**Power**

By conventional definition, a musclecar is an intermediate or smaller car, stuffed with the biggest engine possible, typically six liters (366 cubic inches) or more. Going by that strict interpretation of what a musclecar can be, some seriously muscular machines get ignored; 406 Galaxies, 409 Bel Airs, and 426 Furies, to name just a few.

However, while the musclecar decade of the '60s evolved, with the emphasis on bigger engines in ever smaller, lighter cars, the full-size category wasn’t totally neglected. But where the smaller-bodied cars focused on straight-line performance, the larger cars served to offer a luxurious alternative to big-block performance, Ford and Chevrolet especially. Where starting in 1966 Ford offered a 7-liter series of the Galaxie 500XL hardtop and convertible, Chevrolet continued to offer the 427 engine in the Impala Super Sport series when it migrated to being RPO Z24 — rather than a distinct series — starting with the 1968 model year (priced at $358.10 including the 385-horsepower L36 Turbo-Jet V8).

All of this background information sets the stage for the car you see here, an exceptionally rare 1968 Impala SS427 L36 convertible owned by long-time car enthusiasts Jim and Joylee Pentz of Bend, Oregon. We were lucky to encounter Jim’s stunning SS427 rag top when he trailer the car down to a Southern Vintage California Club of America show in the fall of 2008.

Starting at age 13 with a $10 straight-8 1951 Pontiac, Jim has owned a succession of interesting cars, and the acquisition of the 1968 Impala SS427 fulfilled a long-held desire. “I have always loved these cars since high school,” says Jim. “While in high school my girlfriend’s father had a black SS427 with white interior, white top just like this one. He used to let me take it to work to change oil and tune it up. Since that time these have been one of my favorite cars.”

In addition to this car Jim and Joylee own another 1968 SS427, Green with Ivy/Gold interior with a white top. It’s a heavily optioned car and, like the white car pictured here, is equipped with the Comfortron temperature control air conditioning system found on Cadillacs of the era, plus power windows, power disc brakes, and power steering along with a tilt wheel, AM/FM stereo radio and the fiber optics package. Jim estimates that...
PLUS

JIM PENTZ’ 1968 SS427 IMPALA CONVERTIBLE SHOWS CHEVROLET COULD SERVE UP MUSCLE WITH PLENTY OF ROOM TO STRETCH OUT.
less than 200 SS427 convertibles were produced in 1968. This is based on the fact that 1,778 SS427s were built in 1968 and about 10 percent were convertibles. Jim feels he is extremely lucky owning two of them, quite possibly among the best remaining. (The Pentz’ also own an original 1966 Shelby GT-350 as well as two very unusual collectible trucks; a 30,000-mile 1991 SS454 pickup and Joylee’s 18,000-mile 1991 GMC Syclone original 18K mile truck. It was bought from the original owner and he had GM Engineers approve its conversion into a hardtop convertible so as to not void the warranty.)

Getting back to the white SS427, Jim related that he had a great deal of fun researching its history, pretty much back to its original owner. “After much searching I was able to contact and meet in person the car’s third owner. I was amazed, after 27 years since owning the car he brought out a file he had kept all these years! To top that off, once I had these documents I contacted the second owner of the car that lived near him in Glendale, Arizona. Not having a phone number and it being almost 30 years since they owned the car, I took a chance and drove by the address on the old title. Sure enough, same people and thrilled to hear about their old car.”

Jim acquired the car in 2002 from an eBay listing. Originally the thought was to have a driver to keep his green SS427 fresh. But things changed when Jim realized that, like his green car, it was an equally rare car, very complete and all numbers matched. It had 86,000 miles on the clock and was virtually rust-free. What was interesting to Jim was that the previous owner had treated it to a driver-quality restoration at some point in the past and it was not molested in any way, providing a solid foundation for a complete, number’s matching restoration.

In 2005 Jim went to his first National Impala Association (NIA) event in Spearfish, South Dakota, and there he met Brad Menor who lives in nearby Box Elder. Brad is also a member of the NIA. Jim noted that Brad had an exceptional red 1968 SS427 4-speed car at this event and he couldn’t believe the quality of the workmanship. As cars guys who appreciate the same kind of cars, Jim and Brad hit it off and the agreement was reached to have Brad restore the car. Brad is Old School, does all the work himself in his shop at home and his work is of an extremely high standard. Jim remains most impressed by Brad’s attention to detail and certainly he has expertise in restoring Impalas that is hard to match.
Jim noted that he took his car to the NIA convention in Indianapolis this summer, where it scored 992.5 its first time out. This was followed up by the Southern California event in the fall, where we met Jim and photographed the car, the VCCA event where it scored 990 out of 1,000. Jim plans to enter it in a few more shows but has decided to sell it to start his next project, possibly a 1968 SS427 425-horsepower, 4-speed car. He’s certain there’s at least one out there somewhere that needs a good home. In the meantime, he’ll take his time selling this car, making certain that it passes on to someone who can really appreciate all the unique SS427 details for 1968. These include the raised hood, fender grilles and SS427 badging. Nowhere on the car will you find a script calling it an “Impala.”

Cars like Jim’s SS427 are today a rare breed — fully equipped, big-block, full-sized cars. When released by Chevrolet, it was referred to as the “Super Hooded SS 427, Just the ticket for the sporting man who likes some room to move around in.” Rather than a traditional musclecar, we think that they are best referred to as muscular cars, built for an era of 30 cent per gallon gas, when the call of the rapidly expanding Interstate Highway System made them the ultimate in cross-country cruising comfort.

The document shown here was found in the rear seat cushion by the third owner and kept in a file for 27 years after he sold the car. It is apparently the assembly line sheet used by the factory when assembling the car in the South Gate plant near Los Angeles.

In our conversations with Jim, he mentioned that he would love to get in contact with any Musclecar Enthusiast readers who might have worked at the South Gate plant, or other GM enthusiasts who might be able to fully decode the markings shown here.

Jim notes, “The option numbers are easy but the ones on the top and bottom, no one has been able to tell me what they represent. The numbers in question are the 526 and 4080 at the top of the page. The number 4080 was also found on the gas tank and the firewall. There are also there is an “MG” and “CH-CH” at the bottom of the page that none of the GM experts I’ve talked with that can make any sense of what they represent.”

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