

FRED PETERS & CHARLES BETZ INTERVIEW: COLLEGE PROFESSORS TURNED FERRARI COLLECTORS

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DECEMBER 2013



The Only One

1967 Shelby GT 500
Convertible

Palos Verde Concours

Classics on the Coast



The Car of Kings

Royal Ferraris of Europe and Asia



Driven

Fangio's 1970 IKA Torino 380S



VINTAGE

ROADCAR

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The Only One





1967 Shelby GT 500 Convertible

STORY AND PHOTOS BY J. MICHAEL HEMSLEY



W

hen you have the only one ever built, you might have trouble convincing people that it is real. It's a particular problem when what it looks like really isn't what it is. That's what Brian and Samantha Styles face every time they take their 1967 GT 500

convertible to a show. From 10 feet away it looks like your average 1968 Shelby GT convertible. Lift the hood or look at the interior, and it's all 1968. However, a closer inspection of the Shelby fiberglass shows hand-built prototype components foreign to both model years. Confused? Even well-informed Shelby enthusiasts will do a double-take. When Brian Styles, who refers to himself as the car's caretaker and historian, tells them that Samantha's car is actually a 1967, they immediately reject his claim. Everyone knows there are no 1967 Shelby GT 500 convertibles. Well, there is one, and this is its story.

The effort Brian Styles puts into convincing classic car enthusiasts this car is just what it is pales in comparison to the effort he expended to figure out what it actually looked like during its life. When equally enthusiastic Samantha Styles acquired the car in May 2009, he undertook an investigation involving a "dream team" that included noted Shelby experts and former employees of both Shelby American and Ford Motor

Company. It was a group effort to determine what was true and what was rumor about the car's history and its styling. There was a lot of discussion and even an occasional disagreement or two, but at the end of the effort, everyone on the team endorsed the result—the car that was shown at the 2013 Concours d'Elegance of Texas.

The documented history of this car begins with an August 9-dated "Special Order" placed with Ford Motor Company, approximately a week before production of the redesigned 1967 Mustangs would begin. Shelby American ordered three cars—a coupe, a fastback, and a convertible—all Candy Apple Red. All three were to be identically equipped with a 428 cid (7.0 L) "Police Interceptor" V8 engine with dual four-barrel carburetors, a C-6 automatic transmission, air conditioning, power steering, power brakes, closed crankcase emissions system, AM pushbutton radio, tinted glass, and black décor interior. All three cars were completed in November 1966 and became the first three big block Shelby cars ordered and built. The convertible was finished two weeks after the fastback and coupe, and wears Shelby sequence number 0139. "Company Car—Engineering Proto" was handwritten on the Shelby American Production Order. Other factory notes referenced the car by 062, its California inventory number.



Carroll wanted very much to include a convertible model in his 1967 offering; however Ford had made the decision to shelve the convertible—at least until the following model year. The one convertible that had been ordered was still delivered and, upon arrival at Shelby American, was promptly designated as Carroll Shelby's "personal driver." According to a 2003 Interview, Carroll indicated his one-off convertible was regularly enjoyed by friends, employees, visiting Ford executives and, sometimes, even celebrities.

A few months later, it was time to start preparations for the upcoming 1968 model year. Ford's go-to "skunk works" shop, Dearborn Steel Tubing (DST), was given artist renderings and tasked with fabricating two sets of redesigned fiberglass hoods, front-ends, taillight panels, and interior center consoles. These components would be the most visible differences over the current 1967 styling.

With DST's 1968-styled fiberglass on its way to California, Shelby American would need to allocate a Fastback and a Convertible so they could be repurposed as "1968 styling prototypes," aka the "1968 photographic cars." Plenty of GT Fastbacks were on hand, and a January-built GT500 (serial number 0463) was selected. There was only a single GT Convertible, and that was serial number 0139. About April 1967, both cars were

updated (disguised) with the hand-crafted prototype fiberglass received from Dearborn.

During the spring and early summer of 1967, the convertible and fastback styling prototypes were extensively photographed. These photos would be used for print advertisements, press releases, and dealer literature. Based on subtle clues found in the vintage photos, it is believed that the first professional shoot of the convertible took place at Paradise Cove on Malibu Beach and another was at the Hollywood Park horse track. For years, these two photos suggested there may have been two convertibles—one red and the other white; it was one of the mysteries that Styles and his team had to resolve as they conducted their research. The first print ad—titled "Carroll Shelby has gone and done it!"—appeared in November 1967 issues of *Road & Track*, *Car Life* and *Playboy*. In some of the test reports, Styles mentioned, journalists appear to have been the first to be deceived by this car, since they praised its performance and handling as being better than the 1967 Shelby cars. As Styles says, "This car was intended to fool people, and it has been successfully doing so for the last 46 years."

By November 1967, the print ads introducing the '68 Shelby GT cars had been published, the Shelby American operation facility in Los Angeles

had closed, a small staff was relocated to Ionia, Michigan, and the GT convertible was returned to Dearborn. Because the Shelby GT convertible was a regular production car that retained all its original driveline and federally mandated safety equipment, Ford made the decision to sell the vehicle through its employee purchase and auction resale lot (commonly referred to as the "B-lot"). Styles noted that "Many experts knew it was common practice for Ford to crush prototype vehicles rather than expose them to the liability of having them end up on public roads. My research taught me that Ford also had an established track record of selling safe, non-prototype, regular production cars through their B-lot."

Specifically when the convertible was sold and exactly who purchased it remains unknown. It is most likely that an employee of the Ford Motor Company acquired the car off the B-lot, but Styles has only been able to trace the convertible's ownership as far back as January 1977. At that time it was owned by Neil Osbjornson, although titled in his parents' names—nice parents.

A year and a half later, in August 1978, it was sold to James Ventrella. Like the owner(s) before him, Ventrella purchased the car thinking it was a 1968 Shelby GT500 Convertible—because that is what it looked like. This wasn't his first Shelby and, at some point during his ownership, Ventrella began to take note of several items in the interior and engine compartment that should only be found on 1967 Shelby and Mustang vehicles. Equipped with this evidence, and despite never having seen one before, Ventrella came up with the theory that he had a 1967 Shelby Convertible. He approached the experts and registrars only to be shunned. After more than a decade of frustration and without any authentication by the Shelby experts, Ventrella sold the car to his friend Richard Kot in December 1985. It was during Kot's ownership that the Shelby American Automobile Club (SAAC) obtained original factory records and inquired about the convertible through a pair of interviews in *The Shelby American*, the club's official publication.

Still, it wasn't until August 1989 that the car's provenance was confirmed when Dave Matthews, club registrar for the 1967 Shelby cars, authenticated the convertible's hidden Ford VIN at a club event in Pocono, Pennsylvania. In 2000, it was acquired by the Volo Auto Museum where it was further verified with information provided by the Carroll Shelby Foundation. An authentication letter signed in 2003 by Carroll Shelby confirmed that the convertible was originally styled as a 1967 and the

Volo Museum restored it to that specification. For seven years, the convertible was a primary attraction at the museum in Volo, Illinois. In March 2007, Dana Mecum added it to his personal collection, and would subsequently put it up for auction in May 2009. Samantha Styles purchased the car on May 17th of that year.

Samantha and Brian Styles were interested in the car for different reasons. Brian was attracted because, "It hit my radar due to my knowledge of the rarity factor of muscle cars in general. It was the only true one-of-one ever built that achieved that status without having to factor in color and trim options, or even the drivetrain. I knew this car was as rare as they come." For Samantha, it was "its celebrity ownership and the stories that were told about it," referring to an incident when the car may or may not have been stolen, and may or may not have involved a notable person and his mistress. True or not, it adds an aura of mystery and sex appeal to an already mysterious and sexy car.

With the Styles' acquisition of the car, the hard work began. There were a lot of questions to be answered about the car before restoration could begin. Should it be restored to its original 1967 livery, or as the styling prototype for the 1968 GT 500 convertible? Did the engine have two four-barrel carburetors like all '67 big blocks, or a single four-barrel like all '68 Shelby cars? There were numerous stories about the car already published, but the problem was that much of the previously printed information was based on old theories that would later turn out to be incorrect.

With the "dream team" in place, Styles began the search for documentation on the car. He researched paperwork obtained from Ford and Shelby American; reviewed press materials, advertisements, magazine articles, press kits, dealer literature and vintage photographs; and even uncovered a June 1967 Shelby American invoice referencing the insurance claim filed when the convertible was reported "stolen and returned." In addition, Styles reached out to former Shelby employees and conducted many telephone and in-person interviews.

In February 2010, Jeff Yergovich of R&A Motorsports began the historically correct restoration to concours level. As the research effort continued in parallel, the physical restoration took nearly two years, and the team faced a number of obstacles and learned a lot about the car. Some discoveries were minor and some were major. As Styles recounts, "each



Above: The GT500 convertible added further proof of Shelby's penchant for power. It came equipped with a 428 cid (7.0 L) "Police Interceptor" V-8 engine with dual four-barrel carburetors.

"Temporary tools were made and prototype parts shipped to California to modify two cars for photographic purposes. Included with these shipments were two sets of hoods, front ends, rear lower panels and consoles. A significant amount of premium time was involved on the part of Dearborn Steel Tubing. According to Ionia work order #2639 the total charges were \$14,792. That's almost \$7,500 of special parts added to each \$4,000 car!"

—Brian Styles



it is believed that the first professional shoot of the convertible took place at Paradise Cove on Malibu Beach and another was at the Hollywood Park horse track.

time the team would reach a conclusion on one theory, we came up with two new theories."

Details that might seem trivial today were completely the opposite when Styles began researching the convertible nearly four years ago. Back then he and his team had only a few low-resolution photographs to reference. Some of the interesting facts learned and conclusions drawn include:

- That the convertible was not built as nor classified as a "1967 prototype." It was ordered as a production line 1967 Shelby GT500 Convertible—and built as one at Ford's San Jose assembly plant.

- With information from the Ford database provided by the Marti Auto Works, it was learned that the convertible #0139 was the third big-block Shelby GT to be serialized and built. The first GT500 was a Fastback #0100, the second was a Coupe #0131 (known as 'Little Red'). All three cars were ordered with identical options at the same time, August 9, 1966.

- During restoration, it was discovered that the convertible was outfitted with the very first Ford C-6 Automatic transmission built, # 000001. Additional research uncovered it was also the first Shelby GT500 to receive emissions control equipment.

- During the convertible's role as a '68 styling prototype, Ford and Shelby experimented with different emblem and stripe treatments before deciding on what would become the final product. In fact, when the convertible was first transformed, there was one emblem/stripe treatment on the passenger side and a completely different one on the driver's side.

- That the white convertible and red convertible found in vintage marketing photographs are actually the same car. This conclusion was drawn based on factory documentation and the examination of many photographs where the team was able to scrutinize everything from body gaps to overspray. Further confirmation came during restoration when the paint was taken down a layer at a time to expose that the convertible was originally Candy Apple Red, then Wimbledon White and Acapulco Blue—before being painted Candy Apple Red again circa 1980.

- Contrary to previous theories that the California operation spent months with the convertible building custom fiberglass parts to transform it into a "styling prototype," Styles found a letter from A.O. Smith to Ford's Ken VanAkin that identified Dearborn Steel Tubing as the source for the hand-crafted components. The letter indicated that two sets of hoods, front ends, rear panels and consoles were shipped to California to transform two cars, a convertible and a fastback, for photographic purposes. This allowed the team to conclude that only a week would have been required to fit the parts to the convertible and begin its new role as a '68 styling prototype.

- Interior woodgrain appliqué, blacked-out brightwork on the seats and faux reflectors on the quarter panels were other aesthetic changes to the car that helped to make it look more like a '68 in the marketing photos. Those photos revealed that the metal trim on the seats was black, not shiny, so the trim was blacked out, as were the snaps for the top cover.



**'68 Shelby
COBRA GT 350/500**

The 1968 Shelybs had a boot and no snaps, so they had to disappear in the photos.

- Side marker lights were not required in 1967 but were mandated for 1968, so lights were cut into the sides ahead of the front wheels, but the rear lights didn't look right. In fact, it was determined from the photos that they were phony—a photograph outlined with metal tape and attached to the quarter panels. In the Malibu beach photos, they appear to be peeling away from the fender (above left photo). Styles did an ink jet version of the lights, stuck them to a metal plate, and glued them to the car to replicate the ones on the car in 1967 (above right photo).

- Additional scrutiny of the vintage photographs revealed that the convertible was equipped with Marchal SEV 652 "spot beam" lenses, obviously sourced from the GT40 parts in Shelby's race shop. 1968 Production cars would be outfitted with Marchal SEV 653 "wide beam" lenses.

- While no pictures have surfaced of the convertible wearing 1967-styled fiberglass, the car's timeline and interviews with former Shelby employees all verify that the convertible did receive off-the-shelf 1967 fiberglass when it arrived at Shelby. During restoration, there were also a number of telltale signs found on the car itself, including: a '67-only in-board headlight wiring harness, holes in the dash for a '67 Shelby emblem, large cutouts in the rear valance to accept the '67 Cougar taillights, and



holes in the rear floor used for a cosmetic, tubular roll bar.

- According to Seat Load Deflection Tags found during restoration, and vintage photographs of the car's interior, the car was fitted with "Show Car" black Connolly leather seats. The only other car known to have been fitted with leather seats was the Coupe #0131.

- Many of the promotional photos taken of the convertible between April and June were "re-touched" by the time the photos went to print in August and September. Specifically, the rocker stripes, fender emblems and fuel filler cap were hand-painted on the color negatives. The Malibu beach photo used for the dealer brochure is a perfect example.

- In April 1967, the car was reported stolen and returned days later. Shelby would later say it was not really stolen but was returned and some compensation provided. A Theft Repair Invoice—a bill—was filed with the insurance company. One important piece of information on this invoice is that it documented that the convertible was equipped with dual-quad carburetors.

- The letters in the word "Shelby" on the nose of the car were closer together than on the production '68 cars, so Styles and his crew had to scale the spacing between the letters to get it correct.

- The license plate in the press photos has no mounting holes, so a new one was made and magnets used to attach it to the car.

- The '67 had a convex gas filler cap, but the photos showed a flat one. Styles had a flat aluminum plate made so the insignia could be put on it.

Many details such as these that had to be correct for the restoration, and they often added more proof that the car was a '67 and not a '68. The best detail story, though, has to do with the badges seen in the



The new designs weren't just for looks—the combination of the new front-end and hood provided a “clamshell” design that minimized hood-lift at speed.

Also, widening and moving the hood scoop forward captured more fresh air for the carburetion and the added hood vents helped to extract the warm air from the engine bay (actually an update introduced mid-cycle to help eliminate the overheating problems on '67 big-block cars equipped with AC). The rectangular Marchal lights set in the grille opening blocked less air than the large 7-inch circular “inboard lights.” The redesigned rear valance replaced the '67 Cougar taillights with those from a '65 Ford Thunderbird. The shallower T-Bird assemblies required less butchery of the Mustang's rear panel, providing a better seal against fumes and dust entering the trunk and passenger compartment.

Even the addition of the new center console provided the interior with added comfort and additional storage. Looking at other subtle changes between the 1967 and 1968 Shelby GT cars, we can clearly see the Ford influence through all the added exterior brightwork and interior wood-grain appliqué.

—Brian Styles

1967 SHELBY GT 500 CONVERTIBLE

photos. Different photos showed different badges on the car's flank and a variety of striping on the rocker panel. The Malibu beach photos show striping that includes “GT 500” in the stripe and a cobra on the side of the car. Other photos show a badge in the striping and no words. And still others had just a stripe, although sometimes with chrome letters on the flank. It was finally determined that a variety of insignia and stripings were used, often different ones on different sides. Styles settled on the simple stripe on the driver's side and the unique emblem in the stripe on the passenger's side. Photos revealed that the passenger side emblem was the same as the one on the wood grain above the glovebox. The problem was that they didn't have the badge, so they had to scale it using the known dimensions of the stripes to size the emblem properly. Initially, they had to work with very low resolution photographs, but they could see “500” in the photos and took a guess that the emblem was the same as the one on the gas cap. Later, when they obtained the original drawings for the emblem, they found that their initial guess was very close. Still, it wasn't exact, so they remade the badge. In April 2012, Styles met John Chun at the Shelby employee reunion in Pomona, California. Chun, the former Shelby employee credited with the design of the 1968 Shelby styling was there with his family. When Styles showed him photos of the convertible, Chun's son said he still had one of the prototype emblems in his possession. Two weeks later, Styles flew to Detroit where Chun produced an original rectangular emblem. Much to Styles' surprise, it was made of Lucite and hand painted on the reverse side. Achieving perfection usually doesn't happen without a few re-dos—a third version of the emblem will be made using the correct material and technique.

If being the only 1967 Shelby GT convertible ever built wasn't enough, 0139 is significant for a number of other reasons:

- The only big block GT convertible ever built by Shelby American (Los Angeles)





• The only Mustang or Shelby convertible to be factory-equipped with dual quad carburetors.

• The first big-block Shelby convertible built, and the third GT 500 built

• One of two 1967 Shelby GT cars to be classified as "1968 Styling Prototypes".

• Valued at \$4,249.76, it was the most expensive GT 500 in Shelby American's company car inventory.

• Initially assigned as Carroll Shelby's "personal driver".

• Perhaps the most photographed and publicized Shelby GT ever built.

Maybe because my first new car was a 1966 Shelby GT 350, I was granted the honor of being the first journalist to drive this car since July 1967. It brought back a lot of memories of the time I spent with a car that you could steer with your right foot. Turn the key to start it, and ooohhh the sound. The rumble of the big block just makes you smile. Pull the lever into "D," and the car lunges forward against the brake. This

car wants to go, and I'm happy to let it. Still, this is a one-of-one car, and it's worth a bazillion dollars, so this will be no joy ride—joyful, yes, but no antics.

As I pull out from under the porte-cochere at the La Torretta Lake Resort and Spa, home to the Concours d'Elegance of Texas, it is obvious that this car wants to go fast, even with light throttle pressure. Onto the resort's tree-lined access road, and I'm able to open up the throttle a bit—the car nearly jumps forward. It's anxious to be released, and it demonstrates that desire by accelerating with considerable verve. We quickly triple the posted speed limit, so I back off and experiment with the handling by taking a few curves a bit faster than usual—nice. Shelby understood handling much better than most other muscle car builders. This car goes *and* turns. There's a little lean, but much less than you would




**SHELBY AMERICAN
DEALER PROMOTION
HANDBOOK**



SPECIFICATIONS

experience with a Pontiac GTO, Dodge Charger or Chevrolet Camaro. Without valid plates, I'm reluctant to take the Shelby GT on public roads, and I have no intention of allowing some of the locals to get their SUVs and pickups anywhere near this car. So, I make a U-turn near the entrance to the resort and, well, that was fun, so I do it a couple more times. This car stays nearly flat as I take it through the U-turn around the center island. Eventually, I get out with a broad smile on my face, and return the keys to Brian Styles, whereby he takes it through its paces with a bit more "enthusiasm" than I used, but it's Samantha's car, and I'd rather he answer to her if something happened. The only casualties from the test drive include a slightly sore jaw from all the unavoidable smiles and a full memory card from all the pictures.

At the Concours d'Elegance of Texas in May 2013, the car won best in its class—The Automobiles of Carroll Shelby. A significant achievement—one of several it has won since it was restored and first shown in November 2011. Additional accolades were earned in June 2012 when it was shown at the Shelby American Automobile Club's annual convention and was awarded 768.25 out of a possible 783 points, qualifying for Gold in SAAC Division II judging. A month later, the convertible was once again scrutinized and awarded Heritage Gold at the Mid-America Ford and Shelby Meet in Tulsa. It will certainly be a long-term addition to their collection and a primary feature while on exhibit at museums throughout the country. Brian Styles' success in business has allowed him to pursue his dreams. A car enthusiast since a kid, he remembers his first car, a metallic blue Murray pedal car called "Dude Wagon." A visit to the collection he maintains shows his passion for automobiles isn't limited to full-size examples. Styles also has a die-cast model collection, which contains about 2,000 items from 1:24 to 1:67 scale. Those who enjoy seeing and talking about incredible automobiles such as this 1967 Shelby GT 500 Convertible are lucky to have car people like Samantha and Brian Styles who are willing to restore and show them. For even more detailed information about this car, please visit www.1967shelbyconvertible.com. 

Body:	Welded Unibody. Shelby-styled fiberglass hood, front end, side scoops, and taillight panel
Chassis:	Welded steel
Wheelbase:	108 inches
Track:	58 inches front and rear
Weight:	3,535 pounds (Curb weight is estimated by adding 187 pounds to the published weight of a 1967 GT 500 Fastback with automatic transmission (3350 pounds))
Length:	186.6 inches
Height:	51.6 inches
Width:	70.9 inches
Steering:	Power-assisted recirculating ball
Suspension:	Front unequal arms, coil springs, adjustable tube arms, anti-roll bar; Rear live axle, multi-leaf, semi-elliptical springs, tube shocks
Engine:	Cast iron V8 with overhead pushrod/rocker-actuated valves
Displacement:	428 cid / 7051 cc
Bore/Stroke:	4.13 inches/3.98 inches
Compression:	10.5:1
Induction:	Dual Holley four-barrel 600 CFM carburetors
Power:	355 bhp @ 5400 rpm
Torque:	420 lbs-ft @ 3200 rpm
Transmission:	Ford C-6 Automatic
Brakes:	Front 11.3-inch Kelsey-Hayes discs; Rear 10x2.5-inch drums
Wheels:	15x7 Kelsey-Hayes Mag Star wheels (The convertible, being an "early" built 1967 vehicle, left the factory with 15x7 Kelsey-Hayes Magstar wheels. Upon being transformed into a '68 styling prototype, it was fitted with Shelby's signature 10-spoke Aluminum wheels, and ultimately with 15.6 x 6.5 inch steel wheels with Shelby wheelcovers. The later would become the standard for the 1968 production cars.)
Tires:	Goodyear Speedway 350, ES 70-15

