



Watkins Glen, 2013

Shelby American Notchback #6

Short Ownership List – Long History

– Rick Kopec

The story of 1966 Shelby notchback car #6 properly begins with Ray Cuomo, the car's original owner. And Ray Cuomo's story began in the early 1950s, when sports car racing was just getting started in this country. Sports cars were primarily European creations; small, light-weight two-seaters which had excellent performance and handling, sipped fuel sparingly, and were well-suited to narrow, twisty European roads. Cars with names like MG, Lancia, Jaguar, Triumph, Porsche, Austin Healey, Fiat and Lotus. G.I.s returning from Europe had "discovered" sports cars and took a liking to them. There was almost nothing being made in this country like them. By the time they got over here, between import duties and shipping, they were no longer cheap and were too small to be practical as every day transportation. But for those who could afford one they made great hobby cars. And the hobby went from owners driving them on the open road to competing against each other in organized road races on blocked-off public roads or on air fields, on courses delineated by hay bales.

Following the European tradition, sports car racing began to gain popularity in this country. Prior to the 1950s, American automobile racing had been primarily single-purpose, open-wheel cars running around banked ovals; the most well known was the Indianapolis 500. Sports car racing opened the door to a new group of enthusiasts. Clubs were formed and came up with rules and procedures for holding



Daytona, 1967

events. Because sports cars tended to be expensive and impractical, their owners were usually financially well off. Sports car clubs resembled country clubs with bylaws and rules for membership that maintained exclusivity and the events they put on were more like polo matches. The largest organization was the Sports Car Club of America with affiliated regions in the most populous parts of the country, where sports car enthusiasts resided.

In the 1950s, those who raced sports cars thought of themselves as gentlemen (with the occasional gentlewoman). As they said in England, "*the right crowd with no crowding.*" Wealthy men like Briggs Cunningham personified sports car racing competitors and there were an unusually large number of former military pilots who, with World War II over, sought the adrenalin rush afforded by fighters and bombers. While spectators were allowed, not many average folks had the means to purchase a sports car and join in. This was fine with the sports car clubs,

which tended to be WASP bastions (like country clubs, golf and tennis clubs). Occasionally individuals from outside these invisible barriers broke through because they had a strong desire to compete and either acquired the wherewithal to purchase a car or built one of their own.

Ray Cuomo was one such individual. He loved racing as a kid on New York's Long Island and had a natural mechanical aptitude. He submitted to the SCCA's licensing requirements and it wasn't long before he was behind the wheel of a sports car of his own, an Abarth, racing at local tracks like Roosevelt Field in Long Island and Thompson Raceway in Connecticut. Cuomo's Team Roosevelt was the East Coast Abarth distributor in those early days. Being involved with sports car racing brought Cuomo in contact with a number of people who asked him to not only work on their cars but to co-drive them in longer events. Sometimes they invited him to drive their cars when they were not able to. He was very proud to tell people he was