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Aero Warrior

Hemi Charger 500



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PACKED WITH A HEMI

AEROWARRIOR

STORY RICHARD TRUESDELL



ONCE UPON A TIME, IN THE '60s, NASCAR'S PREMIER GRAND NATIONAL CIRCUIT (NOW SPRINT CUP) ACTUALLY HAD CARS COMPETING THAT WERE BASED ON THE CARS FOUND IN CHEVY, DODGE, FORD, PLYMOUTH AND PONTIAC SHOWROOMS.

Forms of "cheating" ran rampant, going far beyond massaged C-pillars on a template spec-racer body. In the late-'60s, each manufacturer tried to one-up the competition with what were called "homologation specials". One of the first was the 1969 Dodge Charger 500.

Developed in response to the successful 1969 Ford Torino Talladega and Mercury Cyclone Spoiler II for use on NASCAR's high-banked ovals (these Fords were built early in 1969, just in time for that year's Daytona 500), the Dodge Charger 500 represented

a first shot in a battle. When you fast forward from this point, you will find the winged Dodge Daytona and Plymouth Superbird in 1970, but let's not get too far ahead.

Based on the production 1969 Charger, the Charger 500 featured two visible aerodynamic enhancements. The deep-set front grille was replaced with a flush-mount grille derived from the 1968 Dodge Coronet. The flush rear backlight (rear window) eliminated the turbulence caused by the Charger's stylish but unaerodynamic flying buttress C-pillars.





In production form, a reported 500 were built, which satisfied NASCAR's requirement for a vehicle to be considered a "production car". Only 392 were built for street use with the rest going to racers. Most were equipped with the standard 440 Magnum but a reported 64 were built with the legendary 426 Hemi. Bob Amoroso's Charger 500 is one of those rare Hemis.

Bob is a life-long Mopar guy. Now retired after a 30-year career at Pratt & Whitney Aircraft in Connecticut, he had worked as a mechanical project engineer in all phases of jet engine design, development, testing, sales and repair. He was part of the Pratt & Whitney team that worked with Rolls-Royce on joint development of V-2500 engine for Airbus A319 and A320.



Bob's research leads him to believe that the 64 Hemi cars were split equally, 32/32, between three-speed automatics and four-speed manuals. His is the 47th Charger 500 produced and was built in November of 1968. It is said to be one of only two medium gold metallic Charger Hemi 500s produced.

Like most of those who own a rare and special muscle car, Bob's love of his Charger 500 is no accident. "I

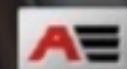




started being interested in cars at an early age, identifying cars with my father as most children do," recalled Bob. "When I was 13 years old, my father let me change the oil and filter on the family's 1954 Chrysler New Yorker with the 331-cubic-inch Hemi and two-speed PowerFlite automatic transmission.

"I really loved that car and took my driving test in it when I turned 17. After the 1954 New Yorker, several more New Yorkers followed until my mom bought a 1964 Dodge Polara 500 convertible with a 383-cubic-inch engine and a TorqueFlite on the console. That car was my first love and I drove it for 91,000 miles until my mom sold it to my



 FULL SCREEN IMAGES

cousin and her husband.

"By 1969, I was working at Pratt and Whitney. When the 1969 Chargers were introduced, it was love all over again," said Bob. "I ordered an R/T with a 440 and four-speed transmission. Delivery came on February 14, 1969. I still have this car with 69,000 original miles and it is still my favorite car. As a certified car nut, I have a collection of Mopars from a 1962 Dodge Dart 440 with the factory

383 with two four-barrel carburetors that was raced in that configuration, a 1964 Dart station wagon, a 1966 Dart GT, a 1967 Dart GT, a 383 1968 Plymouth Sport Satellite convertible with factory air, my 1969 Charger R/T, a 1972 'Cuda 340 with four-speed transmission, a 1970 Challenger coupe with a 440 twin-turbo and automatic transmission, a 1989 Plymouth Grand Fury police car, two 1989 Chrysler





Maserati coupes, a 1985 Shelby Charger, a 1991 Dodge Spirit R/T, and only my second new car, a 1992 Dodge Stealth R/T Twin Turbo. I have too many other cars to mention. I'm car rich and insurance poor!"

When it comes to the Charger 500, Bob continues with his story. "I bought the car in 1985 in Framingham, Massachusetts, from its third owner, Grendel Moore, who had found it

parked outside next to a barn in the country surrounding Framingham. It had been originally bought by a car enthusiast and driven year-round – it had an aftermarket engine block heater installed – until the original owner bought a 1970 Hemi Challenger and gave the Charger to his wife to drive. When I bought the car, it had almost 49,000 original miles and needed only a new harmonic balancer installed to

be able to drive it back home to East Hartford, Connecticut.

"Since the car was driven in the winter, the sheetmetal was heavily rusted," said Bob. "I collected NOS parts for 18 years while the car sat on jackstands in the middle of my two-car garage gathering dust and a cover of parts. In 2001, I contacted Mike LeBrecque from LeBrecque Autocraft in East Windsor, Connecticut, to do a restoration. It didn't start as a full restoration but, as the years progressed, it became one. The car was



completed in 2007 and was shipped to me in Utah where I moved. Its first public appearance was the 2007 Mopars at the Strip where it received a second place trophy as it literally rolled right off the transport van.

“I picked a 1969 Charger 500 because, when I bought my original 1969 Charger R/T, I wanted to buy a 440-powered Charger 500, but the trunk opening was too small and I was getting married in May of 1969 and didn't think it would be practical. I

contacted Grendel Moore through an ad to purchase the car so he could have money to go to college.”

Bob rattled off the post-restoration details. “I think the car should be considered a 99-point car as there are no modifications other than what was original or replaced during the restoration process, thanks to all the NOS parts I had accumulated over the years. The headlights are all from 1969 as dated and are the proper brand. This car is truly a numbers-

matching example. The engine has been completely rebuilt as has the transmission and rear end. The car is 90 percent NOS and 10 percent refurbished original parts. The car has been reviewed by Galen Govier and my car has the VIN that is prior to the one he owned.”

The car is perfection in every detail. Bob makes no apologies for it being a trailer queen, especially given the fact that he has so many other Mopars to choose from. **AE**

