It's All In The Details

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An interesting photo (a digital JPG file) was shared with me several years ago that lit my fire. Brant Halterman sent me the scan of a picture showing rows of white Mustangs parked behind the hanger at the Shelby American LAX facility. They were obviously in the process of being converted into 1966 GT350s. My curiosity was piqued and further investigation was clearly in order. After all, I own a white 1966 GT350 (6S087). Maybe one of the cars in this picture was mine. Okay, it's a long shot but I can dream can't I?

Here are the results of my observations and research into that photo.

• Some of those cars have their rear seat on top of the car. Since '65 GT350s were built without rear seats, it's obvious these are 1966 models.

• The rear vent louvers are missing on the front car, and some of the other cars are missing their interior quarter trim panels, all in preparation for receiving '66 GT350 quarter windows.

• There are no front grilles in these cars. That's the way carryovers* shipped to SA because the 1966 horizontal bar grilles weren't available for installation at San Jose at that time. No other 1965 or 1966 GT350s were delivered to SA without grilles, so these cars are obviously 1966 GT350 carryovers.

• Note that the cars in that photo have a paper taped in their windshields. Let's examine that piece of paper by focusing on the car closest to the camera:

•• The left and right sides of the paper in the windshield are curled back so you can't see all the characters written on it. In the upper part of that paper you can see "…4232…" (the beginning or end of the sequence is not visible). In the lower part of that paper you can see "…6S10…" (the last digit – or digits and any possible prefix digits are not visible.) This is part of the Shelby VIN.

•• This can't be 6S10xx because this car is a carryover and there were only 252 carryovers. And it can't be 6S10 because there is no such car. So if "6S10" is part of the Shelby VIN, then this car has to be 6S10x.

•• Howard Pardee says that of the cars in the 6S100 – 6S109 range, he shows six cars that have "4232" somewhere in their Ford VINs. That can't be a coincidence. So that car closest to the camera has to be one of these six – 6S100, 6S102, 6S106, 6S107, 6S108 or 6S109.

•• More important, we have now established that the digits on top of the paper are the Ford VIN, and the digits on the bottom are the Shelby VIN. All of that was revealed by studying the digital JPG version of that picture.

A close examination of the original photographic print reveals:

•• In the cars closest to the camera you can tell there's no trim piece (grille joint cover) in the lower-center of the grille. Again, that's the way carryovers were delivered because the new-for-1966 part was not available for installation at San Jose when the carryovers were produced. (Of course, that's also the way 1965 GT350s were delivered, but 1965s wouldn't have rear seats.) More proof that those cars are 1966 GT350 carryovers:

••• The car behind the front car shows "…S09..." on the lower part of the paper in its windshield. And has "…94…" visible on the top of the paper.

••• Howard Pardee says that all of the cars in the 6S090 – 6S099 range have "94" in their Ford VINs. So the second car in that row must be 6S09x.

••• The car behind that one shows "…S08..." in the lower portion of its windshield paper. The partial Ford VIN on top of the paper is unreadable, but that car still has to be 6S08x.

From all this we learn that:

•••• The cars in the photo are 1966 GT350 carryovers.

•••• The car closest to the camera is one of these six – 6S100, 6S102, 6S106, 6S107, 6S108 or 6S109.

•••• The two cars behind it are 6S09x and 6S08x.

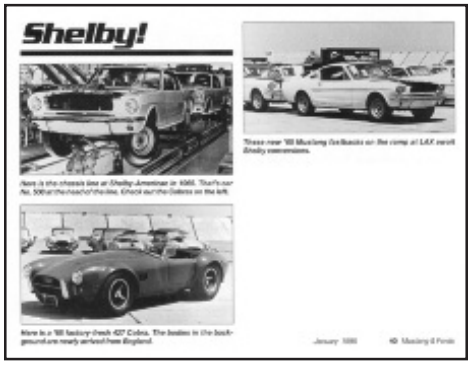
•••• At least for a while during carryover production, SA taped a paper in the windshield that had the last 6 digits of the Ford VIN on top and the Shelby VIN on bottom. The left and right edges of that paper tended to curl back from the windshield making reading the full numbers difficult. That could be critical knowledge if any similar pictures are ever found.

So… I didn't prove that one of those cars is 6S087, but I came pretty close. I have a one-in-ten chance that the car on the far left is mine. Yee Ha!

**Carryover = One of the first 252 1966 GT350s. They were built from 1965 Mustang chassis, to fill the production gap between building 1965 and 1966 models. They have a combination of '65 and '66 features, with some features unique to those 252 cars.*

Part 2

As a recent retiree, I was enjoying all my new found spare time when a photo showed up in my email that caught my eye. My friend Kieth Champine (aka KOP – King Of Pictures) had been perusing some old auto magazines and scanning to digital files some of the articles and pictures of interest. On this particular day he sent me a copy of page 40 from the January 1995 issue of *Mustang & Fords*. The picture on the top-left of that magazine page was an assembly line photo at Shelby American that he'd seen several times before. On the top-right was a cropped version of the LAX Back Lot photo that was examined earlier. On the bottom was a beautiful 427 Cobra.



January 1995 *Mustangs and Fords*

A larger version of that assembly line picture shows up on page 16 of *The Shelby American* #58 without any caption or identification. And another uncaptioned version shows up on page 263 of the 2011 edition of the *SAAC Shelby Registry 1965-1966-1967*. But in Kieth's scan of that magazine page there was a caption indicating that the front car is 1965 "car No. 508." What a hoot! After all these years we finally know exactly which car that is. Or do we? When I looked at that picture closer, I noticed a few things that didn't seem right. Uh, oh! Goodbye, retirement spare time.

The first thing that jumped out was the rear seats on top of the cars in that line. The front car doesn't have them, but all the rest of the cars do. Hey, 1965 GT350's never had rear seats – not even fresh from San Jose. Those cars must be 1966 GT350s. That photo caption has to be wrong! Why did someone think that front car was 5S508? And what other clues are there that might help determine the real identity of that front car?

Well, not much more could be ascertained from that magazine photo. It looked to me like that front car might be missing its grille. And the passenger side rear vent louver assembly appears to have been removed. But that version of the photo lacked the detail to really make those conclusions. Ugh! Looked like a dead end.

Then another friend, Rich Plescia, came to the rescue with a much sharper version of that picture which he found on the Internet. Yee Ha! In that better photo more and more interesting details were discovered. Here are the highlights:

• As previously noted, the cars behind the front car have their rear seats removed and placed on top of each car. Since no car destined to be a 1965 GT350 was delivered with rear seats, we can conclude that the cars in that lineup are 1966 GT350s.

• If you look through the windshield on the front car, you can see that the rear vent louvers on the passenger side of the vehicle have been removed – indicating preparation for quarter window installation.

• Looking inside the front car, in the area just in front of the standard Mustang rear vent louvers, you can see a small bracket exposed on each side of the car. Those brackets are there to allow the attachment of the screws that hold the upper interior quarter trim panels over the louvers. Seeing those brackets exposed means the upper interior quarter trim panels on both sides of this car have been removed. More evidence that this car is receiving quarter windows.

• There's no front grille in that front car. That's the way carryovers came from San Jose because the 1966 horizontal bar grille was not available for installation yet. Those were shipped separately to Shelby American at a later date. All other cars destined to become 1965 or 1966 GT350s were delivered to SA with their grilles in

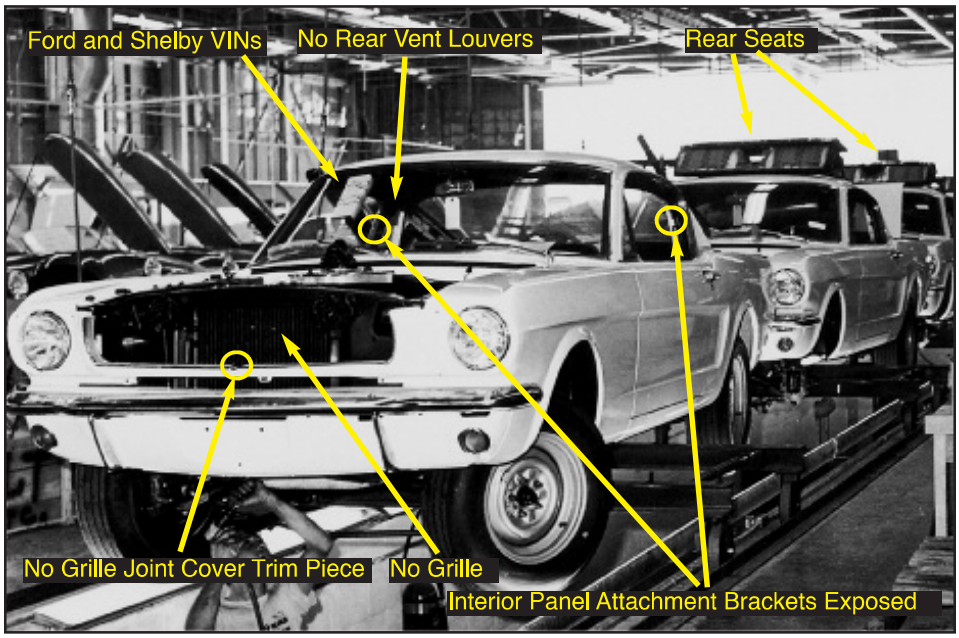
place. There's no reason for any '65 GT350 or regular production '66 GT350 to have its grille missing at this stage of production at SA.

• There's no trim piece (grille joint cover) in the lower-center of the grille on that front car. That's the way 1965 GT350s were delivered to SA. And that's the way carryovers were delivered because that new-for-1966 part was not available for installation at San Jose when the carryovers were assembled. This is further proof that front car has to be a 1966 carryover – not a regular production 1966 GT350.

Now zoom in on the paper taped inside the windshield of that front car:

•• The left and right edges are curled back making the full numbers impossible to decipher.

•• On the upper part it appears to be "…x42…" (a short series of numbers whose beginning and end are not visible; the x could be a 9, but it's not clear enough to determine with any certainty, so this research will treat that as simply another unknown digit.)



•• On the lower part of that paper, is that "…S08…" or could it be "...508..."?

Well, examining that photo certainly yielded a lot of great information. We now know that the cars in that lineup are 1966 GT350s, and at least the one in front is a carryover. So it's one of 252 cars – somewhere between 6S001 and 6S252. Now let's see if we can pin it down any closer.

Let's start by solving that riddle – Is that "…508…" or "…S08…" on the bottom of that paper taped in the windshield?

We know from the LAX Back Lot photo discussed earlier that the upper digits on that paper are the last 6 digits of the Ford VIN, and the lower digits on that paper are the Shelby VIN – with some of the digits not visible because the paper is curled back from the windshield on the left and right.

If that's "…508…" on the lower part of that paper then that car has to be one of these:

• 5S508 – it can't be 5S508 because we've proven it's a 1966 GT350.

• 6S508 – it can't be 6S508 because we've proven it's a 1966 GT350 carryover and there were only 252 of those.

• 6S1508 – again, it's a carryover, so it can't be 6S1508

• 6S508x – it can't be 6S508x because there weren't that many 1966 GT350s produced.

So it can NOT be "…508…" on the lower part of that paper. [*Note: The misinterpretation of those digits is probably why* Mustang & Fords *magazine mislabeled that photo. Remember how this all got started?*]

If it's not "…508…", then it must be "…S08…". Let's see if "…S08…" will match with the other evidence in that photo.

• 6S08 (with no more digits) – that cannot be correct because all 1965-66 Shelby VINs had either three or four numeric digits following the "S."

• 6S08xx – that can't be correct because of the Shelby VIN designation scheme. Any time the "S" is followed by a zero, that indicates a 3-digit number. And 08xx is a 4-digit number.

• 6S08x – this is it. This is the only interpretation of the digits on the lower part of that paper that is actually possible. And cars in that range would be carryovers – matching all the other evidence in that photo.

We've come a long way. First we proved that front car can't be a 1965 GT350 as captioned in that magazine article. Then we proved it's one of 252 carryovers. Now we know that first car is one of ten cars between 6S080 and 6S089.

Is there any way to double-check that conclusion, and maybe narrow that down even further? Yes, there is. We know from the LAX Back Lot photo that the numbers on the top of that paper represent some part of the Ford VIN of this car. So this car must have 42 somewhere in its Ford VIN. I checked with Howard Pardee about that, and without revealing the exact Ford VINs (which he will not do) there are four cars in the 6S080 - 6S089 range that have "42" in their Ford serial numbers – 081, 085, 087 and 089.

Conclusions: when you combine all those observations, the logical conclusions are that:

• The cars in the Assembly Line photo are all 1966 GT350s. Probably all carryovers.

• The front car in that photo can NOT be 5S508 as the magazine photo caption indicates.

• That front car is one of these four – 6S081, 6S085, 6S087 or 6S089.

Howard Pardee checked the Ford number of 5S508 and it does not have "42" anywhere in its Ford VIN. Which quadruple confirms that the car in the front of the Assembly Line photo can NOT be 5S508.

Pardee also checked the R-Models because one of them might be found on the assembly line without any rear vent louvers or in some other odd state of disassembly. There are no R-Models with 42 in their serial numbers. So the car in the front of the Assembly Line photo can NOT be an R-Model (if anyone was wondering about that.)

It was previously observed that one more digit on the top of that windshield paper might be recognizable. There might be a 9 in front of that 42 – making the partial Ford VIN of this car 942. So I went back to Howard and asked about that. He replied that all the results noted above are same whether he uses "42" or "942" in his Ford VIN search. So those conclusions hold up either way.

Enlargement of the serial numbers taped to the windshield of the lead car in the assembly line photo.

Full Disclosure: I own carryover car 6S087. When I first realized that my research lead to a one-in-four chance that the car in that picture is mine, I started to doubt my own work. Could it be a self-fulfilling prophesy? So I sent this to several brutally honest friends to be double- and triple-checked. They assure me that these observations and conclusions are all accurate, and no owner bias has slipped into this explanation. Submitted for your consideration.

6S087