



Renewed American

Mrs. Shaughnessy found her thrill on Blueberry Hill in this 440 convertible!

IN 1963, BASED ON THE STRENGTH OF THE ALL-NEW RAMBLER CLASSIC AND AMBASSADOR MODELS, THE ENTIRE AMERICAN MOTORS LINEUP WAS HONORED WITH MOTOR TREND'S CAR OF THE YEAR AWARD. THIS CAME AT A TIME WHEN THE AWARD REALLY MEANT SOMETHING, BEFORE IT EVOLVED INTO THE MARKETING-DRIVEN PROGRAM IT IS TODAY.

And while the compact American was included in the accolades, in reality its bread box-inspired 1961 restyling did little to hide its 1950 origins when in the form of a two-door sedan with a full roof folding top – what we like to call the “Lois Lane” convertible – it was America’s first compact car. Discontinued in 1955, then reintroduced in 1958 (the first time that a car was brought back virtually unchanged) the Rambler American was an integral part of the three-model AMC model strategy going forward throughout the early '60s.

All that would change for 1964 as the American was completely restyled with a full complement of sedans, hardtops,

station wagons, and convertibles spread over three series: the basic 220, the up-market 330, and the top-of-the-line 440. The look was fresh and contemporary, the first Rambler design under the supervision of AMC's new Vice President of Styling Richard Teague, dominated by deeply recessed front headlights that many say are reminiscent of those found on the 50 then-current Chrysler Ghia Turbine cars.

What is very interesting about the American series was that in a cost-saving move by George Romney, who had just ended his tenure as president of the company to run for the governorship of Michigan, it shared many stampings

with the larger Classic and Ambassador models. A fiscal conservative, Romney preached the gospel of economy, a philosophy not shared by his successor Roy Abernethy who immediately instituted an upsizing program to better compete with the Big Three. In the years that followed, this turned out to be a flawed strategy.

For 1964, the lineup was extensive. In the 220 and 330 series there were three models each – two- and four-door sedans as well as a four-door station wagon. In the 440 series, the four-door sedan remained with a two-door hardtop and a convertible along with a bucket seat 440H model. Base prices



ranged from \$1,907 for the 220 two-door sedan to \$2,346 for the 440 ragtop. If you objectively compare the American to the Chevy II and Falcon, you will see that the complete American lineup was very competitive.

The spiffy Vintage Maroon convertible you see here is one of three Americans and Rogues owned by Cars & Parts contributor Richard Truesdell. It is one of 8,907 440 convertibles built for the 1964 model year.

“My first car in high school, back in 1972, was a 1965 white-on-red, bucket seated 440H two-door hardtop,” remembers Truesdell. “It had the then-new 232ci six and because the car was so light, it had performance that was comparable to a

ENGINE: Unlike the new Mustang, there was no V-8 for the American. The 440 got along just fine with its 195.6ci inline six-cylinder, which put out 125 horsepower in one-barrel form, and 138 ponies with a two-barrel.

DASH: Mrs. Shaughnessy bought her American with the Flash-O-Matic column-shift automatic transmission, Weather Eye heating system, and Airliner reclining seats.

two-barrel 260ci Falcon or a two-barrel 283ci Chevy II. And it had something no Falcon, Chevy II, Dart, or Valiant had: a reclining bucket seat. Need I say more?”

Truesdell’s Rambler ragtop is an original East Coast car that

somehow avoided the rust plague, solid from bumper to bumper with a paper trail dating back to original owner Marie Shaughnessy who purchased the car on October 23, 1963, from H.E. Wood & Sons in Westfield, Massachusetts. The total price, including freight and options, was \$3,028.15 and her out-the-door price was \$1,450 after she was given a trade-in allowance on her 1961 Rambler American convertible. It must have been an early build car as the unique rear fiberglass trim panels are date-coded August 1963.

After purchasing the car, instead of doing the smart thing and shipping it to California, Truesdell decided to drive it cross country, first to Chicago, then on to Los Angeles. His travels were chronicled in a two-part feature in Classic American, an American car magazine from the UK.

Over the years Truesdell has almost always owned a two-door American or Rogue and right now, besides his '64 convertible, he owns a sweet pro-touring '68 290ci V-8 Rogue, and a very unusual white '69 290ci V-8 440 station wagon that sports the more restrained B-scheme paint treatment previously featured on Jay Leno's website, and he's always



ABOVE: The American's current owner couldn't wait to ship his car from the East to West Coasts, so he took delivery and drove it home himself.

looking for a white-on-red '65 two-door 440H hardtop, especially if it has the rare Twin-Stick overdrive option.

Just like the culture it was named for, the American evolved throughout the '60s. In 1966 the even more upscale

Rogue was introduced and was the first recipient of AMC's all-new, thin-wall design, small block 290ci V-8, a V-8 architecture that would see many different displacements (290, 304, 343, 360, 390, and 401) and that would serve all the way until 1991 when it was installed in the final Jeep Grand Cherokee. In 1967 AMC built its first muscle car when a four-barrel version of the new 343ci V-8 was installed across the board in around 100 Americans, including seven Rogue ragtops. In 1968 the basic platform served the basis for the Javelin and AMX in much the same way that Falcon mechanicals served as the underpinnings for the Mustang in 1964. Finally the Rambler nameplate faded into relative obscurity with the build-out of 1,515 fire-breathing, 14-second SC/Ramblers.

While the 1964-69 Rambler Americans and Rogues are unlikely to ever incite much passion with collectors, with the exception of the 343 1967 models and, of course, the SC/Ramblers, they were stylish, practical, sturdy, well-built cars that served American Motors well. And even when they were replaced in 1970 by the Hornet, if you look closely under the skin, you'll still find a lot of American parts, testimony to the soundness of its overall design and engineering. If you would like to know more about the 1958-'69 Rambler Americans and Rogues, visit the Rambler Rogue Registry at www.ramblerogue.com.

CAR INVOICE		H. E. WOOD & SONS, Inc.		No. 372			
25-27 Franklin Street		WESTFIELD, MASS.					
SOLD TO: Mrs. Marie Shaughnessy		DATE: October 23, 1963					
ADDRESS: Blueberry Hill							
Granville, Mass.							
YEAR	MODEL	VEH. TYPE	SERIAL NO.	ENGINE NO.	VEH. NO.	PRICE OF CAR	SALES TAX
1964	440-7-5	F	2663840	2663840	21577	\$2115.00	
Rambler American	2 Dr 440 Convertible					308.90	
						OPTIONAL EQUIP. & ACCESS.	\$507.65
INSURANCE COVERAGE INCLUDES							
<input type="checkbox"/> FIRE AND THEFT				<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC LIABILITY - AUT.			
<input type="checkbox"/> COLLISION - AUT. REDUCT.				<input type="checkbox"/> PROPERTY DAMAGE - AUT.			
OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT AND ACCESSORIES							
Color- Vintage Maroon (M) Airliner Reclining Seats Convertible Top-Black Power Flash-O-Matic Transmission -Column Shift Twin Grip Differential Weather Eye Seating System Power Steering Radio-Push-Button White Tires Undercoating Light Group Flexibility Group A Dwyer's Full Pail Coolant							
1961 Used Rambler American Convertible						TOTAL CASH PRICE	
Serial 2663817 40-2222						\$2000.15	
Model 440-7-5						TOTAL TIME PRICE	
						\$1450.00	
						1976.15	

INVOICE: Here's the brass ring for any old car owner – the original invoice! This single piece of paper tells the whole story behind this car. Mrs. Shaughnessy, who lived on Blueberry Hill, traded her '61 Rambler American convertible and \$1,450 for a new maroon 440 on October 23, 1963.



FRONT END: The restyled American seemed to borrow its front fenders and headlamp surrounds from Chrysler's turbine-powered prototypes.



ABOVE: The American series for 1964 included the 220, 330, and top-drawer 440.



BACK: Wheelbase on the American grew from 100 to 106 inches for the re-design in 1964.



1964 AMC Rambler Tarpon Concept Car

In one of the great automotive "what if" stories, in early 1964 AMC revealed the Rambler Tarpon Concept Car. Built on the new American's 106-inch wheelbase, it showed off a handsome fastback roofline. A year later, the same roofline would be stretched and applied with less success to the larger, ill-fated Marlin.



But it worked on the shorter American wheelbase, and the Tarpon was a very tidy package that compares favorably to the 1964 Plymouth Barracuda and the 1965 Ford Mustang fastback. What ultimately doomed the compact Tarpon from being AMC's original pony car was that the only V-8 American Motors offered, the original 287ci (as well as its larger 327ci version), was physically too big to fit between the American's shock towers.

It was 1968 before AMC fielded a competitive pony car with the Javelin. But looking back on AMC's fortunes in the mid-'60s it's interesting to speculate on what might have happened had it been the Tarpon, rather than the Marlin, that was introduced for the 1965 model year. The current whereabouts of the Tarpon are unknown. Does any reader know what has happened to it? ■