The 36-YEAR Restoration

– Steve Sloan

Yes, that title is correct. It really did take me thirty-six years to restore SFM6S087. Actually thirty-six years, five months and twenty-five days from start to finish. But, hey – who's counting?

In The Beginning

My car ownership started with a well-used 1960 Ford pickup purchased in 1969, and progressed to a 1966 Plymouth Belvedere-II. Then on to my first new vehicle – a 1971 Mustang sportsroof. Marriage followed and the Mustang gave way to a 1974 Volvo 144. Ouch! But owning that first Mustang had marked me for life. I might need the practical Volvo, but I wanted an exciting Mustang. The solution was to find a cheap, used Mustang to park beside the Volvo and have as my toy. I found a beat-up 1965 Mustang hardtop with a strong-running V-8 and used that for my Mustang "fix."

At that time, I didn't know much about Mustangs except that I liked them, but over the next few years I started to learn. The more I learned, the more appealing my little '65 hardtop got. Turns out it was a GT with a factory 289 Hi-Po, 4-speed, Pony interior and Rally-Pac. How cool! I had just stumbled into that. Driving that car was fun, but eventually I wanted it to look nice, too. The body and paint were pretty rough and would need a lot of work (spelled m-o-n-e-y) to restore the car to the way I wanted it. It was clear that would leave me under water; it would have taken more to restore it than it would have been worth when completed. And so, the genesis of an idea.

When researching Mustangs in general I had learned about Shelbys. Oh wow! If you like Mustangs you've got to love Shelbys. And that's what happened to me – I fell in love with them – their looks, their performance and their amazing history.

Now it was time to put two and two together and see if it didn't add up to a Shelby in my garage. The Mustang I had would be a money loser if I restored it, but a Shelby? Well, that would be different. Shelbys had a higher current value and it was continually increasing. Restoring a Shelby that needed a little work would be a financial winner as well as more fun. At least that's the argument I presented to my wife, Robyn.

Now, I'm not one of those guys who has to get spousal permission for everything he does, but I do believe that a little consultation on major decisions helps grease the skids of marital bliss. And it turns out that my high school graduate wife has more common sense than most college professors I've met, so her input is something I value greatly.

You'll find out later just how good she really is, but here's your first sample. She agreed about buying a Shelby, saying, "*If that's what you want then do it.*" YES! I was going to buy a Shelby. But which one? Hmmm…

I had already joined SAAC and read everything they printed. I even ordered back issues of *The Marque* so I didn't miss anything. I was drawn to the 1965 and 1966 GT350s. But which of those did I want? The '65's raw and rugged performance appealed to me, but I really liked the quarter windows

Back in the early days (note 8-tracks and vinyl records in the bookcase) there wasn't much in terms of research material for Shelbys. Information was printed in SAAC publications in drips and drabs, "Shelby's Wildlife" was the first hardcover book written but it quickly became notorious for its inaccuracies, and Ray Miller's "Mustang Does It!" [*lower right*] was about as close as it got at that time to a textbook of unique Shelby features. All these sources were pondered the night before the purchase.

and side scoops on the '66 cars. How to decide?

Then *IT* happened. I learned there were a handful of cars that had both the performance features of the '65s and the appearance features of the '66s – in my mind, the best of both worlds. These cars are now commonly called "carryovers," but back then they didn't have a nickname. Some people referred to them as "early" 1966 GT350s, and they were sometimes mistakenly called "1965 leftovers." I didn't care what they were called. I wanted one.

With only 252 of those cars made, and some of them probably gone to the crusher, I figured the odds of finding one for sale close to me was pretty slim. And I didn't have the time or money to travel very far in this search. So while that was my top choice, I knew I'd probably end up with either a 1965 or a "regular" 1966 GT350. Not a problem. They are all great cars and I would be thrilled to own any one of them.

I looked at a 1965 that turned out not to be for sale, and a 1966 that I concluded was probably a fake. I drove a '67, but that didn't suit me. Then a friend at work mentioned that he knew of a 1966 GT350 for sale. It was supposed to be in poor condition, but he assured me that $1,000 could fix practically anything that might be wrong. I was young and inexperienced and he had bought, sold and restored numerous cars over the years, so I took his word for that. (I'll bet you can guess how that worked out.)

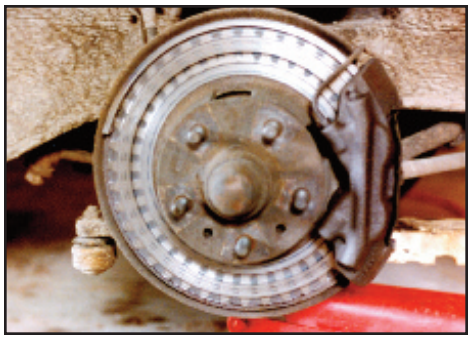
A trip to inspect that car revealed it to be SFM6S087. *Holy Shamoly!* One of the 252 that I considered the best of the best – the Holy Grail! I tried to stifle my excitement as I looked over the car, but all the while I was wondering where I could get a big enough wheelbarrow full of cash to make this baby mine. I slowly and methodically went over my checklist of things to confirm it as being a legit Shelby. A number of parts were missing and the car was in poor condition, but it checked out to be real.

The seller, Bill Levrier, filled me in on what he knew about the car. He said that at some point it had been hit from the rear and repaired. Then, when it was parked along the Galveston seawall, it was hit from the rear again and considered a "total" this time. It was sent to a junkyard in Galveston where he found it. He bought the car (in November, 1978, I think), repaired the rear body damage (poorly) and put in a 289 Hi-Po. It didn't have an engine when he found it and we both agreed that the original engine must have been pulled out at the junkyard and sold to some hot-rodder. But amazingly, the car still had all five original Cragars; probably because the chrome rims were a bit rusty. It was almost drivable, with the most obvious problem being a leaking gas tank. If I bought it, this little cream puff would have to be towed home. I wanted THAT car! Yes, it was in poor condition, but I had it on good authority that $1,000 could fix almost anything.

I guessed that the car would be worth around $6,000 if restored. That meant I could pay $5,000 and come out basically even after fixing it up. Bill was coy about providing his asking price. He was older and wiser than me and could probably tell how excited I was, and knew that could be used to his advantage. He was right. I took the lead, and instead of starting with a low ball figure and bargaining from there, I opened with an offer of $5,000. We eventually settled on $5,600. This was $600 over my estimated market value for the car, but I figured it was a small enough premium to pay to own my dream car. In reality, that was several thousand dollars more than the car was probably worth at the time, but I didn't figure that out until years later. I'll bet Bill threw the party of his life after making that deal. And he deserved it. It wasn't his fault that I was young and naïve and had stars in my eyes over that car. We shook hands on the deal (that's a contract in Texas) and I left a deposit to hold the car while I took out a loan to get the rest of the money.

I got the loan and arranged for my buddy, Don Broach, with a pickup to help me tow the car home. One of the pictures in this article shows the purchase cash surrounded by my Shelby literature and inspirations on the night before I picked up the car. Note the vinyl records and 8-track tapes in the background. Does that tell you how long ago this happened?

The next day, Don and I drove his old Chevy pickup to get my dream car. The money was exchanged and a tow rope was placed between the Shelby and the Chevy in preparation for the 40-mile trip home. We had to cross the Houston ship channel – either over a tall bridge or via the Lynchburg ferry. The brakes on the Shelby didn't feel very solid, which made the downside of the bridge a bit worrisome, so we chose the ferry. I panicked when a deck hand looked into the car to make sure the parking brake was set. There



was no parking brake! Someone must have scavenged that off the car when it was in the junkyard. I was informed that I'd have to chock one of the wheels or get off the boat – and where to get the chocks was my problem. There was a 4x4 block of wood in the bed of the truck for one chock, but what to use for the other one? Then Don had an idea: what about his spare tire? It worked. And from that day forward I had a new respect for his creativity.

It was close to midnight by the time we got home and all that was left to do was push my new pride and joy up the driveway into the garage. Oops! The two of us plus my wife couldn't quite manage that. I walked a few houses down the street and recruited one of my other buddies to add the final muscle needed. Mission accomplished! So on February 14, 1979 (Valentine's Day) I became the proud owner of SFM6S087. YEE HA! Let the restoration begin.

I hardly slept that night because I was planning the things I needed to do to make the car road worthy. First up was to check those brakes… or, as it turned out, what remained of them. Remember when I mentioned that the brakes didn't feel very solid? Well they had gotten worse on the tow home. By the time we completed that journey they were making horrible metallic grinding noises and barely stopping the car. So the first thing I did the next morning was to peek through the spokes in the front Cragars to get a look at the rotors. What I saw put a chill in my spine. The rotors had uneven grooves in them that looked to be a quarter-inch deep. I pulled the wheels off for a better look and it got worse. Besides gouges that looked like the Grand Canyon, the rotors weren't uniformly round anymore because some of the metal on the outer edges was simply missing – ground away, flaked off or whatever. It wasn't a pretty sight. I couldn't believe I had relied on those the night before to keep me from ramming my newly acquired cream puff into the back of my friend's pickup. I guess the old saying is true, the Lord really does watch over fools and little children.

Some fresh rotors and pads and a rebuild of the calipers took care of that problem. And while I was at it, I also refurbished the rear brakes and replaced the rusty-looking brake lines. The master cylinder seemed okay, so I left that alone. The next most important issue was that hole in the gas tank. A small epoxy patch was used as a temporary fix and I was ready for a ride. It was loud (with glasspack side exhausts), the steering and clutch were stiff and the brakes were hard. The car rode rough and rattled like crazy… and I LOVED IT!

A used gas tank (one that didn't leak) was acquired, and a 4-speed transmission replaced the 3-speed that Bill had put in the car just to get it rolling. I knew that it would have come from the factory with a 1965 engine block, but Bill had put a 1966 in there. So I swapped engines with my '65 K-code Mustang to get things a little closer to original. During the swap I took the time to clean up the engine compartment and paint the engine. Unfortunately I painted it blue, and not even a proper Ford blue, but Krylon's version of Ford blue. Ah, the ignorance of youth. I later learned that I should have just left it black, the way it was when came out of the '65 Mustang. Oh well, live and learn.

Over the next couple of years a few other things were done to improve drivability and reliability, but visually the car remained pretty much as it was when I bought it. That part of the restoration would have to wait until I had a little more money.

During all this it was dawning on me that $1,000 really couldn't fix just about anything. My well-meaning friend had simply been wrong, but I forgave him. After all, he's the one who told me about this car being for sale. And by now 6S087 was like a part of the family that I couldn't imagine being without.

In 1983 I drove it to the Texas Region's Shelby Meet. My wife followed in our '83 Ford Ranger with a full complement of tools and spare parts, but none of that was needed because the car ran flawlessly. Although it still looked ragged, Robyn convinced me to enter it in the Sunday car show anyway. She made a sign to put in the windshield that read, "*RUSToration Started*." Ha, ha! You'd be surprised how many people gravitated to my old heap when there were so many shiny beauties to look at on either side of it.

Things were progressing. The car was now mechanically reliable even if the appearance left something to be desired. I was gradually collecting the parts that would be needed to return the car to its original glory. It already had proper, open letter Cobra valve covers but a small letter Cobra intake was needed, along with a Cobra oil pan and lots of other pieces. This parts search led me to meet Jack Shook, the previous owner of several Shelbys who ran an auto parts store. He carried a lot of Mustang and Shelby stuff, and had a knack for finding rare, original parts. He came up with the original intake and oil pan I needed plus an original Cobra tach and a number of other items. He even found an aluminum

case T-10 for me. And when I mentioned wanting a Detroit Locker, he said he had one in a car with a 9-inch rear end with 3.89 gears. Perfect!

We parked them side by side in my driveway and swapped pumpkins. I believe I gave him my open drive plus $50 for his Locker. And boy was that sucker cool. It made great cracking sounds at various times when driving and often caused the tires to chirp when it locked up suddenly during a turn. It was rude and loud and macho and manly. And (you had to see this coming) I loved it!

Jack was a jovial, likable guy; always smiling and seeming to enjoy life. Over time we grew to be friends. Not close friends, but certainly more than just a parts seller and a buyer. Apart from the cars, he and his wife were childless and trying to adopt, which gave us a rather unique bond as Robyn and I were in the same situation.

In 1986, when Jack suggested that I turn the car over to him to continue the restoration, I jumped at the chance. It needed some work that I couldn't do, and what could be better than putting my car in the hands of a knowledgeable, trusted friend? I drove the car to his place and helped him gut the interior in preparation. What a hoot finding pieces of a Goodyear inner tube around the traction bars under the fiberglass boxes. I felt like an archeologist who just discovered a rare historical artifact in an ancient tomb.

The Dark Ages

Over the next few years Jack would always have some excuse for why things weren't progressing. And worst yet, there was always some reason that I couldn't go and see the car that day. But I was young and naïve and I trusted him completely. That would change.

On August 21, 1991 my wife and I returned home late at night from a trip out of town. In our mailbox we found a certified letter from the Constable's Office of Precinct 4 of Fort Bend County, Texas. It was legal notice that SFM6S087 had been impounded and would be sold at auction on August 30th to pay off debts for one Jack R. Shook. As the last registered owner, I was to contact them immediately if I still had any interest in the car. CRAAAAAP!

After reading that letter I know my face must have turned white because I suddenly felt weak and lightheaded. I was very near to being physically ill. Believe me, Christmas Eve was not the longest night in our house that year.

Early the next day I called the phone number on that notice to claim my car. It seems that a local constable and a bill collector had gone to Jack's house with a warrant to take "something of value" to satisfy his debts to a bank in South Carolina. And my car looked like the obvious choice. Jack tried to tell them it wasn't his, but they didn't believe him. I faxed them a copy of the car's title and an old license receipt to prove my ownership. After confirming those, the officer in charge had the car delivered to my house on a flatbed truck – at no expense to me.

A quick look confirmed that in the five years Jack had the car, absolutely nothing had been done toward the restoration – with the exception of a few parts that he had acquired and stored inside the car. It was actually in worse condition than when I turned it over to him. The alternator was now missing, there was spilled paint on the driver's fender and the side scoops had been removed. Fortunately, those original scoops were inside the car. All in all, I felt lucky to just have possession again.

You may have noticed how I blamed some of my previous errors in judgment on being "young and naïve." At this point I wasn't exactly young anymore (almost 40) and I was beginning to wonder when the wisdom of age was going to kick in. Or was I always going to be this trusting and gullible?

In any case, that experience killed a lot of my enthusiasm, and raising two kids (the adoption process finally worked) took care of most of my time and money. So the car sat in the garage waiting its turn for attention. Robyn sometimes used the hood to fold clothes on. And with every day that passed, the cost of continuing the restoration increased. The price of every part and service the car needed seemed to rise with every tick of the clock.

The Renaissance

Fast-forward to 2007, with the car still sitting in the same place in my garage. I finally realized that I was never going to have the money to finish what I had started. That initial "*$1,000 will fix practically anything*" statement would have seemed laughable if the truth weren't so bitter. I finally bit the bullet and told Robyn I was going to sell it so someone else could give it the restoration it deserved. She immediately stated, "*You can NOT sell your car!*" When I explained that a proper restoration could cost $100K or more (more than our house was worth), she asked one question: "*Do we have the money?*" I replied that only by raiding our retirement savings could we afford something like that. She simply said, "*Then do it.*" What a wife!

Now it was time to find someone to finish my decades-long restoration. I was determined to make a better, wiser choice this time. As previously noted, from the factory 6S087 had a rare mixture of 1965 and 1966 parts, and having sat in a junkyard, many of those parts were missing. Only 252 cars were built like that and it was going to take someone with a special knowledge of those specific cars to do a proper job. And someone I could TRUST.

In my search for a restoration shop I found plenty who could do a Mustang, and a few who could do a Shelby. But when I mentioned the 65/66 nature of this car I usually heard a lot of silence on the other end of the phone; sometimes followed by stammering and the mention of being sure they could "figure it out." Not very comforting.

But one shop was different. When I called Shelby Parts & Restoration in Green Bay, Wisconsin the phone was

answered by a guy named Jim Cowles. As soon as I mentioned that I owned 6S087 he immediately recognized it as a part '65 – part '66 car and rattled off four of them that he had already restored, including the prototype, 6S001. Bingo! I had found my shop.

After my previous experience turning the car over to someone, you can imagine my hesitation to send it out of state – 1,300 miles away. (I live in Pasadena, Texas – just outside of Houston.) But Jim's easy manner and detailed knowledge inspired confidence in me. We discussed what I wanted and the kinds of parts that would be used. The desired end result was simple – a near concours car to drive on the street… really. I know that sounds crazy, but you've probably already guessed that I'm not exactly known for my sanity. As far as parts go, we agreed on the following priority list:

- First choice – Assembly line, date code correct, original parts
- Second choice – NOS parts
- Third choice – The best available reproduction parts. Let's face it. Some original parts really are impossible to find – at least in usable condition (like Tri-Y headers)

My compromises would be in the areas of performance and drivability – like a free flow exhaust and radial tires. And I was willing to consider a bore and stroke. That would be decided later. Then came the news that it would probably be two or three years before Jim could take the car into his shop. He was that backed up. And he estimated three to five years after that before he'd have the car completed. Nooooo! Another five to eight years of waiting on top of the twenty-eight I already had in this project? Well, I wanted the restoration completed properly, and Jim was the only guy I trusted to do it. So we agreed on a deal and I settled down for a long wait for the phone call telling me to send the car to Green Bay.

Surprisingly, that call came about a month later. I don't know how that happened and never asked. The car

went to Wisconsin on July 5th of 2007.

The progress was slow but methodical; with the first few years spent acquiring the parts that I had not already found. I was constantly amazed at Jim's ability to do things I thought were impossible, like finding a date code-correct original carb and even date code-correct Koni shocks. He had my Cragars restored with the original steel rims. Most shops replace the rims during the process and those replacements are different from the originals. Those are just a few of the many miracles he performed during the restoration. The guy is incredible.

To help keep up my Shelby enthusiasm during that time I started getting more serious about researching my car and carryovers in general. I learned that 6S087 was part of DSO 71-2510, dated 6/16/65. That order was for sixty-seven white, 1965 Mustangs specially equipped to be converted into 1966 GT350s. And for the first time, these GT350s would get rear seats. They were scheduled for production at Ford's San Jose assembly plant on 6/28/65. But Ford was running behind schedule and they were probably built somewhere between 7/10/65 and 7/17/65, and then delivered to Shelby American at the Los Angeles airport a few days later.

After being converted into a GT350, 6S087 was shipped by rail on 10/8/65 for delivery to Republic Ford in Houston, Texas. The factory options were Cragar wheels and a rear seat. Warranty paperwork indicates that it was probably used there as a demonstrator. The paper trail dies at Republic Ford in December of 1965. Nothing else is known about the car until Bill found it in that junkyard in Galveston in late 1978.

Well, the restoration seemed to be dragging on and my spirits were sagging went I got a morale boost that still excites me today. In late December of 2013 I found a surprise in my email inbox, but it wasn't from Jim Cowles. It was from Howard Pardee and it lead to the purchase of my original engine block! It seems a SAAC member was looking at some Hi-Po blocks to buy and sent Howard a short list of VINs to see if any of them might be significant. One of them was mine and it had turned up in Arizona! It's now back under the hood of 6S087 where it belongs. Thank you, Howard and SAAC! Without you as a trusted clearing house for the Ford VINs, things like this would not be possible.

Jim had been sending pictures, but there's nothing like seeing things in person. So when SAAC-39 was held in Wisconsin, it was the perfect opportunity to check in on my car and attend a convention. The car looked even better in person. I don't believe there is such a thing as a perfect car, but mine was getting pretty damn close. I was in awe. I actually hesitated to touch it at first, thinking that my fingerprints would mar its beauty. I soon got over that and found myself sitting in the driver's seat, imagining driving down the road. Vroom! Vroom! Screeeeeeech! Boy was I gonna have fun in this thing.

The convention was an experience I'll never forget. Partly because of the cars, but primarily because of the wonderful people I met. A number of other carryover owners were there and a few brought their cars. I got rides and made friends and had the time of my life.

Finally

In late July of 2015, my car was ready to come home. I made the transportation arrangements through Gran Turismo and the car arrived on August 8, 2015. The rig driver called when he got close to the Houston area and I gave him directions to a local high school. It was a Saturday and I

figured the bus turnaround area would be a good spot for him to park and unload. He was to call me back when he arrived. The next time he called he said, "*You'd better get to the school pretty fast. There's already a crowd building up around your car.*" YEEEEE HAAAAA! The car was here!

I grabbed my "go bag" in which I had pre-packed a camera and the things I would need to make the car legal to drive home. Then hollered at Robyn and raced out the front door. She knew what was going on and came running out behind me. I asked her to drive because I was afraid I'd go too fast and have a wreck. As we approached the school a glorious sight unfolded before us. There it was – 6S087 – looking like it had just rolled out of the factory doors at Shelby American back in 1965. I cannot describe the feeling that gave me. Thirty-six years of anticipation and excitement all pouring through my body like an electric shock wave! And then…what was that…a police cruiser parked behind my little beauty!?! I hadn't even started the engine yet and I already had a ticket?!? How could it be?!!

It turned out to be the school campus police and all he wanted to do was look at the car. Whew! As a matter of fact, his boss was there and offered to have this officer escort me home if I wanted, but I declined. For some reason the idea of a police car following me around in my Shelby just didn't feel right at the moment. The next day I realized that was a missed opportunity that would have added a little spice to my car's homecoming. Oh, well.

After figuring out that I wasn't getting a ticket I finally got to pay attention to my car. I was so excited all I could think about was getting behind the wheel and DRIVING it. I hurriedly applied the windshield license sticker, mounted the rear license plate and put the proof-of-insurance paper in the glove box. All that was left was to pay the transport driver. The mileage checked out – he hadn't taken the car for a joy ride – so I signed the delivery papers and paid him off.

All together now – START YOUR ENGINE! – And I did. It came roaring to life and filled the air with the most magnificent sound I'd ever heard. I drove around the school parking lot a few times to get the feel of the car. Then I waved to Robyn (and the crowd that had gathered) and hit the road.

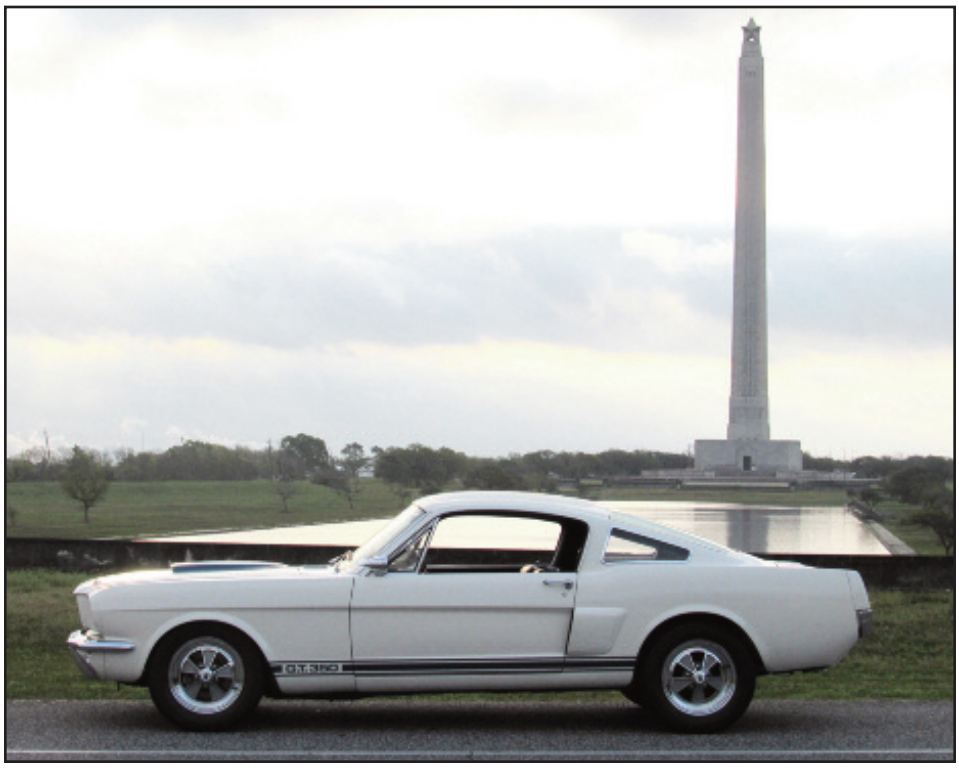
There's nothing else like it in the world. Words simply fail me. But if you're reading this magazine you may know what I mean.

It was a fairly short drive home where I finally took time to look the car over properly – under the hood, in the trunk and so forth. Then it was back on the road – giving rides and just plain having a blast. And that's the way it's been ever since.

In years past I often called this car my little "cream puff" in joking reference to its rough condition. These days it's picked up a new moniker – Casper – as in Casper the Ghost. This was bestowed on the car by a friend who said, "*It's white, and it's so fast that it will disappear right in front of your eyes.*"

I've got around 1,600 miles on 6S087 since the restoration was completed and it is a hoot to drive! If you happen to see me on the roads around Houston, you'll know I'm out there making up for a 36-year wait. So please forgive me if my foot seems a little heavy and my smile looks too big for my face.

Oh, did I mention I have the best wife in the world? "*THANK YOU, ROBYN!*"

And finally, special thanks to the members of the Carryover Owners Group for their help in researching many of the parts and features questions that came up during this restoration. Your moral support, knowledge sharing and even contributions of original parts is greatly appreciated.

Vroom! Vroom! Screeeeeeech!