

A HOT VACATION AND A COOL CAR

By Melissa Wolcott and Al Martino

Photos by Wolcott/Martino unless otherwise noted

A hot vacation would be, say... the Wynn Resort in Las Vegas. And a cool car to enjoy it with would be, maybe... a Shelby GT-H Mustang. A dream? No, reality. Our rental car company of choice, Hertz, has decided that folks should have more options when renting cars, and has added some “fun” cars to their roster. We thought it sounded like a good idea, and went to Las Vegas to try it out.

We flew into Vegas and arrived late morning, which gave us enough time to pick up our “fun” Shelby GT-H Mustang from Hertz at the airport, check into the magnificent Wynn Resort and buzz around town in our shiny new wheels.

The Wynn Resort & Casino is Las Vegas’ latest testament to Steve Wynn’s brilliance in resort concepts. The world-class resort has understated elegance that reeks of richness. Beautiful mosaic floors, dark woods, and muted colors permeate the resort. At the front of the casino is a water feature called the Lake of Dreams, with images projected onto a waterfall set to music. Just inside, giant colorful silk parasols glide slowly up and down from the ceiling.

Our guest room had a breathtaking

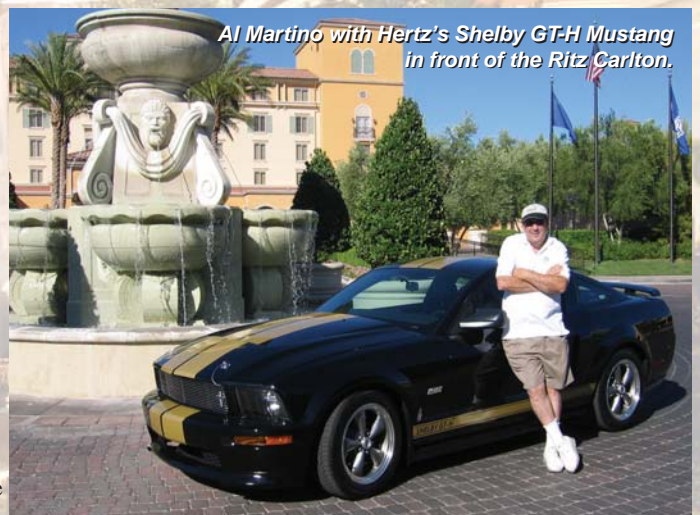
floor to ceiling and wall to wall window view of the golf course, strip and mountains beyond. A pillow-top bed, flat screen TV, bathroom with soaking tub and his & her sinks, and cushy seating areas were the height of luxury.

During our stay, we dined in a few of Wynn’s remarkable restaurants. Chef Mark LoRusso’s dishes at Tableau were as delicious as they were beautiful.

A big attraction to the resort is the 18-hole golf course designed by Tom Fazio. A spectacular 37-foot waterfall is the focal point of the 18th hole.

The casino is set in the center of the resort, surrounded by restaurants and lounges, and the race and sports book at Wynn is elegant, with rich, polished wood individual cubicles with plasma TV screens.

The shopping at Wynn is of the highest caliber. When is the last time you were able to buy a dress at Dior and walk down the aisle and buy a Ferrari? OK, so never. Well you can, if you are so inclined, at Wynn. They have a full service Ferrari dealership



Al Martino with Hertz's Shelby GT-H Mustang in front of the Ritz Carlton.

right on property.

Back down to earth, and our budget, there is a Hertz rental car kiosk conveniently located right at Wynn’s.

We took the Shelby out for a 30 minute drive to Lake Las Vegas. The car comes equipped with SIRIUS Satellite Radio, so we were entertained the whole way with a comedy channel. In our real world, we drive a mini van — practical, but arguably the most uncool of all cars — so driving this very sporty and unique car was a real change of pace. The last time anyone checked either of us out at a light was 1969, so it was a strange (but kinda cool) feeling being ogled. Only this time, it definitely wasn’t us, it was the car.



Wynn guest room.

Photo courtesy of Wynn, Las Vegas

Photo courtesy of Wynn, Las Vegas



View of Lake Las Vegas from the Ritz Carlton Spa.

Lake Las Vegas is the home of the Ritz Carlton, some lovely houses (Celine Dion lives there) and a charming village. At the Ritz, Melissa went for a heavenly spa treatment, and Al tried his luck at the casino. Melissa came out way ahead on the deal. The spa is gorgeous and treatments are top-notch. The Tuscan-styled Ritz Carlton is a more relaxed resort, away from the hustle bustle of Vegas. They have scenic outdoor recreation and water sports, restaurants, movies, festivals and live concerts.

We were enjoying our Mustang so much, the next day we drove out to the Shelby American Automobiles and Museum, located next to the Las Vegas Speedway, to learn the history, and see how they are made.

Back in the 60's, the legendary Carroll Shelby and Hertz decided to produce special-edition Shelby Mustangs for rental customers who were real car enthusiasts. Ford supplied the new Mustangs with V-8 engines and automatic transmissions, and Shelby added extra performance and style, giving the public a unique driving experience — dubbed "Rent-A-Racer". Now, the



Shelby GT-H Mustang Assembly Plant.

2006 Shelby GT-H has several enhancements, such as the Black exterior paint with Gold racing stripes, unique to the Hertz Shelybs. The GT-H version also features a 25 horsepower power increase over the stock Mustang GT to make it 325 hp, as well as a 90 mm cold air intake, perform-

ance muffler, performance X pipe from the Shelby GT500, and performance calibration. The handling has specially tuned dampers, lower springs, sway bars and strut brace and a 3.55:1 gear ratio for better acceleration.

At Shelby American Automobiles we saw the process from start to finish with one team doing all the work (except striping). They start with stock mustang GTs, which have been shipped to their assembly plant, get inspected and then customized.

All Shelby GT-H's are built for Hertz only - not for public sale. Only 500 were built for 2006. The first one was auctioned off for charity (The Shelby Children's Foundation) in July, and fetched \$250,000. That's pretty impressive, since the car's street value hadn't been designated. Of course, since it was for charity, chances are, were they to be sold publicly, it would be less than that. However, it's pretty neat to say we drove around in a \$250,000 car.

At the museum they have a collection of Shelby Mustangs and Shelby Cobras (considered by some to be the best American sports car ever built). They still build



Shelby Automobiles' Gary Patterson with 1966 AHRA car at the museum. The #1 car of only 4 ever built still races. It is worth over \$1 million.

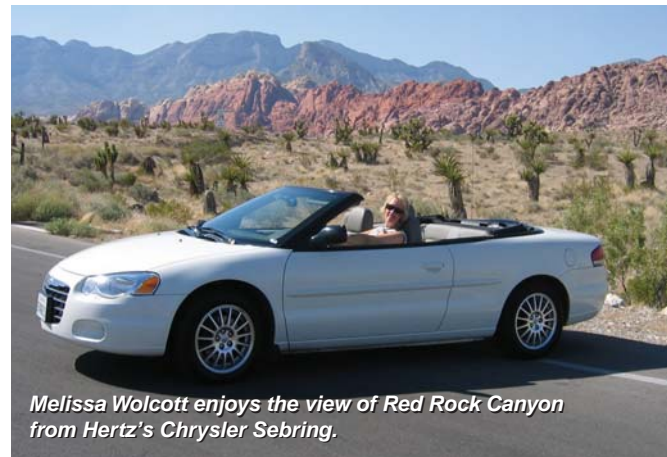
Cobras today based on the 1964 specs of Carol Shelby. The \$60,000 Cobras are now built without engine and transmission, because they wouldn't pass today's emissions tests. Only 6 Cobras are built a month.

The next day, we decided to trade in our Shelby for another "fun" car at the Hertz



This Silver Cobra, built in 1964, took 350 man hours to polish. It was raced by Bob Bondurant.

kiosk at Wynn's. Even though it was 110° outside, we opted for the Chrysler Sebring convertible for a half-hour trip out to Red Rock Canyon. Call us crazy, but it felt good tooling along the highway with the top



Melissa Wolcott enjoys the view of Red Rock Canyon from Hertz's Chrysler Sebring.

down. Had we been thinking straight, we should have headed out to Mt. Charleston, which is about 40° cooler than town, and only 45 minutes from the strip. But Red Rock Canyon is really beautiful — quiet, reflective — a lovely ride. The Sebring experience took us back to our youth when we both had convertibles, and was indeed enjoyable.

Our hot vacation, cool car experiment was a big success. We advise anyone making vacation plans to consider making their rental car choice part of their experience rather than an after thought — it will definitely take your trip up a notch.

In addition to the Shelby GT-H and the Sebring, the Hertz fun collection has a wide range of choices, like the Mazda Miata, PT Cruiser, Nissan 350Z, and HUMMER H3. They are available in over 30 major markets nationwide, including our own Tampa Bay.

As we mentioned earlier, Hertz is our rental car of choice, and we are #1 Club Gold members. We've discovered, after years of trying to find the lowest price and all the aggravation that goes into renting a car, Hertz has always been the most reliable and easiest to deal with. Your car is ready for you as soon as you arrive - no fuss, no muss. Sometimes it's a few more dollars than Rent-A-Junker, but well worth it in time savings, reliability, and now, it's more FUN!

IF YOU GO...

Hertz - 800-654-2200; www.Hertz.com
Ritz Carlton - 702-567-4700;
www.ritzcarlton.com
Shelby American Automobiles and Museum - 702-942-7325;
www.shelbyautos.com
Wynn Las Vegas - 702-770-7000;
www.wynnlasvegas.com