

RACEBRED

ROADSTER

*One of the most original and significant Ford GT40s produced
will soon go under the hammer. This is its life story*

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HISTORY RECORDS that the Ford GT40 programme was a prime example of the old adage 'Don't get mad, get even'. In 1963, word had reached Ford headquarters in Dearborn via Ford of Germany that Enzo Ferrari was anxious to sell his company. What could have been the most sensational takeover in Ford's long history grew from a beginning so insignificant that when, in the 1980s, I interviewed former Ford-Germany executive Robert Layton, the man who had set the ball rolling, he remembered nothing of the Ford-Ferrari negotiations, save that the chance to buy Ferrari was just one of hundreds of proposals made to Ford Germany at the time.

The German consul in Milan had written to Ford-Werke that a 'small, but nevertheless internationally known Italian auto factory' was seeking a cooperative agreement with a larger manufacturer. Layton found that the factory in question was Ferrari's and duly referred the approach to Dearborn, where Ford International decided that 'it is not of particular interest to pursue the matter'. The message was duly relayed back to Ferrari via the consulate in Milan.

However, Ford Division general manager Lee Iacocca – then very much a rising star in the Ford zodiac – was interested, and asked the American head of Ford Italiana, Filmer Paradise, to make overtures to Enzo Ferrari. Iacocca had been looking for a prestige nameplate to add class to the Ford brand: happily ignorant of the fact that Rolls-Royce did not build its own bodywork, he had earlier toyed with the idea of buying Rolls-Royce so that Ford cars could carry plaques saying 'Body by Rolls-Royce'. Anxious to obtain some Italian bodywork skills, he had similarly been thinking about acquiring Ferrari. Yet again, Iacocca's plan was basically flawed, for Ferrari didn't have its own bodyshop, either...

Strapped for cash in a downturn in the Italian economy, Ferrari hoped that Ford would take over the production of road cars, which he had always found a diversion from the real business of racing, while leaving him in charge of the Scuderia Ferrari racing division. Ford, on the other hand, was itching to go endurance racing following the collapse of an interdiction on participation in motor sport that had hamstrung members of the American Automobile Manufacturers' Association since 1957. Under the proposed agreement, Ford would market Ford-Ferrari cars, while Enzo would be in charge of the Ferrari-Ford racing division, with Ford making maximum capital of the publicity and engineering developments arising from its racing activities.

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Negotiations for a takeover had seemingly gone well, and the deal was due to be announced on 23 May but, in his imperious way, Ferrari – who thought the deal had been sealed with a handshake and then found that the Ford lawyers were drawing up formal documents for signature – had called it off at the very last minute. In Dearborn in the late 1980s I met a Ford-US public relations man who had set up a press conference for 23 May to announce the deal, only to have to cancel it at 24 hours' notice...

Smarting from the rebuff, Henry Ford II and Lee Iacocca drew up plans to build a car to beat Ferrari where it hurt, at the Le Mans 24 Hours. The stars were definitely in Ford's favour, for at the same time David Brown decided to bring Aston Martin's racing activities to a close. Aston's racing supremo John Wyer, who had unmatched experience in European GT racing, happened to be on a sales tour in America and was contacted by the top brass at Ford, who invited him to join Ford as 'resident European manager' of a new division called Ford Advanced Vehicles and run a Ford racing team to compete at Le Mans.

The new organisation was headed by the British head of Ford-Dearborn's Advanced Concepts Department, Roy Lunn, who had worked for AC and Aston Martin before joining Ford at Dagenham in 1954. He was assisted by Len Bailey as chief design engineer, plus Chuck Mountain and Ron Martin. Several former Aston Martin men, including chassis designer Ted Cutting and racing mechanic Jack Sopp, who had started with Bentley in the 1920s, also joined FAV.

Time being of the essence, Ford looked for a development shortcut, and found it in England in the shape of the new Lola Mk6, which had been the sensation of the 1963 London Racing Car Show. Low, mid-engined and American Ford V8-powered, it mirrored Ford's ideas about the sort of Ferrari-beater it planned to build.

Moreover, Lola's Eric Broadley was willing to set aside a year for wholesale participation in Ford's project; Ford bought two Mk6 Lolas as development mules, and work began at Lola's little works in Bromley, Kent, while two adjoining small factories on the Slough Trading Estate were prepared for manufacture of the new Ford.

A track evaluation programme of the Lolas began in August, initially with Richie Ginther, then with Bruce McLaren and Roy Salvadori; Ford-designed components were substituted for appraisal, and by the end of November the Lola mules had been tested at Snetterton, Brands Hatch, Goodwood and Monza. A month later, the design of the new mid-engined Ford GT was virtually complete, and wind-tunnel testing of the body had been undertaken in Maryland. However, as the maximum tunnel speed available was only 125mph, aerodynamic flaws later revealed on the Mulsanne Straight at Le Mans imposed the fitment of a spoiler on the tail to combat rear-end lift that caused the cars to become undrivable at maximum speed.

Though its layout and dimensions were broadly (no pun intended) similar to those of the Lola, the new Ford GT – revealed to the British press on 1 April 1964 before being flown to New York for the American reveal – had a spot-welded sheet-steel monocoque, with square-tube stiffeners linking the scuttle to the nose, and a detachable framework supporting the tail against the riveted sheet steel and duralumin structure. There were also multi-tube frameworks at either end, as used on the Lola. The GT was, incidentally, probably the first racing car to be partially designed with the aid of a computer.

The chassis for the new Ford GT were built in Coventry by Abbey Panels, while its glassfibre body panels were produced by Specialised →

Right
GT/108 differed slightly from earlier GT40 prototypes, with a new nose developed by Len Bailey at FAV and high-set rear-pillar air intakes. It remains the sole survivor with this nose treatment. Engine is a Cobra-spec Ford 289 V8.





'ONLY THE SOUND OF A SPORTS RACING FERRARI AT FULL CHAT IS EQUAL TO IT IN SHEER, SAVAGE NOISE'



Mouldings Ltd of Upper Norwood. Its overall height of 40 inches would lead to the model being christened 'GT40'.

Because of that rear-end instability at high speed, the first prototype, GT/101, was written off by Jo Schlesser in testing at Le Mans, where Roy Salvadori also crashed GT/102 (which was finally written off later that year by Sir John Whitmore, when the throttle stuck open at Monza). The third prototype, GT/103, was raced without success during 1964, then handed over to Carroll Shelby's Shelby-American company in Los Angeles to be prepared for the '65 season, when it won at Daytona – the first racing victory for a GT40. Later that year it was sold to former U2 spy plane pilot William Wonder (I saw it at his home in Pennsylvania in the late 1990s), who raced it up to 1970 and kept it for some 40 years.

Four more GT coupés followed, then GT/108 – featured on these pages – was bodied as an open roadster, the first of only four open Ford GTs to be built (and one of only two with a steel chassis – the other two, which were later scrapped, had aluminium monocoques). It was around that time that Eric Broadley left the project, discontented with the Ford internal politics that had wrested control of design and engineering away from him, and moved next door to FAV to concentrate on his Lola racing cars.

Above
Amazingly, GT/108 still wears most of the white paint with which it left the factory, and is the only roadster to survive 'as built'. Right-hand gearshift and blue race seats dominate the sparse cockpit.

The idea behind the roadster was, it seems, to assess the market appeal of the open-top configuration. Roadsters GT/108 and GT/109 were delivered as bare chassis from Abbey Panels in October 1964 and completed in March 1965, when they were tested at Silverstone by John Whitmore and Dickie Attwood before being shipped to Shelby-American on 8 March with a note of 'temporary importation for test purposes'. On 30 April, GT/108 was sent to Riverside Raceway with the Cobras of Shelby's USRRRC team and was displayed throughout the meeting on 2 May.

GT/108 was again used by Shelby for display and press promotion in early July, when Ford's board of directors met at Shelby's Los Angeles headquarters on West Imperial Highway. During the event, individual board members were given demonstration rides on the tarmac of Los Angeles airport by Shelby team driver Ken Miles, unusually wearing a jacket and tie. Carroll Shelby personally took the wheel for Henry Ford II's ride.

While GT/109 – which differed from its sibling in having a removable roof/roll-over section – ran at Le Mans in 1965, retiring after two hours with transmission failure, GT/108 was never actually raced by Shelby, though it was tested at Riverside Raceway on 27 July by Ken Miles, who lapped the circuit in 1 min 36 sec, 'quicker than the best a competition

Cobra could hack'. That was significant, for GT/108 was fitted with a Cobra-specification Ford 289 engine: it differed slightly from earlier GT40 prototypes, with a new nose developed by Len Bailey at FAV and high-set rear-pillar air intakes.

Jerry Titus of *Sports Car Graphic* magazine, who had been badgering Shelby-American's general manager Jim MacLean for a track test of the Ford GT for months, was able to take advantage of the Riverside test session to take a turn at the wheel. He was enthusiastic about the seating position: 'Even though you sit deep between the stressed side sections housing some 39 gallons of gas and the narrow centre tunnel, there still is an impression of considerable roominess due to the flat instrument panel and the relative lowness of the tunnel and tanks,' he wrote.

'The Ford produces that same wild snarl with which the Indy cars chilled everyone. Only the sound of a sports/racing Ferrari at full chat is equal to it in sheer, savage noise.'

While he found the multiplate clutch very much either in or out, Titus was impressed by the overall compartment of the car: 'Taking it through Riverside's Esses, we found it extremely simple and dependable to control from the first lap onwards. Steering pressure is slightly on the high side, and the general attitude definitely understeering.'

The following week, Carroll Shelby shipped GT/108 to San Francisco to be driven as a pace car by Lew Spencer, import agent for British cars

and a keen racing driver, especially with his very rapid Morgan 'Baby Doll'. Said an impressed Lew: 'That thing is such a ball to drive!'

On 17 August 1965, GT/108 ceased to be a Shelby promotional car, and was consigned to Hank Madeiros at Hayward Motors in San Francisco. In October the roadster was demonstrated at speed at the United States Grand Prix meeting at Watkins Glen, New York, by Stirling Moss, Jim Clark and Jack Brabham; it was probably the only time that 1965 World Champion Jim Clark ever drove a GT40.

The roadster then served as a promotional car for Northwestern Ford in Milwaukee in November 1965 before it was mothballed for several years at Kar Kraft, the Ford-run tuning shop in Dearborn. Here, Roy Lunn would transform the GT40 into the MkII-specification Le Mans-winner and at last fulfil Henry Ford's ambition to hit Ferrari where it hurt – and, with four successive victories for the Ford GT40 between 1966 and 1970, Ferrari must have hurt very much!

In May 1971 Kar Kraft sold GT/108 to George Sawyer of Detroit, who sold it back to them some three months later. By 1978, GT/108 was owned by Harley Cluxton III of Grand Touring Cars in Scottsdale, who over the years would own no fewer than ten GT40s; a year later he sold it to John Robertson of Big Fork, Montana. In 1983 Harley Cluxton repurchased the car, selling it on to Tom Congleton of Mission Hills, Kansas, who carried out a full mechanical restoration and campaigned

at top vintage racing venues such as Laguna Seca, along with his son. The roadster was not particularly competitive, as Tom Congleton refused to modify or upgrade the car.

GT/108 found its current owner in 1992, who showed it at the 1994 SAAC Road America event and has driven it occasionally while storing it in a climate-controlled facility. In 2003 the car was treated to a major mechanical overhaul by the well-known restorers Phil Reilly and Company in Corte Madera, not far from the Golden Gate Bridge in California – motto: ‘We only work for people we like’ – which included the refurbishment of the car’s distinctive nose section and a refinishing of its racing stripes in blue.

Since then, GT/108 has appeared on the major show circuit. It came second in the GT40 class at Pebble Beach in 2003 and appeared at The Quail: A Motorsports Gathering in 2010 and the Amelia Island Concours d’Elegance in 2013. As marque expert John Allen has noted: ‘Prototype GT/108 is currently the only intact example of the marque still to carry the correct 1965-style nose, and the low tail section unique to roadsters. 108 is [also] the only roadster, or “spyder”, to remain in as-built condition.’ It even retains most of its original white paint.

Now, after more than two decades in the same ownership, GT/108 will be looking for a new owner in California this August. **End**

THANKS TO RM Auctions, which will offer the GT40 roadster for sale in Monterey on 15-16 August, www.rmauctions.com.

1965 FORD GT40 ROADSTER

ENGINE 4736cc V8, OHV, four Weber carburetors **POWER** 380bhp
TRANSMISSION Four-speed manual transaxle, rear-wheel drive **STEERING** Rack and pinion
SUSPENSION Front and rear: double wishbones, coil springs, telescopic dampers
BRAKES Discs **WEIGHT** 1043kg **PERFORMANCE** Top speed 197mph

