

'69 NOVA Z/28: WHY DIDN'T GM BUILD IT?



Hemmings

MUSCLE MACHINES

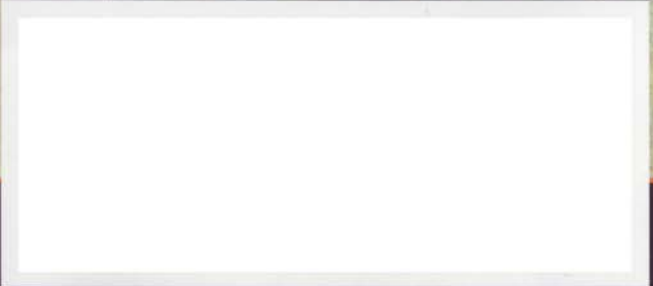
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CHALLENGER RETURNS



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INSIDE

► **DISCO MUSCLE:**
1978 MACHO T/A



1974 AMC AMX

Words and photography by Daniel Strohl

Restoration photography courtesy of Reg Farney

In a way, Reg Farney was his car's own previous owner.

You know, the guy you swear you're gonna hunt down and serve a knuckle sandwich for hacking up your car's wiring, leaving you to fix it all. Or the guy you mutter oaths of damnation to when you can't find critical nuts and bolts in all the boxes he gave you, even though he promised that those boxes contained everything you needed to put the car back together.

Yet Farney's owned his 1974 AMX nearly since it was new. So he's only got himself to blame.

Fresh out of high school in June 1976, he knew he wanted a performance car as his first car. His parents had given him a decent sum of money for a graduation present, and he had started working for his father's construction business. Yet he didn't have enough money saved up for a new car, and all the used muscle cars in and around his home in Lowville, New York (in the upper Upstate region, where they see no shortage of snow), had already been torn to shreds.

About the only muscle car still in decent shape in the area, a 1974 AMX, Farney found over in nearby Watertown, New York, though somebody had traded it in on a Chevrolet down in Syracuse. That previous owner had put only about 12,500 miles on the AMX over two years and made a point of having Rusty Jones do his thing to the underside of the car—likely what saved it from those two harsh upstate winters.

To Farney's delight, the AMX had a four-barrel 401—worth

235 net horsepower when new—a T-10 four-speed and a Twin Grip-equipped, 3.54:1-gear rear axle. The previous owner also seemed to be sort of an audio nerd; he'd hacked a Radio Shack CB unit and a graphic equalizer into the dash (tossing the original AM/FM radio), then cut holes in the kick panels and package tray for speakers. He even cut through the side of the dash to provide a hole for the CB microphone's plug.

The drivetrain and body, however, remained unmolested, save for the tiny holes that the Rusty Jones crew drilled in the doors and rocker panels during the rustproofing process. A little rustproofing overspray made it into the engine compartment.

Farney almost immediately set about installing an 8-track player in the stock console. The next weekend, he yanked the stock exhaust manifolds and the air-injection pump from the emissions system and replaced them with a set of Hooker headers. The weekend after that, he installed an Edelbrock air cleaner and pair of Edelbrock rocker arm covers.

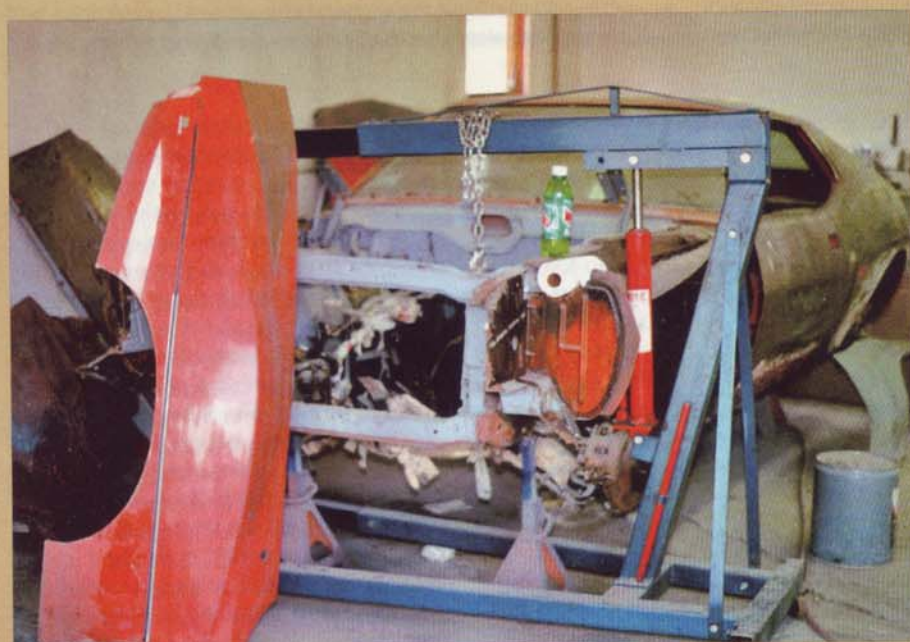
"And that pretty much drained my funds," Farney said.

He used the AMX as a daily driver that summer and for the next five years as he attended college at St. Lawrence and Clarkson universities. During his first winter at college, he had to leave the AMX parallel-parked on the street; another car came by and hit the AMX's left front fender, damaging the bumper and bending the wire mesh AMX grille in half. "I bent it back alright, but it still had this crease in the middle," Farney said. With a junkyard fender and bumper, the AMX was back on the streets.





Shortly after the XMA arrived at the restoration shop, the body was stripped of its poor 1981 repaint using Klean-Strip paint stripper.



Owner left just the engine, drivetrain and suspension in the XMA when he took it to the restoration shop; note the repainted front fender with incorrectly shaped T-stripe section



Owner undid all that he could from the XMA before leaving it with Bailey's Auto Retaining

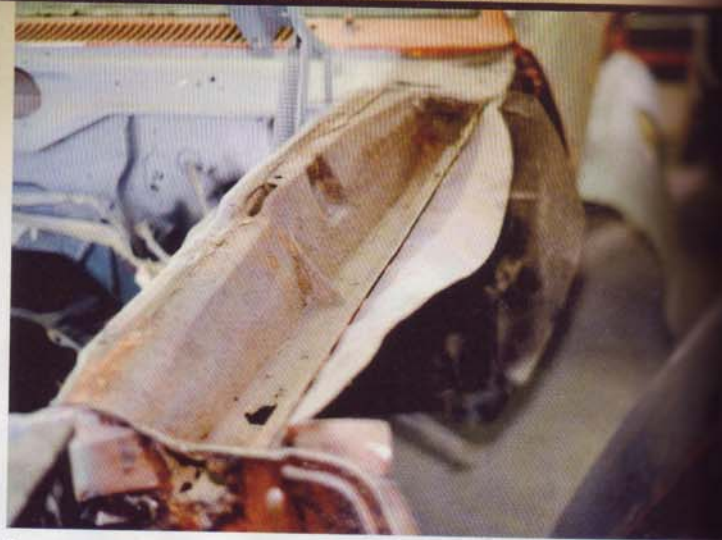


Only the quarter-panel sections behind the rear wheelwells rusted enough to warrant patches

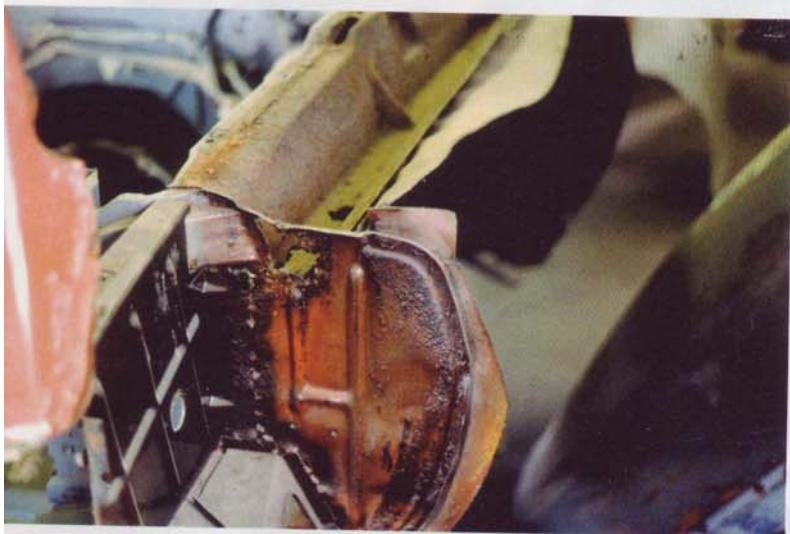
RESTORATION PROFILE



With the door panels off, the current owner could see where the rustproofing that the original owner had applied went inside the doors



A common problem on Javelins and AMXs: The troughs under the tops of the front fenders trapped dirt and moisture over the years



Rust holes through the core support extensions and the bottom of the troughs could've been worse—they just required simple patch panels



Stripping the paint revealed no major dents or damage; minor dents and rust repair areas were given a thin coat of Evercoat filler

The AMX also started well in winter's chill. "So everybody relied on me to jumpstart their car in the winters," Farney said. "One winter in particular, the winter of 1979, was real cold, about 40 below, and my roommate had a job at UPS that required him to get up before 5 a.m. So I had to start his car when it was that cold, that early, all that winter. The AMX started up just fine those mornings, but I could tell that it was starved for oil, and from then on, it started using more and more oil."

But still the 401 soldiered on. By 1981, however, the AMX's body showed enough rust spots to warrant a simple repaint at a local body shop. "They wanted \$400 or \$500 for the paint, but they wanted another \$300 to do the T-stripe," Farney said. Thus, the body shop bestowed the AMX with much sloppy overspray, but no replacement T-stripe.

Farney only drove the AMX during the summers for the next two or three years, then put it away in a barn on his family's property. "I always knew I wanted to keep that car," he said. "I knew it was unique."

But not until 1991 did he pull the AMX from that barn and decide to finally rebuild the engine. He took the AMX down to Best Machine in Watertown, where owner Andy Dobransky left the bores in the 401 at their stock size and gave the engine a simple rebuild with new rings, bearings and gaskets. Farney had Dobransky install an Edelbrock manifold and four-barrel carburetor while he was at it. "But this time I was smart enough to keep the original manifold and carburetor," Farney said.

Farney noticed that the AMX had suffered from its several-year stay in a damp barn. "The paint had started to pop from

the rust getting underneath it," Farney said. "And enough sand had accumulated in the unibody troughs to cause the right front fender to start rusting where it sits over the trough. I got the car cleaned up a bit, but it was still a 20-footer."

So at about the same time he had the engine rebuilt, Farney started to hunt around for the parts and materials he needed to restore the AMX. "I located some NOS seat fabric in the same Domino pattern as the original, so that got me hot to search for more original parts," he said.

Through other AMC enthusiasts, *Hemmings Motor News* listings, and the various AMC parts vendors, including American Parts Depot, Farney said he was able to track down most of the parts he needed over the next four or five years. He found a stock AM/FM radio, a right front fender

1974 AMC AMX



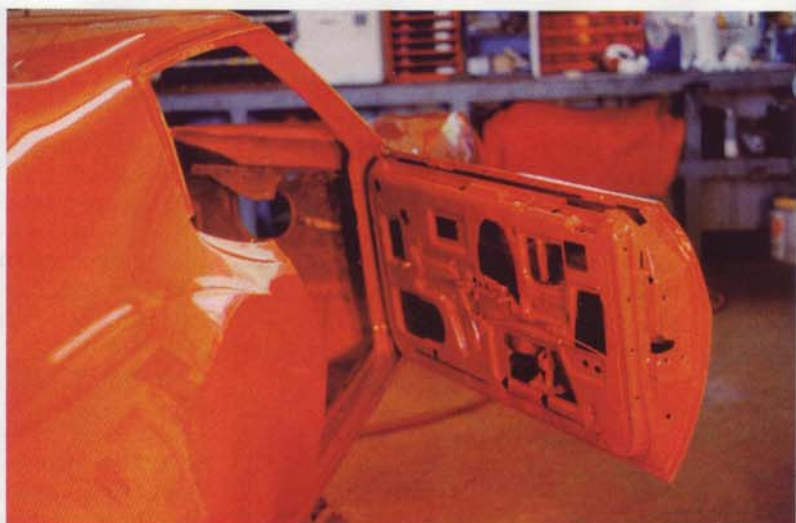
Removing the upper shock mounts revealed date codes confirming the owner's suspicion that this was one of the last 1974 Javelin AMXs



Valspar 2K urethane primer set the foundation for the paint with plenty of block sanding with 600-grade paper in between coats



Another four coats of single-stage Valspar Sunthane polyurethane paint went on smooth after all the block sanding of the primer



Paint replicates the original G6 Sienna Orange... and this time the owner chose to apply a correct replica gold T-stripe to the hood

in good condition, and he even located a new mesh grille sans crease. A nearby junkyard had a Javelin with a console in perfect condition. And from Kennedy American he purchased a used air-injection pump, but one last piece eluded him throughout that time: the engine-turned dash overlay specific to the 1971-1974 AMXs. Not until he found one at a swap meet in Albany, New York, did he finally resolve to begin the restoration process.

While tracking down the necessary parts, Farney also began his research. During the 1990s, Farney had become heavily involved with mid-year Corvettes and restoring them to National Corvette Restorers Society standards; that experience had him convinced that the AMX, too, had to be restored just right.

So while he already knew plenty about the way the AMX oughta be from owning

it for 20 years, he wanted to be absolutely sure of the correct parts, the correct markings and the correct finishes. He took detailed photographs of unrestored Javelins and AMXs at car shows. He clipped photos of correctly restored Javelins and AMXs from magazines. When he began to disassemble the car in late 1995 in his garage at home, Farney scraped away the rustproofing and overspray to determine the original finishes and colors. He also cataloged each screw, nut and bolt that came off the car with notes on 3x5 notecards that joined the fasteners in individual sandwich baggies.

"My mother saw it during this time, and she said that sooner or later I'd have the whole car in little baggies," he said.

Through his research, Farney discovered a few peculiar facets to his AMX. First, according to the date codes on the

door tag and stamped into the coil-spring towers, Farney determined his AMX was built in late August or early September 1974, "well past the normal July 31 model year end date." So while it likely isn't the last 1974 AMX—and thus the last Javelin AMX—that AMC built, AMC certainly did build it toward the end of the run.

Farney also suspects that AMC intended to use up as many Javelin parts as possible at the time, which might explain the strip of fabric stapled across the top of the radiator support—an item usually reserved for cars equipped with air conditioning—on his air conditioning-less car. And according to Farney's research, the lack of fender-mounted 401 badges wasn't too unusual—not every 401-powered AMX in 1974 received those badges, likely because AMC intended to discontinue the engine after that model year and thus

RESTORATION PROFILE



Though the owner replaced the Motorcraft 4300 four-barrel carburetor with an Edelbrock in 1991, he wisely held on to it over the years



Strip of fabric across top of radiator support normally only came with cars with air conditioning, somehow ended up on this non-a/c AMX

didn't see the need to produce more of the badges after the supply dwindled partway through the year.

Without an engine hoist or rotisserie, Farney removed everything he could possibly strip from the AMX before he loaded it up in his trailer and took it to Randy Bailey at Bailey's Auto Refinishing in Carthage, New York. Farney took all the photos he had taken during his research period and mounted them to posterboards, which he left with Bailey as a sort of restoration manual.

Bailey then got to work.

He started by stripping all of the paint from the car (save for the paint directly underneath the door tag, which Farney wanted to remain on the car) using Klean-Strip chemical stripper. "Fortunately, there weren't a lot of war wounds on it," Bailey said. But the stripping process did reveal some rust-through behind the rear wheels that Bailey repaired using a pair of patch panels (supplied by Farney) and his Hobart Handler 110 MIG welder. A skim of Evercoat filler, sanded from 36-grit through 180-grit paper, smoothed the repairs.

With the bodywork finished, Bailey primed the AMX with a coat of Valspar 2K urethane primer, applied a guidecoat of primer, block-sanded the guidecoat with 180-grit paper, applied another guidecoat, block-sanded the second guidecoat with 180-grit, then applied the final coat of primer, sanded with 180-grit, followed by 400- and 600-grade paper. "My advice is that you cannot block-sand them enough," Bailey said. "The more you block them, the straighter they get."

Bailey then loaded his DeVilbiss gravity-feed spray gun to shoot the Valspar Sunthane polyurethane in the AMX's

original color of G6 Sienna Orange. "It's a single-stage paint that is similar to DuPont's Imron, and it's held up pretty well," Bailey said. He said he gave the Sunthane a couple days to set up, then sanded it with 1,500-grade paper and buffed it using 3M products.

Also while in the shop, Bailey cleaned and repainted the transmission and rear axle, then rebuilt the suspension, blasting and painting the suspension components as necessary.

Meanwhile, Farney set about cleaning and restoring the parts that he'd removed from the AMX before he left it with Bailey. He sent the Motorcraft four-barrel carburetor to Pony Carburetors in Las Cruces, New Mexico, to have it restored, and shipped the chrome parts to King's Bumper in Utica, New York, for a dip in the shiny stuff. The interior he trusted to Mary Jane Moore of Castorland, New York.

Once Bailey finished laying down the paint in October 1996, Farney began taking his restored parts over to Bailey's shop, one at a time, to put them back on the car. He returned the stock exhaust manifolds, intake manifolds and a correct set of rocker arm covers to the 401. Reassembly took until about March or April 1997.

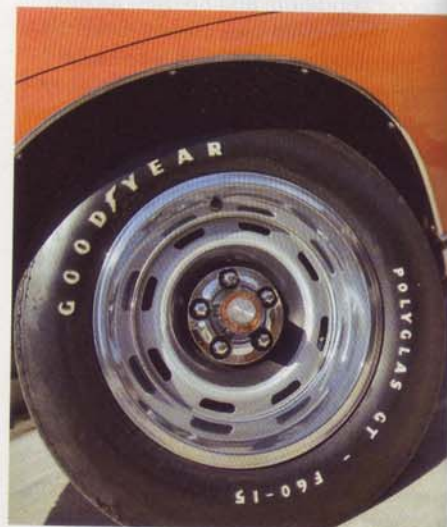
As with his Corvettes, Farney has since taken his AMX to shows for judging, and earlier this year he earned a Senior Gold level award from the American Motors Owners Association.

Also as with his Corvettes, Farney is always looking to correct any minor details that may hinder him from a perfect restoration.

In that way, then, he has perhaps atoned to himself for the sins he committed when he was his car's previous owner. 🐾



Hurst shifter stirs Borg-Warner T-10 four-speed, which remained untouched during the resto



Go Package included 15-inch slot-styled wheels wrapped in Goodyear Polyglas GT bias-plyes

1974 AMC AMX



Rebuild of the 235hp 401 in 1991 inspired owner to begin hunting down parts and materials necessary to thoroughly restore his AMX



Domino seat-cover fabric surprisingly came first in the owner's hunt for parts; console replaced the one owner modified in late 1970s

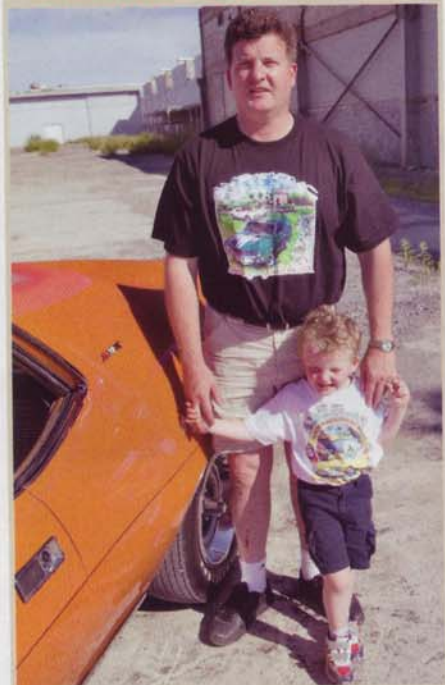


Drivetrain remains original to this car, as does carburetor and intake; only the exhaust manifolds and smog pump are not original equipment



Engine-turned dash overlay took several years to find so owner could replace original overlay

OWNER'S VIEW



I dreamed about getting a performance muscle car or pony car as my first car. When I first looked at the late 1960s and early 1970s cars in 1976, though, they were mostly hard-used. This Javelin AMX was in very good shape for the time, and for a smog years car, it was a very good performer, with a good balance of handling and power.

I think if I was a wiser teenager, I would not have done the mild street machine mods to the car—the headers, the valve covers, the smog pump, etc. That's because locating parts for AMCs takes much longer and requires you to search much harder than if you were to restore the Chevrolets that I'm used to restoring. — *Reg Farney*