



1968 California Special

"California Made It Happen!"

Text by Joe Babiasz, Photography by Tony Firpi

The '60s were a time in history where automotive companies used every means conceivable to increase vehicle sales and exposure. Arguably, Ford was perhaps the best at bringing specialty cars to market. A perfect example was the partnership with people like Carroll Shelby. The other was continuing to develop unique cars for a specific market. In 1968, Ford decided to produce a limited edition Mustang specifically built for the California market. Hence, the California Special or GT/CS was born and "California Made it Happen!"

became its marketing theme.

This wasn't the first time Ford toyed with the idea of a regional car. The California Special had its roots from the very low production High Country Special (HCS), produced in 1966. Developed especially for Denver area dealers, just 333 High Country Specials were sold. Unlike the California Special, the only unique feature of the High Country Special was the exterior color and an identifying badge on each fender.

Lee Gray, Ford's southern California district sales manager, wanted something special and

convinced Lee Iacocca to produce a car just for the California market. Lee agreed and Shelby Automotive was tapped to develop the California Special. While the letters GT were on the side stripes of all GT/CS vehicles, the car was not necessarily a GT unless the GT package was ordered along with ordering a California Special. All California Specials would be available as a coupe only and all cars would be built at Ford's San Jose, California, assembly plant. In early February 1968, several prototypes were shown to California dealers

and orders were taken. The car began on February 1, 1968. The colors and options of the California Special Mustang were available.

Unlike the 1966 Hi-Country Special, the California Special would not be mistaken for a Mustang. Up front, the California Special sat within a blacked-out grille. All California Specials had the deluxe hood with turn signal lamps and door locks. From the side, the California Special's side scoop added a rear spoiler with a side stripe including