

CAR OF THE QUARTER . . . June 1997

'69 Barracuda..... by Paul Gaspard



"Oh, what a rush!" Yes, that's what I felt when I first fired up the magnificent 440. The exhilaration of a freshly built big block through open headers is totally unbelievable. Now to tell you a little about this newfound ecstasy. Growing up in the 50s and 60s was one heck of an experience. I remember the horsepower wars between all the mighty auto manufacturers. I liked them all, but my favorite was always the magnificent Mopars. Their fine lines on the street and their awesomeness at the track proved that these cars were for lovers of finely crafted automobiles. Hurst 300s, Ramchargers, Super Stockers, Chargers, Road Runners, GTXs, Dart GTSSs, Chargers, Sport Furys, Sport Sattelites, Dusters, Demons, and Barracudas. What's in a name? Think about the list I just mentioned. Power and speed are synonymous with these names. And a name that really caught my eye and ear was 'Ba-Ba-Ra-Ra-Cu-Cu-Da-Da'. I really didn't care for the '64-'66 body styles particularly. They were nice but didn't catch my eye. But the change in body style in 1967 really made my head spin. The second generation Barracuda was lower and wider than its Valiant-based predecessor. This also allowed the engine compartment to be 2 inches wider - room that would come in handy as Plymouth began shoehorning bigger engines into the Barracuda.

And that's exactly what I decided to do. Hmm! I wonder if a 440 would make this beast move? You see, my original intention was to use the car as a learning project for my son, Josh. But as all teenagers are, he was impatient and I can't say I blame him. I'd rather be driving anything than working on a project that would take the better part of a year to complete. Therefore, good old dad gave up his '73 Rallye Challenger 340 Top Banana ride for his newfound love. My Barracuda was a one owner car that was originally bought in San Antonio and remained here its entire life. Back in 1975, the original owner decided to park the 'Cuda and bought a pickup truck to be able to use it to go to and from work. He left it parked in his front yard in the Marion countryside until he finally gave it up to me. I had approached the gentleman several times with no success. He kept telling me that he wanted to restore it someday. Well someday never came and he finally decided to let it go to a better home in 1990. And I thank him every time I pass near his home.

As I said in the previous paragraph, Josh decided that he wanted to drive right away. Well, this gave me the opportunity to be creative. I originally intended to restore the car to its original condition that we worked on the project jointly. But since the car was now mine to do as I desired, I decided it was *time to play*. My brother-in-law, back in the bayous of Louisiana, found a salvaged '73 Charger just waiting to go to the crusher. "Why the crusher?", you ask. Well, I asked myself the same question. The car was not in bad shape. It had been bottomed out crushing the front valence and pancaking the left front fender. That was it. I jump started the Charger, put it in drive and drove it up onto the trailer. The transmission was on the fritz but who cared. I trailered the car back to Universal City and unloaded it into my tiny garage. The next weekend I yanked the engine and transmission to use in the 'Cuda. I sold the Charger, sans engine and tranny, to a fellow club member for a measly \$x00. It was exactly what he was looking for.

Well, I decided that I didn't want to rebuild the tranny since I was going to completely upgrade the 'Cuda. I had been fortunate enough to locate an 8 3/4" A-body housing that had already had its spring perches moved in for big meats in the fenderwells. Hunt and search, hunt and search and lo and behold, I locate gears and a sure grip assembly at Pick-N-Pull. Believe or not, I found a 3.91 sure-grip in a 489 case in a '71 Dodge P/U with a 225 slant six in it. Must have been a farm truck. Well, my old buddy Wes Pieper was in the process of attempting to upgrade his '70 Challenger's sagging rear springs and sort of goofed. He picked up a set of Super Stock springs but they were for a '68-'69 Barracuda instead of a Challenger. The shorter springs just would not fit. So nice guy like I am, I decided to take them off his hands. I hated to see him stuck with these old junk springs. Yea, right.

As you are all aware, you just don't drop a big block into an A-body. There were several options to choose from: (1) use elephant ears and bolt it up solid, (2) purchase a big-block K-member, or (3) modify a later model ('73-'76) A-body K-member. The modification was very straight forward. Move one mount back 3/4" and the other back 1" and the old 440 drops right in. Once again Pick-N-Pull came to the rescue. I located a '73 Dart Sport with a 318 just begging to be picked over. I pulled K-member, upper and lower control arms, spindles, rotors, calipers, master cylinder, proportioning valve, front sway bar, and manual steering box as an assembly. Who said I was unlucky? Next came the front-end upgrade. I went out to Performance Suspension Technologies and purchased a complete polygraphite bushing/ball joint assembly to make the front-end rock solid. Calipers were rebuilt, new pads, turned the rotors, new wheel bearings, and a new master cylinder ensure that this beast will come to a stop. Notice I didn't mention anything about a vacuum booster for power brakes. No

room. Same story for power steering - no room especially with the 2" CPPA big block underchassis headers. Boy is everything tight. So tight in fact that the driver's side must be installed with a header, starter and steering box as an assembly. Oh, I didn't mention that the big block torsion bars I had also purchased can not go until all this in place. Once again, no room.

Now it was about time to start working out the logistics for the 440. I was able to locate a company out of California setting up a complete engine kit with TRW 10 to 1 pistons in 20/40/60 thousandths sets. The engine had already been bored .030 and really only needed .010 more to clear the slight pitting in the cylinder walls from sitting up. The crank had already been turned .010 and had apparently gotten hot from the bluing on the journals. So this kit was exactly what I was looking for. It came with new connecting rods, piston rings, main and rod bearings, and my choice of camshafts. I selected the Mopar Performance Purple Shaft 284 degree duration .484 lift camshaft to keep from having to notch the flat-top pistons. I didn't want to have any clearance problems. The machine work was done through Ron Pieters of Shavano Performance, and Kendricks Machine Service. Chrysler 906 heads were given a good going over with new brass guides, and a good 30-angle valved job with port matching work done. Carburetion is handles with a Mopar Performance M1 dual plane aluminum manifold saving about 15 pounds from the cast iron unit and providing about 25 additional horses. A Carter AFB 750 CFM carburetor was selected for its good nature on the street. Mopar Performance electronic ignition through an Accel Super Coil and Accel high performance spark plug wires provide the spark to light this beast up.

As I stated earlier, I decided not to rebuild a transmission. I figured that a new car needed a new transmission and torque converter. Well, Bouchillon Performance came to the rescue. Randy Bouchillon delivers all Mopar Performance part at a 25% discount and pay shipping charges. We worked out a deal to have the \$920 big block 727 transmission delivered to a friend's shop for \$673 complete. I surely couldn't pass up this deal. A decent rebuild will cost nearly as much. I located a 2800 RPM stall torque converter to slip between the 330 and tranny to pass the huge amount of torque to be built by this monster.

The interior was kept as original as possible, even keeping the split bench seat and column shifted automatic. I located an excellent dash pad from a fellow Moparite out of the Austin club. Seats were recovered by a friend in Live Oaks, carpets obtained from Barracuda Classics along with the headliner, and real decent door panels were taken out of my '69 parts car. Now the paint is a different story. The car was originally R6 Scorch Red. Well, it didn't have enough pizzazz for me. So I went down to my friends at Auto Color in Converse. Rick and Steve helped me to locate a color that was real close to R6 but had the metallic in it. Well, the color we decided on is called 'Titian Red Metallic'. It is from an '85-'89 Volkswagen. A tremendous amount of thanks must go to my best friend Dewey Perankovich for all his technical and manual assistance in prepping, painting, and polishing the 'Cuda. he did all the magic to give it such a nice shine. Not bad for a home garage job. Now is the time for me to enjoy the fruits of my labor. When I say labor, I do mean labor. This was a tremendously taxing project, but I wouldn't trade it for the world. The results are extremely gratifying and the comments from everyone I meet makes it all worth while. I would like to thank everyone for allowing me to share the joy of my lifelong dream.