

Carroll Shelby

Highlight Video Transcript



What does a chicken farmer know about auto racing?

Ask Carroll Shelby. After starting out raising chickens, Shelby went on to become a world-class race car driver and a world championship race car builder. In 1962, he designed the Cobra sports car and changed the face of automobile racing.

Get the ultimate insider's account of the different — and much more dangerous — world of racing in the 1950s and learn how Shelby's early career led to his decision to build his first car. Follow him through the excitement and challenge of creating a small, highly specialized company that demanded a high degree of creative freedom and no less than the continued support of major manufacturers to make its concepts a reality.



Bill Mitchell knew the value of branding. As vice president of design for General Motors, he oversaw the creation of cars, such as the Corvette Stingray, whose styling became known as the “Bill Mitchell look.” His personal look — a wardrobe of colorful, sharply cut clothing — identified him as the man who produced those clean, sharp-edged cars.

Carroll Shelby, creator of the Cobra sports car, also has an uncanny knack for branding. He has developed a personal and professional style that have distinguished him throughout his long life.

In everything he’s done, from chicken farming to managing a Le Mans-winning race team, Shelby has been an absolute original — and has become an automotive legend.



Examples of Bill Mitchell’s automobile artwork from the collections of The Henry Ford

Carroll Shelby, Creator of the Cobra Sports Car

Entrepreneur extraordinaire, master storyteller,
automotive legend.

Have the right people on your team.

06:06:56; 02

In '66, we still had, we had the engines, the 427, but we would run out of brakes. They weighed 4,000 pounds with the driver and the fuel in 'em and that was a heavy race car. And down that straight at Le Mans — three and a half miles — when it came time to stop, you burned the brakes out right quick. So about a month before Le Mans, as I remember it, Phil Remington, who was not an engineer but probably superior to a lot of engineers, worked for us and — and — he figured out a way to change the rotors in one minute. So that's what won Le Mans for us, as well as hard work, as far as designing the car they were bulletproof.

Finding your niche. And keeping it.

07:17:44; 11

We work in what you call a niche marker. You can't sell a million of these cars. And their finances are based on they gotta sell a million of something to make any money. It's very difficult for us because we could not operate without being a part of a big company.

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It would cost us \$20 million to do what we call the soft stuff, emissions and crash testing of a model of a car. We have to work with a big company to do that. They have 10,000 engineers working on that. We wouldn't have the \$20 million to do that.

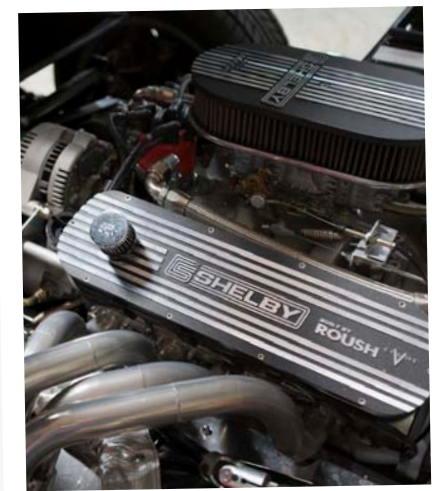
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Us working with these companies, it's a very tight wire that we have to walk. If we're cocky about it, if we think that we're very important in the overall scheme of a big company, they're going to run us off. We're there to perform a service that gets a lot of publicity for the things that we do.



Carroll Shelby.

"We work in what you call a niche market. You can't sell a million of these cars."
— Carroll Shelby



Shelby and NASCAR team owner Jack Roush's high-performance crate motor.

07:20:08; 10

The cars that we take and modify are the sports cars that we build. We can take a project and go from zero to three months we're in production. Where Ford, if they have to do that, they take two years to do what we can do in three months. So it's a very tight rope that we have to walk. But we couldn't be in business if we went out on our own.

The best project is the next project.

08:16:41; 26

I get asked 20 times a week what is my favorite car. And I've always said, "The next one." Our Daytona Coupe, I'm told it once sold for \$22 million in Germany the other day. I sold it for \$4 thousand. We built six of them. They won the world championship.

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"Why in the world didn't you save those cars?" I said, "Because our company needed the \$4 thousand." And at that time, race cars — obsolete race cars — weren't worth anything. A Ferrari that I won . . . a lot of races in sold for \$15 million the other day. I don't worry about that. 20/20 hindsight always works. My favorite car is the next one we're gonna build.

The current project.

08:14:07; 02

Oh, it'll run on hydrogen. It'll run on about anything except peanut butter. It's a very small, little engine that was developed originally in Australia with a lot of faults to it. But it fires two pistons at the same time. It's kinda like a pistol cylinder. And the amazing thing is you take a 30 kW generator, it — and the engine to pull it, the I- the auto cycle engine, the little — two-liter engine.

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We have several companies that are interested in it. I got high hopes for it. But I've developed a lot of things that I had high hopes for. I have a new carbon fiber that weighs a third less, costs half as much, stronger than the present carbon fiber. I've got high hopes for that. I'm not sure it'll work. But I haven't found any real problems with it yet.

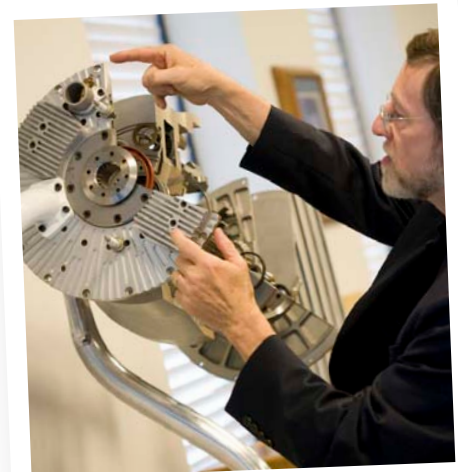
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But I'm always looking for something that's different.



The street legal version of Shelby's Cobra Daytona Coupe.

"My favorite car is the next one we're gonna build."
— Carroll Shelby



Shelby's latest project is the OX2 internal combustion engine.

Sometimes, trademarks just happen.

08:19:10; 00

I had a chicken farm. All the chickens died eventually. And my next-door neighbor in East Texas now is the world's biggest chicken producer. And I started the same time he did. And I went broke. And he's a billionaire. But one day, I was vaccinating my chickens. And my wife called me and said, "You're supposed to be in Fort Worth, Texas. The race starts in an hour and a half."

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I had chicken manure all over these overalls and I was sticking the needle in these chickens to keep them from getting Newcastle disease. I jumped in my pickup truck. I didn't have time to change. I got to Fort Worth, to Eagle Mountain Lake just in time to start the race. I won it in these overalls. And they put pictures of me on the front page of the Fort Worth Press. And I thought, "Hey, this is pretty good." Then I always wore a black hat. I don't know why. But I had a black hat that I'd worn to keep the sun off. And I came to California one day. And I had that black hat on.

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And I won the race out here. They say, "The man with the black hat and his, and his farmer's coveralls." So, I thought, "Doesn't get any better than this." They didn't run my picture when I didn't have all this stuff on. So I've been wearin' that hat ever since.



A high-performance distributor on one of Shelby and Roush's crate motors.



The garage at Carroll Shelby's headquarters.

**Carroll Shelby, has a lot more to say.
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and connect with other visionaries thinking out loud.