

BLACK CHERRY COUGAR

It may have been the gentleman's musclecar, but certain flavors of Cougar, like the Black Cherry XR7-G shown here, are positively scary.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD TRUESDELL

BILL BASORE IS A SELF-PROCLAIMED OKIE, BORN IN THE '50s IN OKLAHOMA CITY, RAISED IN TULSA, GRADUATE OF OSU AND A LONGTIME RESIDENT OF STILLWATER, OKLAHOMA, WHERE HE CO-FOUNDED AUDIO INNOVATIONS, BEST KNOWN FOR THEIR LINE OF Q-LOGIC SPEAKER ENCLOSURES AND FACTORY-FIT REPLACEMENT KICK PANELS DESIGNED TO HOUSE HIGH PERFORMANCE SPEAKERS.

Over the years Bill has owned a number of noteworthy Blue Oval products and traces his Cougar roots back to his favorite aunt, who always wanted a Thunderbird but, as a legal secretary, found the price of admission just too steep. When she saw the new-for-'67 Cougar had those sequential tail lights, just like the Thunderbird, she negotiated a smoking deal on her new Cougar, in which a nine-year-old Bill helped drive home from the dealership along with his aunt, dad and older brother.

Years later, Bill's first ride was a '62 Falcon with a 144ci six and two-speed automatic. As Bill relates, "I was frequently outrun by little girls on bicycles. Next I worked my way up to a Comet with a 260 and then finally found on Route 66 in Tulsa, a '67 Cougar with a 289." It served him well in his senior year in high school as he installed a great 8-Track stereo along with mag wheels, wide tires air shocks and a number of go-fast parts from the Ford Muscle parts catalog. But then OPEC pulled the plug on the oil supply so off to college he went, driving a '72, six-banger Mustang.

While in college the next Cougar was a mint condition, 10-year-old '67 XR-7, Lime Frost Green with a black vinyl roof and dark green interior, an engagement gift to his soon-to-be wife Debbie. The car was ultimately sold and, as Bill likes to say, after 1968 the Cougar grew in length and gained weight, and by 1974 was no longer recognizable as the car it had been in '67. Thus there would not be another Cougar in his garage until May of 2000.

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The acquisition of his Black Cherry 1968 XR7-G is a classic case of following up every possible lead. "My car was advertised in Hemming's as a Dan Gurney special with a 428," says Bill. "The Dan Gurney Special was actually just a sticker and upgraded wheel covers package for '68. From what I had been able to learn, there had been no Gurney Specials with the 428. I





called on the ad anyway and found that the broker did not know the difference and had incorrectly identified the car in the ad. The car did not have the hood pins and hood scoop that were standard on the XR7-G so there were questions about just what the car really was. With the assistance of Royce Peterson, the Cougar Club of America G car registrar, I was able to determine that the car was legitimate."

"Everything about the car appealed to me. I like the color, the engine, the G package and the overall uniqueness of the car just grabbed me. At the time I could have purchased a very nice restored XR7-G complete with the original 390, but running a fresh 428, for the same amount that I paid for this car. It was a tough decision.

"The car has an interesting history," Bill said. "The second owner purchased the car in 1970 when it was a year and

a half old. He cherished the car, but life happens and the car fell into the hands of the divorce court and the XR7-G was awarded to his ex. She was well aware of how much the car meant to him and she used the car to express her unhappiness with the situation. She made it her life's work to scratch dent and ding virtually every surface of the car. Her work complete she called and offered the car back to her ex-husband, but only on a cash-in-advance basis. He bought the car back. Horrified at what had happened to the car, he parked it in a warehouse in Los Angeles until he could find the time and money to return it to its former glory. As so often happens, years passed, 13 of them. Realizing he would probably never be able to restore the car, it was placed in the hands of the broker for sale. The mileage is believed to be correct at about 85,000."

When asked about the rarity, Bill has the numbers. "There were a total of

619 XR7-G's built including all engine sizes. Only 14 were built with the 428 Cobra Jet engine. It is one of 11 with the XPL C6 automatic."

ORIGINAL ONLY ONCE

Since purchasing the Cougar, as it needed work, Toby Ramsey of Ramsey and Sons in Stillwater, Oklahoma, handled the extensive body and paint work required. Bill was so pleased with the results he's since sent two other cars to Toby for paint and body.

Instead of a ground-up restoration, Bill has taken a somewhat different approach with his '68 Cougar. "A car is original only once. I have put a lot of effort in cleaning, restoring and refurbishing as many original items as possible. The car would show better if I replaced the carpet and reupholstered the seats. Instead I have spent hours cleaning and treating the leather, shaving the pills from the carpet and



carefully removing stains. I have treated the car the way that a museum conservator would treat a rare specimen. Some day I will have to replace these original parts, but until that day comes, I prefer to keep as much of the original patina as possible."

"I also think that cars are to be driven. For this reason I don't use NOS parts for consumable items. The greatest risk in driving the car would be having to leave it parked on the side of the road due to a breakdown. Every thing made of rubber has been replaced or restored. The entire fuel system was replaced, as well as brakes, and most other safety related items. The original bias ply tires had to be cut off the rims with bolt cutters, they were hard as a rock.

"When owning and driving an old car, living in Arizona presents its own challenges," Bill said. "All vehicles produced since 1966 must pass a thorough smog check, every year. It also

gets hot here. Really hot, like 115 degrees hot. And the highest octane gas we can buy is 91-octane. All of these things tend to compound on each other when it comes to drivability. The low octane requires that the ignition be retarded; the smog check requires it run very lean, these factors tend to make the car run hot. The searing summer heat does little to help. The net effect is I drive the car only in the cool of the morning during the summer."

If you think you might like a want a Cougar XR7-G for your own, Bill has a few suggestions. "A great place to start would be to contact Royce Peterson, the XR7-G registrar. There is a website devoted to G cars at cougarxr7g.com, which includes info on the ultra rare – 188 built – Hertz XR7-Gs. The Cougar Club of America maintains registries for several of the special edition Cougars and their web site at cougarclub.org is also loaded with information."

And for those of you that think you

know everything Shelby-related, did you know that the XR7-G has its own Shelby connection? As Bill relates, "In 1968 A. O. Smith was building the Shelby Mustangs for Ford. Mercury took advantage of the relationship with A. O. Smith and all of the G cars were built on the same line as the Shelby Mustangs, and all of the special G parts carry Shelby part numbers. Many of those special parts are actually common to both cars, such as the tip within a tip exhaust, and the Lucas driving lights. The G was to be Mercury's Shelby."

As to plans for further restoration, Bill says he prefers to enter his XR7-G for display-only at shows. "It is so rare and unusual, that it might earn votes based on that alone. And besides, this really isn't a show car. I prefer the patina of originality to the uniformity of a fully restored completely stock car. I also like to drive my cars to shows. The real rush for me is not owning the car, it is driving the car." ■

