

The background of the entire page is a stylized American flag. The top half features a blue field with white stars, and the bottom half features red and white vertical stripes. The text is overlaid on this background.

POWER, and GLORY

The muscle car stands for more than just tire smoke. It's the epitome of the American car experience

BY JIM PICKERING

SPEED



MUSCLE THEN, MUSCLE NOW, MUSCLE FOREVER

YOU KNOW IT when you feel it. The rumble that follows the twist of the key and the few pumps of the throttle. The heart of a muscle car has always been under the hood, and it's that ground-shaking heart that sticks with you.

That heart has been hard earned through curb appeal. Through the bright lights of dragstrip dominance and the dark corners of backroad glory. Through parking lot attraction and stoplight swagger. All of it, though, falls back on the visceral attraction of something simple: The sound, the smell and the thrust of fuel turned to horsepower.

And that heart has survived booms and busts, fuel crises, supply challenges, skyrocketing insurance rates, slumping sales and soaring prices. The din of eight cylinders breathing through duals has a way of cutting through the still with the promise of freedom. Of excitement. Performance. Style. It's an enduring reflection of the owners' world as it was and as it is — even so many years after the first performance-oriented machine hit the streets of America.

As for that first performance machine — that first muscle car — the car world remains divided on what exactly it was.

Beginnings

The 1950s jet age brought car dreams into the stratosphere, and stylists were quick to capitalize on a market built for a country that was still fresh from wartime production and grim wartime sacrifices.

Consumers of the '50s were primed to live the life promised to them on the radio and on television: A house in the suburbs for The Greatest Generation and their Boomer children, and a car (or two) to get from A to B. America's might was still fresh, as was the hard-won defeat of fascism.

Harley Earl's Art and Color Division at GM had, by the 1940s, changed the way that America viewed cars. From just prior to the war, each model year had become something to be excited about due to fresh styling, and that expanded in the post-war years. That desire for newer and better carried through the streets of Detroit and beyond. Competition was more important than ever — Victory with a capital V — and style was the first medium to really find a foothold.

A turning point came in 1948, when fins that harkened back to Lockheed's "fork-tailed devil" P-38 were added to the then-new Cadillac. This move by Earl's team at GM kicked off a styling arms race in the American market, with Earl eventually facing off with cross-town rival Virgil Exner at Chrysler, among others, exploring the defining cues of the era: Fins. Bullets. Rockets.

Performance followed suit. GM's Zora Duntov was passing memos about hot rods and Chevrolet's need to gain a performance edge over Ford-loyal dry-lakes and drag racers as early as 1953, and Chrysler Chief Engineer Bob Rodger launched the C-300 — a NASCAR homologation special aimed at track dominance — in 1955. That same year, Corvette gained V8 power for the first time — and by 1957, Rochester fuel injection. Even earlier than that, Hudson's Twin-H Power racers tore up American stock car circuits.

Dual and triple carbs, superchargers and high-lift camshafts brought a performance edge to just about every American automaker by the end of the 1950s.

A defined moment

"What's a muscle car? Normally that's a simple question," says Martyn Schorr, auto writer, editor and PR professional who got his start in the industry as the editor of "Custom Rodder" and "Car Speed & Style" in October of 1960.



"Now you can say the Pontiac GTO was the car that created the field, and it did, however there were muscle cars, or supercars, or high-performance cars long before that. And it depends on your age and your terminology. I tend to look a little further back, and focus on cars like the '49 Oldsmobile. Particularly the coupes, which were available with decent sized V8s and a stick shift. So that would be a car that kicked it off. And then in the '50s, you've got all the Chrysler 300s. They were muscle cars, super cars, whatever you want to call them.

"But Pontiac did such incredible marketing that they really created that field. And the GTO was the car that most people recognize as the car that started the trend. And many ways it did. Because you can option one of the midsize platforms to have just about anything you want in it. Pontiac had an incredible option list that many of the other carmakers didn't. So Pontiac gets the credit, and in most history books, that's how it reads."

The GTO's dominance in this arena came by breaking the rules.

"We were searching for a way to keep the Pontiac image vibrant and youthful," said John DeLorean in Patrick J. Wright's "On a Clear Day You Can See General Motors." "We took the Tempest with two big optional engines, stripped the car down to bare essentials, added heavy-duty brakes and suspension system for safety, added three two-barrel carburetors for performance and readied the car for production. Only this time [Pete] Estes didn't tell the corporation about it... The Engineering Policy Group technically should have been consulted about putting these bigger engines into the intermediate car, but we were afraid that they'd turn us down or take so long to give us their approval that we wouldn't get the car into production on time.



John
DeLorean

“Ad man Wangers personally launched a national GTO promotional campaign centered around a rock group, Ronnie and the Daytonas, whose hit record ‘Little GTO’ sold well over a million singles... the market was filled with GTO shirts, shoes, emblems, and the car and its appeal knocked the youth market over.

“When the corporation management got wind of [the GTO] shortly before it was introduced, it was mad. But the GTO was too late in its development to be stopped,” said DeLorean. “And when the car took the market by storm, The Fourteenth Floor certainly wasn’t going to order us to stop selling it.”

The cars’ performance combined with the media blitz worked, too.

“By the time the GTO came out, that’s all we could talk about,” says Schorr. “And at that point, I was building a street rod – I had more cars than I could afford. It just wasn’t working out. I wasn’t going to buy a muscle car. But I saw the trend, and because I was a magazine editor, I could drive all the muscle cars free. I didn’t have to buy one.”

Jim Taylor of Southern California did buy one.

As he told *Linkage* contributor and photographer Jordan Smith, “At the San Fernando dragstrip, I saw a silver car that had GTO badges on it. This was September or October of ‘63. My last semester in college. And I liked it but I didn’t know who made it. So finally

the magazine articles came out, with ‘Wangers’ Ringer,’ and of course it was a ringer, with a 421 that was blueprinted, and so the performance was just awesome. And I told my wife, ‘Man, we know where to go now!’

“Well, then, this is my family car, but I was still going to the races — not driving, but watching. And I said, ‘I can’t race this while I’m paying for it. It has a three-year payment, right?’ Well, that lasted about five or six months. I couldn’t stand it anymore. We went to San Fernando and I raced it with street tires. Ran 14.90. Then I borrowed some slicks and it ran 14.34.”

Over the years, Taylor worked over the engine using Pontiac’s over-the-counter parts and got his GTO to go even faster.

“It ran a 12.65 at 109. And that’s with factory parts. For street racing, people would look inside and see all that stock stuff and say ‘that thing can’t run.’ My challenge was getting people to race because they didn’t think I could compete against them... until I beat enough guys, and then it was, ‘Here comes Old Man Taylor, watch out!’”

Taylor’s love for competition, which started with that GTO, eventually drove him to buy a second car — this one a Tempest — now fitted with over 500 cubic inches of Pontiac power and capable of 9-second quarter-mile times.

And over 50 years later, he still fires up that first ‘64 GTO.

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A golden era

Pontiac's GTO was soon joined by midsize entries from every automaker in the country, all in an effort to capture a burgeoning market.

"Pontiac started a revolution," says Schorr. "And it didn't take long for Olds and Chevrolet to try to do the same thing. And Chrysler of course. And Ford tried, but Ford struggled with the 390 engine in the Fairlane because it wasn't much of a car. But the GTO in marketing was a major impact on the youth market. Major."

Another turning point came in 1965, when Chevrolet shoehorned its then-new Mark IV 396-ci "Mystery Motor" big-block into a short run of mid-size A-body Malibus. These cars were also fitted with heavy-duty convertible frames and B-body brakes, among other special parts. In total, 201 of these cars were fitted with the Z16 package. The 396 pushed the limits of Chevrolet's 400-ci edict on midsize cars and created what would become Chevrolet's Chevelle SS 396, which would hit the scene in much larger production numbers in '66 and '67.

For Pontiac, success meant bringing the brand's upmarket style to the muscle market, and the GTO gained price tags to match its option list through the end of the decade. Plymouth, on the other hand, aimed their muscle decidedly downmarket, with Road Runners that generally featured rubber mats and few power options other than a 383, 440 or 426 Hemi V8.

Mopar mania and dreams of speed

For Chrysler fanatics, there's nothing with more sway than the street Hemi, which hit the scene in 1966 after Max-Wedge 413 and 426-ci race Hemi dragstrip dominance earlier in the decade. The 426 street Hemi launched in the B-body in '66 due to NASCAR homologation requirements, but Chrysler's engineers had also seen the Z16 Chevelle and knew of Chevrolet's subsequent larger SS 396

A photograph of a pink Dodge Charger driving on a paved road. The car is viewed from a front-three-quarter angle, moving towards the viewer. The background shows a clear sky and some distant trees.

Charger is tickled pink over its new lower price.

Even with new, slightly extra-cost Panther Pink paint, Charger is priced lower than last year. How come? Because of changes like a front bench seat instead of bucket seats. (Don't think of it as losing buckets, you're gaining an extra passenger.) And the door pockets are gone. The garnish moulding on the windows is simpler. And the electric clock is now optional. Still, Charger remains basically the Charger you remember. The shape. The hidden headlights. Racing gas cap. Full instrumentation with readably round dials. Heavy-duty suspension with calmly predictable handling. If you want the tracking any flatter, you'll have to go to Charger R/T. 1970 Dodge Charger. Our classic Super Shape . . . no matter what color it is.

program, which was in turn a basic carbon copy of DeLorean's '64 GTO plan. Why mess with success?

"Mopar was kind of the underdog choice. People are very loyal to Mopar for whatever reason..." says collector, restorer and author Colin Comer. "It's just a little bit different. They had a good formula. Very lightweight cars. Inexpensive, lightweight torsion bar suspension and all of that stuff.

"But they were an engineering company. They had some serious power. They had a \$2,900 car with a cartoon character on the side that people were buying like hotcakes... The Road Runner was a cheap, inexpensive muscle car, and they were selling them. It's that formula. They had crazy colors. Crazy names. The Hemi obviously was top dog, even though you had LS6 Chevelles and stuff, you open the hood on a Hemi car, and visually... that's a motor."



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RUMBLE BEE

Want to start something? Try a hot combined 383 cubic inch in a light coupe body. Just for looks, throw in the heavy-duty suspension, oversized brakes, a brute of a head, bumblebee stripes — the works. It's tough. Check the price. Good news! Dodge has started something all right. Super Bee. Why all these dreaming when you could be running? See the man with the cars with the bumblebee stripes. Your Dodge Dealer.

STANDARD SUPER BEE EQUIPMENT

- Special 4-bar, 383-cu V8 (has the 440 Magnum V8 heads, valve gear, hot cam, and manifolds), 335 hp at 5200 rpm
- Dual exhausts • 4 on the floor manual with 140 clutch
- 140 suspension • 140 shocks • 140 brakes • Dodge Charger Rallye instrument panel • 170 x 14 Wide Treads.

OPTIONAL
The Horn-425 hp.

Dodge Cool Pink
— the cool with the Bumblebee stripes

DRIVE SAFELY...
SPEED CONTESTS BELONG ON THE STRIP

Dodge **CHRYSLER**

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Bigger and badder became the mantra. And it didn't take long for owners to work over their own cars for more power — or to source it from companies that didn't work within the same constraints and rules as the OEMs — Dealer/tuners such as Nickey and Yenko.

"In 1966... '67, I co-founded the Baldwin-Motion brand with Joel Rosen, so I was involved with doing their advertising and marketing from '67 to about '72, when Baldwin Chevrolet closed," says Martyn Schorr. "We were doing cars that people dreamed about. Didn't matter how much horsepower you wanted, you could have it. Those were the golden years, between '67 and '70."

"My first muscle car... I had a '67 Olds 442," says collector and performance guru Ken Lingenfelter. "Manual trans. Fawn Beige, no vinyl top. It was a really, really cool car, and it was very, very fast. I spent a bunch of time at the dragstrip when I was working and going to school and such, so my weekends were drag racing and street racing... unfortunately... I don't know if you can say that now..."

"I was a teenager during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The ultimate car... I had a '69 SS 396/375-horse Camaro, and oh my goodness that car was so, so cool. I got expelled from my high school for drag racing it right out in front of the school."

A high point

Bright paint options and creative advertising bolstered Chrysler's factory efforts, alongside Coke bottle "fuselage" shapes that hit the scene starting in '68. The Hemi became a legend that was hard to catch — although the automakers all tried. Chevrolet dropped a 454-ci big-block in its Chevelle in '70, and Buick, Olds and Pontiac all added 455s to their A-body variants at the same time.

"I think, if you're looking for a high point, it probably was 1970," says Schorr. "1970 was the storm before the calm, because then



compression ratios started going down. The EPA started tightening the screws, and we started seeing lower horsepower and all that kind of stuff. In '70, just about every carmaker was on the street with something quick and fast, and Pontiac was there, but they couldn't compete with Buick, and they couldn't compete with Chrysler for sure."

"1969 was a good year for a lot of cars," says Comer. "Hemis went to hydraulic lifters. They lost the solid-lifter cam [for '70]. A 1969 Ford Mustang Boss 429 is better than a '70 Boss 429 in terms of performance. But '71 or '72, or even a '73 Super Duty Pontiac is in a lot of ways better than a '69 or a '70."

"But overall, on balance, I would say 1970 is probably the peak. You have the 426 Hemi. You have the LS6. Ram Air IV GTO. W-30s were a big deal. They were all making big power and you had some chassis engineering to go with it. We were starting to see the dawn of cars that could go around a corner, as well as having the right powertrain. And the colors — it's hard to beat the orange Judge with the orange, pink and blue stripes. Or a Sublime Hemi car... whatever your poison is."

Armageddon

Just as the classic muscle era hit that high point, a flurry of events ended the party.

You can blame any one of them for taking substantial tolls: Federal crash standards were changing the ways cars looked. The EPA was beginning to crack down on smog and emissions, which meant that the days of competition as a driver of sales were numbered. Insurance rates had skyrocketed due to the number of



high-performance and Day-Two modified machines on the street — and the associated carnage that come with the poor choices that followed them. And by '72, that first-generation muscle car buyer had grown up. At least a little.

But most substantial of all of these, at least for muscle car owners, was the 1973 Oil Crisis, when OAPC created an embargo that targeted the U.S. because of its support of Israel in the Yom Kippur War. Prices shot up nearly 300% per barrel of oil by 1974 — and the resulting financial impact of a 454-ci Chevelle's or 440-ci Challenger's single-digit fuel economy can't be overstated.

When it comes to the decline of original muscle, "the government is a convenient whipping boy," says author and muscle car expert Diego Rosenberg. "The truth is much more complicated."

"After 1968 (when many production records were set), production for sporty and performance cars was declining at a rapid pace. The GTO went from over 80k built in 1968 to 40k in 1970. A basic pony car like the Mustang convertible went from over 73k cars in 1965 to 25k in 1968 to 7.6k in 1970. Clearly the market was changing.

"Insurance was influencing purchases too, which is why, by 1970, several cosmetic supercars started reaching the market. Now you could have the tough looks without the insurance surcharge from a big-block.

"Both of those things influenced sales before low-compression, emissions-laden engines started affecting performance. Of course, the performance hit in 1971-72 was not as great as purported in earlier times of the hobby, but any issues could have been solved by average enthusiasts who were good with their hands.

"So that declining market — what were people buying instead?

Some folks now had families and, hence, different needs. Others were tempted by sporty, luxurious vehicles like the Monte Carlo, Cougar and Charger, with the latter two moving towards the personal-luxury realm when redesigned for 1971 — look how both of those models evolved a few years later. Different times, different values."

"The insurance expense, as I remember, got so outrageous that it became unaffordable, even with the jobs I had," says Lingenfelter. "It was difficult to afford. And if you had anything on your record, in some cases you just plain couldn't get insured. Period. And I believe that had a bearing. A pretty large bearing. I also think the auto companies rode the high end pretty well and flooded it, and overdid it, and put too many out there. I had to alter my plans, and alter what I intended to do."

"I was concerned because I owned the cars, and I saw the rapid shortage of Sunoco 260," says Schorr. "I saw the unleaded gas coming in, and leaded gas being on the endangered species list, so I thought the down trend was real, and I think at that point, either '70 or '71, I got involved with Joel Rosen at Motion on starting Motion Minicar, because we saw the potential for more of the modification work that was done to high-performance cars will be done to VWs and Toyotas and stuff like that, so we opened up... we held the H/ Gas National Record for a long time with Volkswagens. But that was going to be the trend.

"In 1970 and '71 we started changing the direction of 'Cars' magazine... to get more drag racing stuff," says Schorr. "More pro-stock. That kind of stuff because we were seeing the decline of muscle cars, which had been a base of our magazine. So we changed. And like anything else, trends change after X amount of years."

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Keeping the dream alive

But for all the factors that led to the decline of Detroit-built muscle, the cars were here to stay — sold at a discounted rate to a new generation of fanatic who chased after them for the same reasons their original owners did.

"I worked in a garage where the coolest cars that came in were muscle cars," says Colin Comer. "Growing up in the 1970s and '80s, they were a lot cooler than anything that was being made at the time.

"It was the speak softly and carry a big stick thing. There was a guy in my neighborhood who had a Ram Air IV GTO. I never saw him hit the throttle, but we knew he could.

"I became enamored with the old stuff we worked on. The GTOs. The 442s. There was a W-30 442 that we worked on. There was a Ram Air IV GTO. There was a '65 GTO Tri-Power. In Milwaukee Wisconsin, that's what I was exposed to."

"I was in high school in the mid 1980s," says Mike Musto, the former host of /BIG MUSCLE for the /DRIVE channel, the man behind The House of Muscle and the Director of New Media for Hemmings. "And it was great because we had everything from 1965 and 1966 Mustangs to '70s Trans Ams to IROC Camaros and Fox-bodies. And they were the cars that made an impression on me. We had this one section where everybody would leave high school, and when you left, you would pull up, and anybody with a car that could do it would do a burnout. Anyone, right? It was a right of passage. You'd leave high school at the end of the day and just rip the back wheels off it.

"I grew up partially in Brooklyn and partially out on eastern Long Island and in Queens," says Musto. "And muscle cars... that was it. Street racing was huge, we used to do a lot of it. It was the sounds, honestly. The sounds and the styles. That's what it was. It was something that, if you think about the mid-'80s and that era, it was that whole period where you went from carburetion into technology. So you had cars in the early '80s that had digital dashboards and would talk to you. And then you had these big pavement thumpers, you know, big Cragars. 15x10s in the back with 295 Mickey Thompsons and stuff. It was just a very cool time to be an adolescent, and morphing into a car guy."

From muscle to malaise — and back

In 1970s Detroit, chasing sales evolved into chasing economy rather than excitement.

The shift toward economical transportation, overseas influences and personal luxury defined American car production in the later 1970s and early 1980s.

But at the same time, among the suits and ties in the halls of Detroit's sprawling engineering complexes, the heart of muscle was still alive — and now it brought with it new technology to meet the demands of a new time.

In 1978, the Buick Regal gained a turbo option, and in 1982, the Grand National was launched. By '84, it had become an all-black monster. At Ford, the Fox platform ended the scourge of the Mustang II in '79.

"Then the Grand National came out," says Comer, "... and the 5.0 Mustang came out, and that was the new stuff.

"It was tremendous. Seeing those ads. It's etched in my brain, that when Ford came out with the 5.0 that said 'The Boss is Back,' and they had the ad that was for the Mustang 5.0 cop car, and the ad said



This Ford C

Over the past eighteen years, Ford Mustang has earned the reputation as one of America's favorite sports cars.

This year, when California's Highway Patrol needed a fleet of 400 high-performance,

special pursuit highways safe,

This pursuit by a 5.0 liter, 1 from zero to 50

'This Mustang chases Porsches for a living.' And I was like, alright, I'm in."

"The first car I crashed was a Fox-body..." says Musto. "It was an '81 Capri, and I promptly wrapped that around a telephone pole. [As a kid], the only thing I ever wanted to do was drive a car. As a kid, they just left a massive impression. And I think it was the styles, and the colors, and where I grew up. None of the cars in Brooklyn or Queens were nice. There were some nice ones. But most of them



Chases Porsches For A Living.

vehicles to help keep their 1982 Mustangs got the job. suit Mustang, powered high-output engine, accelerates 0 in 6.3 seconds.

Mustang's rack and pinion steering, MacPherson struts, coil springs and anti-sway bar provide the kind of responsive, precise and safe road handling needed in pursuit operations.

In short, Ford Mustang means total driving performance.

There could be a Mustang in your future, too. Even if you don't chase Porsches for a living.



There's A Ford In America's Future.

were just street racers. There were all kinds of mixed color fenders and quarter panels, and most were dented up. And there was rust everywhere. But they were fast, you know what I mean?

"I think the resurgence was definitely in the early '80s, as cliché as it sounds, with cars like the Fox-body. That was one of the first cars that you could still do... like it came out, and immediately it would do burnouts, right? Whether it was an '82 square eye or the '87s and the more sculpted GTs, those were the ones. And it was interesting,

because back then, especially in the early '80s, if you had a muscle car from the '60s and '70s, yes they were cool, but most people just thought they were old and that you didn't have a lot of money, and that's why you drove it. Whereas when the IROCs came out and the GNs came out, that was all cutting-edge stuff.

"When the Buick Grand National came out, in '84-'85, everybody was like 'it's turbocharged? And it's a 6? Nobody's going to buy that!' And then they just destroyed everything on the street. Honestly, to



The ['87] GNX was incredibly quick, and incredibly fast ... And Chevrolet was really pissed. And it all boiled down to a bumper sticker that we did, that said, 'We brake for Corvettes.' That didn't go over very well.

me, the Grand National was probably the most pivotal point where technology met muscle and transformed the era.

"It was the first race I almost lost on a motorcycle... It was to a buddy in a Grand National. I was on an old Ducati... I just remember taking off and he was right next to me, and I was like, 'what the f@*# is that thing?!' And then I found out."

A turbocharged revolution

"The Buick Grand National existed because there was NASCAR involvement with Buick, with Bobby Allison, etc," says Schorr, who was Buick's East Coast PR representative during the Grand National program. "The original Grand National was nothing but a dressed-up Regal. And then the Grand National grew to its own brand almost, and used a turbocharged V6... basically the turbo V6 development was all part of the program that was used for racing, so there was carryover."

The goal, at least for Buick's engineers, was to break rules and step on toes.

They were going to beat GM's halo Corvette with a muscle sedan, which was not something GM's suits would appreciate.

Once again, performance competition between automakers roared to life.

"Buick was able to take a V6 and make it perform like a V8," says Schorr. "And that was the key... in '86, '87, '88, '89... the showcase feature at so many tracks was 5.0 Mustangs and Grand Nationals.

"The ['87] GNX was incredibly quick, and incredibly fast, and caused an incredible amount of problems at Buick and at General Motors. Chevrolet was pissed at us because the car was quicker

than the Corvette, and I promoted a lot of comparison tests with Callaway Corvettes, which it would beat, and other stuff like that. And Chevrolet was really pissed. And it all boiled down to a bumper sticker that we did, that said, 'We brake for Corvettes.' That didn't go over very well."

Evolution

The 5.0, Grand National and the GNX proved the muscle car formula was still valid, and muscle car devotees planted inside the automakers ran with it into the 1990s.

Guys like Jon Moss at GM and John Coletti at Ford brought us a new era of performance from Ford's SVT and the GM Performance division, and over at Dodge, Bob Lutz launched the ground-pounding 400-hp Viper to massive public acclaim.

At the same time, the classic muscle world began a renaissance in the 1980s and '90s, with owners beginning to buy and restore classic examples.

"Next thing I knew people were restoring muscle cars and they were being sold for a lot of money," says Schorr. "People didn't give a s@\$ about unleaded gas and they made do. What you have today is an incredible interest in muscle cars, and you can tell that from the auctions."

Today, new muscle car sales are booming, with Dodge, GM, and Ford selling ever faster and ever more powerful computerized muscle to a market that's hungry for more, even in a changing social environment.

Electrification has entered the fold, too — with varied responses.

"I don't think traditional car people, muscle car people, will look at anything electric and think it's a muscle car," says Comer. "I think they're going to look at it and go, 'This is a great tribute to a muscle car. A great ode to a muscle car.' They're going to go, 'holy s@\$ this thing is fast, it does the quarter in 8 seconds. But I don't think they're going to go, 'yeah, I think this is what a muscle car is.'"

Meanwhile, classic muscle car values continue to climb, with rare and well-restored examples bringing strong pricing from a range of buyers — not just traditionalists. But while 100% correct numbers-matching examples tend to steal headlines at auctions due to their assigned values, that market is also changing.



Garrett Reed, the man behind the AmericanMuscleHD account on Instagram

"I think what's next is that people who get these muscle cars are not going to be afraid to modernize them to use them," says Comer. "I think we're going to move out of the 'it has to be a Mopar Nationals OE Gold car' to being like, 'OK, this car won all the awards, now I'm going to put radial tires on it, aluminum driveshaft, a bigger radiator, maybe I'll throw air conditioning on it, because at the end of the day, if I want to sell it, I'll just take all that crap off.'"

"It seems like people are less afraid of ruining some precious artifact now, and doing sympathetic stuff to them to keep using

them, and I think that's driving the market because people are driving them and enjoying them. There's still something that's inherently good about them... or inherently fun."

Better than ever

"If you're a muscle car enthusiast, you're in the greatest time in history," says Musto.

"If you can think it, you can literally do it on a muscle car. And when you look at auctions right now, it used to be matching-numbers stuff. Well the matching-numbers stuff will still bring a price. But look at what Resto-Mods are going for. Look at LS-swapped Camaros and Hemi-swapped Chargers, and Coyote-swapped Mustangs are going for. They are bringing insane prices because we want to have our cake and eat it too. And for the first time in history with a muscle car, we can.

"I've been invited all over the world to drive cars. I went to Dubai to film an F100 Prerunner pickup in the desert along with a '68 Bullitt fastback. And these guys... Yes, they had Lamborghinis and Ferraris... they didn't give a s@*\$. You pull up in a Mustang. A Camaro. A Charger. Or like a '50s Cadillac or a GTO and they lost their minds. It really does represent a freedom era in America that we haven't seen again.

"The beauty of the muscle car is that it will always be romanticized. That's one of my favorite things about it. They will always have this amazing place in history. I don't think there's anything that epitomizes American car culture greater than the muscle car."

The appeal isn't lost on newer generations, either.

"I don't know what my entry was," says Garrett Reed, the 29-year-old behind the AmericanMuscleHD account on Instagram, which now has over 2.3 million followers. "From just being a fan of cars when I was a child. I don't know if it was classic muscle cars that really drew me in initially, or if it was the late-model stuff that was of the time when I was a kid, like the Viper, the C5 Corvette, the new edge Mustang, the 2000 Cobra R. As I got older and learned more about older muscle cars, that's where my love and my passion went.

"Between, say, 1967 to 1971. That's my prime," says Reed.



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The beauty of the muscle car is that it will always be romanticized. That's one of my favorite things about it. They will always have this amazing place in history. I don't think there's anything that epitomizes American car culture greater than the muscle car.





Doc and Jordan Smith

“And there’s a good mixture of that in my following. Everybody appreciates the classics... the originals. But a lot of them that are my age maybe don’t own one, because they’re expensive to own and restore. A lot of people my age are owning late-model stuff from the last 10 or 15 years. Same reason why I didn’t buy a ’67 Chevelle the first time I had the option to build something oldschool. I couldn’t afford to buy one, first and foremost, so I decided to do something that I could afford, which was a Monte Carlo... a G-body.

“I think they’re always going to be around,” says Reed of muscle cars. “They’re not going anywhere. It’s just the hope that generations of people — I’ll be 30 in a year and a half — it’s that kids that are younger than me will appreciate them. I still do — I’m just waiting to have the funds to be able to afford what I want.”

New beginnings

In the midst of a changing market and changing world, the origin story and the heart live on.

“Growing up, my foster dad Doc had a bunch of old muscle cars,” says *Linkage* contributor Jordan Smith. “My favorite was the 1965 GTO. It was a blue mist. It was beautiful. Had a light blue interior. That’s the car in which Doc taught me how to drive a stick. I love the sound of it, the design, the stacked headlights and the straight bodylines.”

Jordan found a GTO of his own — a ’65 Royal Bobcat that had been once owned by GTO ad man Jim Wangers himself.

“Starting the car, it takes me back to a time when I would drive around Dallas with Doc. The sound, and the rattling and shaking as you’re in the car, just rumbling at a stoplight, just itching to go. It was the experience of a lifetime as a kid. It was just so different. So unique.

“The experience of driving the ’65, particularly the Royal Bobcat, is the transition from the single carburetor in the center, to all three carburetors waking up when you get more than halfway on the throttle... That progressive linkage. It goes from angry to just ruthless. And it changes the dynamic of the car completely, from something that has potential to something that’s just nasty and aggressive and will kill you in a heartbeat.

“That’s the experience I like. The pure power, the responsiveness of the throttle, the high compression from the thinner head gaskets that Royal Pontiac put in there.

“And when you’re driving a car like that, you’re the center of attention. Everybody wants to stop and take a picture, and talk cars, and that’s part of the experience for me, too. It’s meeting the fellow car enthusiasts and sharing that piece of history with other people.” ∞