



**“I love this car!  
It hasn't  
changed at all!”**

**THE CAR... AND DRIVER...  
THAT TAUGHT FERRARI  
ABOUT THE USA.**

## AMERICAN RACING'S CROWN JEWEL

**Bob Bondurant and his 1965 Shelby Daytona Cobra Coupe beat Ferrari to capture the first US victory in World Manufacturers Championship**

The 1965 Shelby Daytona Cobra Coupe CSX2601 was one of six cars built by Carroll Shelby to compete against the dominating Ferrari in the F.I.A. (Federation Internationale de l'Automobile) World Manufacturers Championship for GT race class. An experimental coupe body designed by Pete Brock was built on an existing Cobra chassis, immediately increasing the top speed by 25 mph. That car won its first race, the 1964 Daytona Continental (prompting Shelby to adopt the name), and five more coupes were built, including CSX2601.

After competing at Daytona, Monza, Spa and Nürburgring, CSX2601 made history when it clinched the 1965 World Manufacturers Championship for the United States and Shelby American on July 4 in Reims, France.

Driving the car—and America—to victory on that fateful July afternoon was Phoenix's own legendary driver Bob Bondurant.

“I won a lot of races with this Daytona Cobra Coupe, but when I crossed the finish line at the Reims race track I yelled ‘Yes!’ It was a fantastic feeling,” Bondurant shared. “I always wanted to race in Europe against the world's best drivers. Winning that World Championship was the crowning achievement of my career. I think it's wonderful that the car is being showcased 40 years later.”

High performance collector car specialists Mecum Auction will offer collectors a chance to own this piece of American race history when they auction 1965 Shelby Daytona Cobra Coupe CSX2601 during the 22nd Dana Mecum Original Spring Classic Auction, May 13-17 in Indianapolis.

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Photo courtesy of David Friedman

Event photos: Drew Phillips • Historic photo courtesy of David Friedman



Mecum anticipates this Crown Jewel of American Racing will garner the highest bid ever paid at public auction for an American automobile—eight figures and counting. The Shelby Daytona Cobra Coupe will be sold live on national TV, Friday May 15 at 8:00pm EST during the series “Mecum Auto Auction: Muscle Cars & More,” on Discovery’s HD Theater.

“This car is a true slice of Americana, representing a different time in America’s past when driving a full-blown race car on the roads didn’t turn heads,” added Mecum. “The Daytona was also leased to Paramount Pictures for use in the Howard Hawks cult classic *Redline 7000*.”

A group had gathered at the Bondurant School in March to witness Bob Bondurant’s chance to drive the car for the first time in decades. Present were Bob himself, racer/engineer Peter Brock, Mecum Auctions president Dana Mecum, anxious representatives from Haggerty Insurance, staff and executives from the Bondurant School and Firebird International Raceway, and a phalanx of fascinated media. Peter Brock declared that the beauty of this car is that it combined an English chassis, a US engine and an Italian body. The engine was a production unit from a 1963 Ford Fairlane—and it beat Ferrari. Or “whipped” Ferrari, as Mecum proudly proclaimed. So with the car going to high-stakes auction, said Mecum, “Bob will drive it to another record!” The day’s event was the kickoff of a pre-auction tour, with the car then making appearances at Amelia Island, Sebring and other high-profile venues, before heading to Indianapolis.

The car bore a standard Ford Fairlane V-8 and a stock 4-speed transmission. This was the last car really designed by the whole team while at Shelby. Phil Remington engineered the chassis, which Brock says is the prime reason the car was so successful.

As much as the car had been brainstormed, built and revised, its chopped-off tail was very controversial when introduced. But they ran the car at Riverside, where it promptly beat the track record by three seconds; acceptance of the odd new style was then swift. Prior designs were “like pushing a brick through the air,” says Bondurant. (Before Brock, came brick?) There was a bit of a problem in the day, in that some mechanics just plain wouldn’t work on the car. The chopped-off K-tail created an aerodynamic line that otherwise would have taken many more feet of body length to achieve—yet very little was lost in the adaptation.

By driver suggestion, a spoiler was added later, though there was much resistance to the idea. Phil Hill took the 2287 prototype up to just 130-140 mph through the curves and came back to the pits declaring, “that car has the devil in it; I won’t drive it.”

So they added the spoiler, just a bit of aluminum and four rivets. Hill took the car back out and said the change was basically great, but there was too much downforce on the front brakes. So the team took metal snips, clipped about an inch off both ends, and presto—the thing worked like a charm, and the spoiler has never been changed, right up to today. And the car won its races.

Bondurant drove it in six of its eight races. The rules were different then: you could change the body, change the chassis; in fact, they were able to gain so much efficiency via body changes that this car could probably achieve 200 mph. The Daytona Coupe hit 197 mph at Le Mans with Dan Gurney at the wheel (and with just 275 hp under the hood).

The 1965 Championship in Reims was the ultimate proof of concept: a team of just eight with one small toolbox went to the races and beat the best that Ferrari had.

The car was so successful, in fact, that the sanctioning bodies went on to change the rules. As happens so often, something this much fun meant less fun going forward, and the cars became very sophisticated after that. The Daytona Coupe could not only handle streets, but could even traverse a railroad crossing. But while that had been a car that could be driven anywhere, any time, the new cars were track-only, intended to operate on billiard-table-smooth surfaces. The next car from this basic team was the Ford GT40. Okay, so there was still some fun to be had.

Bondurant set the lap record (14 miles) at the Nürburgring in this car, a record that stood for 15 years. His last race in the Daytona Coupe was at Monza, Italy, where he just couldn’t beat the homegrown drivers on their own track.

Bob last drove the car 20 years ago at Monterey, and he did get to sit in it just a couple of months before this spring’s event.

So how would it be today, to get back behind the wheel and hit the Bondurant course at Firebird International Raceway? Bob wasn’t so sure. He reminded us that each bucket seat was sized and shaped to the driver, and whereas he was 175 pounds then, he weighs in at 200 now.

The car’s chassis is described as antique, with transverse springs. It really grips when braking, but they make it clear that it is *not* easy to drive.

And did it work out? His enthusiasm on the track was unmistakable. We suspected that if it were possible, he might never come back in. But when he did, he proclaimed “I love that car! It hasn’t changed at all!” An enthusiastic grin and fresh sweat bore that out.

Bob Bondurant, Dana Mecum and Peter Brock, March 2009.

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The cars were built for just \$3500 each. At the end of the season, the car could have been bought for just \$800.

At the end of their career, the cars were run by L&M Racing in England, not Shelby. When their racing career was over, Shelby didn’t want to spend the money to ship the cars back to the states. If L&M kept them, they would have to pay considerable tax. Therefore, everyone’s best solution was to take five of the Shelby Daytona Coupes out to the North Sea to dump overboard, letting the salt water and the years devour them. They were very close to doing this, but realized they could indeed ship them back to the States for a bit less than the cost of the North Sea dump.

Bob had bought the car himself in 1968 for \$4000, but sold it later that same year for \$10,000, using the proceeds to start the Bob Bondurant School of High Performance Driving. Bob sold the car to a guy who owned gas stations and drove it 300 miles a day to collect his receipts. As Brock noted, this is a car you can “drive any time and can get parts at NAPA.”

When the car came back, it was entered in a number of hill-climb and other events. The growth of vintage racing ultimately started values climbing. There are currently four in the US, one in Europe (amazingly, no-one is quite sure where) and one in Japan. “Each of the six cars has fantastic stories and ownership,” points out Brock.

We mentioned to Bob that the car is indeed for sale. One of our colleagues pointed out that he would probably have to sell the School to buy it. It’s a good thing we’re not Bob; since he had sold the car to start the School, that idea has almost irresistible symmetry.

“Many vintage race cars have a strong American racing history to share—including this vehicle’s sister car CSX2299—but no car can claim a finer race hour than the Shelby Daytona Cobra Coupe CSX2601,” said Mecum. “The legacy of its World Manufacturer’s Championship win stays with us more than four decades later, reminding us of one the proudest moments in US race history and a competitive spirit of victory against all odds.”

“As Pete said,” adds Bondurant, “it was one of the last of its kind. It always handled great, and it always drove great.”

Now fully restored and wearing its famous Reims livery, the Shelby Daytona Cobra CSX2601 headlines the Original Spring Classis Auction, which is expected to feature 1,250 vehicles. Held at the Indiana State Fairgrounds, the auction is open to the general public with tickets available at the door for \$10. Consignment, bidder, event and accommodation information is available online at [www.Mecum.com](http://www.Mecum.com) or by calling 815.568.8888. ■

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