

West Coast Classic Cougars '67 GT Give Away

I am one of the 1967 Cougar's first, and to this day, fondest admirers. I was introduced to the Cougar in the summer of 1966, just before starting my high school senior year. I was not an academic over-achiever in high school but consider myself fortunate to have been in a program that allowed me to take a half day of traditional course work and work the other half in a vocational education program. After two semesters and two summers working under my auto shop teacher, he helped me get my first "real" job. Before becoming a teacher he had worked as shop foreman for the local Pontiac dealer for over 25 years. When a business needed a mechanic, or a mechanic needed a reference, they would frequently contact him. The Mercury dealership in my hometown was changing owners, expanding inventory and hiring new people. They hired me to work in the new car "Make Ready" department. At first I thought the job would be boring, but I was pleasantly surprised. In fact, I could hardly wait till my morning traditional classes were over so I could get to work! Soon after getting the job, FoMoCo started conducting on-site training, teaching what to expect in terms of problems from the factory. Topics included hood, door, and trunk lid alignment, how to find and correct wind noise, locating rattles, etc. They also taught air conditioning theory, including trouble shooting and how to install dealer air units. I must have installed two or three a week, mostly on the Comets.

Mr. Pickard, the new owner, got everyone in the entire business excited about the arrival of our first Cougar. Lucky for me, I was working the day it arrived. I will never forget that day. I went out to the transport to see the car, but ended up helping the driver. Seems one of the chains on the front of the car was in a bind, so he asked me to crank the car and relieve the pressure. After doing so, he directed me off the trailer. I drove the car straight to my make-ready stall, and just sat in the car admiring it. I remember the almost intoxicating new car smell and admired the arrangement of the instrument cluster. Another thing I remember was "how right" the shifter felt in my hand and how long the hood seemed to be from the driver's perspective.

The car's color was, you guessed it, lime frost metallic. The Cougar was a Standard model, with a light beige/brown interior. It was a 289 2V, three speed manual shift car with no air, power steering, or brakes. The no air part would change the next day in my stall. I remember when I was installing the air, the car had lots of room under the hood, and was easy to work on. Installing the air on the Cougar took about an hour and half to two hours, about the same as the Comet. The a/c units came in a couple of small boxes, complete with every nut, bolt, screw, and washer you would need to do the job. For a little while I "wished" I could buy the green Cougar, but back then, wish was all I could do. There was no way I could make the payments, and my wedding day was only a few weeks away. Lucky for us the old 1957 Dodge got us through our senior year giving us only a few minor problems.

The year I worked there, the dealer never got any 390 Cougars, but it did get two White 67 Comet GTs so equipped. One was an automatic, the other a 4-speed car. Both were impressive, but the 4-Speed car was my favorite. I never really hammered it, but it would break traction in first or second without even trying. Back then, I wandered what it would be like just to drive a 390 4-Speed Cougar. Spring forward some 47 years and I am wandering again, what would it be like to Build then Drive my very own 67 FE equipped Cougar GT?

Enough about my introduction and first encounter with the 67 Cougar. The fact of the matter is I admired Cougars since they were introduced, but am still relatively new in the Cougar owner's community. For most of the last 40 or so years I have owned and restored 1956 Fords, two Victorias and an F-100 pickup in particular. Although they were a big part of my "carhood" for most of my life, I started to lose interest in them shortly after Ford introduced the 2005 Mustang. It happened when I stopped by the dealer to pick up parts for the farm truck. I always have to check out the new cars on the showroom, though I have never purchased a new one yet. When I walked into the show room this time, I was struck by a legend lime green Mustang GT. Yea, I liked the Mustang a lot, but its sight instantly took me back to my high school days when I was working in the Mercury dealership. The new retro Mustang is beautiful in its own way, but it doesn't have the "class" as that

lime frost 1967 Cougar in my mind from years ago. I don't know of any other car, outside the 67-68 Cougar, which blends its styling from long flat surfaces, sweeping angular lines, and curves into a beautiful work of art like the Cougar does. Later that night, I gave notice to my wife, that if I ever ran across the right lime frost 67 Cougar, I was going to have to buy it. To which she gave notice me that I was going to have to sell my Victorias!

Time passed and we made our first trip to Cruising the Coast in Mississippi. We drove down in our 1965 F-100 pickup that I had only recently finished. There must have been one or more of every kind of vehicle ever produced at the cruise. Just over 5,000 that year. I admired many of the cars and trucks at the event, including another red and white pickup almost like ours, only it was a long wheelbase Mercury Pickup from Canada. My very favorite however, was a 69 or 70 Red Cougar convertible with a white interior. The car was restored to like-new condition and was one of the most beautiful cars I had ever seen. Suddenly, it dawned on me that my wife was right, again and soon the 56 Victorias were sold. It's a shame Ford didn't let the Mercury division have a 67-68 Cougar convertible. It would probably have cost them a lot of Mustang convertible sales!

A few months passed, and it was time for the annual Pate swap meet. My local AACA club is one of the 16 or so clubs that started the Pate meet. I have worked the event for 7 years now, and enjoy it more every year. Working the event gets you on the ground before the vendors get set up. This particular year, it really "worked" for me, as a 69 Red XR-7 M-Code convertible showed up for sale. I had heard a lot of war stories about rust on the early Mustangs and Cougars in general, and convertibles in particular so I was a bit concerned. The seller in this case was advertising no rust and solid floors. I didn't take his word for it, but after about an hour of close scrutiny and confirming the no rust, we struck a deal. The car was mine before the swap meet was open for the public. I could hardly wait for the swap meet to be over so I could get home and started on the Cougar!

The car had set up for about 20 years, (thankfully inside) and needed a lot of little "stuff" before I could accurately assess its condition. I installed a new set of points and condenser, a new fuel tank and sending unit, fuel pump, lines, and overhauled the carb. The car cranked, ran, and drove out surprisingly well. Soon afterwards, I was able to get the paint arrangements worked out with the owner of one of the best body shops in the area. He did, however make it very clear that long term project cars like mine had to move under their own power before getting into his shop. Reading between the lines, I assumed that meant stop as well, so I did a complete brake job. After completing the brake job, I felt much more comfortable about driving the car and made several extended test drives, a couple with the top down! A few days later, I began disassembly of the car. It sure came apart a lot faster than it went back together! In spite of being meticulously bagged and labeled, it took what seemed forever to find the correct nuts and bolts to put everything back together after having it apart for almost two years. It was during the convertible's disassembly that my visions of the "Red" began to change. Under the original carpet was a Build Sheet and a beautiful blue metallic painted surface that not seen daylight since the car was built. I had thought the car had likely been painted "Resale Red" years ago, but I had not given much consideration about the car's original color. I then went back to my preliminary Marti report that said about 60 XR-7 convertibles had been ordered with that color for the 1969 year. Since the car was only showing 53k on the odometer, and appeared to have almost all of its original parts, I decided the car needed to go back in its original color. No regrets with this decision!

I fully expected the paint job to take a long time, since it was going to be done between "regular" jobs, but when it was finally finished, I was very pleased with the work. The car did, however come home with a "little" problem I hadn't noticed before, just a "little" miss at idle. I suspected soft valve seats, though I hadn't experienced any for years. Compression test revealed 35 pounds low on #8, head removal confirmed sunken exhaust valve seats, but also revealed a tiny scratch up and down #8 cylinder wall. Since the freeze plugs looked like they were about rusted through, I decided to pull the engine and re-ring it. Further disassembly turned up a broken top compression ring on #8. Honing #8 cylinder took it out of tolerance, so a complete rebuild was done. \$1,275 in parts and machine work plus a lot of labor made the little "miss" go away.

While the engine was making its way through the machine shop, I was convinced by my uncle that I should “dress up” the convertible under the hood to match the work done on the outside. The car was put on blocks stripped down to the fire wall and sand blasted from the firewall forward. I used Eastwood products for everything under the hood, installed a complete new front suspension kit, and talked a friend into overhauling the dreaded power steering valve and cylinder. With help from friends, strides were made and the car finished just three days before the 2012 Yellow Rose show. The car showed well and drew a lot of interest at the event. I have to thank members of the Lone Star Cougar club for encouraging me to show the car and Gene Mullenburg especially for helping get the car ready for display. I received the deluxe Marti report the day before the show. I was really glad I had decided to go original, since the Cougar came back one-of-one, thanks to the stainless steel door edge guards someone ordered from the factory! I am already wondering how the Deluxe Marti report might read on the 1967 project car? How many Lime frost green GTs were ordered with a 390 4-Speed? With a white top???

I never ran across that 67 Cougar I had mentioned to my wife years ago, but I did find a 68 that we bought and drove while the convertible was being restored. We put several trips on the 68 including our second trip to Cruising the Coast. There, we met Cindy, a young lady who got her Red 68 Cougar while in school and was still using it for her daily driver. Her son had recently repainted it for her. She had lots of good stories and things to say about her Cougar. As it turns out, my wife really likes our 68, and when your wife likes a car you like, that makes it special! Our 68 is in the paint shop now, and I am looking forward to getting it back and getting it reassembled soon. I am not planning on a restoration for the 68. The car is a sweet running 302 4V C4 car showing 70K. I really like the “feel” of this car in its near original unrestored condition.

My initial plans for the 67 GT project car would be to return it back to as close-to-original as I could afford. I already have a 67 date coded 390 I removed from a pickup back in 1987 “just in case” I ever needed one. It has the big clutch (I had replaced back in the 80’s) and bell housing still attached. Correct heads and manifolds I do not have. Lucky for me, I really enjoy swap meets and have got to know a couple of really good vendors who will help me find the correct rare parts. If selected, I will move the 4-Speed to the top of my shopping list! So much for the fun part of the restoration. Now to get the project seriously started. I would completely dis-assemble the car, and mount it to the rotisserie. It will be very time consuming, but should not cost much to get the rusted areas cut out and new metal welded back in place. I would scrape off any remaining undercoat, then sand blast everything on the rotisserie except the rear quarters and top, which I might add look very serviceable from the videos. Next, I would prime everything and cut in the lime frost around the edges. After putting new seals and bearings in the differential (hoping the gears are still good) I would hang the rear end on newly arched springs. If gears are bad I have a third member, 300:1 limited slip I removed from a full size big Merc 429 car I could use. Next the car would come off the rotisserie and slowly become a rolling chassis again. I would inspect, refurbish or replace everything needed to make the car a first class rolling chassis. At this time, I would slip in an old and somewhat tired 351 and C-4 automatic I removed from an old pickup and make the car drive in the interim to please my body man. I would then put the car through the paint shop drill as I have done with my last two Cougars. Provided my body man stays on his schedule, this would give me a year or so to locate engine and transmission parts, get them refurbished, and ready for the final install. I know these projects are expensive. Fact of the matter is, I wouldn’t want to know what my invoices just from WCCC were for the 69 convertible. If expenses rise too fast for my pocket book, the progress will have to slow down. At my pace I estimate 3-4 years to do it the way I want too. Everything deserves balance! Regarding offers from the Cougar Community Form, I am certainly not too proud to accept, and drive out of my way to pick up any items anyone would like to donate or sell on the cheap. It is great to see the offers among the Cougar community being made to see this project restored.

Further, regarding the 67 GT project, I very carefully selected the 68 and 69 Cougars I currently own. I made sure neither had any rust issues in frame, floor, or body before purchase. In just a quick look at the Project GT’s video, I can see this car will pose new challenges for me in several areas. I do however, have an old farm shop and use my welders often. I have to admit that some of my early welding probably made the dirt dobbers jealous, but I have taken two semesters of welding classes and have improved significantly. I

have gas, stick, and a wire feed welders. I have a 1967 Cougar parts car that has some real good driver's side sheet metal and other parts I will need. Also, I recently went in with a friend who was building a 68 Firebird for his son, and now have access to a rotisserie, which will come in handy when working on the floors and under carriage of the project car. Transportation over distance has not been a problem in the past, having driven from Fairbanks, Alaska to Omaha, Nebraska over 3,200 miles each way, twice, once in my 1956 Vicky and the other in my 1956 F-100. I now have an old F-250 Super Duty and car hauler I would use to transport the project car the 2,200 miles to Texas. I would likely try to time the trip with the Barrett Jackson Scottsdale event. One of our club members sold a Cougar there last year and a couple of other members who attended said it was a lot of fun.

In closing, I am the person with the passion, expertise and resources to restore the 67 GT project car back to her former glory! Nothing motivates me more than my memories of that Brand New 1967 lime frost Cougar, what it looked like, and yes, smelled like when it was sitting in my Make Ready stall back in the summer of 1966. Although I have never driven an FE powered 4-Speed Cougar (or Mustang), I would really appreciate the first-hand opportunity to do so! Thank you for considering my entry.

Regards,

Michael Hogge

Member of CCOA, Lone Star Cougar Club and

North East Texas Region, AACA

66 F-100 Custom Cab 302 4-V / AOD Parts Chaser

68 XR-7 J Code Project Car

69 XR-7 M Code Med Blue Met

93 and 00 F-250 Farm Trucks

07 CS/GT Mustang Daily Driver