

SASSY

by Randy Holden Photos by Jeff Stunkard



The popular conception these days is that when you see a legit 1971 Hemicuda at a Mopar show, you're in the presence of an extremely wealthy individual. Still commanding the highest prices of any muscle cars on the planet, 1971 Hemicudas are thought of as absolutely unobtainable by the average guy and are deemed exclusively the playthings of the very rich. Well, that's not entirely accurate. Granted, the vast majority of wide valve cover 'Cudas are owned by major players, but once in a while, we run across a tale where the little guy makes good. Such is the case with Darrell Smith of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma and this '71 Sassy Grass Hemicuda.

To properly tell our story, we've gotta' start back in the mid-1970's when Darrell was street racing a 1969 SS396 Chevelle and finishing up his high school studies. His priorities in line, he spent more time with the car than he did worrying about high school. Then came the fateful day when a friend acquired a 1970 orange Hemicuda automatic car with a black interior and vinyl top. While the SS396 car could take the Hemi off the line (probably had 3.23 gears), the

Hemi would come charging hard on the top end and ran like a spotted ape once it was moving. After going for a ride in the orange Hemi car, Darrell was convinced he had to have one of these things; only he wanted a four speed, not an automatic. While he planned on acquiring a Hemicuda reasonably soon, he never dreamed it would take over two decades to nail down the machine he was looking for.

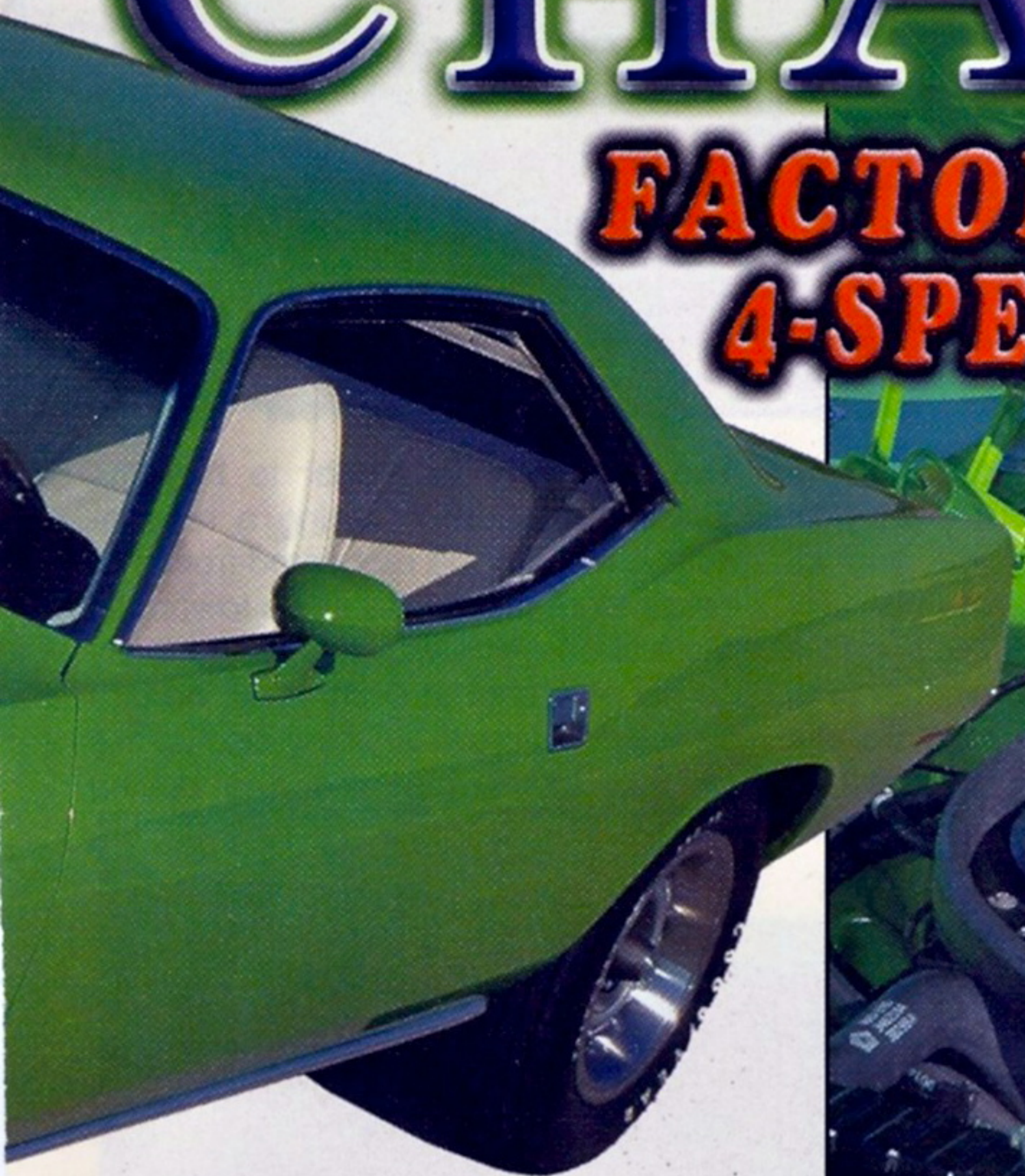
As the seventies wore on into the eighties, cars remained an important part of Darrell's life, and somewhere along the way he saw his first 1971 version of the 'Cuda and fell in love with the one-year-only design. As cool as the 1970 model had seemed, this 1971 beastie was even cooler - dual headlights, toothy grille, gilled fenders, man, this thing had it all! Still, not being a die-hard Mopar guy and being an all-around fast car enthusiast, Darrell didn't realize how scarce 1971 'Cudas were. He started looking for an

affordable 1971 Hemicuda in the early part of the 1980's, but even then, on a working guy's budget, there were no bargains to be found. For that matter, there were no cars to be found period. Darrell received a quick and harsh reality check that the car he dreamed about must not exist in large numbers. He had no idea even late into the 1980's what a rare car he had set his sights on.

As prices on muscle cars blew through the roof for the first time in the late 1980's and early 1990's, Darrell finally realized he might be chasing his dream car forever. The few Hemicudas that did pop up for sale were advertised at prices that could also pay for a new house. Darrell kept on looking, but his outlook was anything but optimistic. Darrell settled into Mopars, being consumed with Road Runners and things like that, usually scoring nice 383 and 440 cars. Then came October of 1996,

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FACTORY SASSY GRASS 4-SPEED '71 HEMICUDA



when a fellow local enthusiast named Scott Lindsey carted home a completely disassembled 1971 Hemicuda. Darrell was quickly on the scene to investigate.

Scott had discovered a long dormant project in Alexandria, Virginia, which he thought would be a money making proposition. What met Darrell's eyes that day was a garage filled with pieces parts of a Hemicuda. The body was largely intact but wearing an old dark blue metallic repaint with primer spots scattered all over and, oddly, a pair of Hemi hockey stick decals. The car's fourth owner, who acquired the car just as muscle car prices were starting to rise, decided to do a full restoration on the 'Cuda, and typical of the 1980's mentality, he decided the 'Cuda needed a lot of options it hadn't been born with. This guy did a great job of taking the car almost completely apart, then he gathered parts from all over the country for his intended restoration. Fortunately, that restoration never came to pass.

When Scott hauled the Plymouth home, among the parts he acquired were front and back rubber bumpers, a console, front and rear spoilers, and a host of smaller odds and ends. While the bare shell pre-



sented a promising picture, it was the plethora of parts scattered all around which really got Darrell's attention. Most of the 'Cuda's original components were still there; this wouldn't be a hard car to restore. Naturally, he wanted it, which worked to his advan-

tage because Scott didn't want it. The only problem was, the money wasn't right for either of them and Darrell went home empty handed trying to figure out how to come up with more cash. A couple of months went by and Scott wasn't having much luck selling the

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disassembled Hemicuda; precisely because it was disassembled (imagine that being an obstacle today). Finally in the summer of 1997, Scott and Darrell came to a financial agreement that would leave all the non-original parts such as the spoilers and rubber bumpers with Scott, thus reducing the price of the car and providing Darrell with his very long awaited dream car. Just for grins, we'll tell you the price for the car, with its matching numbers Hemi and transmission and only 35K on the odometer, was around \$40,000 - once again, try finding a deal like that these days!

Darrell packed the car and its parts home, placed it all in his garage, then satisfied himself investigating just what he'd bought and he spent a lot of time examining the extensive collection of paperwork. The original dealer's invoice, window sticker, broadcast sheet, and a number of receipts for early service work remained with the 'Cuda throughout its life, informing us that the bright green Plymouth was ordered new by a young man named Edbert Poston in Landham, Maryland. You would think with a name that unique, the original owner could be found, but thus far, Darrell hasn't had

any luck locating him. According to the story passed down from owner-to-owner with the 'Cuda, the original owner had bought the car as his daily driver while attending college. This would seem to have a lot of truth to it, for the service receipts indicate the Plymouth had 22,000 miles placed on

The boy went into debt to buy the 'Cuda project, then, being a reasonable kinda' guy, he recovered from that debt before taking any steps toward its restoration. Knowing this would likely be his only shot at such a car, he didn't want to screw anything up. While he was biding his time and buying



its odometer in the first fourteen months of its life. It was sold in the early 1970's to another fellow in Alexandria, Virginia, which is where it spent the vast majority of its existence parked.

As we stated at the outset of our article, Darrell's not one of those millionaire wheeler-dealer type guys.

parts when they could be found affordably, the prices of Hemicudas absolutely exploded. As he stared with wide eyes at each successive sale, the two-edged sword of having such a car struck deep. Darrell's plans of doing a simple restoration and having fun cruising with the 'Cuda faded away simply because the car became too valuable a commodity. So, while he had put the car back together somewhat, the 'Cuda continued to sit in his garage as the years clicked by.

Finally, the time arrived for the 'Cuda's rejuvenation. Having an extensive collection of correct NOS parts for the car and armed with as much knowledge on this particular car as was humanly obtainable, Darrell enlisted the help of Jeff's Restorations in Taylor, Texas. An all-around one stop shop of experts, Jeff's soon had the Plymouth on a rotisserie, stripped to the bare metal. The old blue paint gave up a few secrets as it came off. Apparently when it received the blue



repaint, there was some minor rust repair done, mainly in the area of the cowl and on the lower quarters. These minor problems were remedied with steel patch panels, which left the Plymouth wearing all the same panels it was born with. The original Hemi was rebuilt to stock 1971 specs, as was the 833 four speed and the 4.10 Super Track Pack rear. A new set of Legendary skins went inside, a brilliant new coat of the original Sassy Grass green paint was splashed on, and in just over six months, Darrell's Hemicuda looked better than it did when new. After sitting up for over two decades, the car was back in style and after three decades of waiting for his dream car, Darrell was ready to burn some rubber.

The long wait for Darrell was certainly worth the time, blood, sweat, tears, and creative financing. What he ended up with is the only known Sassy Grass green '71 Hemicuda with a white interior. There are two other Sassy Grass '71 Hemicudas known to exist, but both of those vehicles have black interiors. The 'Cuda is unusual not only for its fantastic color combo, but also for the curious list of options it has and some items it doesn't have. Like many '71 'Cudas, this one left the factory without the billboard decals (one must remember, the giant decals weren't that popular when new). There are no road lamps up front, there's no console for the Pistol Grip shifter, and when new, this one came with black painted steel wheels instead of the 15" Rallyes which were added during the resto. On the plus side, the dual painted mirrors are factory, the Rallye instrument panel is kosher, and there's an AM radio with the optional rear seat speaker for tunes. The striking color-keyed painted grille was standard fare on Sassy Grass cars and is a dramatic departure from the expected Argent Silver finish.

Since finishing the restoration, Darrell has put some miles on the odometer, lit the tires a few times just for grins, and has attended some regional shows. According to Darrell, when Galen Govier looked the 'Cuda over and certified it as being legit, he remarked to him that he thought it was among the best five Hemicuda restorations he'd seen. That's saying a lot! All of which goes to prove it doesn't take a million bucks to own a killer Hemicuda; you just had to be in the right place at the right time and exercise a little patience. ✖

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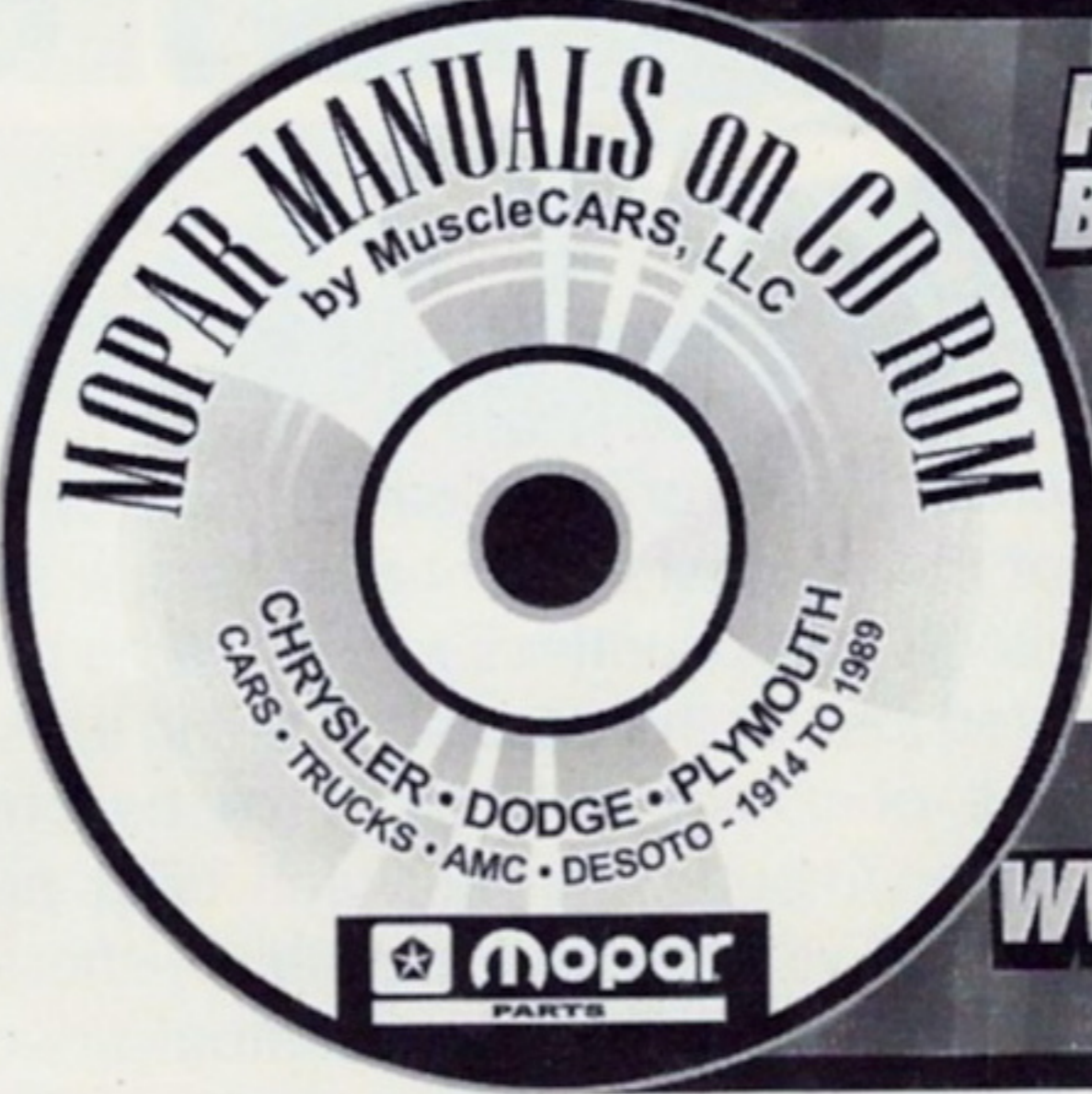
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