



COBRA RAT!

Skip Nordenberg's 8-second, 500 cubic Chevy powered Mustang is anything but boring.

By Phil Elliott

NHRA Super Comp (8.90 index) entries are often rather monotonous — dozens of similar dragsters that merely hum downtrack with nary a bobble from the straight and true. Certainly there are exceptions to this rule and Skip Nordenberg's "Cobra Rat" is one of those.

Skip is a 42-year-old auto parts store manager who has been married to the same woman for 22 years and the same race car for 10. "Cobra Rat" is the culmination of thousands of hours/dollars, and the evolution that takes place as a result.

The car was purchased new by a friend in 1967, a Mustang GT "notchback" that puked its 390 with barely 9,000 miles on the clock. The "obvious" cure to this problem was to bolt Skip's 440-inch rod between the spring towers of the still shiny-new Mustang. After a year of partnership Nordenberg bought the body, and has run the car in various stages since. A short history is as follows, in Skip Nordenberg's own words.

"Originally it was just an engine swap, homemade motor mounts and stock leaf springs with slapper bars. In '72, a 2x3" tube chassis was installed from the firewall back, along with a roll cage, homemade ladder bars and coil-overs for rear suspension. Then in '76 the car was front-halved, giving a full chassis for the first time. At that time the straight axle was

installed, the motor moved back and tin work completed. In '84 the car was back-halved with the current ladder bars and Morrison coil spring kit."

What has resulted is an anything-but-boring, 2825-pound (with driver), radically stylized Mustang coupe, powered by an omni-powerful 497-cubic inch Jack Merkel built big block Chevrolet that dips into the eight-second bracket at a shade over 150 mph!

Performance like that from a car as diverse as "Cobra Rat" keeps an interest in Super Comp, especially when the Mustang beats one of those many dragsters.

The engine is based around a Chrome-A-Shaft 4.250" stroke crank to which are hooked .375" long Childs & Albert rods. Brooks pistons and Speed-Pro rings fill 4.311" bores and the whole package comes out just under 500 cubic inches. Precision Cylinder Head Service prepared the open chamber, cast iron heads and Jack Merkel Racing Engines chose a wide variety of manufacturers to complete the all important valvetrain. A Competition Cams camshaft bumps against Crane lifters, Chevy pushrods, Crane roller rockers and TRW valves. Springs are from Crane, retainers from Comp Cams, the whole array held together by a Ridgeway girdle and then hidden by chrome Moroso valve covers.

To make it into different classes, induction is switched between Edelbrock/1050 Holleys and Weiand/750 Holleys — both

are gasket matched to the heads. Ignition, wiring and plugs are all Accel, lines and other plumbing components from Russell, and Hooker takes care of the exhaust. Plenty of Kendall's finest is circulated through a complete Moroso system including oil pan and pump, and Auto-Meter gauges help Skip keep track of the necessary functions.

Behind the big rat is a Dynamic Racing Transmissions Powerglide and 8" converter, shifted by Hurst and wrapped in a Lakewood blanket.

The rear end is a 9" Ford with either 4.88 or 5.14 Zoom gears that turn Summers Bros. spool and axles. Since the chassis has been redone three times, it



Speed shop manager Skip Nordenberg practices what he preaches with his wildly different '67 Mustang powered by 497 cubes of tunnel rammed Chevrolet. Car has evolved steadily in its 19 years as Skip's resident racer, and shows the individuality of its owner from stem to stern.

has been hard to keep up on what has gone where. Currently an Art Morrison adjustable rear spring kit suspends the rear, while Lakewood/Ness ladder bars locate it. Shocks are Gabriel and brakes are Wilwood.

Up front, a straight tube axle is suspended by coil-over shocks and located by a combination of radius rods and a panhard bar. Spindles came from P&S while S&W provided the support. Helping the four-wheel discs is a Simpson parachute. All the wheels are Weld, with Moroso tires up front and Goodyears on the business end.

All in all, "Cobra Rat" shows what can be done over a period of time with a seemingly lackluster start, and with someone as obsessed with the project as Skip. ■

Photos by Norman Blake

