PART II
FROM MUSTANG DEPRESSION TO SHELBY NIRVANA

– Ruben Bonales

In the Winter, 2018 edition of *The Shelby American* I penned a story about going from a 1965 Mustang (my first classic car) that I just couldn't get running properly to finding my Holy Grail dream car: a 1966 GT350 Carryover Shelby. The old saying can be true, "*Lighting never strikes twice.*" And, for the most part, I would agree That was until April 15, 2019 when I bought my second Carryover, 6S141. But, before I spoil the ending, let me step back and retrace my steps to "Shelby Nirvana, Part II."

I've had an evening ritual ever since I purchased my first cell phone. At night, after I crawl into bed, I turn off the lights and start perusing my favorite car-related websites with my smartphone. One of the sites I frequent is the *Hemmings* website. For those of you who are unfamiliar, *www.hemmings.com* is a website people use to list cars for sale. It has become my practice to frequent this site on any given night. Usually, I'm curious to see what's for sale (Shelby-wise, of course) and the asking price.

On April 6th, 2019, I went to bed and began my nightly ritual. Upon review I found a 1966 Shelby GT350 for sale. As I looked at the pictures and read the few sentences that were initially listed, I noticed the following statement, "*…one of the leftover cars…*" which I knew meant this was potentially another Carryover! I clicked on the link and read through the whole description; which described the car as a 1966 Shelby GT350, SFM6S141. I immediately messaged the owner and asked if we could discuss via phone. The next day I received an email from a woman named, Ruth. She said that she would be happy to connect and discuss the Shelby. I was ecstatic! I shared my phone number and asked her to call me when she had time.

Two days later I received a phone call from Ruth O'Brien. I learned that 6S141 had only been listed for a few days and she had already been fielding calls regarding the car. We subsequently talked for almost an hour about 6S141: how long she had owned the car, the condition, and the car's history. Ruth shared that she and her late husband, Tom O'Brien, had been living in Tuscola, Illinois back in the early 1970s when Tom came across a 1966 Shelby GT350 – 6S141. Tom approached the owner and tried the purchase the Shelby from him. He was car's the second owner, Bob Cutler. Bob was not open to selling 6S141.

Over the following years, Tom and Bob kept in touch, as Tom worked as a certified mechanic at University Ford in Champaign, Illinois. He eventually started his own business of fixing, towing and restoring cars. In 1984, Bob found himself in the midst of a life change and reconnected with Tom about selling the Shelby. Tom and Ruth immediately went to see the car, which had been in storage for the better part of the previous fifteen years. Upon inspecting the car, Tom found it to be incredibly original…although a bit damaged. Apparently, Bob had been run it into a ditch over a decade ago and parked the car, as it had sustained some minor damage to the dri-

ver's side front fender. Tom also noticed that 6S141 had been covered in plastic, so as to preserve the car, and it hadn't moved much (if at all) since the incident. Tom purchased the 6S141 in 1984 for $2,500.

Immediately following his purchase, Tom started a four-year restoration. Ruth shared that she, too, was a part of the restoration process (as well as the family business), and she went to various junkyards to secure parts, as well as test drive the cars that Tom had finished – often praying that the cars had functional brakes!

In 1988, Tom O'Brien finished the restoration of 6S141. Ruth snapped some pictures of Tom and the Shelby prior to and during its maiden drive. As the years passed, Tom took the 6S141 to several shows – both local and across country. One of the first shows 6S141 attended was the Tuscola, Illinois, Spring Fling Car Show in 1989. Later, Tom would take #141 to the Mid-America meet in Tulsa, Oklahoma to be judged in the concours/driven class. The car also received press coverage, as it was featured in several calendars and books through the mid-1990s. The car was everything that both Tom and Ruth wanted and them some!

In 1996, suddenly and unexpectedly, Tom passed away, leaving Ruth, two daughters and 6S141. Much to her credit, Ruth held onto the car after Tom's passing – even to the point of taking the Shelby with her when she moved from Illinois to Georgia in 2009. Ruth even purchased an enclosed trailer just to transport 6S141 on her move.

From time to time Ruth pulled 6S141 out for special occasions. One such occasion was a family photo shoot in 2012 with her two fully-grown daughters and their families in and around 6S141. Ruth enjoyed the Shelby and the memories it provided, and in 2019, with the decision to move closer to her younger daughter in Tennessee, Ruth put the car up for sale. As she put it, it was time to move 6S141 to someone else who would take care of and enjoy the car.

Fast forward to April 8, 2019. After talking with Ruth via phone, I knew that I wanted to see and have a chance to purchase 6S141. She told me that no one had put money down on the car. I then asked if she would be willing to take a non-refundable deposit in order for me to see and inspect 6S141 a week later. She agreed.

On April 15, 2019, I flew through Atlanta on my way to Chicago for work. Once I arrived in Atlanta I picked up a rental car and headed south to meet Ruth and see 6S141. Upon turning into her driveway, I could see Ruth out front cleaning off the front door to her home. I parked my car, stepped out, and introduced myself. Ruth was extremely pleasant and told me to meet her around the side of the house at the first garage door. Within minutes, the garage door began to rise and there sat 6S141 under a car cover. I offered to help her remove the car cover, to which she said, "*I've been doing this for years – I've got it.*" She certainly did!

Over the next few hours I in-

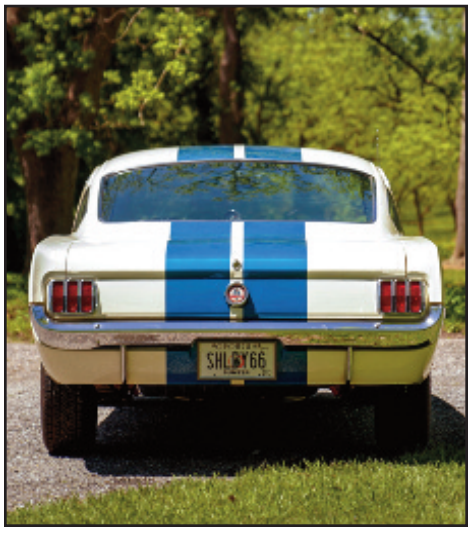
spected 6S141, all while talking with Ruth. I truly enjoyed the memories and reflections she shared about the car. And, I have to say that I was EXTREMELY impressed with her knowledge of the Shelby. It became clear to me that this car wasn't just a passion of her late husband, Tom. The car was a shared passion between Ruth and Tom. During our conversation, she pulled out some old scrap books of Tom and Ruth's adventures in automobiles. I soon learned that Tom was not only an incredible mechanic, but he was also an incredibly successful drag racer. One entire book was dedicated to the years Tom spent drag racing a 1965 Mustang in the early '70s. Ruth described how she and Tom were newlyweds going from track to track racing Tom's 1965 Mustang. In fact, Tom became a National Champion in his class just before their first daughter, Regina, was born in 1974. One of the pictures that really caught my attention was of Tom standing alongside his 1965 Mustang drag car with Ruth in front of him as she fanned out money that Tom had just won. Apparently, Tom had secured enough money that day to pay for their travel expenses, a new washer and dryer – and new carpet back home! She also shared that Tom had an amazing reaction time off the line; which led to his success. It also led to him having to tear down the engine in his 1965 Mustang to prove he wasn't cheating. Yes, Ford blue pumped vigorously through Tom's veins!

Ruth also shared that the Shelby was in running condition, and Ruth started the car for me to prove as much. The initial intent was to let me take 6S141 for a test drive. However, as Ruth started to back the Shelby down the short but steep garage entrance, I saw her eyes become as wide as saucers, and I immediately knew what was happening: the brakes were not working. No worries. Ruth let the car drift to a stop, shut it off, and allowed me to take some pictures. Afterwards, she gently drove the car back up into her garage.

I realized that this was an extremely solid and original car – one you don't find every day. I made Ruth an offer and she accepted – I was elated! I immediately arranged to have the Shelby shipped to an extremely trust worthy and show-winning restorer, Jeremy Tuner of Maple Hills Restoration in Virginia, to complete some finishing work prior to shipping the 6S141 back home.

I could easily end the article right here; however, I would be missing some additional pieces of 6S141's story. As many agree, it's the people and history that make a car, and there were still two owners prior to Ruth and Tom O'Brien. I am thankful to say that I was able to reach both of them to share some of their stories of 6S141.

The internet is an amazing tool. And, if you are willing to exert the effort…and potentially pay some



Original owners Nancy and Dave Trimby.

money…you might find the preverbal needle in a hay stack. After returning from the successful purchase of 6S141, I started to delve deeper into the car's history. I sought to contact the previous two owners: David Trimby (the first owner) and Bob Cutler (the second owner who sold the Shelby to Tom and Ruth in 1984). Within a matter of hours I had contact information for both prior owers. I called both via their listed numbers and voila! The Eagle had landed…twice!

I learned from the first owner, Dave Trimby, that he was in fact the original owner of 6S141. He purchased 6S141 in December of 1965 – just before New Year's. One of the stories that he shared happened within the first few months of ownership. Dave noticed a leak coming from the rear end. He brought the Shelby back to University Ford (where he had purchased it new) and asked about a warranty repair. Upon inspection, the dealership gave David two options: 1. Leave the car for a few weeks to have the rear end repaired, or 2. Wait a couple of hours while they swapped out the rear end on 6S141 with the rear end of a demonstrator 1965 Shelby GT350. David went with option number two. Side note – I went back and checked the registry and University Ford only received two 1965 Shelby GT350s: 5S452 and 5S512. 5S512 was sold in September of 1965; however, 5S452 was used as a demonstrator and wasn't sold until April of 1966. According to warranty paperwork, the last documented work completed on 6S141 was done in March of 1966. This supports Dave Trimby's claim, as University Ford would have had 5S452 still in stock, and could have taken the "used" rear end out of it in order to repair 6S141. The best part? Dave confirmed that 6S141 was given a Detroit Locker at this time, and all subsequent owners confirmed that they received 6S141 with a Detroit Locker installed as well. How cool is that? On June 30th, 2019, I made the drive to southern Illinois to meet Dave and his wife, Nancy, in person. All three of us sat at a McDonalds in Decatur, Illinois and talked for 3 hours! It turns out that Dave traded 6S141 in a year later for an early 1967 Shelby GT350 (#0074 – an original Bronze car); which he regretted to this day. And, Dave had owned several Shelbys including a 1965 Street car (5S456) and a 1965 R Model (5R095)…both at the same time!

I also connected with Robert (Bob) Cutler, Jr. – the second owner of 6S141. He purchased the Shelby from University Ford in December of 1966 after he returned from Vietnam. Robert said he didn't drive the car daily, and that it was mostly used for fun. Within one week of ownership, Robert received two speeding tickets. Getting two tickets may not sound like fun, but warranting them must have been! Robert owned the Shelby from 1966 to 1984, and then sold it to Tom O'Brien.

At the time of this writing, 6S141 is in Virginia and about to come home. So far, the general issues from having not been driven much over many years have all been sorted. The Shelby is about to make her way to San Antonio, Texas, and I couldn't be more excited!

A few weeks ago I was blessed to attend SAAC-44 – my second SAAC Convention. It was great to see the cars, and even better to see old and new friends; which brings me to an important point. It's not just the cars that make this hobby and passion, it's the people. Connecting and talking to all the previous owners of 6S141 is truly a gift. And, finding Shelby Nirvana for a second time is the icing on the cake…some would say it harkens to lightning striking twice, and I would have to agree.