

AN UNCOMMON



PATH



**It only took the right
mixin' 'n' matchin' of AMC parts
to turn 13s with this 1968 Javelin**

Words by Daniel Strohl

Photography by Jeff Koch

We may not notice it all the time, but a particular tension underlies everything we do with automobiles. On the one hand, we yearn for individuality and the freedom inherent in it. The American tradition of transcendentalism has us examine how we can actively put our own stamp on everything we do, from where we work, what we eat and what music we pop on the mp3 player, to what cars we drive, either for pleasure or for basic transportation.

Nobody wants to drive the same beige box that everybody else drives, so we reject convention and personalize our cars with different paint and equipment options, with bumper stickers, with those foam balls that fit on the end of the antenna. We customize our vehicles with tinted windows, with lifted or lowered suspensions, with engine swaps.

But on the other hand, unless we build our cars completely from scratch, we have to accept some level of conformity. We have to accept that we may run the same chassis as the guy in the next lane (either on the freeway or the speedway). We have to rely on some other company's or individual's engineering proficiency in everything from engines to tires to windshield glass. Thus, we're still bound, in a way, to what we can purchase. We have to either temper our individuality or simply walk everywhere.

Richard Alonzo, however, found he could personalize his conformity.

Of course, the choice of an AMC is enough to brand anybody a nonconformist, both in the days when AMC still built cars and today, when it takes a determined individualist to maintain or restore such a car. Alonzo has his older brother, Ron, to thank for the red/white/blue streak in his blood.

"In about late 1968, Ron bought a brand-new Bittersweet Orange 1969 Javelin with a 343, a four-speed, Go Package, dual exhaust and a 3.55:1 Twin Grip rear axle," Alonzo said. "He then joined the Marines and had to go to Vietnam, so I took care of the car when he was gone."

Not a bad gig for a high school kid in Sacramento at a time when the roads were still relatively unpopulated at night.

"Back in those days, we used to race a lot on the street," he said. "I won quite a few; never got beat badly."

He recalls one race in particular, against his buddy in a 1968 Dodge Polara cop car, fitted with a four-barrel 440. Alonzo and the Javelin took his friend and the Polara up to about 120 mph, but the Polara owned the road after that.

When Ron returned, the keys to the Javelin went back in his pocket. Soon came Richard's turn in the Marines, but by the time he returned nine years later, Ron had sold the Javelin to buy a Cougar.

"I really missed that Javelin," Alonzo said. So he bravely set out to find another first-generation Javelin—not an easy task in California, which is about as far from AMC's ground zero in the Midwest as possible.

Fortunately, he only had to look out his windshield as he drove down Florin Road in Sacramento with his wife one day in 1976. "I was driving east and I saw the Javelin going west, so I made an illegal U-turn to chase the car down," he recalls. He ended up waiting outside a supermarket for 40 minutes until the owner returned to the car and Alonzo's offer of \$800 cash for it.

Out of the deal, Alonzo received a

rough—but driveable—343-powered Calcutta Russet Red 1968 Javelin SST with an automatic transmission and a stripped interior. "It had a bad vibration while driving, which turned out to be missing transmission-to-bellhousing bolts," Alonzo said.

Regardless, he had Al's Sons Upholstery, the shop right next to his own repair shop (A&L Automotive), replace the missing interior, then continued to use it as a driver for the next several years.

Over those same years, he became known locally as the go-to guy when it came to AMCs. He began collecting AMC parts, parts cars and projects, and around 1993 he began to formulate a plan for the Javelin.

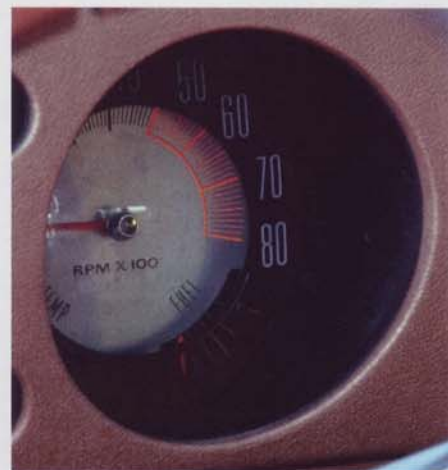
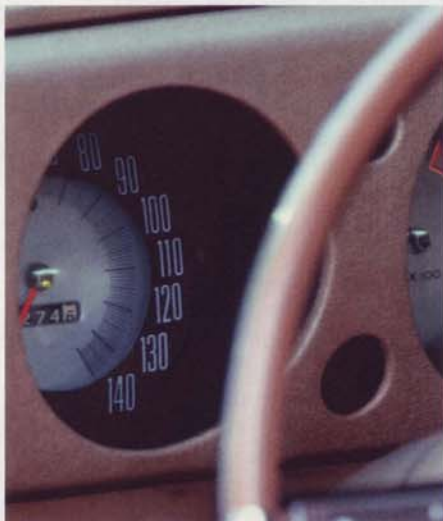
"I'd go to shows all the time and I'd see Fords with Chevrolet engines or Chevrolets with Ford 9-inch rear axles," he said. "I wanted to be different; I

wanted to keep the Javelin all AMC."

But, of course, he didn't feel like settling for the performance of the stock 343. Not when he had a mid-1970s Jeep Wagoneer in the shop, its engine bay nicely filled by AMC's 401-cu.in. V-8, still an option in the full-size Jeeps through 1978.

Out came the 343, then. As did the original Borg-Warner M-11 automatic transmission, which Alonzo replaced with a Torque-Command three-speed automatic transmission from a 360-powered 1974 Matador, beefed with a shift kit from Transtar and rebuilt by Joe Hills Transmission in Sacramento.

"The Borg-Warner transmission is hard to get parts for," Alonzo said. "You can build them, but you just can't get parts for them, so I wanted to run a Torque-Command; they're exactly the same as a Mopar TorqueFlite inside, so you can still buy parts for them easily."



Sure, the interior doesn't look very modified, but that's the point; owner chose to use the best of what AMC had to offer, including 140 mph speedometer

Before he slid the 401 into the engine bay, though, he had a few modifications to make. With a copy of *Performance American Style*—the bible for AMC folks who want to hop up their Kenosha karts—by his side, he took the block over to Lauren Todd's Automotive Cylinder Head, where Todd let him use the machining equipment to clean up the block and bore it .040-inch over.

"All 390s and 401s came from the factory with forged pistons, so I was looking for oversize forged pistons, but at the time, all I could find was Federal-Mogul .040-over pistons," Alonzo explained.

He slipped Hastings rings on the .040-over pistons, which push the 401's stock forged connecting rods and, in turn, the 401's stock forged crankshaft. Alonzo did use a Comp Cams 280H camshaft, which he said is roughly equivalent to the hot camshafts that AMC supplied from the

factory through the Group 19 accessory program.

He then pulled a set of 58cc combustion chamber iron heads—casting number 321-2993, the ones with the dogleg exhaust ports and studded rocker arm mounts—from a 401-powered 1972 or 1973 Matador to raise the compression ratio to 9.5:1. He filled the heads with a set of Manley 2.025-inch intake valves and 1.68-inch exhaust valves, then topped the valves with Erson valve springs and Harland-Sharp roller rocker arms.

On the intake side of things, he chose the Edelbrock R4B aluminum dual-plane manifold, the same one offered through Group 19, crowned with a Holley 750cfm four-barrel carburetor. On the exhaust side, he got lucky when he found a pair of non-smog-equipment cast-iron manifolds on the same Matador that the heads came from. Alonzo then hogged out the rela-

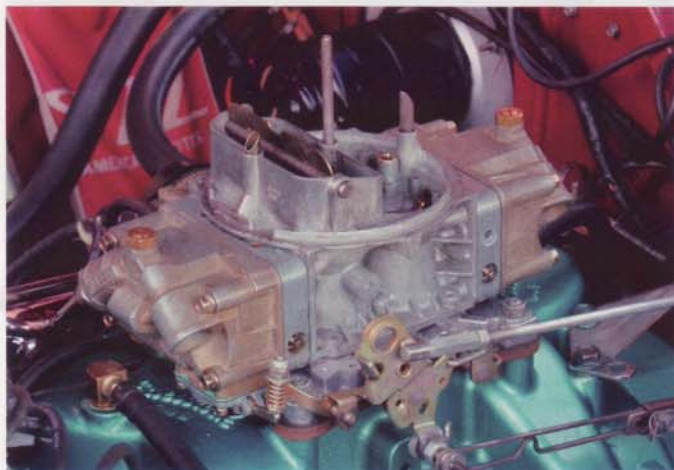
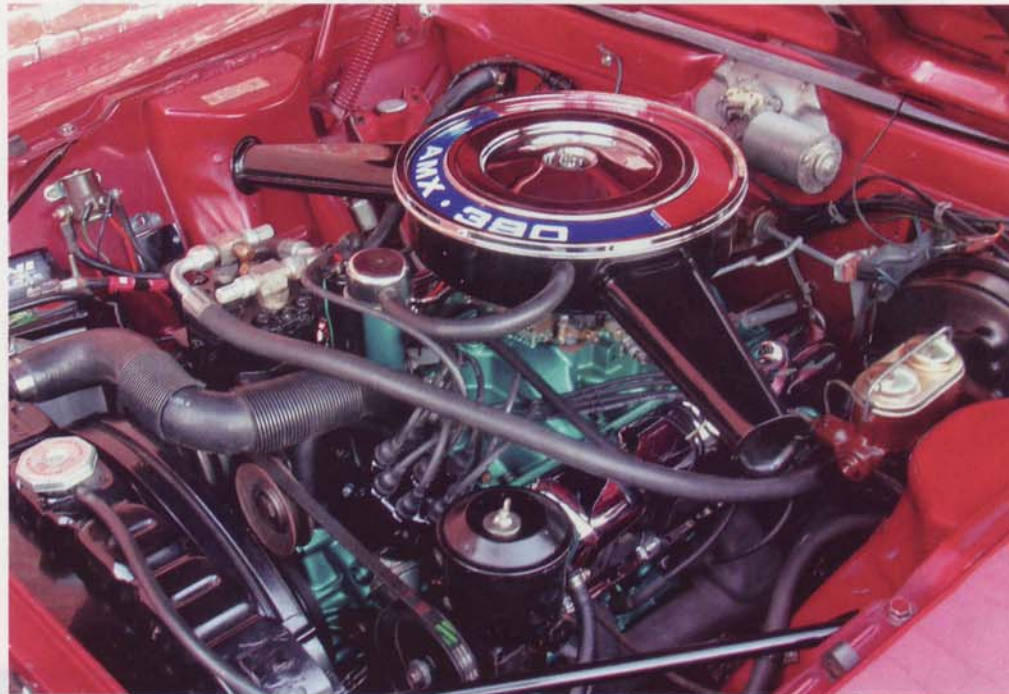
tively rare (at least, in California) manifolds with a die grinder and extended carbide tip.

"I wanted the sleeper look to them," he said. "They look factory, but if you pull them off and look inside, they look like a cast-iron header."

Out of the manifolds, exhaust gases flow through dual 2¼-inch pipes, through an H-pipe and into a pair of Dynamax Ultra-Flo mufflers.

Though Alonzo initially fired the ignition with a stock Delco-Remy points distributor, he found that he couldn't get the points set right and he kept having pre-ignition problems, so he replaced the Delco with an MSD Pro-Billet electronic distributor, which took care of the issues.

The front suspension remains essentially stock, with the power steering, trunnions, coil springs and a 1-inch-diameter solid anti-roll bar up front and parallel



Torque-Command automatic transmission easily poses as the stock Shift-Command, while a fortified and Holley-carbureted 401 masquerades as a 390



Stock-looking theme continues to the exterior, down to the sharp-looking Calcutta Russet Red paint



OWNER'S VIEW

My wife was really unhappy about the U-turn that I took to track this car down. And I showed it to my brother once it was all done; he liked it, but he's not into old cars like I am — he sold his Cougar a long time ago.

But AMCs do run in my family. My daughter drives a 304-powered Gremlin and my son drives a couple of AMXs. My daily driver is a 1973 Matador four-door that looks like an *Adam-12* cop car.

Basically, my plan was just to be different with this car and just make the repairs needed to make it look as factory as possible. I now drive it every weekend in the summers and put about 2,000 miles on it every year. — *Richard Alonzo*

PROS

- + Looks stock inside and out
- + Runs 13s
- + Clocked a century and a half with many more miles to go

CONS

- Had to turn to the aftermarket for a couple of the parts
- Ron's Javelin is still MIA
- Not a four-speed

leaf springs in the rear, rebuilt with Moog rubber bushings and Monroe gas shocks. He ditched the stock drum front brakes, though, in favor of a set of Kelsey-Hayes 10.5-inch discs from a Matador.

The stock 2.89:1-gear rear axle had to go though. Fortunately, Alonzo stumbled across an abandoned first-generation AMX "up in gold country" that offered its 3.15:1-gear Model 20 rear axle, Twin-Grip limited-slip differential, 10-inch drum brakes and adjustable torque links to complement the Javelin's stock rear leaf springs.

Alonzo didn't have far to look for the right set of 14-inch Magnum 500s; the Javelin had them from the factory, and they still looked presentable enough. He simply wrapped them with a set of Doral radials, speed-rated to 140 mph, and bolted them to the car.

The Al's Sons interior remained in presentable condition as well, including the stock air conditioning equipment, though Alonzo did make one minor modification: He replaced the stock 120-mph speedometer with an optional 140-mph unit.

Alonzo also didn't have far to go for

paint and bodywork. He hand-sanded the body down to bare metal, then handed the car over to Franco Martinez of Franco's Body Shop, another neighbor to his shop, who replicated the factory Calcutta Russet Red paint.

Alonzo finished the Javelin in 1995, but after 20 years, street racing didn't carry the same thrill-versus-feeling-of-invincibility ratio that it promised him in his teenage years, so he took it to Sacramento Speedway, his local dragstrip, to see what it could do.

While a 390-powered first-generation Javelin could count on as much as 325 gross horsepower (425-lbs.ft. of torque) and a 401-powered mid-1970s Wagoneer delivered 235 net horsepower (320-lbs.ft. of torque), Alonzo—who assembled the engine and performed all the mechanical work on the Javelin himself—believes the engine now puts out something more like 425hp at 5,000 rpm and 430-lbs.ft. at 3,400 rpm.

And while a 390-powered 1968 Javelin SST covered the quarter-mile in 15.2 seconds at 91.9 mph for a March 1968 *Car and Driver* road test, Alonzo's best



AMX rear axle with 3.15:1 gears, Twin-Grip and torque links, has helped owner run 13 seconds

1968 AMC Javelin SST SPECIFICATIONS

Engine

<i>Block Type</i>	AMC 401 OHV V-8, iron block
<i>Cylinder Heads</i>	AMC casting number 321-2993; 58cc combustion chambers
<i>Displacement</i>	408.8 cubic inches (.040-inch overbore)
<i>Bore x Stroke</i>	4.205 x 3.680 inches (stock bore is 4.175-inch)
<i>Compression ratio</i>	9.5:1
<i>Pistons</i>	Federal-Mogul forged
<i>Horsepower @ rpm</i>	425 @ 5,000 (est.)
<i>Torque @ rpm</i>	430-lbs.ft. @ 3,400 (est.)
<i>Camshaft Type</i>	Comp Cams 280H hydraulic
<i>Camshaft Specifications</i>	230 degrees of duration at .050-inch of lift; .490-inch of valve lift
<i>Valvetrain</i>	Manley valves; Erson valve springs; Harland-Sharp roller rocker arms
<i>Fuel system</i>	Edelbrock R4B intake manifold, Holley 750cfm four-barrel carburetor
<i>Lubrication system</i>	Stock AMC gear-type pump
<i>Ignition system</i>	MSD Pro-Billet
<i>Exhaust system</i>	Modified non-smog AMC 360 manifolds, 2-1/4-inch H-pipe, dual Dynomax Ultra-Flo mufflers

Transmission

<i>Type</i>	1974 Matador Torque-Command three-speed automatic with Transtar shift kit; stock shifter
<i>Ratios</i>	1st 2.45:1 2nd 1.45:1 3rd 1.00:1 Reverse 2.20:1

Differential

<i>Type</i>	AMC Model 20 with Twin-Grip limited-slip differential
<i>Ratio</i>	3.15:1

Steering

<i>Type</i>	Saginaw recirculating ball with power assist
<i>Ratio</i>	24.0:1

Brakes

<i>Front</i>	Kelsey-Hayes 10.5-inch disc
<i>Rear</i>	Bendix 10-inch drum

Suspension

<i>Front</i>	Independent, A-arms, control arms and strut rods; coil springs; Monroe telescoping shocks
<i>Rear</i>	Parallel semi-elliptic springs; AMX adjustable torque links; Monroe shocks

Wheels & Tires

<i>Wheels</i>	Stock AMC Magnum 500 Front 14 x 7 inches Rear 14 x 7 inches
<i>Tires</i>	Doral SDL 70 Front 205/70R14 Rear 205/70R14



Magnum 500 wheels came stock on the Javelin

effort on the quarter-mile—shifting the transmission manually—resulted in a 13.3-second run at 101 mph.

Despite that accomplishment, Alonzo seems more proud about a mark achieved on a trip north to Seattle that he and his son took in the Javelin, during which they found some stretches of open road to test the speed rating of those Dorals and more than pegged that 140-mph speedometer—he figures he hit 150 before he backed off the accelerator.

“That 343 was a real good engine, had a pretty good top end,” Alonzo said. “But the 401 is an animal. I haven’t yet found its top end.”

Others have likely built similar Javelins with similar drivetrain combinations—after all, Alonzo closely followed the recipes in a rather popular AMC performance cookbook. And others have definitely taken Javelins to those speeds—if not AMC’s own test drivers, then Craig Breedlove or one of the many racers out there devoted to AMC speed.

But Alonzo’s not likely to square off next to any of them anytime soon on the streets or speedways of Sacramento. 🚗



Stock steering wheel looks sporty enough as-is

