What we have here is the most perfect Cobra in the world. Stringing these words together in the same sentence is almost guaranteed to cause disagreement between Cobra cognoscenti. They are the equivalent of fighting words in a bar or at a sporting event. Having thrown this skunk into the garden party, let’s step back and parse the statement to make what we’re talking about a little clearer. Make no mistake: what we are not describing, here, is a concours-perfect Cobra. This car is from another solar system.

CSX3133 just might be the longest ongoing restoration project in Cobra history. It was disassembled in 1975 and was only recently final-buffed and detailed. We’ve had an eye on this project almost since the beginning, having first met Bob Gingold, the car’s owner, some 38 years ago. At times the restoration saga has reminded us of the movie “Groundhog Day.”

Gingold purchased the car in 1973 but his plan to own a 427 Cobra actually began in the mid-1960s, before he was in the position to actually buy a car. At that time, his girlfriend described him as, “the sickest of the sick—a car guy who is collecting parts for the restoration of a car he doesn’t even own yet.” He knew he would own a car eventually, and he knew he would be restoring it, so why wait for the car before assembling the parts?

For example, Gingold began purchasing interior components—vinyl, carpet, trim pieces and hardware—in the late 1960s directly from AC Cars in England or the manufacturers subcontracted to produce them. His brother was working for the U.S. State Department at one of its consulates in Spain and he would travel to England frequently on business. He would return on an ocean liner because baggage was unlimited, so he could bring back all of the parts his brother asked for. He once found a used car dealer in England who had several 289 Cobras on display and inquired about 427s, which were extremely rare in Europe at that time. The dealer had no cars but did have some spare parts, like carpeting and a 42-gallon competition fuel tank which had never been used. It all went back and was deposited in Gingold’s basement, awaiting the day it might be needed.

It was never Gingold’s intention to get a 427 Cobra and craft it into a perfect concours example. In fact, concours, as it is known today, did not exist back in the mid-1970s. Back then the top of the Cobra heap was the low mileage original: a car with under 5,000 miles that had been maintained in perfect, showroom condition. In 1974, a 427 Cobra would have only been seven or eight years old, so it wouldn’t have been any kind of a stretch to find one fitting that description. There still a few around. It was also possible to find a well-maintained race car, in outstanding condition, with only 1,200 miles on it—as Gingold was to discover.

This project actually started out as just a re-paint. The car, CSX3133, was originally owned by a B-52 Strategic Air Command pilot and bombing instructor. He had raced it in SCCA regional events in Northern California and when he sold it, the second owner also raced it. One of the first things third owner Gingold did was take it to Bridgehampton in 1974, where he drove it in an open track event. He got the full dose of a 427 competition Cobra that day, and things just sort of spun out of control from there.

He had driven other performance cars before and, in fact, had a pristine Ferrari 275 GTB-4 sitting in his garage. The Cobra was a worthy garage-mate. In fact, Gingold even toyed with adding a Corvette to the stable. When racer George Wintersteen advertised his Grand Sport roadster for $15,000, Gingold made an appointment to
Every story has a starting point, and for this one we need to go back to Tuesday, January 28, 1964. Bob Gingold was in high school, with the lofty goal of going to medical school. His father owned an electrical supply company and a real estate development company in New York City and like most parents of that era, he wanted his son to be successful; maybe even more successful than he had become. Young Bob hit the books assiduously, knowing that the road to becoming a doctor was long and hard. His father hung a meaty carrot in front of him: “Become a doctor and I’ll buy you whatever car you want.”

It was a classic example of deferred gratification, but at that point Gingold had no clear idea of exactly what kind of car his efforts would yield. All that changed as he was leaving school one day with an armload of text books, reference books and medical journals. Parked in front of the building was a sleek, black Galaxie 500XL Sports Hardtop with an R-code 427 engine. Its idle was more of a low rumble. After walking past it he heard the engine pitch begin to rise behind him. The next thing he saw—and felt—was the car hurtling past him in a cloud of blue tire smoke as one tire clawed at the asphalt, leaving a single, 300-foot long black stripe down the street. This was immediately followed by a chorus of appreciative cheers and screams from a dozen girls who had witnessed the display.

That was all it took. Gingold began reading everything he could get his hands on about Ford 427s. Like most school libraries in the 1960s, the one at his school had subscriptions to just about every major monthly automotive magazine printed. What he couldn’t find in the library he got on the newsstand. When the 427 Cobra came out, a year later, as soon as he saw it he knew this was the car he wanted.

By 1966 Gingold was in college. When the summer rolled around and he needed wheels, his father suggested renting a car for nine weeks instead of buying one and then trying to sell it in the fall. He likely had in mind a typical rental like a Pontiac LeMans or a Chevy Impala. What turned out to be an excellent idea was probably not what his father had in mind. Gingold showed up at Gotham Ford, in Manhattan, and negotiated the long-term rental of a 1966 GT350 4-speed Hertz car. Needless to say, the car saw hard use—especially on weekends as Gingold and his buddies used the car at local drag strips trying to better each other’s times. More than once the car was towed to Gotham on a Sunday night, locked up and left outside of their service door. The keys were dropped into the after-key slot along with a note saying “clutch slipping” or “rear end making noise.”

Four years of college had been completed by 1974, along with four years of medical school, and he was working on his internship and was trying to decide on a medical specialty. Gingold realized he wanted to be a surgeon and concentrating on that specialty consumed another five years as a general surgeon and then two more years as a plastic surgeon. He would then go on to specialize in hand surgery, which took another two years.

In 1973 he began looking for a 427 Cobra. There were a few advertised for sale on Long Island at that time. His father went with him and the Cobras he looked at were in pretty rough shape. The elder Gingold convinced his son to hold out for a car in better condition. The neighbor across the street happened to own a Ford-Lincoln-Mercury dealership and brought over a new, Grabber Blue Pantera L. His father bought it for him. However, it just didn’t ring his bell and he ended up using it to travel around to look at 427 Cobras that were for sale in the northeast. He saw five of them, all in the $7000 range. The first one he found was a clapped-out 427 street car with side pipes, which his father talked him out of because it was too loud. He would, after all, be writing the check so his opinion carried a great deal of weight.

While the hunt for a Cobra was ongoing, Gingold was also collecting 427 Cobra parts. In the mid-1970s he had purchased major collections of parts and spares from two race teams after they stopped racing 427 Cobras in SCCA competition.

An ad in Autoweek captured Gingold’s interest. The car was described as a full competition 427 Cobra roadster with many spares for $12,500. The car was in Fresno, California and Gingold was on the other side of the country. He flew out to the West Coast, unencumbered by his father and the better judgement that accompanied him. He took a cab from the airport to see the car. After a test drive, he sealed the deal. All that was left was to get the car and a tractor trailer full of spare parts that went with it across the country.

Of particular interest was the fact that the original owner had pulled the engine that came in the car, a ’65 C5AE-H medium-riser that only had about 300 miles on, and replaced it with a race engine. The production engine was checked, leaked, dynoed and then pickled for long-term storage. The original transmission, a cast iron case top-loader, was also put on the shelf. The second owner passed both the original engine and transmission on to Gingold when he bought the car.

As it turned out, Gingold’s father had a wealth of experience in logistics. Two 55-foot long Ryder semis were loaded with the parts which included seven complete 427 side-oilers (three new and still in their crates), ten rear ends (two of each gear ratio available), 6 new transmissions, dozens of Halibrand wheels, race tires and stacks of cardboard boxes of all sizes. The Cobra was loaded onto an open trailer and the small convoy headed south to Los Angeles and the rail yard. An empty boxcar was waiting and the contents of the trailers were off-loaded. The Cobra had to be drained of gas before it could go into the boxcar and Gingold easily solved that problem by giving everyone in the rail yard rides until the car ran dry. The 40 gallons in the car’s fuel tank were gone in less than an hour.

The boxcar eventually arrived in Staten Island, about 40 miles from Gingold’s house, with New York City in between them. The senior Gingold’s electrical supply business had a fleet of large box
trucks with power tailgates and a couple of them were pressed into service. Ten round trips later, Gingold’s 3,000 square-foot basement and a couple of garages were filled with enough 427 Cobra parts to start a restoration business.

What do you do with an ex-race car? You take it to a race track, of course. The closest one was Bridgehampton, out near the end of Long Island. By 1974 the Bridge’s better days were behind it, the last professional race having been the Trans-Am, held in June 1970. After that the track began a slow decline. Hurricanes had devastated the property and the management was too cash-strapped to make the necessary maintenance and safety improvements to the circuit. New homes began creeping closer and closer as real estate values increased. This soon resulted in an anti-noise ordinance which made unmuffled racing a thing of the past and amateur club events filled the track’s schedule. They were necessary to pay the bills and there was enough interest to keep it busy on every weekend. This, of course, only increased the noise complaints. Eventually the local property owners won and Bridgehampton was closed. The property was used to build an upscale golf course.

In 1974, however, it was possible to get on the famous 2.85-mile track, described as “the most challenging road course in America.” Gingold bought an open trailer with the idea of bringing the Cobra out to Bridgehampton once a month, whenever he could get away from his hospital training. He spent that day having the time of his life. On the track, the Cobra was everything he imagined it would be. Maybe more. The experience cemented his love affair with this car.

CSX3133 was a handful on the street, especially with race tires, so it was used sparingly. In 1975 he decided to repaint it, and Gingold completely disassembled the car, tagging and bagging every part. The rolling chassis and body were brought to a painter who had enjoyed an excellent reputation among Cobra enthusiasts. The original $2000 estimate eventually swelled to $8,500, still unassembled, by the time it was completed. Gingold didn’t have a lot of experience with automotive paint shops, but he nevertheless had the feeling he was being taken advantage of. His only recourse was a legal one. To pry the car away from the hooligan with a paint gun prior to what had the earmarks of becoming a long and unsavory trial, he was required to post a bond of three-times the bill’s total. With the car back in his garage, the trial progressed. Based on the time spent on prep and paint, the judge ultimately ordered Gingold to pay the painter $1,500.

The episode proved to be just one of many speed bumps along the road of Cobra ownership. Gingold was now convinced that the car deserved a first-class paint job (having witnessed what a less that first-class job looked like up close). The car was now more than ten years old and the thought of putting old parts back on a freshly painted car was unthinkable. It was obvious that many of the necessary pieces needed would not likely be easier to find in the future. So the search for original or NOS parts accelerated. And therein was revealed another complication.

As a medical doctor with an understanding of psychological disorders, Gingold recognized that he had one. He was an obsessive compulsive. His self-diagnosis was accurate but it was not a debilitating affliction. In fact, it was actually something of a positive attribute for a surgeon involved in intricate microsurgical operations which required nothing short of perfection. However, when it came to collecting Cobra parts, many of which had become obsolete, the compulsion, while manageable, was at times awkward. The question of “how much is enough,” could never quite be answered.

By the 1980s, CSX3133 was still apart. There was no rush to complete it and no deadline. The need to accumulate parts was the stronger pull. On a surgeon’s income, price was rarely a consideration unless someone’s asking price made it obvious that they really did not want to sell a particular part. It was during this time that the philosophy in finishing the project began to take shape. Simply put, he wanted every component and part, every nut, bolt and washer, to be prepared the way the best fabricator at Shelby American could have done on his best day, using only the tools and equipment available to craftsmen in the 1960s when the car had been originally finished. Better components, manufacturing techniques, electronics—state of the art stuff—was available and was all rejected. The parameters were that everything would be original and period-correct as to the way the cars were actually delivered, right down to the workmanship.

Gingold prowled swap meets and car shows. He became extremely knowledgeable on the subject of Cobra parts, and as his detailed comprehension of the intricacies continued to expand, he was called on to become one of the concours judges at the early conventions he attended. He tried to use this to disseminate some of his encyclopedic knowledge of parts but was soon dismissed after a few years because his standards were too high and his zero-tolerance criterion left no wiggle-room for competitors whose cars were in this gray area. Gingold was simply speaking a language of details that no one else spoke.

His knowledge was so well developed that he knew who manufactured each original part and even subtle variations in production. When he found a bearing, bushing or fastener that was the original one supplied to Shelby American or AC, he bought it immediately, in whatever quantity was available. He became well known to the Cobra restorers of the day, like Mike McCluskey, Bill Kemper, Geoff Howard and Carter Gette. Most were willing to sell him a couple of what he was looking for but they realized they also needed to maintain an inventory for their own customers.

Gingold went a step farther. Once he found an original manufacturer he contacted them to see if they had any parts left. Rear upright bearings, for example, were made by Timken in England. There were distributors who had warehouse inventories and Gingold contacted each one of them (many Cobra parts had applications for other cars which were depleting inventories, so the supplies were not limitless). He found the correct bearings at a parts supplier in Paris, France. This bearing did not exist in the U.S. But he didn’t stop there. He went to the original factory in England and bought whatever inventory they still had.

Another strategy was looking at Cobras that were for sale. Gingold had no intention of purchasing another car, but very often these owners had spare parts in their garage or basement. Having decided to sell their car, many were happy to unload their spare parts, which would be of no use to them once the car was gone. A lot of owners had extra wheels, engine parts or various components. Some were brand new and had not yet been installed on the car. They were happy to sell these parts separately instead of having to include them as part of a package deal with the car, using them as a bargaining chip, as in, “Oh, I’ll throw in the wheels and the extra intake.” These owners were not normally thought of as parts sources. But, in fact, that’s exactly what they were.

Gingold didn’t stop at parts. His compulsion also found its way into Cobra literature. One of his great enjoyments was reading everything he could find on these cars. If he saw something relating to them in his travels, he was unable to resist purchasing it. His collection of books, magazines, factory brochures and posters grew accordingly. Among the things he zeroed in on were some of the original documents,
Step quickly beyond your first impression of the superior quality of workmanship and overall cleanliness and note that every nut, bolt, screw and fastener on this car are perfectly aligned on some imaginary axis. Maybe, in reassembly, that might happen on its own once in a great while, but not often. So, how does it happen every time? Start with intention, add in some patience and perseverance and marinate it in unlimited time. When the competition fuel filler is installed, for example, six bolts attach the collar on top of the aluminum fender to another collar underneath it, with nuts that cannot be seen. The two collars essentially pinch the fuel neck flange leading into the tank and the body skin between the collars. To get each bolt’s flats aligned, the nuts must be tightened while the bolts are held in place. In the case of threaded holes for bolts or screws, to end with them not only tight but in alignment, requires use of stainless steel or nylon washers or shims which are just the right thickness under the bolt or screw head. Likely no two will be the perfect thickness so a lot of trial and error will result. Note that patience and perseverance were not tossed into the equation without reason. Now imagine repeating this process with every nut, bolt and screw on the car.

The slots in the screws which hold the windscreen molding to the body [below] all follow the radius of the windscreen. The small, black powder-coated Allenhead cap-screws which attach the plexiglass screen to the molding are also perfectly aligned.
The SHELBY AMERICAN

When Shelby American needed an electric fuel pump for their competition cars, they didn’t have very far to look. Stewart Warner already had one, model 240A. Originally an aftermarket item, these pumps were used on everything from drag cars to road race cars to circle-track racers as well as inboard/outboard racing boats from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s. Shelby American chose them for small block comp cars, 427 Cobra S/Cs, GT40 MK IIs and R-Models.

These fuel pumps were fairly common in the racing world and they turned up at swap meets in the late 1970s and early 1980s where they were quickly snatched up by anyone who recognized them from their usage on Shelby competition vehicles. They were commonly priced anywhere between $5 and $25. The reason why they didn’t sit on anyone’s table very long at swap meets is because they had been discontinued and recalled from dealers in the early 1970s.

The model 240A was a diaphragm type pump with a set of contact points which alternately opened and closed when power to the pump was activated. And that was the problem. They were commonly used in inboard/outboard racing boats which were powered by one or two V8 engines. The pump was mounted in the engine compartment which was sealed to keep the everything dry. Apparently, on several occasions fuel vapors built up in the compartment and the contact points ignited it, causing an explosion. Stewart Warner could not insure that the pumps would only be used in well-ventilated areas, so they simply stopped making and selling them.

A year or two after the 240A pumps were discontinued Bob Gingold showed up at Stewart Warner’s Northeast Regional Service and Distributor Center in New Jersey with the four 240As that came with CSX3133 and asked if they could be rebuilt. An older guy in charge of the service department looked at them and said that, unfortunately, he could not replace them because the pumps were no longer available. But he said, yes, they could be refinished and all gaskets and fittings replaced. Then he said that he had enough parts to “build” new pumps. Gingold alerted like a retriever in the tall grass and, without missing a beat, said he would like some. “How many do you want?” the guy asked. “How many can I get?” asked Gingold. You can see where this was going.

“Do you have enough parts to make 40?” asked Gingold, pulling a number out of the air. That was possible. Ordinarily $29 each, in quantity Gingold’s cash-and-carry price was $20 a piece. “I even have brand new boxes,” was the topper. Two months later 40 new pumps were waiting for him, along with his original four. He was excited by the sight of the trunk of his daily-driver, a Buick Riviera, filled with bright red and yellow Stewart Warner boxes. Never too shy to go back to the well, he asked, “Can I get 40 more?” He was told to come back in two months.

Two months later he was back to pick the second batch of pumps. It occurred to him that this was like something out of a Dr. Seuss book. Rather than going back again and again and getting 40 more each time, he asked how many pumps could be made from the parts available? “Probably about 100 or so,” was the answer. The limiting factor was the main housing castings. Tired of making the five-hour round trip, Gingold said, “Ok, I’ll take all you can make. See you in a couple of months.” For that last trip he took the passenger and rear seat out of his car and filled it with 120 complete pumps in the original boxes. He also got whatever odd parts were left over, plus two unique chromed pumps that were assembled for display at trade shows.

Fast forward ten years to Howard Pardee, hearing someone say that the SW 240 fuel pumps were still being used as original equipment on International Harvester farm combines. Pardee found an IH parts dealer who was willing to search his computer, which was linked to other IH dealers, to see how many he could turn up. Imagining himself as the Diamond Jim Brady of fuel pumps, he instructed the parts man to order every one available. He had to pay whatever the individual dealers wanted ($40 to $200) but he scored 14 of them. As the supply suddenly dwindled and they could no longer be obtained from SW, they were obsoleted by International Harvester. But not before Pardee got the very last two in their system.
off a priceless gold Spanish doubloon. Or a surgeon preparing for an intricate operation, come to think of it...

It turned out that almost everything that came off the car was able to go back on. Having quantities of spares turned out, in many cases, to be little more than a security blanket. But back-up is always psychologically beneficial. Almost every single nut, bolt or washer that was used in reassembling the car was authentic and in the cases where there were small imperfections, they were replaced with pieces as correct as the ones originally used when the car was built. This went far beyond the desire to “get it right” — it was a compulsion.

In the 1990s the Cobra replica trend picked up when Carroll Shelby began building “completion” 427 S/Cs. He commissioned 44 chassis to be built, intending to give them serial numbers between CSX3056 and 3100 (with the exception of 3063 which had been used in 1965). Shelby contracted Mike Mccluskey to do some research, locating the original manufacturer for every 427 S/C part needed to build a car. When original parts were out of stock, a new production run was ordered. When parts couldn’t be made by original manufacturers, other manufacturers were subcontracted. By 1994 Mccluskey had accumulated 44 of every part necessary to complete a 427 S/C to original specifications, with the exception of engines and transmissions. The shortage of engines would later lead Shelby to manufacture his own blocks, heads and other necessary components.

Only eight “Completion 427s” would eventually be sold by 1998, and during that time the 427 “Component Cobra” project was well underway. These cars would come to be called CSX4000 cars and while not exact duplicates of the original Cobras, they were very, very close. Carroll Shelby did not have the time to run around and seek out NOS or perfect used parts with which to build these cars. Instead he had parts reproduced and since he was Carroll Shelby, he could determine how close to original was acceptable. If his name was on the car, it would be acceptable to almost everyone else.

Shelby faced a problem common to anyone who undertakes the reproduction of a part that is no longer available. It has been referred to as “The 90% Rule.” Simply stated, a reproduction part which is 90% accurately manufactured will satisfy 90% of the people interested in buying it. This level of accuracy allows the piece to be sold for a reasonable price and is acceptable to most buyers. To make the piece 100% accurate would increase the cost to the point where it would be so expensive that less than 10% of the potential buyers would be willing to pay that price. Hence, it would never be reproduced.

Gingold’s belief, back in the 1970s when he started searching for Cobra parts, was that at some point they would cease to exist. He was both right and wrong. The original parts did cease to exist when the supply ran out (in some cases he was the one responsible for the vanishing supply). But the replica Cobra market fueled the need for “replacement” parts which did not require that they be manufactured with 100% accuracy. Only a small percentage of Cobra owners demanded parts that were 100% correct. As time went on, fewer and fewer original parts were available and rather than do without, owners were forced to lower their standards.

Bob Gingold eventually became well known among Cobra owners, mostly by

All of the aluminum inner panels were polished to a mirror sheen. There was fear that opening the trunk in bright sunlight could cause temporary retina damage to spectators not wearing sunglasses. The multiple reflections produced a funhouse “Hall of Mirrors” effect with the Stewart Warner 240A fuel pumps, making them look like they were marching off into infinity.
reputation. Those who didn’t know him suspected that he was stockpiling original Cobra parts and would, at some point, begin selling them for outrageous “profits.” Why else stock up on these parts?

This was not the case, of course, but it was difficult for anyone not familiar with an obsessive compulsion disorder to imagine. Collecting Cobra parts for Gingold was an end in itself. He wanted to restore his car with its original parts and if he didn’t have them then he wanted the very next best thing. In order to recognize perfection it was necessary to have multiple examples so they could be compared, and the best ones chosen for use on the car when the time for reassembly came.

By the late 1990s CSX3133 was still apart and had been painted several times. Each time, he judged it not good enough and he pushed it back into his garage. In the meantime, he continued obsessing over every individual piece or part. He found that adding to his collection of original parts had slowed to a trickle, because most of the things he was looking for were, quite simply, no longer available anywhere because he had already bought all of them. He had become his own worst enemy.

When he finally decided to reassemble the car he chose to use as many original competition parts as possible, knowing full well that things like a Weber carburetors or a dry sump system had never been on this car originally. Unlike undertaking a concours restoration which straight-jackets the owner into completing the car exactly the way it left the factory, Gingold relied on his own guidelines. His car had been slightly modified when it was originally raced because it had narrow-hipped rear fenders. Race rubber on wider wheels would not fit so the fender openings were massaged to accommodate them. Years later, when the body was prepared for paint, he had the rear fenders configured to original competition specifications.

The only thing that mattered was that each and every detail was perfect in its own respect. To this end, he began seeking out experts. For example, the transmission
was an NOS Ford-numbered, Alcoa aluminum-case top-loader with a Ford XE magnesium tailshaft. Gingold brought it to Jerico in Charlotte, North Carolina along with brand new bushings, synchros and bearings—all NOS and in their original Ford boxes—so it could be blue-printed and assembled by the best transmission man in the country. He got original, NOS short-track GT40 gears still in the boxes from Dan Gurney’s All American Racers.

Over the years he had gathered up a large assortment of period-correct, exotic big block engine parts. The engine he built for CSX3133 was the equivalent of a “dream team.” The block was identical to the one used in the Ford GT40 MK II-B. The heads were XE high-rise and he found a special Ford XE Weber intake of the type that Holman-Moody had used. The goal for the engine was to put together the ultimate combination of racing parts which might have been used in 1965. The completed engine was then dynoed on four separate occasions, over a twenty-year stretch, using a single 4V Holley, a set of 48mm Webers and finally 58 IDA Webers. It was finally tweaked to yield 760 horsepower @ 7000 rpm.

For wheels, Gingold had accumulated more than four dozen Halibrands and he chose the four most perfect. Some had been in their original Halibrand boxes since the 1960s. Dozens of race tires had come with the car when he bought it but he had purchased a new set of Goodyear Bluestreak racing tires more than 35 years ago and they were still wrapped in heavy brown paper with the original size stickers and mailing labels from Penske Racing in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania to Shelby American in Los Angeles. Gingold had vacuum-sealed them and kept in a cedar-lined, humidity-controlled basement fur closet since the 1970s. They were in perfect condition with no cracks, disoloration or signs of dry rot.

The first time the car was unveiled to the public was at the Concours d’Elegance of America at St. John’s (formerly the Meadowbrook Concours) in Plymouth, Michigan in July, 2012. It was awarded a Gold Ribbon for the Most Desirable Car in the Show and a huge Silver Cup award, the Best Driving Award for the car the judges would most like to take home. Fat chance, that.

The car has been out of the public eye for the past 37 years. Aside from chance encounters at one of the shops it has been in during that time, few people have actually seen it until the concours in Michigan. In fact, this is the first time that Gingold
Anyone who has spent any time with a tube of SimiChrome and a soft cloth will appreciate the chrome-like shine on these magnesium Halibrands. It only takes about a week for them to tarnish and make you feel like a character in “Groundhog Day.”
has actually discussed the CSX3133’s details. Prior to this, references to the car—including the footnote in the last registry—were based on hearsay or casual conversation by people who had not actually seen the car. It was a lot like the game of “telephone.” Something is passed from one person to the next and by the time the last person receives it, it bears little resemblance to what was first told, but it has the ring of truth.

Why so secretive? Gingold admitted that when he runs into other Cobra owners conversations it invariably leads to discussions of parts availability, followed by desperate pleas for help in obtaining some impossible-to-find part. “I have no desire to sell anything, so the requests just get old,” said Gingold. “I get tired of explaining that nothing I have is for sale.” No one has ever, by the way, seen the entire stock of spares he has collected over the years. Better that it remains one of the enigmas in Cobra history.

The past thirty-nine years have given this project some perspective. It is not likely anyone with the desire to create NOS perfection in a 427 Cobra, starting right now, could ever duplicate this car. And maybe, in this universe, there isn’t the need for another one. No matter; the parts simply do not exist. It was difficult enough for Bob Gingold to fill his shopping cart in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, the only way to get all the parts necessary would be to convince Gingold to let go of some of his spares. And if you know anything about obsessive compulsives, the chances of that happening are Slim and None. And Slim just left town.

In thirty years it might be possible for someone to collect enough NOS parts to restore a CSX4000 or Kirkham Cobra to their original specifications—or some interpretation thereof—but that begs the question: why bother? There have been so many of these cars produced that they are just not very likely to rise in value at anything close to the same rate as an original 427 Cobra. Only about 260 original street cars were made and they sold for about $7,000. Today, they have appreciated to about $850,000. That’s a rate approaching 1250%. More than 1,000 CSX4000s and 1,000 Kirkhams have been built to date. At a basic price of somewhere around $100,000 today, if they maintained the same rate of appreciation in the next thirty years, each one would be worth $10M (not including three decade’s worth of inflation). If you think that’s possible then you should start buying CSX4000 or Kirkham spare parts now!

Finally, every Cobra owner is used to the two questions that virtually everyone who sees the car can’t help asking: how fast will it go and how much is it worth? They don’t have much relevance to Cobra owners but for the great unwashed they are a yardstick they can grasp. Unless you’re going to Bonneville, the top speed is just an educated guess. And the value? Gingold has a standing offer from a long-time Cobra enthusiast for $3.2M should he come to his senses and decide to sell it. That’s probably as close to ascertaining the car’s value as you’re going to get.

Now that CSX3133 is finally finished, we can already hear the undercurrent of voices asking, “What about all those unused original parts?” No immediate plans have been made but after one of each part is put on the shelf as a spare, what remains could eventually find their way onto eBay or be sold as a package deal. But first there would have to be some sensitivity training. “It’s time to let go, Doc.” As with everything else surrounding this project, there is no schedule or deadline planned.

The SHELBY AMERICAN

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The Weber induction system is considered the ultimate carburetor set-up for the Cobra. This is likely because, almost from the very beginning, they were the signature of the small block competition cars, first as 48 IDM models and shortly thereafter 48 IDAs. If things had gone a little differently, a 427-powered Cobra Daytona Coupe might have led to a big block Cobra competition car with 58mm Webers (a prototype lightweight had been constructed), but history took an unexpected twist when not enough big-block cars could be built by the FIA’s April 1965 deadline. The result was that Shelby American was forced to compete with the previous year’s small block Cobras and interest in a big block Super Coupe as well as any FIA big block roadsters basically fell off of the cliff.

In the mix there, somewhere, Carroll Shelby had negotiated an exclusive contract with Eduardo Weber to create and manufacture a larger carburetor, the 58mm model, which would provide increased horsepower for Ford’s 325-cubic-inch Indy small-block and FE big block engines. It would soon find a home on 427 medium-risers in both front-to-back and side-by-side configurations.

The 58mm project did not last very long, because as soon as Shelby realized the big block cars would not be competing in Europe, production was cancelled. His exclusive agreement somehow remained in force. The 58mm, nevertheless, acquired legend status in the Cobra enthusiast world because of its extreme rarity. When each carburetor was built it was given a small brass plate, smaller than your thumbnail, with the production number stamped on it. The plate was riveted to the side of the main casting. An estimate of only twelve sets were made (48 carburetors) based on the fact that no 58mm carburetors with a number higher than 48 has turned up in almost 50 years.

In his continual search for Ford big block performance parts, Bob Gingold happened across several sets of 58mm Webers in his travels because not only did Carroll Shelby receive them but Ford also passed them around to various drag racers. About the time the 58mm were disappearing, General Motors’s research and development department was working on a big-block Grand Sport and they wanted 58mms but Shelby’s contract remained in affect. GM was desperate and short of time. Engineer Jim Kinsler oversaw three sets of 58mm carburetors that were cast in magnesium and used to show the GM higher-ups. They were also used testing engines and when the Grand Sport project was terminated they found their way onto big-block Chevy-powered Can-Am Lolas and McLarens. The magnesium castings were softer and tended to get beat up. Eight of these carburetors eventually found their way into the hands of Al Maynard who was a big supplier of nuts, bolts and hardware to General Motors. Racer Craig Olsen bought two sets but was never able to make them work.

The third set survived in a custom-made wooden case, something you would expect from Louis Vutton. It was discovered and purchased by, surprise, Bob Gingold. It still had airline shipping tags on the handle from Italy.

As anyone who has ever restored a car knows, it never looks better than the day it is finished. If you’re going to have special photography done or enter the car in a show, there is no better time. The longer you wait, the more work will be required to bring the car back up to that ideal you saw when it rolled out of the shop. For CSX3133, this article formed the impetus for studio photography and Gingold was able to assemble two of the best studio shooters in the business to put the car into their viewfinders. Both showed up at the studio in Syosset, New York expecting yet one more “been there/done that” yawn-inducing automotive experience.

Despite years of photographing some of the most stunning cars in the world, they were mesmerized by CSX3133. One likened it to a siren, out of Greek mythology. “You can’t take your eyes off of it. It draws you in and then kills you.” The other noted that the closer you look, the more you see. Photos used here are the work of Scott Nidermaier and Dimitris Kolyvas.