

UP WITH THE MACHINE

This 1971 AMC Matador with "Machine Go" package could be the nicest musclecar you've never seen

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD TRUESDELL

EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT AN AFICIONADO OF AMERICAN MOTORS MUSCLECARS, YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD OF OR SEEN A REBEL MACHINE, AMC'S 1970 ATTEMPT TO COMPETE IN THE LOW-BUCK, STRIPPED-DOWN, ENTRY-LEVEL ARENA.

A one-year only model, only 1,936 or 2,326 (depending upon who you quote) Rebel Machines rolled out of the Hurst Performance Research facilities. It was not the sales success that AMC had hoped for, selling just a few more units than its red white and blue little brother, the 1969 SC/Rambler.

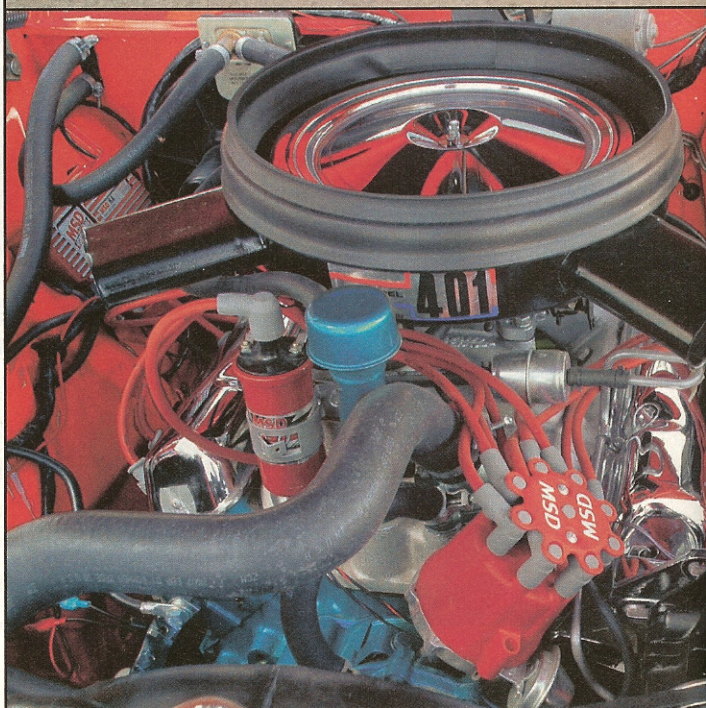
For 1971, with higher insurance rates and lower compression ratios on the horizon, the Rebel Machine was discontinued, replaced, in a way, by the \$373 "Machine Go" option package for the renamed Matador intermediate. Available with either the 360 or 401 V-8, the Machine Go package consisted of a 4-bbl carb, dual exhaust, the HD handling package, power front disc brakes, E60-15 Goodyear Polyglas raised white letter tires, 15 x 7-inch styled steel wheels along with a space-saver spare.

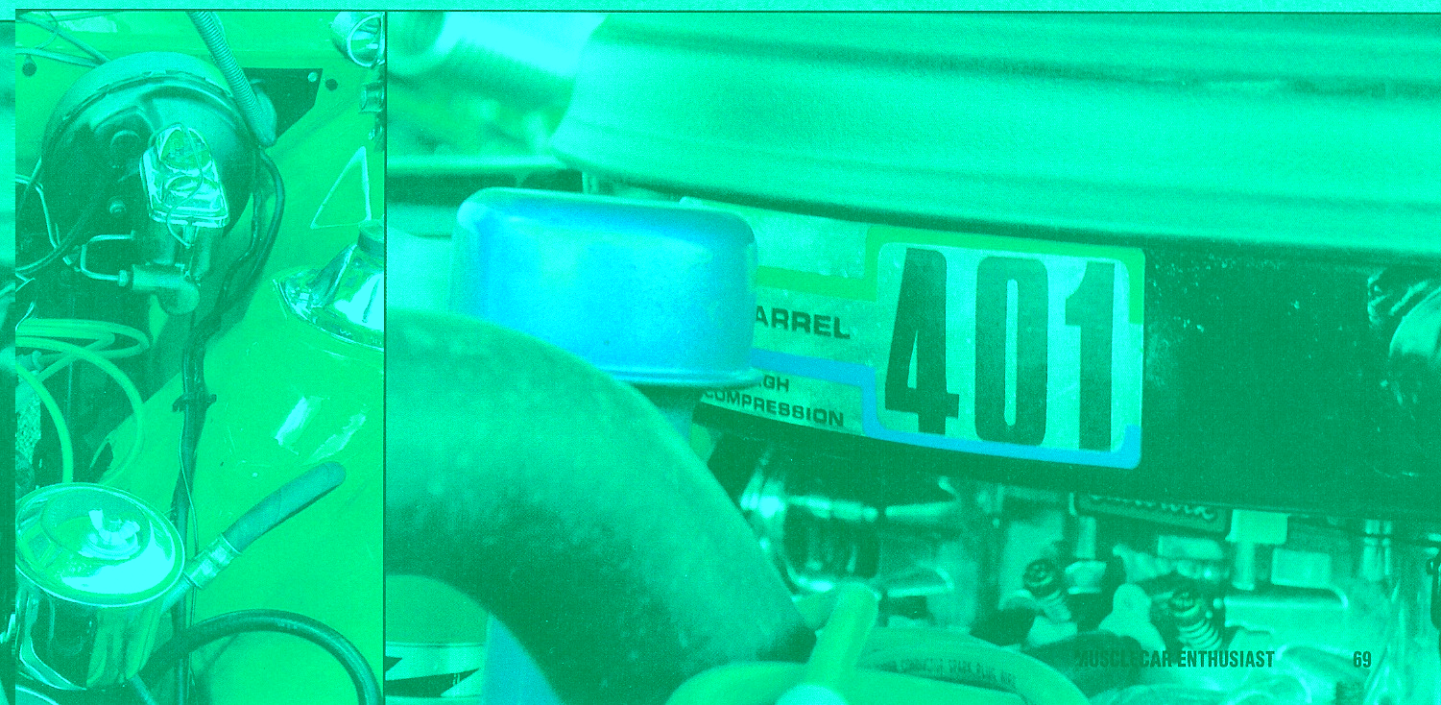
Interestingly, while the Machine Go package was available only on Matador hardtops, by judiciously checking off the right lines on the option sheet you could get everything but the 15-inch wheel/tire combo and that could be purchased at the dealer level. So in theory at least, it was possible to "build" a "Machine Go" four-door sedan or station wagon.

While the 1970 Rebel Machine was available with a restricted number of options and a reduced color palette, for 1971 the Machine Go package was available in all AMC colors along with all options. Despite this flexibility, the 1971 Matador with Machine Go package sold even more poorly. Bill Deringer, who worked in AMC's Kenosha facility and who built the motor for the Breedlove AMX restoration (and who still works at Jeep in AMC's old Plymouth Road facility) says he vaguely remembers seeing the cars come down the line and recalls that a very small number were built — 55 or 57 are the numbers that stick in his mind after all these years.

If that was the case, then a 1971 Matador with the Machine Go package would be one of the rarest musclecars in existence. Unfortunately, there's no notation in the VIN, unlike 1970, when "X" designated the separate Rebel Machine model in AMC's VIN

The Matador's 401 V-8 is functionally bolstered with a ram air set-up from a 1970 Rebel Machine, MSD ignition, and visually upgraded with a smattering of chrome. Stock 1971 401 was rated at 330 horsepower.





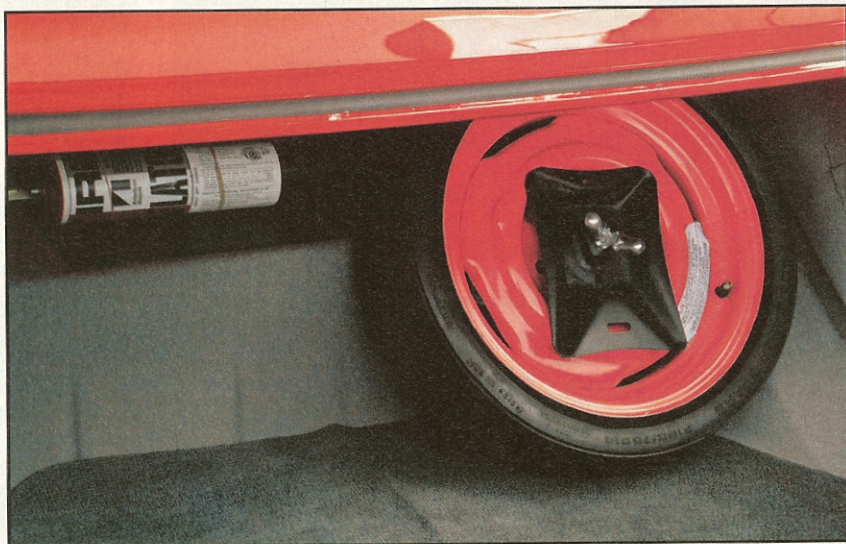
REBEL MACHINES IN THE WAREHOUSE

One of the great things about the Internet and the World Wide Web is the way that it brings like-minded enthusiasts together. In researching this story, I made it known to the AMC community that I was looking for Machine information and received this E-mail from Lee Schulz:

"Hello Richard, I have a little information on the Rebel Machine you might find interesting. In 1972 my father was a salesman

for an AMC dealer in Ontario, California. The AMC factory rep told my father that there were 50 brand new 1970 Rebel Machines in a warehouse in Phoenix, Arizona, and one could be bought for a bid of \$2,500. When my father told me this I was 18 years old and I was interested in one, but I wanted to see one in person. The factory rep told my father that Savage AMC in Monrovia, California had bought some of the cars from Arizona. I went

to look at Savage AMC and the dealer was buying the cars and repainting the red white and blue paint jobs. I drove a brand new 1970 Rebel Machine which was painted black and had a 4-speed; mind you this was 1972. I wanted to buy one of the Arizona cars but in the end my father won out, making the point that if AMC couldn't sell them in 1970, what kind of resale value would this car ever have? Well that's my 'fish that got away story.'"



Space-Saver spare tire was part of the Machine Go package.

scheme as the seventh character. Without a factory build sheet, dealer order or window sticker, the Matador Machine is ripe for cloning.

The Matador Red 1971 Matador with Machine Go option you see here has a

Denning added the red piping to the seats and 1970 "The Machine" graphics to warm up the interior. The four-speed transmission with floor shifter was only available with the Machine Go equipment.

long, documented history going back to its original title, when it started life as a black on silver hardtop. Brad Denning of Summit, New Jersey, bought the car in 1998 and over the next seven years Denning, who owns Dobbs Auto Body in Springfield, patiently disassembled the Matador, collected as many NOS parts as possible, and completely restored the car, rotisserie-style. And as soon as it was finished, having tired of the ordeal, what did Denning do? He put the car up on

eBay, where we first saw it, and where it stalled at just under its \$25K reserve (a fraction of the cost to restore it). After making direct contact with Denning, he explained his situation.

"The car was unique and was the only known documented survivor," he said. "One AMC guy said that it could not be restored, it was far beyond repair! Since I was in the market for a unique musclecar and I had previously decided on a Rebel Machine, when I came across this car, I grabbed it. In acquiring parts it was amazing at the range of the cost of new old stock parts that I located. The cost ranged from ridiculously cheap to second mortgage price. The mechanical parts were easy, my local parts store had everything in stock, but body and trim parts were difficult to locate because there are no reproductions available."

"The most difficult part of the restoration was the fabrication of the floor section and the inner and outer rocker panel," he continued. "I was very fortunate in this area because of a very good friend of mine, John Sommers from Springfield Metal Product, in Springfield, just a



1971 MATADOR SPECIFICATIONS AND OPTIONS

Engines	Carb. Type	H.P. @ R.P.M.	Torque @ R.P.M.	Comp. Ratio & Fuel	Bore & Stroke	Transmissions	Axle Ratios Std. (Opt.)
232 CID Six (Standard)	1-Barrel	135 @ 4000	210 @ 1600	8.0:1 Reg.	3.75" x 3.58"	3-Speed Manual on Column (Standard)	3.15 (3.54)
258 CID Six	1-Barrel	150 @ 3800	240 @ 1800	8.0:1 Reg.	3.75" x 3.58"	Shift-Command Automatic on Column	3.15 (3.54)
304 CID V-8	2-Barrel	210 @ 4400	300 @ 2600	8.4:1 Reg.	3.75" x 3.44"	Shift-Command Automatic on Column	2.87 (3.15)
360 CID V-8	2-Barrel	245 @ 4400	365 @ 2600	8.5:1 Reg.	4.08" x 3.44"	Shift-Command Automatic on Console	2.87 (3.15)
360 CID V-8	4-Barrel	285 @ 4800	390 @ 2700	8.5:1 Reg.	4.08" x 3.44"	Shift-Command Automatic on Column	2.87 (3.15)
401 CID V-8	4-Barrel	330 @ 5000	430 @ 3400	9.5:1 Pro.	4.17" x 3.68"	Shift-Command Automatic on Console	2.87 (3.15 & 3.54)
						4-Speed Manual on Floor (Go Pkg. only)	3.54 (3.15 & 3.91)

☐ Bucket seats—vinyl (Hardtop only)
Performance (see "Engine" & "Transmission/Axle Ratio" Charts)
☐ 360 or 401 "Machine Go" package for Hardtop (1)
☐ Dual exhaust system for 360-4 barrel (standard on 401)
☐ Twin-Grip differential (recommended with performance equip., req'd. option with 3.91 axle)
Power Assist
☐ Power steering (recommended with air conditioning)

that I just got sick of the 'date coded hose clamp club.' It

just seemed wrong to crap all over a guy who spent countless hours restoring his car, what he deemed was the best. It was then I decided to pursue unrestored original and prototype cars. I'd rather spend my time looking for a whole car rather than a service part that usually ends up being made of unobtainium."

Having driven the Matador on our freezing February New Jersey photo shoot before it was shipped to the far north, and experiencing first-hand how tight the car drove, I was curious as to Phillips' first impression behind the wheel. "It feels like a lot after getting out of my Suburban, but when I get into my pro-touring Mach 1 (600hp, 12 quart dry sump, four wheel disc, Jerico trans) it feels...pedestrian. Hey, I've tasted the forbidden fruit, sorry. The true enthusiasts make the car world so interesting. AMC specialists like Eddie Stakes and Mike Lewis that have knowledge of these cars that give them the presidential seat on the date coded hose clamp club. But at the end of the day Brad deserves all of the credit for saving this car, enabling me to preserve and enjoy it."

1971 AMC Option Sheet

mile from our shop, was able to custom fabricate any sheet metal or structural parts that were no longer available. I was lucky enough to find one person that had a complete ram air/tach assembly from a 70 Rebel Machine, but the tach was in terrible shape (the hood scoop/tach assembly was not available for the Machine Go Matador in 1971, but Denning added it as a sort of "period correct" modification). I sent it to a gauge specialist in Florida and he charged me \$440 and took two years to restore it."

AMC purists will look at the car and pull back when they see the dog dish wheel covers but there was a method to Denning's madness. "I did not like the look of the original Machine wheels, I was looking for something different. I wanted to give the car a pure muscle look. I decided to search for the original dog dish hubcaps that were used

on the Adam 12 car. I was lucky enough to locate seven NOS ones. These are original AMC parts with AMC part numbers on the inside, which some people try to tell me are Mopar items. They are not."

The story might have ended here but Denning decided to take another chance on eBay and on the second attempt the car was sold to Fred Phillips of Calgary, Alberta. Phillips, president of Focus Auto Design Inc., is a certifiable AMC nut. Phillips adds the Matador to a very eclectic collection that includes two AMC prototypes — the Vignale AMX I that for years resided in the museum next to the Talladega Motor Speedway and the AMX II pushmobile. He also owns a 1969 AMC SC/Rambler and one of the two four-wheel-drive SC/Ramblers raced by actor James Garner.

When asked about his thing for AMC concept cars, Phillips had this to say. "Prototype cars are just plain cool. After participating in car shows I guess



Brad Denning, who restored the car, combined elements of the 1970 Rebel Machine — such as the "The Machine" stickers and the hood scoop/tach combo — to his 1971 Matador with the original "Machine Go" equipment.