

There's No Fool Like an **APRIL FOOL**

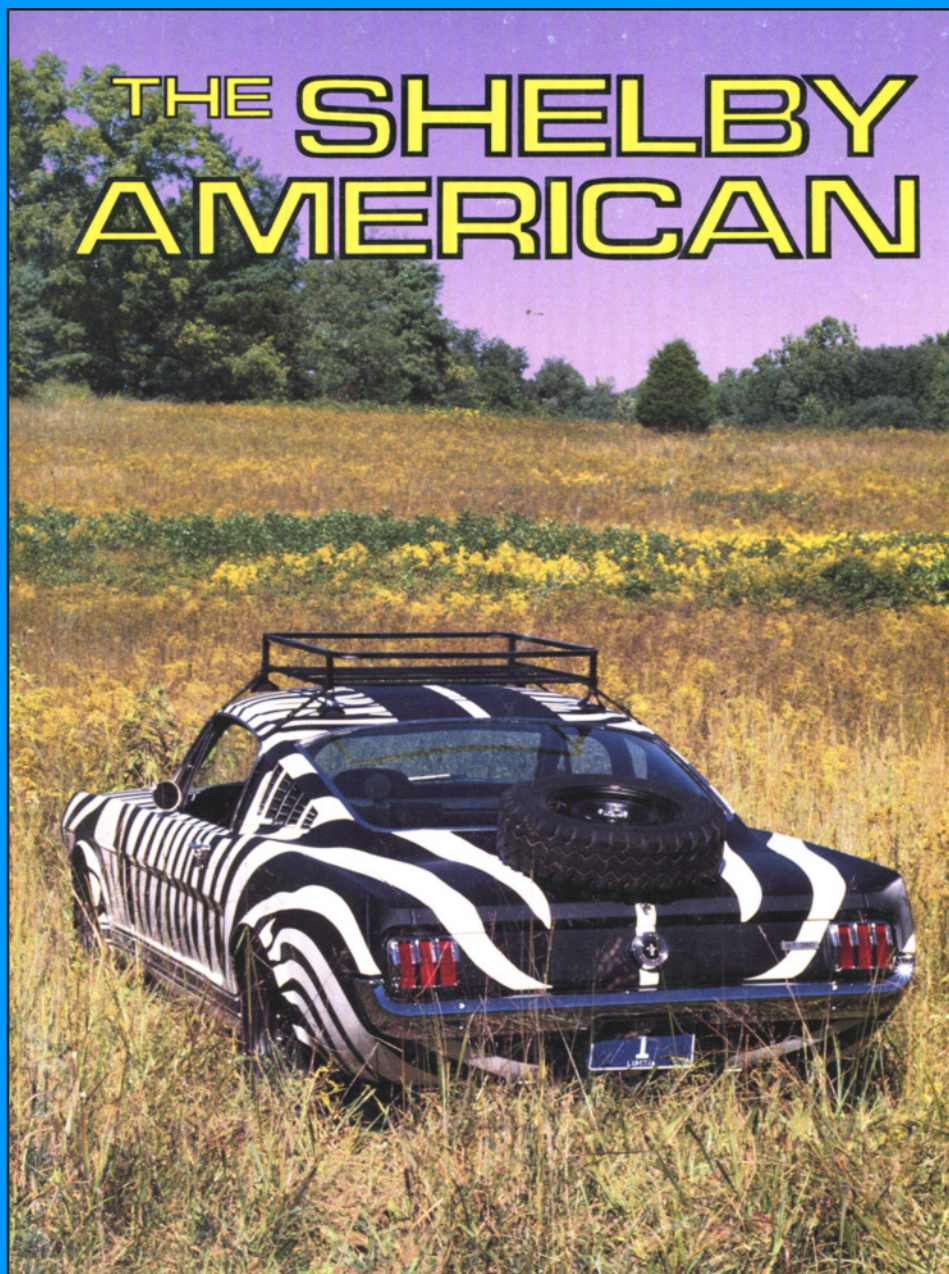
— Rick Kopec

Nobody likes April Fools Day more than I do. And I've played my share of jokes on the SAAC membership over the years—although not nearly as many as I would have liked. Mostly, that was just a matter of bad timing: if it's an April Fools prank in a magazine, that magazine should land in your mailbox very close to April 1st. It loses a lot of its ability to trick you if you get a few weeks late.

Probably the best known SAAC April Fool's joke was the "Zebra GT350" used on the cover of issue #54 in 1988. It shows a '65 GT350 with a zebra-striped paint job, black steel wheels, a rear deck-mounted spare tire and a roof rack that screamed "safari." It's parked in a field that is supposed to bring to mind the landscape somewhere north of Mt. Kilimanjaro, under a purple twilight sky.

It really didn't start off as an April Fool's joke. It began with a note to SAAC HQ from SAAC member Kevin Mellema of Falls Church, VA. He was the owner of 5S152, and was asking how he could get his car on the cover of *The Shelby American*. I responded that since all 1965 GT350s looked pretty much the same, to get his car on the cover, Mellema would have to send a picture with a background that was unique and interesting—but did not detract from the car itself.

Mellema was an art student at the time, and a few months later I received some photos of his car with some very realistic-looking zebra stripes on half of it. Needless to say, I couldn't have asked for anything much more unique. I gave him the green light with the promise that if he did the entire car in zebra stripes it would go on the cover. The idea for an article that would appear in that issue began to percolate.



I began doing a little research on the time Carroll Shelby spent in Africa in the 1970s. I discovered that not many actual details had ever appeared in print, beyond vague references to hunting big game. Lew Spencer, working at that time as Shelby's personal assistant, was a big help. He was able to fill in a lot of the blanks. After a few hunting trips, Shelby purchased part of a safari company in the Central African Republic. That led me to an encyclopedia and a geography book (this was before the days of the internet, search engines and Wikipedia). To make the article believable, it would have to be sprinkled with facts. And to make the hoax work, the details had to be accurate. Where to begin?

I started with a narration from someone I imagined could have known Shelby in Africa; a frequent guest at his safari company. I created Sir Reginald Wentworth-Skeffington, a retired Leftenant Colonel in the British Army. I was picturing Terry Thomas with a waxed, handlebar mustache, dressed in khaki shorts with knee-high socks, a safari jacket and a pith helmet. I had Wentworth-Skeffington telling a story about Shelby leading an elephant hunt, getting lost and ending up in a cannibal village. He makes a batch of chili for the chief who burns his mouth on the first spoonful. Shelby consumes a whole bowl and is then hailed as a God.

Mellema's zebra stripes were a work of art. He used black contact paper and included a couple of really nice touches. He found a Liberia license plate (#1) at a swap meet and put it on the car. He also created a window decal for the "Shelby Owners of Africa"—the SOA.

The Liberia plate allowed me to weave into the story that Shelby gave a GT350 to the President of Liberia who was a friend of his. I looked up who the president was in 1970—William V. S. Tubman. Tubman died in 1971 (true) so the story continued that the incoming president, William R. Tolbert (also true), didn't want the car and returned it to Shelby. That explained how Shelby got it back, only to lose track of it again in the mid-1970s when the government was overthrown in a military coup (again, true). A law was passed prohibiting non-residents from owning property, so Shelby lost his safari company and moved back to the U.S. All in all, fairly believable. I purposely let the car disappear, leaving the door open for a future "car in the barn" story. But I couldn't leave well enough alone. Near the end of the article I mentioned that the car's original Blue Dot tires had been replaced by tires with a more aggressive tread because there were few



paved roads in Liberia. A supposed picture of Tubman's yacht was described as showing that the original Blue Dots had been cut in quarters and nailed to the pilings of the pier to keep the yacht's hull from scraping against it.

In 1988 there was no such thing as an on-line forum. They hadn't been invented yet. Word of mouth between members spread belief or skepticism for things like the Zebra GT350. Word filtering back to SAAC HQ convinced me that more than a few members had fallen for the ruse.

But Kevin Mellema went one better. He left the zebra stripes on his car after his photo shoot and brought it to SAAC-14 at Pocono in July of 1989. Once there, he left it unattended, parked in a corner of the lot—with a Liberian newspaper on the dashboard—creating even more believers.

THE THURMAN LOOMIS COBRA

Where do these ideas come from? There is no one, single source; no tree I shake that ideas fall out of. Back in 1980, I took advantage of the timing of the March/April issue to spoof SAAC members and it worked better than I ever expected. It all started, inexplicably, in Branford, CT at the Loomis Temple of Music. I drove past this place every time I went to visit my pal, Jim Inglese. And every time I drove by I would think, "*That's one very strange name for a business. If I owned a hardware store, would I call it the 'Kopeck Temple of Hardware'?*"

The Loomis Temple of Music sold pianos, organs and sheet music. It was about a mile away from Inglese's house. So, one day with nothing better to do, I came up with the idea that we take a picture of his 427 Cobra, CSX3318, in front of the place. It would have to be on a Sunday when it was closed. But that wouldn't be funny enough. We would have to make the car into a veritable sacrilege. Inglese was a good sport, and with each new idea we would become increasingly hysterical. We wanted to cause the people who took 427 Cobras ultra seriously to grimace in pain.

THE SHELBY AMERICAN

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APRIL FOOL'S ISSUE

MEXICAN SHELBY'S?
1967 GT-350 RACE CAR?
FAMOUS COBRA OWNERS?

1971 GT-350 & GT-500s?
SUPER RARE, SUPER LIGHT
SECRET ENGINE PARTS?

SHELBY AMERICAN AUTOMOBILE CLUB



We planned to start by jacking the car up like some high school gearhead's idea of a pro-stock drag racer. We would use a scissors jack which would be hidden by the front tire. That's when the idea hit me: what would a 427 Cobra look like if it was owned by a 16 year-old kid? And it had to be a car that he had been given—not something he worked his butt off to buy. Because then it would have some value. But if it had been given to him he would treat it the same as every other kid in school treated their first car. The idea began to take some shape.

I got a bunch of speed decals and using a loop of masking tape (so they wouldn't damage the paint), affixed them to one side of the car. Then I painted flames coming out of the side vents using poster paint. A large sheet of heavy paper with circular cut-outs was taped around the side pipes to look like the heat shield from a Kenworth. We also made large mud guards and taped them to the inner fenders. A chrome Rolls Royce "Flying Lady" hood ornament (not a real one, of course, but a \$9.95 facsimile from Pep Boys) was taped to the nose and a string of white pop-poms were taped to the inside of the top of the windshield. We used black contact paper for the large "427 CI" lettering on the door. "Macho Man" script was also considered but it was rejected as being in poor taste. We had standards.

The picture, shot in black & white, turned out ok. The final touch, which more than a few people spotted, was a large SAAC decal we taped on Loomis' front door. So, I had a photo for the cover of *The Shelby American*. Now all I needed was the story behind it.

That started to appear on the screen as I began typing. I used every cliché I could think of. The present owner was 16 1/2 years old. His name was Thurman Loomis. It had to be "Loomis" because of the Temple of Music. And Thurman? New York Yankee baseball player Thurman Munson had recently been killed in a plane crash and that was all over the news. What I couldn't get out of my mind was, who would name a little baby "Thurman"?

So, young Thurman Loomis joined SAAC. He next wrote a letter to SAAC explaining how he came to own a 427 Cobra. It had originally been purchased by his older brother after he returned from Vietnam in 1966. The family lived in Idaho (a state where there were only a half dozen SAAC members) and the car had been purchased at S&C Motors in San Francisco. On the 850-mile drive home, the brother had stopped to get out and stretch his legs and was hit and killed by a semi-tractor trailer. His father brought the car home and parked it in the barn and never looked at it again.

Fourteen years later, Thurman hammered his father relentlessly. He finally gave in and let his young son have the car.

The purpose of Thurman's letter—which was printed in the issue—was to request SAAC's assistance in helping him find someone who might be willing to buy the car. He asked us if we knew what it was worth. He was going to start college in a year or so and needed the money for college expenses. He was also complaining that the car was using a lot of oil and smoking heavily. And the brakes had started to grind, locking up the front wheel and dragged the tire for thirty feet before it unlocked.

As you might imagine, as soon as the issue hit the mail a veritable feeding frenzy erupted with members calling directory assistance in Preston, ID and asking for the number of Loomis or the Loomis Temple of Music. They were told there was no listing available. Cobra Registrar Ned Scudder was inundated with phone calls about the car. Things seemed to wind down as members began to realize it was just an April Fools prank. It resurfaced at SAAC-5. The hotel had a continuous information scroll on the TV in every room and a message appeared, day and night, for three days asking Thurman Loomis to please move his car because it was blocking a service entrance.



BASKIN & ROBBINS MOVE OVER !

Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream's "Cherry Garcia" flavor (named after Grateful Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia) provided the inspiration for a small band of Shelby zealots to begin an intense letter-writing campaign. They bombarded Ben & Jerry corporate headquarters with more than a thousand letters and a petition containing over 5,000 signatures asking that a flavor be named after Carroll Shelby. The result is Ben & Jerry's newest flavor, "Carrott Shelby" — natural vanilla and spiced carrot cake. As the say in the commercials, if you don't see it in your supermarket's ice cream section tell your grocer to get it.

This photo and caption appeared in The Shelby American #61, mailed at the end of March, 1993. It was just one of those wacky coincidences. When I went to the grocery store I saw a pint of Ben & Jerry's "Cherry Garcia" ice cream sitting next to a pint of Haagen Dazs "Carrot Cake." On the way home my brain made the connection: why not a "Carrott Shelby" flavor?

Ben & Jerry use the same basic carton for every flavor. The only thing that changes is the lid, which has a band around the outside printed with the actual flavor. So it was a simple matter of fabricating a band which repeated the flavor and gluing it on top of a legit lid. Shooting it in black and white made it appear very real. Then I put the bogus top on a carton of Ben & Jerrys and set it next to a few other legitimate pints in my freezer and snapped a picture. After that it was just a matter of writing the caption.

There was, of course, no letter writing campaign to Ben & Jerry but it fooled a lot of people in the club. The tag line, "If you don't see it in your supermarket's ice cream section tell your grocer to get it,"

was the finishing touch. SAAC members took it to heart and asked their grocer why he didn't have this flavor. The grocers asked Ben & Jerry. And Ben & Jerry didn't quite know what to make of it. As luck would have it, a Ben & Jerry employee happened to know a SAAC member who had asked him about the new flavor. Word went back to Ben & Jerry Corporate and it wasn't too long before I got a phone call from a Ben & Jerry lawyer, asking if I knew anything about this particular flavor that had appeared in the club magazine.

"Sure," I said. "I can explain it in two words: 'April Fool.'" I went on to clarify who Carroll Shelby was and that this was only an April Fools Day joke in a club magazine. I could hear him pulling his horns back through the phone. It seems that they were concerned about other ice cream manufacturers stealing their flavors or their flavors' names. They took it pretty seriously and that was the reason they tracked this incident back to SAAC HQ. Bottom line: no damage had been done and no further action was taken.

The 2009 Attempt to Prank SAAC's Website

NED SCUDDER ACCEPTS POSITION ON SAAC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

One of the best known names in Cobra circles, Ned Scudder, recently accepted a position on the Board of Directors of the Shelby American Automobile Club. Scudder has served as the Cobra Registrar since 1970 and will continue to do so. In that capacity he has maintained records on the owners and individual histories of every one of the original Cobras, both leaf spring and coil spring.

In joining SAAC's five-person board, Scudder announced that he intended to serve as a representative of all Cobra owners—those of original cars built between 1961 and 1967 as well as all of the later day recreations including fiberglass replicas of every stripe.

"A Cobra is really just a state of mind" said the loquacious Scudder, "much more than it is an automobile. The originals started the ball rolling, of course, but if there was no such thing as a Cobra replica, there wouldn't have been the AC MK IV, the CSX4000 or the Kirkham which make it possible for everyone who wants a Cobra to have one. Today, almost 60 years after the first Cobra was built, there are tens of thousands of Cobra-like

It was easy to go after Cobra Registrar Ned Scudder. As a purist, he was a ripe target. How much irony can you pack into one news item?



cars on the road all over the world, making tens of thousands of people happy. Gone are the days when a small clique of owners of the original cars could browbeat everyone else into feeling inferior because they weren't one of 'the fortunate few.'"

Proving that he is no prima donna himself, Scudder was proud to show off his latest acquisition, a wild custom Cobra low-rider.

"I like the original Cobras as much as anyone else, but when they are restored they all look like they came out of the same cookie cutter." Said Scudder. "I want to show some originality and not be constrained by standards that were set 50 years ago by people with no imagination. I guess you could say, 'I gotta to be me!'"

This one started with a color photo that was just too good not to use. I received it a few years ago (before color was a factor in SAAC publications other than the cover). SAAC member Terry Krystofiak of Minden, NV sent it to me as an 8" x 10" and there was just something about the bright orange flames, black smoke and Guardsman Blue paint that I found compelling. That, and it wasn't a real Cobra so I felt no great sense of loss (apologies to the replica guys...).

There was, of course, an interesting story behind the picture. The car was an ERA replica that Krystofiak used as an open track car for NorCal events. It was powered by a 600 h.p. 427 that was, as Krystofiak described as being "a bit much" for street driving. When he tired of it he sold it to a 30-ish buyer with more enthusiasm than experience. He tried to pass it off as a real Cobra but anyone in the know realized it wasn't. One day he took a friend for a "good ride" in the huge parking lot of Sacramento's Cal Expo convention center.

It was early in the morning when the lot was deserted and, as is often the case, the car got away from the driver. California Highway Patrol investigators estimated it was going about 80 mph when it made hard contact, at an angle, with a Jersey barrier. The passenger, not wearing his seatbelt, was thrown from the car. The driver was wearing only a lap belt. His chest was crushed by the steering wheel and his head hit the windshield, knocking him unconscious.

The passenger was able to pull him out of the car before it burst into flames, which were fed by two electric fuel pumps wired into the ignition circuit. They kept pumping. The owner was helicoptered to the hospital in critical condition. He remained unconscious for 24 hours and lost his vision, but it eventually returned.

Then things got worse. The owner had registered the car as a real Cobra and the insurance company smelled a dead fish. There was an investigation followed by charges of insurance fraud. And then things got worse yet. The passenger sued the owner for negligence. At this point, the fire started to look pretty good.

All this is no more than background for the photo, however. The intent of the prank was to make original 427 Cobra owners nervous with the thought of being ordered not to drive their cars until they were repaired by their local Ford dealer. I'm not sure if we fooled any of them. In cases like this, victims often don't admit they were tricked due to embarrassment.

DOT RECALLS 44 YEAR OLD SPORTS CAR



U.P.I. (Washington D.C.) A spokesman for the Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration announced today that they have issued a recall notice on the Shelby 427 Cobra sports car. A problem with the under-dash wiring harness has resulted in several cars catching fire over the past month and each one was totally destroyed. To date no injuries have occurred.

Robert Harding, NHTSA Deputy Director of Public Affairs, said the highly unusual step was taken because of three fires which were directly related to faulty electrical wiring in these limited production sports cars within one month. "We are not going to wait until somebody is injured or killed in one of these cars before we do something," said Harding as he spoke to reporters in the foyer of NHTSA Headquarters in Washington DC. "It hardly matters that the cars are now over 40 years old. This is a serious problem."

Today, 427 Cobras have become highly desirable. They are prized by collectors and due to their low production numbers have become incredibly expensive. According to the original manufacturer, sports car builder Carroll Shelby, about 350 of the two-seat sports cars were built

between 1965 and 1967. They originally sold for \$6995 but today restored examples sell for between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 or more.

Harding said it was highly unusual that a car which has been out of production for so long would be subject to a recall but this was in keeping with NHTSA's new zero tolerance policy mandated by the Obama administration. Records of current owners of these cars were thought to be impossible to come by after all this time, but NHTSA asked for and received assistance from the Shelby American Automobile Club, an enthusiast group dedicated to these cars. The club's registrar for Cobras, Ned Scudder of LaJolla, CA was able to provide NHTSA a list of present owners for a majority of these cars. Each owner will be sent a letter ordering them not to operate their vehicle until it has been inspected and updated. They will be required to bring the car to the nearest Ford dealer where a section of wiring harness under the dash will be replaced at no charge to the owner. Scudder says that out of 343 427 Cobras built, he was able to provide addresses for owners of 330 of the cars.

MASSIVE ERRORS FOUND IN 1965-1966 SHELBY REGISTRY



If you own a 1965 or 1966 GT350, here's a headline that will cause ripples of apprehension and fear to run up your spine. Your palms will begin to sweat and your mouth will go dry. Butterflies will bat their wings against your stomach walls.

Most owners began reading feverishly, but the farther they got into it, the more they realized that it was another April Fool's joke. This time it was Howard Pardee who was getting whacked. And why not? What would April Fools Day be without taking a cheap shot at Pardee?

Preliminary proofreading of the 1965 and 1966 Shelby registry has revealed that the production numbers for most of the cars do not match their individual histories. At first the team of volunteer proofreaders could not understand how these mistakes could have been made on such a large scale. There were far too many to be simple typographical errors or transposed numbers.

When registrar Howard Pardee attempted to explain how he was maintaining the registry, the proofreaders discovered that he was making the same type of error over and over again, transposing the last two digits of each production number. For example, the individual history for 5S182 was switched with that of 5S128. The history of 5S386 was switched with 5S368. The only cars which had no problems were those in which the last two digits repeated: 5S122, 5S288, 5S366, etc.

One of the proofreaders, Yvonne Kirk, happened to be an educational psychologist. After a preliminary examination she was able to determine that Pardee was suffering from a rare form of dyslexia that affected his short term memory and sequencing skills. In layman's terms, the number 43 would be processed in his brain as 34. This explained why the footnotes for almost every car (with the exception of those with repeating digits) were reversed.

All owners of 1965 and 1966 GT350s are urged to consult the last registry, the 1997 edition, and check to see if the footnote for their car matches its serial number. Any discrepancies should be reported directly to Howard Pardee 65-66registrar@saac.com

KOPEC: THE MISSING YEARS



Very little is known about what Rick Kopec did prior to becoming involved with SAAC. However we recently received a plain manila envelope from an anonymous source which contained this photo along with a note which referred to Kopec's being cast in the original Star Trek television series as Lieutenant Kowalski, the Enterprise's weapons officer. His television career was short lived. In fact, he appeared on only one episode before he was fired for what was described as conduct unbecoming a cast member.

Nothing more was ever said in public and Kopec retired into relative anonymity but it has been learned that the reason for his sudden termination was because he told some gay jokes on the set in the presence of fellow cast member George Takei whose roommate was the show's executive producer.

This one started with a photo I had taken during a trip to Las Vegas. One of the casinos had a place where they would take your photo in a costume (slit up the back and held closed with velcro) against a blue screen. After capturing the image on a computer, they could place it into a photo they already had on file. They do a really good job, getting the shadows just the same, and it's hard to tell it's a photoshop-job. I couldn't resist being on the bridge of the Enterprise with Kirk, Spock and Bones and I've had the 8"x10" hanging on the wall for years. So why not use it? I know it caught a few members because a couple of days after it was posted I received three separate emails asking me if I had any Star Trek memorabilia from my days on the show that I might want to sell.