

# EXCLUSIVE COUPE

by, ALL PRO CARS



*Only a Few Memberships Available in the Shelby Daytona Club*

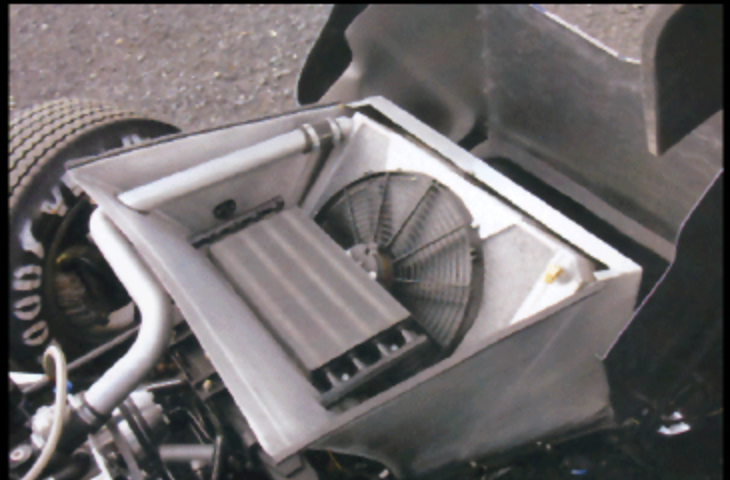
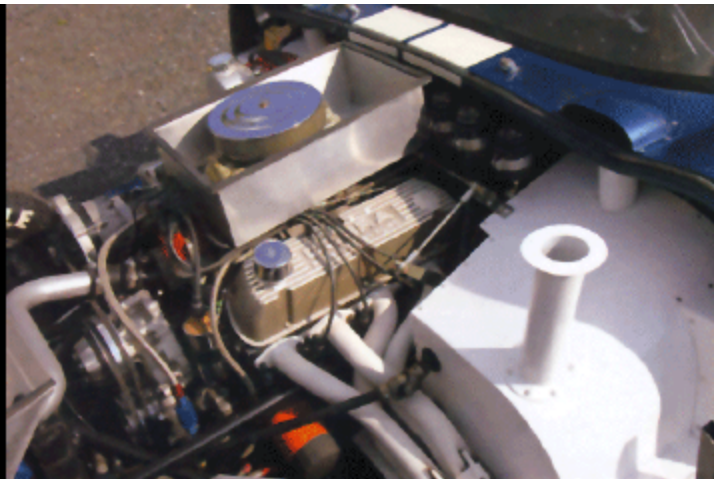
**F**or Cobra fans, there's nothing more rarified than Shelby's Daytona Coupe. Among the most valuable of all collector cars today (one recently reportedly sold to a Swedish buyer for a cool \$8 million), it was developed in the 1960s to beat Ferrari on the road courses of Europe, because the Cobra roadster of that era had poor aerodynamics. ("Like a shoebox" was how Carroll Shelby put it.)

So back in 1963 when his racing team was competing against the best in Europe, work began on the Daytona Coupe to give the open-cockpit Cobra an enclosed, aerodynamic body. Using bits of string fastened to the body mockups, designer Pete Brock analyzed the airflow to minimize wind resistance.



Dan Gurney, A.J. Foyt, and Bob Bondurant, the Daytona Coupe dominated every event it entered and finally won Shelby American the 1965 World Manufacturer's Championship, a feat that has gone unmatched by any other American company to this day. Only six original cars were built and raced in the mid 1960s, and each carries with it strange bits of both legend and lore, as with so many things Shelby.

In the late 1990s, Shelby resumed production of his ever-popular Cobra roadsters, offering them in component form. Lee Benson of All Pro Cars was one of the first authorized dealers to come on board with the then-fledgling program. At that time I worked for Shelby American as Director of Sales and Market-



arms over all the teething problems encountered, he was one of the more patient and understanding of the lot. Frankly, I don't know how he put up with the initial delays and backordered parts, but he hung in there, much to his credit. (I wish I could make the same claim for myself, since I eventually got fed up with all the production hassles and internal politics, and decided to return to the publishing field.)

Today, Shelby American's production of the Cobra has come a long way, with some interesting twists and turns along the way. A number of companies have supplied Shelby with Cobra components. Notably, Superformance has stepped into the breach to provide production from its manufacturing facility in South Africa and some production is still located in Mexico.

A quick look at the Shelby website shows that of all the Cobra models available, the Daytona coupe is conspicuously absent (not to be confused with the Superformance coupe featured in a previous issue. That car is a revised and updated version from the Daytona's original designer, Pete Brock). Which brings us back to Lee Benson.

Seeing this gap in the Shelby lineup, he secured permission from Shelby to produce a limited number of coupes (ten in all), using the three-inch round-tube frame for the 289 Cobras, as per the original Daytona. As such, it comes with an authentic Shelby CSX chassis number (7060 through 7069), so the cars can be listed in the Shelby Registry.

From there, Benson fabricates a subframe and fits on a body made of fiberglass, aluminum, or even a carbon fiber (or a combination of fiberglass and carbon fiber, as on the car shown here). The level of expertise required to fabricate both the subframe and body is considerable, but Benson's background in building cars is extensive.

In addition to ten or so years of completing Shelby roadsters,

back in the 1980s he built about 60 replicas using the well-regarded kit from Contemporary Cobra (and helped in the development of that company's coupe replica as well). Over the years he's also restored a number of classic and collectible show cars.

Since signing on as a Shelby-authorized dealer in 1997, his shop, All Pro Cars in Muncy, PA, has built GT40 replicas, and various Shelby cars. These include a half-dozen CSX7000 series cars (the 289 FIA roadsters), a slab-sided street 289 CSX8000 series car, and 30 or more CSX4000 (the 427 roadster) cars in all.

What also sets Benson apart on the Shelby Daytona Coupe is the fact that he's had his hands on three of the original six Daytona Coupes. He took dimensions off them for reference, and not surprisingly, found a number of minor differences, since they are essentially hand-built racecars. Benson decided to pattern his coupe after the first one ever built, which he says has a higher and more rounded roof.

Breaking with a tradition a bit, the nose on Benson's coupe is made of carbon fiber to reduce weight, but the rest of the body is fiberglass. On the other hand, he built the body molds from scratch using drawings of the original buck that he has on file. Also, he used original-style lacquer paint instead two-part urethane in painting the body Guardsman Blue and Wimbledon White.

The engine is slightly larger than the 289 block, but still eligible for vintage racing. Sourced from Cobra Automotive, the 302ci Ford Motorsports block is over-bored to 306 cubes, and has Roush iron heads, topped by a single Holley 750cfm four-barrel double pumper. Weber carbs are optional.

An aluminum four-speed Toploader funnels power to the Salisbury aluminum diff, with a 3.54:1 rearend ratio. The suspension pieces are all Shelby components, with the traditional transverse leaf springs and Spax shocks. Trigo supplied the

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original-spec wheels, wrapped with Goodyear rubber. Brakes are solid-disc Girling or vented-rotor Baer, depending on customer preference.

The interior, paneled in aluminum, actually presented one of the bigger challenges in building the car. For an all-aluminum body, Benson has access to the metal man who made the first coupe for Shelby back in the Sixties. That version doesn't come cheap, though. The car shown here has a few options such as air conditioning. In addition to this coupe, Benson already has two more in the works. That only leaves seven more to come in the limited-edition run. So if you plan to join this Daytona club, don't be disappointed if there's a line ahead of you.

