

Living with a Legend

9

The Money Shot

– Steve Sloan

If you look up “money shot” in a dictionary you’ll find two separate definitions. Both are idioms. The one we use means “a very important, impressive, or memorable picture or scene.” We’re not sure about the other one. If you show us ten photos of a Cobra or Shelby, we can pick the one that would obviously make the best cover photo. The money shot. –Ed.

It was August 2015 when my 1966 GT350 first came home from restoration. You’ve probably seen stories of people frying eggs on sidewalks in the summer. That’s for folks with mild weather. Here in Houston it’s so hot and humid that we just set whole eggs outside in the afternoon and let them boil. As a matter of fact, this is where the word “HOT” comes from. Houston = Oven Temperature. Okay, maybe that’s an exaggeration, but you get the idea.

Most of my drives were in the early morning when it was slightly more bearable. As the seasons changed things got a little better. Mid-winter and early spring were particularly good. Sometimes the temperature would drop all the way into the 40s during the night and early morning hours.

My favorite time to be on the road is sunrise on a weekend. Nice view, light traffic, the rumble of a 289 –

what a life! So one Sunday in March (before the oppressive heat of summer kicked in again) I decided to take an early morning drive. Just before heading out the door I had an inspiration – maybe I should take my camera this trip. I guess every Shelby owner wants to get his car on the cover of *The Shelby American*, and I’m no different. And, yes, I still use an actual camera. I don’t mess with those new-fangled “smart” gadgets. Although I will admit I use a memory stick instead of film these days.

The idea that morning was to drive somewhere scenic and take a lot of photos. Then pick the best ones to send to SAAC. Not being a professional, or even a good amateur photographer, I knew I’d make plenty of mistakes. But I had to start somewhere, and I know Rick Kopec is the helpful type when it comes to submissions for the club magazine. I figured he’d reply with a few tips on how to improve my pictures so I could at least be considered for a cover shot sometime in the distant future.

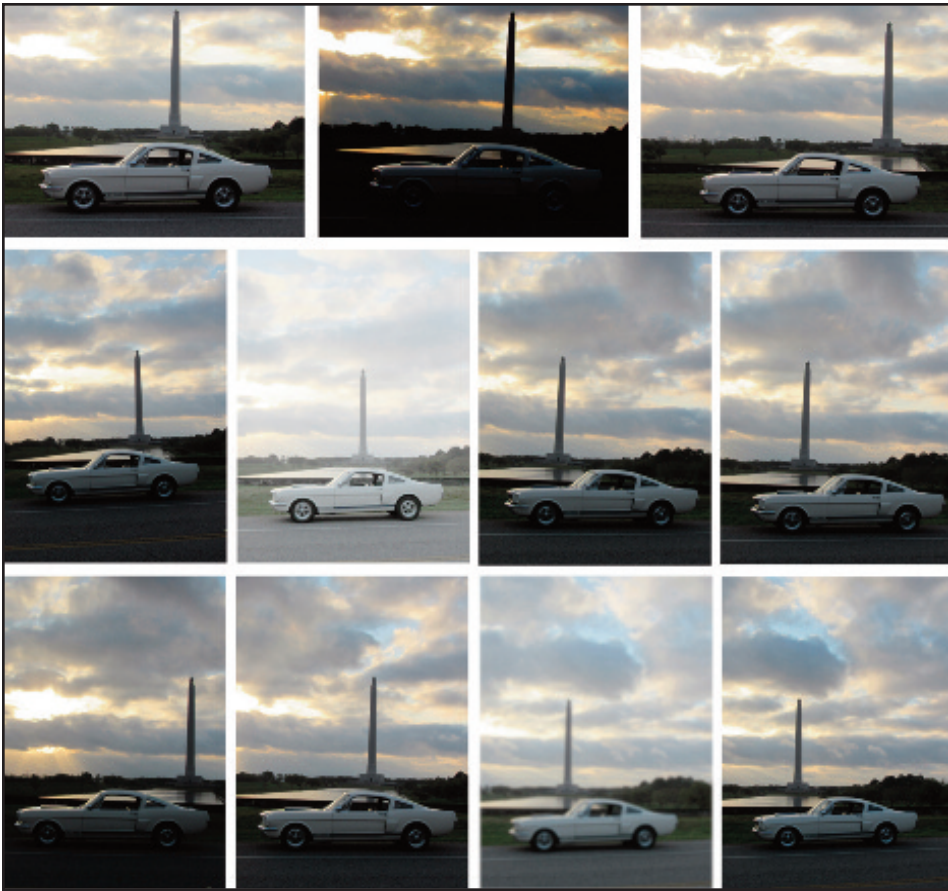
There was a small chance of rain on this particular morning, but I headed out anyway. After all, it had been almost two weeks since I’d driven Casper (my 1966 GT350), and a fellow can only wait so long for perfect weather. The San Jacinto Battle Ground sounded like a good place for some photos, so that’s where I headed... the long way. By the shortest

route, it’s only about 15 minutes from my home, but I wasn’t in a hurry. It was a relatively cool morning and the sun was just starting to come up as I left the house, so I turned right instead of left coming out of the neighborhood and parlayed that into a 25-mile sunrise drive. Invigorating.

For those not familiar with Texas history, San Jacinto was the site of the decisive battle in Texas’ war for independence from Mexico. The monument there is the tallest stone column memorial in the world. At 570-feet, it is fifteen feet taller than the Washington Monument. And the historic Battleship Texas is berthed at the edge of the grounds. The Texas was commissioned in 1914 and is the last remaining battleship to have served in both WWI and WWII.

When I arrived I had a choice of those two great backdrops for my photos. I started with the ship because the car would have to be staged in a parking lot, and it would start filling up soon. I positioned the Shelby the best





These photos were really not suitable because while the Texas-sized monument might look impressive in real life, it lacks preeminence in a picture. The various levels of brightness are not as bad as they seem with the miracle of Photoshop.

I could and started snapping shots. Then I decided that the angle wasn't quite right. So I shuffled the car around a little and started clicking away again. I had 32 pictures before deciding to move over to the monument. Hey, the more pictures I took the better chance I had that at least one of them would make the grade.

I parked the car on the side of the road with the monument in the background and took a dozen more shots. That seemed like enough and it was starting to look like that small chance of rain could start any minute.

As I was getting back into the car I glanced in the rear view mirror and noticed a vehicle moving slowly as it approached from behind. It pulled up beside me and the two guys inside asked if I needed any help. After all, I was in a very old car on the side of the road. That started a conversation that revealed them as a father and son duo cruising the country going to car shows. What a great vacation idea!

I gave them a tour of my car right

there on the side of the road. I'm always happy to show it – especially to people who know and appreciate what they're looking at. And these guys professed to be Mustang fans (although their knowledge of Shelys was a little thin). It turned out that the son owned an old MG which he claimed to be able to start up even without a carburetor. I haven't figured that one out yet and, sadly, I didn't get their contact info.

As our little chat was wrapping up I offered to give each one a ride if they wanted. The only limitation was it would be one passenger at a time: no rear seat belts (factory correct for this car). They were short on time getting somewhere, but the son accepted anyway. I guess he figured a ride in an original 1966 GT350 was worth it, and the smile on his face as he got out at the end of the ride told me he was right. As I drove home, it was looking more and more like rain, but it held off until I had my photogenic beauty all tucked away in the garage.

Then it was time to get those pic-

tures into my computer and see what I had. It amazed me how many flaws were in those shots that I didn't notice when I snapped them. Camera tilted, people walking on the deck of the battleship in the background, the monument appearing to grow out of the top of my car like a corn stalk, poor focus, too bright, too dark – you name it. I never knew there were so many ways to mess up a picture. It's a good thing I took plenty of them. Of the almost four dozen shots I had, I narrowed it down to four that looked pretty good – two in front of the battleship and two in front of the monument. So I emailed those to SAAC and prepared for the photography lesson that I expected as a reply.

Imagine my surprise when the answer started off, "Steve, you hit the bulls-eye on the first try." YEEEE HAAAA! My car was going to be on the cover of *The Shelby American*! I continued reading and learned that one of the battleship pictures had been chosen, but (uh-oh, there's that word) it wouldn't be for quite a while. Covers were already in the works for the next two issues, so I could end up waiting as much as nine months for my turn. No problem! I honestly thought it would take years for me to get a shot accepted... if ever. And I had already waited over three decades for my car to be restored. Another few months would be a cakewalk.

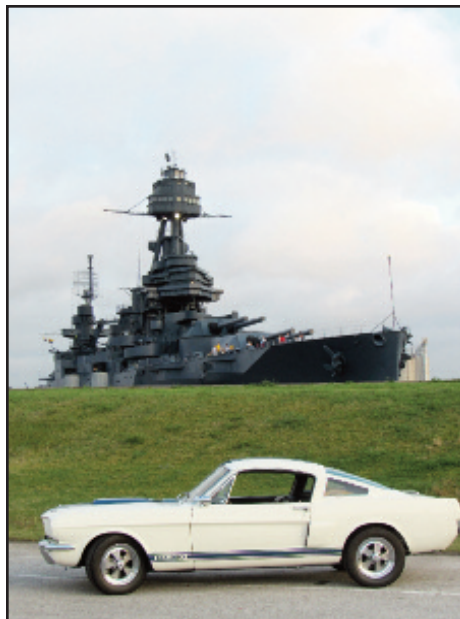
To top it all off, Rick had previously approved an article about the restoration of my car, so he timed it to

The details of 6S087's 36-year re-birth 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 ninth installment.

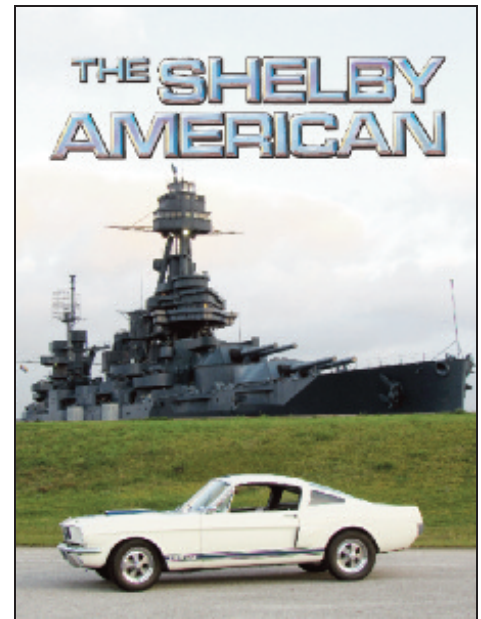
appear in the same issue. What a hoot! That's as close as I've ever been to Shelby heaven without being behind the wheel of my car.

The toughest part was keeping the news a secret until that issue of the magazine was published. After all, I couldn't expect Rick to follow thru using that picture and article if the whole world had already seen them. But I was up to the task and the wait was worth it. And it turned out that IMG_0289.jpg was the lucky cover shot. How's that for serendipity?

I'll wrap this up by stating the obvious. If you've ever thought about getting your car on the cover of the club magazine, get out there and start taking pictures. You just never know. You might get lucky like me and hit the bulls-eye on the first try. Ah, life is grand when you're living with a legend... and your car is on the cover of *The Shelby American*.



People on the deck, car not centered in the frame, the ship could be better centered in the picture. All things leading up to a "rejection."



When you look at the images side by side, the differences are obvious as to why this one was The Money Shot.

COVER CAR

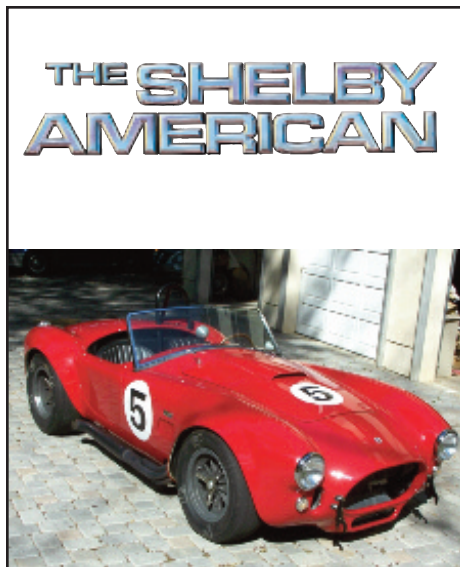
This addendum is not intended to be a how-to photography guide. If you're serious about learning about what makes good photography, we suggest checking out www.Cobra-Country.com's excellent tutorial. Go to "Cobra Photography - Expert Tips" on their home page menu.

What are the odds that your car will be selected to appear on the cover of *The Shelby American*? SAAC currently has about 3,000 members and there are four issues each year. That narrows it down, right there. Then figure in the car's year and model and color. Variety is the spice of life. You may have noticed that we try not to use the same year/model or the same color car on subsequent covers. Magazines know that red cars attract the eye and that helps make a publication jump off the newsstand. As a subscription-only magazine, we don't have that challenge. Variety is important and it's often a problem when we see too many Wimbledon White or Guardsman Blue cars. And as exciting as Cobras are, we wouldn't want to run a Cobra on several consecutive covers

So, if there has been a '66 GT350 on the cover in the past year, unless there is a compelling reason for it, you shouldn't expect to see another '66 Shelby appear soon.

If we get a really good cover image we have been known to hold it for a while, if it's not something with a short shelf life. If a historical car made a splash by being unveiled after a lengthy restoration, that's news. Holding it for a year because it's the wrong color has a tendency to lose impact.

One of the most important consid-



erations is the format. A cover photo must be vertical format. What does that mean? The picture must be taller than it is wide, and the subject – the car – has to be in the lower portion of the frame because we have to drop the magazine's title over the top. A lot of really nice photos we get are immediately rejected because they are horizontal format.

Sharp focus in a must. Moving only a tiny bit will put the photo out of focus. With an iPhone this means not moving it when you push the button to capture the image. If a photo is out of focus there's nothing we can do to make it sharper.

Not so with contrast. Before Photoshop, if a photo was too dark or too light we wouldn't use it. But today, we can alter the contrast with Photoshop to make a photo we would have rejected in the good old days useable.

Our last piece of advice is to take notice of everything in the photo other than the car. When you look at your car it's usually the only thing you see. Good shots are often ruined by garbage cans, clotheslines and trees or telephone poles growing out of the top of the car. Yuck.