

CLASSIC DRIVER

Blowing Hot - New Shelby Series 1



Think Shelby and, chances are, the brutally functional shape of the Cobra will spring to mind. It was Carroll Shelby, after all, who conceived and masterminded this all-conquering sports car in the 1960s. As well as beating Ferrari and winning the FIA World Manufacturers' Championship in 1965 with the Cobra Daytona Coupe, the now-legendary Shelby went on to build the meanest and baddest Cobra of them all - the much admired, and much-copied, 427 SC. There's every chance you'll have seen a replica of this car, but as all of the originals were built by Shelby American Inc in the US, the real thing is a rare sight in the UK.

Equally rare on Britain's roads is Shelby's latest sports car sensation – the Series 1. In 1999, Shelby drew deeply from his beloved motor sport world to create what was described by Top Gear TV as “the best handling American muscle-car ever,” when they drove it in 2000. But that was over three years ago. At the time, the car boasted a normally aspirated, 320hp Aurora V8 engine developing 290lb ft of torque, a six-speed rear transaxle, and perfect 50/50, front-rear weight distribution. Shelby hinted then that a supercharged version might be on its way, and guess what? A blown version of the car has now gone on sale – with nothing less than mind-bending performance on tap.

How about 0-60mph in just 3.2 seconds (better than any current production sportscar) and a standing quarter mile of 11.3 secs at 124mph from the forced induction, quad-cam, four-valves-per-cylinder, 4.0-litre V8. The delivered 450bhp and 406lb ft torque are impressive figures, although not the highest outputs by super-car standards, yet the Series 1 accelerates off the line like no other. Part of the reason for this eyeball-blurring performance lies in the supercharger system, the installation of which goes way beyond simply bolting on a Vortec blower, and part in the chassis construction and weight distribution of the Series 1.

“We wanted to maximise blower performance to engine longevity while maintaining clean running,” says Shelby American's Marketing Director, Gary Patterson. Predictably, the increased performance demanded higher flowing fuel injectors and an uprated fuel pump that could deliver increased pressure on demand.

Careful attention has been paid to blower bearing lubrication, to ensure long-term reliability, the clutch plate has been changed to a ceramic item to cope with the extra power and the radiator shroud is modified to accept an intercooler heat exchanger. Finally, the engine management system is reprogrammed to optimise the power curve. Once the Shelby team are happy with the way each engine performs, it is put on a rolling road to verify that it is making a genuine 450bhp. Under-bonnet, the result is a beautifully engineered and packaged system, which delivers raw power the way only a supercharged power unit can.

Americans are legendary for making cars that go fast in a straight line, but when it comes to cornering prowess, it has often been said that the Europeans can show them a thing or two. The Series 1, however, is clearly a class act that Europeans could learn from.

Through the use of lightweight materials like aluminium honeycomb and carbon fibre, Shelby has been able to produce possibly the world's most advanced production car chassis. It has twice the torsional strength (52 hertz) and stiffness of most sports cars, and is also incredibly light (2850lb kerb weight for the Series 1 compared with, say, an Aston Martin Vanquish at 4045lb), endowing the car with an extremely favourable power-to-weight ratio.

Shelby has brought all of his racing experience to bear on the specification of the car's suspension, steering and brakes. Main features include forged aluminium upper and lower A-arms for the independent rear suspension, race-bred, inboard-mounted, coil-over shock absorbers and 12-inch ventilated discs. At the front, rocker arms activate inboard-mounted, coil-over spring/damper units, while stopping power is generated by 13-inch diameter ventilated brake discs clamped by powerful, four-piston calipers. The Series 1 rolls on 18-

inch diameter wheels and tyres, has power-assisted, rack-and-pinion steering with just 1.6 turns from lock to lock for ultra-quick response, and is capable of generating a neck-stretching 1.0g lateral acceleration.

Clothing the advanced chassis is an aggressively styled, carbon fibre body that possesses all the drama of the original Cobra, but in a design penned for today. Air is sucked through the familiar, Cobra-style, oval-mouthed grille, and forced out over the low-slung bonnet to produce downforce and thereby aid stability at speed. Sculptured air vents faired in behind the front wheels serve to relieve air pressure and aid brake cooling in conjunction with circular ducts set in the front air dam. The swoopy body “kicks-up” over the rear wheel arches before ending, in true fastback style, with an abruptly cut-off tail – all in the interests of effective aerodynamics.

The Series 1 comes fully equipped with a hand-crafted leather interior, body-hugging sports seats, power windows, air conditioning and CD player – in fact, everything you would expect in a top-level sports car. In performance terms and layout, the Series 1 stacks up favourably against the Ferrari 456, which costs over £170,000 new. By comparison, a supercharged Series 1 is priced at around £110,000 at today's exchange rates, representing what Shelby believes is a notably more cost-effective performance package as well as a more thrilling and communicative driving experience. For those for whom ultimate performance isn't a requirement, the normally aspirated version is also available at around £95,000.

Shelby Series 1 production is limited to just 500 cars, adding exclusivity and long-term value to the marque, and 50 supercharged versions have burbled away from Shelby's Las Vegas Motor Speedway-based premises. The cars are available direct from the factory and are sold all over the world, the latest Supercharged Series 1 being finished for a customer in Monaco.

For further information regarding the Shelby Series 1 or the legendary Shelby Cobra sports car, contact Gary Patterson at Shelby American Inc. Call 00 1 702 643 3000, e-mail: sales@shelbyamerican.com, or visit the Shelby American Inc web site at www.shelbyamerican.com.

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