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Celebrity Status

How To Create A Movie Star—a '67 Shelby GT500 Mustang Named Eleanor

By Steve Temple
Photography: Steve Temple

No one will ever mistake the remake of *Gone with the Wind*. For one thing, the former movie's most notable performers weren't even human—the real stars were the cars. The big news is that one of them in particular can be recreated in your own driveway, but not by any movie magic.

Before we cut to that scene, though, we need to provide a bit more background and character motivation. If you recall the film's improbable story line, a group of car thieves faced the daunting challenge of stealing 50 exotic sports cars in one night in order to prevent the brother of Nicolas Cage's character from meeting a nasty fate. As chance would have it, the belle of this automotive ball was a modified '67 Shelby GT500 dubbed Eleanor.

Despite the movie's unlikely premise, it achieved remarkable success, as have many other Jerry Bruckheimer productions (*Crimson Tide*, *Con Air*, *The Rock*, and *Black Hawk Down*), largely for their brutal lack of subtlety (or "hard-hitting action" in promotional parlance). No surprise, then, that Eleanor was asked to perform a remarkable variety of stunts.

That's where Total Control's suspension experts entered the picture. The stunt drivers were dismayed by the chassis woes of the stock vehicle and knew that it wasn't up to handling the demanding chase scenes. Cinema Vehicle Services' Ray Claridge found out about Total's suspension mods and added them to nearly all of the baker's dozen of Eleanors built for filming (the 13th was built for Bruckheimer's personal collection and used an original Shelby).

In addition to the changes in the underpinnings, the film's production designer and resident car guy Jeff Mann felt the Shelby GT500 needed a facelift to stand out from the superstar cast of cars (Lamborghinis, Ferraris, Jaguars, and so forth). Mann hired hot rod designer/illustrator Steve Stanford to create a more charismatic screen presence for the car.

Working from his renderings, Chip Foose (former designer for famed rod builder Boyd Coddington) helped fabricate a clay-and-wood body on a stock '67 Mustang. This more muscular shape featured fender flares, a new hood and front fascia with PIAA driving lights, side skirts with exhaust tips, scoops, and a modified tail piece.

When the trailer for the film hit theaters, Claridge began receiving thousands of e-mails inquiring about Eleanor. "It was a real grassroots kind of thing," he says. "[Fans] just fell in love with it and were curious about where they could get one like it." Why not offer the average moviegoer an opportunity to share in the celebrity status of Eleanor? Why not indeed, and include the Total Control suspension upgrades as well? As Terry Buch of Total Control points out, "With our body kit, you can make your car look like Eleanor, but you need our suspension parts if you want it to drive like Eleanor." As of this writing, more than two dozen Eleanors are now under construction.

The particular Eleanor shown here has its own celebrity connection. It's owned by Chris Kenner, executive producer of the David Copperfield magic show. Kenner doesn't have any plans to include it in an illusion—he just likes to collect cars. The '68 Mustang he acquired for the project was partway to becoming a Shelby clone, so it already had a lot of the needed accessories, such as the decklid, mirrors, tach, and dash. Claridge was able to supply the correct fuel filler and rear emblem.

The car also has the right rumble, courtesy of Brian Saklad at Dyno-Flo, who stroked the 302 to 347 cid with SCAT rods and crank. He topped the block with an Edelbrock 650-cfm carb and Performer intake, and the 351W heads have been ported and polished. Saklad also added the Total Control



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To take the flex out of the chassis, subframe connectors were bolted underneath. These are designed to reduce chassis twist by linking the car's sub-frames together, creating a unified structure.



If you want your Mustang to look like a movie star, this body package is designed to fit '67-'68 fastbacks and coupes (upper side scoops for fastbacks only).



The car has muscle with its stroked 347-cid Ford that's topped by an Edelbrock 650-cfm carb and Performer intake. The 351W heads have been ported and polished.



Eleanor is not just another pretty face—she took 60 hours for prep and paint (DuPont Enamel Pepper Gray Metallic No. 44490 with Black Metallic No. 44435 strips) to get that movie-star

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front suspension pieces and swapped out the rearend with 4.11:1 gears. The car is designed for good all-around performance and also for cruising the Las Vegas Strip. Even though Kenner owns a Viper and Cobra replica, he says Eleanor gets way more attention—just like most movie stars.

look.



What started out as a '67 Shelby Mustang now has a new interior look as well, with upgraded tach and dash.

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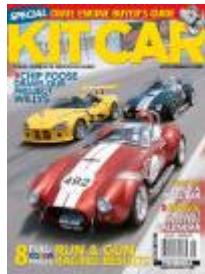
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