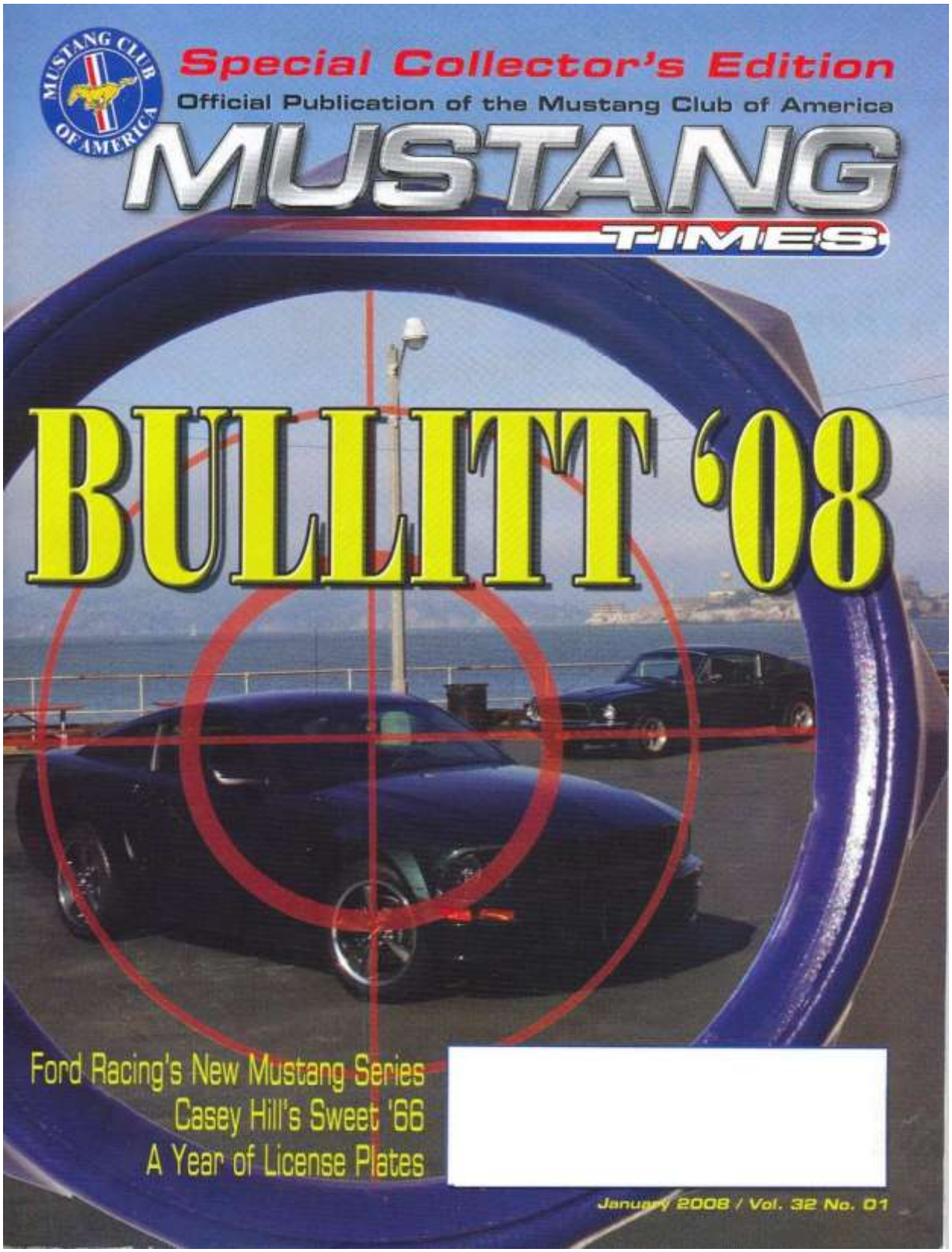

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Something To Do During Cold Winter Months in Illinois

Text and photos by Casey Hill

In November 1999, my wife, Sarah and I along with our four children left hot Fort Worth, Texas, and moved to cold Crystal Lake, Illinois (in the northwest suburbs of Chicago.) Having never lived in a cold climate, it was quite an adjustment for the family to get used to long, dark, cold winters spent indoors.

On one of those cold, dark, rainy nights in 2002, we were driving down Main Street Crystal Lake when we passed by a local classic car dealer. We saw a beautiful blue and white 1966 Mustang convertible on the lot. I turned to Sarah and said, "If they are selling that Mustang, we are buying it tonight!" Happily, Sarah agreed.

We quickly turned around, pulled into the dealership, and had the owner pull the car into the garage out of the rain to start it and take a look. The Mustang was stunning. It was a beautiful Medium Metallic Blue classic with a white top. When we opened the hood, we were quite surprised to find out the Mustang was a sleeper. It had its original six cylinder engine replaced with a high performance 351W barely lodged with custom headers between the shock towers. It was a combination of beauty and brawn, and was the perfect combination for us. After we finished drooling, I reached for my checkbook. When the deal was done, we had bought it that night before even driving it!

For 20 years, we had been looking for the perfect Mustang convertible, and this was it. It had to have just the right name. Sarah suggested the license plate; "MY SWT 66."

As with most Mustang stories, a 40-year-old car is never what it seems after a good checking over. The first year, we drove the Mustang to local shows and replaced the occasional worn out part. One day, however, when I was pushing the headlight dimmer switch, something bizarre occurred. It went completely through the floor! The worst possible scenario was suspected. It was time to pull the carpet, and unfortunately I found what causes every classic Mustang owner to have nightmares. It was rust, and lots of it! "MY SWT 66" started its life sold through the Cleveland district with the undercoating option to protect it from the harsh salty winters. The undercoating did its job and kept much of the rust out of the normal places. The cancer eventually made its way into the torque boxes and rails where the undercoating actually helped hold in all the salt and water! One good burnout with the 351W, and the body could have snapped like a twig. So in 2004, Sarah and I made the decision to do our own "on-chassis" restoration during those dark winter nights. A local craftsman did all the metal work to restore the Mustang to concours condition. The 351W, C4, and

rear end were all rebuilt and detailed. I took on the task to reupholster the entire interior getting my knuckles bloodied in the process. I still don't know how to use hog ring pliers correctly. I replaced the dash, carpet, and console. I did my own lacquer painting. For two years the "operation on the patient" continued.

In 2006, the job was completed and "MY SWT 66" was reborn in Crystal Lake. It seemed suitable to commemorate the rebirth by doing the photo shoot at a local Crystal Lake, Illinois, historical landmark; The Dole Mansion. The mansion was built in the 1860's by a wealthy Chicago grain baron on 1,000 acres overlooking the beautiful Crystal Lake, with adjoining gardens and stables. The mansion was lavish and even had its own spur rail line from the Chicago and Northwestern Railway tracks almost to its doorstep.

"MY SWT 66" started it all. I found the very thing I needed to work on during the dark, cold, snowy winter nights in Chicago. That thing was a Mustang! Sarah found the perfect classic Mustang to drive in the gorgeous Chicago spring and fall weather. Once we had the Mustang fever, we later enlarged our garage and now stable three Mustangs, a 1966 convertible, a 1968 GT/CS California Special (*Mustang Times* Feb. '06) , and a 2000 Laser Red GT Convertible.

Chicago winter, spring, summer or fall, Sarah and I now have plenty of Mustangs to enjoy! The really good news is there is still room for another one! **MT**








MY SHT 66











