

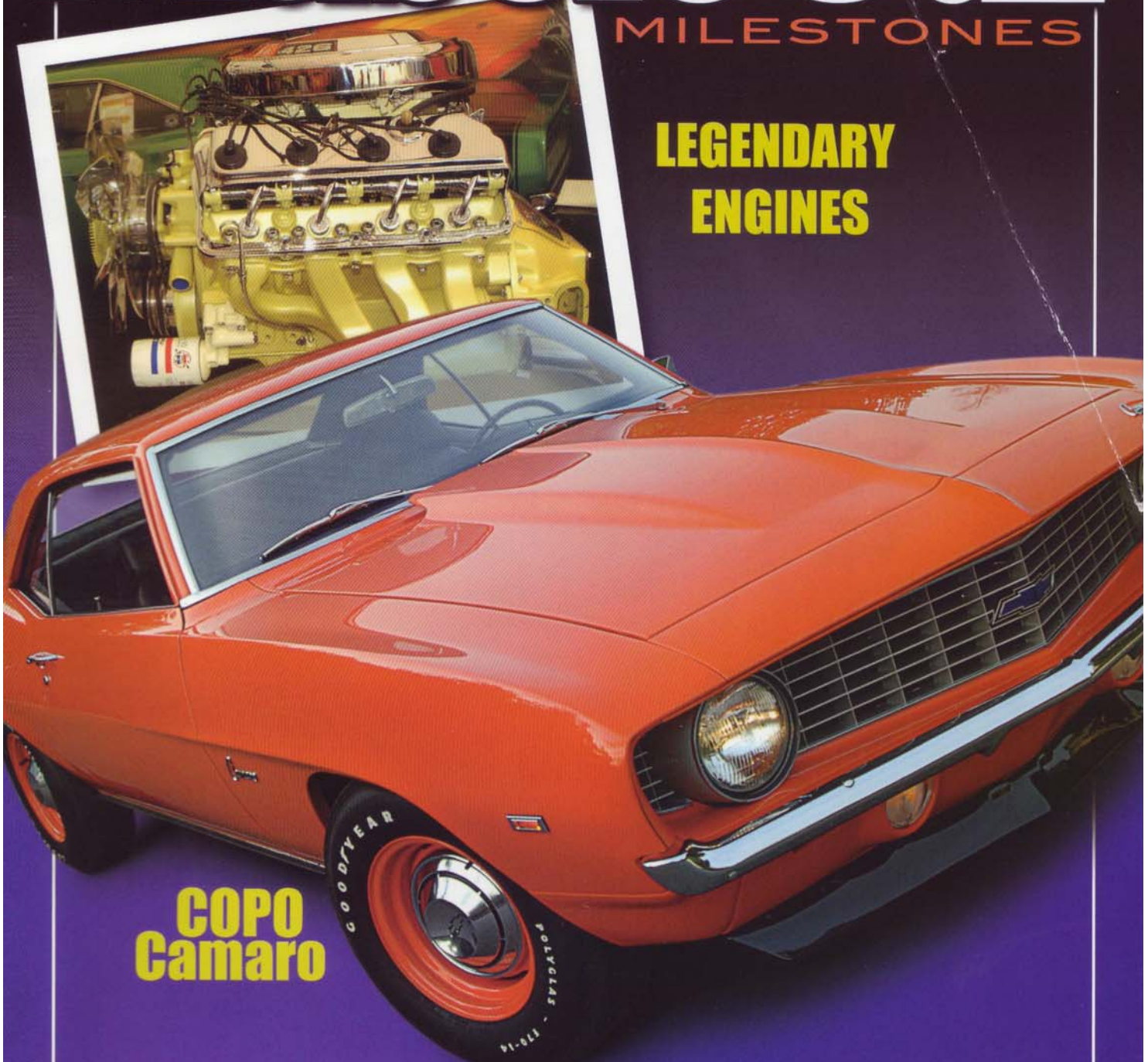
Top 10 Engines

COLLECTOR'S EDITION

MuscleCar

MILESTONES

**LEGENDARY
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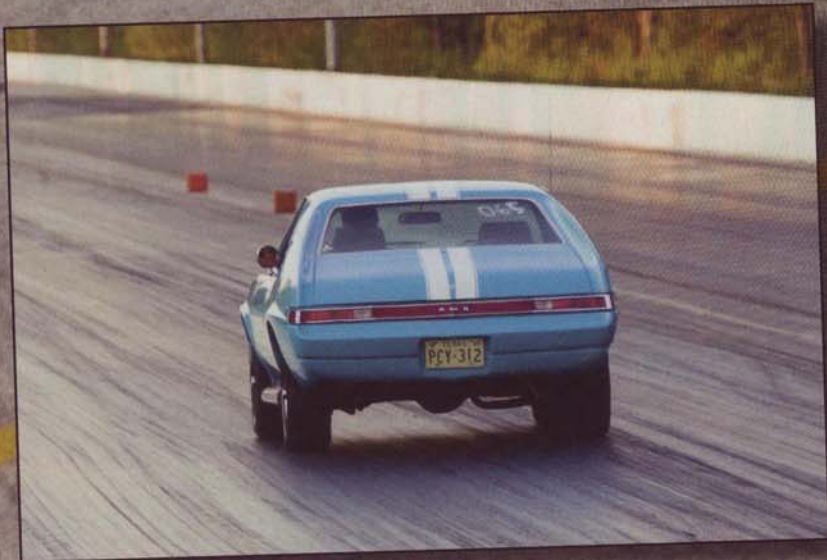
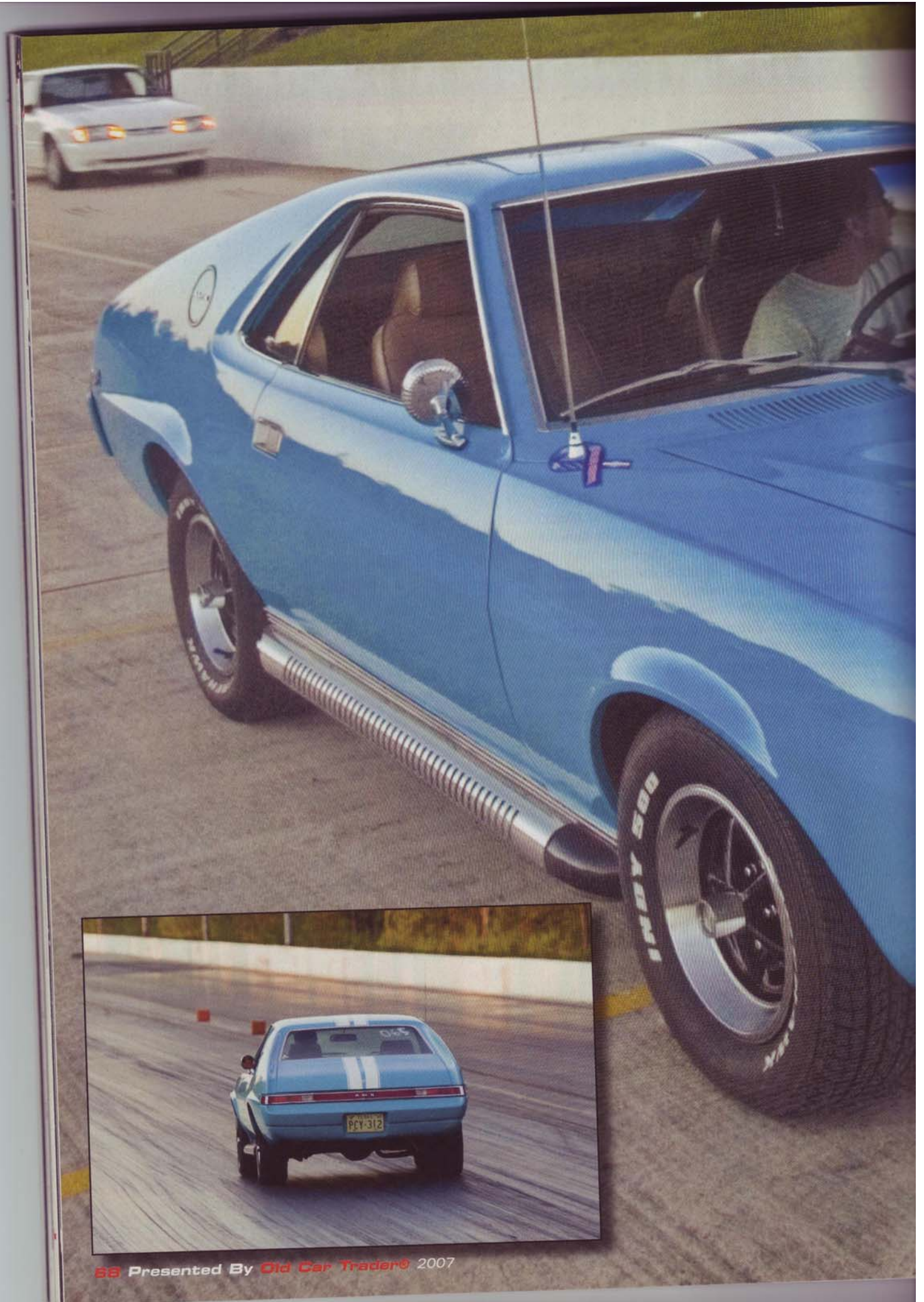


**COPO
Camaro**

- > Pro Wrestler Goldberg's Collection
- > Shelby's \$5.5 m Super Snake
- > "King of Hi-Performance"

US \$4.99 / CAN \$6.50





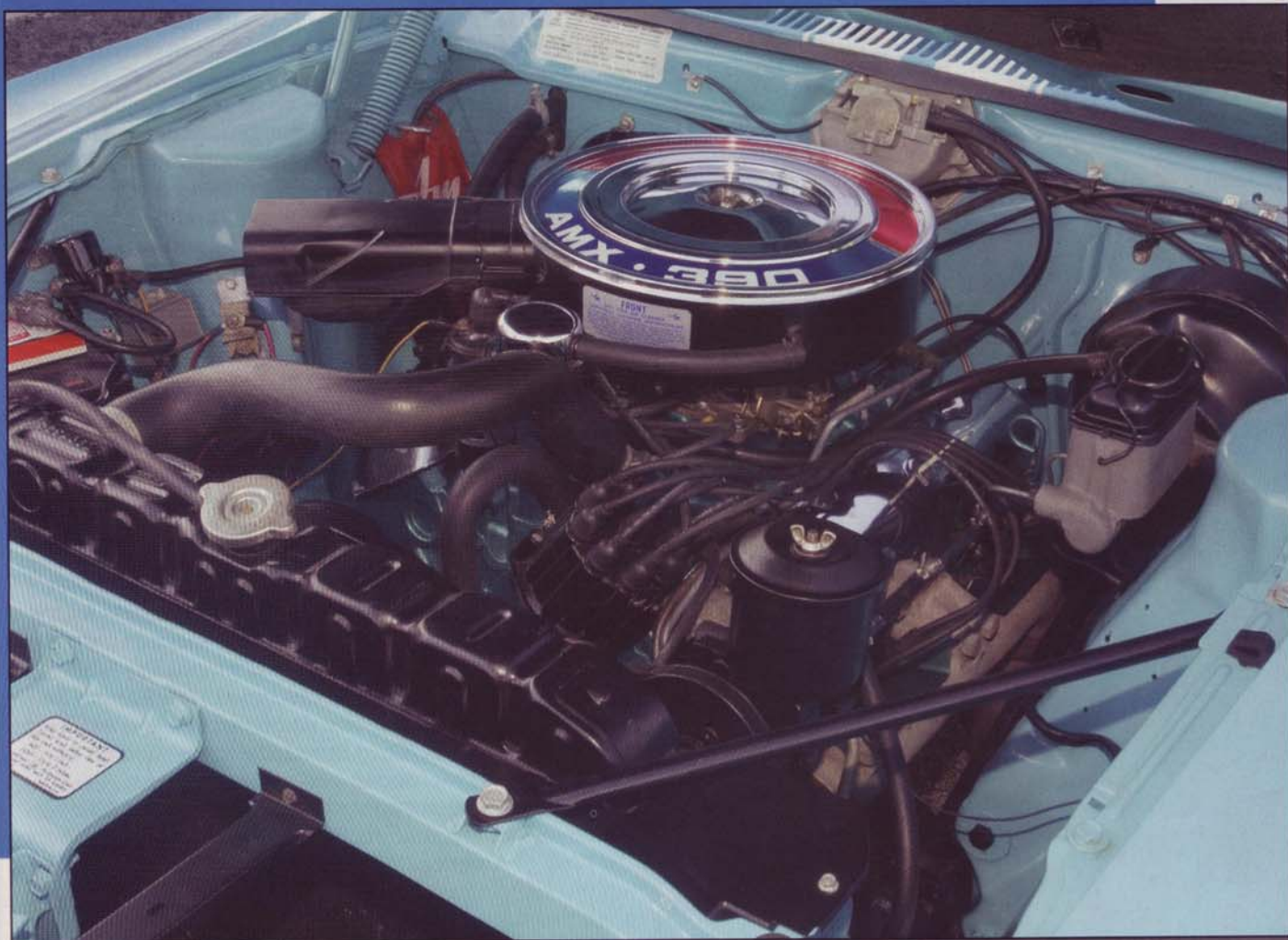


Big Bad Blue
AMX

One of the Rarest of American Muscle Cars

Text By Harold Pace, Photos by Harold Pace at Houston Motorsports Park

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should, shod with fat 14-inch Goodyear Polyglass "wide oval" tires. The stock steel wheels had fake-mag covers, but chromed Magnum 500 Rally wheels were thankfully optional. American "Torque-Thrust" mags were available at the dealer level.

Inside were a pair of sporty bucket seats and a functional dash sullied only by a splash of wood-grain trim. The final touch was a special "collectors" dash plaque stamped with a serial number (not the chassis number).

For more excitement AMC added the Go Package option, which was offered with the 343 and 390 engines. This consisted of twin stripes, front disc brakes, wider tires, a limited-slip diff and numerous other trim and performance enhancements.

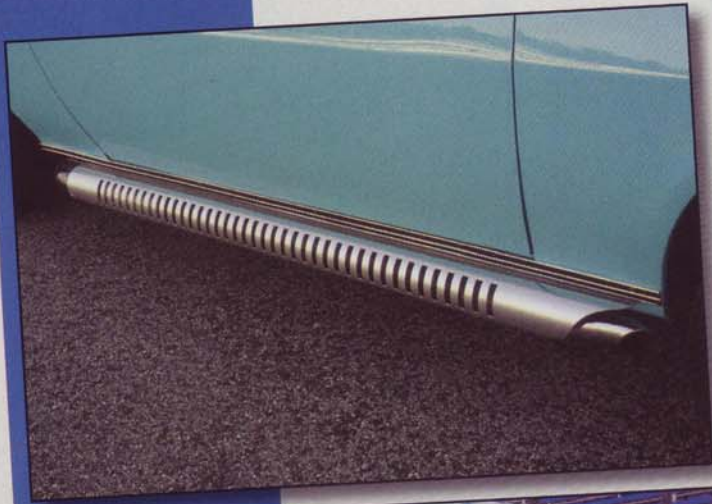
Underneath the suspension was basically Javelin, with a Rambler live axle in back and dated trunnion-style suspension in front. The quick manual steering was very heavy and the optional power steering was vague. But the combination of traction bars, stiff springs and sway bars made the AMX one of the better handling pony cars of the era. A limited-slip diff was another aid in the quarter-mile or on a racetrack. The standard four-wheel-drums were inadequate, but most AMXs were fitted with optional power front disc brakes.

The 1968-1/2 AMX sold reasonably well, with 6,725 of them finding new homes in the five months it was offered. Priced at \$3,245 it was more than \$2,000 less than a Corvette and was viewed as a bargain by many

of the magazines that road tested it. But AMC needed to sell more, and hoped to shake things up with some "Bad" modifications.

Even so, the 1969 AMX was little changed from the '68. The interiors were treated to a higher trim level and leather became an option. There were some minor improvements including a new tach, optional chrome simulated side pipe rocker covers, functional Trendsetter Sidewinder side pipes and a Hurst shifter. There were also three new solid colors that had been popular with Javelin buyers the year before, cleverly named Big Bad Blue, Big Bad Orange and Big Bad Green. These were very rare, with fewer than 300 each orange and green paint jobs sold, plus fewer than 200 blue ones. Big Bad cars also had the bumpers painted body color instead of chrome plating. AMC came out with a number of "special edition" AMXs in an attempt to boost sales, which upped sales to 8,293 cars. This was still short of the 10,000 cars needed to break even.

By the time the revised 1970 AMX hit the showrooms the decision had already been made to discontinue the two-seater at the end of the year. The '70 model was treated to new, longer nose panels courtesy of the revised 1970 Javelin, resulting in a new grille and a handsome domed hood blister shared with the four-seat model (on Go Pack models the hood scoop was functional). The Javelin taillights were also appropriated and the optional chrome simulated side pipe rockers from 1969 became standard,



While the Big Three were cranking out Detroit's first generation of high-performance sports sedans, a desperate American Motors was re-inventing their image over 300 miles away in Kenosha, Wisconsin. After years of touting safe, responsible (read: boring) transportation, new management decided to reverse course and build something that under-60 buyers would want. The Rambler Marlin, an oversized fastback intended to take on the Mustang, had tanked but the striking Javelin introduced in late 1967 had received critical praise and healthy sales. AMC was at last on a roll and eager to capitalize on its success by adding an "image" sports car (like Chevrolet's Corvette) at the top of the lineup. That car was the AMX, and it was destined to be one of the rarest and most respected of the pony-car breed.

AMC didn't have the cash to develop an all-new model for the tiny niche occupied by two-seat sports cars, so company engineers basically shortened the Javelin. Not only did this save a fortune in tooling and engineering costs, but it gave the sporty new challenger a family resemblance to the more practical four-seater. After sorting through a series of prototypes, AMC introduced the production AMX in February 1968. The 97-inch wheelbase was an inch shorter than the contemporary Corvette and a foot shy of a Javelin. Tipping the scales at healthy 3,340 pounds, it wasn't a featherweight but still 112 pounds less than a Javelin.

Of course, what really makes a muscle car is muscle, and the AMX was in the hunt. Lacking the cash to offer both big and small-block engines, AMC settled on a "middle block" size (like Pontiac initially did with the Firebird 400). All AMC V-8s used in the AMX and Javelin program were variations on the same engine family, first introduced in 1966 in 290-inch form. Although the Javelin was also offered with a six, the base engine in the AMX was 225-hp 290 with a four-barrel carb and dual exhaust.

Optional mills included a 280-horse 343 and the top-of-the-line 390 that belted out 315 horses and 425 pounds of torque. Both of the bigger engines wore Carter AFBs and the standard transmission was a close-ratio Borg-Warner 10 four-speed (an automatic was optional). Forged crank and rods were standard in the 390.

At first the AMX was the only AMC model available with the 390 but it was soon available in the Javelin, Rambler and Rebel Machine. A standard AMX 390 would cut the quarter mile in the high 14s, quick enough to keep up with an SS396 Camaro or a 327/350 hp Stingray. It would eat a 390 Mustang alive. Top speed was around 130 mph. It was quicker in a straight line than a Boss 302 or a Z-28, but couldn't match them in handling. It was slower than a Hemi Cuda or a Yenko 427 Camaro at the drags, but handled better. Overall, the AMX was a good combo and a hot performer on the street.

Although the AMX was great fun to drive, it was the razor-edged styling that really set it apart from the crowd. AMC styling guru Dick Teague led a team that managed to keep this truncated Javelin derivative from looking like an afterthought. In fact, it was aggressive and clean with a minimum of flash. It sat high, like a hot street



as did the 14-inch Magnum Rally wheels (15s were optional). Otherwise, most of the "new" AMX was carried over from the earlier models.

There were two new engine choices, as the 343 was stroked out to 360 inches and the 290 was dropped. The 390 was still the King, and now pumped out 325 hp thanks to improved cylinder heads and a bigger Motorcraft carburetor. The AMX and Javelin were both upgraded to ball-joint front suspension and variable-ratio power steering which improved both ride and handling. Inside a new full-width dash was covered with wood grain. The new model's price of \$3,395 failed to cure the sales problem, and only 4,116 found new homes.

There were no more real AMXs, but the name was later attached to a special Javelin model.

In the 1960s "real" muscle cars were expected to hold their own on the racetrack as well as from stoplight to stoplight. AMC enlisted the help of land speed record holder Craig Breedlove, his wife Lee and racer Ron Dykes who set 106 speed and endurance records with 290 and 390-powered AMXs. The engines were built by famed West Coast tuning shop Traco, who also assembled the engines for the Javelin Trans-Am cars. Top speed on the specially prepared 390 (bored to 397 inches) was over 175 mph! The "little" 290 (bored to 304 inches) even averaged 140.790 mph for 24 hours. It was an impressive demonstration and AMC announced a special "Craig Breedlove" dealer add-on kit with a fiberglass roof spoiler and other trim items.

In 1969 a small volunteer team of fanatical AMC employees built a road racing AMX to compete in Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) events. The 343-inch AMX ran the same class as 327 and 350-inch Corvettes, and driver Ike Knupp (an AMC Supervisor) shocked the Bowtie faithful by winning the Midwest Division title and qualifying for the Daytona runoffs that determined the SCCA National Champions. Knupp grabbed the attention of the crowds when he easily pulled away from Allan Barker's smoking hot Stingray, only to have the gearbox lock in second while he was far in the lead just laps from the finish. Knupp still finished second, and after that AMC gained a new level of respect from the road racing fraternity who would shortly see the Javelins dominate the Trans-Am Championship.

The most successful AMX racing program was in drag racing, where AMC had 53 AMX 390s extensively modified by Hurst (the shifter folks) to compete in the Super Stock classes. Over 400 pounds of sound deadening, trim and unneeded street equipment bit the dust, although they had to leave most of the stock interior in place. The engines were treated to flowed heads, high-compression pistons and an Edelbrock cross-ram manifold crowned with twin Holleys. These race-only mills put out a little over 400 horsepower when delivered and development soon added much more. Some cars were put into the hands of experienced racers like Shirley Shahan who soon had them running in the low tens and setting Super Stock records. Today a verified AMX/SS can bring a six-figure price. AMC also offered an extensive list of performance and racing parts that could be ordered through their dealers.

We recently came across one of the nicest AMXs around, an ultra-rare Big Bad Blue 1969 model with the hot 390 and a four-speed. Owner Dan Startin had been

ooking for one for two years when he found this one in Baltimore. "I had always loved them as a kid. My friends made fun of me because they were Ford and Chevy guys, but I thought it was a cool car," Startin laughs.

He wanted the rarest regular production model, the 1969 Big Bad Blue model (only 195 were made). And it had to be a match-number car with all the correct equipment. This one had everything, including the Go Package with twin stripes, front power disc brakes, a 3.54 Traction Lock rear end, an improved cooling system and much more. The Trendsetter side pipes look great, and Startin says most of the Big Bad cars had them. Inside is the rare Rally Pac gauge set, which included a vacuum gauge and an over/under oil pressure and amp gauge installed in the center of the dash. The Rally Pac could only be ordered in cars without air conditioning because the gauges fit in the same recess where the A/C outlet vents had to go!

Startin says restoring an AMX is not for the faint of heart (or thin of wallet) since NOS parts are now very valuable and there are no repro trim parts available. For example, he says a good taillight lens now sells for about \$600!

But he figured out how to make this inflation work for him: "At one point I bought \$13,000 worth of AMC parts, kept what I needed and sold the rest for \$13,000 as the price went up," he recalls. However, hard mechanical parts can still be had and he has beefed up his 390 with a mild Comp Cam, forged 10.5:1 pistons and Chrysler stainless valves with triple springs. It's a great looking

car that stops the crowds dead at car shows (including the Houston Motorsports Park dragstrip, which provided the location for this photo shoot), since immaculately restored AMXs are so rare.

So why wasn't the AMX a bigger success? It failed in the marketplace due to no fault of its own. In looks and performance it was a match for any similar-displacement pony car from the Big Three. But it was common knowledge that AMC was in financial trouble, and the buying public was wary of buying a car from a company that might not be there to back it up. Also, AMC was not known for sterling build quality, a problem that would get worse as time went on.

The Javelin struggled on through 1974, and in 1987, AMC was gobbled up by Chrysler. Today the AMX is an undervalued collector item that is quickly going up. Considering that there were fewer total AMXs built than 1968 Mustang convertibles alone, the sports model from AMC is one of the rarest of American muscle cars.

Today an original, restored AMX 390 with Go Pack can top \$50,000 at auction, but less original cars with engine swaps (the most common being the later AMC 401 into former 290 or 343 cars) start at under \$15,000. Many have also had Chevy engines installed, but what's the point when the AMC engine is just fine? The AMX is a classic you can drive every day and still have the only one like it on cruise night. Try that with a Camaro or a Mustang! **MCM**

