

TWO OF A KIND

In 1967, Chevrolet ran an ad that read, "SS 427... For the man who'd buy a sports car if it had the room." John Honiotes owns not one but two superb examples

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NEVER WAS THERE SUCH DIVERSITY IN THE MUSCLECAR ERA AS WHEN 1967 APPROACHED. FROM COMPACT PONY CARS NOW SPORTING BIG-BLOCKS, UP THROUGH MID-SIZED INTERMEDIATES ALL THE WAY UP THROUGH TRADITIONAL FULL-SIZED OFFERINGS, THE MUSCLECAR INFLUENCE SPREAD TO ALL CORNERS OF THE MARKET. THE FULL-SIZED CHEVROLET ESPECIALLY, THEN THE USA'S BEST SELLING CAR LINE, HAD SEVERAL WAYS FOR BIG-CAR AFICIONADOS TO FILL THEIR NEEDS FOR BOTH SPEED AND SIZE.

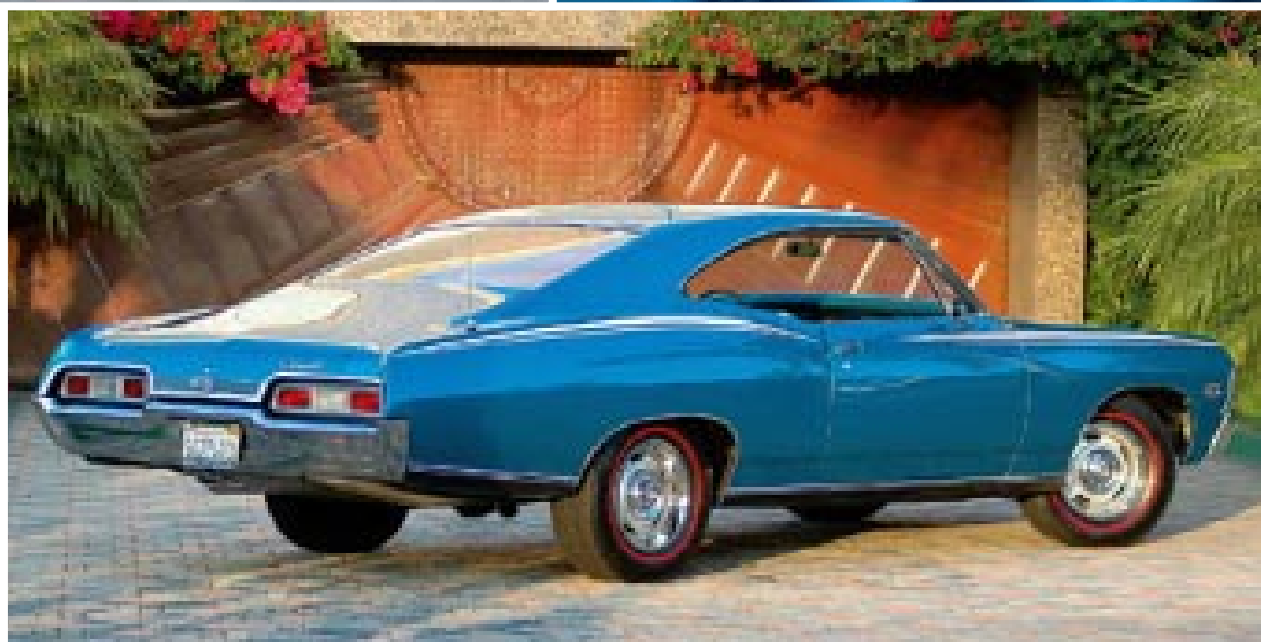
In 1967, Chevrolet's tag line for their full-sized musclecars was "For the man who'd buy a sports car if it had the room." John Honiotes of Corona Del Mar, California, has not one but two 1967 Marina Blue Impala SS 2-door hardtops in his three-car garage. Both are powered by Chevrolet's biggest engine for its full-sized models, the 427ci, 385-horsepower torque monster (the third slot in his garage is occupied by an equally beautiful, Nassau Blue, 1967 327 Corvette). Honiotes acquires collector cars for a private automotive market analysis consulting company.

Several months ago, Musclecar Enthusiast caught up with Honiotes, Vice President, Dealer Relations for online auto services portal autobytel.com. (Honiotes was part of the Autobytel founding team that started the giant of on-line automotive purchasing.) We found him at the weekly Crystal Cove gathering when he showed just one Impala SS along with the '67 Corvette. "As nice as this car is," related Honiotes, "I've got my eye on one even nicer, with even more options." As the first Impala SS was spectacular, we wondered how much better a companion car might be. After Memorial Day, 2004 we saw

exactly what he meant. Not only was the second Impala SS better equipped than the first, but in subtle ways, hard to see unless there was a similar car beside it for comparison, Impala SS number two was even more concours-ready than the first.

BEHIND THE WHEEL

If Honiotes' big-block Bowties share any single characteristic, it's that each car represents a fresh-from-the-showroom look and feel that goes far beyond what you might expect even from trailer queens. (As beautiful as each is, all are driven regularly, none of the three is towed





SUBTLE DIFFERENCES

When we were shooting Impala SS number two, we took the opportunity to shoot the two cars together, just for fun. The first difference you see when the cars are side-by-side, are the front fender-mounted lights, the grille treatment is different. The number two car's trim is shared with the upmarket Caprice; his first Impala SS shares its trim with other Impalas.

anywhere.)

He was so confident of the abilities of his second Impala SS that he had no hesitation in throwing us the keys to drive it to see for ourselves. Having driven the first Impala SS previously, we had high expectations and we weren't disappointed.

Pulling out of his driveway and on to the Pacific Coast Highway, California 1, just a few blocks away, it was like driving a time machine. The exhaust note, burbling through the dual pipes, told us immediately that this was a special car. As some pavement opened up heading south Honiotes said, "Put your foot into it, see what it will do."

What it will do is pin your bottom deep into the plushly padded bucket seat, as all four barrels opens up, gulping all the air they can, moving the 4,000 pound beast to extra-legal speeds in a heartbeat or two. Zero to 60 comes up in less than six and a half seconds—now common in 2,200-lb force-fed rice rockets, but rare in a two-ton full-sized car back when the Beach Boys were topping the charts. In spite of the bulk, the handling belied the mass, helped by the fact that the period-correct bias-ply 8.25x14 tires were replaced with 235/70x15 radials, beautifully accented by the 15-inch rally wheels commonly found on SS-equipped Impalas.

SLOW FADE

Nineteen-sixty-seven marked the last time in the musclecar era that the Super Sport Impala was its own model; for 1968 it was relegated to the option list as RPO Z03. The top rung on the full-sized model lineup was occupied by the luxurious Caprice. Full-sized performance clearly was on the decline, as by 1969 only 2,425 full-sized Chevrolet buyers opted for the then-available RPO Z24 SS 427 option. After almost one million full-sized Super Sports were produced in an eight-year run starting in 1961, the Super

ALTERNATE A

John Honiotes may own two 1967 Marina Blue Impalas SS427s, but he has no trouble telling them apart. The first car, pictured here, has the automatic transmission, but it's the second car that is loaded with interesting options.

"There are interesting and subtle differences between the two SS 427 Impalas," Honiotes says. "As far as the drivetrain is concerned, the big difference is that the second car has a four-speed Muncie, the first is a three-speed Turbo HydroMatic. Both are numbers matching. The

underside of both vehicles is exemplary. Looking at the original window sticker for the second Impala also shows that it has the optional wood steering wheel, push button AM/FM radio, special suspension, special dash instrumentation, tilt steering wheel, rear manual antenna and power disc brakes. Last, the four-speed stick also has very rare factory paint striping (only 200 delivered with these D96 "special bodyside accent stripes") which I think really highlights the car's styling...in my opinion, it's aged very gracefully over the last 37 years."



Sport option was dropped in 1970, not to return until the modern day Impala SS was introduced in 1994. It ran for three seasons until GM killed off the last rear-wheel-drive full-sized cars in order to build even more full-sized SUVs in its Arlington, Texas plant.

Needless to say, Honiotes is not done on the collecting front. As we shot all three of the cars he related that he had his eye on a matching Marina Blue '67 Impala 427 ragtop. "The owner wanted crazy money for it. I thought he might get more realistic but as things are so super heated on the collector car front, he found someone who paid his price. We didn't want it that badly and I know

from experience, as with this car, an even better example will come along if I'm just patient."

Patience certainly is a virtue and in the meantime, Honiotes found, of all things, a 1966 Mustang, with an updated, late-model drive train, which he added to the collection just a few weeks after our photo shoot. "It's a great driving car, but in a different way from the Chevys. Not better, just different. As far as I'm concerned, there's nothing that quite compares to the driving experience provided by either of these 427 big-block Super Sports."

Without hesitation, we'd have to agree. ■

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