Living with a Legend

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The First Car Show

– Steve Sloan

You've probably exhibited your car at a show at some time, but that sort of thing is new to me. While I've attended plenty of shows as a spectator, I've never had a car worthy of entering. That is, until after the restoration was completed on 6S087. And after 36 years of waiting, I have to admit that I was much more excited about driving it than showing it.

However, with some encouragement from my good friend Stewart Russell, I finally slowed down long enough for one local show. Actually, he played the guilt card on me, and that trumped my selfish desire to be out burning more rubber for just one day. Stewart is the Chief of Police for the local school district and once a year they have a car show to raise scholarship funds for graduating seniors. How could I turn down such a worthy cause? I told him I'd be there and marked that Saturday on my calendar.

When the appointed morning arrived I realized that I hadn't washed or waxed my car in several months. Oops! So I did a little cleaning on the quarter panels where water had splashed up from the tires, but the rest of the car didn't look too bad. And it's a good thing, because I really didn't have the time for a more thorough prepping.

Besides, I'd been telling myself that getting trophies is not important – driving the car is where the fun is. So, although I wanted my pride and joy to be presentable, I felt no compulsion to spend hour after hour with cloths and chemicals and Q-tips, trying to polish and clean every little nook and cranny. And, let's be honest here, I'm also a bit lazy. So with the car reasonably clean and a few folding chairs in the back, my wife and I set off for our first car show.

At check-in we received a card to put in the windshield to identify our car to the judges and spectators; also t-shirts and a ballot so we could mark our choices in the popular vote categories. Then we were guided to a parking spot which happened to be on the end of an aisle. Robyn set up her chair and stayed with the car while I took a walk around to look at the other cars in the show.

There was a wide variety of amazing autos in this show: Mustangs, Ca-

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 sixth installment.

maros, GTOs, pickups, customs, drag racers, motorcycles – you name it. It was enjoyable looking at each one and talking to the owners. I prefer Shelbys, but appreciate any great vehicle. My discussions with the other owners turned out to be the best part of this show. I found it fascinating learning about each of the other cars – its history, why the owner prefers that particular model, and so forth. My only regret is that there wasn't enough time to get really in depth with each one of them.

After seeing how sparkling clean the other vehicles were I began feeling a little embarrassed that I didn't prep mine better. And when I walked by the trophy table, a little voice inside me whispered that while winning an award might not be my primary goal, it wouldn't be an unwelcome turn of events. Oh well, too late now. Maybe I'll wash and wax the car before the next show.

I looped back by the Shelby to see how Robyn was doing, and she informed me that some official looking guy had been examining our car very closely. And he'd been back 3 times. Oh my! Maybe I did have a chance. Nah. Be realistic, Steve.

All in all, it was turning out to be a great day. Things were going just fine until I met… "that guy." And being my first time to show a car, I was completely unprepared for him. You know who I'm talking about. I'll bet you've met him too, although I hear he changes his name and appearance quite often. Sometimes he's tall and thin, sometimes short and round, but usually somewhere between those extremes. His most distinguishing characteristic is his infatuation with his own car – which he didn't bring.

He walks around the show feigning interest in other cars long enough to get the owner involved in a conversation. Then he starts shooting out facts about his car like a machine gun on steroids. He owns the most rare and desirable vehicle in the world, and it has a looooooog history that you simply must hear about. In this case, his obsession was a Buick Grand National GNX.

Being born and raised in Houston, I acquired some of that Southern hospitality that you often hear about. In most cases, that's an asset that makes my interactions with other people most enjoyable. But on some occasions I'm too polite for my own good, and this was one of those times. In retrospect, I should have told "that guy" that I'd be happy to listen to his story… next year – if he brings his car. But I didn't think of that at the time. So there I was, stuck listening to his never-ending epic about a car which I consider most notable for being a little better than the other crap-mobiles Detroit was building in the late 1980s.

Now don't get me wrong. Buick has produced some fine automobiles over the years, and the Grand National is a nice enough car. But to talk nonstop about a GNX when you're standing in the presence of an original 1966 GT350 shows a certain lack of perspective. It's like standing on the deck of a battleship and talking about your row boat back at home.

Finally, the loud speaker crackled to life and requested the show entrants gather at the podium for the awards ceremony. Even though I knew I would not be winning anything, it was the perfect excuse to bring the GNX trivia marathon to an end. So I hurried to join the crowd at the trophy table.

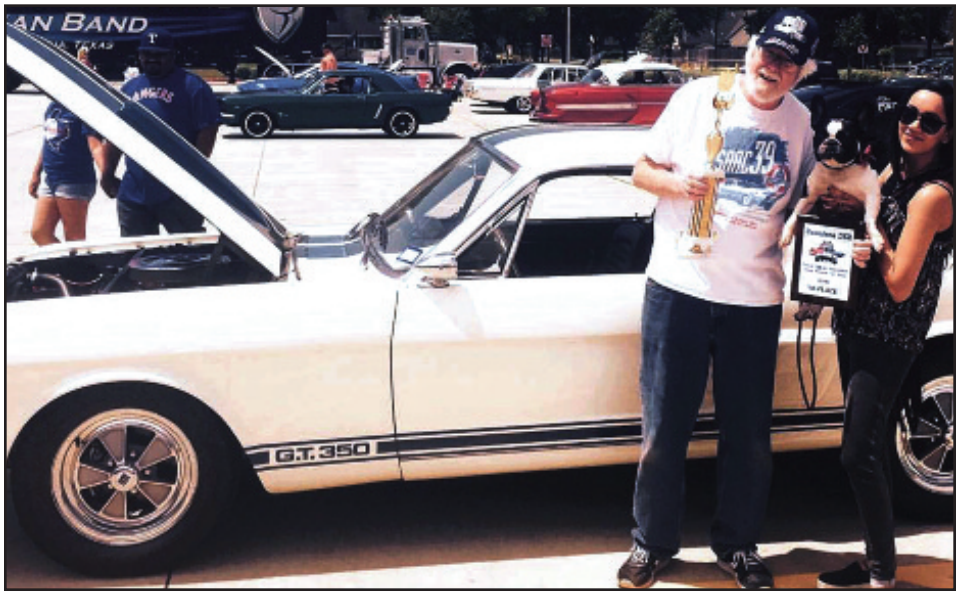
I reminded myself that winning an award was not important, but somewhere deep inside I knew that was a lie. It may have been true when I woke up that morning, but once I got to the show I'd changed my mind. Was it jealousy of those whose names were being called to the applause of the crowd? Was it my competitive nature? Was it a deep seated inferiority complex that could only be countered by the approval of others? Who knows?

Perhaps I just wanted a trophy that meant something. After all, I'm 65 years-old and the only automotive award I own is from 1972, when I managed the amazing feat of getting my 1971 Mustang to accelerate for a quarter-mile without breaking down. How fast didn't matter. All I had to do was get from the start line to the finish line. Yes, really – that's true. I had the only car in the class at the drag races that night, so there was no competition. I kept the trophy, but have never displayed it because the meager accomplishment it represents is almost embarrassing. In any case, I had suddenly decided that I really wanted one of those awards.

Imagine my surprise when my name was called for "Best in Class." Oh, my! Sometimes dreams really do come true. I accepted my plaque and waved to the adoring crowd as I walked away with my treasure.

I headed back to the car to show Robyn and she was just as pleased as I was. We paused a few seconds to enjoy the moment and then started packing up our gear for the drive back home. A quick "pit stop" to the men's room and we'd be on our way.

Then, as I was walking back to the car from "pit row," I heard my name being called on the loud speaker again. What? I raced back to the podium where they presented me with a trophy for the "Best Engine Compartment." What a hoot! Two awards in my first car show. Both totally unexpected, and very much appreciated. And both with a 427 Cobra in the middle of the graphic. How cool is that!?

After that experience, I have a newfound appreciation for car shows. But not for the reason you might think. Oh sure, I was thrilled to come home with those awards. But the best part was the opportunity to see other cars up close and talk to their owners – the human element. (Although I'll be on the lookout for "that guy" next time.)

I still prefer driving my car to showing it, but it turns out there's room for both in my life. It's all part of living with a legend.