

Stormin' in a Shelby



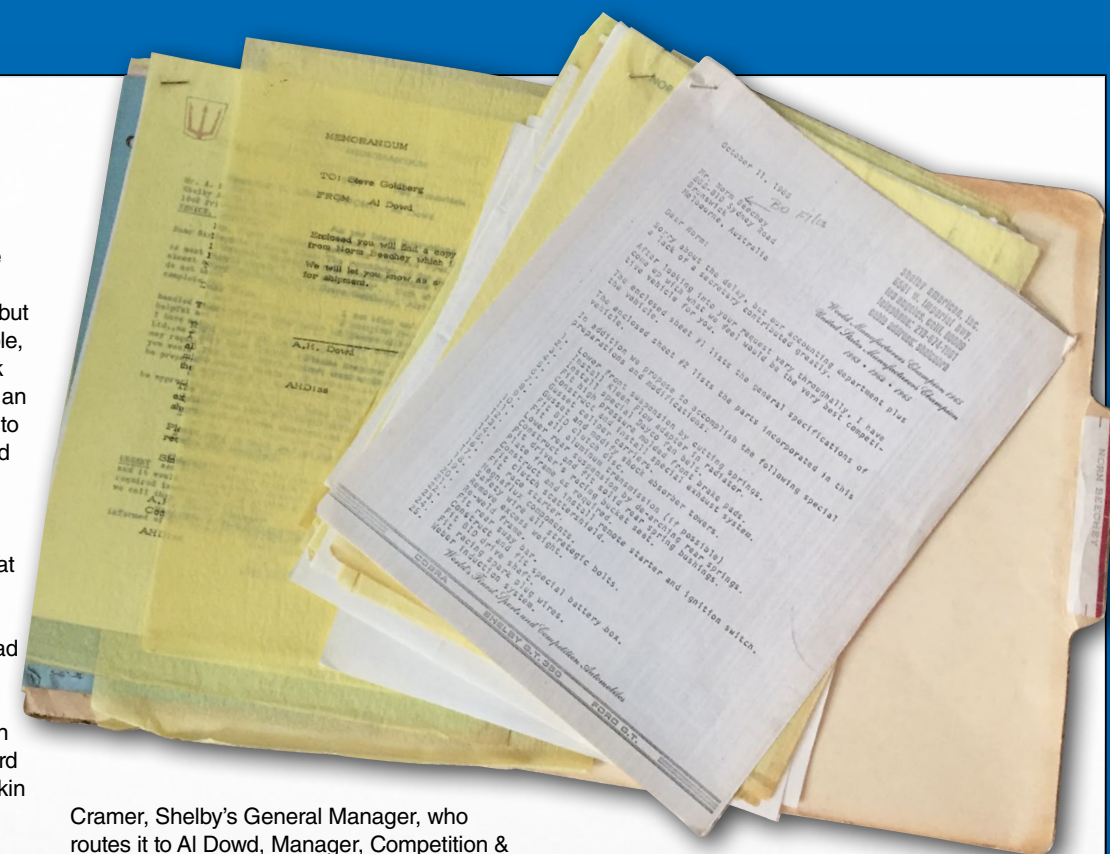
Late in 1964 Norm Beechey flew to the US to buy a brand-new Ford Mustang, the car which 'Stormin' Norman' would steer to victory in the following year's Australian Touring Car Championship. Here, close to 60 years later, unearthed almost by accident from Ford's historical records, is a detailed collection of the correspondence that took place between Beechey in Melbourne and Shelby American in California between 1964 and '66 - as well as Beechey's recollections today of his association with Shelby and the famous blue Neptune Ford Mustang.

Story: Mike Matune Jnr Images: Autopics.com.au, Mike Matune Jnr

Time travel has always captivated humankind's imagination. And while no one has yet perfected it, sometimes we get a glimpse of it. On my desk lies a non-descript file folder. To be sure, it is but a pile of paper, but as we turn each letter, cable, clipping and magazines, we are whisked back more than 50 years as a story unfolds of how an Australian sedan racer journeyed 7,500 miles to the doorstep of Shelby American and changed motorsport history.

Norm Beechey's motivation in switching mounts from his tried-and-true Holden may have resulted from a change in regulations that shook up the Australian touring car ranks. He was certainly plowing some new ground with his intention to use a Mustang as a racer. It had been on the market for less than a year and had made only a smattering of appearances in competition. And that's in the States; back in late 1964, the chances of spotting a single Ford Mustang on Australian roads were probably akin to a coming across a Tasmanian Tiger in the Apple Isle hinterland.

Beechey's initial inquiry to Shelby American asking for information on Cobra options suitable for a Mustang lands on the desk of Peyton



Cramer, Shelby's General Manager, who routes it to Al Dowd, Manager, Competition & Development Department. Norm receives a cable back the same day, simply saying the issue would be discussed upon his arrival in the US,

Documents unearthed from Ford's US archives show Beechey's correspondence with Shelby in California when he did the deal to race a Mustang in Australia.





For Shelby, I want to see
Dad mid "for all the best
I am ready
challenges that



Along a track
Dad was
I am ready
challenges that

Caldar Race Track (Auss).



At Shelby can
"Hond at road"
I am ready
challenges that



Australian Touring Car Champion 1965



MUSTANG

At one-point Dowd passes a piece of competitive intelligence along when he advises that a fellow from Australia "... by the name of Jane" came in and bought pieces to compete with Beechey in his own Mustang.

list and various notes. The enclosed adding machine tape totals \$5,358.07 (near enough to \$50,000 USD today). Among the pieces listed were a close-ratio gearbox and a complete disc brake setup, along with a cache of spares.

After Beechey returned to Australia, letters crisscrossed the Pacific detailing the progress of his order, shipping issues and, of course, the ever-dreaded back order conversation. On November 17, 1964, Al Dowd tells Beechey they will ship as much of the order as possible. Included in his letter is a dyno sheet for Norm's new racing engine.

As time progresses, the correspondence between Beechey and Dowd grows friendlier. From the first, somewhat terse, "We'll see you when you get here" note, it takes on a warmer tone. Perhaps it was the sizable parts order, or Norm's credentials as a serious racer, or

possibly the gifts referenced that led the two men to develop a rapport. Their relationship was mutually beneficial. Norm wanted to gain a competitive advantage and saw Shelby as a source of that, and Dowd wanted to sell Beechey as many parts as he could to help build Shelby's competition parts business.

At one-point Dowd tells Beechey: "I didn't realize that you were quite as famous as you are, so it looks like we will have to treat you a little better in the future." In another note, he asks Norm to bring him a baby kangaroo as a pet on his next trip to the States. Perhaps looking out for his friend, Dowd passes a piece of competitive intelligence along when he advises that a fellow from Australia "... by the name of Jane" came in and bought pieces to compete with Beechey in his own Mustang.

In February of 1965, Beechey reports back that the Mustang has notched two victories, handily beating the previously invincible 4.2-litre Jaguars. He is quick to point out the favourable press the Mustang is receiving and includes clippings to demonstrate his point. Shelby was only too anxious to connect itself to Beechey's

success. Stateside, mentions of Beechey's efforts in Australia are quick to point out the Shelby connection; labelling the car as a 'Shelby American Cobra Mustang'

Left: Beechey's telex to Shelby enquiring about a Mustang. Parts inventory (right) of the trick Shelby bits Beechey ordered. Autographed pics from Beechey to Shelby shows how close the relationship was; for its part, Shelby made a point of trumpeting Beechey's successes down under.

or the 'Neptune Racing Team Shelby Mustang.' A headline in *Competition Press* trumpets "Norm Plus Shelby Win in Australia."

The last piece of correspondence in the file, dated October 11, 1966, is a letter from Dowd to Beechey in response to Norm's request for a quote on a new Mustang racecar. On offer is one of the 1966 Mustang 'Notchbacks' produced by Shelby for Groups I and II rallying and circuit racing suitably modified to meet Beechey's requirements at a cost of \$6,520. That price also included a \$500 discount "For a job well done in the past." The closing line in Dowd's letter gives another indication of the relationship which had developed between the two racers stating, "I hope the above is what you want old buddy, and that we can do some business together." But apparently it just wasn't enough, as Beechey switched to a Chev Nova for the 1966 racing season.

How the file came to rest on my desk is less than straight forward. Every good story needs a touch of mystery and happenstance, and this is no exception. It was discovered among a pile of files scheduled for disposal by Ford during a search of their archives by author and GT40 guru Mike Teske. While not on point for his research, he retained the file, feeling that it had some historic significance. Teske passed the file to Greg Kolasa, author of multiple books on the Shelby GT350 and registrar of the Shelby American Automobile Club. Not exactly his usual research fare either; Kolasa held onto it until he saw an article I had written on the early competition history of the Mustang. Noting the mention of Norm Beechey, the file came to rest on my desk. As we said, mystery and happenstance.



For all the good
I am ready
challenges that

Agent: A.A. Lendon 345. 5th Spring St. Los Angeles
ATT: Tom W. Dowd
PARTS LIST OK. (Spare)

Shelby American, Inc.
1042 Princeton Drive
Venice, California
phone: 391-7246

ENGINE:	Engine, complete	\$ 729.00
Basic engine	\$ 425.00	
Special cylinder heads	\$ 895.00	
Weber induction system		
Racing oil pan, 6 qt. capacity, baffled and gaged	\$ 125.00	
Special racing starter	\$ 66.00	
Outside machine work, machine shop work, balancing, polishing, port matching, magnafluxing, and assembly	\$ 1,000.00	
DELIVERED 500.00		
1 short block (with pistons - 11 to 1; connecting rods; crankshaft; camshaft; oil pump)		
2 sets of standard main and con. and bearings		
2 sets of valve keepers - .16¢ per valve		
3 sets of valve springs - .50 each		
8 push rods - .47¢ each		
1 set of rockers and balls - .65¢ each X 16		
6 sets of connecting rod bolts and nuts - .36¢ each		
2 connecting rods - \$9.85 each		
2 11 to 1 pistons, left hand and right hand - \$8.05 each		
1 set of piston rings - \$7.85 (two piston set) X 4 sets		
12 pairs of head gaskets		
6 sets of spark plugs for racing, BF601		
3 sets of racing ignition points - \$2.90 ea., \$5.60 per distributor		
3 fan belts - \$3.88 each		
6 oil filters - \$3.45 each		
3 cans of copper coat gasket cement - @ \$3.57 each		
1 spare timing chain - \$8.50 each		
Spare Weber jets - sets		
140 air bleed to suit Cobra carburetors		
Spare set of needles & seats		
Exhaust header plate assembly kit - \$14.50 set		
14.50		

PARIS 70. Ship before 11/18/64
Norm BEECHEY
65 SYDNEY RD.
COBURN Melbourne Australia

Shelby American, Inc.
1042 Princeton Drive
Venice, California
phone: 391-7246

DIFFERENTIAL:	Ring and pinion	1 3.89 ratio
\$ 45.65	1 3.89 ratio	
174.90	1 power-lock differential complete	
12.00	2 axles and races - Galaxie	
16.56	1 diff. service kit	
	1 dozen diff. gaskets	\$12.00
	2 gallons of limited slip oil	
	Different ratios to suit 14 inch and 15 inch wheels (With two of the most useable ratios to suit 14 inch)	
GEARBOX:		
\$ 323.13	1 complete close ratio gearbox (Ford)	
21.60	1 overhaul kit including rollers	
BRAKES:		
\$ 106.80	1 complete disc brake assembly sets including front wheel bearing hubs	
44.60	2 spare discs - \$22.30 each	
21.30	2 sets wheel cylinder washers front and rear - \$10.65 set	
105.06	24 DS11 disc pads @ 4.34	
74.00	12 sets of rear sintered metallic linings and shoes - \$12.00 per brake assembly	
17.00	2 rear brake drums - \$8.50 each	
	Special spring clips, one dozen. (Heat). Retaining rear brake shoes. NO CHARGE.	
	1 power brake booster kit	
	2 master cylinder kits	
FRONT SUSPENSION:		
\$ 46.50	1 set idler and pitman arm	

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4T CARROLL SHELBY ENTERPRISES (DLR2)=
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COULD YOU PLEASE (URGENT AIRMAIL) LIST OF AVAILABLE COBRA OPTIONS WITH PRICES FOR FORD MUSTANG SUITABLE FOR ROAD RACING AVAILABILITY AND COST OF COBRA FACTORY CONVERTED RACING ENGINE COMPLETE APPRECIATED STOP ALSO INFORMATION REGARDING DELIVERY OF MUSTANG NEAR CALIFORNIA WOULD GENUINELY BE APPRECIATED AS DELIVERY IN AUSTRALIA TOO SLOW FOR OUR RACING PROGRAMME IN 65 ANTICIPATE ARRIVAL

Rec'd 10-2-64

WESTERN UNION

OF MYSELF IN USA APPROXIMATELY OCTOBER 15TH IN ANTICIPATION YOURS=

NORM BEECHEY 65 SYDNEY ROAD COBURN MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA (CAPTAIN NEPTUNE RACING TEAM SPONSORED BY NEPTUNE OIL COMPANY SUBSIDIARY OF SHELLCO OF AUSTRALIA)=

65 15TH 65

Beechey's recollections

When AMC's US correspondent Mike Matune Jnr sent us this remarkable set of documents showing the communication and dealings between Shelby and Norm Beechey during his period racing the Mustang, we took the opportunity to show them to the man himself.

Story: Steve Normoyle

Norm Beechey confirmed the bona fides of the detailed correspondence with Shelby – from some 57 years ago.

"It just shows you what a bit of old-fashioned PR can do for you, even all those years ago!" he told AMC.

He also revealed that just before jetting off to the States to secure a Mustang to race in Australia in 1965, by fluke circumstances he was introduced to the then newly-installed managing director of Ford Australia, Bill Bourke.

"The car that I bought, I would never have got it without that letter from Ford Australia and Bill Bourke," Beechey told us. Here he takes up the story:

"Back in those days I used to go out with for dinner fairly regularly with another car dealer, Kevin Dennis. Kevin Dennis was a big deal in Melbourne and very well known – he had a TV show called New Faces that was on at the time. I think at the time I only had two car yards and Dennis had about 10! Anyway, we'd each take our girlfriends out to dinner, the four of us, at this restaurant in Toorak. The restaurant was owned by an American, and one day we're sitting there and the restaurant owner asks me, 'Norman, what are you going to do next year with your motor racing?' I told him I was going to go to America and get a new Mustang. And then he says, 'would you like to meet the managing director of Ford? He's sitting at that table over there.'

"So he took me to Bill Bourke's table and introduced me, and from that Bill Bourke organised a letter of recommendation for me."

Of course, the Aussie touring car racing star didn't simply return from California with one new Ford Mustang. As the documents detail,

Beechey took the opportunity to stock up with as many spare Mustang parts as possible.

"I bought a lot of stuff, but you've got to remember that there were no spare parts for that engine at all in Australia at that stage."

As the parts inventory shows, the spares included one short motor, for which Beechey paid \$500. This in fact had been the 289 short block Shelby had used on the dyno when they were developing the engine.

According to Beechey, that 289 short motor proved an invaluable purchase – certainly more so than the box of no less than six sets of connecting rod bolts and nuts (that's 96 nuts and bolts to cover six engine rebuilds!) that he also brought home.

"The reason I bought so many of those was because we'd had a lot of trouble with the big end bolts in the Holman and Moody Galaxie motor. After that experience we thought that we might have to be changing the big end bolts every second or third race with the Mustang. That didn't prove the case and the spare conrod nuts and bolts weren't required."

As the documents show, Al Dowd was Beechey's main contact at Shelby. According to Norm, Dowd was 'pretty much close to being the managing director of the show'.

"They all looked after me really well.

I remember Al Dowd took me to Sebring for a race meeting, as a guest of Shelby. We're on the way to the track, and I was driving

a brand-new Mustang. I said to him: 'if the police pull me up, Al, what do I do?' And he said to me, 'Norm, you just speak normally – they won't understand you!'

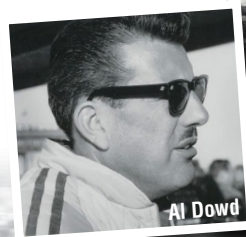
"We're at Sebring sitting there having lunch, and AJ Foyt walks past. So Al yells out to him, 'hey AJ, come over here, I'd like to introduce you to the AJ Foyt from Australia!' And AJ Foyt turns around and says 'Yeah?', and just keeps walking!"

The 1965 season was a busy time at Shelby, being right in the middle of the Le Mans effort with the Ford GT40 (as depicted in the recent blockbuster movie, *Ford vs Ferrari*). Beechey had a lot of dealings with Phil Remington, who had a key role in the Le Mans programme (Remington features heavily in the movie, played by Ray McKinnon).

"Phil Remington was a guy there who I got on well with. He was very kind to me, and later on when I was racing my Chevys and Holdens with fuel injection, even though I wasn't racing a Ford product he steered me in the right direction with some decent information and where to get the right gear. Phil was a good, keen racer. He was a very important contact for me over there."

Dowd was also involved in the colossal Ford Le Mans effort – and some of the unique challenges it presented, as Beechey remembers:

"I was talking to Al one day and he said, 'you know, Norman, we're off to Le Mans and I've got to get some pit passes. And I said, 'we'll yeah that sounds pretty normal, Al,' and he says, 'well what's not normal about it is that I need 3000 pit passes for the Ford Motor Company!'"



Speco

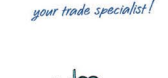
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