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DNF'd: The story behind how some of the first Shelby Cobras got built



By Hemmings Contributor – Updated August 27, 2024 in Muscle Cars

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[Editor's Note: Bob Walker's recently released book, "Cobra Pilote: The Ed Hugus Story" chronicles the life of perhaps one of the most unsung personalities of the American sports car scene - a man who imported dozens of makes of sports cars, who raced in Le Mans, and who worked with Carroll Shelby to assemble some of the first Shelby Cobras. In this excerpt from the book, Walker details how that arrangement came about and how it ultimately fell apart.]

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The story of Carroll Shelby's success in building and racing Cobras is a legend. Hard work and a few lucky breaks along the way had helped him achieve his goal. Most stories written about Shelby were sourced from information almost entirely, and selectively, provided by Shelby himself, and a lot of his fame is also attributed to the hard working folks at Ford's Public Relations Department. He certainly did not do it alone. Many people helped Shelby with his climb to success, yet few are remembered or even given their fair share of credit for creating the Cobra.

Ed Hugus was one of those people and perhaps the most deserving. He was also the single most important person responsible for the Cobra having ever been produced. Without him, Shelby's dream may never have happened. Hugus' story is based on interviews with the author during the last two years of his life from 2004 through 2006. He provided his own account of the Cobra's creation, with supporting documents, personal mementos and never

before published photographs from his personal collection.

Hugus could not remember exactly when he first met Carroll Shelby. It was undoubtedly at a racing venue in the very early 1950s somewhere near the East Coast of the United States. Both men were part of the American sports car racing evolution that followed World War II and they excelled with their individual driving skills. They were competitors who shared a love of sports cars and racing, but not close friends.

Hugus recalled that the first time he and Shelby had actually talked about Shelby's plan to build and race his own sports car was at Le Mans in 1959. Shelby and his co-driver Roy Salvadori had just won the overall Le Mans victory, driving an Aston Martin DBR1. Hugus was also a competitor, teamed up with fellow American Ernie Erickson, driving a Porsche 718 RSK, but due to mechanical failure after completing 240 laps they were classified as a "Did Not Finish."

In the days following that race, both Hugus and Shelby were lodging at a Goodyear facility near Le Mans while waiting for their flights back to the United States. Hugus recalled that Shelby had asked him the same question that he asked anyone who would listen; "If you were to build your own sports car, what would it be?" As a world-class racer and one of the leading sports car dealers on the eastern seaboard of the United States, Hugus had definite opinions. Hugus noted that, "Shelby's term was sport cars."

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Over several days, Hugus and Shelby spent countless hours talking about virtually every older and contemporary production sports car built. One of those many discussions had centered around Hugus' suggestion of the A.C. Ace that was currently being produced in England. He had no first-hand experience with racing an Ace but as a competitor, he was impressed with the car's performance, even though he thought it was a bit under-powered.

Hugus even offered to contact Derek Hurlock at A.C. Cars, if Shelby was serious about meeting and exploring several different design ideas. Hurlock and Hugus were friends and Derek had been operating A.C. Cars for many years, along with his uncle Charles Hurlock. It appeared to Hugus that "Shelby was still unsure about which direction he was headed and what course of action he wanted to pursue," and he seriously doubted that Shelby had even considered that the A.C. Ace was a viable option during their first discussions.



Inside the small European Cars work shop where many different makes of sports cars were serviced and repaired. The first production Cobra would also be completed in this shop during the spring 1962 by two of Hugus' best mechanics and supervised by master mechanic William M. Speer. Once the procedure had been worked out, most of Hugus' Cobras were actually finished next door in the basement of Continental Cars.
(Robert Walker Collection)

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Back in the U.S., Hugus and Shelby often bumped into one another at races or during car-related events around the country, and they would resume their conversation. Hugus was not the only person with whom Shelby engaged in similar discussions about building his “sport cars,” but he had one huge advantage. Hugus had told Shelby to contact him if Shelby ever achieved his ambition since Hugus would be willing to promote and sell those vehicles through European Cars.

Toward the end of 1961, Hugus heard that “someone advised Shelby that the A.C. Ace’s Bristol engine was slated to be discontinued from production.” A.C. Cars would soon be without an engine supplier for the nearly obsolete Ace, which was one of its few remaining production vehicles. For Shelby, the timing was perfect. The combination of the new lightweight 221 cu in Ford V8 engine, soon to evolve into the 260 cu in Ford V8, and a modified Ace chassis could be a good financial and production solution for both Shelby and A.C. Cars. Shelby contacted the Hurlocks and immediately ordered a slightly modified Ace that would accommodate the new Ford V8.

Hugus explained that, “the only problem was, Shelby had barely enough money to pay A.C. Cars for the prototype car, CSX 2000.” Even with Ford providing several free engines and lots of advice, Shelby was still incapable of financing any initial production run of sports cars, soon to be known as Cobras. Without the necessary capital, Shelby had little chance of securing a contract with the Ford Motor Company, A.C. Cars, or anyone else. In England, the Hurlocks were reluctant to embark upon any production agreement with Shelby, and at the same time he did not have a workable plan in mind for Ford. What Ford needed however was a performance vehicle to showcase its new and quickly evolving 221/260 cu in V8 motors. The publicity people at Ford had recognized Shelby’s Ford-powered Ace venture as interesting, but only perhaps for a quick advertising campaign.

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Shelby had very few options available. As Hugus described it, “everyone Shelby contacted about financing, wanted to be Shelby’s partner. He needed lots of money quickly, but he was unwilling to share the ownership of his car proposal with anyone. He just wanted a little help in getting some cars built so he could go racing.” Without the Ford Motor Company’s firm commitment with the engine, and financial backing, the entire venture could not move forward. Shelby needed a savior who would be willing to take on the financial risk and meet the needs of both A.C. Cars and the Ford Motor Company.

Within weeks of receiving the prototype sports car, CSX 2000, Shelby contacted Hugus. Unlike all of Shelby’s other friends, Hugus was not interested in being Shelby’s partner. He only wanted to sell and race the cars. Rather than supplying Shelby with financing, Hugus agreed to contact Derek Hurlock at A.C. Cars and order the next two unfinished, modified Aces on his own account.

The first car, CSX 2001, was delivered to Pittsburgh for completion and use in setting up a limited production run of Cobras at European Cars. The second car was then rerouted and delivered to Shelby’s Goodyear tire shop in Santa Fe Springs, California for completion as a Ford-powered race car. With luck, a limited number of Cobras would follow. Those vehicles would all be shipped to Pittsburgh. Hugus had not yet driven Shelby’s prototype Cobra CSX 2000. Had he consulted his friend and occasional N.A.R.T. co-driver, Augie Pabst, he may not have proceeded. Pabst remembered visiting Shelby at his Goodyear tire shop in Santa Fe Springs in early 1962 when he had just put together the first Cobra and was offered a drive. Pabst said that it was a poor car and told Shelby, “they will never sell.”

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Hugus agreed to assume the initial debt that would be accumulated at A.C. Cars in England. European Cars' service department would then install the drive trains and complete the Cobras for retail sales and distribution to other dealers. All Shelby had to do was to try to convince the Ford Motor Company to supply the motors and transmissions to Hugus at dealer cost, or at least at a substantial discount.

Without a formal contract, Hugus became the initial producer of Shelby Cobras, the East Coast Cobra distributor and the first Cobra dealer. He had even agreed to be financially responsible for part of Shelby's Cobra race car debt. If the Ford Motor Company ever took over the financing of the project, Shelby promised to reimburse Hugus in full and guaranteed that European Cars would still receive a fair return on every Cobra Hugus completed, sold or distributed to dealers east of the Mississippi. According to Hugus, "the whole arrangement was a simple gentleman's agreement and based on a handshake."

With European Cars starting the initial Cobra production (or completion process) Shelby could then focus his attention on securing the Ford Motor Company as his own benefactor. Ford had allowed Shelby to display his prototype Cobra, CSX 2000, at the New York Auto Show in April 1962 but no agreement or production contract had been discussed or signed.

Hugus was aware that "Ford was highly motivated to achieve its 'total performance' goal but all they had was a slogan." Ford's only connection to racing had been a past history with NASCAR and an "on and off" relationship with a former stock car builder in Charlotte, North Carolina, Holman-Moody. What Ford needed was its own sports car, which could compete with the Chevrolet Corvette. The Ford Thunderbird had originally been created as a two-passenger sports car for production in 1955 but by 1958 it had evolved into a sedan-sized "boulevard cruiser." Ford was desperate for racing publicity and as Hugus put it, "Carroll

Shelby was the only game in town."

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Even so, Shelby's Cobra proposal was not well-received at Ford. Hugus stated, "at first, Ford engineers and executives were at a loss to see any value in Shelby or his 'antiquated' design of a sports car." Most executives saw him as more of a promoter and a possible charlatan rather than a serious car builder. Ford senior management officials were especially reluctant to consider risking stockholders' money on Shelby and his poorly developed proposals. It would take many weeks for Ford to seriously consider investing in Shelby's project. Even then, the first agreement signed was rather limited in scope. "All that Ford wanted was to receive the maximum publicity for a minimal investment."

Unfortunately for Shelby, all the positive features of Hugus' operation in Pittsburgh were also major obstacles to signing any agreement with Ford. Hugus already had a system in place to receive sports cars and other imported vehicles through the Port of New York. He also had a contract with the storage facilities at Dunnington and Arnold's New York warehouses. Once cars were received, they were quickly transported to Pittsburgh and prepared for resale through Hugus' well-equipped parts and service departments. When ready, those vehicles were then displayed in European Cars' and Continental Cars' showrooms and marketed by one of the best-trained automotive sales staff in the country. Hugus' people knew sports cars and their client base included some of the wealthiest customers in the United States.

When Ford executives reviewed all of that information, the logical conclusion was, "why do we need Shelby?" According to Hugus, without a Hugus/Shelby partnership, Ford was reluctant to move forward and fund any part of Shelby's proposals. Everything that was needed for Cobra production was already in place and operational at European Cars in Pittsburgh. Signing a contract with Shelby would require Ford to duplicate facilities for

Shelby American in California. Even then, Shelby had little experience with selling cars and he was not financially viable. As Hugus put it, "Shelby didn't even have the basic requirements to be a Ford dealer."

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Shelby was impatient and had been calling his contacts at Ford on a daily basis. Finally, one of those Ford executives informed Shelby about the confidential issues under discussion, in particular, that Ford management would have no trouble moving ahead with a contract with Hugus but they were undecided about Shelby who they regarded as a "high risk" promoter.

Without a signed formal contract between Shelby and Hugus, Shelby was fearful that Hugus would steal his project. In a panic, Shelby contacted Hugus who reassured him that their original gentleman's arrangement was secure and that he had no intention of interfering with Shelby's goal by trying to steal his sports car venture. He even offered to contact the Ford management and reiterate that "European Cars was only interested in selling Shelby's cars. Any contract with Ford for the financing of Shelby's sports car production would have to be signed with Shelby."

For Shelby, that reassurance from Hugus was a big relief but their "confrontation" also created lingering doubts in Shelby's mind. Even after securing his first financing and production contract with Ford by June 1962, Shelby still had deep-rooted reservations about Hugus' intentions and sincerity. He was still fearful that Hugus and European Cars could step in at any time and replace Shelby American as Ford's Cobra connection, and "that situation became the major basis for a stormy relationship with Shelby." Everything that Hugus did was above reproach and his word was his bond. For Hugus, the very thought of someone doubting his integrity was offensive. Shelby's constant distrust would continue to fuel that rift throughout their working relationship and beyond. Within days of the

confrontation, both men had serious doubts about continuing to work together on the Cobra project.

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Hugus was reluctant to discuss his difficult relationship with Shelby and initially dismissed it as a minor misunderstanding, stating that “someone at Ford had said something to Shelby that wasn’t true.” He only wanted to speak about someone as well-respected as Shelby in a positive light.

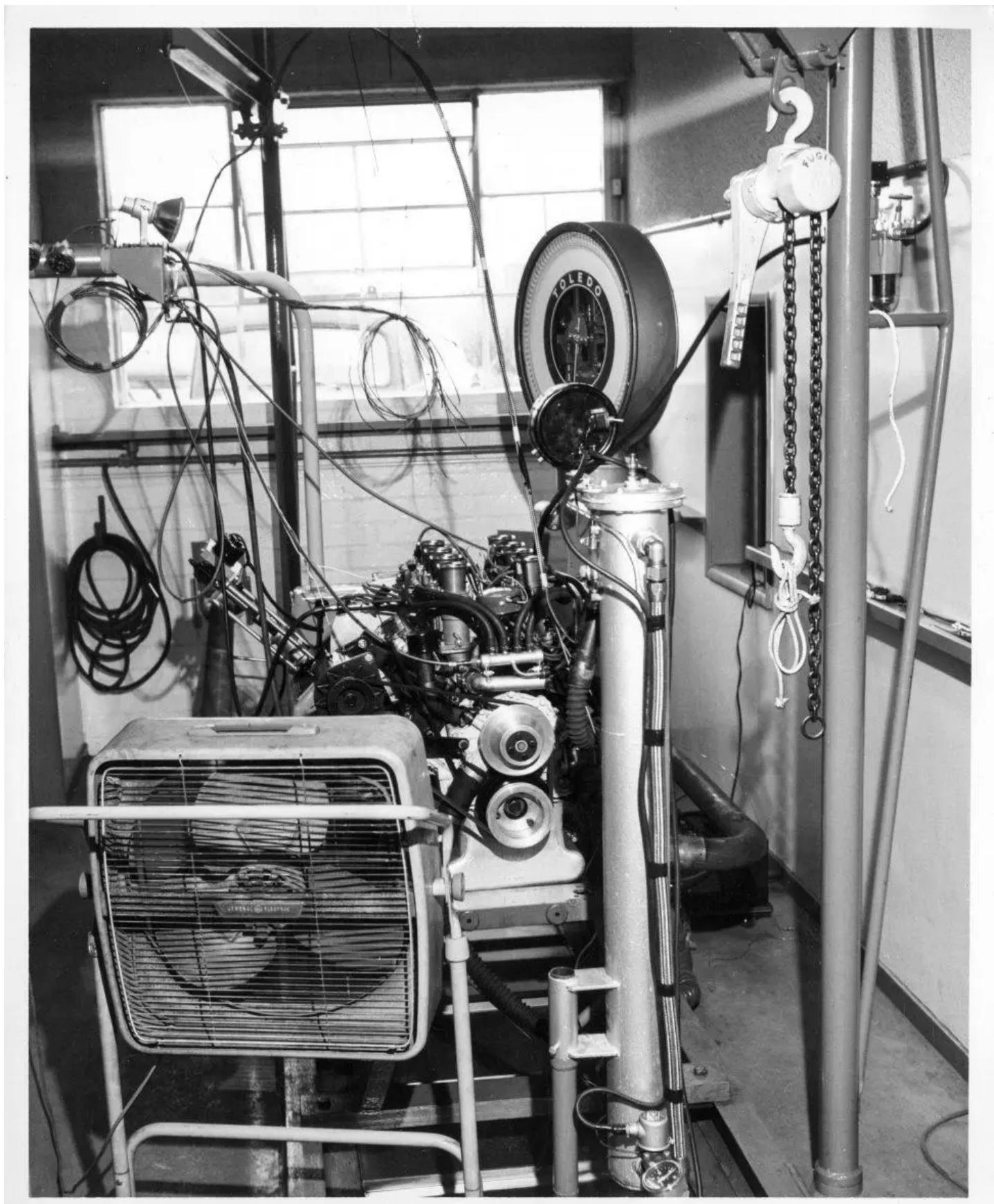
In May 1962, weeks before any contract had been signed with Ford, the first production Cobra CSX 2001 had arrived in New York by air freight. That engineless vehicle was quickly transported to European Cars in Pittsburgh for completion and Hugus selected a small crew of his best mechanics to begin the development work which involved attaching the loose components and installing the 260 cu in Ford motor and four-speed Borg Warner cast iron transmission.

William M. Speer, Hugus’ good friend and the first mechanic hired at European Cars in 1952 was put in charge of the team. Speer was described by several European Cars/Continental Cars line-mechanics as being the most knowledgeable mechanic they had ever worked with. He was a German master machinist by trade and Hugus gave him the autonomy to pick and choose the projects he wanted to pursue. Between 1952 and the early 1960s, Speer was responsible for preparing all Hugus’ personal race cars and maintaining a vast assortment of customer competition vehicles. He initially selected two of Hugus’ best mechanics to work with him on finishing CSX 2001 and he continued supervising all completion work on every Cobra distributed through European Cars.

Hugus recalled that, “even though Shelby had arranged with Ford to have the motor and transmission available for European Cars at dealer cost, no credit arrangement was in

place." Hugus had to pay up front for all Ford components as they arrived. During that early production period from May 1962 to the end of the year, Hugus stated that he was also irritated that, "Shelby always received generous Ford credit terms but European Cars was still expected to pay for everything C.O.D."

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A Shelby American 260 cu in Ford (or early 289 HIPO) motor with 48 Weber IDA carburetors being run on a

dynamometer in Venice, California in early 1963. Engines were modified and put to the test before being run in competition. (Robert Walker Collection)

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Within days of the car's arrival, CSX 2001 was completed and running. This initial operation enabled the mechanics to work out a procedural plan for the first batch of unfinished Cobras which would soon follow. A trial and error approach had produced a simple routine to install the missing drive train components and all the unassembled Ace parts using only the most cost-efficient measures.

In Santa Fe Springs, Shelby had just received the second production Cobra and Shelby's only job was to make CSX 2002 into a competition race car. Hugus noted that, "European Cars covered the cost of CSX 2002 for Shelby." It had been agreed that the loan would be repaid whenever Ford took over the production costs or Shelby sold his first Cobra. Since Ford's focus was on racing publicity, Shelby hoped that the secret to signing a production contract would be to deliver a car that was competitive with the Chevrolet Corvette, both on and off the racetrack.

The next batch of five Cobras had already been ordered by Hugus and were expected to arrive in Pittsburgh within the next few weeks. Almost all the first production Cobras were shipped to European Cars and not to Shelby's Goodyear tire shop because, in Hugus' words, "I alone was the person financially responsible for those first Cobras and my job was to complete them as quickly as possible and try and make a profit."

Hugus was favorably impressed with his company's work on CSX 2001 and he wanted to use his first Cobra to generate sales for both street driving and competition. With the installation of a roll bar, he planned to enter the car in several S.C.C.A. events during the summer of 1962 and to be the first person to race a Shelby Cobra.

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The roll bar that Hugus designed and had installed in CSX 2001 was considerably different from the drivers'-side paper clip-style roll bars that would soon evolve through Shelby American in Los Angeles. Hugus' unusual roll bar was attached to both of the three-inch-diameter main chassis tubes near the center of the car. The structure was rather cumbersome in appearance and seemed to lack both cross bracing and adequate width. A similar roll bar was later attached to CSX 2081.

Period photographs from Hugus' personal collection (See page 94) show CSX 2001 with the newly installed roll bar at the S.C.C.A. Divisional Race at the Connellsville, Pennsylvania airport on August 26, 1962. Hugus had tried to enter CSX 2001 at several earlier events but either the Cobra was not ready, or he was unable to rearrange his busy schedule. For Hugus, the Connellsville Airport Race was a late entry at an over-subscribed event. (See Chapter 4 for details of Hugus' racing of CSX 2001.)

By the time the next five Cobras were ready, Hugus was still stuck with six of the first eight Cobras that had been completed. Shelby had CSX 2000 and CSX 2002 but neither of these was available for sale. However, lacking a Ford-sponsored national publicity campaign and without a contract between Shelby and Ford, Hugus found it difficult to sell his inventoried Cobras. Basically without Ford's help, the Cobra was just an English built "hot rod" with a Ford motor.

Hugus did eventually sell CSX 2001 to Dr. Richard Milo toward the end of 1962. The understanding with Milo was that the Cobra would be kept as Hugus' demonstration/race car at European Cars until another suitable competition Cobra was ready. Hugus expected to receive his special order competition Cobra from A.C. Cars, CSX 2142, by late October 1962. The deal was negotiated in September, but the delivery to Milo would not take place for many more weeks.

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With Ford finally ready to move forward and possibly finance Shelby's project, two of Hugus' Cobras were immediately purchased by Ford for evaluation by their Special Vehicles Team in Dearborn, Michigan. CSX 2003 was inspected and driven by engineers, department heads and even Henry Ford II. Engineers partially dismantled and rebuilt CSX 2004, using updated engineering and as many Ford components as possible. Within weeks of experimenting with CSX 2004, Ford also purchased a third Cobra, CSX 2008, for a second rebuild attempt and a production/design study. That Cobra would be ordered directly from A.C. Cars and paid for by the Ford Motor Company under the first Shelby-Ford financing contract.

Hugus stated, "Ford engineers were appalled by those Cobras and tried to work out how to redesign and adapt them for production under the Ford name." The Cobra was noisy. It did not have roll-up windows or lockable doors and it was incapable of keeping the occupants dry, even in light rain. Worse, Hugus claimed, "Ford engineers didn't like the Cobra's antiquated transverse leaf spring suspension." That crude A.C. Ace suspension design had been obsolete even when John Tojeiro first copied it in the early 1950s. He had based his original Ace design on an obsolete 1940s Fiat production car suspension that had its roots dating back to the horse-drawn buggy and wagon era of the 1800s.

The end result, however, was that most of the Ford engineering improvements were found to be detrimental to the Cobra's performance. Even a redesigned body using fiberglass panels only added unnecessary weight and failed to improve the car's lines. Hugus said, "Ford engineers hated the obsolete mechanical design of the Cobra but they loved the performance." In frustration, Ford personnel and designers could not work out how to adapt the Cobra to Ford's "in-house" production.

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CSX 2006 and CSX 2007, two other early European Cars production Cobras were sent to Tasca Ford in Providence, Rhode Island. Bob Tasca was interested in all high performance applications of Ford products and was the first Ford dealer to sign up and purchase completed Cobras from European Cars for resale. These two cars are incorrectly listed in the Shelby American Registry as being completed by Tasca Ford. Hugus has stated categorically that European Cars had built both those Cobras and that he “only distributed completed Cobras to Tasca Ford.” Unfortunately, some unsubstantiated information is still being circulated about Tasca’s role with those early Cobras. Bob McClung’s book *The Tasca Ford Legacy: Win On Sunday, Sell On Monday* is a good example. Apparently a mechanic at Tasca Ford had claimed that they were involved with the initial Cobra production. On pages 50-51, a Tasca mechanic described, “Roger Roy... and I (John Healey) put the first three Cobras together. The car came in a crate. The front suspension and rear end came in a crate, and we had to put them together. They were just one big kit car.”



One of the first 260 Cobras completed and sold, chassis number unknown. Rather than a European Cars product, the license plate (#013) identifies the car as being a Shelby American production Cobra. The rear badge is the elongated Cobra emblem, which would indicate that this car was completed before the first flat head badges were used (beginning with chassis number CSX 2032). Note the absence of the engine compartment side vent behind the front wheel. All Cobras would receive a modified version of the Le Mans side vents during mid-1963, beginning with CSX 2160. (Ed Hugus Collection/IMRRC)

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All Cobra production is fairly well recorded in original A.C. Cars' factory records and Shelby American documents, even with the first three cars completed. Hugus and European Cars are prominently listed as playing a significant role in that early production, not Tasca Ford. It is also documented that virtually all Cobras were transported to the U.S. as uncrated "rollers" with all "major components" assembled, except for the missing Ford engines and transmissions. Only the Ford drive train items would have arrived in crates.

One of Hugus' biggest headaches in Cobra completion and production had been dealing with the insurance claims attributed to the "uncrated" cars being mistreated during shipping. Stevedores on the docks in England always tightly packed the cars into the ships' cargo holds. The ship's crew members were notorious for walking across the unprotected aluminum Cobra bodies. Hugus even stated that one of his last heated and unresolved issues with Shelby was trying to get repair authorization and payment for Cobra paint and body damage that had occurred during shipping.

It is also difficult to imagine that any uncompleted Cobra "rollers" would have arrived by ship, transported to European Cars in Pittsburgh and then be partially disassembled and crated for shipment to Tasca Ford in Rhode Island for reassembly and completion.

Perhaps some of that Tasca Ford misinformation can be attributed to an early pre-Ford Cobra proposal by Carroll Shelby. It seems that one of Shelby's early ideas was for authorized Ford dealers to be encouraged to "possibly" assemble and complete their own Cobras for resale. Shelby was desperate to get 100 Cobras built for S.C.C.A. homologation so he could start a racing program, and Bob Tasca Sr. was a big supporter of Shelby's initial Cobra proposals from the beginning. However, even before Ford signed the initial financing contract with Shelby, Hugus was already geared-up and completing East Coast-bound Cobras for sale and distribution so Cobra dealers would not need to build their own cars.

and Shelby's early proposal had never been implemented.

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Hugus did not know why the Shelby American Registry information about Tasca Ford having completed "any Cobras" was listed incorrectly, but he speculated that it occurred when Ford became involved. With Ford management finally signing a contract with Shelby and getting on board with Cobra financing, some of that early Shelby American information and documentation was cobbled together at Shelby's new shop in Venice, California and reformatted incorrectly. European Cars' early production information and paperwork (pre-Ford) had not been complete or readily available to Shelby American. Someone attempted to fill in the blanks and consolidate that information into a more concise form and a new format that better reflected Ford's need for uniform structure and continuity.

When reading the Cobra production information listed in the Shelby American Registry, it would appear that Shelby American and Ford were in charge of all Cobra production from the beginning. The earlier Cobra production records at European Cars were seldom detailed, and Hugus said, "that information no longer exists."

With the signing of the initial Ford contract with Shelby, Ford immediately took control. Although Hugus may have been the unsung hero and the catalyst to bring Ford and Shelby together, his own problems were just beginning. The difficulties Hugus had previously experienced with Shelby quickly intensified. Further, although he had achieved a good working relationship with dozens of import car manufacturers, he was unprepared for the Ford management style and detail. Ford wanted to have all Cobra transactions pre-approved and documented in triplicate. Hugus was not a Ford dealer and never wanted to be one. He wanted to make his own decisions and to dictate his own policy. European Cars was now showered with corporate red tape and the ongoing dispute with Shelby was not helping the situation.

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It was then that Hugus “started regretting my decision to help Shelby with the initial Cobra startup program.”

He also wondered how long he could continue to work on the project with Shelby, especially under Ford’s direction. By then, Shelby was fairly comfortable with Ford’s commitment and began to realize that he no longer needed Hugus. During that Ford takeover period, the staff at European Cars was well aware of the tensions that had been slowly brewing between Hugus and Shelby. When Carroll Shelby telephoned European Cars, Shelby did not even have to identify himself. His abrupt verbiage and tone was easily recognized by everyone in the office and shop, and employees would announce, “Find Mr. Hugus, Old Grumpy’s on the phone.”

By the early summer of 1962, Hugus had entertained the thought of racing a Cobra at Le Mans the next year. Brief discussions with Shelby had proven to be unproductive. Ford also had not yet committed to any Cobra racing program for Shelby American. The only recourse for Hugus was to plan for his own racing entry and hope that Ford would eventually back Shelby for a Le Mans Cobra team effort for that year. Hugus placed an order with Derek Hurlock at A.C. Cars for a Cobra that could incorporate all the updates and racing technology that was being accumulated at both Shelby American and European Cars. A.C. Cars would soon furnish the out of sequence chassis number CSX 2142 to Hugus for his use in submitting race applications for Nassau in December 1962, as well as Sebring in March and Le Mans in June of the next year.

No exact receiving date for that car was originally specified, but Hugus anticipated having his Cobra arrive at European Cars by late October or early November 1962. That delivery date would allow enough time for the service department to install the missing drive train components and complete the needed racing modifications so that it would be ready for

the Bahamas Speed Weeks in early December, the perfect time to test drive and practice during a relatively low-key event.

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Hugus thought that “Ford’s management people had decided that the Cobra could never be a true member of the Ford family, but the Special Vehicles Team was still given the go ahead to extract the maximum publicity out of the Cobra, at least until a proper race car could be found.” By that time, Shelby had been given Ford’s unprecedented financial backing and several corporate advisors to set up and manage the West Coast Cobra operation. With Ford in charge, Shelby American was finally ready to join European Cars in completing and selling Cobras. Hugus was still responsible for the completion and distribution of all Cobras east of the Mississippi, as per the original Shelby-Hugus verbal agreement.

The first two Ford contract Cobras shipped were CSX 2008 and CSX 2009. Both cars arrived at Shelby American’s facilities and were paid for by the Ford Motor Company. CSX 2008 was transported to Michigan and was used as the basis of a styling exercise with a custom body mounted on the original tube chassis. When finished, that car was named the Cougar II and ended up as a rather modern (Corvette-looking) sports car but was never put into production. CSX 2009 was transported to the Holman-Moody shop in Charlotte, North Carolina, in an attempt to see what Ford’s stock car builder could accomplish preparing a competition Cobra. Ford would then compare it against Shelby Americans’ version, CSX 2002. CSX 2009 was wholesaled to Holman-Moody by Ford on October 30, 1962 for \$4,995.

By the fall of 1962, Hugus had already received Cobra CSX 2018 for completion and delivery for the exclusive use of Henry Ford II. That Cobra was one of the last of twenty Cobras to be shipped through the Port of New York, as part of European Cars’ Cobra

distribution. Four were completed and wholesaled to Tasca Ford and four ultimately ended up at George Reed's Racing Rats shop in Homewood, Illinois.

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Hugus knew that Carroll Shelby wanted European Cars out of the entire Cobra operation so that he could take total control of all Cobra completion and distribution. It would only be a matter of time before the Hugus/Shelby agreement would be terminated by either party. With the situation becoming more difficult by the day, Hugus had increasing doubts about continuing his long-range commitment to race a Cobra at Le Mans in June 1963. If and when Hugus parted ways with Carroll Shelby, Hugus would have little or no interest in being part of a Shelby American Cobra team effort for Le Mans.

Hugus contacted Derek Hurlock at A.C. Cars and post-poned the production and delivery of his Le Mans Cobra CSX 2142, hoping that the delay would give him enough time to settle his production and financial affairs with Shelby and decide if a Le Mans Cobra effort was still viable. This meant that he had to also abandon plans to test and race the car at Nassau. The last thing that Hugus wanted was to be criticized for competing against Shelby American Cobras and possibly spoiling Shelby's chances for a racing program with Ford. Even with the Shelby-Hugus relationship deteriorating by the day, Hugus was still a team player, willing to help out by putting his own personal differences aside.



Hugus is standing next to CSX 2002, the red number 98 Cobra at Nassau, driven by Bill Krause in the December 2 race (number 3), for the Tourist Trophy Race (Open Class). The car to the left is the number 80 Triumph TR3 driven by G. Waltman and directly in front is John Everly with car number 106, the red Cobra CSX 2011. Krause finished 26th out of 38 starting cars. Everly was 31st and the race was won by Roger Penske in a Ferrari 250 GTO. Hugus had written a note on the back of the 1962 Nassau photo of him standing next to CSX 2002 and talking to the driver Bill Krause. (Robert Walker Collection)

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The Nassau program listed CSX 2142 as Hugus' personal entry with the race number 198,

scheduled to compete in the 56-lap Nassau Trophy Race. The race records in December 1962 show Hugus' Cobra as "Did Not Arrive."

Hugus' decision to cancel his participation at Nassau was partly due to Shelby's own plan to enter several Shelby American Cobras there for a special performance exhibition demonstrating his cars' racing ability to Ford executives and allow them to be compared with the Holman-Moody preparation of CSX 2009. Ken Miles was scheduled to drive Shelby's newest racing Cobra, CSX 2127, (entry number 197) and Bill Krause drove the original Cobra race car, CSX 2002 (number 98). Augie Pabst was assigned to CSX 2009, (number 18) the Holman-Moody Cobra. As a privateer, John Everly drove CSX 2011 (number 106) the fifth Cobra entered at Nassau. An independent Cobra (number 88), unidentified by chassis number on the application, was entered by Bo Miske, a Pennsylvania resident with a long history of participating in occasional hill climbs and road racing events during that era. He is not documented as being a Cobra owner and it is unknown whose Cobra he planned to drive. Only three of the six Cobras actually participated in the race. The three cars that "Did Not Arrive" were CSX 2142, CSX 2127 and Miske's entry. In the book Augie Pabst: Behind The Wheel by Robert Birmingham with input from Tom Schultz, Pabst is quoted as saying, "the whole experience with the Holman-Moody Cobra was just terrible. The crew did not do half of the things I told them to do. The car was scary. Probably one of the worst, if not the worst, car I ever drove." He started in the December 2 Trophy Race but dropped out after the first lap. Finally, he managed to finish eighth in race 4, heat 2, on December 7.

Hugus did participate at Nassau that year, sharing the driving of a Ferrari 250 GTO with Charlie Hayes, and during those several days of partying and racing, he photographed many Speed Weeks cars and drivers including the Cobras using his own box camera.

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“The Shelby American performance at Nassau was unspectacular,” but Hugus said, “it was good enough for Shelby to get started with a limited Ford racing contract for both Daytona and Sebring in 1963.” That news was a godsend for Shelby but yet another blow for Hugus.



Shelby American had two early production red competition Cobras at Sebring in 1963, CSX 2002 (car number 16) and CSX 2026 (car number 14). CSX 2002 is seen here on Shelby's newly-acquired transporter. The Cobra was driven by Ken Miles and Lew Spencer, with a short assist from Dan Gurney to a “Did Not Finish.” Peter Brock is listed incorrectly as a co-driver in this event in the 2008 World Registry. (Robert Walker Collection)

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Shelby American team car CSX 2026 (car number 14) at Sebring in March 1963. (Robert Walker Collection)

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Hugus' updated plan was to have his Le Mans Cobra finally shipped to Pittsburgh and completed for testing at Sebring by March 1963 for an essential practice and the only dress rehearsal for his Le Mans Cobra attempt in June. But once again, Hugus was unwilling to compete against Shelby American Cobras at Sebring and CSX 2142's completion date was further postponed. Hugus even allowed Shelby to use his Sebring entry slot to enter an additional Shelby American team car, CSX 2127.

That Cobra was the first rack and pinion car produced and it had been fully race-prepared by Shelby American, along with an almost identical car, CSX 2128, both cars being equipped with all the latest Shelby American racing improvements. Although Hugus' name appeared on the Sebring program as CSX 2127's entrant and co-driver, as predicted, he did not take a turn at the wheel, and for the first time in many years was a non-participant at Sebring.

During the latter part of 1962 and long before the Sebring race in March 1963, the Hurlocks at A.C. Cars had decided to join Hugus in his Le Mans effort. A.C. Cars' plan was to organize its own factory team and build an independent British Cobra entry. It seemed apparent to them that Shelby and Ford would not be prepared to race Cobras at Le Mans that year and they knew that any Cobra participation in the event would be up to Hugus and A.C. Cars. Derek Hurlock had suggested that Peter Munro Jopp, a seasoned British driver, would be a good candidate to share Hugus' Cobra for the 24-Hour race and he was hired by A.C. Cars to test and evaluate the three Le Mans Cobras being built, CS 2130, CS 2131 and CSX 2142. Upon acceptance by Hugus, Jopp made immediate plans to travel to Sebring and use that 12-hour endurance race as an opportunity to become acquainted with Hugus' driving style and strategy, and acquire some practical Cobra racing experience. However, with Hugus out of the picture and CSX 2142 still in England, Jopp did not have a dedicated Cobra to drive. At Hugus' suggestion, Shelby offered Jopp the opportunity to co-drive the Holman-Moody Cobra, CSX 2009, which was now being campaigned as a Shelby American car, along with stock car driver Jocko Maggiacomo. That decision was a reasonable compromise for Jopp and it also gave Shelby American an additional team driver.

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Unpublished and fuzzy photos from Hugus' box camera captured several images of the Shelby American Cobras during practice and on race day, March 23, 1963. Hugus only appeared at Sebring that year as a spectator and he kept a low profile.

It is interesting to note that a privateer Cobra was also entered at Sebring in 1963 by George Reed of Reed's Racing Rats. European Cars had just completed CSX 2051 and Hugus had advised Reed about the competition modifications that would be needed to race the car at Sebring. Reed had been Hugus' Le Mans co-driver in 1962 and he had wanted to repeat the experience at Sebring, but with Hugus unwilling, he enlisted Nate Karras to co-drive instead. Karras was a potential buyer of CSX 2051 at the conclusion of the event and wanted a first-hand view of the Cobra's racing potential before he bought the car. As Hugus recalled, "it was unfortunate for Reed that a broken tie rod caused CSX 2051 to crash into a tire wall during the race." The Reed/Karras Team only completed 22 laps and Karras refused to complete the purchase of the damaged Cobra.

Hugus noted that "CSX 2051 was Reed's second Cobra." Hugus has arranged for Reed to purchase CSX 2003 directly from the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn after its engineers and executives had finished evaluating that third production Cobra prior to Shelby being awarded his contract and the creation of Shelby American in California. RRR Motors of Homewood, Illinois, which became one of Hugus' first Cobra dealers was a race shop and a Ferrari dealership. Like Hugus, Reed was never a Ford dealer.

In the weeks leading up to Sebring, Hugus was aware that Shelby American was quickly expanding with Ford's financial help. It was also apparent that European Cars' days as the East Coast Cobra distributor were quickly coming to a close. Issues over Cobra shipping claims, replacement of parts and reimbursement for expenses were unresolved and ongoing and Shelby would not cooperate in resolving many of those financial problems. Hugus had

arrived at his breaking point, although years later he could not remember the exact issue or the specific date. He quickly notified both Shelby and the Ford Motor Company that European Cars would no longer assemble, complete, distribute or sell Cobras, effective immediately.

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Hugus knew that Shelby wanted to take complete control of all Cobra affairs, but he doubted that Shelby American was ready for the task. Hugus demanded that all Cobras, completed or not, were to be picked up immediately from his retail dealerships. All pending Cobra sales through European Cars were to be canceled, both wholesale and retail. Within a few hours, Hugus dumped the entire eastern seaboard Cobra completion and distribution setup into Shelby's lap.

Frantically, Shelby scrambled to find transportation for the seven Cobras at European Cars, CSX 2080, CSX 2082, CSX 2083, CSX 2084, CSX 2085, CSX 2086 and CSX 2089. With Ford's help, several Cobra and Ford dealers were able to take delivery of most of them within days, or at least remove them from European Cars' inventory. The next crisis for Shelby was to reroute the delivery of Cobras in transit from England which were destined to arrive in New York within days and the following weeks. Hugus' receiving facilities of Dunnington and Arnold, through the Port of New York, would no longer accept and accommodate Cobras or be available for Shelby's use.

Cobra dealers doing business with European Cars were notified of the immediate distribution change. Hugus was reserved in his explanation but most Cobra dealers had been aware of the surrounding problems, and rumors were rampant.



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An advertisement placed by Hugus in the May 12, 1963 Cumberland race program to promote Cobra sales.

The timing of the ad and wording is interesting. Hugus was about to cancel his Cobra distributorship agreement with Carroll Shelby when the ad was submitted. By the time of the race, Hugus and Shelby were not even on speaking terms. In the fall of 1963 when he had partially settled his issues with Carroll Shelby, and again became a Cobra dealer, Hugus was no longer the East Coast Cobra Distributor. It is undocumented and doubtful that Hugus actually used any 289 HIPO motors during European Cars' Cobra completion and distribution arrangement with Carroll Shelby before he terminated his verbal agreement during the early months of 1963. (John Bessey Collection)

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Bob Tasca at Tasca Ford in Providence, Rhode Island was one of European Cars' biggest accounts and a long-time Hugus friend who was one of the dealers contacted by Shelby to receive Cobras sitting in Hugus' warehouse and showrooms. He was even offered the possibility of completing East Coast Cobras and taking over Hugus' distribution system. Tasca's response was very supportive of Hugus and he refused. By June 1963, Tasca had terminated his own Cobra dealership and he requested that Shelby immediately pick up the two remaining Cobras in his inventory, CSX 2104 and CSX 2112. The only Cobra that Tasca did not return was CSX 2109 which he purchased and used as his own personal car. Apparently, Bob Tasca Sr. was a very large man and had some difficulty sitting in, let alone driving a Cobra.

George Reed at RRR Motors was also offered European Cars' inventory and the opportunity to take over Hugus' Cobra affairs. After a brief trial period and a great deal of thought, Reed refused Shelby's deal, and very soon, he had also canceled RRR Motors' Cobra dealership agreement. By that time. Reed had returned Cobra CSX 2082 to Shelby American and was left to deal with the financial burden of fixing the paint and body damage on his remaining Cobra, CSX 2086. Shelby had denied Hugus' original claim to Shelby American for fixing the shipping damage on that Cobra when it was first received at European Cars and Shelby similarly denied Reed.

A few other East Coast Cobra dealers, including White-Griffith Motors in Hicksville, New York, were contacted by Shelby about filling European Cars' void but no successor was found. During the next several weeks almost a dozen unfinished Cobras that were en route from the U.K. had landed in New York. They were received and transported by Ford trucks and/or Ford dealers and redirected to various destinations. Some were shipped directly to the Ford Motor Company, others to the Shelby American location in Venice, California and a few even ended up with cooperating Ford and Cobra retail dealers. The responsibility for completing all these vehicles is not completely known or documented.

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With numerous complaints being heard from disgruntled Cobra dealers, most of whom were Ford agencies, the Ford Motor Company must have wondered about Shelby's ability to run the Cobra project. Bob Tasca had been a driving force for Ford's return to racing and was very outspoken with Ford's Division Assistant Manager, Dave Evans and Ford Advanced Vehicles Manager, Donald Frey. Tasca's displeasure with Carroll Shelby and his Cobra affairs must have been severe and to the point. He contacted most of Ford's top management and expressed his wrath. He wanted to support Ford's "Total Performance" goal but would rather forgo the Cobra program than continue working with Carroll Shelby.

The only unresolved Cobra issue left for Hugus, other than money owed to him by Shelby American, was his ongoing plan to race a Cobra at Le Mans in June 1963. Removed from all Shelby American affairs, Hugus became more comfortable with his decision to fulfill his commitment to Derek Hurlock and be part of an independent American/British Cobra team challenge. Hugus' only stipulation to A.C. Cars was that he "did not want Shelby and Ford to be a part of the Le Mans effort." He was prepared to pay for his own Le Mans Cobra expenses and all related costs, as he had done since his first race at Le Mans in 1956.

Shelby and Hugus were no longer on speaking terms but on arrival at Le Mans they were

required to co-exist in the same general pit and staging area. Hugus was in command of the American Cobra CSX 2142 and Shelby was there only as part of the Ford delegation to evaluate the Lola-Ford MK 6 GT prototype. (That car would fail to complete the 24-Hour event but was quickly developed into the Ford GT 40 Program. Ford had finally found its successor to the Cobra.)

Hugus embarked upon driving the first Cobra to race at Le Mans in June 1963 and the first international competition with a Cobra on foreign soil. (See Chapter 8.)

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Toward the end of 1963 Hugus partially settled his rift with Carroll Shelby. He once again became a Shelby American Cobra dealer through his newly consolidated dealership Continental Cars Inc. The first Shelby American “completed” Cobra received at the new premises of Continental Cars Inc. was CSX 2153, invoiced on October 9, 1963. Hugus no longer had to deal with the headaches of Cobra completion but he continued selling Shelby American parts and cars until his retirement and the sale of his dealership in 1968. Soon after his reinstatement, both George Reed and Bob Tasca were also able to come to terms with Shelby and they once again became Shelby American retailers.

[Bob Walker's “Cobra Pilote: The Ed Hugus Story” is available signed by the author at CobraPilote.com or through publisher DaltonWatson.com.]

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