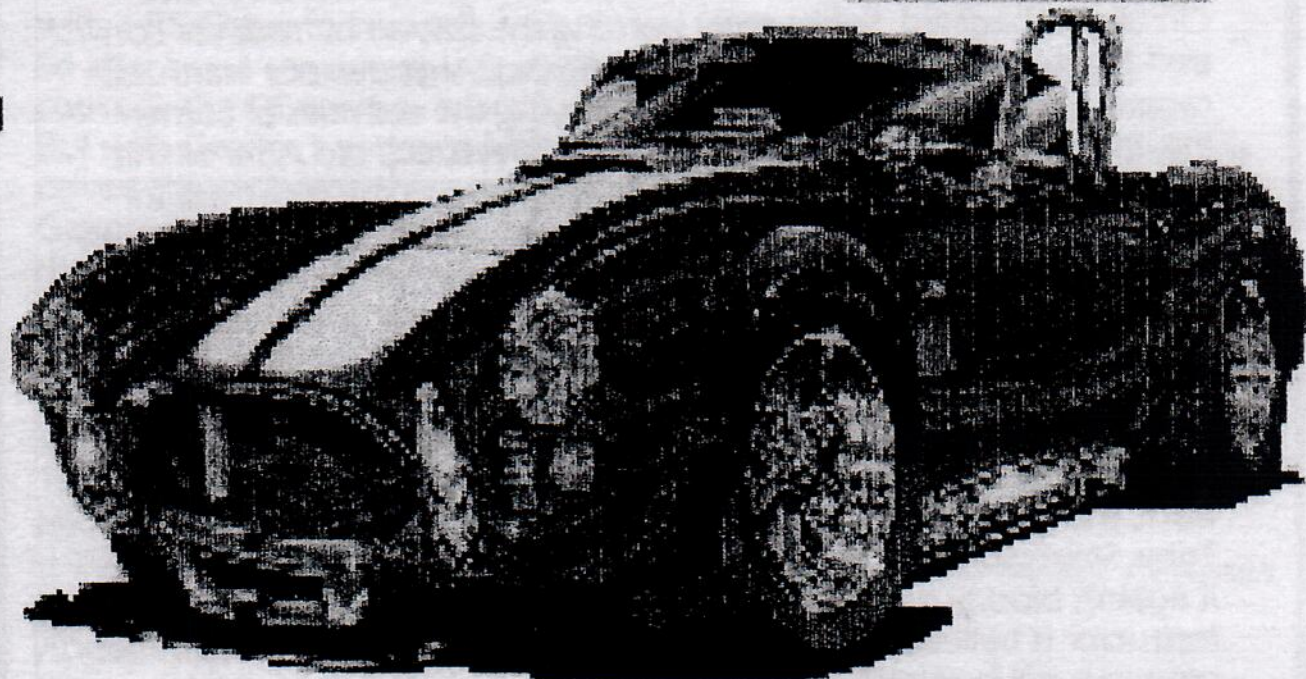


**COBRA CAR CLUB OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

# **THE SNAKE SKIN**

**Fangs and all.....**

**VOLUME 2, EDITION 5:      OCTOBER 2001**



**[www.cobracarclubwa.com](http://www.cobracarclubwa.com)**

## *Rumour has it.....*

I have spied with my "little" eye, a "Green" reptile in a Kalamunda yard of a certain Club member that was a bit on the worst side for a good nose job (courtesy of broken brake line) and TLC. This reptile is the first 6 cylinder version and has not been on the road for some considerable time, but was still registered when purchased. Now belongs to a silver haired chap, 60ish, Club member. Oh yer, has another Cobra shell sitting in his yard also. Anyhow, hope you enjoy the new toy Graham S.

*A bloke who lives up Kalamunda way, we'll call him Paul C. After spending nearly 2 years building his Cobra and having it registered for just a couple of days, was out hooning around the streets in Midland with another Club member. Spurred on by that wind in the hair feeling, middle aged desire for grunt and thrust, wound the wick up on the "pedal to the metal"..... "Let's see what this baby can do?" Ah, end result, spun the tail-shaft over and out of action.....got towed home by a vintage 64 Ford Compact. Great feeling hey Paul?*

Again our "wannabe racers" were at a meeting at Wanneroo Race Circuit (Barbagello). Supposedly learning the skill/art of "race car control" (At this point note the word CONTROL). Anyhow our wannabe racers (nah, just one of them) were enjoying the activities of cornering, in and out witches hats, straight line speed, etc, etc. After all this learning and yes, hopefully "listening" they take to the race track for the serious stuff of putting their learning into practice. This "big bloke", "truckie", long flowing silvering hair, helmet on, instructor beside, head out to the unknown. (Mumbling from under the helmet could be heard, "gotta beat Wayne, gotta beat Wayne"). Down the "straight", eeeeasy into "Cat" corner, gently accelerate, now line up for the "esses". "EASY ON THE POWERRRRRRRRR , TONY!!!" .....err, to late.....for round and round, with heads spinning. The wall, the track, the grass, the sky, a never ending blur. Missed the wall I hear Tony. Stayed on the black stuff, hey mate. Shit yourself?, yer mate. Do it again?, bloody oath mate. For those who are wondering, yes, the Instructor is believed to be back at work, shaken and stirred well. Flanigan is still laughing Tony.

## **Another country cousin, from Newman**

*Got this little article from the Club Secretary, one of our newer Members, Terry McKay in Newman. Welcome Terry and family.*

Back in the 70's, was about the time I started getting interested in Austin Healey's and Cobras. The Healy was the favourite back then because you would see more of them on the road. As time went on, things started to change, I would see more and more Cobras on the road which in turn started to convince me of what car I liked the most.

Although the Healey looks a great car, the shape and lines of the Cobra stood out the best. Anyway, from years of reading and looking, I made my mind up and purchased a partly built Cobra (17.9.98). But I broke the golden rule of never judge a book by its cover and consequently found out there was more wrong with the car that had been told over the phone. The car is a RC Sports of Melbourne and is now out of business. After nearly 6 months of lies and cover-ups, I arrange George Vidovic of GV Automotive (Python), South Melbourne and discussed the problem to which I was not the first with a RC Cobra to invade his workshop.

So after some considerable time getting the engine rebuilt (it had been cooked), the T5 gearbox rebuilt, electrical problems and it just goes on. But with George's patience and a depleting bank account, my wife and I received the car here in Newman in October 2000. Much thanks goes to George and Maggie Vidovic for all the work and time spent on rebuilding the car.

Since then I have done a bit more engine work, electrical wiring and gauges, suspension changes (Koni adjustable), fuel system and exhaust. The car is great to drive and looks fantastic. Our happy motoring has finally begun. We live in Newman (Pilbara) about 1250 k from Perth. An outing for us is, 165 k south to Kumarina Roadhouse, 160 k north to Auski Roadhouse or about 180 k to Tom Price. The scenery is beautiful.

*Terry McKay, Newman.*

### **About the Cobra**

Kit: RC Sports  
Rego: AC 65 WA

Engine: 5 litre HO

Trans: T5

Front: LC Torana Jag hub/disc

Rear: Jag/Konis

Wheels: Halibrand 8x15/10x15

Perform: Great but not sizzling

Colour: Dark Blue/Silver Blue stripes

## The KIWI Cobra Man By Bruce Allen.©

### John Ohlsen Story

#### PART 1

##### Introduction

On holiday in Auckland, NZ – Struck with this deadly Cobra bug, I decide to say g'day to John Ohlsen, one of the key men in the Shelby Cobra Daytona story. Not that you would notice from the US sourced publications, but this was the man who built the car that finally kicked Ferraris' butt when Shelby's' Cobra Daytona's won the world sports car championship in 1965.

Around 11.00 am I eventually find the nondescript workshop in Onehunga's waterfront area, wander in through the side entrance. The memorabilia around the walls immediately impact my senses that this is quite a special workshop, cosy if you like, a real homely place.

Before I have a chance to introduce myself John has thrust out his hand with a warm smile, I mumble something about being from Aussie and the Cobra Club and stuff - not wanting to take too much of his time. "Sit down" he points to this large divan to one side of the work area. "I'll get you a coffee and we can talk". I'm just blown away by the friendly genuineness of the man. As though He is really pleased you took the trouble to go and see him.

Over to the left the unmistakable profile

of a Daytona coupe is taking form. There is work being done on the skeletal frame at the rear. Necessary for the "ally" skin to be fixed to. To the back, son Paul is dealing with customers. John is talking freely and quite keen to tell his side of the story – not that I knew there was any "side" to it. So I realised fairly soon that what was shored up in the legendary grist about the Cobra Daytona, mainly from the US publications bothered him – a bit. One archival type of book even gets his name wrong, calling him "Ove Ohlsen.

He appeared to keep a typical Kiwi sense of humour though – on his business letter head he states – Fabricators – Restorers – General Maniacal work.

Sadly, John died too soon – Taken down by an enlarged heart condition brought about by childhood measles. So Jean and Paul carry on the business – when an order comes through, usually from the US for a Cobra FIA roadster or Daytona coupe, that car will be accepted as a Shelby Cobra and given a SAAC (Shelby American Auto Club) reference.

#### *My View*

Over the last 12 or so years that I have been delving into my and others' Cobra addiction's. And even from my point of view, albeit one of the pitiful "fake Snake" brigade that the so-called journalists go on about. I

think I have got an insight, through time and study and perhaps being a co-founder of our successful Cobra Car Club. I'm talking about the culture, "the big picture", mystique if you like, but that word doesn't really suit the Cobra story – not butch enough. Anyway, depending on what you read about the Cobra story – it soon gets down to whether the British AC Cars angle suits your point of view or on the other hand the USA – Shelby side of things, hits the spot.

As I said before, from my perspective the car certainly was derived "British" and in fact reading through Rinsey Mills book "The AC COBRA" the replica guys can breath a sigh of relief when one realises that the original car was multi - component derived anyway. This is not to take anything away from the craftsmen who hand formed those beautiful alloy bodies you have to understand.

However, the more I read (reluctantly) of these mainly English Tomes, one soon has a realisation that the Brits have a real problem in understanding that the success of the Cobra centred in the USA. No-where else but in Venice, LA, California. It's a simple and oft retold story and I'm not going to waste space by repeating it, but the real beaut part about it is the variety of personnel that Carroll Shelby picked up along the way. Some, he head-hunted like Phil Remington and Ken Miles – old race car buddies who knowing Shelby for what he was, new - that despite all the hype of car

show launches etc; all over the US with Ford backing them up, they new that here was a damn good car to race.

It was their "can do" attitude that made these spanner men so special. It was said that the Hurlock Bros the then owners of AC Cars, were in awe of Phil Remington's skills when he helped prepare the newly V8 powered AC Ace which became the beloved Cobra.

And so it was that a tall gangly young Kiwi by the name of John Ohlsen happened in Carroll Shelby's net. He had first met Shelby when Shel' was one of the Maserati 250F team drivers that competed in NZ in the 1958/59 season. With this exposure to the "real racing world" and most probably listening to characters like Shelby regaling young ears with tales of great excitement and wonder. John was one of many Kiwis (Ron Butler was another) that began to "sprout" wings on this sort of "diet"- nothing was going to hold them in Kiwi land.

And so with the "sure thing" promise of a job, he found himself in Europe where reality soon struck as there was no job, but no matter Le Mans was on so he helped out with the US Camoradi team who raced a Corvette. The odd jobs with Scarabs with Lance Reventlow, Coopers and then in England he met Donald Healey who put John with the Austin-Healey Racing team. Australian Paul Hawkins was part of the team, so a solid friendship began.

Moving around England and Europe, John found himself with the Ian Walker Racing team as mechanic for Graham Hill and Aussie Frank Gardner with whom a life long friendship was formed. When the team travelled to the US they happened to share Shelby's workshop in Venice, LA (they were racing at Riverside at the time).

So here John O and Shelby renewed the acquaintance, so when the season finished Carroll asked him if he would work for him on the new Coupe that Pete Brock an a ex-GM stylist had sketched up.

So in a quiet (relatively) corner of the ex-hangar workshop he set to work on a chassis of a wrecked car (CSX2287) making up a wooden buck for forming the body panels. About the only time his program got disrupted was for "executive decision" meetings usually involving Brock, drivers such as Dan Gurney and Shelby when he was around. If it wasn't called Johns' baby at the time of construction it certainly was when test driving it at Riverside.

When anyone is asked about John Ohlsen and what he is famous for while at Shelby American. 9 out of 10 people who know a bit would relate the story of when during a pit-stop at Daytona he dived under the rear side to see what he could do to fix an overheating diff. Just at that time however another crew member was refuelling the tank when spilt petrol ignited from the red hot brake-discs. Instantly both

car and John were engulfed in flames, amazingly not seriously damaged on both counts.

So just about every Shelby or Cobra publication has the dramatic photo of crew member Ohlsen a human torch that survived.

It was sort of a baptism by fire that the Cobra Coupe became the Cobra Daytona because of the Daytona debut. Unsuccessful as it turned out but by heck what potential - easily another 20 mph more than the roadsters top speed.

It appeared that John had found his niche as Daytona race car builder and the project now had extra priority because Shelby and Ford realised that here was a Ferrari beater that could net them the World sports-car championship a first for an American Team/manufacturer.

## PART 2

### A Starting Point

When John started, Shelby asked him if he would like to work on a new ultra streamlined project intended to overcome the Cobra's inherent high drag. It was to be basically a road car so that it could run in the GT class, the category all road going derived sports and GT cars were placed in for International racing. Ex General Motor's stylist, Pete Brock had sketched up a super streamlined shape predating an even lower Countach theme by several years. No one was quite sure

which way they were headed but it was hoped if all went well they would have a go at the World GT title. Unfortunately no one had even thought to consider the international GT Championship prerequisites, such as minimum windscreen heights, fuel tank sizes, spare tire and so on. John pulled out his RAC handbook and immediately proceeded to upset the tranquility . . . and in particular, Pete Brock's. However, Shelby eventually gave John the go ahead to make a start, and working over a Cobra chassis, he proceeded to produce a wooden mock-up.

Studying the situation it soon became evident that while the AC chassis was, may I say it, ace for the original AC, Bristol and Zephyr-powered English cars, and was quite satisfactory for the open 4.7-litre Cobra roadsters, it would probably flex too much for a closed coupe thus causing the alloy body to crack. A more rigid arrangement would not only solve this problem but would also provide for a better handling car. For homologation purposes a minimum of 100 cars had to be built before they would be accepted into the GT series. However, if based on a production chassis such as the AC Cobra's, any given body shape would be eligible as special coach-built versions of an existing car. With an all-new 100-off series being out of the question, much discussion on how to improve the chassis ensued. It was suggested that another pair of 7.62cm (3/4") tubes be added alongside the existing ones but as John saw it, and

went to great lengths to impress upon his fellow teammates, such an arrangement was not only a heavy, inefficient way of gaining strength, but it would leave them wide open for scrutineers to reject their entries of using a modified or non-standard chassis.

Since alloy bodies always need support, John proposed that a space-frame be made for the purpose and by welding it to the existing chassis, would do both jobs at once. He got his way, and so while climbing in and out from under the wooden formers, he formed a shape that not only fitted his lanky frame – so that anyone should fit – but one that conformed to what he believed to be the best aerodynamic principles . . . working with the framework of the FIA regulations and the confines of an existing front-engine chassis. With the body mounted, the space-frame was not recognizable as such. However, two areas of framework were left to be bolted in separately – over the gear-box, and diff housing – so that quick changes could be facilitated in and out of racing.

Although he had received no formal aerodynamic training, John absorbed as much knowledge as he could in his own time and from working with others, he believes, as most aerodynamicists do, that wings and things are like hanging your dirty washing out through the top of the bonnet, immediately in front of the fully enclosed engine bay. Lower down between these two enclosures sat the front sus-

pension cross member.

From the engine bay the hot air vented three ways. One was down through the enclosed transmission tunnel, over the diff and sideways, both ways, around the petrol tank, across the disc brakes and out through vents in the "bobtailed" tail section. The rest of the air exited in ducts that carried the twin exhaust pipes on each side out into the lower regions of the sill area under the doors. With heat from the exhaust pipes causing the engine bay, and combining the venturi effect from the air passing over the outlet in the sills, and the ram effect from the front, plenty of passing fresh air was hoped to keep the engine sufficiently cool. It got hot in the foot wells though, where the exhaust passed nearby. Race-driver, Dave Macdonald used to wear tennis shoes which had a habit of melting in long stints at the wheel.

At the base of windscreens, especially

where the screen rises sharply above the bonnet line, there is always a strong pressure build up as passing air tries to fight its way over and around the passenger cab. It was here that the carburettor intake was formed; similar to a normal interior ventilation intake on the family car. This ensured that not only did sufficient cold air get in the carbs at all times but it also provided a ram induction effect as speed increased – similar to a mild form of supercharging! The value of such a system was well demonstrated several years later by Chevrolet when they changed the intake from the front grill to the windscreen based on their 7-litre L88 Corvette. 0 to 140mph times dropped from 24 seconds to 17 seconds! Very much a case of something-for-nothing.

To further assist in cooling the rear disc brakes, small intakes were placed at the back of the side windscreens and ducted down to the wheel wells. However, during initial wool

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tuft tests at Riverside it was shown that air actually came out these slots not quite what was intended! By placing small perspex foils, about 3/4" clear, up the side of each front windscreen pillar, the air was held in, reversing the air flow back down the "tube" and probably reducing drag into the bargain.

The roofline was made into a long gentle curve, rising slowly from the windscreen top to a maximum height over the driver's head and gradually back down to the tail. At first no rear spoiler was incorporated but later a very small one proved beneficial. As the car advanced Shelby brought in various aerodynamic experts for their opinions. One thing that amused John was that none of them could agree with each other. They all reckoned that it would need about 500bhp to reach 200mph though.

As is often the case with production-based cars, the front suspension wasn't quite to John's liking but it had to remain stock standard. Without showing it on the homologation papers he lowered the central pedestal on the upper transverse leaf spring arrangement. The front suspension was in fact, like many sports and racing cars of the 1950's, derived from the humble Fiat 508. It consisted of upper transverse leaf springs and a lower wishbone on each side, connected of course by the kingposts. On normal Cobras, the spring sloped down on each side from the central pedestal to the wheels. By using a trick learned

from Coopers, John polished the leaves, not only reducing their friction in movement but slightly reducing their thickness also, ensuring a softer more resilient ride, producing a lower spring rate and raising the roll entire slightly by dint of flattening the springs. By lowering the pedestal too, the roll centre was further raised bringing it closer to that of the rear axle. This meant less weight transfer to the front under cornering and thus less under steer. It also had the added benefit of keeping the front wheels more vertical while cornering. In fact, under hard cornering it would lift its inside front wheel clear off the ground – aided of course by the now stiffer chassis. While this may seem of dubious benefit for maximum grip of the front tires, it proved well balanced and was real boon when clearing the inside shoulders often found on tight corners.

John started the prototype in November 1962 and completed it 2 months later with the aid of little more than a body and engine builder. What helped of course was that when he said he needed something he got it.

An amusing aside was that Ford produced the special windscreen. For this John made up a wire cage the shape he wanted but the piece of wire he used had a slight kink in the middle bottom of the screen. He thought nothing of it but when he got his screen the kink was there too!

**Part 2 of article in next edition**

## SHED RUN and BREKKIE

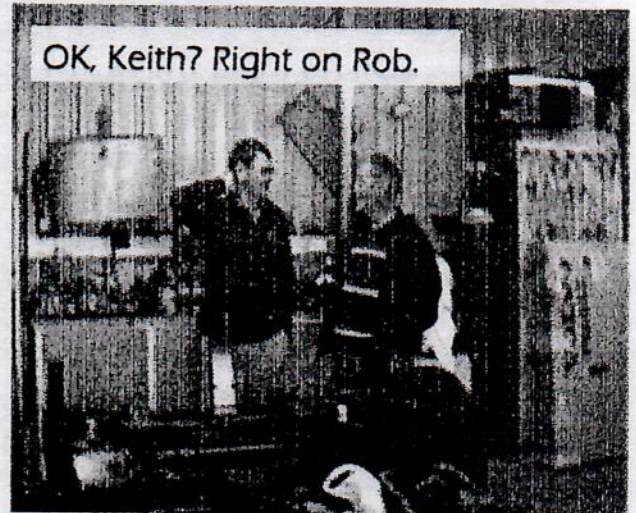
On a bloody wet, cold Saturday morning in September, 10-12 intrepid souls did a garage run to 2 Club members garages for a bit of a sticky-beak at what was happening in those back yards.

First up was a invitation by new Club member, Rob Darge of Greenmount. I am reliably informed that a great brekkie was provided for those having a poke around Rob's garage. Rob's garage is something out of this world apparently, with lathes, mills and everything else we all want in our own sheds. His Cobra is coming on nicely also, with a great amount of attention to detail being given to his car.

After about 2 hours at Rob's place it was off to Graham Sach's place in Kala-

munda for a look-see at his own newly completed chassis (9 years later). Again a lot of attention to detail in this chassis manufacturing/design process. With the rain nearly gone the rest of us sat around with tea, coffee and muffins solving the Clubs problems and that of the worlds.

What a great way to spend a Saturday



## EDITORIAL.....

Well there has been plenty happening over the past couple of months and no excuses from anyone that they have not got anything to do with their cars, so for those that take time to organised all activities well done and keep it going. Of recent interest at the September meeting was not only the large turn out of members for a monthly meeting (30), but also a talk on a new fuel additive (Nitrous Formula Products) present by Geoff West a self confessed ex Corrigin farmer now turned inventor/scientist and owner.

Geoff held everyone's attention for some time, giving a very honest, informative and at times a very technical description of his Octane Boosting range of products. He has at times spent many hours of research and development in his quest to prove the viability of Nitrous Formula Products.

Some very good technical questions came from Club members and Geoff gave a very detailed response. In concluding his presentation, Geoff kindly donated a range of his products to the Club to do with what they liked, only asking that for those of us that get to try the product give him feedback. Thanks Geoff for you time, information and freebies much appreciated by Club members.

## September Club Run

Yep, Macca's again for an 8.00 am brekkie.....yuk. 7 Cobra reptiles turned up for the run in cold, bleak and windy conditions.

What is it about Cobras that they seem to have a water retention/weak bladder problems. Ron Meecham was struck by this curse from the outset of the morning.

Most, I say most people turned up for the run appropriately dressed for the cold condition that awaited them for the next 300k's or so. But t-shirt, THONGS and trackie pants make you wonder. His son and passenger looked like Skaifees replica in all his WARM race gear. (Jeez, Tony R you keep this mag going mate). Anyhow off the boys and their toys trundle, out along the Albany Highway (110 kph) to Bannister for refreshment and pit stop (bloody cold weather). Albany's a tad further on Tony. Turn west and head inland to Boddington, more pit stops, fuel and on to Dwellingup. Pit stops fuel (still bloody cold). From hear to Pinjarra, South West Highway and return to home bases. Good time had by those that went so I am told.

Now back to Ron Meecham. Organised another radiator hose from auto shop at rear of Maccas (like all things, cost the world) Spent a hour or so fitting it in the car park only to cut it too short and have to make do until he and Terry L got home. Home 4 hours later, another new length of hose, re-design some of the offending brackets 6.00 pm job finished. Good day hey Ron?

## MAJOR EVENTS FOR DECEMBER

**Pencil in Christmas Dinner Venue is, "Somewhere Else Restaurant", Kalamunda. Date is yet to be finalised, either December 1st or 15th. Cost approximately \$30 per head. Set menu. Good parking for Cars.**

**The Club's Annual "Show 'n Shine" is on. Burswood Park (Casino). Sunday December 9th. From 9.30 am to 4.30 pm**

**"Shannon's" have donated a trophy for the Top car.**

**For more details contact**

**Brian Plank (Sec).**



The Club magazine needs your support, so phone, fax or email anything to me of interest for Club Members.

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