FROM MUSTANG DEPRESSION TO SHELBY NIRVANA

It Doesn't Take As Long As You Think

– Ruben Bonales

I wish I could say that I grew up in a car family, but I didn't. In fact, none of my family were car people. One of the first family cars I remember us having was a Ford Pinto Wagon - definitely a bad omen.

However, like most young boys my age I grew up completely enamored with cars. I had Matchbox cars, remote control cars…I even built model cars. I loved pretty much anything with an engine, especially classic Muscle Cars. I remember growing up in the mid-70s on through the 80s. In my mind I had a picture of what a *REAL* car would look like: it was a 1965 Mustang. You may think that the car I pictured was a fastback, but all I had ever seen were pictures of notchbacks. No matter, I was hooked on Mustangs. Eventually I would learn about and fall in love with the fastback version of the Mustang, and in due course, the 1965 to 1970 Shelbys.

Fast forward to 2003 when I was on active duty serving at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas. After spending ten years in the military I was finally able to buy my first Mustang! It would have been great if this car was a souped-up GT but, alas, it was a mere six-banger…and I *LOVED* it! This was my entrance into the world of muscle cars, albeit more modern muscle.

In 2006 I separated honorably from the Air Force and found myself in corporate America. Over time, I was able to work my way up the corporate ladder and was able to finally purchase my first classic car: a 1965 Ford Mustang 2+2! I immediately sent the car off to restoration. Unfortunately, this particular part of the story doesn't have a happy ending. A well-known restorer in the Mustang/Shelby community took up the restoration, only to spend more than double the time and money initially quoted to "complete" the project. The finished car never ran correctly and after many roadside breakdowns, I ended up selling it within a year of completion. I can't tell you how heartbroken I was to see that car change hands for less than half the money I had spent on it, knowing I had never really had the chance to enjoy it.

At this point, I wasn't sure if the classic car world was for me. Years of waiting and thousands of dollars later I was left discouraged, disgruntled, and completely disenfranchised. But, I'm no quitter! After successfully puchasing and restoring an early 1967 Shelby GT350, #0022 (which was finished in 2017), I was inspired to go for my next car - one that drew me like no other Shelby: a 1966 Carryover Shelby GT350.

As many of you know, the term "Carryover" is used to describe the first 252 cars built by Shelby American for the 1966 production year. I won't dive into the details of what causes these cars to be called "carryovers" – there are other articles that have done much more justice than I ever could. What I want to do is share the story of how I found and recently purchased my dream car: 6S030.

In August of 2017, I was given a tip on a carryover car located in North Texas. I was told it was an early carryover and that the current owner had purchased it when he was eighteen and had owned it ever since. I remember thinking, "*Wow! An early carryover that has had the same owner since 1969! I've gotta talk to this guy.*" The car was 6S030 and the owner was Ken Chrismon. He was living in Wichita Falls and was thinking of selling his car.

At the time I received this tip I was traveling on business in Bu-

1972, before Chrismon headed off to army boot camp.

Sometime after 1978 the car was repainted white/blue.

dapest, Hungary, but I wasn't going to let a few thousand miles come between myself and this opportunity. So, I called Ken (morning his time, afternoon local time) and we talked for over an hour. It was clear that Ken was a straight-shooter with a really good sense of humor. At one point during that first conversation I said, "*Wow. Having owned that car for almost 50 years, you must have some amazing stories to share!*" Ken paused for what seemed like five minutes before he said, "*Well, I'm pretty sure my son was conceived in that car.*" I about fell out of my chair laughing. Mind you, this is an original package tray car. Yeah, I couldn't picture it at the time either. Regardless, the conversation ended with Ken suggesting that I come visit him and take some pictures of the car once I returned to the states. We agreed and Ken said that I was welcome anytime.

October, 2017, became "anytime," as I was heading north to see my daughters in Arlington, Texas and I decided to go a little further northwest to meet Ken and 6S030. I pulled up to Ken's home and he welcomed me into his garage. I was extremely impressed upon seeing 6S030 for the first time. The car wasn't perfect, but I couldn't help myself – I *LOVED* the car! It may sound odd, but I felt a certain bond to the car almost immediately. It was definitely love at first sight. Most of all, I loved hearing Ken talk about the car and describe his history with it.

Ken shared that in April of 1969, when he was 18 years old, he was driving his city dump truck home after work. He would pass a certain home along this particular route where a gentleman lived and ran a trailer park located in the rear of this property. The man was, apparently, quite the entrepreneur, as he not only ran the trailer park but typically kept one or two used cars for sale in the front yard of his house. On this night, as Ken passed this house, he spotted what looked like a Shelby GT350. As he put it, he locked up the brakes on his dump truck, swung around, parked his truck and knocked on the door of the home behind the Shelby. The seller opened the door and Ken stuffed $50 in this man's hand and said, "*Don't sell that car. I'll be back tomorrow to buy it. If not, you can keep the $50.*"

The next day, Ken and his dad came to seal the deal on the car, and Ken's dad purchased it (since Ken wasn't able to finance it by himself). The price was $1,895.00 plus $56.85 sales tax. Ken was ecstatic, however, upon his return home his Mother was less than thrilled with his recent purchase. The car was painted blue with gold stripes, it had huge reversed gold-painted wheels and oversized tires. His mother said, "*That thing looks like a race car,!*" as if to discourage Ken about his recent acquisition. Instead, Ken muttered under his breath, "*Exactly.*"

6S030 was Ken's daily driver for the next nine years, through 1978. In fact, he held onto the car even when he joined the Army National Guard and left for basic training in 1972. Before departing to serve his country, he parked the Shelby behind his parent's house, snapped a quick photo, and then covered the car to protect it from the elements.

In 1978, 6S030 was finally repainted in its correct colors of white with blue stripes. And Ken was finally able to purchase a home with a two-car garage. Happy days for sure.

Ken continued to drive 6S030 with its original engine and transmission until 1999, when he removed the engine and transmission in order to "save" them. He installed a 302 cubic-inch engine that was stroked to 347-inches, with roller rockers, a new cam and everything necessary to make them work. He also installed a T-5 transmission and he changed the rear end to 3.50 gears. This car was ready to run hard and cruise.

In 2014, a perfect storm hit Ken's life. He installed an air conditioning unit on 6S030, as well as an aluminum radiator and electric fan to help combat the North Texas heat. These changes required a higher output alternator, so Ken installed one, only to start experiencing electrical issues with the car, making it almost impossible to drive. It was at this same time that he lost one of his best friends to cancer.

Ken then made the decision to put the car back to stock, as he had kept everything original to the car that he had removed over the years. One day, as he was getting ready to remove the non-original engine, he made the decision to stop. He decided to stop working on the car and stop driving it.

Over the next couple of years he watched the car sit in his garage. He realized that it would take a lot of effort to get it running again and he began to feel that it was time to pass 6S030 onto a new caretaker. It would take another year or so before Ken could bring himself to actually sell the car. It was not long after that realization that I received Ken's contact information.

Fast forward to October, 2017. I'm standing in Ken's garage looking at 6S030. I took a bunch of pictures (quite the understatement) and told him I was interested in the car and would call him to talk money in the coming week.

A few days later I reconnected with Ken and he gave me his price. Unfortunately, it was well beyond what I could afford at the time. I told him that I appreciated his offer, but that I just couldn't provide the means to secure the car. I also told him to call me if he ever decided to change his selling price.

Over the next ten months I continued to reach out to Ken – not to try and talk him down on price, but to spend time with him. I loved hearing stories about 6S030 and boy were there some good ones! He told me about the time he was living in Arlington, Texas and was making a left hand turn when a jogger ran out in front of him. He hit the brakes so hard that the driver's seat frame broke, causing him to fly forward towards the steering wheel as the car came to a complete stop. The next thing he knew, the car was stopped and he and his seat were back up against the package tray, leaving him staring at the headliner.

Another story Ken shared was about a time he was heading home from work around 6 a.m. He was on a

October 2017, the first time Bonales saw 6S030. When a car is stored like this, you pretty much know that the owner had lost interest in it and decided that it was time for it to move down the road. Note original Borg-Warner T-10 behind the rear wheel.

deserted highway when he noticed about twenty or thirty bags of something littering the road. From the looks of it, these bags seemed to have fallen off a semi-trailer. As Ken slowed down to take a closer look, he realized they were bags of garden composted manure. Feeling like he had hit a small jackpot, he drove up to a bag that was still intact, opened the driver's side door, and lifted the bag with both hands to put in the passenger seat. But, as soon as the bag came across his lap, the bottom gave way and completely covered both he and the interior of the car with manure. What followed was, as he described it, the longest and most disgusting two-mile drive of his life. How's that for a crappy ending?

One of my favorite stories about 6S030 is probably the least favorite for Ken. One day he was out for a drive, doing about 55 mph, when he heard a obnoxiously load-crashing noise come from under the hood, followed by a steady stream of steam and mist coming from the front end of the car. Ken immediately pulled over thinking that he'd blown the engine. Upon inspection, he was able to see that the engine was still intact; however, the radiator was not. He had recently changed the water pump but the piece that the fan

blades bolt to let loose during his trip home, and the fan went right into the radiator and chewed almost clean through it. [Side note: one promise that Ken had made to himself was that he would NEVER leave his car alone alongside the road. In fact, he had told his family and friends, "*If I ever don't come home, just retrace my steps, and I guarantee you'll find me sitting in my Shelby waiting for you!*" Keep in mind this was in the days of wall mounted phones with rotary dials – cell phones had not yet been invented.] Given Ken's commitment to the car, he decided not to leave it stranded in the middle of nowhere. Instead, realizing that no one knew where he was and no one was coming to get him, he sat there for what seemed like an eternity while the car cooled off. Determined to make it home, he started the car and drove it until it started getting hot, and then pulled over and let it cool down. Once the engine was cool again, he would start the car up and drive it until it got hot.He did this for eight miles. *8 MILES!* He finally made it home much, much later than expected, probably a quarter mile at a time and not very much fun.

On August 4, 2018 I received an unsolicited text from Ken stating, "*Hi. Let's talk. Call me when you get time.*" I grabbed my phone and headed to the nearest empty room I could find (sometimes, it's best to decide how you want to share something with your wife versus her overhearing it, if you know what I mean). I called Ken and we talked about the car. He threw out a new number; which was now in my wheel house and was extremely fair. I asked for a week to get the money secured and to confirm with my wife and he agreed.

August 12, 2018. Ken and I secured the deal over the phone and I told him I would pick up the car on August 25th. On August 24th, I drove up and spent the night at a hotel (well, at least I tried to sleep). The next morning, at 8 a.m. I picked up Ken for breakfast. We talked and laughed as he shared more stories with me. I, too, was able to share some stories, as I

The torch is passed. Ken Chrismon poses with 6S030 before it goes down the road with its new owner. Sometimes an owner will get emotional and a little teary at this point, but not so, Chrismon. The page was turned with very little emotion.

The original aluminum-case T-10 came with the car. That was a real bonus, as was getting the original engine.

had spent a lot of time in Wichita Falls previously without ever knowing about Ken's car. In fact, I was in Wichita Falls during the summer of 1993 while attending Tech School at Sheppard Air Force Base, in 2000 when I went back for an advanced leadership/technical course, and I even lived in Wichita Falls from 2002 to 2006 – just miles away from a car that I never knew existed.

To add even more oddity to the story, Ken worked with my previous father-in-law for decades! How's that for a small world?

After breakfast we went and completed the bank transaction, I picked up the trailer, and we went back to his place to load the car along with all its parts. Mind you, this is August in North Texas and it was, literally over 100 degrees out. It took us about four hours to load everything, but we did it. It's amazing that we were able to stand upright, let alone move once the work was finished.

Before I drove off I asked Ken to stand by the car for one last picture. In typical Ken fashion, he threw his hands up in the air and said, "*What do you want me to do – pose?*" His nostalgia for the car had obviously passed.

It took me over five and half hours to drive home to San Antonio that afternoon with 6S030 in tow with so many thoughts running through my mind. I thought about Ken and the stories he had shared. I thought about how exciting it was to be getting my "Holy Grail" car. And, I thought a lot about what it must be like to own a car for so long and then one day see it leave on a trailer, never to return.

I cannot tell you how many times I looked at 6S030 in my mirrors as I drove home that day. The truth is that I probably spent more time looking back than I did looking forward. But, that's the beauty of this hobby (if you can call it a hobby. I prefer the term

"passion"). As the new caretaker for 6S030, I'm just as excited about the car's past as I am about the future.

The car, as it sits today, has Ken's fingerprints all over it. There is literally nothing on the car that wasn't placed by Ken, and I love it. At the same time, I know that I'll get a chance to leave my fingerprints on 6S030, which is both exciting and humbling. I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity to own and care for such a special car. I don't know what the future holds, but if the history of 6S030 is any indication of the future, I'm about to have one hell of a ride!… pun intended.