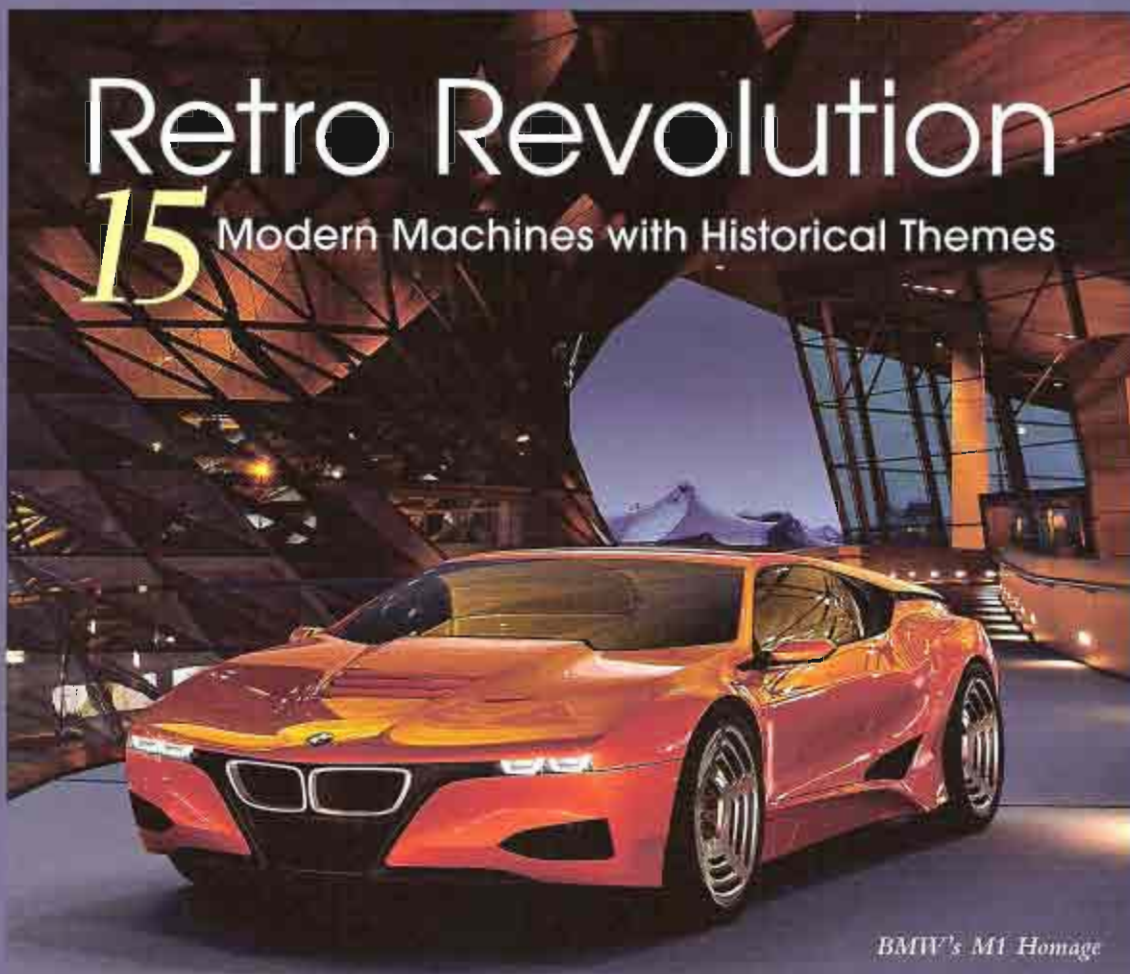


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Revelatory Performance Machine

Shelby's 85th Commemorative GT40 shows that
one good turn deserves another.

BY EMMA PARKER-BOWLES





IT TAKES A LOT to surprise Carroll Shelby, a man who has spent most of his life being the one doing the surprising: Sweeping away his fiancée by dropping her love letters, stuffed in his boots, during World War II pilot training exercises; stunning the international racing community by winning Le Mans for Aston Martin

in 1959; astonishing his doctors by becoming the oldest and longest-living double organ recipient, undergoing a heart transplant in 1990, at age 67, and receiving a kidney from his son, Mike, in 1996.

So when Amy Boylan, Shelby Automobiles president, wanted to surprise the tenacious Texan on his 85th



birthday, she needed to come up with something pretty spectacular. Boylan got in touch with Lance Stander, owner of Superformance—a company that has earned a reputation for fanatical attention to detail with its recreations of the Shelby Cobra roadster and Cobra Daytona coupe.

The pair hatched a plan to mark Ol' Shel's 85th by offering a limited-

production "continuation" of one of the great man's favorite racers—the Ford GT40 MK II, a car that stunned the motorsports world with a one-two-three finish at Le Mans in 1966. It was an unparalleled show of American muscle and a glorious moment for the Ford Motor Company, one that would not have occurred without Shelby's intervention and ingenuity.

After his attempt to purchase the Ferrari racing team was rebuffed by Enzo Ferrari, Ford president Henry Ford II made it his mission to trounce the Italians on the racetrack. Ford's weapon: the mid-engined GT (later renamed "GT40," as a nod to the car's 40-inch height). Developed in collaboration with chassis-maker Lola, the car first campaigned in 1964,



Together with Shelby Automobiles, Superformance built the Commemorative Edition GT40 to celebrate Carroll Shelby's 85th birthday.



The number "2" painted on the car's side panels refers back to Shelby's Mark II racecar, which took first place at Le Mans in 1966.

with disastrous results. Undaunted, Ford wisely invited Shelby—who had already turned the Mustang ("a secretary's car," he called it) into a world-class performer and race-winner—to rework the GT40.

Shelby promptly ousted the car's 4.2-liter aluminum V-8 (from Ford's Fairlane sedan) in favor of the brutish 7-liter V-8 he had employed with resounding success in the Cobra roadster. He reworked the GT40's cooling system to mitigate the car's tendency to overheat, adding larger radiators and fresh-air ducting for the engine, brakes, and transmission. At the '66 Le Mans, the Shelby-revised, Mark II GT40s were touching 220 mph down the Circuit de la Sarthe's long straight. The Ferraris couldn't keep up, and "Hank the Deuce" watched as his dream of embarrassing Enzo Ferrari at last came true.

The new Shelby GT40 Commemorative Edition is a meticulously crafted, street-legal reproduction of

the '66 Le Mans winner. Sold as a rolling chassis (that is, sans engine), each car receives an official Shelby Automobiles manufacturer's statement of origin and is recorded in the Shelby American Automobile Club registry. Production plans call for a mere 85 cars in each of the Le Mans liveries: Arcadian blue with white stripes, black with silver stripes, and red with white stripes.

Assembled at Superformance's sprawling facility in Port Elizabeth, South Africa—and available in right- or left-hand-drive versions—the GT40 Commemorative Edition is exhaustively true to the original racecars. The car, claims Shelby, is built to accommodate only a Shelby-branded engine, with the company's all-aluminum 427 FE V-8 the obvious choice. With a steel monocoque structure and an all-steel body, coil-over dampers and unequal-length control arms at all four wheels, and 15-inch Hali-brand wheels, 90 percent of its parts

are actually interchangeable with the 1966 model.

Air-conditioning is a welcome addition, as is a shifter mounted on the center console (although an original sill-mounted shifter is an option with a right-hand drive version, for the anal-retentive collector). Naturally, the Commemorative Edition is peppered with special Shelby badges and wears a numbered plaque on the dash.

A recent test-drive at Shelby Distribution's Irvine, Calif., headquarters provided a glimpse of the retro-modern GT40's decidedly cutting-edge performance potential. You don't enter the GT40 so much as *insert yourself* into it. The cockpit features a removable steering wheel, original-style seats with rows of aluminum grommets, and four-point racing harnesses. The engine barks to life behind the seats and settles into a lumpy idle that makes the entire car quiver. Caution is not a flower that grows in my garden, so I planted my



Shelby's recognizable signature is embroidered on the GT40's door sills, and the Shelby Automobiles logo adorns the 570 hp V-8 engine.

foot on the accelerator and took off down the road.

The GT40 is endowed with a Shelby 427 FE engine tuned to a startling 570 hp and 550 ft lbs of torque, which is sufficient to launch

the 2,400-pound GT to 60 mph in about three and a half seconds. Super-performance claims the GT40 will hit 207 mph, an assertion I did not seek to verify during my time behind the wheel. With no anti-lock brakes

or electronic traction systems to keep the car pointed in the right direction, approaching the GT40's astonishing limits requires skill, nerve, and a very prudent right foot. This is good, old-fashioned American muscle. The level of communication between driver and car is phenomenal, but the feedback is somewhat brutal. The suspension offers a sporty ride without shaking your fillings loose.

The whole driving experience—the sound of it, the feel of it, and even the sight of it—really gets under your skin. This new GT40 is fast, rough, and raw: an altogether worthy homage to two of motor racing's titans—the GT40 and Carroll Shelby. Unlike an original GT40, which can command well in excess of \$1 million, Shelby's continuation edition can be had for a starting price of \$170,000. ☐



Shelby Distribution USA,
www.shelbydistributionusa.com
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