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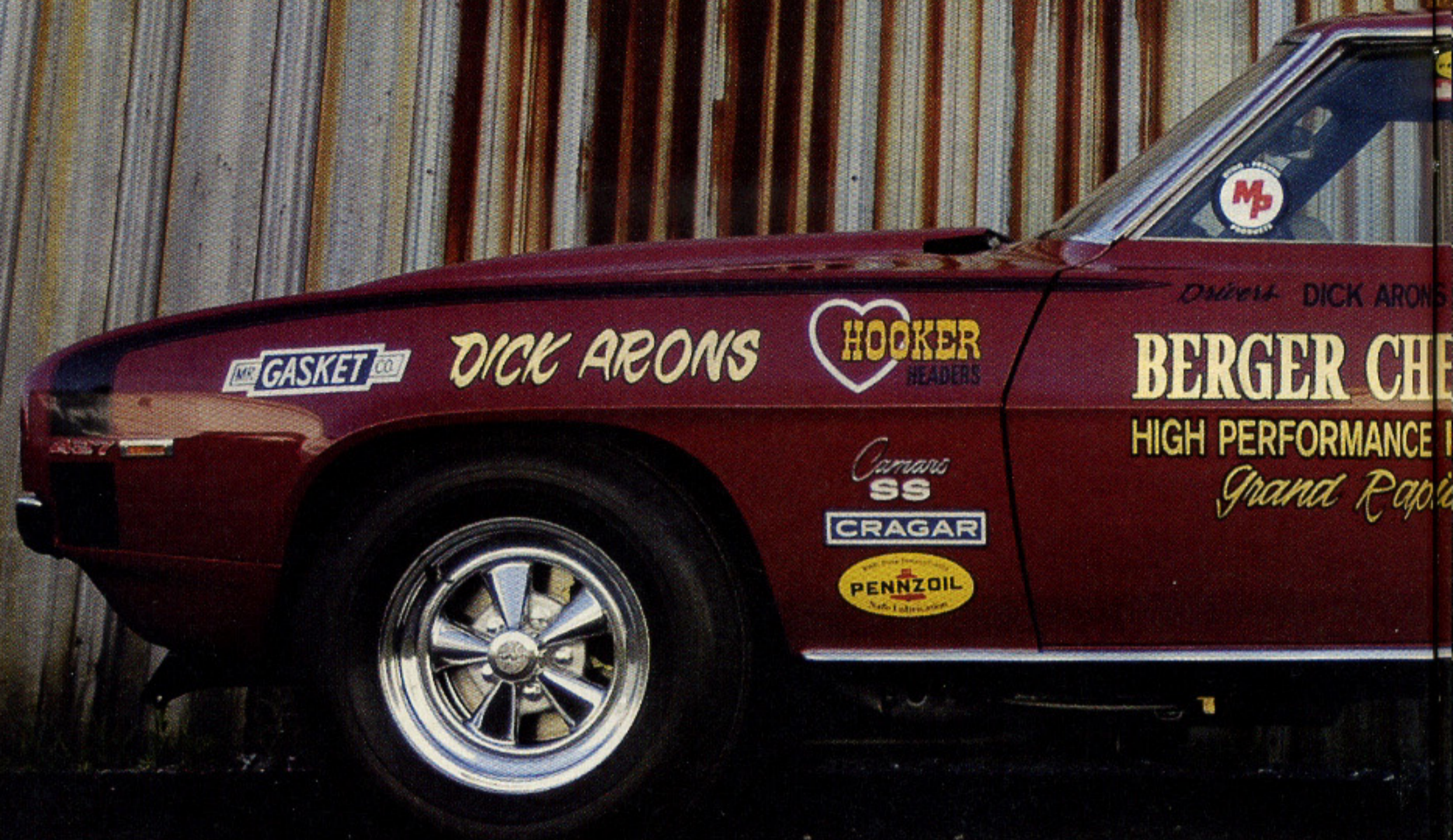
**UNCOVERED
AND RESTORED
'69 BERGER
SUPER STOCK**

FROM THE EDITORS OF
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HIGH PERFORMANCE

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ON THE COVER

A few months ago we got an e-mail from Al Wyant letting us know he had just finished building a car he thought would fit nicely within the pages of *Camaro Performers* magazine. So we met up with Al and his spectacular 1972 Camaro at the Super Chevy Show in Indianapolis. After seeing the car in person, we were completely blown away. So much so, we decided to make it our November 2007 cover car. Photo by Nick Licata.



BACK IN

COPO 9561 RIDES AGAIN!

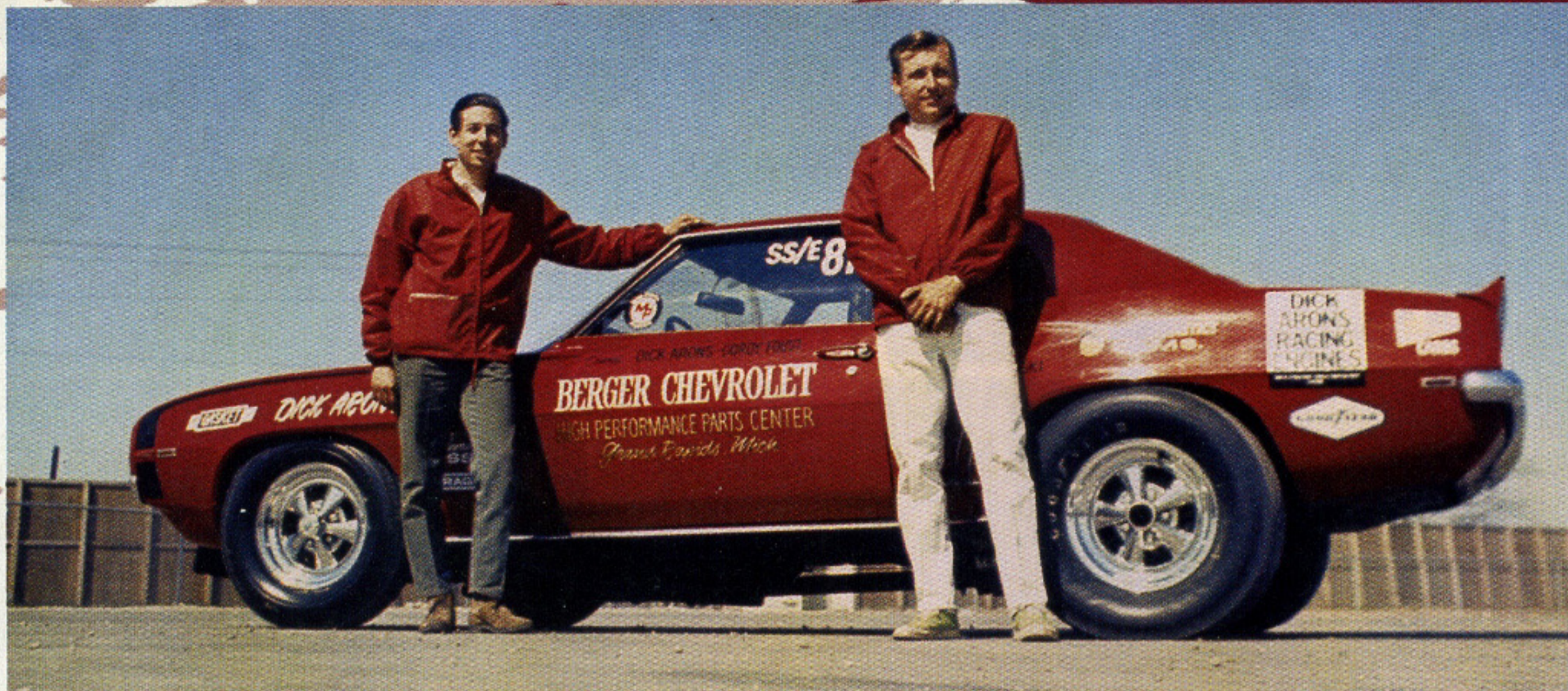
by **Ro McGonegal**

photographs by **Nick Licata** and courtesy of **Matt Murphy** and **Ted Robinson**

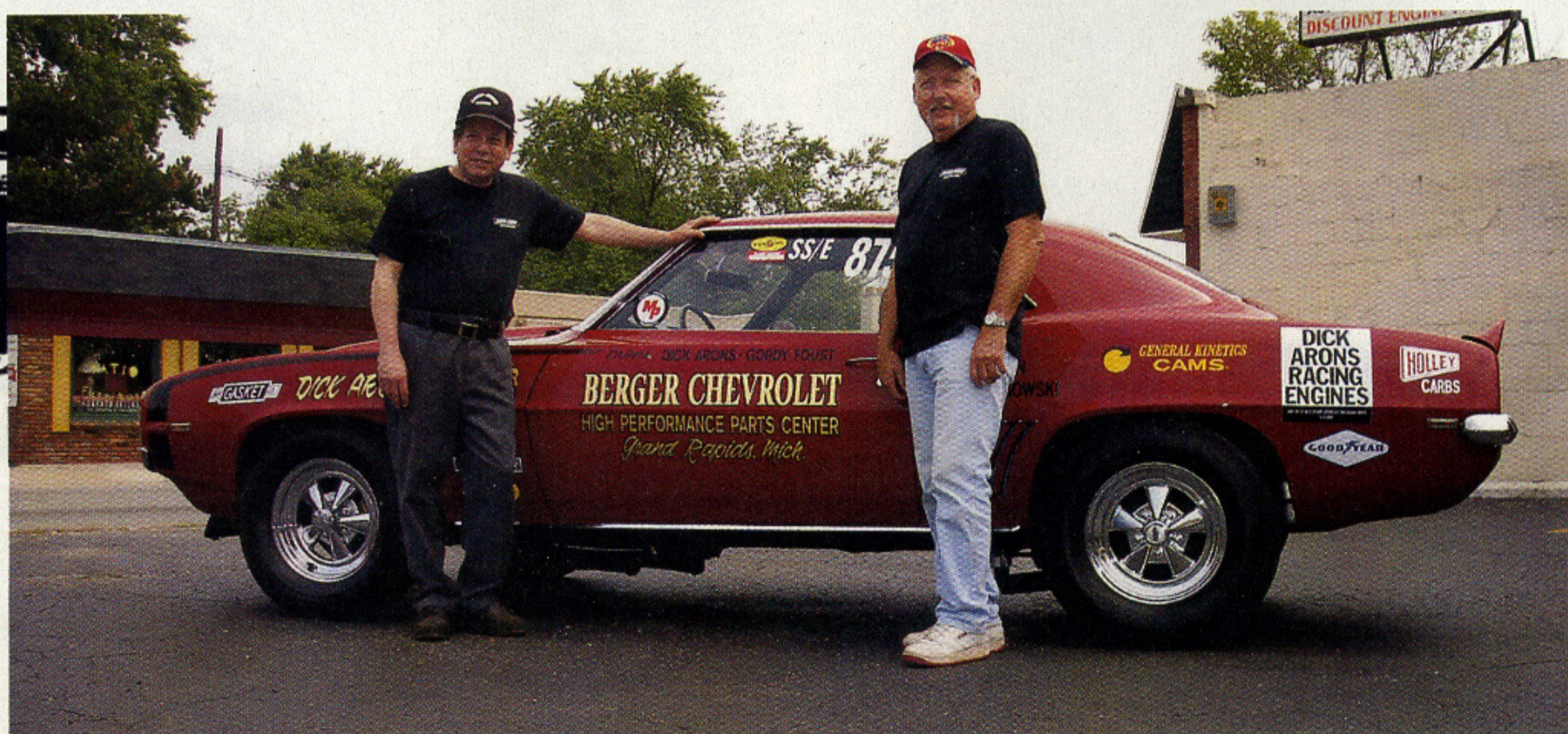


THE DAY





Dick and Gordy pose in front of the prize Super Stock in 1969.



Dick and Gordy during the unveiling at Arons' shop in 2006.

We can remember testing at Lions dragstrip one afternoon in 1970 when Dick Arons and Wally Booth rolled in with their clean, emerald green '68 Camaro Pro Stocker. Dick wrenched, Wally drove. Guru Jim McFarland was at Edelbrock then, and he came to watch the proceedings and help with the tuning. We went about our business, but kept our good eye on the green car nonetheless. McFarland and Arons hovered over the engine compartment. Booth strapped in. We watched as he made a strong, clean lap. Then cheers and huzzahs boomed from the Pro Stock camp. They'd clipped off their first unofficial 9-second pass. Just a scoche less than 10, but a 9-second lap at that.

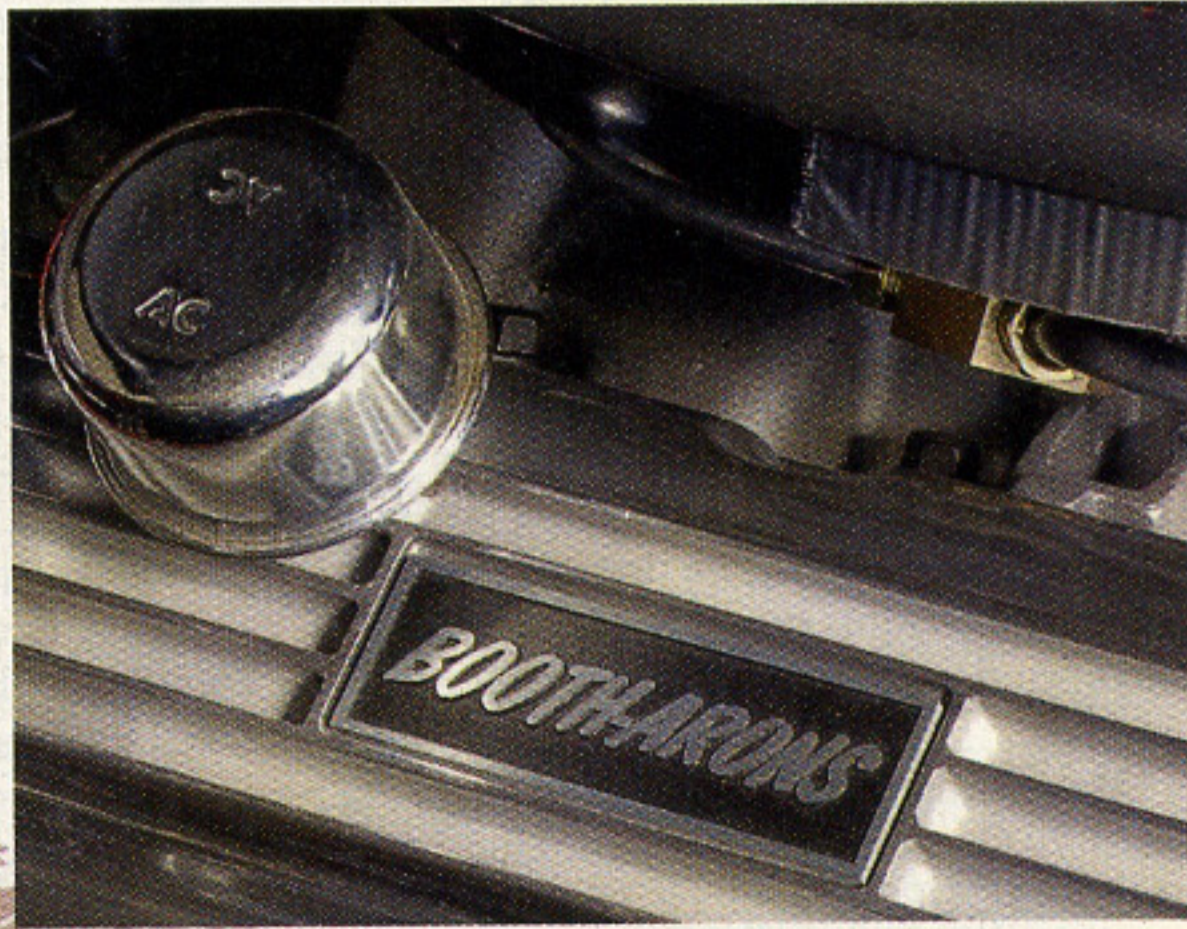
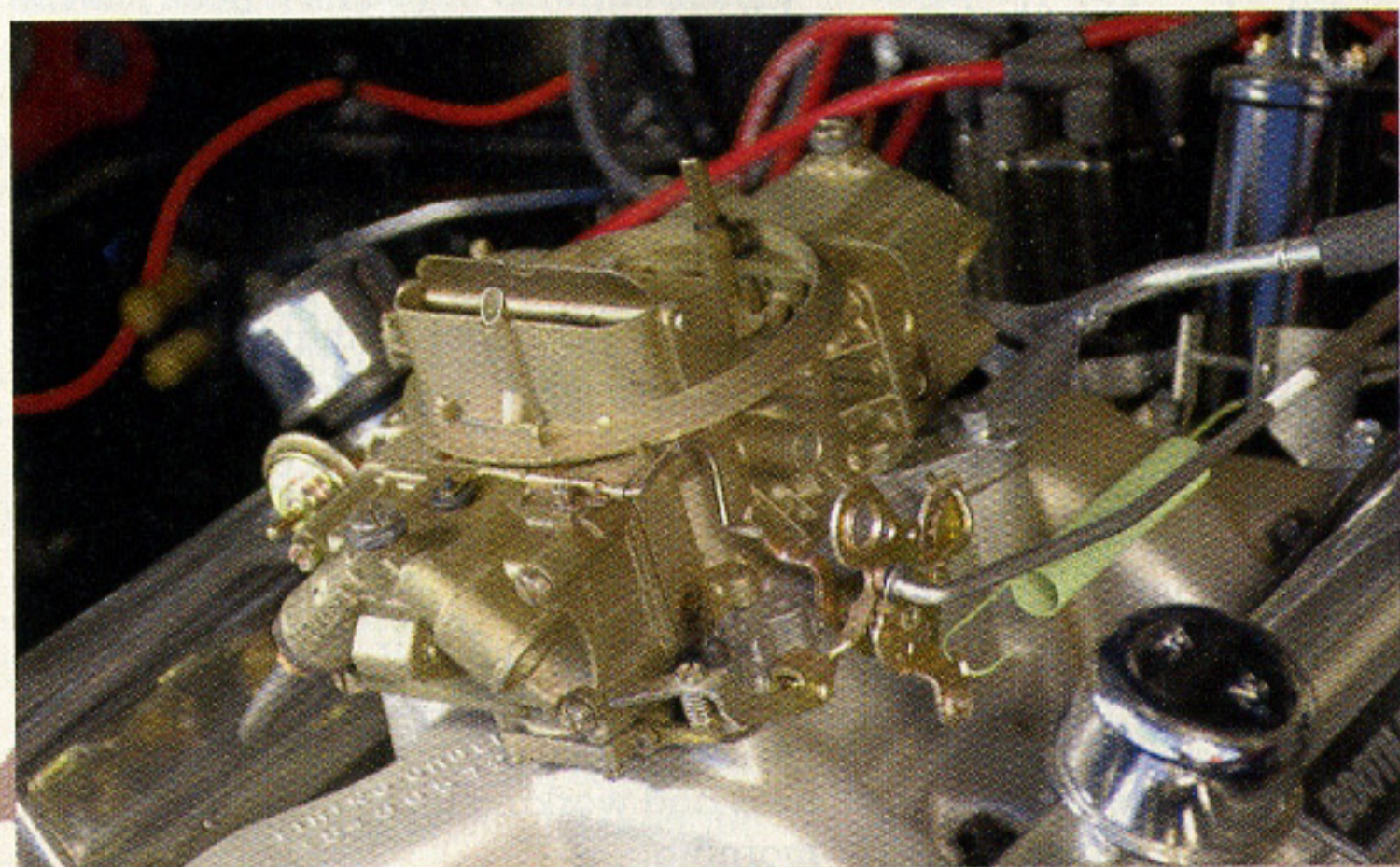
Arons was about our age, mid-20s, maybe younger, though he looked about 17. We wondered out loud how such a kid could possess so much knowledge of the craft. (Hint: he was tight with Bill Jenkins.) We'd been watching him ever since he and Gordy Foust had campaigned the Garnet Red Super Stock/E '69 Camaro, the car they used to win class at the NHRA Springnationals in Dallas, circa '69. Gordy drove. The wrenches of the day were Joe Hrapkowski and none other than Richard Maskin (just plain Rich back then). These guys ran the circuit, all the time sponsored by Berger Chevrolet (Grand Rapids, MI) and by secondary partner Motion Performance. It was a marriage of equal convenience. Berger sold parts to Dick

at cost and Dick sold Berger speed equipment at the same rate. Then things escalated sharply. Arons partnered with Booth for the fledgling NHRA Pro Stock circus, first in the green Camaro and then, in '71, on a full factory deal with an AMC Gremlin.

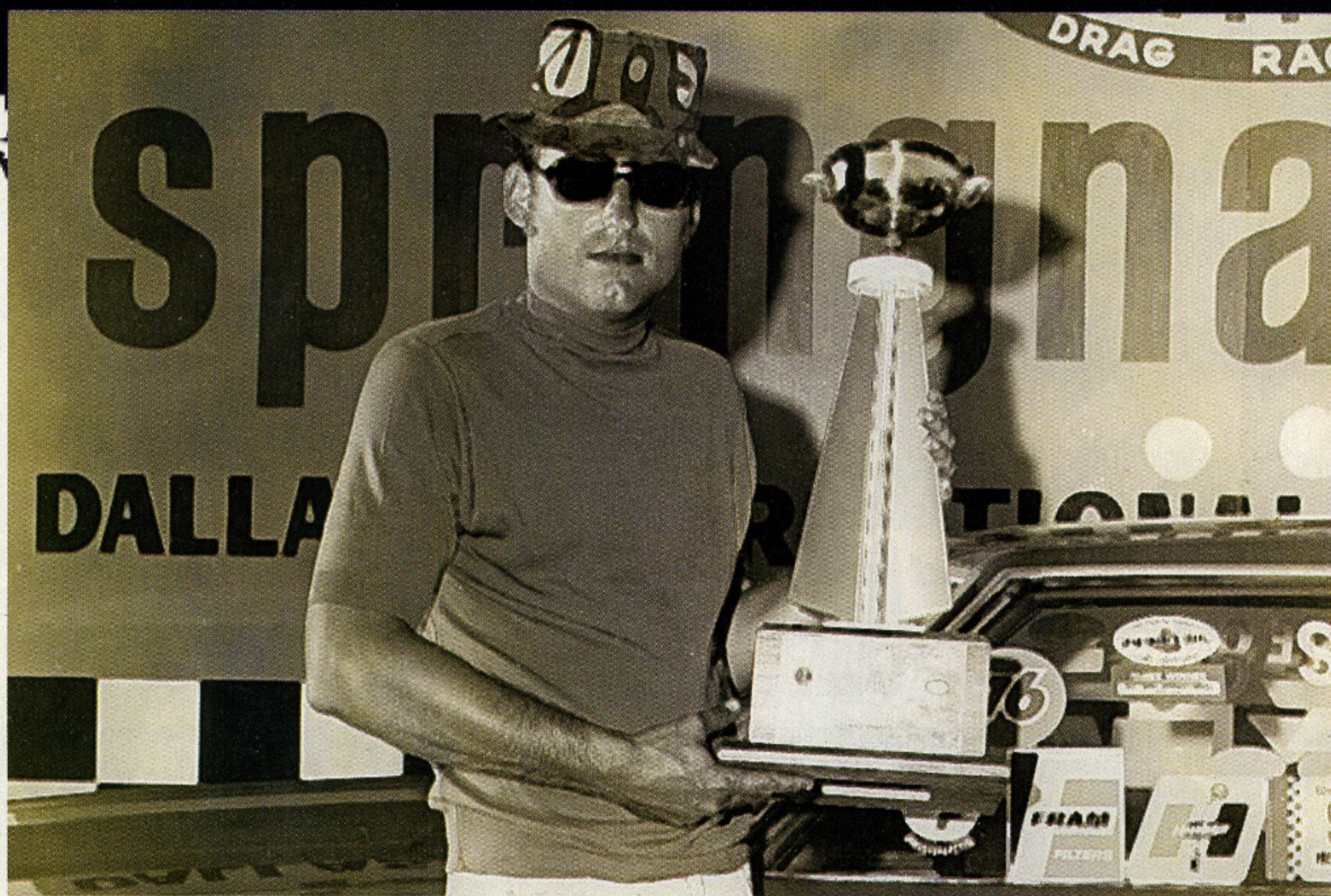
Arons' deal with Berger Chevy was to use the Camaro until the end of the year and then ante up. Dick ran an ad in the November 21, 1969, issue of *National Dragster* to sell the car in order to pay Berger off. Dick Wolverton bought the red Camaro a month later. By then, the rules had changed and Super Stock cars were allowed any rear axle and wheel tubs to accommodate the 32-inch tires. When Wolverton moved to Florida, he dragged the artifact with him. After 15



“We wondered out loud how such a kid could possess so much knowledge of the craft. (Hint: he was tight with Bill Jenkins.)”



“Gordy knocked out more than 20 Hemi Mopars and a few other Camaros to take the class trophy.”



Gordy Foust poses with the class trophy from the victory at the 1969 Springnationals in Dallas. Dig that lid.

years of service, Wolverton parked it. It sulked in his garage on four flat tires. Mold blanketed the seats and tried to become one with the car. The last time he'd fired the engine was in 1986.

Now crank up to summer of 2003. Ah, the world was definitely a different place. Enter GMMG's (www.gmmginc.net) 40-year old Matt Murphy (Marietta, GA). Matt is responsible for the modern renditions of the ZL1 Camaros, Dick Harrell Edition Camaros, and countless dealer-branded high-performance Camaros. Chevy in his blood? Oh, you bet, graybeards. His dad Matt Sr. spent 37 years with GM Corporate. Baby Matt slid headfirst into the plate and his very first ride in anything was in his pop's '65 Corvette Coupe. His dad always had one, so Matt grew up around the mystique of the marque and all it represented.

Matt is also a collector. He's got '67, '68, and '70 Camaros and was looking hard for a '69 COPO big-block. His avoc-

tion led eventually to his reason for life. "I enjoy working on the new Camaros and collecting the old ones. I believe knowing the history of the old Camaros and what is collectible has helped me to build some of the most unique 4th-generation Camaros for limited Chevy dealers and the Camaro brand team."

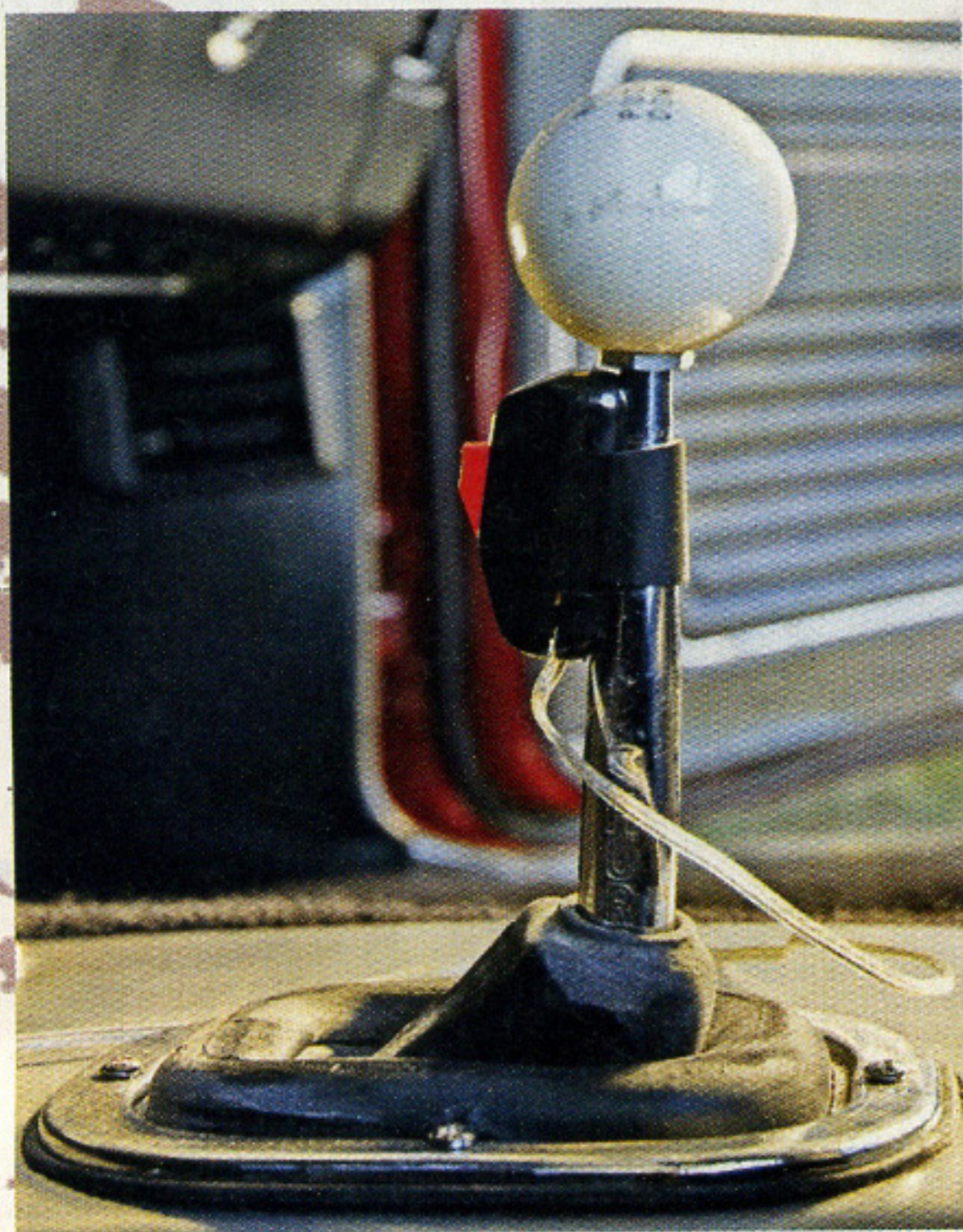
Three years ago, he found his desire huddling in Wolverton's garage. "I then noticed the 209 miles on the odometer," Matt said. "I asked Dick about them and he said that the car had been a drag car its whole life and was never tagged for the street, so the odometer registered a 1/2-mile at a time [1/4 mile down and 1/4-mile back to the pits]."

Matt was in a quandary: Should he flat restore the piece or make modifications as part of its rehabilitation? "When I found out about the unique history of the car, I decided that it needed a complete restoration and wanted to bring it back to its 1969 racing look," offered Matt. "NHRA rules for 1969 didn't require a

rollbar, but the rear axle had to be stock, so I decided to get rid of the Dana axle and the tubs."

After purchasing the old Berger drag car in June 2003, Murphy hauled it to the Camaro Superfest in Detroit later that month. Matt Berger had informed Murphy that Dick Arons Race Engines was still in business in the same location as it was in 1969, off 12 Mile Road in Berkley, MI. And there were specific others who knew the history of the car at the show. Brain Henderson, Joe Swezey and Frank Arone operate Supercar Workshop in Latrobe, PA. "I knew that they were the ones to do it," said Matt. "They knew the history of the car and the legacy of Dick Arons and Gordy Foust."

Serendipity ramped up. Matt dragged the hulk to Berkley on a fact-finding/blow-Arons'-mind tour. Murphy said, "I didn't know how old Dick was, and was very surprised to find him still in business and working there that Monday morning."



"I asked him if he remembered this car and showed him one of the old photos. He looked at it and said, 'My old Super Stock Camaro.' I asked if he thought much about the car, or if he'd seen it since 1969 and he said, 'Well, I remember building the guy who bought it from me a few motors in the early '70s and I haven't seen it since the Gatornationals in 1971.' Then I asked if he'd like to see it. His eyes flickered and then lit up. 'You have my old car?'"

Arons couldn't believe his old car was still around and in such good condition. "We talked about restoring it, and I asked him right then if he'd build me a new 427 motor for it and told him we'd restore it to '69 race condition. He was excited to be part of it again, I could tell, as he said, 'Sure, I can do that for you.'

"And then just before the restoration began in December '03, my friend Greg in Atlanta said that he knew someone named Gordy Foust. He said that Gordy was into drag racing. I thought it couldn't be the same guy, but Greg

insisted and said he would find his number and call him. A day later, Greg called me and said, 'It's him, he wants to come see his old car.' The next day Gordy came by with his scrapbook and a few friends of his from Detroit.

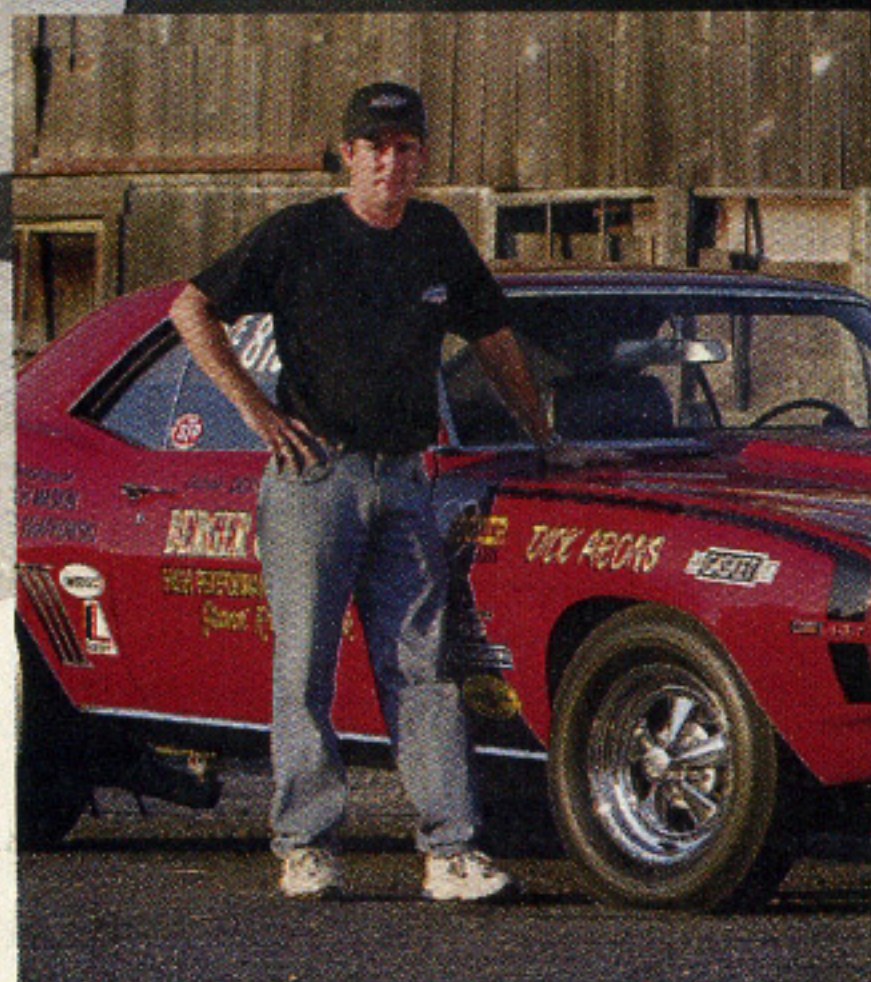
"The amazing thing about this car is that we kept finding more and more original photos and original people involved with racing the car back then. Foust's scrapbook included some photos from that first day they got the car from Berger and proceeded to take it apart." Matt was stoked. He had a great crew for the reconstruction and, as a good luck charm, the two originators as well. "Working with Dick and Gordy helped inspire us to do an over-the-top restoration, since we weren't just restoring an old drag car, we were doing it for the guys who owned and raced it back in the day. We wanted to impress them with the resto so they would be proud to attend shows with us and the car. We also had original photos of every aspect of it, and most of the original painted-on

decals and lettering was still intact."

Though Berger had specified an Olympic Gold COPO 9561 equipped with the L72 (427/425) for Arons in '69, the car never got built, so Dale Berger gave Arons and Foust a Garnet Red Camaro outfitted with SS trim, 396/375 engine, M21 transmission, 4:10:1 Posi, and a whole lot of other stuff that never graced a COPO creeper. To run in SS/E required the L72, so the boys at Arons' shop simply converted the car via engine swap, and set it up for the newly formed NHRA SS/E class that year. Their first big outing with the car was at the NHRA Spring Nationals where Gordy knocked out more than 20 Hemi Mopars and a few other Camaros to take the class trophy. They raced the Camaro at many events that year, the Super Stock Nationals in York, PA, and the NHRA U.S. Nationals among them, and match-raced all over the country to compile a winning record that only a scarce number of Super Stock cars could match.

For the current experiment, however,

Early Ted Robinson photo session of the car in 1969.



Matt Murphy with the beautifully restored Super Stocker in 2007.

the engine was rebuilt to L72 status with some Arons' massaging: 12.5:1 compression ratio, 850-cfm Holley, iron 840 GM cylinder heads, a healthy 268/272 Crane Cam in place of the original General Kinetics stick, and a fabbed 8-quart oil sump. Custom-built Booth-Arons rocker covers and air cleaner lid completed the engine package. Puffing through 2-inch primary-pipes, the original Hooker Super Comp headers were re-coated in black. Output is more than 500 hp at 7,000 rpm and 500 lb-ft at 3,000 rpm.

The insides of the whiny, but severely husky, M-21 rebuilt tranny are rearranged by a Hurst Competition Plus shifter, just as they would have been back in the day, but the remainder of the drivetrain is blushing original. Suspension is the OE F41, save for leaf springs tied together with a custom aluminum block to staunch wheelhop and to augment the power of those vintage Lakewood/Jenkins slapper bars. As it would have back in the day, the 12-bolt carries an official Posi-traction differential and a 4.10:1 gearset.

“Then I asked if he’d like to see it. His eyes flickered and then lit up. ‘You have my old car?’”

More old guys crowd around the trough. Nothing says the '60s like Cragar S/S wheels, 15x4 and 15x8 packing lamp-black refugees. The original fronts, Kelly-Springfield skinnies and rims are still on the car, and new M&H Racemasters are where the original Goodyear Blue Streak 10-wides used to boil. All genuine COPO interiors were six-cylinder-like, so the guts aren't much more than stock black vinyl. This car was ordered with no console and radio delete. There are no other signs of visible activity except for the period Sun Super tach and the requisite threesome of Stewart-Warner gauges.

Supercar Workshops blasted on the car, fitting its niches with markers, accents, and trim from YearOne and Rick's First Gen. Then they gave it up to Frank, who maintains Arone Autobody. Frank and George cleaned up the body and gave it a vibrant, new aura with PPG Garnet Red basecoat and clearcoat. Bob Johnson, of Saltsburg, PA, finished dressing the old guy up with graphics and faithful recreation of the original

painted lettering of the day. By the time the transformation was complete, everybody was two years older. But was everybody still happy? “The detail that Brian and his crew went into is amazing, and the final product turned out better than any of us could have expected,” offered Matt.

Though the car made its public debut at the 2006 Camaro Superfest outside Detroit, it was unveiled at Arons' shop. Many old friends were in attendance: Gordy Foust, Wally Booth, Al Maynard, Jim Luikens (Berger Chevy's original parts manager from 1969), and Ted Robinson (who photographed the car for Arons in 1969) among them. Murphy plans to exhibit the old horse at special racing-oriented car venues like the York Musclicar show, the Forge Musclicar show in Pigeon Forge, TN, and at Camaro shows around the country. “It's important to me to show the car off and introduce it to a whole new generation of Camaro fans, and most importantly, to let the original owners and crew have fun with their old car again.” ■

