The Old Shelby Switcheroo

Does your Shelby's interior have Matching Numbers?

– Doug Cresanta

Let's talk about the interior of 1965 and 1966 GT350s. Specifically, the cars with over-ride traction bars. It is well documented that these cars had pieces of their interior removed for the installation of the overriders. Groups of approximately a dozen cars at a time were brought into the Shelby American production area. Interiors were removed, the over-rides were installed and the interiors put back together. All pretty straightforward— or so it seemed. That is, until I discovered something that raised a few questions that beg for answers.

Shortly after acquiring 6S188, I decided to take out the rear seat and install the '66 package tray. As I removed the back seat bottom, I noticed an adhesive-backed filing label on the underside. It had #198 written on it. I didn't think too much of it at the time. With the removal of the rest of the rear seat assembly, another filing label with #198 was attached to the filler panel that goes between the folding rear seat back and the trap door. Again, not much to get excited about there. I was too busy trying to get the Shelby on the road and the labels were soon forgotten.

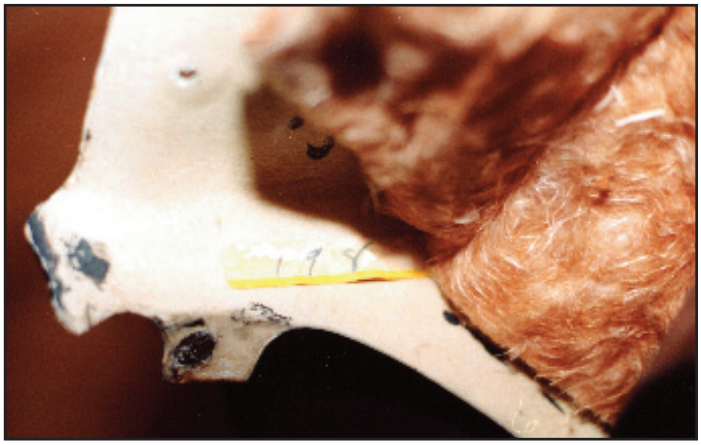
Fast-forward to October, 2008 when we decided it was time to finally paint the Shelby. Once in the shop, the disassembly was started. This was when things began to get interesting. When the rear interior side panels were removed, we were greeted by more filing labels with #198 written on them. All the filing labels found appeared to be similar.

After thinking about this for awhile, the first thing that came to mind, is that my car, 6S188, appears to have the interior pieces from car 6S198, if the filing labels are accurate and to be believed (and why not?). So, what happened at Shelby American the day the interior was reinstalled?

My next thought was that there must have been a procedure, or check-list to be followed, at Shelby American for the over-rider installation. It must have been deemed important enough that someone was assigned to mark the interior pieces with the labels as they came out of the cars. The reason would be to assure they were returned to the proper car. If the labels were intended to make sure interiors remained with their respective cars, then an obvious error was made concerning my car.

The next thought that popped into mind was, if the interior pieces for my car, 6S188, have the pieces from 6S198, where are 6S188's interior pieces? That is, if 6S198's interior was erroneously installed in my Shelby? And did 6S198 get 6S188's interior? If so, were these the only cars affected OR were there more than just those two cars involved? It's probably not known for sure, unless other owners find labels that do not match their cars' serial number. Then, possibly a pattern can be established. Right now, lacking other "evidence," I think this may be just a random case ...a production anomaly.

6S188



As 6S188's interior pieces were being removed prior to the repaint, each one had been tagged "198." Filler panel between the seat back and trap door [*upper left*]; bottom of rear seat [*upper right*]; lower right side interior side panel [*lower left*]; lower left side interior side panel [*lower right*].

I have spoken with former Shelby American employees who were involved with over-ride traction bar installation. They report that the interiors were simply piled up between the cars and that it was always a rush to get the interiors back in. So, perhaps, a check list was not followed when 6S188's interior was reinstalled. This appears to have resulted in at least two mismatched interiors. Are there others? Hard to say. Hopefully not, but we were dealing with Shelby American and we know that sometimes strange things occurred.

I'm sure the questions that have been raised concerning the interiors of at least two cars will never be completely answered. I guess this little episode could just be added to the list of strange stories surrounding the happenings at Shelby American. It's not likely that factory documents would add anything because production details such as disassembly/reassembly of cars would not be written down anywhere. Perhaps a former employee whose memory is still quite sharp about these details could weigh in on the subject after reading this article.

I'm left with the thought that my Shelby, 6S188, has the interior pieces from 6S198, and perhaps, 6S198 has my car's interior. As luck would have it, 6S198 is presently "owner unknown." The car was shipped on 10/26/65 to Marv Tonkin Ford in Portland. It is not known when it was first sold or who the original owner was, but based on its shipping date, 6S188 was shipped a day later. So the cars were built at the same time and the traction bars were probably installed at the same time.

What is not really clear is why the interior pieces of each car were labeled in the first place. There was really no need to identify them because they were interchangeable between cars—as demonstrated by 6S188's having pieces from 6S198. It's hard to draw a conclusion based on only one car. Here's a piece of conflicting information: Rick Kopec reports that the interior pieces on 6S118 were all labeled with "118." So, was Cresanta's car a production anomaly? More data is obviously needed. That means more owners of over-ride traction bar cars who, upon disassembling the interior, need to pay attention to see if the pieces were similarly labeled with their cars' serial number or some other number. If you have this information, please share it with the Shelby registrar:

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