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SPRING FORWARD with Matthias's R-Code XR-7



CLASSIC
LUXURY
READING



LARRY
CARRELL
Collection
Takes Off



MICHAEL BANKS
PORTLAND, OR
CCOA #9553

By Jeff Amo, Michael Banks, and Tom Welsh

Editor's note: Credit - Mustang Club of Mid-Michigan Newsletter, December 2020.

MICHAEL BANKS needed help. Jeff Amo was available. The two struck up a long-distance working relationship to do some sleuthing work in the Saginaw area of Michigan.

Our story starts and ends in Saginaw. It also includes the two men above, along with Rick Montagne, two from Saginaw, and the other from Portland, Oregon.

Of course, Mike Banks is a beloved member of the Cougar Club of America and owns a Competition Gold 1970 Eliminator that's 1 of 70 with the 428 Super Cobra Jet/ram air/4-speed combination. But this story is about sleuthing, so let's get started with the how, why, and where the sleuthing took place.

It all started when Mike was browsing Facebook looking for Eliminator-related posts as he tracks and documents these striped Cougars. "In this particular instance, I came across a Facebook Market listing with a lot of parts and panels that obviously came from an Eliminator. I messaged the seller, Kareem, to learn more about the car that the parts came from and find out what happened to it."

Kareem, who lived in Saginaw, was not interested in doing more investigation on the parts, so Mike started looking for someone in the area that would be willing to go to Kareem's house and check them out for him. Mike put out feelers in the area and they lead to Jeff who, Mike noted, "was very gracious to take the time to arrange a meeting with Kareem as well as travel there to check out the details."

What followed was some emails and photos that helped Mike obtain key details on the Eliminator parts. It also serves as a primer on what you may want to look for when researching a car or part purchase from afar:

Hi Jeff, thanks for calling and talking to me this morning—I appreciate it! I track and document Cougar Eliminators for the Cougar Club of America and the Eliminator Registry. Last week I came across an old listing for a bunch of Eliminator-specific parts, such as dash panels and rear spoiler, plus a bunch of body

SLEUTHING

with JEFF

panels—I could tell that someone had parted out an Eliminator. I am hoping to get a VIN number for this car so we can add it to the registry and record it as parted out.

I contacted the seller and asked about the car itself. He told me that he did not know anything about the car, but that the parts had been left behind in a house that he bought. He told me that besides the parts he had already sold, he still had the engine (351C) and transmission (FMX auto), plus a bunch of other

Editor's note: Photos by Mecum, are representational.



various components like the grille, rear end, lower dash, wiring, etc.

I tried to work with him to get a picture of the VIN stamp from the engine or transmission, but he was not motivated to do that.

So, at that point, I started trying to find someone in the Saginaw area that might be able to contact him and inspect the engine and transmission for a VIN stamp in person. I'm located in Portland, OR so it would be a long way to go to check out some parts, LOL!

[The owner] has been very good at answering my questions, so communication has been very good so far.

I could use [the parts] for my Cougar or trade for other parts I need, but it's always a good thing if someone can see the parts in person and take some pictures too. Plus, it's a good excuse for

someone to check out the VIN stamps as well.

Okay, as for the engine VIN stamp, it normally is located on the back of the driver's side of the engine block. It would be located just below where the head mates to the block, and just above where the bell housing mates to the block. They were stamped by hand, so the digits can be faint, or some numbers may appear solid while others may appear weakly stamped—some may even be upside down or sideways. I've attached a picture as an example of how they might look.

I have also attached a picture of where to look for the casting date, which will be on the passenger side of the block, behind where the starter would mount. I've also included a picture of the location of the engine assembly date stamp, which is located on the front passenger side of the block, right along the edge of the timing chain cover behind the water pump.

If the VIN is not completely legible, then the casting date and engine assembly date can be used to help narrow down the production date of the car, which can help us determine the VIN.

The transmission VIN stamp would be located on the top of the transmission, at one of three locations on the cast iron



main transmission body. I have attached a picture of the normal locations, and an example of what you might see.

There also should be a metal tag on the passenger side of the transmission. That will have the trans part number and assembly date on it. If the VIN stamp is not legible, then the tag info can help us narrow down the production date and possibly the VIN. You might need a wire brush to hit the engine and trans to see the VIN stamps depending on how well they were stamped originally and how crusty they are now. Try to get a few pics of each stamping to make sure we get a good readable pic, please.

Thanks for your help with this one Jeff, I appreciate it. Have a great day, Sir, and I will talk to you again soon!

Mike B.

The next day, the email continued:

Hi, Jeff, if possible, can you get some good pictures of the



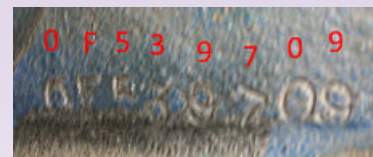
stampings, as well as the other parts he has available?

Jeff asked pal Rick Montagne to come along due to the location of the house not being in a good area, and to help move parts into better light as needed. They checked out the parts that Mike was interested in and sent him photos on August 18th along with these comments in an email:

Mike, hope this gives you what you're looking for!

Jeff Amo

- Trans: 0F539709
- Trans tag: PHB-P/DOZN-A2
- Engine block
- VIN stamping: 0F539709
- Starter area block casting: DOAE J
- Casting date: 0A8
- Assembly casting date: 0A8
- Water pump area 0A19 6



On the following day, Michael responded with this final email:

Hi, Jeff, I appreciate you going out of your way to help me out—thank you very much! Exactly what I was looking for! Mission accomplished!

From the pictures and the stamps you sent, the VIN for this car appears to have been 0F91M539709. Using that and pictures from Kareem's listings, I can determine the following info: [The car was a] 1970 Eliminator Competition Yellow/black Décor interior 351C-4V/FMX automatic. Options: Courtesy Light

group, console, AM radio, Décor Group.

That VIN was not previously recorded in the Eliminator Registry, but we will add the information and pictures to our files. We will also work with Marti Auto Works to confirm the VIN as a legitimate VIN and a true Eliminator.

Please let me know if there is anything I can do for you in return for your help. Thanks again and have a great day!

Mike Banks

Here is where this sleuthing project helps any of you that might consider getting a FoMoCo vehicle and/or parts from a distant location. A big part of buying from afar is getting the right car or part and knowing it is what is offered. With counterfeiting and cloning going on at new levels, it is important to get what you are paying for. The details, while primarily related to the 1970 Cougar in question, would also relate (to a high degree) to other Ford products from that era and beyond. If you're looking for a different year, model, or even brand, the specific VIN or tag data may be different, but the research—or sleuthing—would follow the same concept.

Another point made in Mike's last note is to get a Marti Report to confirm what you've found. Marti Reports are reliable and worth the cost if you are considering a high-value purchase. They are available on most Ford brands from 1967 and newer.

So how do you do what Mike did? Start with the Ford



Performance Club Connect to find a club in the area where the car or part is located. Then it's just a case of making contact with an area member that is willing to do what Jeff and Rick did. If there is not a Club Connect member in the area, look for other clubs or reach out through the internet or someone who knows someone. As with Jeff, most people will be happy to do this for you without compensation but, even with an agreed-upon service fee, it may be worth it if there are more than a few dollars at stake.

If you have further questions about sleuthing for your next Ford or Ford parts, ask a member of the Cougar Club of America, or check out Club Connect at Ford Performance, and make your own sleuthing partner. Below are the contacts for Marti Auto Works and Ford Club Connect.

Marti Auto Works:

<https://www.martiauto.com>

Ford Perf. Club Connect:

<https://performance.ford.com/enthusiasts/what-s-happening/2020/03/ford-club-connect.html>

