



First in line

The First Saleen Mustang

Text and Photos
by Dave Stribling

Every story has a beginning, and the story of the Saleen Mustang began in 1984 with a white Mustang hatchback. The ensuing 10 years have seen the interest in the Saleen Mustang program grow, but little is known about the first Saleen. Many, in fact, don't even remember that there was a 1984 Saleen Mustang produced (there were only three total), so very little is known about them. Saleen enthusiast and current owner of the first Saleen ever built, Stuart Akers, of

Indianapolis, Ind., has been compiling data on this and other Saleens for several years now, and we can finally bring to light the history around the beginning of a legend.

The first Saleen began life as an LX 5.0 hatchback that was originally purchased by Steve's sister Robin Lee

Saleen and turned over to Steve to be "Saleened." The car purchased was painted white with a tan cloth interior, 5-speed transmission and optional 3.08 rear axle. Working in a one car garage in Southern California, Steve assisted and directed in the transformation of the car into what he had hoped would be a long running venture.

The suspension on the car was to be one of the high points of the transformation, since engine mods in 1984 were a no-no, especially if you want to eventually get factory warranties for your conversions. The suspension was reportedly changed up to



eight times by Steve until he achieved the right balance for the car. Specific rate springs that lowered the car one inch, Bilstein shocks and Hayashi 15 inch wheels and Goodyear 215/60HR 15 tires were the final call for getting the new Mustang around the corners. The engine, as stated, was left alone except for a set of Cal Custom chrome valve covers, a chrome air breather and a special Saleen air cleaner decal.

The exterior ground effects package benefitted directly from Steve's work on the SCCA Tran Am circuit, as Stuart reports that the trademark rear Saleen spoiler was removed from one of Steve's Trans Am race cars (Notice the big Saleen Mustang lettering). The front spoiler, side skirting and rear spats were all originally laid up in fiberglass, and in 1985 were made from urethane. Being the only one in existence at the time, all of the graphics, including the three tone side stripes, were applied by hand. The side stripes are painted on the first car, and unlike production cars, narrow at the front of the car, where production car stripes stay the same width. The Racecraft Suspension decal was all hand-laid up personally by Steve, and is shifted slightly, unlike production models that were aligned top and bottom. The windshield decal appears to be a one of a kind item, with a black outline around the letters, and there are no 302 emblems mounted on the hood, unlike production models. Velcro front headlight covers were installed and were used on the early Saleens, and a special Saleen black

plastic name badge was mounted on the rear hatchback right about the factory Mustang emblem (later units would carry a metal chrome emblem; the current replacement is a plastic chrome unit).

The interior received special treatment including a Wolf Steering wheel, Cal Custom Hawk leather shift knob with special Saleen emblem and a Cal Custom ultrasonic security system. Although the first sales brochure advertised it as standard, the original prototype did not come with an Escort radar detector installed. The stereo in the first car was a Sanyo Digital until, which was later replaced with a Kenwood system for '85. Finally, a serial number was given to the car, 84-0032. This number was placed on a plate mounted on the driver's side headlamp bucket. The original rumor was that this number was chosen because Steve's wife Liz was reportedly turning 32 at the time, but that has been denied.

After completing the transformation, Steve and Liz drove the car around the country promoting their latest venture. The car was the one on the promo brochure for both 1984 and '85. During one of the photo shoots, the car was carrying a special license plate frame that read "Petaluma, Calif." on top and "Racecraft" on the bottom. During the shoot, Steve began peeling the California off the plate, but before he could get to Petaluma, the photographer reminded him that they were running out of sunlight, and that they needed to hurry. So Cal does not

appear in the photos, but the frame still remains with the car.

After a full season of promotions, the car was given back to Robin, who drove the car daily until 1988 when Steve purchased the car back. It stayed with Steve until 1990 when it was purchased by Blue Diamond Classics in Indianapolis, Ind. The car was purchased by its current owner in September of 1991 where it will probably remain for a long time.

Again, many people were unaware that there was even an '84 Saleen Mustang built, and there was quite a lot of incorrect information and holes surrounding the history of #32. Stuart began researching the car, finding some auto related papers under the seat belonging to Robin, contacting Steve about specific items about the car and, to Steve's amazement, re-installing the original license plate frame that the car adorned while being photographed (it somehow remained with the car). Stuart plans to keep the car "as is" since a majority of the history on the odometer was placed there by Steve, Robin and multiple press leadfoots.

More information on the car is bound to surface, and Stuart Akers is bound and determined to find all of it. Until then, try and catch a glimpse of the first Saleen ever built on the national show circuit sometime soon. It's one of the few truly rare and original late model Mustangs out there, and represent the beginning of a ten year run for the new Mustang legend, the Saleen Mustangs.

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Opposite page; Steve Saleen did much of the work on his first Saleen Mustang himself.

Steve signed the car for Stuart and left no doubts about the car's authenticity.

Left; This wing is pretty unique, as it came off of one of Steve's Trans Am cars and pressed into service on the 1984 #32 Saleen. Stuart's car has several pieces that are unique to #32.