

CLASSIC AMERICAN



Driving the American Dream

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CORD STORY

Rediscovering a Legend

FORTIES JEEP

'71 DODGE CHALLENGER

'56 OLDSMOBILE



FREE ADS HUNDREDS OF AMERICAN CARS FOR SALE

IMPALA Leaping forward
with Chevy's favourite



Lock Stock & Four Smokin' Barrels



Chrysler showed up late to the party when it came to the pony car department, in fact so late that they nearly missed 'the smoochie songs'. Yet, better late than never, some will say, as the all new E-Bodies hit the American streets in the Fall of '69.

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THE 1970 models were simply stunning; long hood, short deck, a wide stance and every engine option that Chrysler Corp. could muster nestled in between the frame rails. The Dodge Challenger and Plymouth Barracuda had finally arrived. Performance versions were designated 'Cuda for Plymouth and R/T for Challenger, these are amongst the most collectable Mopars today as their clean styling and awesome horsepower, coupled with relatively low production figures, make very desirable muscle cars indeed.

A base 'Cuda or R/T came with 383cu.in. with a four-barrel carb, pumping out a healthy 335 horses. Also available were:

440ci, 440 6bbl (Cuda), six pack, (Dodge), and of course the mighty 426cu.in. Hemi. Strangely though, the 340cu.in. small block could only be ordered with the Plymouth. Special versions of both cars were produced, so that Chrysler could be represented in the SCCA Trans Am circuit series. They carried a 340cu.in. small block, with a specially devised alloy Edelbrock manifold, topped off with three Holley 2bbl carbs producing a whopping 290bhp.

Designated AAR for Cuda and T/A for Challenger, limited numbers were produced and sold through the appropriate dealerships. More luxurious models could be had by ordering



LEFT: ARGENT SILVER REAR PANEL APPEARED FOR '71

FAR RIGHT: 383ci FOUR BARREL PUMPS OUT 300 HORSES, BUILT TO FACTORY SPECS

BELOW: DODGE FRONT END STYLING PEAKED FOR 1971

the Grand Coupe package for Plymouth and the SE, for Dodge. Both E-Bodies sold well throughout their introductory year, although convertibles went the way of the industry trend and did not enjoy a viable production rate.

Basically though, the two divisions tampered little with their ponies for 1971. Slight changes appeared in the engine line-ups, the Cuda lost the 440 4bbl but the R/T gained the 340. Although all horsepower figures were down across the board (owing in the main to Federal emission laws), a ground pounding '71 E-body could still be had.

Which brings us nicely to the '71 Dodge Challenger featured on these pages owned by Rick Griffin, a 36 year-old Senior Construction foreman, from Luton, Bedfordshire. Rick is no stranger to American cars, in fact, he cut his teeth way back in 1967, when a family trip to the 'Big Apple' saw him perched on the bench seat of a Ford Galaxie. That experience stayed with him until he reached legal driving age when a '77 Ford Mustang II became his first car.

The Muzzie gave way to Mopar power in the shape of a '71 Plymouth Satellite which up to 1992 gave faithful service, until a fateful encounter with 20 roof tiles damaged the car beyond repair. The hunt was on for another American ride.

A chance phone call from a three month old classified saw the whole family head off to Essex, with the intention of looking over a '71 Challenger. After the usual haggling, a deal was struck and Rick found himself driving home a 383cu.in. big block wearing a '70 grille, requiring TLC and in desperate need of a respray.

Indeed, the car headed off for a colour change from black to the High Impact FJ5 Sublime Green and whilst in the body shop, the task of collecting parts intensified. A '71 grille, body mouldings and a Flip Top gas cap all came Rick's way as the Challenger began to look more like a complete car. Once put back together, the Dodge's first trip just happened to be the '96 Mopar Euro Nationals, where it attracted many favourable comments.

However, a further twist in this tale is about to take place. During the car's down-time, Rick contacted the Mopar Muscle Association and had the fender tag and accompanying broadcast sheet de-coded, which led to the discovery that the car had been assembled in Hamtramck, Michigan, in late October 1970. It was indeed a rare triple black E-Body, with an original 383cu.in. four-barrel, column automatic and with such luxuries as air conditioning, R/T suspension, Sure Grip axle, high grade split bench seats and many other desirable options. In fact, it was one of only 412 ordered that year.

This prompted a complete re-think in the direction of the restoration, and the decision was taken to get the Dodge back to just as the original owner had intended, way back in 1970. Putting the car back to its former glory would also increase its value, so a plan of attack swung into action.

The E-body soon became a shell and the bodywork was taken back to bare metal; the strip-down revealed the need to obtain a new nearside front wing and a new rear deck panel. Hugh Potter came up trumps with both items as his large inventory of used Mopar pieces came to the rescue.

With the new panels fitted the car was painstakingly prepped and then expertly treated to its lustrous coats of TX9 Formal Black paint by Phil Conway. A black vinyl roof came from Year One, restoration parts suppliers of Georgia, and was fitted by Andrew Chapman, who also repaired the front bench seat.

New carpet, trunk mat, decals and badges also came from Year One, as the car once again began to resemble a driving machine. The final touch was a complete exhaust system from 'Pipecraft' of Romford, Essex.

By now, Rick could see how the first owner intended the car to look when sitting down in the dealership with the salesman ticking off those option boxes; this muscle car had been built as a 'sleeper' and we ain't talking Woody Allen here. Subtle, yet menacing, it was able to trounce the opposition at the stop light drags should the need arise.

The car may not display any of the 'Scat Pack' or R/T identifications, but could with its options easily pass as one of 'Mother Mopar's Muscle Machines'. Since completion, the Challenger has met with much interest and admiration. In fact, at the 1998 Mopar EuroNationals at Avon Park, the judges saw fit to award the E-body 'Best Euro Mopar' award, an accolade that Rick was very happy to accept. ★



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