Putting the First Two 1966 GT350 Prototypes

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

– Steve Sloan
sloanx@swbell.net

Part 1: The "Two Mocked-up Mustangs" Story

For several years now a story has been showing up in print about two white Mustang fastbacks that were "mocked-up" to look like 1966 GT350s and used as prototypes and for publicity photo purposes. These cars are noted to have been used in the "Bib Overalls" photo shoot, the 1966 "press kit" photos, and more.

In one version of this narrative these two Mustangs are speculated to have been sold off through Hi-Performance Motors; possibly becoming the first Shelby GT350 replicas. In other versions their eventual disposition is not accounted for. But the common theme is that these two cars were NOT actual Shelbys – they started and ended their association with Shelby American as simple Mustang fastbacks.

If some of that sounds familiar, it should. The first half of that story has been a well documented part of Shelby history for decades. But the part about those two cars not being actual Shelbys or their being sold off through Hi-Performance Motors is incorrect. Those two cars were in fact the 1966 GT350 prototypes 6S001 and 6S023, and they each exited S.A. through the standard Shelby dealer network.

How do I know that? First, I did my own research – which consisted primarily of digging through many of the older books written about these cars. Books published prior to 2010 when this false narrative seems to have surfaced. Then I consulted with two individuals who probably know more about the 1965-66 GT350s than anyone else in the world – Howard Pardee (SAAC 1965-66 GT350 Registrar) and Greg Kolasa (SAAC 1966 Hertz Registrar). Both confirmed my account of those two cars. They were 6S001 and 6S023 – not just two standard Mustang fastbacks that served their purpose and then quietly disappeared from Shelby American history.

PART 2: The "Two Mustang GTs" Story

The 1966 prototypes 6S001 (a 4-speed car) and 6S023 (with an automatic transmission) did not start life like the rest of the GT350s being produced at that time. By the middle of 1965 Shelby American had a smooth and orderly process for acquiring Mustang chassis to build into GT350s. Those cars would arrive at Shelby American as "knock downs," ready for transformation into Shelbys. The things Shelby American didn't want were deleted at San Jose – like the hood and the pony-and-corral grille assembly. And unique parts they did want had been added – like the export brace and larger Fairlane rear brakes.

A pair of fastbacks with slightly different features were needed immediately to be made into 1966 prototypes. So Shelby American acquired two full production-line, white, fastback Mustangs for that duty. Those cars eventually became 6S001 and 6S023.

Publications that discuss the history of those two cars typically mention them starting life as white Mustang GTs. They get that from period factory documents – meeting notes, memos, etc. – where these two cars are usually described as, well… white Mustang GTs. But it turns out that back in 1965 the people at Shelby American used the term "GT" interchangeably with the term "fastback" when describing Mustangs. When they said (or wrote) "Mustang GT," they really meant "Mustang fastback." So, to be technically correct, 6S001 and 6S023 started life as white Mustang fastbacks – not white Mustang GTs. What proof do I have of this? Keep reading.

In all but one of the factory documents where these two prototypes are discussed, they are referred to as "white Mustang GTs." With no mention of the word fastback or the term 2+2. If everyone at Shelby American didn't know that GT meant fastback, they could have ended up with two

hardtop Mustangs for their 1966 prototype cars. Ouch!

The only time the word fastback shows up in the documents is the minutes of a 1966 Product Management Meeting dated May 17, 1965 where we see this:

"*It was stated that the two cars were to be white fastbacks with black interiors, GT Kit (5-dial dash, disc brakes, heavy-duty suspension), one having 225 HP automatic and the other a 4-speed High Performance power train.*"

It's clear from that text that Shelby American did not want two white Mustang GTs. They wanted two white Mustang fastbacks with what they called a "GT Kit" – i.e. 5-dial dash, disc brakes and heavy-duty suspension. That makes even more sense when you realize that, for Mustangs, the GT was an option package. And that package contained things that would create extra work for Shelby American. The 289 fender badges and Mustang 2+2 script would mean extra holes in the fenders that Shelby American would have to fill and paint when those badges were removed. The fog lights would have to be pulled and discarded. The chrome exhaust trumpets would have to be removed and replaced with standard, turn-down exhaust. The rear valance (with its holes for the exhaust trumpets) would also have to be removed and replaced. And more. Yes, there were a few things in the GT package that Shelby American wanted (the 5-dial instrument cluster, front disc brakes and heavy-duty suspension), but those could be installed at San Jose during assembly without the full GT package and its many unwanted features.

Not convinced yet? I've been saving the best proof for last. After all, seeing is believing, right? There is one picture, taken by Dave Friedman's replacement, William Eccles of Airport Photography, that has seen wide use in several publications. Among those is the 2011 SAAC Registry (page 726), and Colin Comer's book, "SHELBY - The Complete Book of Shelby Automobiles - Cobras, Mustangs, and Super Snakes" (page 195). It's a photo of Ken Miles and comedian Mort Sahl sitting in a GT40 Spyder at Shelby American on July 1, 1965. In the immediate background is a production line white Mustang fastback undergoing work. A study of that Mustang reveals that it has to be either 6S001 or 6S023 in progress. And a closer examination shows that this car does NOT have the Mustang GT option (no trumpet exhausts exiting through the rear valence, among other things).

In all of the factory pictures that SAAC has, this is the only one that shows this particular Mustang. As used in other publications, it has a tendency to be cropped because the focus is on the GT40. But this shows a little detail behind the Mustang up on jackstands. You can barely see the tail of another Mustang which appears to be a notchback, due to the larger trink lid. It also appears to lack a rear bumper, leading us to guess it is a Group II Mustang.

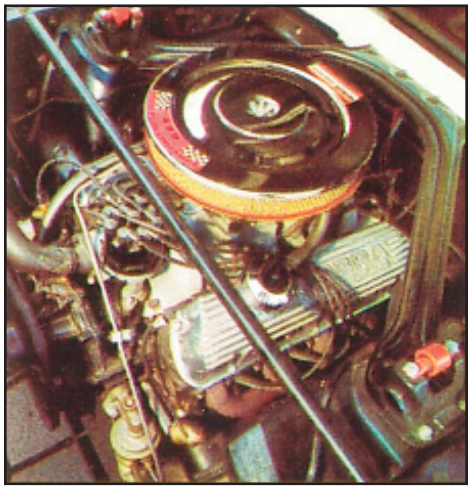
This photo proves that at least one of those two prototype cars did not start off as a Mustang GT. Combined with all the other evidence available, it's a pretty sure bet that the other car didn't either.

So when you read that "two white Mustang GTs" were used to build 6S001 and 6S023, think about what that really means. Yes, Shelby American called them Mustang GTs; however, we now know what they really meant were Mustang fastbacks with some GT equipment – not Mustang 2+2s with the full GT option package. A minor distinction perhaps, but one that matters.

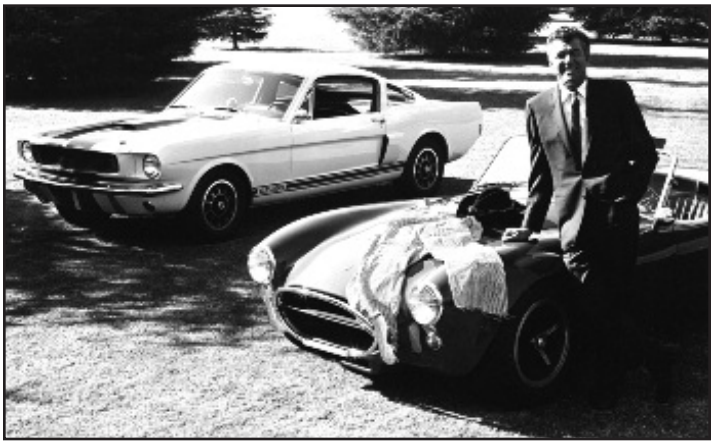
Here is additional distinction not available to Sloan's sleuthing. An examination of these cars' Ford VINs (confidential even to an enthusiast as serious as Sloan) reveals that they are out of sequence with the 252 "carry-over cars" which, as we know, were built near the end of 1965 production at San Jose and carried 1965 Ford VINs. 6S001 and 6S023 were 1965 cars, to be sure. However their Ford VINs show that the two cars were completed ahead of the Shelby build (6S023 preceeded the carry-over build by 8,785 cars and 6S001 was 296 cars ahead of the lowest numbered 1966 GT350). The two prototypes were obviously pulled off the 1965 assembly line at random and shipped to Shelby American well ahead of the 252 carry-over cars. - Ed.

Prototypes were used for brochure photography because of the lead time necessary to get the brochures printed. They had to be in dealers' hands before the new cars arrived in the showroom so using production cars for photography was not possible. This car, using 14˝ cast aluminum 10-spoke wheels which would be optional on '66s (instead of the 15˝ Shelby/Cragar wheels used on the carry-overs) is likely 6S001.

1966 GT350 color brochure interior photo is 6S001 because it's a four-speed.



Transmission cooling lines [*lower left of photo*] indicates this is 6S023.



A dozen different shots were taken for the "Bib Overalls" ad and one was chosen for use. The GT350 is thought to be 6S001 or 6S023 but no paperwork offers conclusive evidence. Cars were often chosen at random for photo shoots, depending on what was available.