



Bob Estes Cougar at Watkins Glen

This article originally appeared in CCoA's magazine *At The Sign Of The Cat*



Trans-Am Cat Keeps Claws Sharp

By Phil Parcels

It's Friday, Sept. 5. Tucker Callan and I arrive early for the Watkins Glen Vintage Grand Prix and begin to set up camp. Off in the distance, through the trees, you can hear the rumble of the Group 6 cars as their engines start and the first practice gets underway.

The sound grows to a ground-shaking roar as they get closer. Our attention is diverted from our campsite duties to the cars as they come around turn 8: the heel of the famous Watkins Glen "boot." Shelys, Camaros and Vettes take the turn and accelerate on the straightaway, past our campsite.

Then I see a Cougar enthusiast's dream: a bright yellow 1967 Cougar coming into the turn. Its blacked out grille and black hood stripe are distinctive. As it completes the turn, I see it's No. 79, the Bob Estes Lincoln Mercury Cougar! By now, I've dropped the tent stakes, grabbed my camera and am madly shooting off most of a roll of film. He accelerates on the straightaway, raising the front end of the car. Going into turn 9, he downshifts, hits the brakes and those classy Cougar taillights come to life. He completes the turn and is gone from sight. I'm ready for the rest of the weekend now!

The questions start popping into my head. Who's the driver? What engine is in it? What's the VIN?

After the race is over, we search for the Trans-Am (T/A) Cougar, and find it in the Paddock with several other cars. It's owned and driven by Michael Eisenberg, of MAECO Motorsport, a Northridge, Calif., race shop. I had an excellent discussion with Michael, and he was very willing to share the following information and history of this unique part of Cougar history.



Restoring History



Michael said MAECO Motorsport specializes in the restoration and service of vintage Trans-Am race cars and A & B Production sports cars. The company, which supports about 35 cars in vintage racing, specializes in Shelby Mustangs, Boss 302 and Camaro race cars. MAECO built the engine and transmission and tuned the suspension on the Bud Moore Trans-Am Cougar originally driven by Dan Gurney and now owned by Ross Myers. The company's built engines for one of the Penske Donohue Camaros, the Smokey Yunick T/A Boss 302 and numerous other Camaros and Mustangs. MAECO just completed a complete restoration on the 1971 Penske Donohue AMC Javelin. They

even built the car that carried Boris Said to the 2002 Trans Am Championship. Check out their web site www.maecomotorsport.com; it's well worth a look.

Michael went on to detail the early history of the Bob Estes Cougar. The car was a new trade in on the Bob Estes lot. It was originally a black, 289 two-barrel automatic 1967 Cougar. The car was converted into a race car in March and April of 1967. The major fabrication was done by Bernie Kretzschmar, one of the lead fabricators at Shelby American. He was responsible for building all the R-Model Shelys in 1965 and the Trans-Am Notchback coupes in '66 and '67.

Bernie left Shelby in 1967 to open his own race shop, and one of his first projects was the Bob Estes Cougar. Except for the external sheet metal, this car looks just like a '67 Shelby Trans-Am Mustang coupe. All the competition parts on the car can be traced to Carroll Shelby, except for the radiator, which was from Bud Moore. All the mechanical parts are the same as used on the Shelby race cars.

When the T/A build was finished, the car was repainted Harvest Yellow. The race configuration as run in 1967 was a Shelby-prepped HiPo 289 with a Ford 2-by-4-barrel manifold and two center squirter (415) cfm Holley



carburetors and a close ratio T-10 transmission. The car also ran with the big Lincoln calipers and brakes on a pair of super secret Shelby spindles.

The car was driven by Mark Waco and Nels Miller. Nels did much of the work on the car after it was built. He raced the car in Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) regional races. Mark drove the car in the SCCA national events and the Trans-Am races.



In 1968, a Tunnel Port engine was used. But the Trans-Am series was conducted under Fdration Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) rules, and the car had to run the original FIA-approved HiPo engine in Trans-Am races. At the end of the 1968 season, the car was repainted by George Barris.



Bob Estes Cougar owner Michael Eisenberg with his car.

Michael's search for this car began at his first open track event, which was a Cobra Owners Club of America Willow Springs weekend, in October 1985. The second owner of the car, Craig Cline, had just purchased the Cougar from Bob Estes and that was also his first open track with the car. Michael had wanted to own this car from the first time he saw it. Finally, he purchased the car from Craig Cline in October 2002. That makes Michael the third owner.

In the future, the Bob Estes No. 79 Cougar can be seen at all of the races in which the Historic Trans-Am group participates- Monterey Historics, Sears Point Wine Country Classic, NAS Coronado, occasionally Seattle, occasionally Lime Rock, Conn., and Watkins Glen N.Y. See box below for a listing of 1967 and '68 races in which the Bob Estes Cougar competed. Michael continues researching the 1969 season. Mark Waco told him he raced the Cougar a couple of times in 1969 before switching to a

Camaro.

Bob Estes Cougar—The Races	
1967	
May 8	First Race: Santa Barbara, Calif., 5th Place
July 6	Riverside, Calif., 2nd
July 7	Riverside, 1st in class, 3rd OA in 6 hour enduro
Sept. 2	Santa Barbara, Calif., 5th
Sept. 16	Riverside, 1st
Sept. 30	Stardust Las Vegas, 1st
Oct. 15	Laguna Seca, 2nd
Oct. 22	San Diego, 1st
Oct. 28	Riverside, 3rd
Nov. 12	Stardust, Las Vegas, 1st
1968	
March 9	Willow Springs (Calif.), 1st
March 10	Willow Springs, did not finish (accident)
March 30	Tucson, 1st
March 31	Tucson, 3rd
April 28	Riverside, 1st
May 4	Laguna Seca, 2nd (Sedan Pro Race)
May 5	Laguna Seca, 1st
June 2	Willow Springs, did not finish (engine)
July 12	San Diego, 2nd
Aug. 4	Riverside, 4th
Aug. 25	Salt Lake City, Utah, 1st
Sept. 8	Riverside, Calif., T/A 15th (4th until broken rotor)
Sept. 22	San Francisco, 2nd
Sept. 29	Denver Continental Divide, 1st
Oct. 13	Phoenix, did not finish (clutch)
Oct. 27	Riverside, Times Grand Prix Sedan Class, 1st
Nov. 23	Riverside, ARRC, 5th