



**PUT YOUR CAR ON THE COVER!**

Just choose a magazine and framing style – we'll do the rest!  
*Click here for more details*



[Search All Classifieds](#)

Members: [Log in](#) | New User? [Register](#)

## FEATURE ARTICLE from Hemmings Muscle Machines

[Home](#) > [Contents](#)

### TOP 12 MUSCLE CAR LEGENDS

Hemmings Muscle Machines - AUGUST 1, 2006 - BY [JIM DONNELLY AND GEORGE MATTAR](#)

 [Print This Article](#)

Once Shunned, Muscle Cars Take Center Stage

To be honest, muscle cars are dinosaurs. They are overweight, they gobble high-octane gasoline at alarming rates, they're noisy, the brakes are marginal in contrast to today's systems, they don't handle that well, and most did not offer the comforts that Americans have come to take for granted on even the cheapest, least dramatic cars being sold today.

So why have muscle cars, primarily those built from 1964 through 1971--which at one time were selling at three-digit prices--become works of art to so many? And how is it that suddenly, a 1971 Hemi 'Cuda convertible is selling for more hard, inflation-squeezed greenies



**SUBS**

**World's Collected Market**

- Over 10,000 each month
- Thousands of parts for sale
- Auction results
- Buyer's Guide

more:  
**CLICK**  
**SAVE**  
**OFF**  
**NEWS**  
**PR**  
**AND**  
**WE**  
**AC**



than a true American Classic, the fabled Duesenberg? Get a grip, sit down and think about that for a minute. An assembly-line car, thrown together at the rate of about 60 an hour 35 years ago, today is worth more than a hand-built automobile, with world-leading engineering and a coachbuilt, custom body, from the never-again era of the Olympian cars.



There are numerous reasons for this curious, seemingly impossible reality, chief among them the fact that restoring a Duesenberg is not for the faint of heart or the thin of wallet, as most replacement parts must be fabricated by hand by the most skillful of craftsmen. The generation that remembers those cars is gradually dying, and driving a car that large, or that expensive, in today's traffic, is well, just about impossible. It isn't as if you can run down to the parts counter and ask, "Can you get me a fender for a 1933 SSJ Duesie?"



In contrast, if you're unfortunate enough to have a mishap with that 1969 Camaro SS 396, you can just thumb through the pages of *Hemmings Motor News* and find a new fender from one of about a dozen vendors, at least.



Parts availability is a major reason why muscle cars have gone so forcefully big time, but their fundamental appeal is really rooted in innumerable causes. The baby boomers are now of the age and financial standing where they can finally head out and buy that GTO, Chevelle or Road Runner they lusted for in high school, but just couldn't afford. Another reason is likely that muscle cars were designed and built during simpler times. Life is much more complex today, despite what economists or politicians might say, with all the modern electronic gadgets available. The stockbroker, who leaves his suburban house at 5 a.m. to get to work on time and returns at 8 p.m., if he's lucky, five days a week, may look forward to the weekends, when he can get that muscle car out of the garage, work on the engine and then take his beloved muscle car for a tire-spinning blast to get milk. Ahhh, the stress is gone.



The *HMM* staff labored over which 12 cars to pick as legends of this deeply missed era. The vehicles are not listed in a ranked order, so please don't rush to your computer and fire off a nasty e-mail about the sequence of the cars in this story. We hope we've come up with a list that stands as a good cross section of what we believe are truly unforgettable muscle cars from years in the past.



**Photo 1:** If there was a prize for the most radical and efficient cold-air hood ever installed on a muscle car, this Road Runner, with its coveted A12-code lift-off hood, would win it in a walk. This was all but a total race car from Plymouth, with the stump-pulling grunt of the 440 Six Barrel engine. For all of you non-Moparites, the Six Pack was Dodge's version. The car's hood has no hinges and takes two people to remove. OK, here's where the numbers get confusing. Our feature car is an M-code Road Runner, still wearing its original black paint and is owned by Gary Arvanigian of Worcester, Massachusetts. M code indicates a Special Order





V-8, namely the 440 with three two-barrel carburetors on the 1969 VIN plate, but the body-code plate lists the E63 as the high-performance 383 four-barrel engine. To un-complicate the issue, the A12 code on the plate indicates the engine conversion package. What did matter was this fire-breather produced 390hp at 4,700 rpm and 490 lbs.-ft. of torque at 3,200 rpm; the first cars used aluminum Edelbrock intake manifolds.

**Photo 2:** One can argue that any Shelby Mustang is a muscle legend and win, but we chose this gorgeous dark blue model because it was the first of the new body style, which, unfortunately, only lasted two years. But there's another method to our madness: It's equipped with factory-optional Weber carburetors. The 289 engine in this car is a legend in its own right, built with terrific internals such as a precision-cast block and heads, a flat-tappet camshaft made of molded special-alloy iron, and connecting rods made of SAE 1041 forged steel with separately forged caps. But the real news was atop the intake manifold; Four 2-V Weber 48 IDA-1 carburetors. Our feature car is owned by Jack Greene of Lake Oswego, Oregon and has quite an interesting history. It was owned by a known drug dealer, whose compound was shot up by federal marshals. There were about 15 cars on the man's property and bullet holes riddled them all, except this one.

**Photo 3:** You can stop laughing whenever you're ready. This was the Rambler Rogue pretending to be pro wrassler Scott Steiner, or maybe Barry Bonds before he adopted the proportions of the Michelin Man. AMC and Hurst Performance got their heads together on what was a no-miss idea: A true muscle car with an MSRP of less than \$3,000. What emerged was the SC/Rambler, a zero-option offering with the 315hp 390-cu.in. AMC V-8 out of the AMX, Borg-Warner close-ratio four-speed manual and 3.54 Twin-Grip rear. Dowdy origins aside, the SC could, and did, take down some much more vaunted muscle cars. With just 1,512 built, it only existed for one year, which, ironically, was the final year that Rambler existed in AMC's model nomenclature. This SC is owned by Tony Callaway of Arizona.

**Photo 4:** A to-die-for muscle car from 1973? Isn't that the year when smog control choked output in earnest and seat-belt buzzers were in vogue? Believe it. Breathe these words with respect and reverence: "Super Duty." Yes, despite the fact that Pontiac sold boatloads of 455-cu.in Firebirds and Trans Ams during those years, virtually all of them were desmogged arthritics with just 250hp. The revived Super Duty V-8 in the 252 SD-455s that Pontiac built in 1973 had the same displacement, but very little else. This, you can rightly claim, was the closest thing to a hand-built racing engine ever installed in a production-line performance car. The cylinder heads alone boasted yawning 111cc combustion chambers and three-angle ground valves. The rods were forged from 5140-grade steel, shot-peened and Magnafluxed three times during production for strength. And speaking of strength, the SD-455 was rated at 290hp, thanks largely to a low-lift cam selected as an emissions compromise, though any serious rebuild can easily double that number, and then some. This Buccaneer Red car is

owned by Steve Ames of New Hampshire.

**Photo 5:** What more can we say about this towering piece of American automotive history? John Z. DeLorean decided to go against General Motors' policy of stuffing a big engine in an intermediate car. If it were not for DeLorean, who died last March at 80, the car that rocked the performance world down to its very DNA may never have been born. The famed Pontiac 389 was put into a Le Mans, some other high-performance goodies were added and the loftily named Gran Turismo Omoligato was born. The GTO sold beyond GM's wildest expectations and continued to do so until about 1970, when sales fell to a shade more than 40,000. By 1974, the GTO, a rebadged Nova, was a shadow of what was being built just a few years before and was killed. Thirty years later, Pontiac brought it back, but while it had a great engine, the styling just wasn't popular. Greg Raymond of California is the keeper of this original.

**Photo 6:** Next to Buick, Oldsmobile had a fuddy-duddy stigma that just didn't fit in the frantic muscle marketplace. The 4-4-2 machines were introduced in 1964, the same year as the Goat, but they never got anywhere near the sort of laudatory press that the GTO did. However, Oldsmobile built some of the most deadly powertrain combinations ever, and by 1970, when GM allowed 455-cu.in. V-8s to be installed in the Cutlass, Chevelle and Skylark, this car really took off. With tons of torque, the Olds 455 was one of the most powerful street engines ever, with 370hp. The 1970 model also, certainly, was one of the best-looking Oldsmobiles ever made, and the most powerful: The 455 was booted up to 365 standard horsepower, and the optional W-30 package upped that number to 370, adding a fiberglass hood with functional ram-air scoops. Jim Strouse of Ohio owns this feature 4-4-2.

**Photo 7:** In 1969, Chevrolet sold a ton of Camaros, but after three years, it was time for a new body style. Introduced at the Chicago Auto Show in February 1970, the new Z28 was a smash. Looking more like a creation of Bertone or Pininfarina, the new Z was gorgeous from any angle. Even though performance hoods with big scoops were all the rage in 1970, Chevy stylists focused on a design that flowed in a fluid manner from front to back. The car looked like it was going to swallow up pavement as it moved down the street, especially with the Rally Sport option and the beautiful split front bumper. Under the hood was likely the greatest small-block ever: A 350-cu.in., rev-crazed 360hp beast known as the LT-1, capable of 6,500 rpm. Assembled with the finest materials available, the LT-1 had gobs of performance, and was reliable to boot. Ben Arena of New York owns this 9,000 mile original.

**Photo 8:** Just a secretary's car? Sure, keep telling yourself that. The Cougar was, dare we say it, what Buick might have built if it had had access to GM's F-body instead of its being gripped like a derelict's bottle of MD 20/20 by Chevy and Pontiac. The Cougar got its first major restyling for 1969 under the guidance of Larry Shinoda, and for 1970, Mercury

redubbed its muscle contingent as the Action Pack, and anchored it with the new Cougar Eliminator, identifiable by its front and rear spoilers. Base power, if that's the right term, was the 290hp V-8 transplanted directly from the Boss 302, which gave the Eliminator similarly crisp handling. Of the Eliminators remaining today, these high-luxury 302-powered cars are the most common, but Lincoln-Mercury did build 444 Eliminators in 1970 with the Ram Air, 428-cu.in. Cobra Jet big-block pumping out 335hp. Rarest of the rare? The pair of Boss 429 Eliminators that were built, one of which became Bunkie Knudsen's ride of choice. Sonny Morgan of Texas owns this beautiful car.

**Photo 9:** An automotive legend, and one of the best-looking muscle cars ever. With 450hp, which was unheard of among production cars in 1970, this Chevelle had more than even the most powerful Corvette, and the LS6 engines were assembled with the best internal parts available. With any pressure at all on the accelerator, this car could shred a set of 60-series tires in minutes. With a stump-pulling 500-lbs.ft. of torque, the LS6 had 11.25:1 compression, mechanical lifters, a special high-performance camshaft and an aluminum intake manifold. On top sat a 780 cfm Holley 4150, which was as big as a toaster. The LS6 had the highest horsepower rating of any car during the muscle car era, but some have estimated its actual output at 500hp, thanks to gigantic 2.19-inch (intake) and 1.88-inch (exhaust) valves. These Chevys have, of late, become wildly popular, with prices to match: An LS6 convertible, the former NHRA Stock Eliminator world titleist, went for \$1 million at a Barrett-Jackson auction this past January. The silver LS6 Chevelle here is owned by Brian Stiscia of New York.

**Photo 10:** It's hard to fathom that Buick had the engine with the highest torque rating of any muscle car produced in 1970. Period. More than the LS6 Chevelle. More than the Hemi. More than a 429 Boss Mustang. It's true, however, and this now-famous car has a following unlike any other. The Stage 1 was a 455-cu.in. V-8 that produced enough pure, churning torque to rip a 100-year-old oak free of the firmament, roots and all. Moreover, Buicks were among the best-quality GM cars ever produced, using premium materials throughout. Not only were these cars powerful, they were beautifully styled and comfortable enough to drive every day. They still are, but you'll be hard-pressed to find one of these gemstones cruising Main Street on a daily basis. For the insatiable, there's always Buick's follow-up to the GS, the stunning GSX, available in your choice of yellow or white finish. This Stage 1 is owned by Carl Rychlik of Connecticut.

**Photo 11:** This car has a smaller engine, and lower horsepower and torque rating, than just about everything else that made this list. So what makes the Boss 302 such a muscle icon? Simply the fact that more so than its competition, the Boss 302 was a nearly seamless interpretation of the Mustang that Ford was racing with enormous success in the SCCA's Trans-Am series, arguably the greatest competition of all during the muscle years. The 1970 Boss 302 delivered a true sporting car with nearly perfect balance, the G-code Ford small-

block with 290hp, 10.6:1 compression, a Holley four-barrel, a standard 3.50:1 rear, and, we say confidently, the best visuals of any Ford muscle car, anywhere, anytime. In its entire history, less than 9,000 302s were produced by FoMoCo. The Boss 302's departure dovetailed with Ford's pullout from the Trans-Am Series, and all other racing genres, at the conclusion of the 1970 season. This fully restored Boss is owned by Ed Pierce of Vermont.

**Photo 12:** Arguably the King Kong of all Mopar muscle cars, and today, one of the most valuable cars in the world. With 425hp under the hood, the now-legendary Hemi had 490-lbs.ft. of torque and, when properly tuned, it was all but unbeatable in the quarter mile. Equally important was the sex appeal of this car. With the long-nose, short-deck design, the 'Cuda had one of the best-looking sets of quarter panels ever sculpted in sheetmetal. The rear panel was equally beautiful, and stylists incorporated the exhaust tips into the rear valance, leaving a clean and sleek design. The 'Cuda came in some truly high-impact colors too, such as In Violet, Vitamin C and Rallye Red. Our feature car is owned by Ralph Barbagallo of Connecticut.

This article originally appeared in the AUGUST 1, 2006 issue of Hemmings Muscle Machines. [Order Backissues of Hemmings Muscle Machines Here.](#)

1317079



**Hemmings** FIFTH ANNUAL  
Classic, Exotic & Muscle Car  
**CRUISE**

A 12-NIGHT MEDITERRANEAN CRUISE  
sailing from Rome, Italy, aboard the  
**Carnival Freedom**  
September 7-19, 2008

[CLICK FOR INFORMATION](#)

**ONLINE:** Home | Classifieds | Parts Locator | Clubs | Online Tour | About Us | FAQs | Terms & Conditions | Privacy Policy | Contact Us  
**SUBSCRIBE TO PRINT EDITIONS:** Hemmings Motor News | Hemmings Classic Car | Hemmings Sports and Exotic Car | Hemmings Muscle Machines  
Copyright © 1996-2007 Hemmings Motor News