



# Rewriting **THE RULES** of car collecting

INSANE, OVER-THE-TOP RESTORED MUSCLE CARS CAN'T TAKE US BACK TO BEING 16 AGAIN WITH A TURN OF THE KEY



Cooler than a Cobra?

I'm not a mental-health professional, but lately I've observed some very distinct cases of childlike behavior in both myself and those around me. Well, at least as it pertains to our cars. Don't get me wrong — we're not driving through candy store windows and looting all the Now & Laters or drawing on our seats with crayons. Instead, we're giving a big nanny-nanny-boo-boo to the established rules of car collecting.

How? Here are two examples:

## **1** "Hopping up" cars that were or are expected to be restored to concours level

When '60s and '70s muscle cars were new, keeping them bone-stock didn't speak to the owner's individuality or offer anywhere near optimized tire-shredding performance.

The "Day Two" moniker refers to what most guys did the day after they bought a new muscle car. Out went the power-robbing smog systems, wheezy exhaust systems, skinny stock tires, and anything else deemed unnecessary or uncool. Headers, traction bars, glasspack mufflers, Cragar mags, big tires, and even more invasive hot-rod techniques like camshafts and steep rear gears were the norm.

## Trending toward fun

These "Day Two" modifications are not a new phenomenon in the restoration world, but they seem to have really come on strong lately.

Why? Have we all strived to restore cars to factory-fresh, bone-stock, NOS-air-in-the-tires condition for too long? Is having a COPO Camaro identical to the three other ones at the show now passé? Did that first drive in your concours-restored muscle car not match your memory of the ride your older sister's boyfriend gave you in a similar car in 1970? Or has sitting in a lawn chair looking at a 440 6-barrel Road Runner as a moveable art installation at a show grown tiresome? Do we enjoy rumbling into a cruise night more than wheezing onto a concours lawn?

All are good reasons, but whatever the case, I think the bottom line is this: A lot of us are over building a car for others or to "factory-correct" condition. We just

want a car that makes us happy. We want to hear a big cam and high-compression slugs loud and clear through the pipes. We want a car that scares the tar out of our passengers when it goes sideways in third gear. Most of these modifications are not hard to reverse, and most make a better, more enjoyable car to drive. Maybe as we've aged we've remembered why we wanted this stuff in the first place?

I see a lot of people having more fun with "Day Two" or sensibly dialed-in 97%-correct restored cars than with trailer queens. After all, nothing makes you feel more like a kid again than doing a wicked big burnout or showing up that teenager in the Honda next to you. With a professional driver on a closed course, of course.

## **2** Laughing with the cars we once laughed at

I don't know about you, but when I was (regrettably, much, much) younger, I had an "I'd rather walk than ride in that" attitude about certain cars. And I hated walking then as much as I do now.

Even when I had no wheels and some of these cars were available for little more than pocket change, I did a Nancy Reagan and just said no. Guess what? I'm now finding some of these cars offer a lot more fun than the Holy Grail aspirational cars we all dreamt (and still dream) of owning.

## Once uncool, now collectible?

Case in point: A very good friend of mine (who has perhaps the finest collection of one-off muscle cars and significant Cobras on the planet — a guy who is one of those all-NOS/assembly-line-part-only dweebs who counts the flutes on plastic valve-stem caps and never drives any of these great cars because he is a weenie) bought a killer all-original 1972 Gremlin last year. He called to tell me how awesome it was and how all of his weenie friends were teasing him about it.

Now, remember — I am from Wisconsin, and even here NONE of us wanted an “Ain’t My Car” Gremlin, ever, even when they were new. But as soon as I saw the pictures, something came over me and I said, “Let me know when you’re done with it and I’ll buy it.”

As luck would have it, a few months ago my buddy calls and says “I need the room. Were you really serious about the Gremlin?” So, let me tell you about my new Gremlin... it’s as horrible as I remember and I absolutely love it. Shockingly, it seems I am not alone in liking these cute little Hornets with the back hacked off. You can’t drive it anywhere without a crowd forming. Everybody who comes to my garage sprints past the Cobras to see the Gremlin. It’s insane.

And my weenie buddy? As soon as he sold me the Gremlin, he found an Opel Manta GT and bought it. Why? He had one as his first car. And that’s something all the insane over-the-top muscle cars can’t do for any of us — they can’t take us back to being 16 again with a turn of the key.

## What’s old is new

A few years ago, my wife saw an early Bronco driving around in Arizona and loved it. I explained to her how I hated them because I fixed way too many rusty Bronco plow trucks in my youth and how




**Willingly traded a Mustang GT for ... a Bronco?**

she would hate driving one. But, as anybody who is married knows, you can indeed lose a one-to-one vote, so I was tasked with finding her a Bronco.

We found a nice,

rust-free 1977 (last year, with auto, PS, a/c, and power disc brakes) in Phoenix, AZ. All it took was one test drive for her to be hooked. She even drove it from Arizona to Wisconsin along Route 66 — about 2,300 miles — to get it home. It has now become her car of choice — so much so that we ended up selling her 2008 Mustang GT because she never drove it after getting the Bronco. Now she is looking for a vintage Ford pickup — another vehicle none of us would have traded a Mustang GT for in our formative years

I could offer a third example after a trip to the local appliance store recently where I witnessed “retro”-colored appliances, but I refuse to acknowledge this movement. Yet. But check back with me in a few years. Who knows, by then I may be waxing a vintage olive green Kelvinator in my kitchen. Perspective. God help us. 

# HALF PG AD