

Ambyr's Cobra Jet

A 1971 429CJ Ranchero GT becomes a family heirloom

text and photography by Jerry Heasley



Ambyr doesn't own this one yet, but the day is coming. Wayne wants her to have it. Riding his only daughter to kindergarten in this Ranchero GT, a 429 Cobra Jet no less, created a symbiotic bond between man, child and machine.

It doesn't hurt that the Ford, like Ambyr, is a rare gem. Currently, she's attending TCU. She can have any car she wants, and the car she chooses is this 429 Cobra Jet, now restored to perfection.

"I was born in 1951. And I remember that car on display at the oil show in Odessa," Wayne Davis began. The oil show was a big event in West Texas. Sewell Ford

ordered this Ranchero especially for their display. Wayne saw the car new and wanted the odd, shaker-equipped 429 Cobra Jet.

The first owner was a lady in her mid-fifties. She needed a light-duty pickup and the Ranchero GT, all gentlemanly and looking as much car as truck, filled the bill. Actually, the lady had no knowledge of the prize muscle engine lurking beneath the hood. Automatic helped, as did power steering, power brakes and air conditioning. The Magnum 500 wheels jumped the looks, as did buckets inside.

A few years later, Wayne was in business with his own car lot, dealing in special interest cars. He tracked down the Ranchero and tried his best to make a deal. The lady refused to sell. For years, she hung on to her '69 Cobra Jet. The little old lady from Pasadena wasn't half so fast, nor could she haul half as much.

Eventually, the time did come to sell. Wayne got the car in trade in 1979. Once in his possession, the GT became a keeper. This is quite remarkable if you know the range of

exotic special interest and muscle cars that have passed through his "Thunderbirds Etcetera" business. (He specialized, at first, in 1955-'57 Thunderbirds.)

Wayne restored his baby without laser stripes, which were stock. He likes it that way. Firing up the 370-horsepower 429 Cobra Jet brings the light-duty pickup all the attention it needs when the black shaker hood scoop rock 'n' rolls atop the big-block. The duals reverberate, trying vainly to muffle the notes played by the high compression Cobra Jet. Aficionados will not miss the extruded aluminum rocker panels incorporating the GT logo, either. There's also a GT badge on the fold-down tailgate.



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As for tire-scorching performance, one usually does not look for muscle in a pickup. Rarity plays a big role in this car's camouflage. Of 24,946 Rancheros built in 1971, exactly 3,632 had the GT package, and a minuscule 138 had the 429 Cobra Jet engine.

After taking the car out of daily service, Wayne restored his Ranchero GT to the way he saw it in 1971 at the oil show—save for the body side tape stripes. Just 86,000 miles show on the odometer.

Ambyr was born in 1980. She retains fond memories of trips to kindergarten in the Grabber Green truck. The deal is Ambyr will own this truck when she gets out of college.

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WAYNE DAVIS RESTORATIONS, SOUTHLAKE, TEXAS

For 25 years, Wayne Davis has proved the experts wrong. Common thought is that buying and restoring collector cars for resale cannot be done professionally and is strictly a hobby. Thus, all professional restoration shops make money by restoring cars for customers.

Davis, however, bought and restored only his own cars and then sold them at a profit. In 1995, a large multi-chain new car dealer in the Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex offered Wayne the presidency of "Regency Conversions", a truck and van specialty conversion shop on Interstate 35, just north of Ft. Worth.

Wayne closed down his shop in Odessa and moved to Southlake to accept this position. In 1999, he re-opened his shop to function strictly as a hobby-type mill to restore the cars in his growing collection. Three employees work there full time.

Wayne's secret to buying, restoring and selling collector cars has been to restore the automobiles exactly the way the buying public wants. Color and options are prime considerations. For example, in 1991, Davis tracked down a 1971 Plymouth 'Cuda 440 Six Pack convertible, one of 17 ever made, and restored this Mopar to concours condition. In 1992, at the Barrett-Jackson collector car auction, the 'Cuda brought a world's record \$111,000. A few years ago at B-J, Davis sold a 1961 Chrysler 300 G convertible for \$125,000, the highest price ever paid for this model and series. He bought and restored one of the rare 1957 DeSoto Adventurer convertibles, and then auctioned it at Scottsdale for \$125,000.

The ability to put together cars with extremely good looks—sometimes modified slightly from stock—is the reason Don Davis (no relation) recruited Wayne Davis to run his Regency Conversions.