

Kallio's Cobras



Family Reunion

The owners of MidStates Classic Cars & Parts don't want their company to get too big. They're content to build about one Cobra body a week, several turn-key cars a year, and do the work well.

The company is situated in the village of Hooper, Nebraska, population 932, about 60 miles from Omaha, Nebraska. With Bob's wife, Vanessa, and their skilled workers happy to spend less than 10 minutes getting to work, it's a close-knit, family-type operation.

In fact, when customers buy a MidStates

Cobra kit, they're practically adopted into the family. And every fall they're invited back for a family reunion. The '91 Cobra Roundup, held last October, brought out 15 Cobras from eight states, plus two customers who took advantage of the occasion to pick up their bodies.

Several of the cars were out for the first time. The new owners were anxious to display their accomplishments. When Vic Larson couldn't leave his job on Friday to make the 500-mile drive from Denver for the weekend, his wife, Sharon, drove their Cobra solo and met Vic when he flew in that evening.

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Lauri Kallio didn't know what Cobras were when he started making windshield frames for the cars. "I was never a car buff before," he admits. During the ensuing years, though, as he continued to hand-craft aluminum channel into windshield frames for a manufacturer of replica kits, he eventually was won over and became a hardcore Cobra enthusiast.

Already retired once, Lauri went on to establish MidStates Classic Cars & Parts as a respected manufacturer of Cobra replicas. That done, he's now semiretired again—but he still shows up every day at the small plant in Hooper, Nebraska, to lend his considerable expertise to his youngest son, Bob, who now heads the enterprise with his wife, Vanessa.

Lauri Kallio's long career was spent "making things with a fine finish." These items included bank and store furnishings, then pickup toppers, and even a couple of Bugatti replicas turned into salad bars for a restaurant chain.

MIDSTATES' FAMILY APPROACH MAKES ITS CUSTOMERS FEEL LIKE KIN, TOO

TEXT & PHOTOS: JOHN LEE

Eventually, his involvement with Cobra components led to an opportunity to buy a fiberglass body mold that had been taken from an original Shelby Cobra. "I'd never worked with fiberglass, but I got a specialist to help me learn," said Lauri. He built his first body in June of 1982.

It wasn't up to his exacting standards, so he continued to rework and perfect the mold. Everything Lauri does has the touch of old-world craftsmanship. The son of Finnish immigrants, he speaks with a noticeable accent. (He'll tell you Lauri is a common man's name in Finland.)

MidStates now uses two molds for its Cobra bodies, one for original bodies and another for the custom model. What's the difference? According to Lauri, the original AC Ace bodies that Carroll Shelby used to build his Cobras were not formed by stamping machines, but hand-hammered out of aluminum. Thus, they didn't have the cookie-cutter sameness of assembly-line Detroit products. They weren't even perfectly symmetrical; for example, the right-side air scoop next to the grille opening

