

FUEL FOR THE MOTORING LIFESTYLE

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mopar mania

HOW CHRYSLER LAID DOWN THE
RUBBER IN THE HEYDAY OF MUSCLE

Hagerty's

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BLAIR BUNTING

Those Marvelous Mopars

WHEN IT COMES to making noise in the collector car world, few manufacturers have done it more effectively than Mopar.

Though Chrysler was the first to jump into the Pony Car wars with the Plymouth Barracuda, which predated the Mustang by several weeks, the Chrysler Corporation is a relative latecomer to the muscle car wars. The automaker started with the simple, yet potent, Road Runners and Super Bees, perfecting the art several years later with the Challengers and third-generation Barracuda/Cuda.

It's these latter cars that have raised the most eyebrows in recent years at Barrett-Jackson and RM, with rare examples fetching more than \$2 million each and creating a controversy about muscle-car prices that has yet to settle down. Add to that the almost religious deference to the Hemi V-8 in all of its manifestations over the years and you have the makings of a fascinating story.

So this issue we dive into Mopar Muscle with the latest installment in our "World of" series. Colin Comer, author of *Million-Dollar Muscle Cars* and president of Colin's Classic Automobiles in suburban Milwaukee, takes us deep into the history of Mopar to discover the emotion behind this marque. And to make it interesting, we invited Jim Wangers, the man who promoted the original GM muscle car, the Pontiac GTO, to weigh in from a competitive perspective.

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll find a story on two of the more famous individuals in the hobby — rodder Chip Foote and restorer Paul Russell. Foote is a household word in cable TV circles, thanks to his association with the series *Overhaulin'*. Russell, meanwhile, is known for his sublime efforts in turning rare Ferraris and Bugattis into best-of-show candidates at the most prestigious concours d'elegance events in the world. While both men are at the top of their game, we commissioned Brock Yates to explore with them the question of which is engaged in the nobler pursuit, and why. Their opinions may surprise you.

As your *Hagerty's* magazine continues to evolve, including a new, bolder cover masthead, we hope you like where it's taking you. Please drop us a line at editorhagertys@hagerty.com.

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THE WORLD OF

mopar



Hemis, 440s, Scat Packs, Challengers and Super Bees—when it came to muscle in the heyday, Chrysler let it all hang out.

*** by Colin Comer

*** photography by Jim Haefner

“MOPAR OR NO CAR!”

It's the battle cry of the Mopar faithful, often heard when a badass Ford or Chevy motors by. To the uninitiated, this fierce brand loyalty can be almost cultish in nature. However, to those who have experienced the wild Chrysler creations from the late '60s and early '70s muscle car era, this loyalty isn't shocking.

During their heyday, those pavement-thumping Super Bees, Road Runners, Chargers, Barracudas and Challengers ruled the avenues that mattered with their bumblebee stripes,

shaker hoods and color names like Plum Crazy, Sublime, Go-Mango and Top Banana.

So what led to this muscle-car supremacy for Chrysler? It was actually just a continuation of a long line of performance-oriented cars going back to the early '50s. Chrysler, considered by many the most engineering focused of the Big Three, has always been a leader in horsepower innovations. In 1953, Chrysler set a stock car record at Bonneville with a scorching 196 mph pass, and Lee Petty introduced NASCAR to the Hemi with five first-place finishes and 25 top-five finishes.

But real production muscle started in 1955 with the Chrysler C-300, the first of the famous "Letter Cars." Sporting a 300-hp, 331-cubic-inch dual-quad Hemi, the C-300 assumed legend status after a record-setting 127.58-mph flying-mile run at Daytona.

The best part was that for \$4,050, anybody could walk into a Chrysler dealership and order one of these luxurious hot rods. By 1958, the last year of a Hemi-powered Letter Car, the 300D, the record-setting tradition continued with Norm Thatcher's Class E 156-mph-plus record run at Bonneville.



The B Series "wedge" engine replaced the expensive and complex Hemi in 1959. Later, with the advent of the Max Wedge version, Chrysler was doing quite well in NHRA competition. The problem was NASCAR.

Although great for drag racing, in NASCAR, the Max Wedge just couldn't compete with the best from Chevrolet and Pontiac. By April 1963, the top brass at Chrysler sent "the word" down from above: They wanted to win Daytona in 1964.

According to the "Godfather of the Hemi," Chrysler engineer Tom Hoover, all agreed

that to win Daytona they needed the free-breathing Hemi back. The engineering team immediately went to work, creating the 426 Hemi by placing Hemi heads on the 426 Max Wedge engine. In February 1964, Chrysler introduced its new 426 Hemi at the Daytona 500 and simply destroyed the field.

Driver Paul Goldsmith put his Hemi-powered Plymouth on the pole with a record-setting 174-mph run. Richard Petty qualified second in his Hemi Plymouth and led 184 of the 200 laps — even lapping the entire field on his way to victory circle. In

the end, Chrysler and its new 426 Hemi finished 1-2-3 at Daytona, handily meeting their goal of taking back NASCAR in '64. The Hemi won 26 of 62 races that year.

After a 1965 NASCAR rule change that almost eliminated the 426 Hemi in competition, as it was not a regular production option, Chrysler made the 426 Hemi available in 1966 Dodge street cars. NASCAR was again the "Property of Mopar" and the car-buying public could get 426 Hemi power just by walking into a Dodge dealership.

Richard "The King" Petty took full advantage of Hemi power and used it to dominate NASCAR. Petty is shown here piloting his famous #43 Plymouth.



Muscle Mopars also left their mark in NHRA drag racing competition. The "Ramchargers," a team comprising Chrysler factory engineers, won the NHRA Nationals in '58. The legendary "Big Daddy" Don Garlits used Hemi motivation in his "Swamp Rat" dragsters to be the first to break 170 mph in the same year, before smashing the 200 mph barrier in 1964. In multiple classes of NHRA competition, drivers like Garlits, Ronnie Sox, Gene Adams and countless others used their Hemi hammers to drive away the competition.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, Chrysler products made heroes out of racers and accumulated race wins like a windshield gathers bugs on a muggy night in Louisiana. If you were serious about winning, you raced a Mopar.

Which brings us to the real reason manufacturers put so much effort into winning races — to sell cars. While Chrysler was dominating the racing world, they were not winning in the showroom. The fight for the performance car

market in the mid-'60s was fierce. Chrysler products had the engines — they just didn't have the flash needed to get buyers' attention.

Late response to the pony cars

The two platforms for Chrysler products aimed at the youth market in the mid-'60s were the A Body cars (the Dodge Dart and the Plymouth Valiant and Barracuda) and the B Body cars (Dodge Coronet and Plymouth Belvedere and Satellite).

Chrysler's offerings didn't stand a chance against the competition. The Ford Mustang, introduced in 1964, caught both GM and Chrysler asleep at the switch. While GM was able to speed up the introduction of the Chevrolet Camaro and Pontiac Firebird, both released as 1967 models, Chrysler was solidly

shut out of the pony car wars with its outdated A Body offerings. They were nowhere near as stylish or performance oriented as the GM and Ford compacts.

The fight for Mopar B Body cars was even tougher. Starting in 1964, Pontiac officially kicked off the muscle-car race with the GTO. The GTO and its corporate cousins — the Oldsmobile 442, Buick Grand Sport and Chevrolet Super Sports — were quite well focused on the youth market, with an intoxicating blend of performance and spotty appearance. Dodge and Plymouth had little to offer outside of big horsepower. Even the 1967 introduction of the Coronet R/T and Belvedere GTX did little to bolster sales. No question, Chrysler was late to this party.

But this would change with the 1968 introduction of the new B Body models. Two new cars were aimed squarely at the youth market: The Plymouth Road Runner and the Dodge Super Bee. The tables were turned on the competition, for even though they had great cars, not one had anything named after a cartoon character.

Chrysler had found the magic formula — a good-looking, no-frills performance car at a price almost anybody could afford.



Left: A 1955 Chrysler C-300, the first of the legendary "Letter Cars." It proved Chrysler was serious about performance — NASCAR performance you could drive home!



Sales improved dramatically. In 1967, Plymouth sold 12,115 Belvedere GTX models — the sportiest model for that year. In 1968, the redesigned GTX sold 18,272 cars, while the new Road Runner, a low-price trim level of the same car with a standard 383 CID V-8 and manual transmission, sold a whopping 44,598 copies.

Chrysler had found the magic formula — a good-looking, no-frills performance car at a price almost anybody could afford. With a base price of \$2,896, Road Runners were being sold as fast as they could be built. As had been the case since 1966, check the right boxes on a B Body order sheet and you could get the 426 Street Hemi with 425 hp, a fact not lost on horsepower-hungry buyers switching to a Mopar from the GM or Ford camps.

In 1969, Chrysler refined the new B Bodies even more, adding more performance drivetrain options, such as the Super Track Pak, which consisted of a 4.10:1 Dana 60 rear axle, power disc brakes and other tweaks.

As an alternative to the almost \$900 Hemi option, midyear saw the introduction of the 440 CID 3x2bbl carbureted engine as part of the bargain \$468 option code A12 “conversion package” offered on Road Runners and Super Bees. The A12 cars were thinly disguised drag cars offered right from the factory. Chrysler wasn't stupid — it knew the best way to get



Two serious Wedge-headed monsters — the 426 CID “Max Wedge” (top) and the 1969 .5 440 CID “Six Pack” (above). Big power isn't always spelled “Hemi” in the world of Mopar.

its new 390-hp, multi-carbureted 440 noticed was to put it in cars that would see heavy street and drag racing action.

Today, good Hemi B Bodies sell for \$100,000 to \$200,000, and A12 cars trade at similar numbers. Any good B Body is desirable, and there's one to fit just about any budget. For example, a great '69 383/four-speed Road Runner hardtop is right around the \$35,000 mark — and a lot of car for the money.

One die-hard GM guy wooed by the new Mopars in 1969 was then-22-year-old Mike Guarise. After seeing the new 1969 Charger R/T, he traded the Tri Power GTO he was driving at the time for his first Mopar.

“It was a beautiful car; very sharp in B5 Bright Blue with a white vinyl top and white



MOPAR MOTORHEADS MEET

NOT THAT THEY need extra incentive, but national clubs and events give Mopar fans a great excuse to come together and share their passion. Few car clubs can rival a Mopar gathering when it comes to variety — in every sense of the word!

CLUBS

The WPC Club Inc.
chryslerclub.org

Daytona-Superbird Auto Club
(includes Aero Warrior Registry)
superbirdclub.com

Mopar Enthusiasts Car Club
of America
moparenthusiasts.1afm.com

Winged Warriors/National B-Body
Owners Association
wwboa.org

EVENTS

Carlisle All-Chrysler Nationals
Carlisle Fairgrounds
Carlisle, Pennsylvania
July 11–13, 2008
carlisleevents.com/ce/events/chrysler-nationals

Mopar Nationals
National Trail Raceway
Columbus, Ohio
August 8–10, 2008
moparnats.org

MOPAR MANIA

MOPAR FANS HAVE an ample supply of Web sites, museums and literature to keep their mania alive.

MUSEUMS

Walter P. Chrysler Museum
One Chrysler Drive
Auburn Hills, Michigan 48326-2778
888-456-1924
chryslerheritage.com

Smith Collection Museum of American Speed
Speedway Motors Corporate Campus
340 Victory Lane
Lincoln, Nebraska 68528
402-323-3166
museumofamericanspeed.com

Floyd Garrett's Muscle Car Museum
320 Winfield Dunn Parkway
Sevierville, Tennessee 37874
865-908-0882
musclecarmuseum.com/index2.htm

WEB SITES

Official Mopar Site: mopar.com

Moparts: moparts.com

Mopar Ring: mopar-ring.org

BOOKS

Million-Dollar Muscle Cars: The Rarest and Most Collectible Cars of the Performance Era
by Colin Comer

Mopar Muscle: Fifty Years: Dodge, Plymouth & Chrysler Performance
by Robert Genat

Muscle: America's Legendary Performance Cars
by Randy Leffingwell and Darwin Holmstrom

Original Challenger and Barracuda 1970-1974: The Restorer's Guide
by Jim Schild

Original Dodge & Plymouth B-Body Muscle 1966-1970: The Restorer's Guide
by Jim Schild

== 1971 PLYMOUTH HEMI 'CUDA CONVERTIBLE ==

\$4,434	\$2,690	\$7,800	\$20,000
← BASE	1975	1980	1985
\$3,470	\$2,150	\$5,000	\$5,300

== 1969.5 440 SIX PACK SUPER BEE ==

interior," Guarise says. "It had the 440 Magnum V-8 and 375 hp, and the color combo looked great with redline tires. I owned it for two years and wish I would have kept it."

The biggest shot fired by Chrysler in the muscle-car wars came late in the game — the iconic Plymouth Barracuda and Dodge Challenger. Introduced as 1970 model year cars on Chrysler's new E Body platform, they were a complete package with both looks and performance. At long last Chrysler had two cars that could actually compete with the Mustang, Camaro and Firebird.

Available with everything from a lowly Slant Six engine to the mighty 426 Hemi, the E Body cars were all new, unlike the warmed-over 1964 design used on the previous A Body Barracudas. Performance versions of both were offered — the Plymouth 'Cuda and the Dodge Challenger R/T.

The base engine was the 383 CID V-8, with optional 340 CID 4 barrel, 340 CID 6 barrel, 440 4 barrel, 440 6 barrel and 426 Hemi. A multitude of transmission and drivetrain options were available, as well as just about every luxury and convenience option

After 1971, ever-tightening government regulations took most of the fun out of just about every car from Detroit.



An Old Goat Speaks

"I GOTTA CHANGE MY PLUGS" was the rallying cry for Hemi owners when we pulled through the drive-in in one of my Royal Bobcat Pontiacs on our late-night rounds up and down Detroit's famed Woodward Avenue. Why, you ask? Because after a night out cruising Woodward, the "Street Hemi" would foul the plugs and could do nothing more than "piss, moan and backfire" when trying to "get one off" on Woodward.

We would wait down at Royal Pontiac until about 11 p.m., then go out to pick on the Hemi guys, knowing their plugs would be loaded up. Yes, we got our hats handed to us a few times by those factory guys with a well-prepped Hemi — they knew better than to cruise. A well-prepped Hemi was "King Kong," but wouldn't hold its tune very long on the street.

With the Hemi, Chrysler was winning every race but the one that counted — the sales race. Its cars had nothing in styling until the



you could want in a "sporty" car. To top it off, 1970 began the availability of Chrysler's famous "High Impact Paint" colors.

Although the Challenger and Barracuda continued in production through the 1974 model year, after 1971, ever-tightening government regulations took most of the fun out of just about every car from Detroit, including the once mighty Mopar performance offerings.

The last year of the 426 Hemi and 440 engines was 1971, and the most horsepower you could get in an E Body for 1972 was 240 from a 340 CID 4 barrel engine. So for collectors, pre-1972 model year cars are where it's at for Chrysler products.

Riding the muscle car revival

In 1970, the base price for all Barracuda variants was right around \$3,000. If you built the ultimate '70 'Cuda, a 426 Hemi-equipped drop-top, like 14 people did that year, your car would have been roughly \$4,500 new.

In 2006, one of the 14 sold at auction for \$2.16 million. Think that's a big number? How about a similar 1971 Hemi 'Cuda convertible, one of just seven produced, also about \$4,500 new. In 2007, RM Auctions sold just such a car for a staggering \$2.42 million.

David Christenholz owned the '70 Hemi 'Cuda convertible that sold for \$2.16 million. "I bought the car when it was expensive, but

SOURCE: carthatmatter.com; prices given are examples only.

not so much that I was afraid to drive it," says the Arizona muscle-car collector.

But while he owned it, the values increased so much that it became a delicate investment. "It was garage art," Christenholz says. "The money took away from my enjoyment."

He replaced the Hemi 'Cuda convertible with a '70 Hemi 'Cuda hardtop. "It's a great car, just like the convertible, but something my whole family enjoys driving," Christenholz says.

Don't despair — not all 'Cudas and Challenger R/Ts have phone-number prices. For the enthusiast who just wants a great E Body to drive, show and enjoy, there are plenty to be had for well under \$100,000. My pick? The limited-production 1970 Plymouth 'Cuda AAR and Challenger T/A 340 Six Pack cars — with a four-speed, of course.

Built to homologate the E Body for SCCA competition, these cars with their high-revving 340 engines, side-exiting exhaust, road-raced suspensions, fiberglass hoods, front and rear spoilers, and tasteful racy graphics are as much fun to look at as they are to drive.

The world of Mopar Muscle has a long and successful history, with vehicles to match just about any taste. And while I recommend against getting a Pentastar or Road Runner tattoo to display your loyalty, I wouldn't blame you one bit if driving some Mopar Muscle makes you shout "Mopar or No Car!" at least once.

around that cocky little bird made everybody sit up and take notice.

Packaged with the 383 "wedge," the Road Runner was a very capable car. Advancements with the wedge head engines eclipsed the street capabilities of the Hemi, which sat on showroom floors.

Hence, there were so few Road Runners (and Super Bees) and 'Cudas (and Challengers) sold with Hemi engines that they are today's rare collectibles.

— Jim Wingers, "Godfather of the GTO"



RESTORATION AND SERVICE

OLD CARS AREN'T always like a good watch — some just don't take a lickin' and keep on tickin'. If your Mopar could use a little love, put it in the hands of someone who understands it from the inside out. Following is a list of well-known and respected Mopar restorers.

Restorations by Julius

101011/2 Canoga Avenue
Chatsworth, California 91311
818-882-2825
rbyj.com

Roger Gibson Auto Restoration

106 State Highway PP
Scott City, Missouri 63780
573-264-2022
rogergibsonautorestitution.com

Midwest Muscle Car Restoration

104 Weil Drive
Slinger, Wisconsin 53086
262-297-1029

Mopar Muscle Car Restoration

100 Air-Industrial Park Drive
Boyer City, Michigan 49712
231-582-3215
restoremymusclecar.com

Vintage Iron and Restoration

15015 North 74th Street
Scottsdale, Arizona 85260
480-922-2480
vintageironandrestoration.com

For a comprehensive listing of automobile museums, club and restorers, go to hagerty.com/ResourceDirectory/resdir_index.aspx.



Road Runner and the great advertising for it came along. Not only had Chrysler created a new car, its marketing for it was a stroke of genius. It was so good that I wish I had thought of it myself! Promoting that new car