

THE LAST MUSTANG COBRA BUILT AT THE DEARBORN ASSEMBLY PLANT

BY JIM SEISSER

The last Mustang Cobra built at the DAP, VIN 1FAPP49Y14F217149, a red convertible was assembled on March 31, 2004. We interviewed the owner of that historic car, Larry Plopan, a 34 1/2-year employee at the DAP about the Cobra and how he came about owning it.

MT: Larry, how did it come about that you became the owner of the last Cobra built at Dearborn Assembly Plant?

LP: I didn't set out with the goal to own the last Cobra from DAP—it just evolved. I've loved the look of the current Mustang since the 1999 style came out and I like the Cobra model the best. Every year since 1999 I kept thinking I needed to get one. Late last year I saw what the new 2005 Mustang was going to look like. It was nice, but I liked the looks of the current Mustang better so I went down to my dealership and put in an order for a new 2004 Cobra. I was able to get my order in before the Cobra orders were cut off. It's typical practice at most Ford assembly plants that the production of low-volume, specialty, or high-content vehicles get considered for build-out weeks before regular production ends. This makes the logistics easier for model-year change over in an assembly plant since there are fewer parts to change over all at one time. Since my car was ordered right at the end of Cobra production, I started thinking how I'd like mine to be the last DAP built Cobra. So I put the request in.

MT: What is your position at the plant?

LP: I'm in the shipping and receiving area. I'm the non-production stores supervisor.

MT: What happens to Larry when the Dearborn Assembly closes, where you go?

LP: I go over to the new truck plant next door.

MT: What was it like to be able to watch your new car be built?

LP: Our SVT group wanted to make an event out of this car getting built. So this car got a lot of attention and I got to watch it get built. Being the last Cobra, many of the workers on the line assumed this car was being built for some high-ranking executive. When I told them it was for me, some of the assembly workers on the line asked if they could sign it? Since it was my car I said sure why not? So on the underside of my car on the floor pan, while the car was being built, a lot of people signed my car. One guy signed my spare tire and one guy even signed the face of my front brake rotor. That signature disappeared the first time the brakes were applied. It was a lot of fun, but I found out later that it was a big no-no to let people sign a production car like that. I almost got in a lot of trouble over that.

MT: You have a gorgeous red Cobra convertible, what do you plan on doing with it?

LP: I plan to keep it; it's not for sale. I've had it for two months and it only has 200 miles on it. The weather has been really cold and I've only had the top down once since I've had it home. I plan on

driving it, but plan on taking very good care of it. I don't plan on driving it in the winter. I have a daughter who lives in California. She has a 2002 Mustang GT coupe. She wants to know when I'm going to trade my Cobra convertible for her GT coupe? I told her she's not getting this one.

MT: Did you watch your daughter's 2002 GT being built also?

LP: No, she took one off the dealer's lot. She didn't want to wait.

MT: How many Mustangs have you owned?

LP: My wife and I had a dark blue 1965 coupe. I had a blue 1970 Mach 1. And I also had a 1986 Mercury Capri that was built at the Dearborn Assembly Plant.

MT: What are you going to miss about the Dearborn Assembly Plant?

LP: The closing of the plant is like the death of an empire. Most of us will be moving over to the new truck plant next door, but it's not the same. When we built the Mustang, it really was something special. We were the only plant building the Mustang so we got a lot of special attention that no other plant got. The new F150 is a beautiful vehicle and I know everyone will take great pride in building it. But when we build the new pickup truck we'll be one of three plants doing that. The Mustang was something that was special to everyone. *MT*

