



CUTTING EDGE

meets **CLASSIC**

HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR VINTAGE? LIVE, MEMOREX OR DIGITAL?



Will Brewster

A few judicious tweaks can improve the performance and maintain the spirit of your classic

There is an interesting phenomenon in our hobby: Many of today's buyers are after modern interpretations of vintage muscle instead of complete "old" originals. Just look at the recent eye-opening high-dollar sales of resto-mod/Pro Touring cars, and the immense following these cars have in the real world. But are these cars relevant or just a fad? Have original cars offended that many people?

Let's face it, stock muscle cars have little in the way of comfort, handling or braking. This could explain why owners have been trying to improve these cars' reliability and performance since they were new.

By the 1980s, the roots of today's Pro Touring movement were forming. We saw Mustang owners scouring junkyards for Lincoln Versailles rear axles to upgrade their cars to four-wheel disc brakes; GM owners looking for the elusive quick ratio F and G Body steering boxes to speed up the tiller in their GTOs; and companies such as Herb Adams were embracing modern technology and engineering turn-key-modified Firebirds that would run with Porsche 911s. BBS wheels, turbocharging, Recaro seats and Gatorback tires were in; chrome and shiny trim were out.

And while the fashions may have changed, the state of the art continued to evolve, leading us to today's Pro Touring cars —

1,000-horsepower "vintage" cars that offer supercar performance with all the creature comforts a new car buyer would expect.

Is modern really better?

But here's the rub for a curmudgeonly sort such as myself: I like old cars. That doesn't mean I like crappy cars. I like old cars that are finely tuned, sorted, and work as well as (or better than) they did when new. I don't need 1,000 horsepower, and while I certainly appreciate climate control and satellite radio, I don't drive old cars to use that stuff. I drive them to appreciate the way things were. It's a connection to a simpler time.

I like giving a Holley carb a couple of prods to prime it and set the choke. I like the whine of a T-10, the racket of a Detroit Locker, and the sound of solid lifters and a cam that is lumpy enough to make its presence known. I enjoy the pre-drive ritual of checking fluids, awakening the old beast, and letting it warm up before hammering it through four (yes, just four) gears.

I like the fact that I can identify all of the mechanical parts, and armed with a rock, a pocketknife, and a nail file, I can fix almost anything that breaks. Driving these cars allows me to feel like it is 1965 again.

Of course, it isn't 1965. The roads are different, speeds higher, and brain-dead kids texting "OMG" to their BFFs pose a real hazard to the guy in a 1965 Mustang with only a lap belt keeping him from a lethal steel dashboard.

So, between these two extremes of the ultra-high-tech homage to muscle and the ultra-low-tech original cars, is there any middle ground?

Optimize it

There is a middle ground. It is what I like to call an optimized vintage car.

Consider any number of the high-tech Mustangs that have sold in

the past six months at auction in excess of \$200k. All were stunningly beautiful with meticulous workmanship. But let's face facts — as highly personalized machines done in the current style, they will likely never be worth more than the day they were purchased. It is just like buying a new Corvette ZR1 or Shelby GT500: Both are killer cars, but neither are collector cars.

So what would I do with the same money? I'd buy the best collector car I could find that speaks to me, in this case let's say a 1965 GT350. For you it could be a 1969 Z/28 or a 1971 Trans Am — the same principle will apply, and it's adjustable to any budget. Once you have the car, you can use the last 40-plus years of technology to improve its performance and reliability. This can be accomplished almost undetectably, without negatively affecting the value of the base car.


It is amazing how carefully selected, sensible bolt-on upgrades such as modern shocks, springs, radial tires, brake pads, aluminum radiators and professional tuning can transform these old cars. A quality engine builder can get you a carbureted, stock-appearing engine that will run on today's fuels with drivability and horsepower that will surprise you.

The idea here is to make sensible, reliable tweaks that vastly improve the real-world feel of old cars.

The best part? Buy the right car, with a proven track record as a collectible, and while you are enjoying driving, its value will continue to go up. And when the time comes to sell, if the buyer doesn't like the subtle upgrades you've bolted on, just unbolt them and put the stock parts back in their place.

Don't get me wrong, I fully appreciate great Pro Touring and resto-mod cars, so I hope the 2013 Hot Rod Power Tour gang doesn't stop by to burn my garage down. But my point is that stock muscle

cars often get a bad rap because most people today haven't driven a properly dialed-in example. As a guy who drives his "optimized" old cars thousands of miles a year, I get a ton of enjoyment from old cars that work, and when driven properly, can run with anything on the road.

I want to hear what you think. What do you like to drive, and how? Drop me a line at comments@americancarcollector.com and let me know. 



Courtesy of Kindig-It Design

On the more radical end of the scale, this 1968 Ford Mustang custom fastback sold for \$275k at Barrett-Jackson's Las Vegas auction in September 2012

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