A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

Quite a few years ago Mark Hovander sent us this picture. Since then we've used it in several SAAC publications. He recently filled us in on the details.

" The nice thing about this photo is that we know the exact date it was taken. Its being in color makes it an added treat. The photo was taken by Ron Peters, who was my next door neighbor. I was three years-old at the time. We are still best friends, but I am upset that he did not take me with him on this trip. It's not likely my parents would have missed me for a few days, and I wouldn't have eaten much.

"In 1965 Ron was into Corvettes for several years but he followed other sports cars as well so he heard for quite some time that the Cobras had been beating the Corvettes all around the U.S. Ron also enjoyed water skiing so he grabbed a friend with similar interests and they thought it would be fun to take Ron's red '60 Corvette, wearing American mags, and tow his ski boat down to California. They planned to stop off at various lakes to water ski for a bit and then head farther south to Los Angeles where they would visit the Shelby American factory.

"They probably got this idea from watching too many episodes of "Route 66." Anyway, everything went well until they rolled into Los Angeles and there were fires and smoke on both sides of the freeway. For whatever reason, they decided to take one of the nearest exits to see what was causing the fires. It turned out to be the Watts Riots. To paint a little better picture, both Ron and his friend were Caucasians, so you can understand the little red Corvette piloted by two white guys towing a ski boat through Watts didn't fit together too well.

"In talking to Ron recently, he recalled the exact date – Friday, August 13, 1965. He made it to Shelby American and there was one person at the door. He was told the tours for the day had ended and they would have to come back on Monday. When Ron realized he would not be able to see any of the cars up close he walked around the corner and put his camera lens through the fence and took this photo. They felt that maybe L.A. wasn't the safest place to be so they pointed the Corvette and ski boat north and drove, non-stop, to Lake Tahoe. They arrived about 3 a.m. the next morning.

"From the front of the photo working back, there are eight R-Models. I was thinking these might be from the last batch of cars, from 5R527 to 5R540. All of those cars had start dates of 6/24/65 and most had finish dates of 1/66 or 2/66. It's not possible to tell exactly what R-Models are in the competition hangar at the time, but these may be the " '66" R-Models, with '66 grilles and destined to receive '66 rocker panel stripes.

"Behind the R-Models are a batch of 427 Cobras, which are probably the early 427 comp models. The dates in the Cobra Registry would support that as the CSX3100 cars weren't received until early September. The comp Cobras were waiting for their back-ordered Halibrand wheels so they were resting on wooden crates.

"Behind the Cobras are perhaps not '65 GT350s as mentioned in one of Colin Comer's books, but carryover '66s. The '65 GT350s seem to have been finished around July 9, 1965. (Reference the Cantwell/Kolasa book, page 102, third paragraph, 'By the time August was three-quarters gone (August 21st), we had received all 250 cars. but none were completed because components were missing (rear side brake scoops, hardware, and rear quarter window parts).'

"The other cars I was wondering about were the Daytona Coupes, but since the Coppa Citta di Enna was on August 15, 1965, they were still in Europe, with Shelby American wondering if they should be left there or returned to the 'States. Various early GT40s were in and out of the competition hangar going to various races. It was an interesting time to visit Shelby American.