



1962-1965  
THE VENICE YEARS

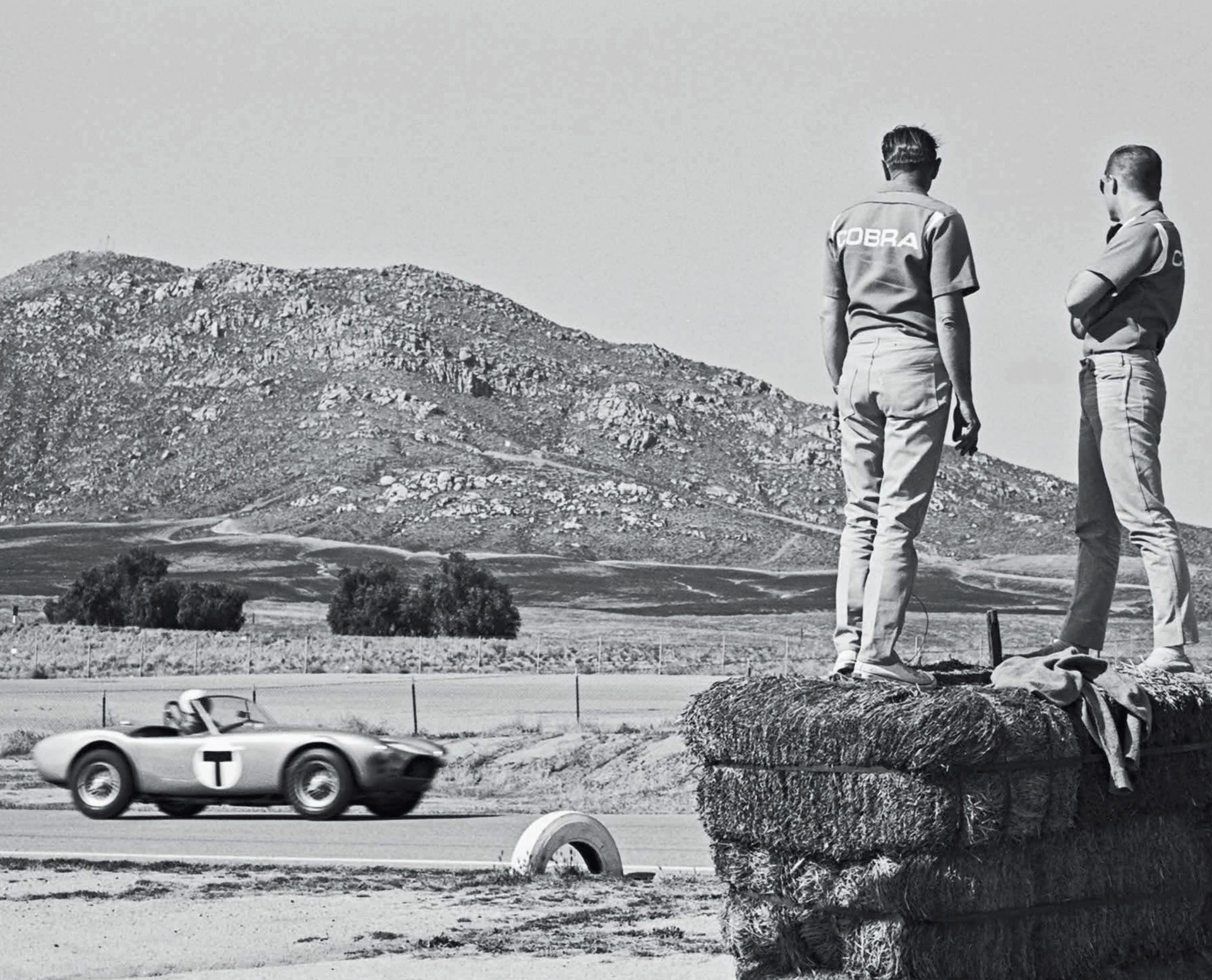
# SHELBY AMERICAN

UP CLOSE AND  
*Behind the Scenes*

DAVE FRIEDMAN















# **SHELBY AMERICAN**

**UP CLOSE AND BEHIND THE SCENES**

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**1962-1965: THE VENICE  
YEARS**

**DAVE FRIEDMAN**







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ON THE FRONT COVER: Entering Turn 7, Bill Krause pulls out to a half-mile lead. "Once I got going we were really smoking them and no one could stay close, but as it was with a new car, unexpected things happen," Krause said. *Dave Friedman*  
ON THE BACK COVER: As the finishing touches are put on the new Cobra, Shelby sits on the stool in the back wondering if the damn thing will run and with no idea of what was about to happen in the coming months. *Dave Friedman*  
ON THE FRONTIS: A student under observation at the Shelby Driving School.

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# DEDICATION

Carroll Shelby had a dream, and he had the passion to pursue it. That pursuit enriched the lives of everyone who worked for him, particularly from 1962 to the middle of 1965, the company's years in Venice, California.

All of the men and women who worked at 1042 Princeton Drive and across the street at 3221 Carter Street in those years were the

people who helped create the magic. Their work bloomed as Carroll Shelby Enterprises, then blossomed to become Shelby American Inc. Everyone there helped to build a company unlike any other, past or present. They made great dreams come true.

Well done, everyone.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I can never thank Carroll Shelby enough for what he did for me. Years after my time at Shelby, he told me in a stroke of genius that I should interview as many of the old Venice crew as I could track down. I took him up on his suggestion, which was fortunate: many are now gone, but their words and memories live on in these pages and help to bring this book to life.

Thanks to Susan Claudius who worked her magic in correcting my grammatical mistakes and putting up with me, and to Skye Schmidt who did a great job in cleaning up many of my old images. Pro Photo Connection in Irvine, California, scanned many images from original negatives and prints. Special thanks to Tim Wright of LAT and Randy Richardson for their help.

Bruce Junor gets a huge thank-you for keeping many of my old Mustang shop images from fifty years ago. The negatives were stolen long ago and never recovered: without those original prints, there would be no photographic record of the original cars as they were built at the Venice shop.

Jim Marietta, Bill McLean, and Ed King were not among my original interview subjects, but they've since provided great stories about the Shelby Mustangs built at both Venice and LAX.

And, of course, thanks to my longtime friend and editor at Motorbooks, Zack Miller, who always keeps me pointed in the right direction.







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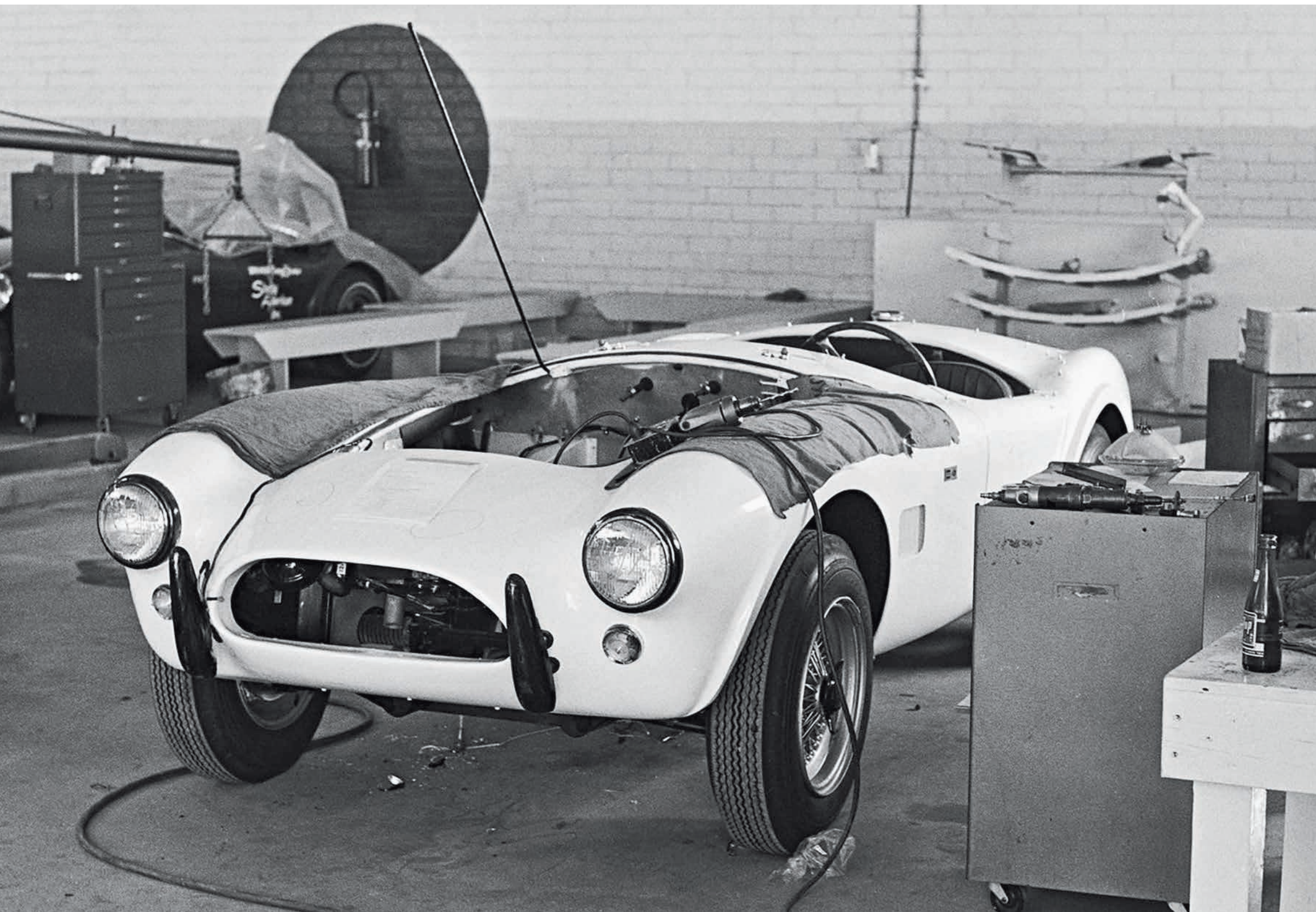
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SHELBY AMERICAN & FORD MOTOR COMPANY  
PROFESSIONAL & FIA RACE RECORD 1962-1967

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# PREFACE

The shop at 1042 Princeton Drive was a magical place where dreams came true, first for famed Scarab builder Lance Reventlow and later for Carroll Shelby.

Woolworth heir Lance Reventlow moved his successful Scarab racing team to the Princeton Drive shop in 1958 and stayed there until early 1962; he employed some of racing's biggest names at the time. When Shelby moved into the old Scarab shop in spring 1962, none of us had any idea of what was about to happen, but we found out in a hurry. The company grew so fast that we were soon renting an additional building across the street at 3221 Carter Street to accommodate the production department, accounting, sales, special projects, and the Goodyear tire distribution.

My darkroom, such as it was, was located at Carter Street, too. I had been recommended to Shelby by public relations guru Deke Houlgate and designer Pete Brock, both of whom knew my work. How I was able to produce as much work as I did in that tiny, smelly, poorly ventilated, totally inadequate former bathroom is still a complete mystery to me. I quickly learned to work my own hours there, because, if I didn't, I couldn't get anything done. Shelby loved to spend time there, fascinated as the images materialized on a piece of paper, but he hated the smell of the photochemical solutions I used.

So many historic events occurred at the Venice facility: building the 289 Cobras, launching the world-famous racing team, developing the King Cobras, creating the Daytona Coupe against all odds, unleashing the record-setting Dragon Snake, re-engineering the Ford GT, and building the first fifty Mustang GT350s.

Shelby was the world's greatest salesman, and he was also a PR man's greatest asset. Ford's Don Frye always said that, after a meeting with Shelby, you had to check to make sure you still had your wallet and, boy, was he right.

One of Shelby's greatest skills was hiring the right people to do the

job and then leaving them alone to get it done. The way he assembled and ran the Venice operation could never happen in today's politically correct, litigation-happy world. We were a small family in the Venice facility and everyone was close, helpful, and focused. Everyone worked their asses off and no one minded. We were young, having the time of our lives, and doing amazing things every day. What more could you ask for?

Many incredible young people got their start at Shelby American, quite a few just teenagers, and most of the people became successful in future endeavors because of their time with Shelby. We learned life lessons there, and our lives were greatly enriched by our experiences in Venice. It truly was a place to grow, where we found our true calling in life.

Carroll's first employee, Joan Sherman (Shelby) recalled:

*We never thought about the what-ifs, we just did it. There were no prima donnas, we just all worked together to achieve a common goal, and we had a hell of a lot of fun doing it. Shelby was like a Pied Piper and when he played his music, we all followed. What we learned by following that piper was invaluable to us for the rest of our lives.*

Amen.

## A NOTE ABOUT THE PHOTOS

Everyone who worked at the Venice shop saw things differently, depending on what job they had and where in the shop they worked. Obviously, I saw things with a photographer's eye. I have tried to include as many new or seldom-seen images in the book as possible. Though some of my Venice images have been published before and will be familiar to many, these images had to be included to tell the full story.

I hope you enjoy all of the images in these pages.







## CHAPTER 1

# 1962

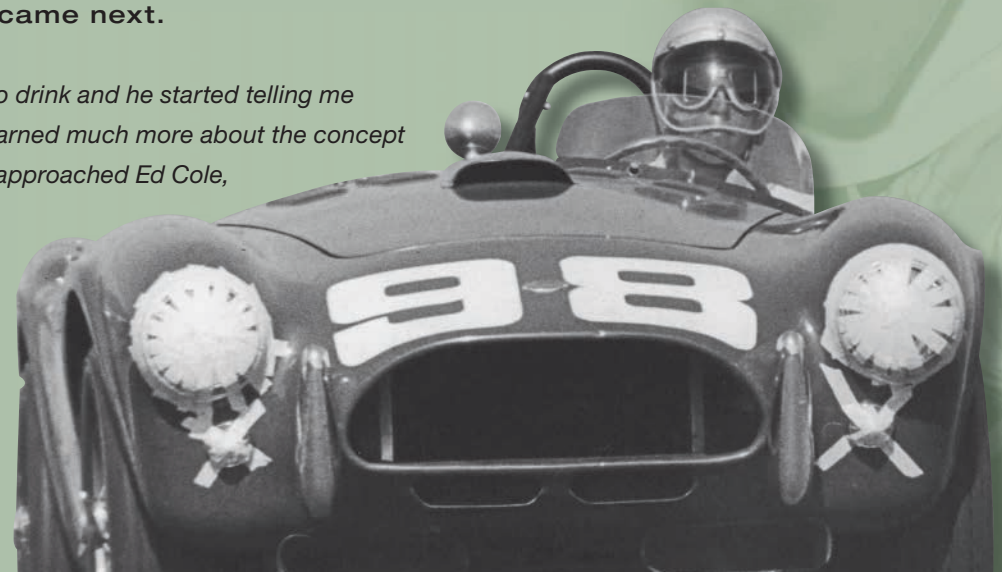
## THE BEGINNING

Joan Sherman was Carroll Shelby's first employee and the company's first general manager. When she met Shelby she was living in Reno, Nevada, and assisting with public relations for casino owner Bill Harrah. Her main function at the time was to help set up Harrah's automobile museum, but she also worked with VIPs who came to visit his Lake Tahoe facility. One day, Harrah told her he'd been approached by about a dozen automobile enthusiasts from Southern California; he wanted her to plan a weekend for them at Lake Tahoe. One of the men in that group was Carroll Shelby.

Here's how she described their first meeting and what came next.

*"I arranged the weekend and during that time, Shelby and I had too much to drink and he started telling me about this idea that he had for a sports car. As the weekend developed, I learned much more about the concept of the car. One of the significant things that Shelby told me was that he had approached Ed Cole, who was head of Chevrolet, about his sports car project. Chevrolet turned Shelby down because they already had the Corvette program.*

*"Although Shelby was pretty much broke at the time, he believed enough in his sports car concept that he was going to keep pursuing it no matter what. After Carroll left Lake Tahoe, he called me several times*





*and asked if I would come down to L.A. and get involved with the project. Carroll had very little money at the time but he offered to pay me, I think it was three hundred dollars a month, to come down and help him put the program together. I said that I'd have to think about it, but I didn't think about it very long, and I gave Harrah a month's notice and I came to L.A.*

*"I didn't realize that Santa Fe Springs was a very small railroad town, and that's where Shelby had a tiny office at Dean Moon's shop. Shelby had just acquired that office and I think we were paying Dean two hundred dollars a month for just the office, no garage space. The thing that was supporting Shelby's idea, and us, was the fact that he had the Goodyear Racing Tire distributorship for the eleven western states. Carroll also had a driving school that he had started, and Paul O'Shea was running that. Bob Bondurant helped out when Paul was not available. At that time the distributorship was no big deal, but at least it was some income to keep the dream, and us, alive. This all took place, if memory serves me correctly, in early 1961.*

*"Dave Evans, from Ford, was a big booster of our program from the very beginning, but he was not in a position of authority to make our program happen. Dave had sent us some old 221-cubic-inch engines that we sent to AC as a guide to fit a Ford 260, and later a 289 engine, into their chassis. Those 221 engines were later discarded. Don Frey was also a great supporter of our program and, as a vice president of the Ford Division, could and did make things happen.*

*"The first mechanic that Carroll Shelby Enterprises hired was Roy Gammel, who also worked with Dean Moon. We paid him three hundred and fifty dollars a month. Roy worked with the two brand-new 260-cubic-inch engines that we had just gotten from Dave Evans prior to our program being officially approved. We felt that Ford sent us two or three engines as a token to keep us shut up until they decided whether they wanted to move ahead with the whole project. When we finally got the telephone call that Ford had approved the project, Shelby couldn't be found. Shelby was traveling and I had no idea where he was or how to get a hold*

*of him in order to tell him the good news. When he finally called one or two days later and I told him that we had approval, he said, 'Well that sounds like a pretty good deal and when I get back in a day or two, we'll get going on it.'*

*"When Shelby got back, he concentrated his effort on getting that first chassis over here from AC Cars. Shelby, with his great promotional mind, had already informed most of the magazine people that the Cobra was about to happen and that it was going to happen on such-and-such date. Shelby was madly telephoning and flying to England to try to get the chassis flown to L.A., and I was on the phone for the next couple of months trying to delay the magazine stories. Things got so tight that we had to get approval, out of our budget, to fly the first chassis into Los Angeles in February 1962. Shelby, John Christy, and I met the first chassis at LAX and we brought it back to Dean Moon's shop."*

Don Frye, who was Ford Vice President at the time, recalled what that first meeting with Carroll was like and how the entire Cobra program was launched.

*"I first met Carroll Shelby when he walked into my office at Ford in the fall of 1961. Carroll had met Dave Evans, a member of our performance department at some racing event [Pikes Peak Hill Climb on July 4, 1961] that they were both attending over a holiday weekend. He had told Dave about the car that he was planning to build and asked him if he could help out with a couple of engines. Dave had sent a couple of our old 221-cubic-inch engines to Carroll and by the time I met Carroll, Shelby had shipped one of the engines to AC Cars in England to work out the installation in what was to be the first Cobra.*

*"It was because of that chance meeting with Dave, and Dave's recommendation, that Carroll came to my office for the first time. I was the assistant general manager of the Ford Division at that time and Carroll showed up with no planned appointment and asked if he could talk to me. I'll never forget that he introduced himself as 'a poor chicken farmer from Texas.' I even think that he*



*was wearing those damned bib overalls and cowboy boots at that meeting. He told me about his plan to build what became known as the Cobra. He said that he wanted to build enough production cars so that he could homologate the Cobra and go racing. I'd never heard of this guy before but there was something about him that I really liked. He had so much charisma, and he could sell camel shit to an Arab, and I just knew that this was not another bullshit idea. Ford was getting back into the racing business at that time and I was getting calls every day from people who*

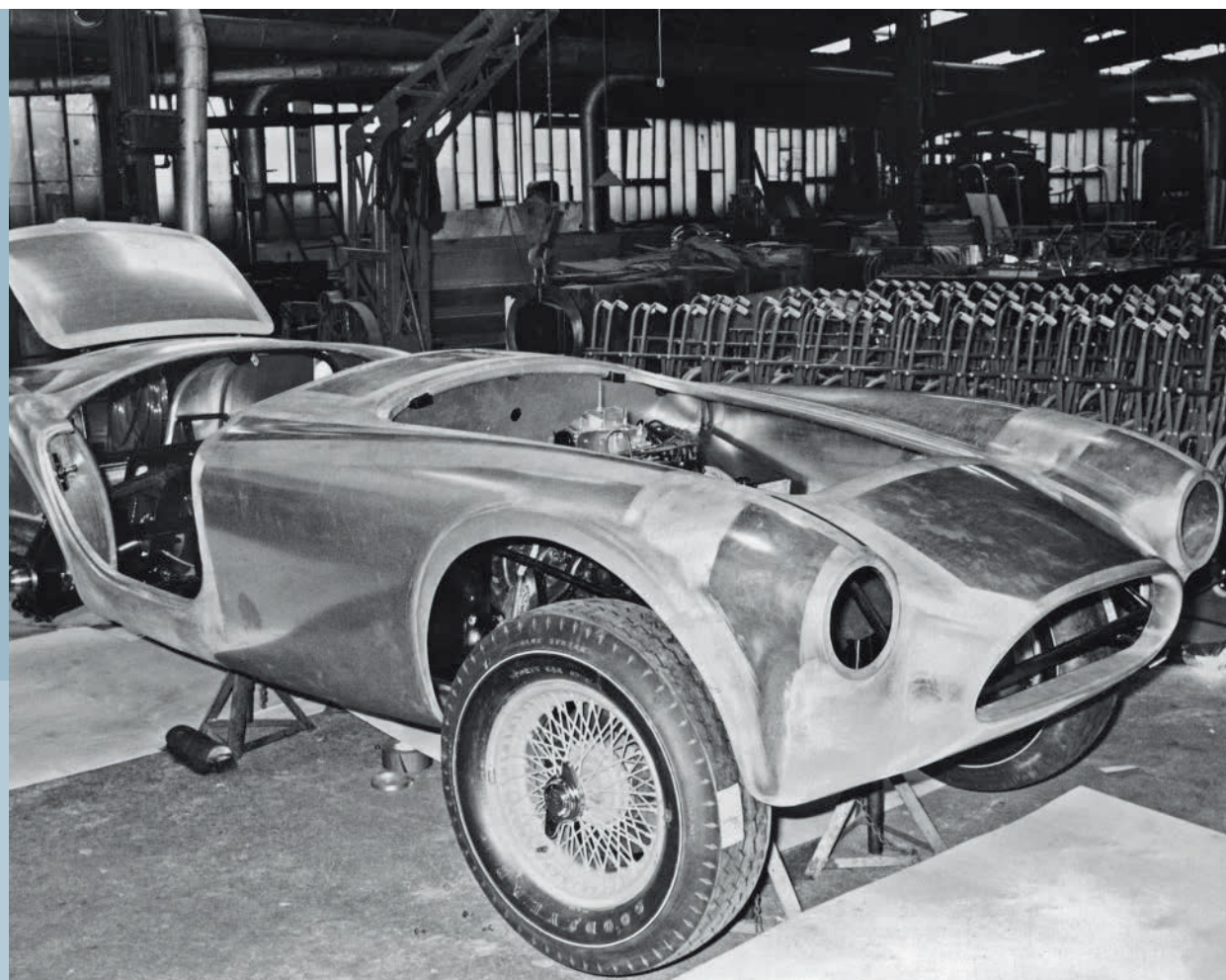
*wanted to hit me up for money and parts for their proposed programs. Carroll had a certain charm about him and his program was so different and bizarre that I couldn't turn him down. The more I listened to what he had to say, the more I was impressed. I felt that if we gave him some help, he might win a couple of races and give us some publicity in the sports car magazines that were being widely read at that time."*

As 1962 approached, Carroll's dream was about to come true.

## THE ANGLO CONNECTION

**"C**arroll originally approached me about building some sports car chassis and sending them to America, but Cooper Cars couldn't do it at the time because we didn't have the facilities or the manpower at our garage," explained John Cooper (Cooper Cars). "AC Cars was just up the road from us and they had what it took to give Carroll what he wanted. I introduced Carroll to the Hurlocks who ran AC and that's when the deal got put together to build the Cobra. As we all know, the Cobra advanced from leaf springs to wishbones and coil springs and became a much better car because of it. Funnily enough, that's how the whole Cobra business got started."

The first Cobra chassis was constructed at AC Cars in Thames Ditton, Surrey, UK. The engine sitting in the chassis here is an old 221-cubic-inch Canadian Ford truck engine. This is the same size as the 260-cubic-inch engine that was mounted in the chassis upon its February 1962 arrival in Santa Fe Springs, California, at Dean Moon's shop. In the background are some of the wheelchairs which were fitted into AC's motorized "invalid carriages" which they built under government contract.





## CHASSIS NUMBER 1

Charles Hurlock (right) supervises the assembly of what will be the first Cobra chassis. Hurlock is closely watching the installation of the Ford 221-cid Canadian truck engine.

**“S**o much has been written, wrongly I might add, about Ford’s early involvement with Shelby and about its original intentions,” said Ray Geddes, Ford Sports Car Manager. “I was involved in the Cobra project from the very beginning. It was Shelby’s original proposal to Ford to build 100 cars to gain production sports car homologation to race against the Corvettes that interested us because Ford couldn’t afford a Corvette-type program at the time. The Cobra idea was warmly received by Iacocca and Gar Laux.”

As Don Frey recalled, “I never expected anything more than a few cars, if that, from the Shelby program. If you asked if the Cobra program had any importance to [Ford] at that time, the answer would have to be absolutely no. I could never have possibly imagined that the Cobra program would become what it did from that first meeting.”

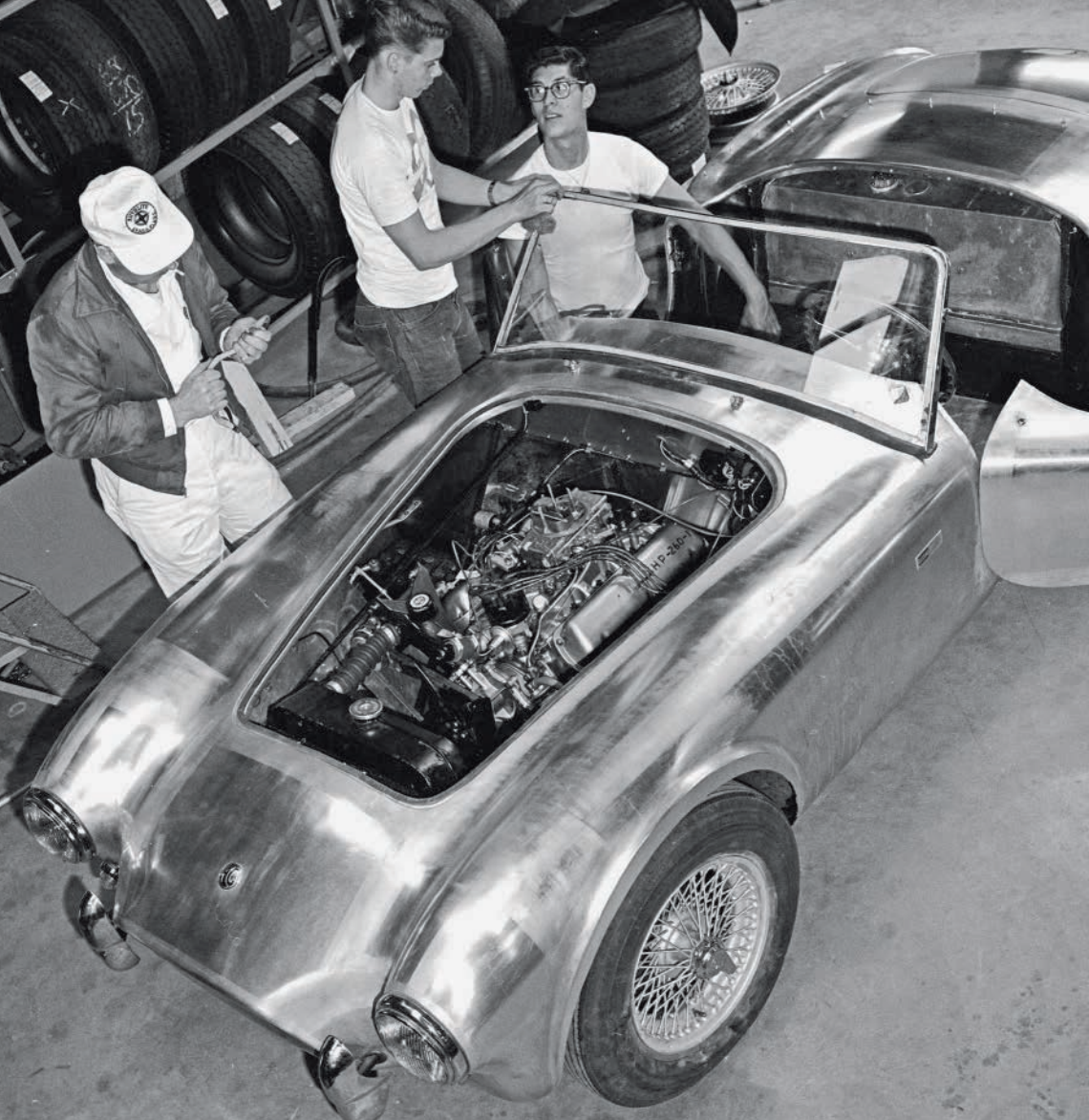






"I was just trying to get that car to run," said Dean Moon's chief mechanic, Roy Gammell. "I could have never imagined what the Cobra would become based on what we were doing at that time."



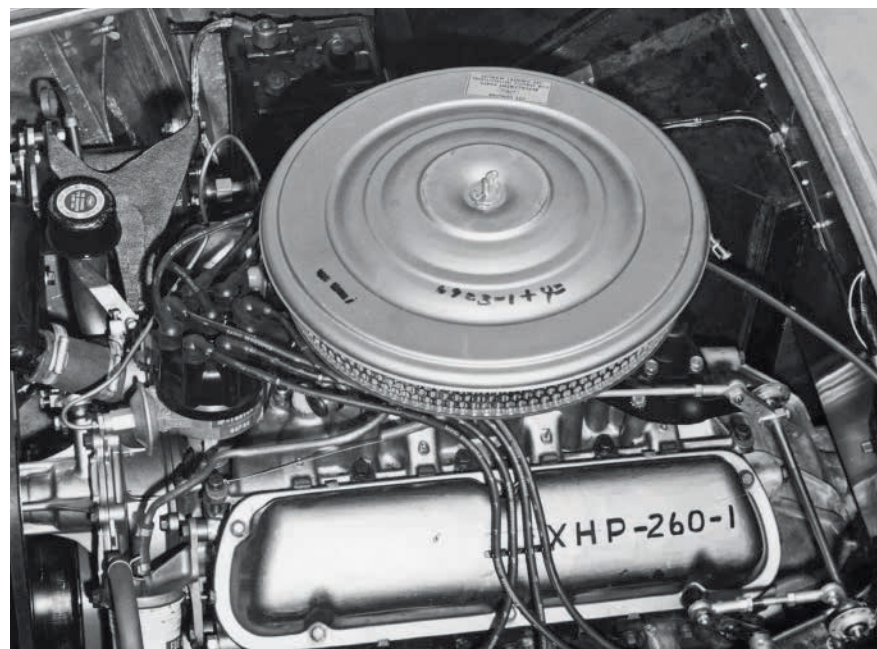
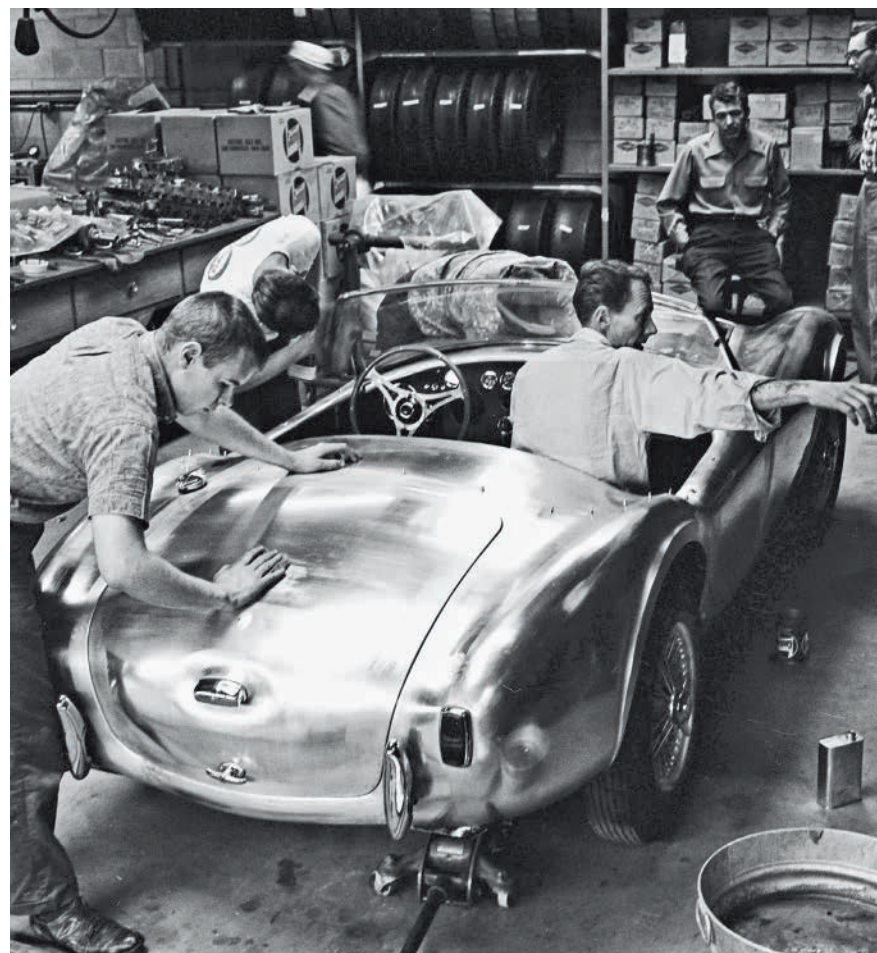


ABOVE: Roy Gammell (white hat) getting the car set up, while his son Doyle (center) and Larry Maldonado finish the interior work. It's interesting to note that high school students like Doyle and Larry did much of the work on the original car.

"Roy Gammell and several other guys started fitting the 260-cubic-inch engine into the chassis," recalled Joan Sherman. "Roy had already done whatever he needed to do to the engine before the chassis arrived so it was, basically, just fitting the engine and transmission into the car and getting it ready for the magazines. That was our big push."

ABOVE RIGHT: As the finishing touches are being put on the new Cobra, Shelby sits on the stool in the back wondering if the damn thing will run. He has no idea what will happen in the coming months. John Christy is to Shelby's left and Fred Larson is sitting inside the car, while Doyle Gammell (left) works on the windshield. "That first car was put together with spit, glue, and rubber bands, and we just prayed that it would start," said Joan Sherman.

BELOW RIGHT: Roy Gammell did a first-class job on the engine installation. When John Christy first drove the car, he announced that the acceleration was "devastating, it would leave any car on the road standing in its own dents."







## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

**“T**here was never an AC Cobra, and if you don’t believe me, take a careful look at the original Shelby homologation papers from the fall of 1962,” said Carroll Shelby. “It is clearly stated that Shelby American was the Cobra’s manufacturer and that it was not an AC Cobra or a Ford Cobra. Ford and AC were suppliers with AC supplying the body and chassis and Ford supplying the engine and drivetrain. It is true that we put out a press release and a brochure with AC Cobra on it but that was before our homologation papers became official. The continuation of using the AC Cobra name was nothing but British and media bullshit. The British always tried to take credit for what we did whether it was with the Cobra or later with the Ford GT.”

The first pre-homologation Cobra badge as made by AC Cars. The crew removed the badge and painted “Shelby” on the car’s nose.





Shelby considered John Christy, editor of *Sports Car Graphic*, the Cobra's godfather. He got the scoop on all things Cobra before any of his motor journalist rivals. Here Christy takes an open-road blast while looking for some Corvettes to race. According to Joan Sherman, "John Christy took the car for its first test run and we all kept our fingers crossed that the car would run long enough for John to make it back to the shop."





## EXIT LANCE, ENTER CARROLL

**“**In the spring of 1962, Shelby found out that Lance Reventlow was running out of his tax shelter time, so we sublet the Princeton facility from him,” explained Joan Sherman. “After we moved to Princeton, our biggest problem was hiring people and that was my main responsibility. We had so many great people that came into our shop to work, it was really amazing. I have no idea where the hell most of them came from, they just seemed to materialize. When I remember the original production line at Princeton and then at Carter Street, I don’t know how the hell we got anything built. God must have that answer because no one else does.”

This early Princeton shop photo shows the original production line, such as it was. This was in mid-1962 when the race and production shops were together. The early chassis arrived in wooden crates and were equipped with a terrible worm and sector steering unit. All of these early cars were fitted with the 260-cubic-inch engines.





LEFT: This early race shop image shows the first racing car being prepared as Phil Remington (back to camera), and George Boskoff (to Remington's left) plan the next move. The white car in the rear was destined to be our second team car. It raced in February 1963.

BELOW: Joan Sherman and Carroll Shelby pose near the old Fox Hills golf course in the Culver City area for one of the first press release photos. "In 1962, while on a business trip in Southern California, I visited Carroll Shelby and Paul O'Shea who was running a driving school at Riverside," recalled Augie Pabst. "I don't remember whose house we were at, but Carroll asked me to take that yellow Cobra around the block and tell him what I thought. When I came back I told him it was overheating and that it would never sell. Boy, was I wrong about that one."







John Christy, seated in the passenger seat, prepares to run the Cobra for a car magazine test at Riverside Raceway in early 1962.



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10820 South Norwalk Blvd.  
Santa Fe Springs, California  
Oxbox 8-9733

General Story  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOS ANGELES, Apr. 10 -- A new, 190-m.p.h. sports roadster -- the Shelby AC Cobra -- designed for fast touring and world-wide road racing competition was shown for the first time in Los Angeles today.

Designer of the Cobra is Carroll Shelby, former national sports car driving champion and winner of the famous Le Mans 24-hour race in 1959.

The bright yellow Cobra prototype will be sent to New York this week to be exhibited at the International Automobile Show which starts April 21.

Powered by Ford Motor Company's recently announced 260-cubic-inch V-8 engine, the Shelby AC Cobra is a unique and effective combination of a modern American production powerplant and a renowned English sports car body and chassis. The handformed, all-aluminum roadster body is made by the AC Car Company, one of England's oldest coach building firms.

Shelby says the Cobra is intended as a dual purpose sports car, for fast touring as well as road course competition. Although only limited production is contemplated, additional units are now being built.

The chassis, running gear, body, upholstery, appointments and trim to the finish color coat of paint are completed by the AC Car Company in Thames Ditton, Surrey, England. The Ford engines will be installed when the cars reach Los Angeles, and Shelby will test drive each Cobra before delivery.

- More -

- 2 -

Features of the 2,100-pound Cobra include 12-inch Girling disc brakes on all four wheels, independent four wheel suspension, four-speed transmission, fully synchronized with close ratio gears, individual seats with genuine leather upholstery, all weather top, wire wheels, dual radio and heater, full instrumentation including tachometer, adjustable steering wheel, a choice of gear ratios and a selection of optional equipment.

The car has a suggested list price of \$5,995.

The basic powerplant, the Ford 260-cubic-inch V-8 offered as an optional engine in the 1962 Fairlane and Fairlane 500, has been modified slightly with solid valve lifters, larger valves and other components that alter the compression ratio for higher performance. With a 3.54 to 1 final drive ratio, the top speed of the car is rated at 150 m.p.h. Other engine modifications -- multiple carburetion, special camshaft and higher compression -- increase the output to 335 bhp. for competition in "A" Production class.

"The Cobra is designed as a threat to the cars that now dominate the world's sports car races," Shelby said. "I believe this is the right type of sports car for the American driver who wants performance with no sacrifice in normal driving reliability. The Cobra is made to be driven on the street and enjoyed, but it also will be highly competitive in all types of events, including Le Mans and other demanding races."

"I knew the reputation of the AC sports cars for their handling and clean design. When Ford Motor Company announced its new Lightweight V-8s this year, I knew the powerplant I needed was available."

- More -

- 3 -

The new V-8 engine achieves its light weight with a thin-wall casting technique which Ford pioneered in the auto industry. The engine weighs less than the two litre (121-cubic-inch) Bristol which was used in previous AC cars, but the Ford V-8 develops almost twice as much horsepower. It has a bore and stroke of 3.6 in. by 2.875 in. and a compression ratio of 10 to 1.

A single four-barrel carburetor tops the basic engine (for Class "3" Production sports car racing), but engine options up to 335 bhp. will be offered. Optional equipment includes racing camshaft, higher compression ratio, Weber carburetors and supercharger.

The Ford four-speed transmission has close ratio gears, floor shift and a short, positive throw, reverse inhibitor.

Shelby designed the body with a streamlined nose and flared wheel cutouts. The aluminum body is hand crafted and finished with 12 coats of acrylic lacquer. Coachwork and trim are of the same high quality which characterized the AC Bristol and Aceda cars. A folding convertible top, with movable lucite side curtains, is available as an option.

Although the output of the 260-cubic-inch engine and independent suspension give the Cobra excellent handling, the rear axle halves. Dual disc brakes on all four wheels. The Shelby AC Cobra is available at 10820 South Norwalk Blvd., Santa Fe Springs, California.

**PREVIEW—SHELBY 260 CUBIC INCH AC COBRA**

ROAD TESTS—MGA MK. II  
COMPETITION, PEUGEOT 404

**SPORTS CAR GRAPHIC**  
Combined with  
**MOTOR LIFE TECHNICAL—MAGNAFLUXING**

MAY 1962 50¢

**EXCLUSIVE TRACK & TECH REPORT—CHEVROLET'S 200 MPH EXPERIMENTAL... CERV I**



TOP: The first press release to announce the Cobra project. Note how "AC Cobra" is circled on page one, to make sure it will be deleted from future releases.

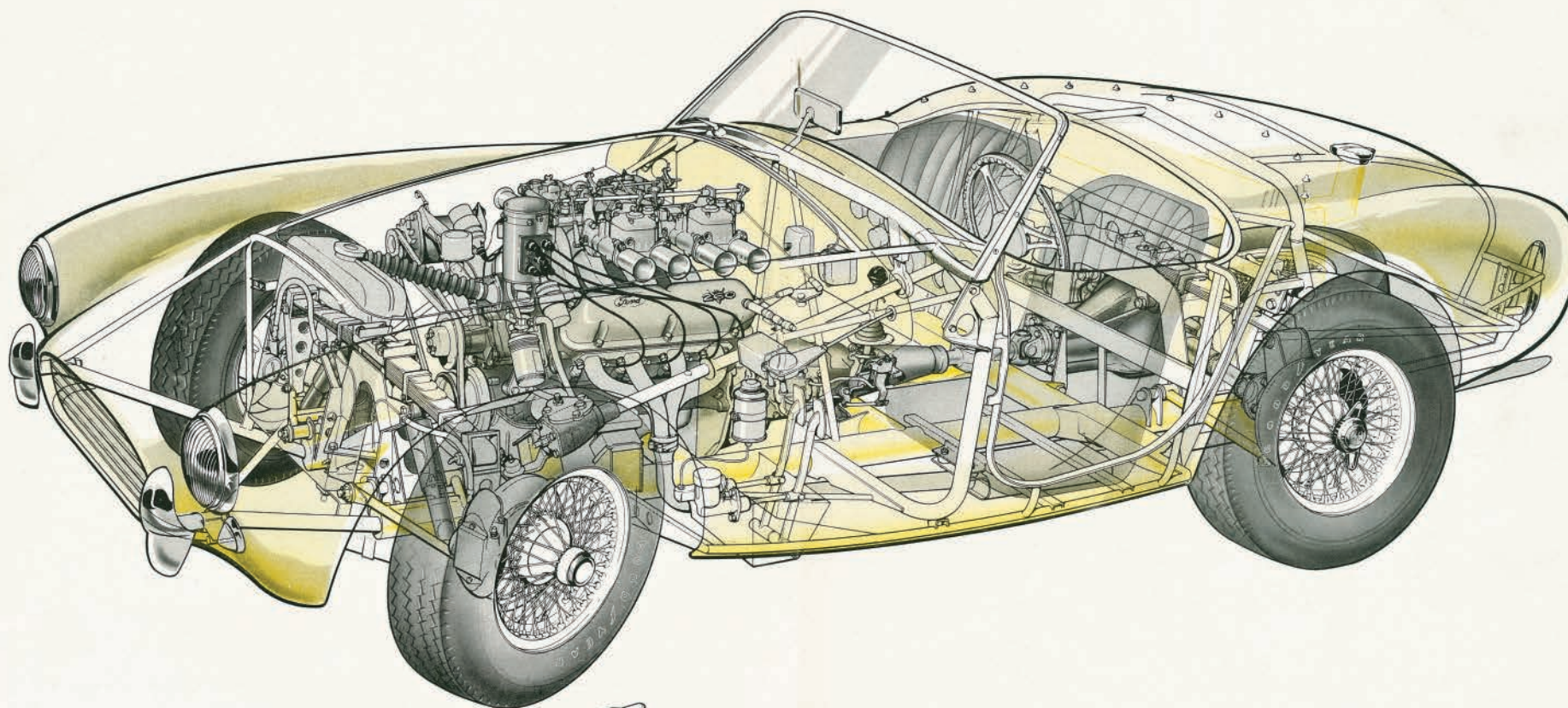
LEFT: The first Cobra sales brochure.

ABOVE: The May 1962 issue of *Sports Car Graphic* with the first preview report of the new Cobra. As the article said, "The engine can only be described as explosive, and for those wishing to cause consternation in the big, hairy Production classes, the line forms on the right."

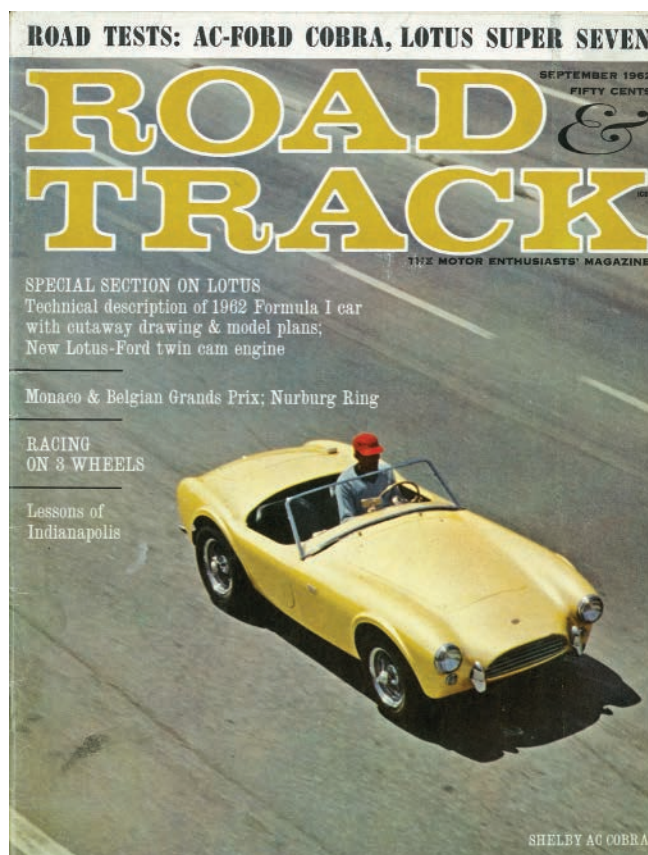


**SHELBY AC COBRA**  
**POWERED BY FORD**





**SHELBY AC COBRA**



ABOVE AND FAR LEFT: The first full road test and technical report of the Cobra's performance appeared in the August 1962 *Sports Car Graphic*. It featured this detailed cutaway drawing of the Cobra 260. Note that the engine shows the never-used Weber carburetor manifold. "Shelby said 'buy it or watch it go by.' Put differently, the Cobra is one way to go superfast and save \$10,000."

LEFT: *Road & Track* ran their Cobra road test in September 1962. "The Cobra is a sports car with more sport than anything available and the brakes are the best we have ever tried."