



AUTOWEEK'S GT350

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AUTOWEEK

CAR CULTURE ♦♦ SEPT. 18, 2017

SINCE 1958 ♦♦ MADE IN DETROIT



CRAIN

OWNERSHIP

1966 SHELBY GT350

6S289

How Autoweek's GT350 became a family heirloom



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REACH BACK INTO your Competition Press & Autoweek archives. Pull out the July 29, 1967, issue, flip to the classifieds and right there on page 19—between spots for a '67 Alfa Romeo GTV and a '64 Lotus Elan—you'll find an ad: "1966 Shelby 350GT—Mustang, White with no stripes, black interior, Blaupunkt AM/FM radio. Low miles, like new. \$2800. Too many cars."

It was exactly what Sharon and Jack Lopez were looking for. "My dad was racing and my mom wanted a new car, and one of the cars they wanted was a GT350," says son Mark Lopez, speaking a little over half a century later.

Now, this wasn't just any GT350: It was offered for sale by none other than CP & AW president William Finebrock. But by the time the Lopez family called, it had already been sold.

That's where the story of the 1966 Shelby GT350 bearing serial number 6S290 ends, and the story of this 1966 Shelby GT350, serial number 6S289, begins. It turns out that CP & AW publisher Russ Goebel also had the keys to one of these cars—interesting times for the office parking lot, indeed—and while it wasn't listed for sale, he offered the Lopez family a test drive anyway. So they headed to the magazine's headquarters in Lafayette, California, to check it out.

"I remember very well sitting in the back seat with my brother, Rick, as our parents test-drove it, and of course, being a 7-year-old kid, I told them, 'You gotta buy this car,'" Lopez recalls. "A couple days go by and we're staying at our grandmother's house and we hear a car pull up. We went out at, like, 10 at night, and sure enough, our parents had bought the GT350."

He knew it was something special—how could he not? But then, there was always something special in the Lopez driveway. "We had some nice cars around the family, and this was a bit of a continuation of that," he says, noting in particular his dad's Triumph TR4 racer and a '55 Jaguar XK 140. "My friends didn't have them, but on the other hand, (the GT350) was just a family car; we took trips to Southern California in that car, vacationed in that car," Lopez says. "We just parked it in the lot at Disneyland or the San Diego Zoo. It's not like we preserved it or anything."

The fact that it remained in the family at all, rather than going the way of all those other cool machines, is bittersweet. "My parents unfortunately got divorced around 1970-71, and my mom kept the GT350. I feel that if my parents did stay together, my dad may have sold it in anticipation of the next car."

His mother drove the car "until '77, when it got kind of run down. She stuck it in the garage and said 'I'll work on it later.' It sat there for 28 years."



The GT350's exterior has been restored to showroom-fresh condition, but the interior is original.

Life moved on. "I hadn't been paying attention to the car world at all. I got married, had kids. But in 2005, I heard that the Shelby club (Shelby American Automobile Club, or SAAC) was having their annual convention down in Los Angeles. I asked my son, 'You know that car that Grandma has in the garage?' and he's like, 'Oh, the one with all the cardboard boxes and carpet on it?'"

So father and son headed to Los Angeles to watch cars like theirs, sans detritus, in action. Prior to the event, on the advice of the late restorer Jeff Dunn, he excavated the car, removed the glovebox door and took it with him for Carroll Shelby to sign. "I have a photo of me and my 12-year-old son with Carroll Shelby as he signed the glovebox, with Carroll shaking my son's hand. After that weekend, I was like: 'That's it.'"

"It was a month after that that we pulled the car out of the garage, took it to Dunn's shop and began the 18-month restoration. But that's what got me started: going down to the SAAC event, watching all the guys with their cars and saying, 'Well, I have one of these, but it's not ready to drive.'"

6S289 didn't receive your typical overrestoration. "We went through it and took it right down

to the metal. If you look at it today, the thing is super straight ... there are no dimples or dings anywhere on the car.” But, Lopez notes: “The interior is original. In the back, it’s got the hump I sat on when I was 7 years old on that test drive. It has patina; the driver’s seat has a little split in it. I wanted the car to look like it’s in showroom condition when you walk up to it, but I wanted to keep some of the history, too. That’s why I left the interior intact—the way it was.”

Along with those touches, the car retains its original powertrain, wheels, Koni shocks and two Blaupunkt radios with an electric antenna. “Because of how I decided to restore the car,” Lopez explains, “I don’t plan to race it. But I do take it out on parade laps of the track.” Not that taking it to events was the impetus behind the restoration—he says he never really intended to show it off. For him, the main thing was, and is, the connection to his family.

“I remember one time when we were driving to Half Moon Bay, in California, where my grandmother was living. I was asleep in the front seat, and I woke up hearing the engine just revving like I was in a race. I looked over at my dad, and, sure enough, he’s smiling. We’re going up this hill and there’s a Porsche 911 in front of us, and my dad is right there on his tail,” Lopez says. “And as we’re climbing the hill, the Porsche hit gravel and slid out and went into the bushes. So we pulled over really quick and helped the guy. It turned out that my dad and him kept contact for years. Nobody got hurt, everybody had fun and it’s stuck with me.”

Fifty years in, it doesn’t seem like the car is leaving the family any time soon. “Occasionally there is talk in the household about selling the GT350,” Lopez says, “but there are no plans to do so at this time.” And so, it’s still making memories.

“I take it out every two weeks or so just for a drive. I ask my wife, ‘You need to go to the store?’ And we’ll take it to the store,” Lopez says. “With my kids, it’s the same thing ... we’ll go for a little drive, just to keep them involved with the car.” His older brother Rick gets in on it, too: “He attends some of the car shows with me, and he’s always eager to share the history of the family car with those around.”

It’s hardly surprising, though, that some of the most meaningful moments in the car involve his mother. “When the restoration was finished and we brought it over, I said, ‘I’ve got something in the garage I want to show you.’ She saw it and she started bawling ... it had been 30 years since it had been on the road. I said, ‘Let’s go on a drive,’” Lopez says. “It was a sweet, sweet thing. It was really special to her.”

Over the course of the nearly three decades it sat in that garage, Lopez says, “People would ask to buy it, and she’d say: ‘No. Someday, someday, it’s going to be back on the road.’”

We’ve all heard that line before, sure. Only in this case, 6S289’s ongoing journey with the Lopez family did end up with the beloved car returning to the road—and that journey started on the pages of Competition Press & Autoweek half a century ago. ♦

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ABOUT THE COVER

Mark Lopez's 1966 Shelby GT350 isn't just another fast Mustang—it's one with a family history (and an Autoweek connection), stretching back half a century. Photographer Morgan Segal did an excellent job shooting the car, but for a story this personal, perhaps it's appropriate that Lopez himself took the photo on the cover. The Autoweek keychain featured so prominently is one of those that's supposed to get mailed back to you if lose your keys; it was given to Lopez's parents when they purchased the car back in August 1967.