

GM'S HYBRID

THE 1967 BEAUMONT SPORT DELUXE 396 WAS A UNIQUE CANADIAN MELDING OF CHEVROLET AND PONTIAC DESIGN CUES

WHEN IS A PONTIAC LEMANS NOT A PONTIAC LEMANS? WHEN IS A CHEVROLET CHEVELLE NOT A CHEVROLET CHEVELLE? WHEN IT'S A GM BEAUMONT, A CANADA-ONLY INTERMEDIATE-SIZED CAR SOLD IN CANADIAN PONTIAC DEALERSHIPS FROM 1966 TO 1969.



Built in response to the import/export regulations in place at the time (at the same Oshawa, Ontario, plant that now builds the new 2010 Camaro), the Beaumont brand spawned a unique muscled car that was a strange hybrid between the U.S. versions of the Chevelle SS396 and Pontiac GTO. Mark Bortolotto of Hamilton, Ontario, has what might very well be one of the best

preserved examples of this interesting slice of GM's Canadian heritage, a 1967 Beaumont Sport Deluxe 396, equipped with a big-block 350-horsepower V-8.

The 1967 Beaumont SD396 is a rare and special car. According to Bortolotto, his is one of only 451 Beaumont SDs built with the 350-horsepower 396 big-block. Its numbers-matching engine is mated to a M20 Muncie 4-speed transmission,

a combination found under the hood of countless U.S. Chevelles. Like many of its American counterparts aimed at young enthusiast buyers in the mid-'60s, it is equipped with only a few options, in this case, besides the muscular drivetrain, just a 3.55:1 Positraction rearend and an AM radio.

In talking with Muscled Car Enthusiast, Mark tried to clear up some of the

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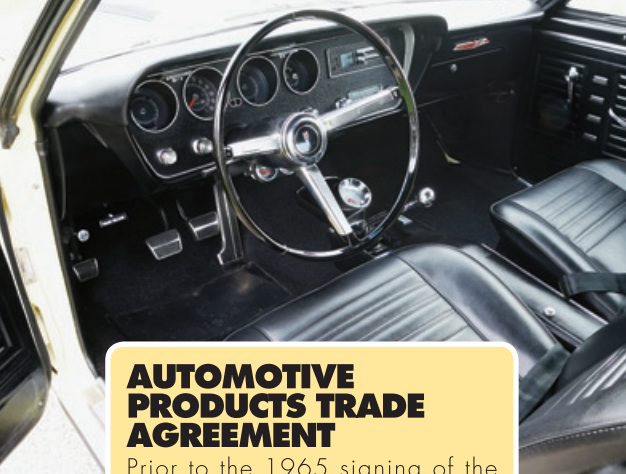


BY RICHARD TRUESDELL / PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD TRUESDELL

misconceptions surrounding his car. "After I bought the car," says Mark, "I quickly realized I truly had something very unique, a Canadian-produced musclecar offered only in Canada. It is far rarer than a comparable Chevelle. While it might be considered the sister car to the Chevelle, they are not Canadian Chevilles as many refer to them as. The unique Beaumont used a complete

Chevrolet frame and drivetrain unlike the American-built LeMans, Tempest, and GTO. But it gets its interior from the U.S. LeMans and GTO. Other subtle differences from U.S. manufactured cars included air cleaners, clamps, and hoses. The paint on the firewall, trunk, and undercarriage was painted body color, an obvious difference to their U.S. counterparts from Chevy and Pontiac."

Like enthusiasts south of the border, Mark enjoyed being around cars as a kid, especially building car models or attending local shows. "I started driving on my father's farm at the age of 12 where I drove the farm tractor and dump truck on the property and then graduated to a 1963 Volkswagen Beetle that was once owned by my uncle and which I promptly ripped off the fenders and painted with a



AUTOMOTIVE PRODUCTS TRADE AGREEMENT

Prior to the 1965 signing of the Automotive Products Trade Agreement, also known as the Auto Pact or APTA, shipping of newly manufactured cars across the U.S.-Canadian border was a convoluted affair. Prior to the pact, there were significant duties on cars, trucks, buses, tires, and automotive parts between the two countries. As a result, as hard as it might be to believe today, only three percent of vehicles sold in Canada were assembled in the United States.

While 97 percent of cars sold in Canada were assembled in Canada, most of the parts were manufactured in the U.S. As a result, Canada maintained a large trade deficit with the U.S. The result of this previous state of affairs was that in Canada the Big Three maintained essentially separate sales and marketing operations north of the border and, as a result, GM, starting in 1962 with the introduction of the Chevy II-derived Acadian, developed the Beaumont sales channel, sold through GM's existing Canadian Pontiac dealers through 1971. With the previous passage of the APTA, the redundant Beaumont brand was eliminated.

By the time I was legal I graduated to a 1973 Dodge Charger SE upgraded with the then-popular Cragar mag wheels, modified the engine and applied a new blue metallic paint job."

Mark's SD is exceptionally well-documented, as he has the all-important GM Protect-o-plate, the GM Canada build sheet, the original owner's manual, and the full-line 1967 Beaumont sales brochure. The car had seven owners prior to Mark's purchase in August of 2003 from Legendary Motor Car in Halton Hills, Ontario, (creators of the Dream Car Garage show on the SPEED Channel). At the time, the car had 24,800 miles on the odometer and benefited from a full frame-off restoration in 2001. It was produced at GM's Oshawa, Ontario plant (which has built a variety of GM passenger cars since the '50s) and the

delivering dealer was Jantzen Hanbrock Motors in Port Colborne, Ontario.

When the car was restored by previous owner Dan Forfar, the color was changed from its original Silverglaze Metallic to its current combination of Butternut Yellow with a black vinyl roof, a very popular color combo in the '60s. Dan also added the optional sport stripe at the same time. As the photographs show, the restoration is of a very high standard, right down to the chalk marks on the passenger-side firewall. When looking under the hood, you might first be struck by the nomenclature of "Econo-Jet" gracing the air cleaner atop the 396-cubic-inch big-block, wondering if this is something of a cruel joke on a car that might get 13 mpg if driven with a feather-light right foot.

Because the Beaumont was





produced in far fewer numbers than either of its U.S. Chevrolet or Pontiac counterparts, and most were subject to harsh Canadian winters, very few have survived. And even fewer have been preserved in the condition as Mark's exceptional example.

Our photo shoot the morning after the 2008 Woodward Dream Cruise was extra special for Mark. "It was very sentimental watching my Dad drive my car during the photo shoot. I will never forget the look on my father's face when I asked him to drive my car. I am sure it meant as much to him as it did to me."

Mark's Beaumont is a consistent trophy winner almost every time he takes it out. Two noteworthy shows in 2008 included a first place in the street machine class at the Toronto Performance World Show in March. His SD396

also participated in the invitational Willistead Concours d'Elegance show in Windsor, Ontario, the top Canadian show, where it was a crowd favorite.

"I would say that my car is not a trailer queen or daily driver but somewhere in between," Mark told us. "I don't put a lot of miles on it, probably averaging about 1,000 miles per year. It's driven only in good weather and as long as I've owned it, it has never seen rain. With that being said, I love driving the car at every possible opportunity. Last year it took its longest trip, to the Woodward Dream Cruise in Detroit, a round trip of 400 miles from my

home in Hamilton, Ontario."

The car may have been right at home cruising the streets near GM's headquarters in Detroit, but even there you'll find GM fans who might never been aware of the Beaumont SD396's existence or the unusual circumstances of its conception. ■

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To view the 1967 Beaumont dealer brochure in PDF form, visit www.automotivetraveler.com/jump/416

