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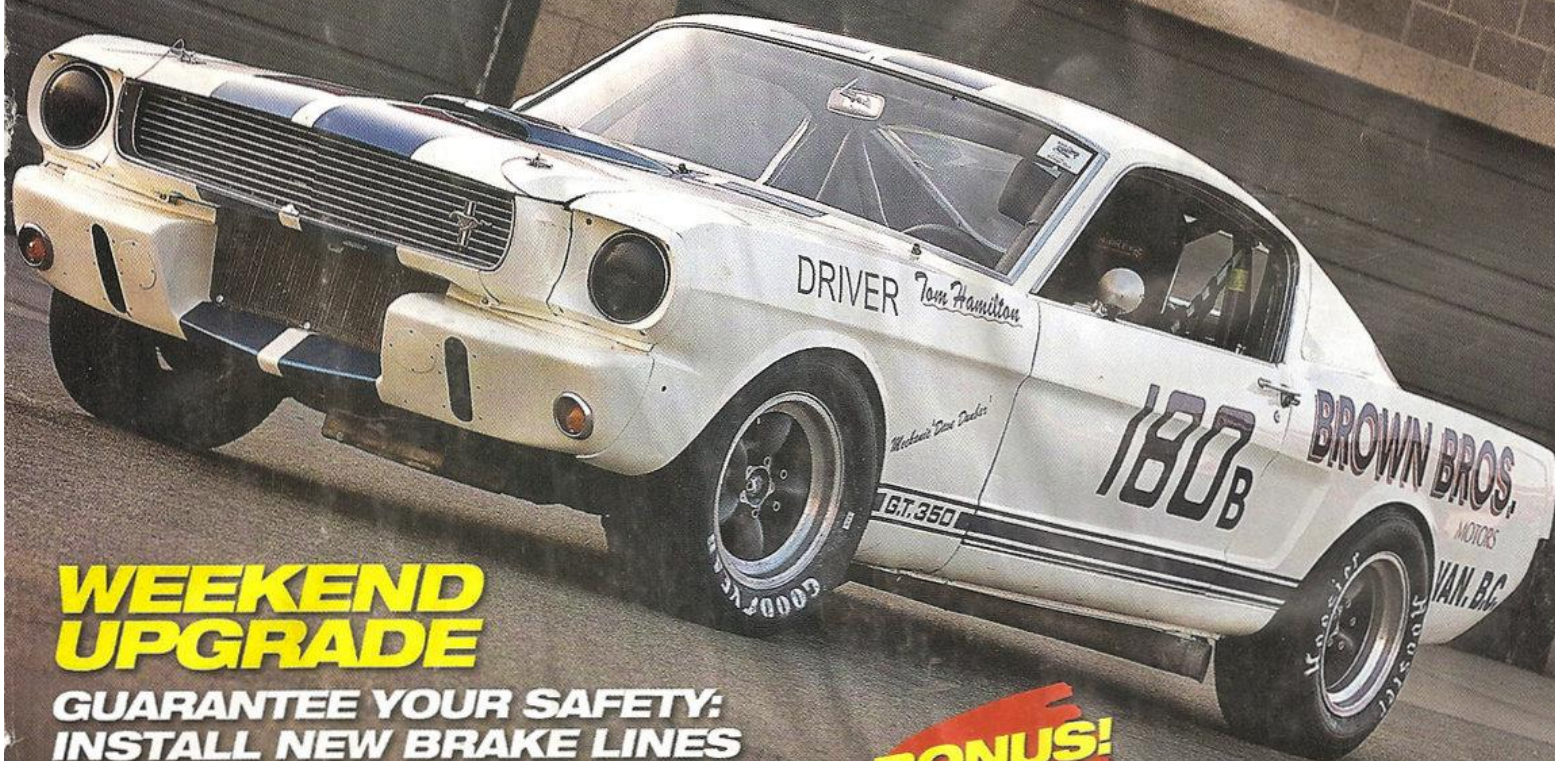
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# International FLAVOR



ONE OF THE MOST HISTORICALLY SUCCESSFUL  
R-MODEL GT350s IS BACK TO ITS OLD TRICKS

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY **BY ERIC ENGLISH**

**W**e suspect that few of our readers need an introduction to the rare and revered '65 Shelby GT350 competition model, yet most will certainly need an introduction to the car shown before you, the SFM5R533.

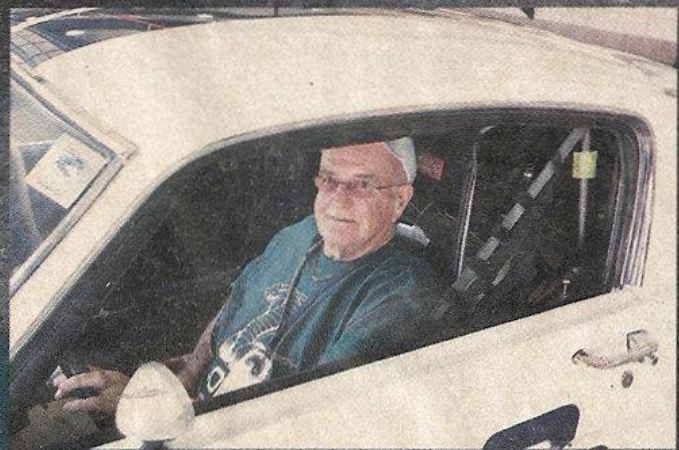
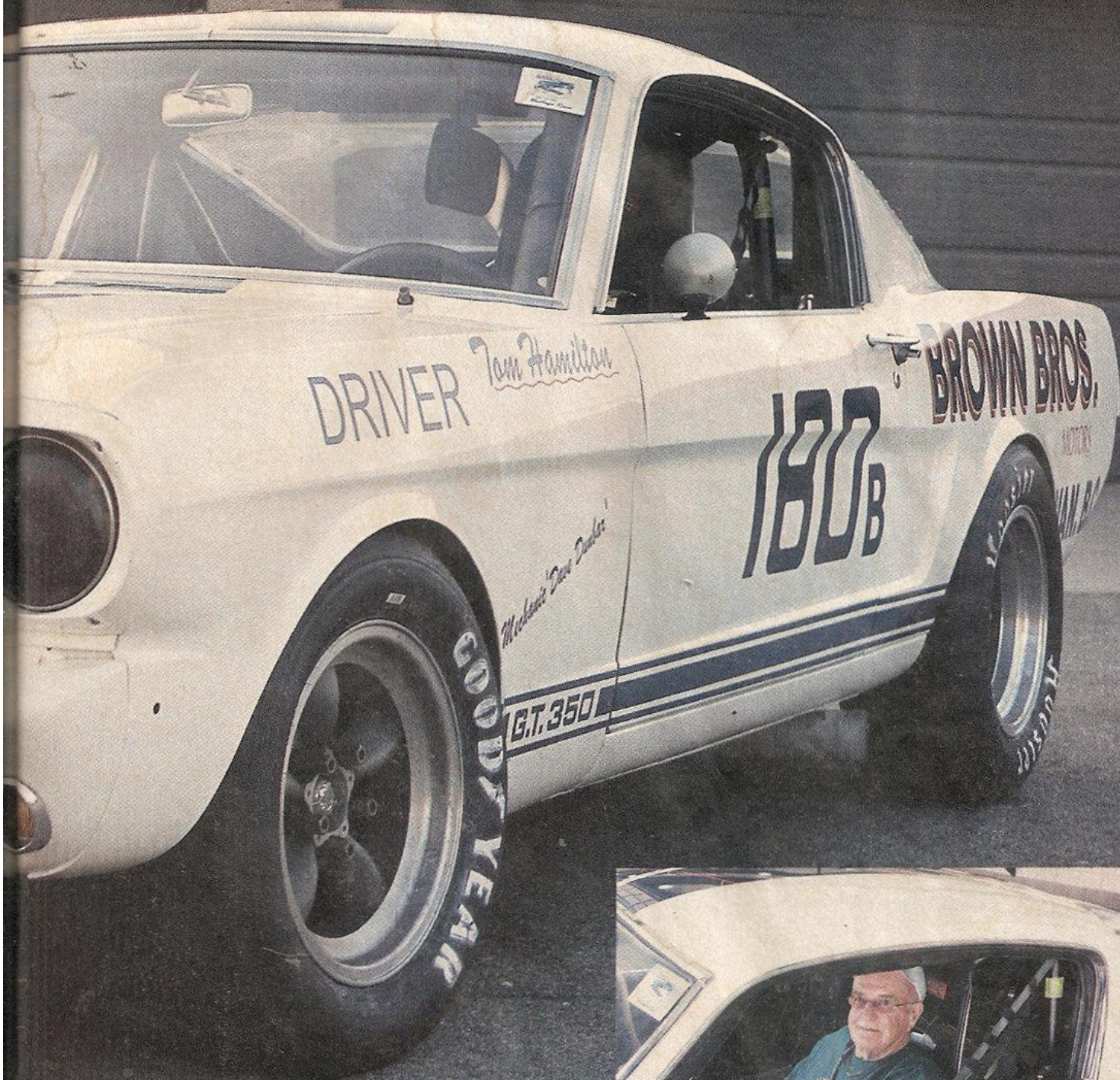
Better known today as an R-model, 5R533 spent its formative years battling all comers in the rugged and beautiful western province of British Columbia (B.C.), Canada, and today is right back at it—in the hands of vintage racer Gary Fitzgerald.

We caught up with car and driver at the '05 Shelby American Automobile Club (SAAC) convention in Fontana,

California, where we not **only** witnessed the R-model at full throttle, but encountered **original driver** Tommy Hamilton reuniting with his former **ride** for the first time since 1969. Simply put, it was a **sweet reunion**.

Rewind back to 1965. Among the 562 GT350s that rolled off Shelby American's niche assembly line in its inaugural year were three separate batches of competition models. Just 36 of the hard-core racers were assembled, and this one was among the last batch of 14 that included car numbers 527-540. This is according to the SAAC's latest registry.

The same source also notes that Shelby American received the car from Ford on May 22, 1965, yet didn't ship it to New



Westminster, B.C.'s Fogg Motors until March 31, 1967. While some R-models were successfully campaigned right out of the gate, it's apparent that others took considerable time to be sold. The SAAC registry notes that a handful of R-models were delivered well into 1966, along with two in 1967—with 5R533 appearing to be the last one sold. So much for the impersonal data; the real story here is the car's racing history.

We found the 77-year-old Hamilton more than happy to relate his experiences with this R-model during the late '60s, and believe us, there's plenty to share. At the time, Hamilton had established himself as one of the toughest sports-car racers in Western Canada, racing MGs, Austin Healeys, Sunbeam

SAAC 30 at California Speedway saw original driver Tommy Hamilton reunited with 5R533 for the first time since he and the car went separate ways in 1969. The smile rarely left Hamilton's face all weekend, revealing the special connection between car and driver and the "good guy" personality that is Hamilton to the core.

Alpines, and Sunbeam Tigers prior to the Shelby. Fellow racer and coworker Ken Dunsire hatched the idea of codriving something bigger and better and approached his friend and local Ford dealer Jack Brown for a sponsorship deal.

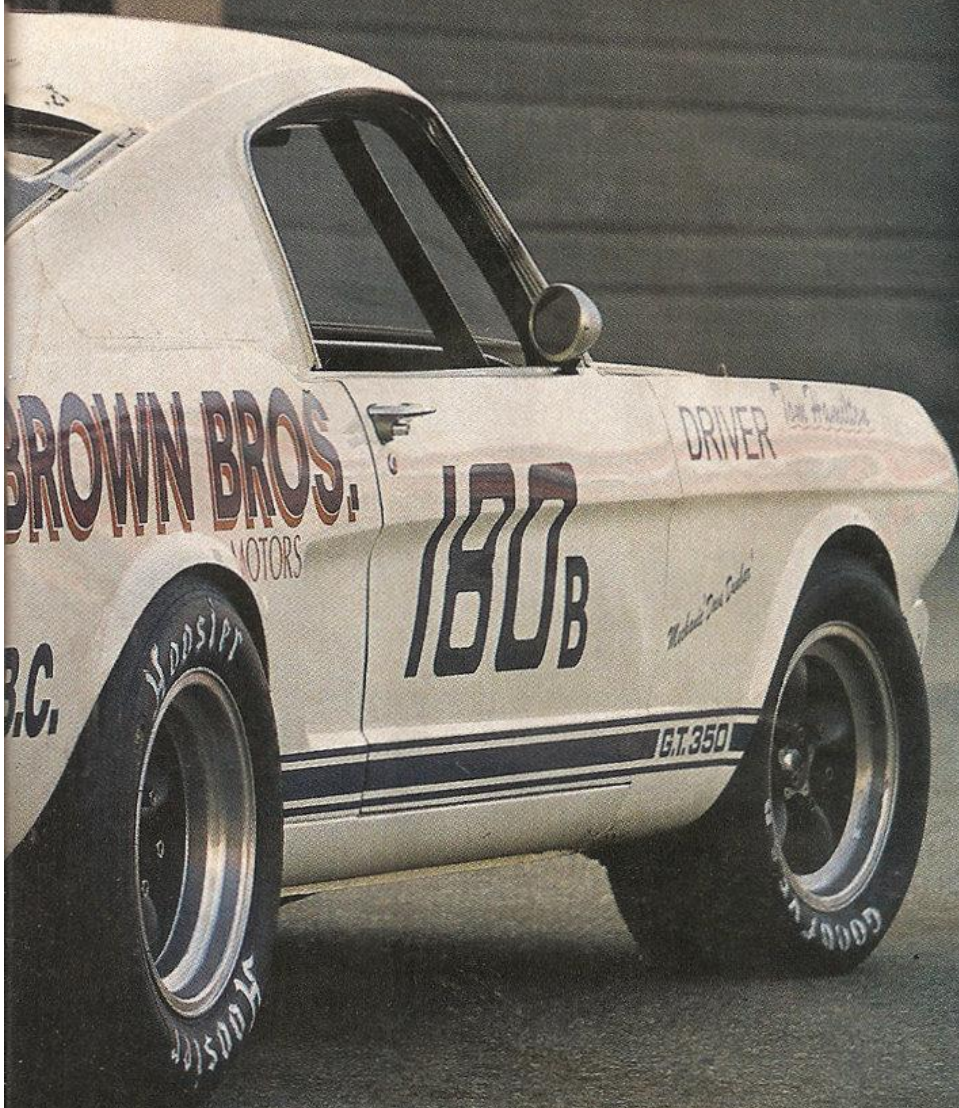


The interior is a mix of original and upgraded: The full rollcage, the Halon extinguishing system, and the aftermarket racing seat are among important concessions to safety. The Hurst stick now operates a full-race Jerico four-speed instead of the original T10. Hamilton says he experienced at least two complete failures of the original Borg-Warner unit—one time obliterating the aluminum case, sending shrapnel through the floor and out the passenger door, though Hamilton emerged unscathed.

When Brown agreed, it wasn't long before the R-model order was placed through Ford of Canada and nearby Shelby dealer Fogg Motors. It was 5R533 that arrived several weeks later at Brown Brothers Ford in Vancouver, where the car received final race prep by mechanics Dave Dunbar and Cal Witt.

Hamilton still has the Shelby American vehicle invoice dated March 10, 1967, which shows the sale of 5R533 to Ford of Canada for the sum of \$5,233.63, including freight.

Race cars with significant history seldom emerged physically unscathed, yet this one suffered its worst mishap prior to the



## The Details

'65 Competition Shelby GT350 (R-model)  
SFM5R533

### ENGINE

295ci  
Boss 302 block (4.030-inch bore)  
Scat billet-steel crank (2.900-inch stroke)  
Crower steel rods  
Ross forged pistons  
Cobra Automotive-spec solid-roller cam  
World Products Windsor heads, fully ported  
Comp Cams roller rockers  
Edelbrock Victor Jr., ported  
Holley 750 double-pumper  
MSD distributor and ignition box  
Aviaid oil pan

### TRANSMISSION

Jerico four-speed  
Tilton dual-disc clutch  
Hurst shifter

### REAR END

9-inch  
Detroit Locker  
3.89 or 4.11 gears  
Moser 31-spline axles

### SUSPENSION

Front: 620lb springs, Koni shocks, Cobra Automotive 1½-inch sway bar, boxed upper and lower control arms  
Rear: 225lb-rate leaf springs, Koni shocks

### BRAKES

Front: Lincoln 12-inch disc assembly, Cobra Automotive/Porterfield carbon-Kevlar pads  
Rear: 11x 2½-inch drums, Cobra Automotive/Porterfield carbon-Kevlar shoes

### WHEELS

Front: American Racing Torque Thrust D, 15x7  
Rear: American Racing Torque Thrust D, 15x8.5

### TIRES

Front: Goodyear Blue Streak, 6.00-15  
Rear: Hoosier Street TD, P245/60D-15

first race at Coquitlam, B.C.'s Westwood road circuit. Hamilton chuckles at the episode some 40 years later, but it was surely no laughing matter when he lost control during practice and put the car on its lid—newspapers at the time reporting the damage at a princely \$2,000. After repairs, Hamilton quickly made amends, scoring multiple victories and International Conference championships in B/Production and C/Modified classes. Unfortunately, codriver Dunsire became seriously ill shortly after the season began, leaving Hamilton as the man at the wheel after just a couple of races.

As the C/Mod championship would indicate, the Brown Brothers GT350 competed in a variety of classes beyond the expected B/Production. "We raced every time we had the chance," Hamilton says, which arguably places this R-model as perhaps the most victorious of the era. Road courses included the aforementioned Westwood, B.C.; Spokane, Washington; Kent, Washington; and Portland, Oregon; while



Owner Gary Fitzgerald graciously allowed former driver Tommy Hamilton some seat time in 5R533 during one of the open track sessions. Staging for this particular track excursion was like a time-warp rewind of some 40 years.

hill climbs were run at Mt. Douglas, Greater Victoria, B.C.; Knox Mountain, Kelowna, B.C. and others. Of note is the fact that Canadian rules allowed Weber induction in B/Production, unlike their counterparts in the United States, and Hamilton and company took full advantage. Hamilton says the four-carb downdraft setup made significantly more power than their single-four arrangement but wasn't the ticket for races in the rain—of which there were many in the Pacific Northwest. The Brown Brothers team found the Webers to be a bit of an all-or-nothing proposition, which didn't lend itself to hooking up on a slick track. When wet weather was expected, the four-barrel was easier to keep on the ragged edge of traction.

As good as the '67 season turned out to be, '68's was even better. Hamilton and the Brown Brothers GT350 won five championships that year, this time even nailing A/Production and A/Modified titles in Canadian Auto Sport Club and

International Conference, respectively. Unfortunately, all good things come to an end, and in early 1969, Brown Brothers Ford made the decision to stop racing and put the Shelby up for sale.

Hamilton says he had the opportunity to buy the R-model at the time for just \$3,500 but instead used his disposable cash to launch an effort racing Super Stocks. He reports the car was sold to "a kid," followed by a slew of Shelby enthusiasts over three decades. Among them was Bill Roush of Puyallup, Washington, who finished what was likely the first restoration of 5R533 during ownership from 1984-1987. More recently the car was owned by Peter Rogal, who had Wallingford, Connecticut's Cobra Automotive prepare and maintain the car for vintage racing in SVRA. Current owner Fitzgerald purchased the car in 2004 and continues to run out of the same camp.





SAAC events always place an emphasis on track time, and here we see the Brown Brothers R-model on the infield portion of California Speedway at SAAC 30. Credit for the first-class race prep goes to the crew at Cobra Automotive.

While Rogal wanted to go fast, a lesser interest in originality meant 5R533 had evolved to a point far from its '67 configuration. Fitzgerald prefers his speed with an authentic period look, thus a gradual change is currently in the works, the first step of which is reflected in the pictures you see here. Cobra Automotive was again called upon for the proper cosmetics, involving removal of mild rear flares, requisite body massaging, a new Wimbledon White PPG topcoat, and appropriate racing livery per Hamilton's extensive file of period pictures. The same emphasis has yet to make its way under the hood, where the full-tilt 289 is surrounded by modern amenities such as an aluminum radiator, a hydraulic clutch, MSD electronics, aftermarket high-rpm induction, and more. The basis for the whole affair is a four-bolt Boss 302 block filled with a billet crank, Crower rods, Ross pistons, and a stout solid-roller camshaft ground to Cobra Automotive's specs. Behind the now 295 cubes is a Tilton

dual-disc clutch, a Jerico four-speed, and a 31-spline 9-inch rearend. Hamilton often ran 3.89 gears back in the day, and Cobra Automotive typically sets up the car with that same ratio today—though 4.11s are also common depending on the particular track.

In addition to vintage racing in the United States, Fitzgerald hopes to further 5R533's international flavor by taking this former north-of-the-border Shelby to compete overseas. Such an intent means that for the foreseeable future, what could easily be a museum piece will not be—a big plus for anyone who truly appreciates the breed. Grand as a competition GT350 may appear on static display, it simply doesn't hold a candle to seeing one at full song, the difference between the sounds of silence and 7,000 rpm being immense. We applaud anyone willing to risk their historic race car in any sort of action, and in this case, we wish Fitzgerald the best as he continues in the grand R-model tradition. **MF**

## News Flash

Just prior to going to press with this story, we learned of some significant, recent changes to 5R533. Collector and classic-car dealer Colin Comer ([www.colinsclassicauto.com](http://www.colinsclassicauto.com)) purchased this car from Gary Fitzgerald, took the interior and engine back to circa 1965, and was heading to the January '07 RM Auction in Scottsdale, Arizona, with it when we caught up with him by phone.

Comer was nice enough to share his thoughts with us, saying that when he first purchased the Brown Brothers R-model, he planned to keep it with his significant collection of classics. Comer already races a '66 GT350 in select vintage events and thus felt the urge to pamper 5R533 a bit by back-dating it and taking it off the track. As fate would have it, another R-model subsequently became available to Comer, thus the decision to put 5R533 up for sale. Comer says the car's current configuration makes it vintage-eligible for many more sanctioning bodies and could now include events such as the prestigious Monterey Historics. The RM Auctions catalog has identified the projected sales price of 5R533 to be around \$750,000-\$950,000.