



SOX'S STO

John Arruzza certainly needs no introduction to anyone who's into serious speed. Arruzza Performance has a well deserved reputation for building killer drag racing Hemis. The North Carolina native has been turning wrenches practically since he was born. Naturally, when you're engaged in building potent Hemis for a living, you meet a lot of interesting people; John has struck up friendships with a host of famous and not-so-famous racers.

In December, 1993, John happened across a tiny classified ad which read something to the effect of "former Sox & Martin Barracuda race car". After a phone call, John was hardly convinced that what had been described was a legit Sox & Martin car. The seller said he had a small block powered '68 Barracuda. That didn't immediately ring any bells with John.

Still, he called Ronnie Sox to inquire if such a car ever existed.

To his surprise, Ronnie informed him that not only was there such a car, but he knew the Barracuda's whereabouts and verified that the car was definitely legit! Ronnie had even toyed with the idea of buying it back himself, but at that time he was engrossed in racing his Pro Mod Mercury Comet and had his hands full. John was back on the phone quickly and began arranging for a road trip!

John found himself in a dairy farm in rural Pennsylvania standing before a medium blue '68 Barracuda time capsule. The owner was a fair lass named Debbie Faretta, who had inherited the car when her father, Al Faretta, passed away. The Barracuda had last been campaigned by Al in G/Stock in the early 1970s, then retired to his friend's dairy bottling plant where it remained undisturbed for the better part of two decades.

While the car didn't have an engine or tranny installed, it was otherwise assembled and complete. The makings for a killer small block lay scattered around. Included with the deal were a brand new X block which had been bought in the 1970s and never used, the original LD340 intake, the original Jake King stamped heads, a stamped Sox & Martin new steel crank, the original Carter carb, a Racer Brown solid cam, and loads of smaller bits and pieces. This was a nostalgia drag racer's dream! John nearly broke his arm getting out his wallet. After carting the A-body home, his history lesson began. Here's the deal with this largely forgotten small block warrior.

On September 14, 1967, Sox & Martin took delivery of three new Plymouths direct from the assembly plants; a 440 powered '68 GTX, one of the first Road Runners ever built, and this 340 powered Barracuda Formula S. This was long before the now famous Hemi '68 Super Stocker Barracudas were built.

The idea behind the small block Barracuda was logical. Chrysler was tired of watching small block Chevys dominate the lower stock classes and wanted exposure for the new 340" wedge. So, Sox & Martin were presented with the Formula S car (ironically an automatic) and in the Dodge camp Bill Shrewsbury received a 340 powered Dart.

Built on August 31, 1967, the fastback was delivered in white and immediately received the traditional red/white/blue S&M paint with bold Plymouth graphics on its flanks and the team name on the doors. Initially, the car even retained its redline tires and spoker hubcaps!

The Barracuda was first tested in Pure Stock form with 3.91 gears 29" tall 7" wide slicks and its full original exhaust. With the engine all



by Randy Holden
photos by Robert Wolf

Perhaps most unusual of all on the Formula S Sox & Martin car is the unique "S&M" door lettering. For some reason now lost to everyone's memory, this one didn't receive the common "Sox & Martin" door logos that had been common on all their Plymouths since 1966. As far as we know of, this was the only Sox car which had this more simplistic logo.



ROCKER **FOUND!** SOX & MARTIN'S ORIGINAL 1968 BARRACUDA RACER



stock and as delivered, Ronnie ran a best of 13.98 at 100.12 mph!

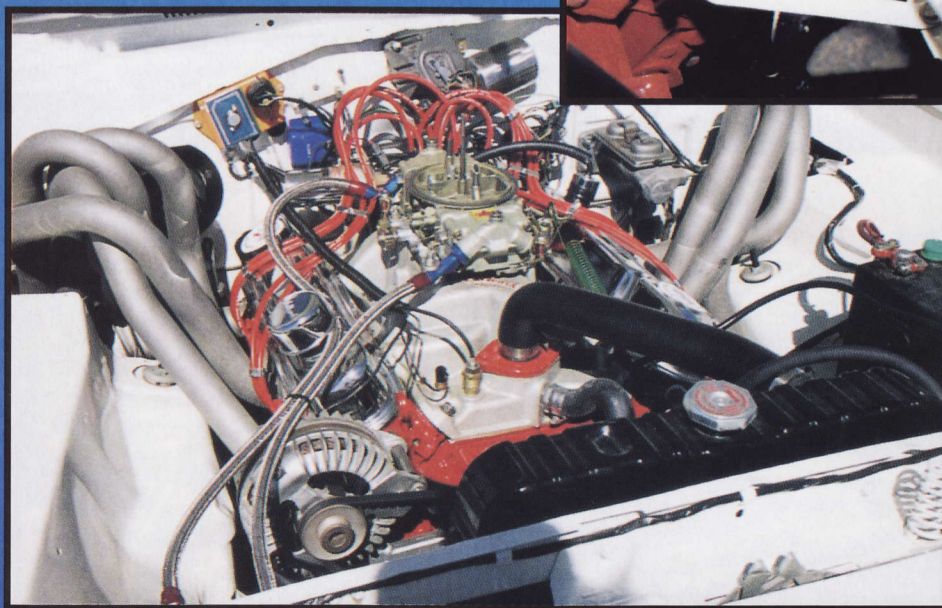
The Barracuda's racing debut came at the Winternationals in Pomona running in E/SA. For an added touch of publicity, Hot Rod magazine editor Jim McFarland was tapped to drive the car. By this time, the legendary Jake King had worked over the 340, headers had been installed, and a B&M shifter controlled the manual valve body TorqueFlite.

To prove the car was genuinely streetable, it was driven to Pomona for the race. Once at the track, the gears were changed out and it was time to race! With McFarland at the wheel, the Barracuda won its class, clocking a best time of 12.92 at 108.46, and went all the way to the final round in Super Stock Eliminator!

For the remainder of the '68 season, Ronnie Sox did the driving and the Barracuda continued to get faster. At Irwindale, the car won Event Stock Eliminator and posted a 12.81, then repeated the class win at Orange County, running a 12.59 at 112.56.

Ronnie said the car was the most street friendly car in the Sox & Martin stable and that

Continued on page 92



A load of original equipment remained with the Barracuda through the years. The fenderwell headers were added when the car was racing in B/MP. The intake, block, and heads are all original to the car and survived the years of racing without being damaged. The bar bolted to the head on the driver's side was a cheap and efficient way to deal with the little 340's torque. These guys didn't have time to worry about broken motor mounts! The radiator is also original to the Barracuda and is a Slant Six unit!



Above: The way things were. Above is a fantastic shot of the Barracuda in action at the 1968 Winternationals in Pomona. The license plate was for real; the Barracuda was driven cross country to the race and, with just a gear change, placed on the track! Below: The 340 car's time in the limelight with Sox & Martin lasted only one season, the remainder of its racing days were spent wearing the blue Valley Motors paint scheme shown below. To graphically illustrate how well the A-body was preserved, the photo below was taken shortly after John Arruzza removed the car from its long hibernation in 1993! Talk about finding an untouched piece of history!



on many occasions the car was literally used as a parts chaser and all-around transportation! This accounts for most of the Barracuda's 13,000 miles. The car was also driven back and forth to the west coast at least twice in early 1968. During his initial restoration of the Plymouth, John found a gas station receipt from 1968 under the seat signed by Jake King himself! Proof positive that this one was used by the whole gang at the shop for running the roads.

At the end of the 1968 season, Al Faretta of Valley Motors purchased the 340 Barracuda. Al had a great relationship with Sox & Martin and bought a number of their former race cars from them. At one time, he had five former Sox cars in his stable!

The Barracuda was upgraded a little further by Valley Motors in 1969 and campaigned in SS/FA, eventually going as fast as 12.28 at 114.50.

In 1970, they ran the fastback in G/SA, and it went faster still, posting a best of 11.91 at 117.34. It also ran in B/MP in 1970 and gained a set of Hooker fenderwell headers. Shortly thereafter, the 340 suffered meltdown and the Barracuda was retired to the dairy farm.

Immediately upon acquiring the car in '94 John embarked on a full bore restoration. Using contemporary photos of the car on the track, he restored the cosmetic appearance to how it appeared at the Winternationals in Pomona.

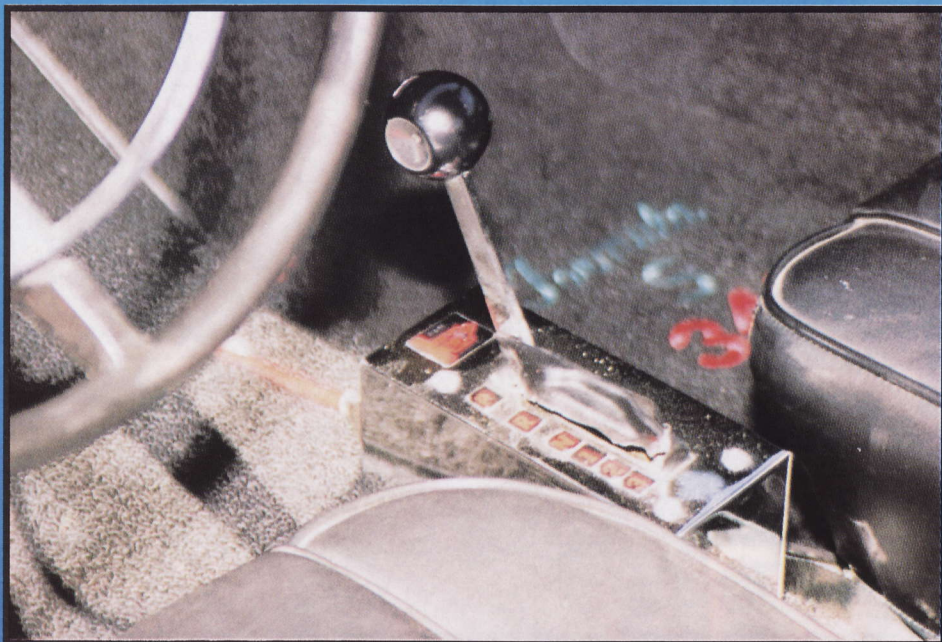


The matching numbers TorqueFlite was still with the Barracuda, so the tranny was rebuilt and a new motor was built around the 340 X block using the original heads and intake.

John uncovered some interesting things during the restoration. To lighten the Barracuda, the front sway bar had been removed, two of the front bumper brackets had been removed, aluminum bolts had replaced steel ones all over the car, and the heater box had been gutted and reinstalled. To shave a few more pounds, the brake drums had been turned until they were super thin, the interior panels of the doors had been cut away, the padding under the carpet had been removed, and the radio had been replaced with a radio delete plate. Even the front bumper had been acid dipped and replated. They even went so far as to remove the bulbs from the side marker lamps and interior lights! Who says Sox & Martin weren't some sneaky fellows? All this brought the car's weight down to just under 3,100 pounds.

John didn't have time to enjoy his prize back in 1994 however. A Midwest collector kept offering him more and more money for the car until finally the cash got too tempting and he sold the fastback. He regretted the decision right from the start. Three years ago, the car traded hands again and wound up in the collection of Bernie Mangnitz in Florida.

In the summer of 2001, opportunity



The interior is all 1968 original equipment, and the shifter warrants special attention. The 340 has been backed up by a reverse manual valve TorqueFlite since it was delivered to Sox & Martin, and the shifter is a very rare vintage B&M unit made specifically for reverse valve body trannies. Note that the shift pattern is printed atop the shifter housing and goes backwards with 3rd gear being at the back. This meant you merely had to keep pulling the stick towards the back one click at a time. Unfortunately, the shifter didn't work all that well, and in most contemporary photos of the car on the track, you can see the driver looking down at the shifter to see what gear they're in!

knocked twice for John. After a conversation with Bernie, a deal was arranged that landed the one-of-a-kind racer back in John Arruzza's garage again - looking and acting precisely as it did when he sold it in 1994!

Since getting the Barracuda back, John's put it back on the street and gone to a few shows. The little 340 rips and roars but maintains its street savvy. Future plans for the former Soxer include a 4" crank, Manley rods, Ross forged pistons, and, according to John, a lot more use! To make the car street legal, he has reinstalled a number of things, such as working windshield wipers and the marker bulbs. This is

one of the most fun cars John's ever driven, and like Ronnie Sox and Jake King before him, it doesn't take much of an excuse for him to hop in and take a trip in it.

For the record, John also informs us that, NO, this one is definitely not for sale again! He will not make that mistake again! Look for this one to be a regular at the bigger Mopar events in the coming years. Being one of the most original and complete vintage drag cars currently existent, it's pretty cool that this one's still doing the job it was originally designed for - proving to the world that the 340 is nothing to be taken lightly on or off the track! ❖

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INSIDE

- PENTASTAR NEWS **PG. 10**
- ENVIRO-MASOCHISM **PG. 14**
- TOYS IN THE ATTIC **PG. 16**
- BY THE NUMBERS WITH GALEN GOVIER **PG. 18**
- READER LETTERS **PG. 20**
- MERCHANT REGISTRY **PG. 21**
- 6-SECOND AVENGER **PG. 41**

VIPER MOTORED RAM PG. 9



14-SECOND HOT ROD



WILD! 8-SECOND SHOW CAR



PG. 50

PROWLER PG. 11
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PG. 54



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