

REELING IN THE



By Paul Zazarine

Plenty of us are loyal to traditional nameplates, even (or maybe especially) makes that are not around anymore. One of those die-hards is Rob Caste of Tarpon Springs, Florida. For Rob, it's all about American Motors. And as so often happens, one particular muscle car links Rob to fond memories of great music, happy times and dear friends.

Rob bought his first AMC—a '72 Javelin SST with a 401ci engine and four-speed tranny—in 1974, and since

then he's added two '69 AMXs and this Pewter Silver Metallic '73 AMX to his collection. "A lot of people consider the '68-70 models as the 'true' AMX because it was a two-seater," Rob said. "The Javelins of those years had rear seats. In '71, AMC changed the styling, added rear seating and called it the Javelin AMX. That lasted through 1974, which was the last year for this car."

The '71 restyling of the Javelin was a total departure from previous models. The design was fluid, with bulges and

curves suggesting that just maybe there was still some muscle under the fiberglass cowl-induction hood. In fact, the AMC 401 engine was hardly a stone. Rated at 255 net horsepower at 4,600 rpm and 345 lb-ft of torque at 3,300, the '73 AMX 401 was one of the last, true, high-performance engines of the '70s, turning a 15.40/91 mph quarter-mile. That was respectable acceleration in a mid-'70's world of low compression, high axle ratios and low-octane unleaded fuel. In fact, only AMC and Pontiac

YEARS

This AMX is a Link to Happier Times



offered engines over 400 cubes in a ponycar in '73.

Rob's '73 AMX also has personal significance to him. His best friend, Stan Losee, purchased it in 1989. A year later, Stan and Rob began restoring the AMX together. "We spent hundreds of hours, him more than me," Rob said, "along with a lot of sweat and most of his and

his wife, Jennie's, savings on the AMX. The car was completely disassembled and painstakingly restored."

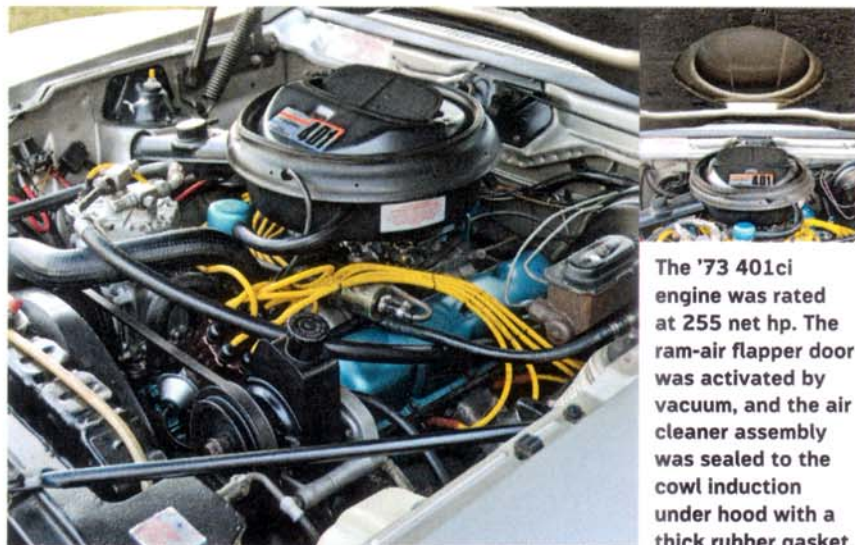
As part of the restoration, the engine was pulled and rebuilt. A clean-up boring brought the displacement up to 407 cubes. From there, Stan and Rob went through the entire motor, keeping it stock appearing on the outside but dropping some extreme hardware inside. The 401 came factory equipped with a forged crank and rods, which Stan blueprinted and balanced. A Crane cam with 0.498-inch lift on the intake

and 0.527-inch lift on the exhaust was slipped in. The heads were milled, then ported and polished. As part of the valvetrain upgrades, Harland Sharp 1.6:1 roller rockers were installed, along with Manley stainless steel valves (2.025-inch intake, 1.680-inch exhaust) and Crane double valvesprings.

For induction, Stan chose an Offenhauser 360-Degree Equa-Flow Dual-Quad Low-Rise aluminum intake manifold and an Edelbrock 750-cfm carburetor with the stock AMC air cleaner and cowl-air-induction package. The 401 exhales through a set of Hedman headers with



The AMX's stance is low and aggressive. The optional black-vinyl top accentuates the semi-fastback profile. Traction bars are a necessary aftermarket addition.



The '73 401ci engine was rated at 255 net hp. The ram-air flapper door was activated by vacuum, and the air cleaner assembly was sealed to the cowl induction under hood with a thick rubber gasket.



A tale of two trophies: The First Place trophy on the left was the last award won by Stan Losee and his AMX in 1995 before he passed away. Almost 12 years to the day, Rob won this virtually identical First Place trophy with the same car.

AT A GLANCE

1973 JAVELIN AMX

Owned by: Rob Caste, Tarpon Springs, FL
Restored by: Stan Losee and Rob Caste, Tarpon Springs, FL
Engine: '73 401ci/255hp (net) V-8
Transmission: Three-speed Torque Command automatic
Rearend: Dana 20 with 3.15 gears and Twin Grip limited slip
Interior: Pierre Cardin custom fabric
Wheels: 15x7 AMC slot-style
Tires: 255/60R15 front, 275/60R15 rear Firestone Firehawk SS

1.58-inch pipes feeding 3-inch collectors routed to a pair of Flowmaster Super 40s. Twin 2.25-inch exhausts feed to chrome 2.50-inch exhaust extensions. With the internal upgrades and the free-flowing exhaust system, Stan estimated the engine was putting out an honest 450 hp at the flywheel.

AMX buyers had a choice of either a four-speed manual transmission or the three-speed Torque Command automatic. The Torque Command was the same 727 TorqueFlite that Chrysler used behind the mighty Hemi. Stan and Rob added a B&M street/street shift kit and GER 11-inch pro/street torque converter. Backing up the drivetrain was an 8⁷/₈-inch Dana 20 rear with 3.15 gears

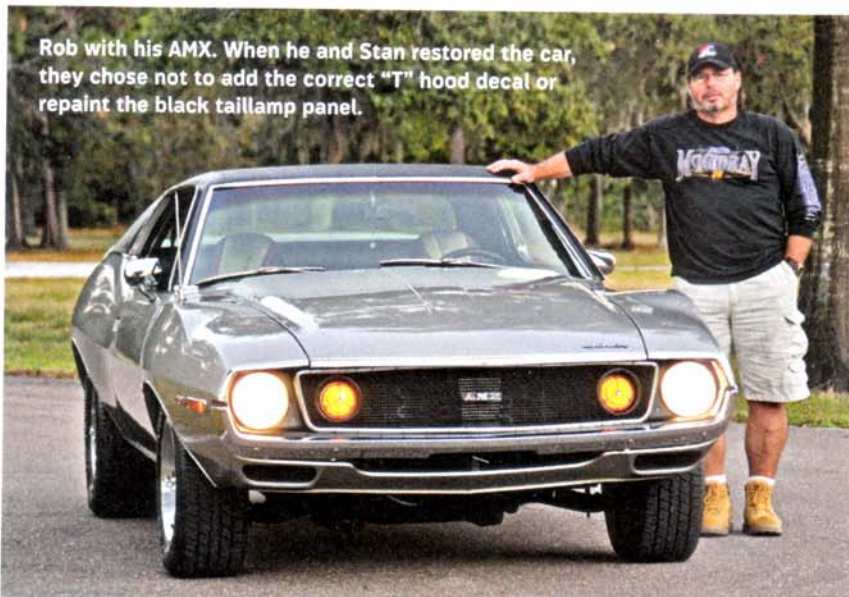
and Twin Grip limited slip, ideal for high-speed driving.

AMC's suspension setup for the high-performance, 401-equipped AMX was more than adequate; Stan and Rob just added a set of Mr. Gasket Super Traction Bars to control axle windup. The 11-inch power-assisted front disc brakes with ventilated rotors and 10.5-inch rear drums were rebuilt. With AMC's handsome, 15x7 "slot-style" rally wheels mounted to Firestone Firehawk radials, the AMX handled like a slot car.

In its never-ending sales struggle with the Big Three, AMC always worked harder to make its products unique, and the optional AMX Pierre Cardin interior is unlike anything found in a



The wild Pierre Cardin interior wakes up the AMX's interior. The wraparound instrument panel is faced in engine-turned aluminum and is equipped with the optional Rally Pac. The three-spoke sport wheel and tilt steering column were also extra cost. When the optional Pierre Cardin interior was ordered, these emblems (inset) appeared on the front fenders and the interior door panels.



Rob with his AMX. When he and Stan restored the car, they chose not to add the correct "T" hood decal or repaint the black taillamp panel.

Firebird or Camaro. Cardin styled a wild and colorful set of Chinese Red, Silver, Plum and White stripes for the front buckets and the rear bench seat. The stripe theme was also carried into the headliner. The instrument panel was one of the best looking and most functional around, incorporating an engine-turned panel with three large, square openings. When the optional Rally Pac was ordered, it came with full gauges, 140-mph speedometer and a "Tick Tach" that incorporated a clock and 8,000-rpm tachometer. Other options in Stan's AMX included tilt column, sport steering wheel, AM/FM radio and air conditioning.

Stan and Rob finished the AMX's restoration in April 1992. Three years later, Stan was diagnosed with cancer and passed away in August 1996 at the too-young age of 41. "Jennie knew that one day she would eventually sell the car only to me," Rob said. "It took her 10 years before she decided it was time to let it go."

Rob purchased the AMX from Jennie on July 3, 2006, what would have been Stan's 52nd birthday. "Jennie and I agreed that the last five digits of the price would be \$401.73," Rob said, "to signify the engine size and Stan's birthday. Ironically, it was also the model year of the AMX." In homage to Stan's sense of humor, Rob gave Jennie a 73-cent "non-refundable" deposit.

Since then, Rob has displayed the AMX at shows all over the Florida Gulf Coast, and it's been a genuine crowd pleaser. "There are a million Camaros and Mustangs," Rob said, "but very few nice Javelins and AMXs."

After bringing home an award from one of those shows, "I experienced a strange twist of irony with that trophy," Rob said. "The AMX took First in Class at the March 2007 West Coast Mopar Club show. When I got home and put the trophy on the shelf, I noticed it was the exact same color and nearly identical in style to the last trophy Stan won before he died. It, too, was a First in Class, awarded at the March 1995 West Coast Mopar Club event, almost exactly 12 years earlier. Stan must have been smiling down on me."

The bond between Stan and Rob was the result of the camaraderie born of working together to restore the AMX and sharing a strong passion for the car. So it should come as no surprise that Stan rides with Rob every time he takes the car out for a run, not only spiritually, but physically as well. "I have a small vial of Stan's ashes hanging from the rearview mirror," Rob said. "He really loves it when he slaps up against the headliner when I'm running through the gears!" **MCR**