

FISHING AROUND FOR VINTAGE 'CUDAS

Unlike most muscle car enthusiasts who would be content to locate a pristine Hemi or AAR (All American Racers) 'Cuda, Arizona collector Pat McGroder has assembled one of the world's finest collections of rare factory prototypes, the source cars, as he calls them, for an entire generation of great American muscle machines.

"Prototypes tended to disappear as did factory-built race cars," says McGroder. "When these cars were new, they served a very specific purpose, racing, and when that was over, most were retired, and nearly all eventually wrecked and discarded. They were by nature disposable. For me, finding them is actually part of the excitement." That "excitement" often takes years and tens of thousands of dollars to fund. In the case of the '68 Woodward Garage Hemi 'Cuda prototype, McGroder says that the search for this car was one of the longest and most expensive of all.

"We were fortunate enough to have the help of Arlen Vanke, a premier race car driver for Chrysler during that time, and he was able to locate the Hemi 'Cuda prototype." To ensure that the Hemi was accurately restored, McGroder actually flew in the original Chrysler engineers who had worked on the Woodward Garage project in 1968. When they showed up on his doorstep, they had all of the original design and engineering plans with them! It still took more than a year to put the car back together, matching every nut and bolt right down to the original specifications, an expensive and arduous task for any restorer when you consider that every piece of the car was literally hand-fabricated in the first place!

While it's certainly no looker, even with a 100-point restoration, it is undeniably the most significant Hemi 'Cuda of all time—a quality that only comes with being the first of its kind.

POP!