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THE REAL DEAL

In a time when it's so easy to clone a milestone musclecar, Dave Lindsley goes to sleep every night knowing he has a numbers-matching 1966 L78 Chevelle SS396 in his garage

GROWING UP IN ERIE, PENNSYLVANIA, AT THE HEIGHT OF THE MUSCLECAR ERA, DAVE LINDSLEY WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO COME OF AGE JUST AS THE DETROIT HORSEPOWER WARS WERE ESCALATING. AT 18, IN 1968, HE HAD ALREADY BOUGHT AND SOLD SIX CARS, SO FOR HIS GRADUATION YEAR HE PURCHASED AN 11-MONTH-OLD 350-HORSEPOWER 1967 CHEVELLE SS396.

As the time, the street racing scene was quite active in the northwest corner of the Keystone State, so adding speed parts to go faster was a natural part of the equation. "I had established a reputation of having very nice cars that went very fast," remembers Dave, talking from his Bowtie-flavored garage in Lake Forest, California, where besides this month's cover car, a 1966 SS396

Chevelle, the remaining two spots in his three-car garage hold an original 16,000-mile 1969 Z28 Cross Ram Camaro and a very rare 1969 Nova SS396, a 375-hp, numbers-matching L78 with bench seats and a Turbo 400 auto on the column.

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State Street' just looking for someone to race! Looking back, there were a lot of hot musclecars in our town. In November 1969, I ordered a brand new 1970 Nova SS 396/375 L78 with a bench seat and a Super Turbo 400 on the column. I received the Nova in January 1970. I added all of the race parts and after the winter season was over, I really terrorized the streets. That car was really fast. As the





“I have always liked this style, and size of musclecar and of course it brings back fond memories of my 1967 Chevelle SS that I owned in my graduating year of 1968,” Dave says. His gold 350hp SS396 was a street racing terror in Pennsylvania in the late 1960s.

story goes, I had a few more fast cars, a speed boat, and 4x4 trucks.”

As it turned out, Dave was no stranger to hard work, typically working two jobs, essential to keep his car habit properly fed. But in 1972 he was working construction and, a bit older, somewhat wiser, and with Disco starting to infect the airwaves, he grew up a bit and bought a 1970 Riviera. As the first musclecar era drew to a close, Dave’s direct connection to big-block muscle drew to a close but the musclecar bug was never fully purged

from his system. In 1976 he married his wife Madeline, a car person herself.

In 1983 Dave and Madeline moved to California, with Dave starting his own construction company. Together they got the Corvette bug, Dave buying a 1985 Corvette for his wife while parking a 1966 Corvette L79 327/350 in the garage next to it for himself. After that, he acquired a 1967 Camaro from a guy who owed him money, at the same time reactivating the musclecar virus and getting involved in the hobby again, concentrating on

original, numbers-matching musclecars. Shortly after that, he met Sal Perez, the owner of American Muscle Cars, who has done two frame-off restorations for Dave, and countless other car-related projects. Over the years they have become very close friends.

When it comes to a paper trail, his 1966 SS396 L78 has it all. He has copies of all of the titles of the previous owners since the car was new. He has many pictures of the car before it was restored, which helped he and Sal verify the many rare options this car has. “I have the Protect-O-Plate which is probably the most important document you can possess for any Chevy,” says Dave. “I hired Mike Crown from Pennsylvania, who is one of the foremost authorities on 1966 Chevells in the country, to document this Chevelle as a real L78. It more than met with his approval.”

“Believe it or not,” relates Dave, “I purchased the Chevelle in 2006 after seeing it at the Pomona, California, swap meet. I had been looking for a ‘66 or ‘67 Chevelle L78 for many years. The price was not a



giveaway, but well priced for a car that rare, restored, and well-documented.”

Starting with a solid, example, Dave was able to concentrate on getting the details right. “The Chevelle had a high quality frame-off restoration with only some minor detail items required. I considered the car 90 percent-plus restored when I purchased it. I have since completed most of the missing detail items. The undercarriage has a spectacular restoration which includes all of the original factory colors, codes, and markings with few details overlooked.”

Dave’s SS396 is still equipped with the original L78 engine block, heads, intake, distributor, and so forth. Through extensive searching Dave was able to locate the correct date-coded carburetor, the correct Harrison radiator, dipstick, and the one-year-only idler pulley. These items were missing when he purchased the car and being the perfectionist he is, he just had to have them, making the car exceedingly correct.

The L78 option is the rare 375-horsepower engine, with steel crank,

11:1 compression forged pistons, special rectangular-port heads, solid-lifter cam, aluminum intake and a dual feed 780 cfm Holley carburetor. The car has a factory-equipped 4.10 Positraction 12-bolt rearend. It also has factory tinted glass, bumper guards, rear antenna, and remote mirror. The interior includes a wood/tilt steering wheel, gauges, “Knee Knocker” tach and four-way flashers. All items are documented with the Protect-O-Plate, the trim tag or pictures of the car prior to being restored. The Dana Chevrolet license plate frames are only on this car as a tribute to the legendary Supercar builder, Dave says.

Dave shows the car extensively but refuses to drive it on the freeway. It was noted by good friend and neighbor Lanny Broders, a collector car owner himself who assisted us with the photo shoot, driving our camera car, that in the course of our photo shoot he thought Dave had probably driven the car farther and faster than he had at any time previously. When going to shows involving any distance, the SS396 goes in an enclosed trailer. At the

recent 2008 Super Chevy Car Show the car won the trifecta; Best in Stock Class, Editor’s Choice, and Best Paint.

When asked about his car’s strongest attributes Dave stated that its rarity and desirability makes a strong first impression. “I have always liked this style, and size of musclecar and of course it brings back fond memories of my 1967 Chevelle SS that I owned in my graduating year of 1968.” Dave is a lucky guy; unlike many of us who purchase musclecars because we couldn’t afford them when we were teenagers, Dave is able through this car to relive a memorable part of growing up, providing a great set of bookends to a car guy’s life — past, present, and into the future.

AUTHOR’S NOTE:

In case you’re interested, the striking background we used for the shoot was the Oakley Interplanetary Headquarters in nearby Foothill Ranch, California. With its monolithic grey backdrop, it provided the perfect counterpoint for its bright red exterior. ■