



ABOVE: Ron Makovich bought his gold '70 Camaro new (a base model, because "it was all I could afford with a young family"). He's kept it pristine all these years, and recently his son Jeff bought an unrestored, low-mile, original Citrus Green Camaro SS, "Because I always loved Dad's Camaro, and wanted one of my own." Undeniable truth: like father, like son.

BELOW: If you bleed Ford blue, then the Cobra Jet Invitational was sure to spin your crank! Some of the rarest 351, 428, and 429 Blue Oval muscle could be found here.

MCAACN 2021

ANOTHER INCREDIBLE GATHERING OF
THE GREATEST MUSCLE CARS... EVER!

WORDS BY CHUCK HANSON • PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHUCK HANSON AND GARY GERSTNER



IT'S EASY TO BECOME JADED WHILE WALKING THE FLOOR AT THE MUSCLE Car and Corvette Nationals (MCACN). There are so many incredible exhibits of the most obscure, most powerful, and most wonderfully restored and preserved muscle machines on the planet. It's easy to get caught up in the excitement of the event and find yourself gawking at one extreme example, while walking right past another that would otherwise stop you in your tracks at any other gathering. Not that there's anything even remotely comparable to MCACN.

After the 2020 event was cancelled due to COVID-19, it was tentatively rescheduled for November 2021. Eventually it got the go-ahead (with some restrictions in place due to the pandemic), and the exposition returned November 20-21 to the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont, Illinois, much to the delight of muscle car enthusiasts around the world. That's right, MCACN has captured the attention and affection of the international automotive community, and thousands flock to the event from all corners of our planet to witness what some have called the greatest car show, ever. If you've attended in person, it's an assertion that's difficult to disagree with.

In the past, MCACN has presented special displays of extraordinary groupings such as Plymouth and Dodge "wing" cars, '70 LS6 Chevelle convertibles, supercharged Studebakers, Ford Cobra Jets, and even a contingent of AMC muscle.

This year, a display of Challenger T/A and 'Cuda AAR models comprised an AAR & T/A Invitational. Meanwhile, Pontiac aficionados were treated to a gathering of Pontiac's Ram Air Firebirds. Another dedicated display featured Ford and Mercury 428, 429, and 351 Cobra Jet models, but one of our favorites was the 1966-'67 Olds W-30 display presented by "The Syndicate." More than 30 examples of these rare "civilized super-cars" were on display for all to admire and appreciate. It seems no matter what your favorite flavor of muscle is, you're certain to find something to fill your plate and satisfy your hunger.

The show also includes celebratory 50-year "Class of" displays that center on model year anniversaries coinciding with the calendar for that year's event. Because of last year's cancellation, attendees at the revitalized event were treated to displays commemorating the "Class(es) of" 1970 and 1971, making up for 2020's "missing" 50th milestone.

While competition in muscle car showrooms back in the day was keen, competition on the strip was razor sharp. There were plenty of vintage dragstrip specimens at the event to ogle, and attendees had a chance to meet some of their hero drivers. Several drag racing legends showed up this year, including Butch "The California Flash" Leal; Arnie "The Farmer" Beswick; Herb "Mr. Four-Speed" McCandless; and driver of the *Hemi Under Glass* wheelie cars, Bob Riddle.

There were also several muscle machines currently competing in events such as the Pure Stock Muscle Car Drags (PSMCD) and on the Factory Appearing Stock Tire (F.A.S.T.) circuit. As cool as it is to see perfectly preserved and restored factory muscle, it's also gratifying to know that some are still being used in quarter-mile competition that they were designed for.

So, while MCACN has been held the weekend before Thanksgiving in Rosemont, Illinois (next to O'Hare International Airport) since its inception, there is talk of changing the dates to an earlier time, giving participants and spectators alike a bit more separation between the event and the holiday season that follows it. If that should occur, we'll report the new dates here in *HMM* as soon as that information becomes available. In the meantime, sit back and enjoy the coverage of this year's event, and keep your calendar open to attend next year's gathering of the greatest!



This brace of blue 'Birds was part of the Ram Air Firebirds exhibit, organized by Pontiac Historic Services honcho Jim Mattison. The display also included several rare first-gen examples.



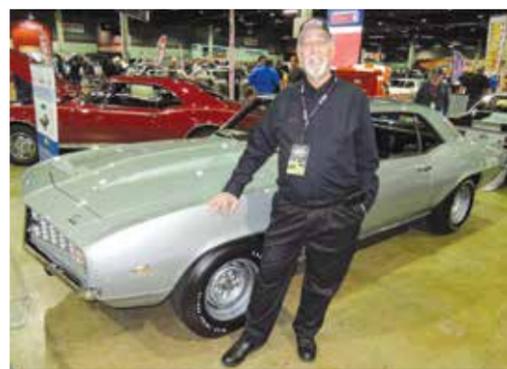
The Hurst Hemi Under Glass Barracuda is arguably the most famous wheelstander ever and was enthusiastically embraced by the MCACN crowd. With driver Bob Riggle available to answer questions and sign autographs, the car was an object of perpetual popularity.



According to certification by the Pontiac Historical Society, this is the very first '69 Firebird Trans Am, built in the Van Nuys, California, plant a month prior to commencing production at the Norwood, Ohio, plant. Surprisingly, it wasn't sold to a customer until July 20, 1970, as an "out of service" company car, long after other later-built T/As were already in customers' hands.



Terry Pennington's '69 Corvette, which runs an ET of 9.37 @ 146.10, is touted as the fastest Corvette to compete in F.A.S.T. (Factory Appearing, Stock Tire) competition; the grunt comes from an L88-based big-block that now displaces 560-cu.in. The Mishawaka, Indiana, resident makes regular appearances in the F.A.S.T. winner's circle.



When Don Martens went shopping for his first car back in '76, the Ohio resident came across a small-block-powered '69 Camaro he liked, so he bought it. It also had a cowl induction hood, a big-block heater core, a four-speed, and a 12-bolt rear axle. Later, he saw a list of ZL-1 VINs, and noted his was among them. Serious parts collecting and a full restoration ensued, with the finished product seen here. Lucky guy!



Dragstrip heroes were available to meet fans, take pictures and sign autographs. One of the most popular was Butch "The California Flash" Leal, who gladly complied with requests.



ONE OF (N)ONE!

This is the '65 Chevelle that was (supposedly) never built: Now you know differently. Owned by Tennessee resident Mike Smith, the Chevelle 300 two-door sedan was ordered by Mike's uncle, "Fast" Eddie Kantor (who worked for GM and did some "back door" R&D for the automaker). It was ordered under COPO 9719 and fitted with several options endemic to the fabled Z16 Chevelle. The notable parts are the L78 engine (396-cu.in, 425 hp, usually reserved for Corvettes and full-sized Chevys), the Muncie M22 trans, and a 12-bolt rear end fitted with 4.88 gears and Positraction. The original window sticker and other documents exist, for those who doubt the veracity of this very special Chevelle. Wanna know more? Watch for a future feature in *HMM* that will disclose all the details.



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Fans of the '71 movie *Vanishing Point* were thrilled to see one of the actual movie Challengers at MCACN. Despite the 426 Hemi callouts on the hood, the restored E-body hides a 440 instead, disappointing some who were expecting to see a big Elephant. The current caretaker is Alabama resident and cult-movie-devotee Ted Stephens.



Many folks overlook the AMC AMX as a serious performance platform. But not Jeff Schwartz, who has built one of the baddest Rambler rumbler we've ever seen. The EFI'd 401 cranks out 500-plus horsepower feeding through a Torqueflite, and features a host of suspension mods to ensure it lives up to the AMX's Trans-Am victories from the early '70s. See "A Javelin That Sticks" in *HMM* #205, September 2020, for more details.



A historical perspective of C1 through C8 Corvettes was on display at the Corvette Legends Invitational, providing a chronological sequence of the evolution of the All-American sports car. Some were restored, some were original, but all were fantastic examples of the marque, and enjoyed by everyone.



Dedicated to the memory of famous Olds racer Loyed Woodland, the 1966-'67 W-30 display represented years of planning and coordination by stalwarts John Kenneally and Phil Welch to get nearly three dozen of these ultra-rare "W" machines on in place at one time. The assembled cars, memorabilia, documentation, and history of these "civilized supercars" was mind-blowing!



Tweed Vorhees was a terror behind the wheel of his B/SA '67 Olds Cutlass W-30 machine, which was successfully campaigned out of the famous Chesrown Olds dealership in Newark, Ohio.

OLDS NEWS IS GOOD NEWS!

During the late-Eighties, we heard the familiar Oldsmobile tagline touting the automaker's then-current offerings as: "Not your father's Oldsmobile." Well, our fathers had plenty to be proud of if they owned an Olds 4-4-2 from the mid-Sixties, and especially if they were smart enough to check the W-30 option box. In '66 it got them a host of hi-po hardware that included a hand-assembled 400-cu.in. engine fitted with a hot cam and topped with a trio of two-barrel carbs that were fed fresh air through special ducting. The W-30 was rated at a conservative 360 hp. To "make room for the ducting" and improve traction, the battery was relocated to the trunk. Induction changes for '67 forced the W-30 to drink from a single four-barrel carb and reduced its power rating to 350 hp, but the difference in real performance was negligible. Check 'em out!



This is the first '67 Camaro converted by Yenko, now owned by collector Phil Mitchell. It began life as an SS 350, and you can see (inset) the heater core and cooling system still reflect that origin.

UNDER COVERS

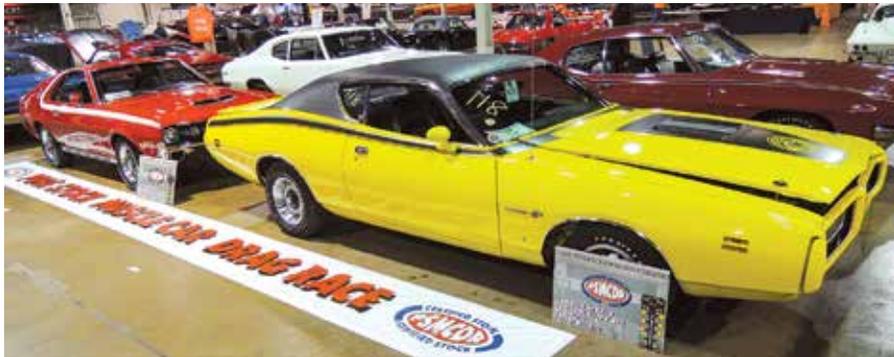
Freshly finished muscle cars are always a highlight at MCACN and are given special recognition during unveiling ceremonies that take place over the course of the event. Many of them are especially notable for a number of reasons, including original prototypes, one-off factory show cars, celebrity-owned vehicles, and TV or media cars. This year over 20 unveilings took place before an excited crowd, and here are a few examples.



If GTO commercials had your attention back in 1970, this "Humbler" RAIV GTO is the one that kept your eyeballs glued to the TV. Phil Mitchell also claims title to this famous Goat; the display also had an example of the rare, one-year-only, RPO W73 Vacuum Operated Exhaust.



While most '70 AMC Machines were seen in their patriotic red, white, and blue paint schemes, after January '70 they were also available in more traditional hues—minus the stripes—and even a vinyl top, as seen on this one owned by Terry Weiner.



The Pure Stock Muscle Car Drag Race (PSMCDR) contingent was well represented again this year, and features muscle cars in competition that are stock, with few exceptions. Costs to compete are kept down that way, and with no trophies or prize money, the fun factor is through the roof!



When was the last time you saw a '70 Grand Prix with a 455 H.O. and a four-speed? "Never," was our answer. But Michael and John Ferri brought both these ultra-rare beauties all the way from Hartford, Connecticut.



With plenty of back-door support from the factory, the *Mopar Missile* was one of the most famous racing teams to fly the Pentastar flag. The *Missile* was launched off the line by Don Carlton, supported by a legendary team of factory engineers, and it beat the competition consistently.



It may not have been exactly resplendent in its original Fathom Green hue, but this '69 Yenko Camaro was the object of envy for Bowtie aficionados with a yen for Chevy's F-body.



Only 201 '65 Chevelles were constructed with the Z16 option, so finding one in the rough today is an extreme rarity. Regardless of their as-found condition, their scarcity makes them well worth the time, trouble, and expense to bring them back to life.



With barn dust clinging to its flanks, this '60 Ford Starliner still bore its dual spotlights and exhaust cutouts, alluding to the notion that this one wasn't just used for Sunday go-to-meeting trips.

BARN BURNERS

Another perennial favorite at MCACN is the Barn Finds display, where the natural effects from years of neglect and seclusion are celebrated rather than suppressed. Ryan Brutt has an uncanny knack for finding these dilapidated paragons of pulchritude and is the man behind these displays. While walking through, we spotted a '65 Z16 Chevelle, a couple of "wing" cars, a pair of unusual four-door "family" cars, and even a Yenko Camaro recently aroused from its Wisconsin hibernation. If you possess the vision to see what ultimately lies beneath decades of rust, dust, and decay, then you're in the right place for an eye test!



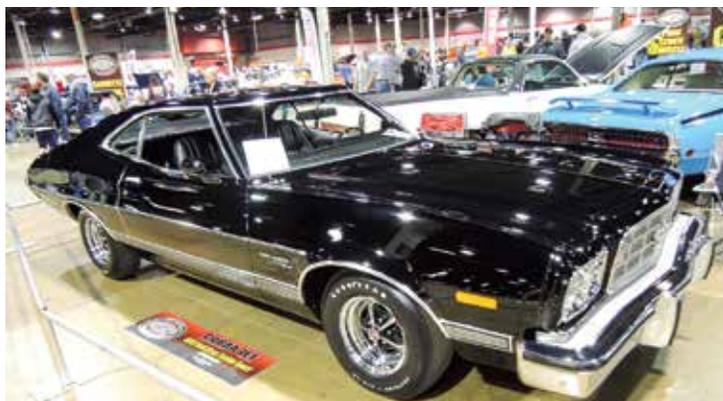
When you take what is arguably the most gorgeous muscle machine on the planet, combine it with every modern accouterment plus a 426-cubic-inch, all-aluminum Hemi crate engine, you'll end up with a '68 Charger like this. It was screwed together by the uber-talented folks at The Hot Rod Barn in Joliet, Illinois.



Billed as "The Fastest Ford Lightweight in The World," this plain white wrapper hides a dual-quad 427 FE engine, rated at 425 horsepower. Fiberglass and aluminum components were used to put the big car on a diet, resulting in low 12-second passes back in the day.



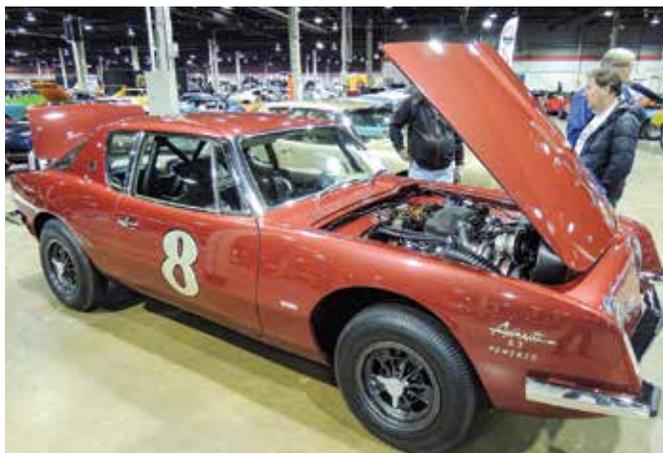
In past years the muscle bikes display has been filled with banana seat and monkey bar examples, but this year was expanded to include mini-bikes as well. For many of us, they were the first step from pedal power to internally combusted, self-propelled machinery.



This '73 Gran Torino, owned by National Parts Depot mogul Rick Schmidt, represents Ford's final gasp for performance with a "Q-code" 351C/four-speed under the hood, while buckets, a console and a factory instrumentation package adorn the interior.



Another pre-production car was this '68 428 Cobra Jet Mustang, one of several built by Tasca Ford in Rhode Island to amp up the mediocre performance of the 390-powered "S" cars. The concept was so successful that Ford sent six "factory" cars to the '68 NHRA Winternationals, where Al Joniec won the Super Stock title. Oklahoman Ben Cole currently owns the legendary pony.



The "8" Studebaker Avanti was a Bonneville record-setter in '63, with propulsion coming from a Paxton supercharged 304-cu.in. R3 engine. Owned now by Gary Wood, the restored racer still features the rare magnesium Halibrands, full roll cage, a complement of original instrumentation, and the impressive R3 engine backed by a Borg-Warner T-10 four-speed. ■