



FIRST TASTE

One drive in a GT350H can be a life-changing experience.

– Doug Cresanta

In December of 1966, I found myself on the way to Los Angeles for a vacation. As my TWA flight approached LAX for its landing, my thoughts drifted elsewhere. They were focused on what was about to happen once I arrived. I had reserved a 1966 Hertz GT350H for my week in the Los Angeles area. At that time the Hertz Sports Car Club offered a Jaguar XKE, a Corvette, or the Shelby Hertz GT350H for a rental. I was working for TWA, and had previously been assigned to LAX. I was transferred to Albuquerque in the summer of 1966 so I had become very aware of the Hertz program of renting GT350s. I was even able to use my airline employee discount with Hertz. It knocked off \$7.00 a day and 5 cents a mile, so on top of getting a GT350 to drive, it was also fairly cheap. I couldn't think about anything else other than a GT350H.

I was 25 at the time and had been hired by TWA in 1965 as an FAA-licensed

airframe and powerplant mechanic. Initially I worked in their hanger at LAX. Shelby American's hangers were across the runways from TWA, and I passed them everyday as I drove to and from work. I was driving a '65 Corvair Corsa at the time. After a brief stay at Chevy specialist Bill Thomas' shop in Fullerton, California it came out performing much better than it went in, but it was still no GT350. The bitterest pill was that Hi-Performance Motors was right around the corner in El Segundo and I remember they had a fire sale at one point: there were ten new GT350s on the lot: your choice for \$3,995. We had to drive on an access road around the perimeter of LAX, so I had plenty of opportunities to check out the rows of Shelybs and Cobras that were lined up outside the Shelby American hangers.

After retrieving my baggage, I headed directly to the Hertz counter, with great anticipation. Back then the rental cars

were right at the terminal, unlike today, where they are usually off the airport premises. It was around 9:30 at night and the Hertz agent promptly presented the paperwork to sign. Then he tossed the keys to me. I asked him if I was going to get the driving check-out that was a part of the Hertz program. The agent just replied, "Go have fun!" I was his last customer and I think he just wanted to lock up and shut the door.

My excitement increased the closer I got to the parking lot. Then I got the first glimpse of "my" Shelby. It was a blue one with gold stripes. WOW! It really stood out from the rest of the rental cars. With my luggage in the trunk, I got in, got the seat belt latched, and then I turned the key. All I can say is, it was love at first sound. When that engine started and that exhaust rumbled, I knew I had to have one.

After a couple minutes of warm up, adjusting the mirrors and turning the lights on, I ventured out into traffic. I had never driven a car like this before and I was really surprised by the way it drove. Lots of power, quick acceleration, agile but somewhat heavy steering until the speed increased. It was impressive to look out over that striped hood scoop and listen to the exhaust sounds. Ahhh, this was definitely my kind of car!

Over the next few of days the Shelby transported me all over the LA Basin: down to the beaches, to Disneyland and Knott's Berry Farm. I was really getting into driving the Shelby by now. Any excuse was enough to turn the key and be off to any destination. Even the convenience store a half-block from the hotel. Driving it was pure joy and excitement. After a couple days of having fun with the Shelby, the thought of having to return it to Hertz, formed a little dark cloud in my mind. Giving it back would not be easy to do.

All too soon, the dreaded hour had arrived. It was time to return the Shelby to Hertz. Rats! This was a real let down. I re-



Alas, no photos were taken during my Los Angeles vacation, so this Shelby American press photo will have to suffice. Had I taken a picture back then, the car's license plate could probably have been traced to the car's serial number. But I guess I'll never know what that is.

luctantly headed to the Hertz counter to return the keys. It was not a particularly happy moment for me. On the flight back to Albuquerque I couldn't let go of recent memories of driving that blue and gold striped Shelby. What a fabulous time I had. So, I began to make daily stops at the Hertz agency at the Albuquerque airport, bugging the manager about buying the black and gold car he had in his inventory. Needless to say, that did not happen (it wasn't his to sell). But it led to his hiring me, part time, to retrieve GT350s from Phoenix. I would use my TWA pass and fly from Albuquerque to Phoenix, pick up a Hertz car that somebody had rented one-way, and drive it back to Albuquerque. The GT350 got to me and it was only a matter of time before I bought a brand new 1967 GT350. But that's another story for another day.

About a month or so after my vacation in Los Angeles a small cardboard box arrived in the mail. The printing on it announced the contents to be a GT350H glass. Upon opening the box, I found what Hertz described as a "Hertz Sports Car Club Trophy Glass." Tucked inside the glass was a small printed note from Hertz, congratulating me on having had a Hertz Sports Car Club experience.

A closer look at the glass showed that the rim had gold trim. One side of the glass had the Hertz Sports Car Club logo, in gold and black. On the opposite side of the glass was the outline of the Watkins Glen race-track in black. I was stunned to have received this surprise memento from Hertz. Little did I know that 45 years later it would become one of my favorite items in my collection of Shelby memorabilia.

Today, I fondly remember that Hertz Sports Car Club experience, driving that GT350H. To say that it inspired me to pursue buying a GT350 would be a rather large understatement. I can positively say that it was this single experience that led me to buy a brand new GT350.

Thinking back on those times, driving past the Shelby American hangers everyday, going to the races to watch the Cobras run, having that GT350H for a week of fun—it was a great time in my life. I don't know how many other SAAC members have experienced exciting times like I did, over 45 years ago. But if you're one, I'm sure they are as memorable for you as mine are to me. Is there anyone else out there who also had the Hertz Sports Car Club driving experience in a GT350H? And did you get a Hertz Sports Car Club trophy glass? And if so, do you still have it?

Doug Cresanta shlb66@yahoo.com



Hertz produced a number of promotional items which were given to sports car club members during various promotions. They included plastic garment bags and overnight bags but the most common item was a single cocktail tumbler. They were sent to someone who rented one of their sports cars (XKE, Corvette or GT350H). Glasses were also given in sets of six. In all, eight different tracks were pictured on the glasses. Back in 1966, postage to send a glass was 22¢.



NOTE: I don't have a clue as to "my" GT350H's serial number. Several years ago GT350 Hertz registrar Greg Kolasa heard my Hertz rental story and gave me a small list of several Shelby VINs that could have been the car. Of the four or five on that list, #877 kind of got my attention. I grew up in a house whose street number was 877. But what were the chances that was the car I rented? Probably slim, but there is no way of ever knowing for sure.

