

CAR OF THE QUARTER . . .

'71 Dodge Charger R/T by Lee Zimmerman



Back sometime in 1985 and being a member of the San Antonio Mopar Club, a club member named Erick S. told the members at a meeting the whereabouts of a 1971 Charger R/T. At the time I was driving a 1972 Charger and a 1973 Satellite. The next day after work I drove to the location where Erick reported the Charger to be and there it was. I saw a 1971 hemi orange colored keyed bumpers louvered hood charger R/T. It rested on four flat tires and under a pecan tree in a backyard. I parked and knocked on the door. No one home so I left my name and phone number on a piece of paper and slipped it under the door. I received a call the next day from the brother of the owner. The owner was deceased and the car was for sale. I bought it for two thousand and had a wrecker haul it home. After a through inspection I replaced the carb, tires, plug wires and cleaned up the engine compartment. It's stripes were cracked and paint faded and the vinyl was rotted off. The interior was in good condition with the typical black cracked dash panel and cleaned up well. The slotted exhaust tips were rusted but still had the hemi orange paint visible through the slots. It started up and I delivered it to an old high school buddy of mine who worked as a mechanic for his father. He took it for a test drive with me onboard down Old Laredo Highway and stopped every

so often to tune the carb and adjust the distributor. It ran almost good as new and peeled rubber. Not bad for over a 100,000 miles.

I used it for daily driving to work and took it to Columbus the following year in July to the Mopar Nat'l. On my way home I stopped in Orange, TX. to get breakfast at McDonalds and as I was leaving the engine stopped. What happened? A couple of young men helped me push it back into the parking lot and I thanked them. After they left I started to check under the hood for the problem. Everything looked fine. Got fire, fuel air....what? I was approached by an old fellow and he introduced himself to me as a retired oil man. He started checking out the engine and poured some ether into the crankcase. It still would not start. So we figured the chain had slipped. He said he owned a storage facility and there the car was hauled. We made an agreement I would pay him for one month storage and he helped me get a bus home with my belongings. The following weekend me and dad got a trailer and picked up the car. I thanked the oil man and paid him. We stopped in Fort Worth and rested at Allen Vasut's home then headed home.

The following weekend I pulled the engine and disassembled it. This was no ordinary 440. It had a strange harmonic balancer with some kind of

C- shaped weight welded to it. It had the 6-packed rods, 10-over pistons and 10K milling on the rod journals. It had the cast #352 heads which I replaced with #906 harden seats and stainless valves. .60 over pistons Keith Black to keep it at 12-1 and milled block and heads with aluminum gaskets. Added is a hemi fuel pump, electronic ignition and Edelbrock carb. Cam is a Lunati and heads cc'd to within 83.5. Tires are P235 SR rated Goodyear on Enkia aluminum 15x8. Trans. is 727 Tork. with 11" TCI converter and new internals.

Future plans call for a replaced rear-surround window sheet metal, full body straightening, new quarters, new paint and stripes applied. Additional goodies not equipped with the car for add on as I see fit and in the mood are: Air -Grabber hood, new engine, new trans, new rear, disc all around and new interior.

I have owned more than a hundred '71 through '72 chargers and a few other Mopars but currently own only four '71 chargers. Of these owned: 6 R/T's, 2 Rally and various SE's, auto. and manual. Over 80 are documented with the Charger registry.

My current project is to finish assembly of my '71 4-speed, 383 SE Charger and a donor for my '71 hemi engine. Time will tell.