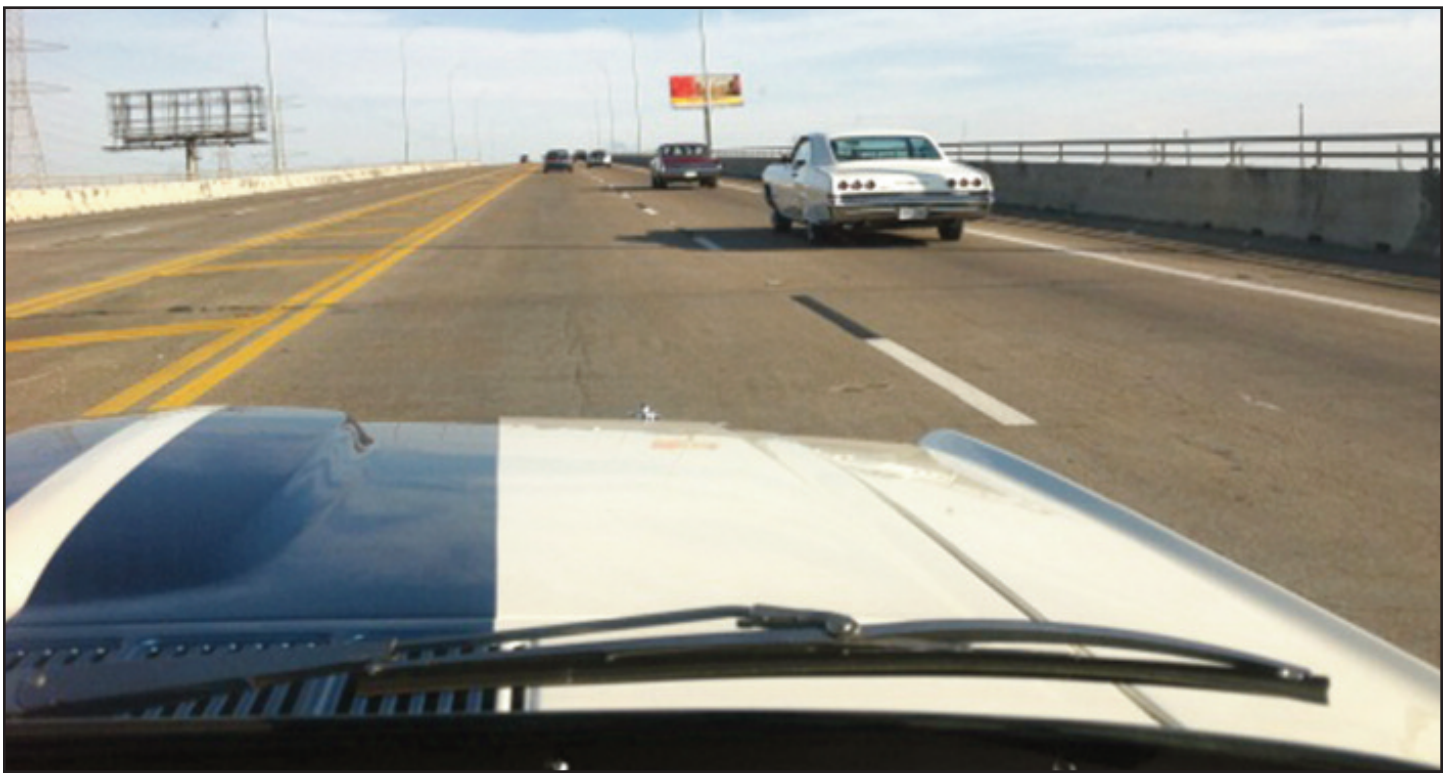
We eased out of my neighborhood about as quietly as a marching brass band. Hey, what did you expect with those kinds of cars? It was about a 30-minute drive to Seabrook; with very few red lights and some highway speeds in places. Jeff had agreed ahead of time to use his 2014 to give me a speedometer check. As he settled into the lane next to me I did my best to hold a steady 55mph. A half a minute later I got the signal. He flashed his fully open right hand twice – five-five. Perfect.

We slowed as we neared Seabrook and held the 35 mph speed limit through that little town. Rumor has it there are no taxes in Seabrook because they get all the money they need from handing out traffic tickets on that one-mile stretch of road. That may be an exaggeration, but why take a chance? Fair warning if you're passing through.

Then over the bridge into Kemah we went. That bridge was really the highlight of the trip. It rises over a channel that connects Clear Lake with Trinity Bay. We had the lake on our right, the bay on our left, and sail boats passing underneath us gleaming in the morning sun. What a sight. To be experiencing this while driving my Shelby in the company of my friends and their cars was just magical. And having waited over three decades to get there made it even sweeter.

After crossing the bridge we found a large parking lot to pull into and take some pictures. Of course we had to open all the hoods and ooooh and aaaaah over every engine. They were each impressive in their own way. After that, it was back over the bridge and onto the open road for the drive home.

For some reason it was harder to keep the ponies reined in on the trip back. Staying within the speed limit was getting more difficult by the minute. Then it dawned on me – we needed some pictures of these cars in motion. So I told Al to get out his camera and start snapping. I'd make the "sacrifice" of speeding up as needed to pass each of the other cars in order to get a good shot. Yeah, that's the ticket. I'm not speeding up because I want to; it's to get a better shot. My little ploy worked… and we even got a few good pictures. Ha, ha!

All too soon we were back at my house and saying good bye. The whole trip had only taken about an hour and a half. But for me, that was an hour and a half in car heaven; another long awaited dream fulfilled. And hopefully, just the first of many classic car cruises. Hmmm… where can we go next time? I know a little place… it's a bit farther away…

Ah, life is great when you're living with a legend, and have great friends to share the experience with.