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Book Review – Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupé

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Author: Kieron Fennelly

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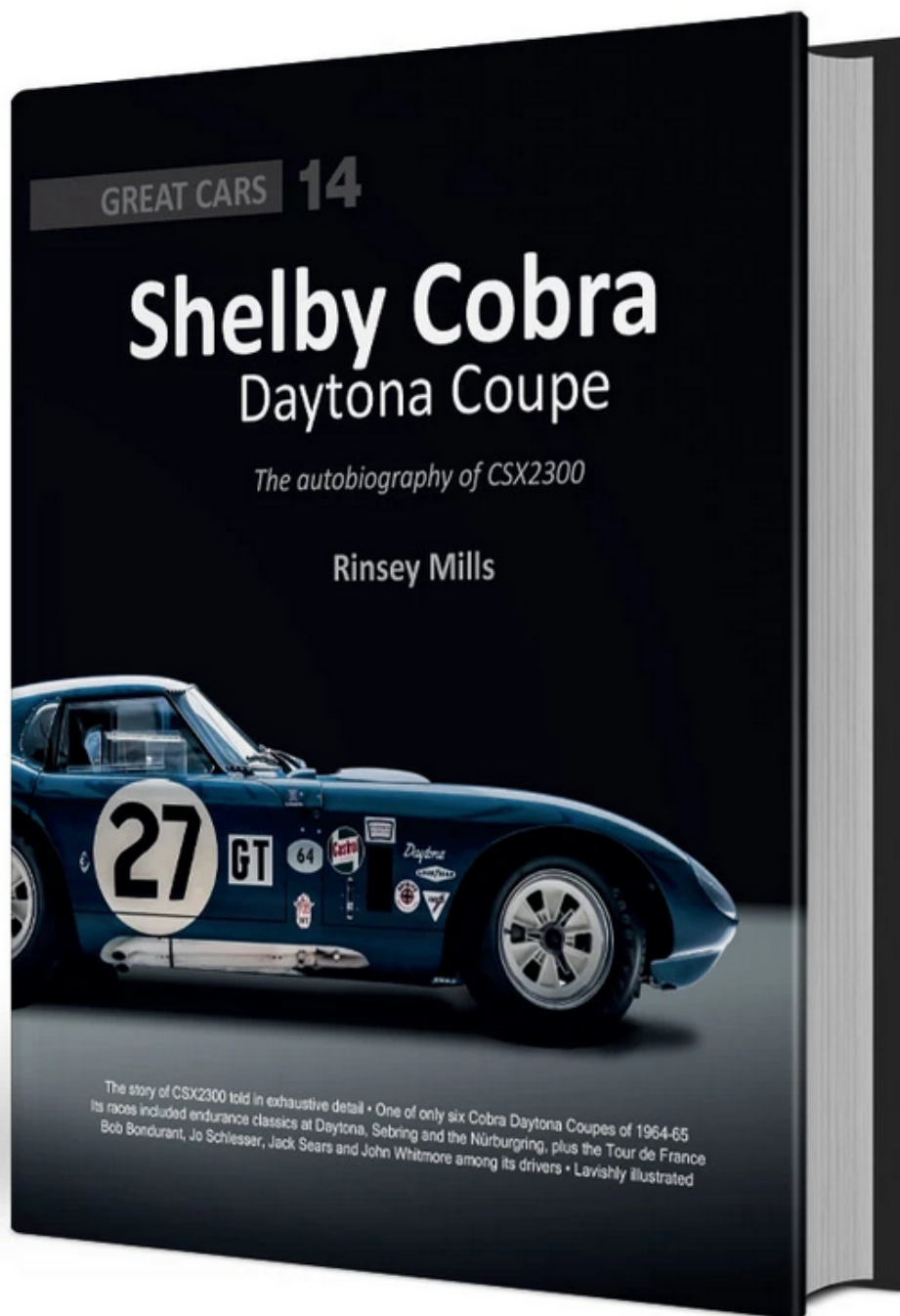
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Book Review - Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupé - The Autobiography of CSX 2300

...Reviewed by Kieron Fennelly.

Title: Shelby Cobra Daytona Coupé

Author: Rinsey Mills

Published by: Porter Press International Ltd. www.porterpress.com

336 pages; hardback

Price: £60.00

ISBN: 978-1-907085-42-0

This is a mighty tome, entirely appropriate though for what was a mighty if short lived racing car. The Cobra Daytona was a development of the Shelby Cobra, itself a successor of the Bristol- and Ford-engined sports cars made by AC cars of Thames Ditton. American Carroll Shelby, whose driving career culminated in winning Le Mans for Aston Martin in 1959, turned to running a racing team. With Ford's agreement to finance a competition engine, he alighted upon AC and contracted the British specialist to modify the chassis of its Ace to accept a V8. The AC Cobra, or as Shelby always insisted, the Shelby Cobra, was born. But competitive though the Cobra was, its roadster aerodynamics robbed it of the 180 mph top speed it would need to compete successfully at le Mans. This book shows the brutish, but effective GT-class Daytona coupé which emerged from Shelby's workshops and which managed briefly to beat the Ferraris at their own game.

It is a fascinating story: Daytona designer Peter Brock describes how he had to use 'butcher's paper' for drawings as proper vellum was far beyond their pocket. Fortunately,



Brock's initial shape was a success, the first test of the coupé recording 183 mph when the bluff roadster even with a faired hardtop fell 30 mph short of that. The design and development of the coupé are described in convincing detail, as are the personalities involved especially expatriate Briton John Miles who did all the test driving, but to his dismay was overlooked when it came to racing, and the charismatic Carroll Shelby. Clearly very effective at motivating people, Shelby was quick to take responsibility for success and side lined those such as designer Brock who wanted to do much more the make the unstable Daytona less wayward at 180 mph. More buccaneer than engineer, Shelby's lack of interest in detail led to his being defrauded among others by de Tomaso which misleadingly claimed it could enlarge the 4.7 litre engine to 7.0 litres.

What began as a Shelby idea was by 1964 subsumed in a major Ford operation which was running its GT 40 programme in parallel to unseat Ferrari's sport car domination. For Dearborn money was no object - the author reports that coachbuilder Radford was charging Ford \$7,000 simply to build the interiors of each GT40....and as Ford's own car became Dearborn's focus, the Daytona was pensioned off after the 1965 season.

VERDICT

This impressively detailed book is clearly the product of intense research and it has the unmistakable authenticity of a narrator immersed in his subject over many years. Author Rinsey Mills has also spoken extensively to many of the participants, very few of whom alas are still with us. His text is supported by copious illustrations, some of the images quite compelling, the sheer breadth of photography going far beyond the usual picture sources and typifying the endeavour which underpins this fine piece of historical writing.