GEORGE WATTERS

It was early May, 1965 when my tenth-grade teacher made arrangements with Shelby American to tour the factory at 6501 West Imperial Highway on the south side of LAX. I was very aware of the Cobras and GT350s, having seen various versions of both cars on the streets in our area. The GT350 was my favorite and a chance to visit the factory was a dream come true.

The tour was set up for after school so only a small group of us went. It was only a twenty-mile drive down the 405 freeway from school to the factory. The day finally arrived and my excitement was building as we got off the freeway and headed west on Imperial Hwy. As we approached Shelby American, row after row of brand new '65 GT350s were visible. There were also a of couple of rows of Cobras on the far side. Nothing was like seeing everything in full color as opposed to black and white magazine articles. One thing that stood out was that almost all the GT350s didn't have top stripes.

We pulled into the front entrance and parked in the visitor spot to the right of the small guard house. As we got out of the car and took a couple of steps, Ken Miles happened to walk by right in front of us. He gave us a smile and a slight nod.

Unbelieveable!

Our tour guide met us at the guard house gate and for the next hour or so we got a very thorough look at the entire factory. The highlight might have been when we walked into a staging area in the west hangar race shop area. Sitting there were a group of factory team cars: a Cobra Daytona Coupe, a Ford GT, a few Cobras, and a GT350 R-Model. We were able to get a close look and the guide gave us the history of each car and answered our questions. At the conclusion of our tour he pointed out the small building at the front entrance and invited us to go inside and take any literature we wanted from the display table. I took one of everything and to this day I still have it.

I was hooked for life!

Over the next couple of years, every once in a while I went back to the factory and looked at the cars through the exterior chain link fence. I also drove around the corner to Hi-Performance Motors on Sepulveda Blvd. and got a close look inside the small showroom and their used car lot which always had GT350s and Cobras. As always, I would always grab as much literature as I could. And yes, I still have it all.

In late 1970 I was finally able to afford a real GT350. I bought a very low mileage, red '68 from Galpin Ford. I could not believe it was mine. The first night I had it I sat in the car outside our garage for hours.

I first heard about the Shelby American Automobile Club in 1977 and joined immediately. When I received my first *Marque* magazine I could not believe all of the great articles, pictures, and the extensive classified section. The bug really bit me. Over the next few years I was able to buy a couple of '65 GT350s and a couple of '66 GT350s. In 1984 I bought 5R528 and got California plates for it. I drove it on the street for five years. In 1989 I sold it and bought 6S148, which I still own.

As time went by I watched SAAC get bigger and better. The *Marque* became *The Shelby American* and eventually we got color pictures. SAAC has published a variety of great books and many Registries. There's more information available now than when our cars were built. All because of SAAC. It's an incredible resource to this day. I also want to mention the annual conventions. That's where you get to see everything. SAAC-3 in Pasadena in 1978 was the first convention I attended, and I never forgot it.

I still can't believe it's been sixty years since my class first visited Shelby American in May of 1965. The years have flown by but my enthusiasm for the cars is as strong as ever. I will say that without SAAC, our cars would be just a nice memory. But with everything SAAC has done, our cars are more popular today then ever. SAAC is responsible for keeping the Shelby American legend alive and for that we owe them a large debt of gratitude.