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GUNSMOKE

The Last Hurrah for the High-Compression 340 'Cuda

Story and Photos by
Geoff Stunkard

In the last few years, the big-block '71 'Cuda has become one of the best-known icons of the American musclecar. Fueled by *Nash Bridges*' antics and high-dollar resales, the demand and value of these cars has gone through the proverbial roof. Even pedestrian models powered by the Slant Six and 318 are in demand for conversion to big-inch power; there is money even in the clone market.

However, while overkill displacement may seem to have been the order of the day, the small-block 'Cuda 340 was praised in most period road tests as the best representation of how well-balanced the Plymouth E-Body was. Indeed, in addition to cornering well, the package was sometimes quicker against

bigger-displacement competitors. It was faster than both a 383 Challenger and a 454 El Camino in a comparison test printed in the May 1971 issue of *Drag Racing USA*; this was a four-speed driver's test between stick aces Ronnie Sox, Dick Landy, Dave Strickler, and Don Nicholson (the 351 Mach 1 Nicholson brought was quicker when Sox was throwing the handle around).

Like the other engines in the Chrysler lineup that year, the pumped-up 340 was on its last legs due to increased government pollution controls. For 1971, it received a slight drop in compression from the original 10.5:1 to 10.2:1, likely just enough to get it off the jagged edge. However, in 1972, the 340 would fall down to 8.5:1; great for pump gas, but the writing was on the wall, and the

emissions-laden 360 would soon send the 340 on to engineering infamy. The biggest plus of 1971 was the choice of Carter's spread-bore ThermoQuad carb as OEM equipment, which allowed the engine to cruise on two small barrels but dumped copious amounts of fuel through massive secondaries when the throttle was punched.

Of course, 1971 is also considered the high-water mark in terms of 'Cuda style by many aficionados. In keeping with the "more is better" philosophy coming out of the design studios, this was the year the car grew its fender gills and multi-scaled grille, crazy graphics, and other frills. Incidentally, the same reviewers

who like the 'Cuda's mechanical design were not as impressed by all the extra trim that was hung on that year's sheet-metal. Most press vehicles were loaded to the proverbial "gills" with extras that did nothing for performance.

But we digress. Let's get back to the 340 'Cuda seen here, owned by Jeff Dashiell of Salisbury, Maryland. He went with several friends out to the Barrett-Jackson auction in Scottsdale, Arizona, last spring, but after looking at many marginal cars, he decided to pass. A couple of months later, friend Tony Maccari called and said he had a line on a '71

'Cuda in great condition located in Michigan.

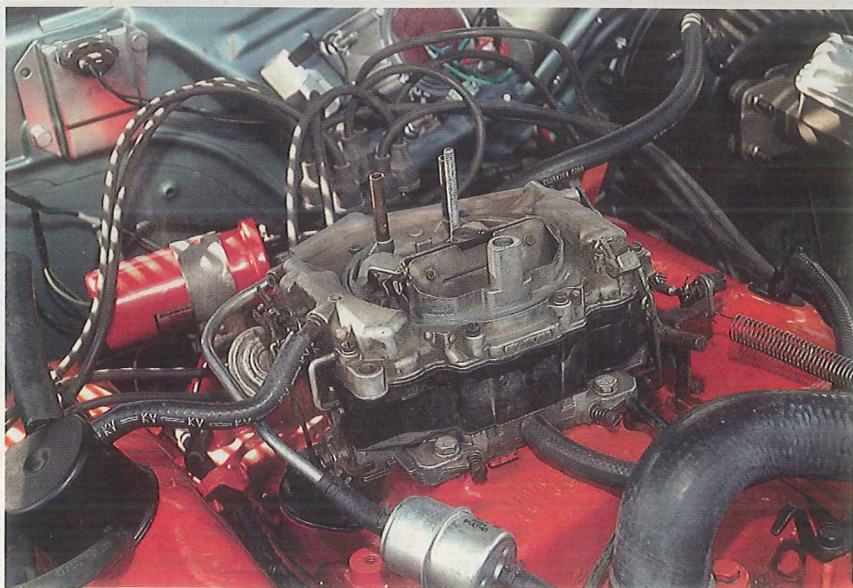
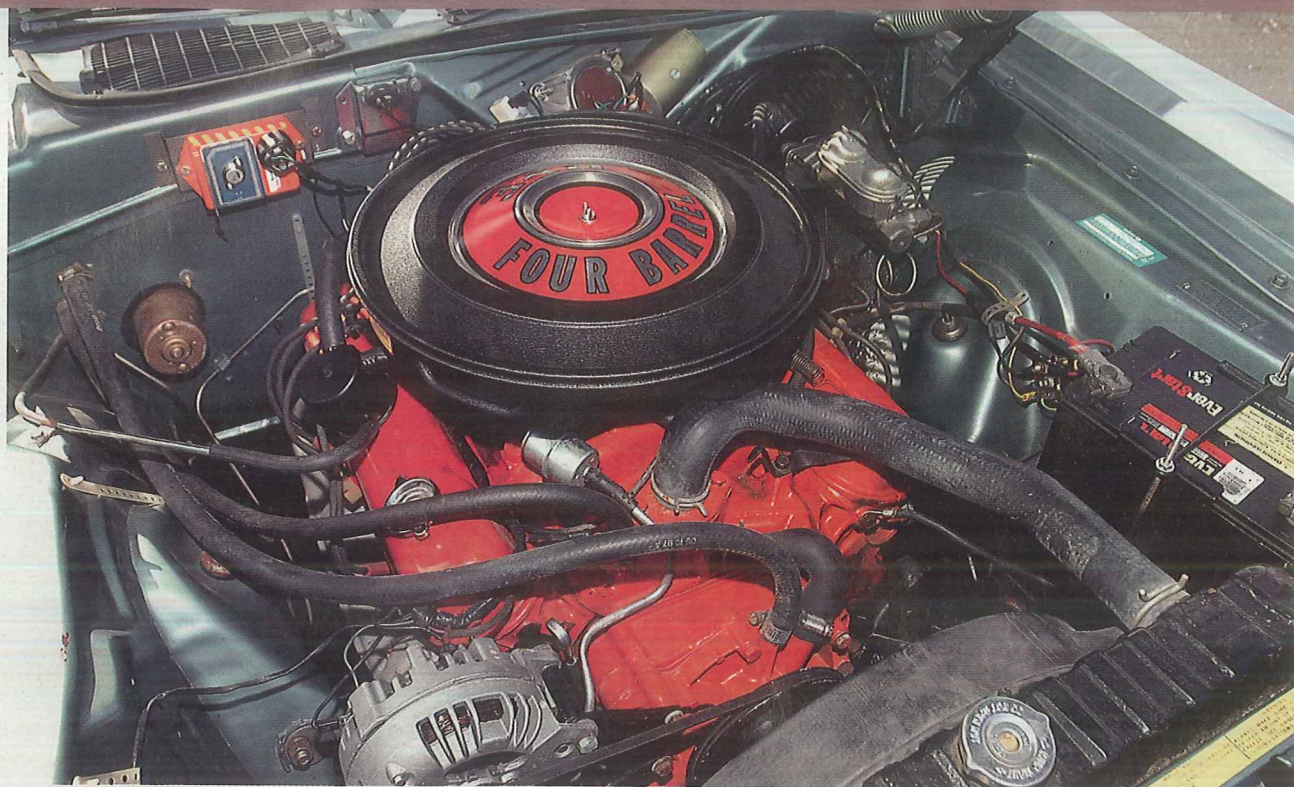
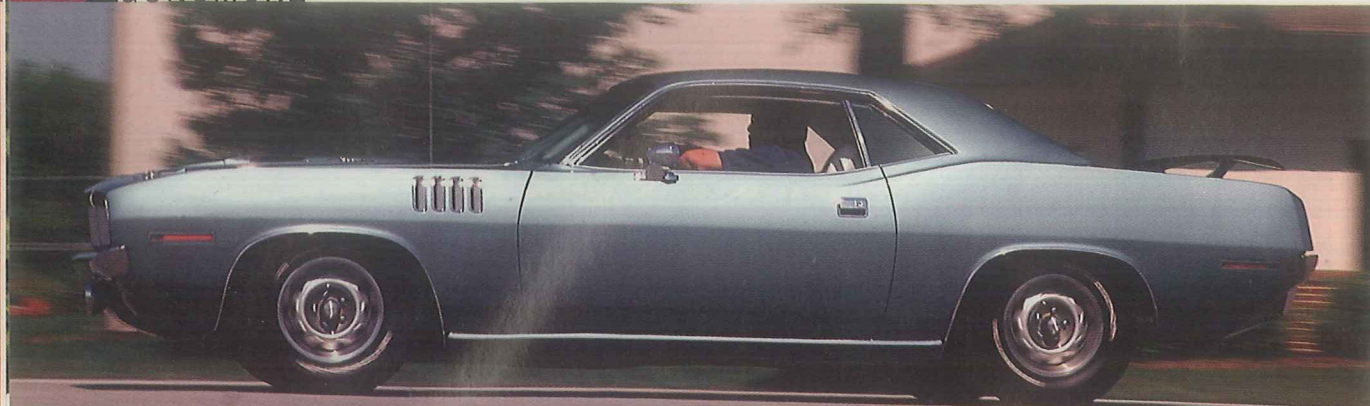
Jeff and partner Ed Maguire went and looked it over, and decided the asking price, which was at market value, was not unfair. Soon after that, the 69,000-mile gem, complete with the buildsheet and window sticker, was on its way down to the Chesapeake Bay region.

"I like the color, which is pretty unique for this model," says Jeff, who makes his living as a general contractor on the Delmarva Peninsula. "The condition was also

great. We did need to put a clutch in it, but for the most part, this car did not need anything major." Regardless, he plans to take it down for a full restoration during the next 12 months.

The color is GA4, Winchester Gray, which indeed is uncommon on musclecars in the era of "High-Impact Paint." The build order also kept the large "billboard" callout graphics off the car. While the Shaker setup was optional, the hood





AT A GLANCE

'71 'CUDA 340

Owned By: Jeff Dashiell and Ed Maguire,
Salisbury, MD

Mileage: 69,000

Use: Occasional (tagged/insured for
driving)

Engine: 340 Chrysler LA-series

Transmission: A833 four-speed

Rearend: 3.55-geared 8.75 banjo design

Interior: White vinyl buckets with console,

AM radio, Pistol Grip shifter

Color: GA4 Winchester Gray

Wheels/Tires: 14x6 Rallye with 225

R70-14 tires

Options: Go-Wing deck spoiler,

performance hood, dual outside mirrors,

graphics delete

selected on this example was the standard non-functioning scalloped version, which is actually quite appealing with the scalloped '71 grille. The car was finished off with dual outside rearview mirrors on the doors and a Go-Wing spoiler mounted to the decklid. In the end, the buyer got a cruiser with good handling, pep under the bonnet, and conservative styling—which is saying something for a '71 'Cuda.

In addition to the 340, our buyer opted for a four-speed and the 8.75 banjo-type rear with 3.55 Sure Grip gearing. The interior was nicely done though somewhat pedestrian. White buckets and trim, the infamous Pistol Grip shifter jutting out of the console, AM radio, and the standard dash set up with a 120-mph speedometer are it. A set of 14-inch Rallye wheels finish it off.

The package might not blow the doors off a 427 Camaro, but we have a feeling that this car may have been some middle-aged executive's last hurrah, a chance to get in on the tail end of the muscle era in a street machine that could be driven regularly if needed. Truth be told, most of those of us who are middle-aged today wish we could still order something like it. *MCR*

