

# CAR OF THE QUARTER . . . March 1999

'69 Dodge Charger..... by Don Kosuda

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In March of 1992, I spotted a '69 Dodge Charger SE at the Handi Stop near Seguin, TX. I had owned two other Chargers in the past: a '70 Charger RT 426 Street Hemi and a '73 Charger SE 400; but the '69 was one Charger I always thought was special. It wasn't too pretty when I first saw it. The metallic bronze paint was faded and the rear window drain channel and the trunk floor was rusted out. It had at least a hundred door dings up and down both sides of the car. The interior that was originally Saddle (tan) appeared to be gray and when I opened the hood--no motor or radiator! Further checking indicated the original motor was a 383 2-barrel Automatic with A/C. It was loaded with options, including power disc brakes and even a rear window defogger. It was a one-owner California car that still had 1982 plates on it. That probably explained the heavy, heavy undercoating underneath the body (west coast salt). Incidentally, 1969 was the first year for the "Special Edition" option. I bought the car for \$700.

This was to be my first attempt at restoration and I thought it might be fun. I took the car to a body shop and had the rear window channel and trunk floor repaired. I then started looking for a painter. Danny Zoeller, a friend who was in my Sunday school class, offered to paint the car if I would do the hard work of sanding. He said he would show me how to correctly sand. I jumped at his offer because I knew Danny had built and owned some of the finest Street Rods in this part of the country. I took the car to his home and put the Charger in the garage. And little did I know how much work was involved. Danny kept spraying the primer and I kept sanding; sanding; and sanding. I can't tell you how many hours were spent sanding but the car was at his house for about three months. One night while I was sanding, the phone rang. It was one of Danny's classic car spotters calling from New York. Danny said I could quit sanding if I wanted to. The guy from New

York will pay \$5,000 for the Charger. I thought about it, but said, "I think I will keep it." I did get tired and sore from all the sanding and it might have taken even longer if my son, Bryan, had not helped. Bryan picked out the color. He said, "Dad, if it's going to be fast, it's got to be red."

Danny sprayed the Charger with PPG Deltron Urethane paint. No clear coat was used. When the paint dried, I'm back sanding again. This time with 1500 grit paper. After that, Danny buffed it out to a mirror finish. I was not too sure about the color, but it turned out to be Bright Red--just what I wanted.

I brought the car home and went to John's Salvage and bought a '71 440 motor out of a 71 Chrysler Imperial. I started making calls to old racers and engine builders that I remembered from my racing days in the 60's. Some of them had helped in the past with my '66 Coronet Hemi drag car, which North Star Dodge sponsored. My goal for the Charger was to be able to cruise the streets and still be respectable at the drag strip.

The 440 is .30 over with TRW forged pistons; 346 heads-pocket ported; Mopar 284° Hyd. Cam with ADJ. Rockers, Weiand Dual plane Manifold; Holly 750 Carb. Mopar Performance Electronic Ignition; Accel Coil; Hooker Super Competition Headers, 2-1/2" Exh. with Dyna Max Mufflers-rebuilt 727 TF with Shift Kit and 5.1 Hemi Kick-Down Lever; A-1 2400 -2800" Loose" converter; 489 Rear Carrier with 3.91 Sure-grip, with MT ET Slicks. Best E.T. was 12.79, 106.77 at Houston Raceway Park at 55°. Last summer at 105° at Houston Raceway Park, it ran 13.05-105.78 MPH.

The Charger is really fun to drive. It has been completely reliable and never calls in sick. Plans for the future include freshening up and updating the motor with the latest technology. I also enjoy taking the Charger to a few car shows every year. I really enjoy visiting with everyone and have never met a Mopar guy or lady I didn't like.

This year, the Club has chosen the Charger to be the theme car for the '99 Club Show. It is a great honor to represent our Club in this manner. The success this car has had, I owe to the Lord, my family, and my friends.

Hope to see everyone at the Charger Registry Show on June 5th and 6th at Boerne, TX.