

The History of --418

Back in the day, motorists could travel US Highway 70 from coast to coast. The route was a sort of a southern version of route 66 except that it went all of the way across America. It originated in North Carolina at the Atlantic Ocean and in its early glory ended in Los Angeles California. US Highway 71 has also always been another iconic highway. It stretched from southern Louisiana all of the way to International Falls Minnesota and is still widely used over some parts to bring goods out of New Orleans to various northern US cities. The importance to our story is the fact that the Hob Nob Cafe and Motel was located at the junction of these two major US highways. It was situated very close to the two highways with a lot of the parking spaces barely large enough for cars to park without sticking out into traffic. The Hob Nob was one of those iconic landmarks that weary travelers stopped at before interstate highways lured them away. This is where 418 met its date with destiny and started a chain of events that led it to me. It seems that the previous owner had just installed a new engine and was taking the car for a test spin before he had finished the job. Bad for him but good for me. In his haste to get the car back on the road, he hadn't installed the exhaust pipe, only the manifolds ordained the engine. The excessive noise probably masked the real problem which was evidently a lack of vacuum to the brake booster. The previous owner wheeled into the restaurant parking lot and did not have enough brake to stop before crashing into the cafe. The car didn't hit very hard, only fiberglass and front bumper damage occurred.

This all happened before I came along or knew anything about the car. Next is my story about what led up to my date with destiny.

At this point it was just a rumor. A Shelby parked behind a body shop in a nearby town. That was the extent of the information. The craving was there, I loved fast cars and immediately felt the need to confirm the rumor. I hopped in my Ford Maverick and took off. I still remember pulling up to the chain link fence and shining my lights inside as my heart pounded. There it was, a 1968 GT500! It was night and there was no one to ask about the car. The next day I called the body shop and found out that the owner wanted to sell the car for \$500. I got the owners phone number and called him, his story was a little different, the price had gone up to \$750, but the car had a fresh engine. We made an appointment to check the car out, the body shop left the gate open and we drove over after they closed.

The GT500 was the only car inside the fence except for the shop's wrecker. We looked under the hood and to our surprise the engine was adorned with a 3 deuce setup. A closer look seemed to confirm that the engine was indeed new. The exhaust manifolds were on the car but there was no exhaust pipe.

We later found out that the owner had indeed installed a new engine and took the car out for a spin before he had completed the job.

\$750 was still a lot of money in 1975 and we felt the need to confirm that the engine was indeed okay. That was definitely a mistake. Anyone familiar with Holley carburetors that have not been used for quite a while will understand the possibility of fuel leaks. The engine busted right off and was running; what we did not notice was the fuel that was running down the back of the intake manifold. A slight stutter and a flame out of the open exhaust manifold and we were in trouble. We immediately turned the ignition off but the fire persisted. We were trying to beat the fire out with anything that we could find but it kept flaming up. A quick look around and we spotted the wrecker which had a sign that read fire extinguisher inside. The door was unlocked and we grabbed the extinguisher and pointed it at the fire, but nothing happened when we pulled the lever. The fire extinguisher was out of pressure and the flame shown no sign of burning out. The problem was that the float bowls kept leaking and by now the hose was starting to leak more fuel. The part that seemed in the most jeopardy was the hood. The flames were starting to wear a little on the under side of the hood and we knew we needed to put the fire out quickly. We grabbed a couple of wrenches and had the hood off in less than a minute. We managed to keep the flames beat back long enough for the fire to finally burn out more or less on its

own. After the fire was out we put the hood back on and we were happy to call it quits as far as running the engine was concerned..

I was only 17 at the time and was attending high school with no job and of course no income. I talked to my dad about the Shelby. He understood the fact that the car was rare and had a lot of potential. My dad was always interested in my brothers dirt track racing as well as my hot rodding, He never seemed to mind the fact that I was always modding my motorcycles as well as my Maverick. (My aunt later told me a story about my dad turning over his granddad's model T in the middle of the street once when he was showing out.) Well anyway he readily agreed that the car was well worth the \$750 asking price and agreed to purchase it for me.

We got the car back home and begin to check it out. First on the agenda were carburetor rebuilds. Next was a trip to the local auto parts store and the purchase of an exhaust system. The engine was solid and freely revved to 6000 rpm before it experienced valve float. The transmission needed a couple of quarts of fluid and it was ready. The car had junk for tires and wheels, I suppose that the previous owner had already sold them. My brother had some magnum 500 wheels that he gladly loaned me and I was ready to go. That was pretty much all that it needed to become a daily driver.

I drove the car quite a bit during my college years and thoroughly enjoyed my time in it. I would drag race it pretty often and won every race for quite a while. The car came equipped with 3.91 rear gears and a C6 transmission and would top out about 105 through the quarter mile. Top end was limited by the gear ratio and 120 mph was about all the car would run. I thought the car was fast until I raced a local guy in a big block Chevelle. The guy since has become a dear friend, but at this time his Chevelle trounced the Shelby. I was devastated, was the Shelby that slow? The short answer was yes. I decided to do something about it and built a new engine with better cam, headers, compression and top loader 4 speed. With slicks, the car now ran upper 12's in the quarter mile, nothing to brag about but still okay for me. After blowing up the engine and considering the weight of the Shelby,(3620 lbs) I moved on to a lighter car to drag race.

That was it for 418, it sat in my yard for many years. When I moved, it went with me and sat in my driveway for 10 more years. 2010 is a new year however, and it has now become time to do something with the car. With the shock towers butchered up by the previous owner, I decided to go with a TCI front suspension. I don't have the original engine so a concours type restoration would be impossible to do. Who wants a car like this only to look at anyway? The only way that I can enjoy the car is to drive it. The thing that I can do however, is to make the car into the kind of car that Carroll Shelby envisioned before Ford took over production.

I have a 427 cross bolt from my drag racing days, and with the addition of a stroker kit and Edelbrock heads and manifold I believe that I can make a car that will turn a lot of heads and be an absolute joy to drive.