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August 2006

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HOOVER'S



A279

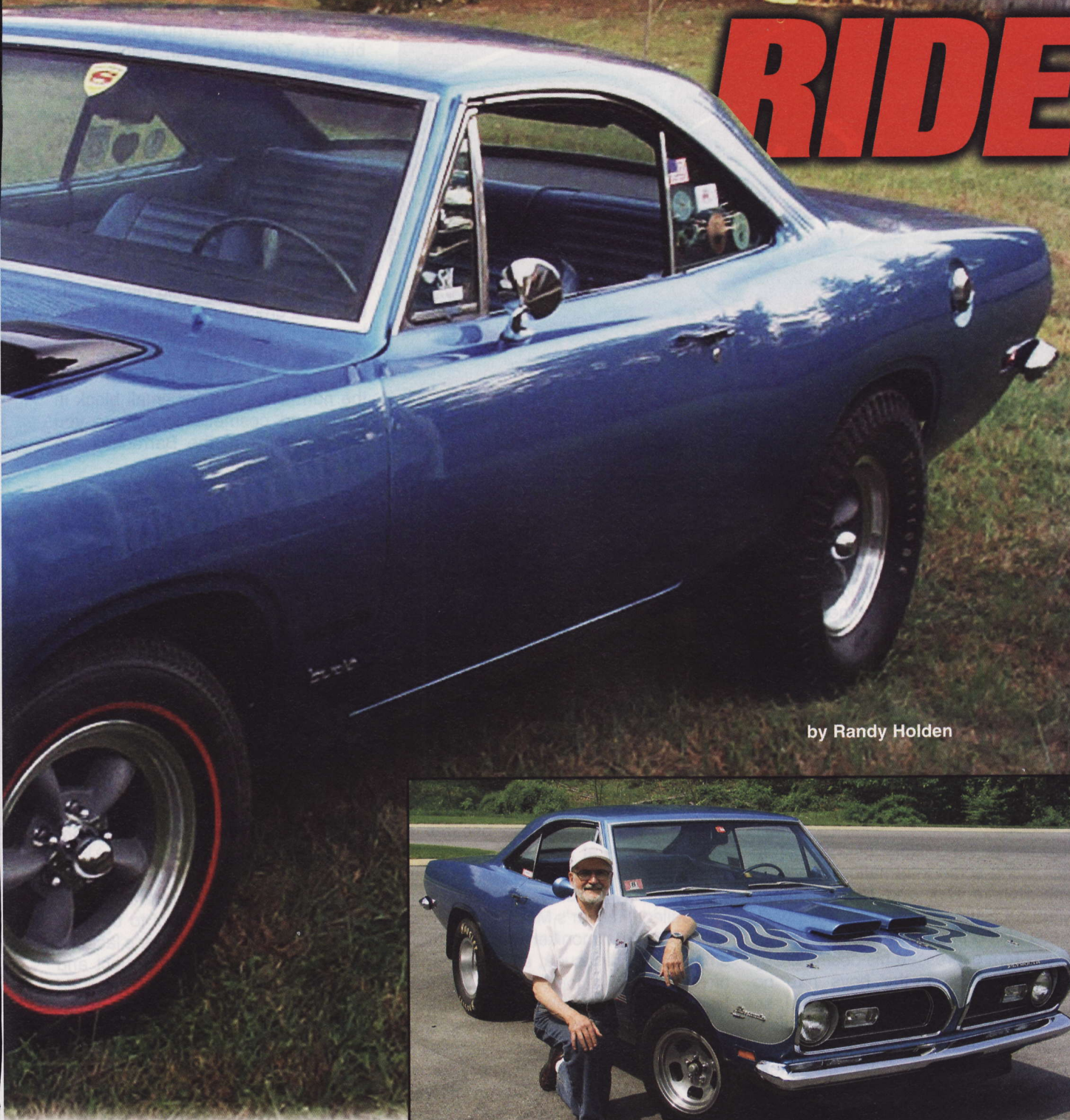
BALL STUD HEMI *meets* TOM HOOVER'S 8,100 ORIGINAL MILE 1969 'CUDA

There are a lot of nicely restored Mopars out there, but Tom Hoover's 8,100 original mile Barracuda is a unique machine from the golden age of Chrysler's heyday in drag racing. What makes this one so special? Well for starters, it's a legit special order 1969 'Cuda 440 hardtop coupe (BH23M). This car was built as a 383 spec notchback Barracuda at Plymouth's Hamtramck

assembly plant and converted into a 440 car by Hurst for Chrysler, just as the '68 Super Stock cars were. From Hurst, these cars shipped straight out to the dealers, or in the case of this particular car, straight to a hardcore drag racer. This one is VIN BH23M9B273678, and came from the plant with B5 blue paint, a matching blue bucket seat interior, and very little else in the way of options; which is quite fitting for the likes of Tom Hoover.

The early history of this Barracuda is a story in itself. Smith Stokes, who was at M&L Motor Company in Lexington, North Carolina at that time, ordered the blue notchback new for a fellow named James Bryce Ader, in January, 1969. It arrived in April and was then shipped over to the Sox & Martin shop to be converted into an all-out drag car. S&M prepped the Barracuda, installing 4.89 gears, Super Stock springs, fender well head-

RIDE



by Randy Holden

ers, a cool can, and a number of other minor modifications. Ader took possession of the car before summer and campaigned it in 1969 as an I/Stock Automatic car, naming and lettering the car "Lil Cuda." Ader, for whatever reason, didn't stick with the 440 powered notchback, however, and traded it to Sox & Martin in 1970 for another car. The lettering was removed, a new coat of blue paint went on, and the 440 was replaced with a 426 Hemi. S&M then



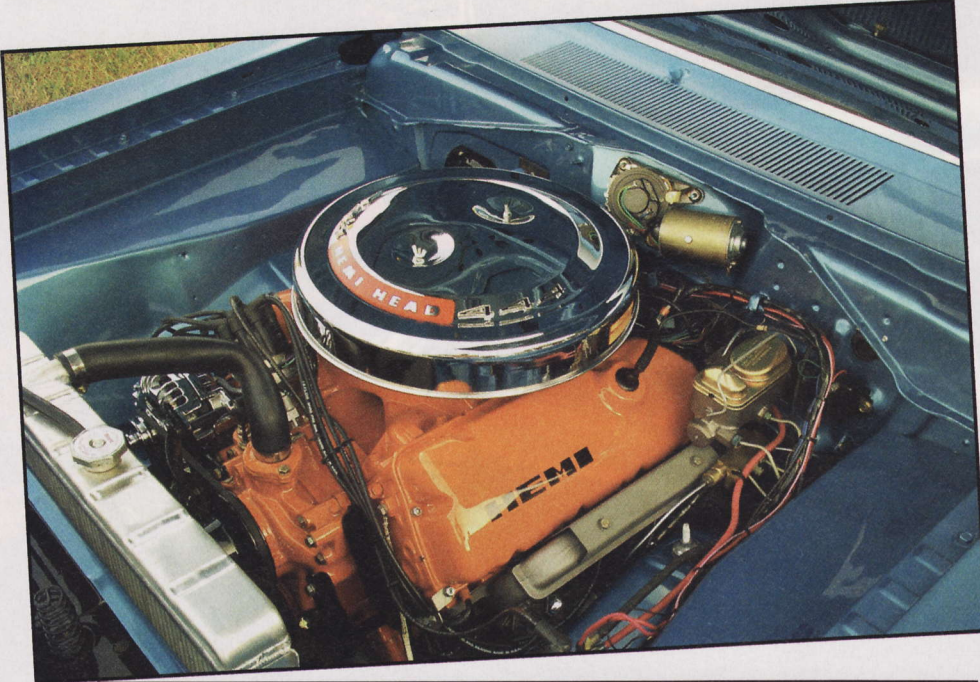
**TOM HOOVER SPENDS QUALITY TIME WITH HIS LONG TIME RIDE
JUST BEFORE HE HANDS HER OVER TO JOHN ARRUZZA.**

sold the coupe to the Smallwood Brothers, who raced the car at the Long Island Freeway Street Drags in 1970 and 1971. They traded it back to S&M in 1971 for a former 1970 Pro Stock 'Cuda. It was after this that Tom Hoover

entered the picture.

For the benefit of those who may not be completely enlightened yet, Tom Hoover wasn't just any average Chrysler engineer; Tom Hoover is the

Continued on page 78



SPECIAL THANKS GOES TO FEL-PRO FOR MAKING THE UNIQUE HEAD GASKETS FOR THE A279.

literal Godfather of the 426 Hemi. From 1961 through 1979, Tom worked at Chrysler as their chief engineering manager of all drag racing programs and oversaw the development of the 426 Hemi and most all of the company's performance engines. One of the few true mechanical geniuses in the automotive world, Tom's the kinda' guy who will likely figure out cold fusion one of these days. Through the years, Tom's had a number of radical rides (predictably) and some rather mundane sleepers as well. This one wasn't a sleeper.

In the middle of 1972, Tom was doing some information swapping with Ronnie Sox and Buddy Martin, when he discovered the '69 notchback 'Cuda sitting in the Sox & Martin shop. When Tom expressed his desire to buy the blue hardtop, the boys had no qualms about selling it to the guru, so from that day forward, the blue notchback became Tom Hoover's hobby car and rolling test bed for his latest mechanical theories.

It may come as something of a surprise that the father of the Hemi didn't initially slap a Hemi into this lightweight A-body toy. One must remember, by the time he got to turning wrenches on the Barracuda, the end of 1972 was rolling around and he had his sights set on what would be important in 1973. The Hemi was dead by that point as far as the factory was concerned; they weren't offering it in new cars any longer and the future for the wide valve covers didn't look good out-

side of all-out professional racing. That being the case, Tom's efforts at that time were focused on how to make the small block LA engine perform, so this one received a hyperactive 360 based mill when it became Tom's weekend fun car.

Of course, due to Tom's position with the company, the Barracuda wasn't destined to be just a weekend hot rod. The car quickly became a reference piece for Chrysler's Spring Drag Racing Seminar Series lectures. The car appeared at a number of seminars around the northeast and became a regular feature at local drag strips. In 1976, the Barracuda was featured in Popular Hot Rodding magazine and was called "Hoover's Mover." That was an appropriate moniker for the radical small block Barracuda, as it was capable of putting a lot of big block and Hemi powered machines on the trailer.

The engine in the car at that time was described in depth and was a complicated piece of machinery for its day. The 1972 casting 360 block was hand selected by Hoover and used a specially made crank which resulted in a stroker motor displacing some 371". The compression ratio was 11:1, with NASCAR 8640 steel connecting rods with SPS fasteners and flattop pistons. The heads were 1970 NASCAR T/A heads ported by Mullins & Co., which had originally been intended for NASCAR endurance testing. A specially ground cam met up with a double roller timing set. There was a MSD multi-strike ignition system, a '73

360HP max cooling radiator, and a '70 340 Six Pack intake and carb assembly off a T/A Challenger. Backing this up was a built TorqueFlite and an 8-3/4" rear holding 3.91 Sure Grip cogs.

Obviously, Tom opted for a few cosmetic changes to make the Barracuda stand out from the crowd. The fiberglass hood scoop was pirated off their 1973 Motown Missile project, and the rear alloy mags were removed from the 1972 Motown Missile Pro Stocker. The flames made sure nobody would mistake this one for a grocery getter, but that really wasn't necessary, as the exhaust tone by itself made sure nobody would ever make that mistake! With the normally aspirated small block in place and cosmetically just as you see it with Tom, the Barracuda ran 12.40s at around 112 mph.

As Tom became busy with other projects through the years, the Barracuda continued to be an interesting stress burner, but more often than not, it was parked in his garage. For the majority of thirty-four-years, the A-body remained idle in several different locations, but mercifully, out of the weather. All that's changed though now, thanks to the meddling of Hemi ace John Arruzza. Being a dyed-in-the-wool Hemi fanatic, John came to know Tom well through the years and finally succeeded last year in talking Tom out of the spunky little Plymouth. The timing couldn't have been better, for it was around the same time that John managed to talk Dick Landy out of the long dormant A279 Ball Stud Hemi. Karma? Maybe, but whatever you want to call it, John saw it all as too cool to be true. He found himself with Hoover's last ultimate version of the Hemi project and Hoover's personal play toy Barracuda as well. As you can see, the two projects have become one. Tom Hoover's old Barracuda is now mated with Hoover's A279 Hemi!

Since M code Barracudas are a lot more respected now than they were when this one was made into a hot rod, Arruzza wanted to give the car back some of its factory personality while still maintaining a nostalgic street-savvy look. The immaculate body was stripped of the wild blue paint and flames, had a few minuscule dings taken care of, then the whole works was resprayed in the factory B5 blue metallic. The wild Super Stock looking hood which the car wore most of its life now occupies a spot of honor in John's

shop, and a correct dual scoop stock hood is back in place for the first time in decades. The pair of matte black stripes running up the hood do an excellent job of breaking up all the blue north of the windshield and help portray to unsuspecting victims that there's nothing more than a 375 horse 440 up front (as if that wouldn't be enough ordinarily!).

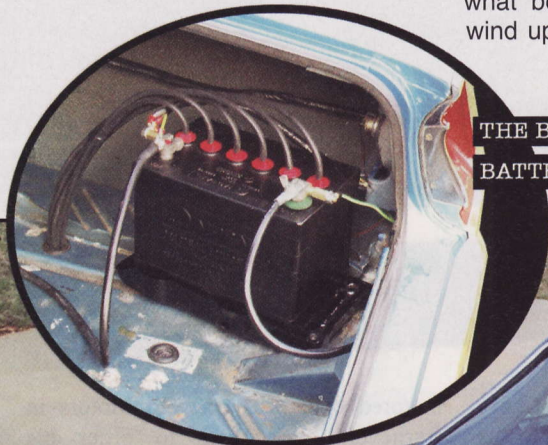
Because of the unique nature of this project, Arruzza wasn't worried about doing a nut-and-bolt restoration or putting back paint splotches and grease pencil markings. It doesn't make much sense to build a textbook perfect OEM looking 440 'Cuda if you're going to place a one-of-a-kind prototype Hemi in it. The most important factors became that the car look great and be capable of being driven safely. Nostalgic Torq-Thrust wheels hold repro redlines up front while the fatties out back hold vintage Firestone ribbed side racing slicks - you can't get a much more vintage wheel/tire combo than this. As John had done with the A279 Hemi, he rebuilt all the mechanicals from nose-to-tail, not wanting to



take any chances with the historical Barracuda or its even more historical mode of motivation. As you can see, John's succeeded in all departments.

Watch for the blue notchback on the show and race trail this summer, and make sure you take note of the engine - it's the only surviving Ball Stud Hemi in the entire world. And what better place for that engine to wind up? The engine never turned a

tire its whole life until John Arruzza mated it up with this Barracuda, and now it's powering the car of the guy who designed it! Sometimes, fate has a way of dealing out strange hands, thankfully in this case all the cards came up eights and aces. Congrats to John and to Tom Hoover for working out all the details to make this historic coupling possible. We can't wait to see this one boiling the tires! ✕



THE BARRACUDA USES AN OLD SUPER STOCK TRUNK MOUNTED BATTERY FOR JUICE.



*Look for this car at
Chryslers
Nationals '06*