

## Shelby-DeTomaso P70 Can Am Racer



Carroll Shelby's Cobra roadsters had already won the SCCA's United States Road Racing Championship in 1963 and were well on their way to winning again in '64 with a couple of mid-engined Cobra-powered Coopers called "King Cobras", when Shelby realized that 1965 was already shaping to be a far more competitive season than the first two. A variety of rumored new Sports Racers from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Italy and America were already threatening Shelby's dominance in the series. The USSRC would eventually morph into the greatest, most innovative, and highest paying racing series in the world, the Can Am, so every serious constructor and engine builder was planning ahead. The Texan's 4.7 liter "289 Ford" Cobra engines had been strong and reliable for two seasons but were about to be overwhelmed in a horsepower race that took no prisoners.

Knowing that a large displacement American based V8 would probably be the best solution to maintain superiority Shelby called his friend Allesandro DeTomaso in Italy and asked if the wily Argentinian could design and re-engineer Shelby's trusty Ford "small-block" into a 7.0 liter racing engine. DeTomaso said, "Yes!" and then sold the Texan on an innovative new chassis that would integrate the new engine with a special trans-axle as part of the chassis! Shelby ordered six for the coming season.

As Pete Brock, relates "I'd recently completed the lines for Shelby's Daytona Cobra Coupe he asked me to design an equally innovative body for DeTomaso's new chassis. Even though Shelby never really understood the reasons for the Daytona's speed he seemed far more confident of my abilities than he had been

a few months earlier. I didn't speak a word of Italian but I was on my way to Modena with the drawings within a week."

Brock adds "DeTomaso picked me up at the airport in Rome and began our conversation by explaining his concept for his radical new "back-bone" chassis. The rigidly mid-mounted V8 would actually be a structural element along with an integrally attached trans-axle! Although I was impressed by his obvious enthusiasm for his creation I also gathered that he wasn't exactly pleased that I'd been sent to design the body for "his" new car! My mere presence seemed an affront by Shelby which somehow inferred that DeTomaso was incapable of directing the design and construction of Shelby's new racer at one of Modena's small "carrozzerias" that specialized in building one-off bodies for racing cars. I could see that I was already involved in a volcanic personal rivalry, but it didn't matter....I was in sunny Italy designing an aerodynamic body for a new racing car!"

Brock continues, "one of the happiest, most exciting periods of my career was working with the remarkable automotive artisans in Modena, Italy. It was in complete contrast to any other automotive building experience I'd ever had. Modenese are more like artists than cold technicians. My carefully drawn plans seemed of little initial value because I'd drawn them in quarter-scale inches not millimeters and there was no easy way to convert to convert the dimensions to full size. I needn't have worried. Medardo Fantuzzi, the genius proprietor of his tiny "carrozzeria" explained in broken English that his fabricators worked "per occhio", by eye, and wouldn't be following conventional Anglo-practice by building a wooden "buck" over which to create the body. Instead one of Fantuzzi's apprentice workers was sent off on his bicycle to a local construction site to get something for the "maquette". I hadn't a clue as to what a maquette might be and with no access to an Italo-English dictionary I could only wonder. In about half an hour he was back with a conveniently sized coil of springy steel wire. The Italian builders used it for re-enforcing concrete. Fantuzzi's artisans used it to create automotive sculpture! Within a couple of days the wire-formed "maquette" had been finely fitted to DeTomaso's chassis like a bespoke suit and duplicated my lines exactly!"

Brock concludes, "When the entire project was almost finished I got a late-night call from Shelby. "C'mon home tomorrow, I have no plans to finish the car!" I was stunned but didn't ask why and Carroll seemed in no mood to elaborate. When I arrived home Shelby explained that DeTomaso had called to let him know the proposed 7 liter engine would not be finished on schedule. Without its special engine the car was obsolete before it had turned a wheel. Shelby was angry and so was DeTomaso. It was a bitter disappointment for all involved. DeTomaso kept the car and displayed it at the Turin Auto Show in 1965. He'd just bought Ghia and displayed it as the "Ghia Sport 5000" completely ignoring the fact that I had designed the car and that it had been built in Modena by Fantuzzi! DeTomaso held a press-conference stating that he planned to race against Shelby's Daytonas with a GT new "Cobra Killer" based on the 5000! He'd hired a hot new designer named Giorgetto Giugaro to create a new GT body on the 5000's chassis. When completed it was called the Mangusta, the mortal enemy of the Cobra! At that point the FIA intervened cancelling all GT engines

over 3.0 liters so DeTomaso's plans for revenge fizzled, but the Mangusta and later the DeTomaso Pantera, all built on DeTomaso's revolutionary P70 "backbone" chassis remained icons of Italo-American design."

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