

HOT ROD

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We went nuts for this shot of Swede Savage and Sam Posey mixing it up into turn 5 at Elkart Lake in the AAR 'Cuda and T/A Challenger, respectively. In race trim, these Mopars did not have Six-Pak induction (that was a showroom geegaw), but they did have Keith Black destroyed 305ci small-blocks.



These interior shots of the Parnelli Jones entry and (below) the Mark Donahue entry give you an idea of

their proper blend of stripped parts, tinwork, and OE trim that's required for the correct look.



Don't even think of cloning a Trans Am car without a big, gangly shift lever. And you should be slapped if you even think of an automatic.



A Trans Am story cannot be printed without honorable mention to AMC, which was arguably the most dedicated to the cause. Of all the AMC racing ventures (including Bonneville and Pro Stock), it was most successful in SCCA Trans Am.



Dual quads were totally Trans Am territory, and in the '69-later years, big, homemade ram-air setups under a scoopless hood were the norm. The Fords had dual Dominators.

The Trans Am Look
 What It Is, How To Get It
 Photography: The Hot Rod Archives

No—as in SCCA, not as in Pontiac. Which raises a good point: The Trans Am racing seasons of 1966-1972 affected the overall genre of gearheadedness far more than perhaps you know. Thank those glorious years for not just the namesake TA, but for the Boss 302 Mustangs, Javelins, and Mopar's AAR and T/A E-bodies. Without Trans Am, neither the Camaro Z/28 nor its seminal 302 small-block would have existed. (The displacement was a direct result of SCCA rules.)

It all came from a road-racing series that started at Florida's Sebring Raceway with the very first Trans American Sedan Championship held in March of 1966. By 1972 the rules had gotten out of control, and guys like us stopped caring. In the interim, though, legends like A.J. Foyt, Parnelli Jones, and Smokey Yunick had been involved, and the series had turned Mark Donohue (with 29 wins and his own signature-series showroom AMX) and Roger Penske into household names. Even the venues were legendary: Riverside, Elkhart Lake, Limerock, and others.

You'll note there's not a dragstrip among 'em. Those tracks are all twisty, and not just lefthand ovals. A full 30 years of quarter-mile-biased car guys and mass-marketed NASCAR enthusiasm now separate Trans Am's zenith from our smooth brain lobes, but with today's surge of interest in the Pro Touring look, we thought it's time to remind you of or introduce you to where it came from. Early Trans Am racing was about nasty, V-8 ponycars with fat meats going wheel-to-wheel around the chicane. The cars that competed have an unmistakable vibe, and it's a good one. Gives us the chills, actually. It's elemental Pro Touring without the billet wheels and air conditioning; handling cars minus the wine and cheese.

With this story, we'll do our best to point out the key styling of the Trans Am mystique as well as encourage you to build a car today that has this look. Frankly, it should be easier, cheaper, and more of a standout than hopping on the Pro Touring bandwagon. More guttural. Yes!



The good thing about the vintage look is that you can easily fabricate it at home—the workmanship was rough by today's standards. Here's the Watts-link setup under the Chaffey College Camaro.



This '66 Dart engine photo reveals the low-tech that made up the early years. Note the valve-cover crossover and the NASCAR-type bowls on the Holley carb. The stock window-washer bottle is still in place.



Jerry Titus' Firebird at Riverside in 1969 displays the definitive magnesium Minilite wheels that instantly say "Trans Am." These 15x8

wheels are still available new in aluminum from Minilite in England or from Main Street Motorsport (New Milford, CT; 877/940-0598; www.minilitewheels.com), and the appropriate long lugnuts are sold by PS Engineering (Torrance, CA; 310/534-4477). Dig up a set of Goodyear Blue Streak Sports Car Specials in 6.00/12.50-15 and you're set.



Bob Estes Lincoln-Mercury, which had previously supported an Indy car, fielded this Cougar in 1968. The neat quick-fill cap is a styling point that would separate a modern rendition from the posers. The vintage electric fuel pumps appear very similar to modern Carters, though we'd err on the side of safety and use black braided hose rather than rubber line.



This is the engine in the famous Penske '69 Camaro Z/28 with the factory crossram. There are tricks like braided line for the fuel and breathers, an oil-

collection tank, and an oil cooler, but the alternator and power brakes seem stock. Other race cars we had photos of featured manual steering and brakes.



In the early years, Trans Am classes for under-2.0L and over-2.0L raced side-by-side. Later they were separate, and the smaller class was dominated by little import cars that looked pretty cool in their own way. However, we had a soft spot for this Pinto at Elkhart Lake in '72—one of very few Pintos in Trans Am. Note the sponsor, Racer Walsh, still active today (see www.racerwalsh.com).



Hard to believe that the first V-8-class Trans Am winner was a Dodge Dart. They look a bit ungainly, like this '66 Barracuda at Riverside, but the small Mopars have a legacy that'd be cheap to duplicate. However, the gaping hole left by removing the front bumper—covered here by window screen—is an aesthetic downside, or a rough-and-tumble plus

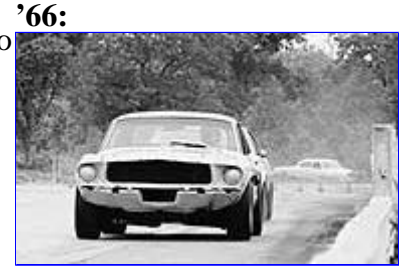
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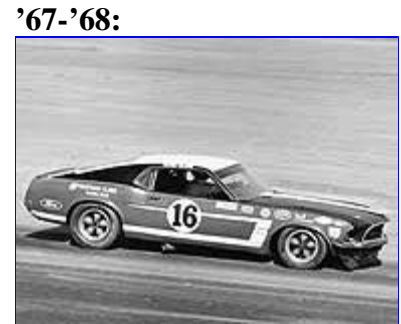
Three Generations of '66-'72

We've defined the first six seasons as the heyday of Trans Am racing, but we've found that there are really four subtle but important vibes.

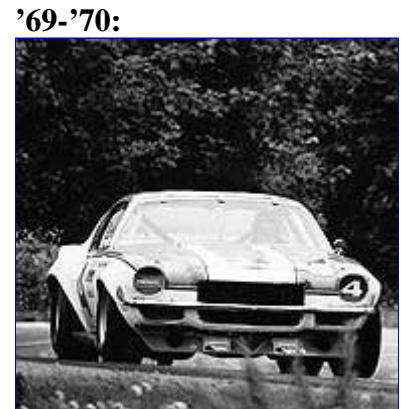
'66: The first year was largely amateur, as you can tell by looking at photo A from the '66 Riverside race. The first two years featured smaller pony cars, and the look consistently featured full trim sans front and rear bumpers, electrical-taped headlights, simple rollbars, and minimal lettering. Photos of this time reveal handling traits not as refined as the later cars. While this 'Stang has Americans, extra-wide factory steel wheels were common.



'67-'68: As interest took hold, the cars became more advanced with side-exit exhaust, trunk-mounted fuel cells with quick-fill caps through the decklid, and more stripes. Underhood, dual-quads began to be seen, and interiors were more gutted. This is Jerry Titus at War Bonnet Raceway in 1968.



'69-'70: By the time the factories became involved, the bumpers went back on, presumably to make the cars look more stock. These cars had more advanced chassiswork, plus chin spoilers, totally removed headlights, and window tabs. George Follmer is shown in the Mustang that won Bridehampton in June of 1969, but the photo is from Riverside the same year, where he wrecked the car; it has since been restored and is now owned by Vic Edelbrock, who plans to race it once again.



'71-'72: To our eyes, the final musclecars of Trans Am were built very similarly to the '69-'70 rides except that body style changes for Mustang, Camaro, Firebird, and AMX made a big difference in the look. This was also a time when fender flares came into play, especially on the Camaros.

'71-'72:

What to Build?

Very Safe Trans Am Clones

- '66-'68 Mustangs
- '69-'70 Mustangs
- '68-'72 Camaros and Firebirds

- '71-'72 Javelin AMXs
- '70 Challengers and Barracudas

Also Cool, But Less Expected

- '66 Dodge Darts and Plymouth Barracudas
- '70-'72 Ford Pintos
- '70-'72 Mavericks
- '68-'70 AMXs
- '70-'72 Dusters and Darts

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