

# Shelby Hertz in Austria

— Udo Rienhoff

**T**he story began a dozen years ago when I visited Monterey and took in an auction of classic and sports cars. A 1966 Shelby GT350H in perfect condition was offered, including the original license plate and the frame surrounding it.

At that time, we were the Austrian importer and dealer for Chevrolet, Cadillac, Oldsmobile, Buick and Pontiac. We were also the only Hertz franchise in Austria. I saw this black and gold Shelby and immediately fell in love with it, but I had never been to an auction before and had no idea how to get some money within the next few minutes to bid on the car. I also had no idea of its value. And the thought of displaying it in a Chevy/Cadillac showroom was also something of a problem. So I had plenty of excuses to miss this opportunity. I regret it to this day.

Being a total car nut, when I heard that Hertz was, once again, introducing a Shelby Mustang in 2006 I immediately contacted Hertz USA and was eventually able to purchase one of the new GT-H models. I arranged shipping to Europe at the end of November. However, instead of having it shipped to Vienna, my wife and I picked the car up at the port in Germany. The plan was to fly to Hamburg on a Thursday, pick up the car on Friday, and spend two days sight-seeing on the drive back to Vienna. When we arrived in Hamburg we were told there was “a little delay” because the car had missed the boat. We spent three beautiful days Christmas shopping in Hamburg. On Sunday my wife flew back to Vienna alone.

On Monday morning I drove 100 miles from Hamburg to Bremerhafen, the main harbor for car shipping. After a dry weekend it was a rainy day but luckily it was not cold enough to snow—my biggest concern for the whole trip. It wasn't that the car would not have snow tires; I was wor-



ried about salt on the roads, which would do some long term damage.

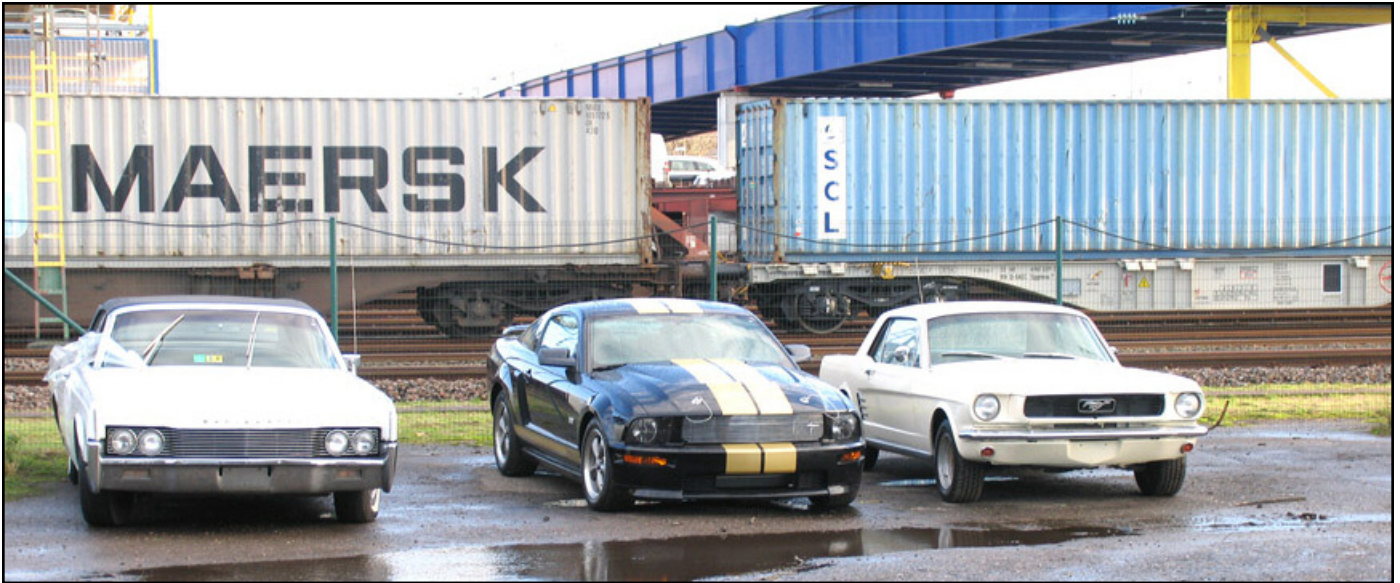
I arrived at the harbor in the early afternoon. There were thousands of cars awaiting export to the U.S. and some waiting for their new European owners. I finally found the company that organized transportation and customs formalities for my car. Everything was prepared and all I had to do was sign the paperwork and the car was mine. After receiving the keys, the guy said, “*The car is parked around the corner behind our building. Have a look at it, check for damages, sign one more time and then have fun.*”

First I saw a Porsche 959, a 911 3.8 RSR and an Audi Sport Quattro. They are very rare and desirable but when I saw the next two cars I got ever more excited. A brand new yellow Mustang GT and a white '66 Mustang coupe. Finally I spotted the black hood with gold stripes. There it was: my Shelby GT-H. What a first impression! I loved everything about it: the full body stripes, the 5-spoke wheels, the

aggressive stance. And there was no body damage from shipping. It only had 1,000 miles on it. And as a Hertz man for over 25 years, seeing all of the Hertz logos was icing on the cake. In the trunk were the posters and press information that I had requested. Everything was perfect.

I got behind the wheel and the first thing I noticed was that the hood was much larger and higher than I had seen on any other car. My first thought was that I would only be able to see half as much as with a stock Mustang. I had not driven either a new Mustang or an original one. My impression of this car was that it was big, long and wide. But I settled into the seat very comfortably and started the engine by turning the key.

The engine spun over and caught and for the first time in my life I heard the sound of a Shelby engine. I realized that a '60s GT350 sounded different, and an original Cobra even more so, but I definitely liked what I was hearing. My first “drive” was about 200 yards back to the office. I



parked it there and spent about an hour just looking at this car, and taking pictures. I also had to finish up the paperwork.

One small problem was where to put the license plate? The car was to be registered in Austria in 2007 so I had a special dealer plate with me; I planned to keep the front plate on the passenger seat and tape the rear plate to the inside of the rear window. But my plans were thwarted when I learned that the car would not pass the customs control, a half-mile away, without a properly installed number plate. I didn't have any way of attaching the plates without scratching or

damaging the bodywork, and due to the size of the port, there were no shops in the area. It took me an hour to find a place where I could buy some tape and soft material to mount the plates. By the time it started to get dark I was ready to start the trip home.

A few miles past the customs control I stopped at the first gas station I could find. The driver's side fuel filler was unusual for me. Initially I pulled up to the left of the gas pump and got out, only to discover there was no filler door on the right of the car. No matter where or when I stopped, the car attracted large numbers of people who

were curious, impressed and complimentary.

I was driving on the German highway at an average speed of 110 mph in the dark and in the wet. Traffic was light and the car felt very comfortable at that speed. While slowing down due to some traffic I heard some strange noises. I stopped twice, thinking the hood was not closed all the way or that the front plate was coming loose. But the hood was closed and the plate was on tight. It took me another few miles to locate the problem. It was simply the radio. I was so excited about the new car and the sound of it that I did not realize that the radio



had been on but had lost the radio station's signal. At higher speeds the sound of the engine and wind noise covered it but at slower speeds it was the scratching sound I had heard.

The exhaust and engine sound is a very nice one. Powerful and loud but not disagreeable. The real hammer (sound and power) falls when making a kick down through all gears. That's very close to the sound of the new Lamborghini Gallardo. Just the shifting paddles are missing.

Due to the unplanned late departure from Bremerhafen I had not studied the car's owners manual. Most of the switches were clear but with three or four of them it took me a while to understand them. It also took a while to learn how to change the CDs—which are unnecessary because the engine is making the music. I also discovered that there is an indicator for gas consumption but it depends on your right foot, so it is also unnecessary. An outside thermometer would be nice. The most difficult thing I found was how to switch between

miles and kilometers. It took me more than 600 miles to change it—and it was so simple!

I made an unplanned stop in Frankfurt and the next morning, in the traffic jam and at a petrol station, I got the same reactions. Everybody who looked at the car asked the same three questions: "*What car is this?*" "*This is a beautiful Mustang—is it something special?*" Or, from insiders, "*Is this REALLY a Shelby?*"

Now, in daylight, dry weather, and with some miles on it, I decided to check out the high speed performance of the car. I was not able to make much more than 140 miles per hour due to traffic, but the car runs very smooth at that speed. The sound is great and becomes better and better the farther you go. I think on a weekend, with no truck traffic, speeds higher than 140 miles an hour would be fun.

For my personal tastes, I would have changed some things on the car: brakes, automatic to manual, and eliminating the traction control. But

then the car would be closer to a GT-R than a GT-H. And I'm happy with the GT-H. I have no intention of making any changes other than what is necessary to register the car in Austria.

Arriving in Vienna, I phoned my family and told them to come out of the house to see me arrive in the new car. My kids did not know about it and it was a big surprise for them. They all went crazy and after a six-hour drive I was forced to add a few more miles with them on board. They began arguing over who would ultimately inherit the car in the future.

To my knowledge, this is the only 2006 Shelby GT-H in Europe, and it was one of the first ones sold to a private owner in 2006. The car was on display at the 2007 Vienna Holiday Fair in January to promote travel to the U.S. and plans are for it to be displayed at other special events. But you can be sure that after its registration becomes valid and the Austrian plate is permanent, this very special Shelby will be no stranger to the Austrian roads.



The trip to pick up the car in Germany and bring it to Austria was a total of 813 miles. Average speed was 72 mph and the gas consumption was 15.4 mpg. Serial number is 06H0098. Postscript: Since Udo sent us this article he added a second Hertz car to his stable. This one is a convertible (#487), one of only 17 with a 5-speed. As soon as the conversion at Shelby Automobiles in Las Vegas was completed (the car acquired a Paxton supercharger, upgraded brakes, 20" Razor wheels and a custom gauge cluster), it was shipped directly to Europe where Udo Rienhoff purchased it from Hertz before one rental mile could be put on it.