



GSS HEMI

Anything But Subtle



MI DART

By Larry Weiner

Photos by The Brunt Bros., Al Kirschenbaum and Blue Moon Motorsports

Hemi Dart. Just the name alone strikes fear into the heart of owners of lesser vehicles. The sound of a maxed out 426 cubic inch multi carbed Hemi is indelibly connected to the sight and sound of brutal tire smoking burnouts and wrinkle wall slicks buckling against the high traction asphalt during 8000 rpm wheels up launches. It's all part of the imagery of these incredible Mopars that have dominated the premier class in Super Stock racing for nearly fifty years. And in spite of its age, the 1968 Hemi Dart not only shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon; the fact is, the older they get, the faster they run.

The story of the 1968 Hemi Dart has been well documented over the years. It's well known that Chrysler specifically developed the vehicle with the intention of dominating the NHRA SS/A and SS/AA classes. The fact that the Hemi Dart and its A-Body fraternal twin, the Hemi Cuda have done that better than anyone could have ever predicted is nothing less than an understatement. Only 80 Hemi Darts were originally constructed by Hurst Campbell at the direction of Chrysler, but their successes and subsequent notoriety has resulted in many more being built throughout the years by numerous builders. While the originals were destined for drag strip only duty, and never intended to run on the street, today there are shops like SSandAFX that will build you an extremely faithful reproduction of the original 1968 Hemi Dart that you can also legally drive on the street. Some of these replicas are correct

From the front, the Mr. Norm's GSS Hemi Dart looks like one of the original BO29 Super Stock Darts. While it is street legal, this A-Body is nearly a pure bred race car with license plates, and is the textbook definition of a wolf in wolfs clothing. On the street, it's like bringing a Glock to a knife fight.







right down to the lightweight fiberglass front end, Chemcor type side glass with seat belt strap pulls and the choice of an A833 4-speed or a 727 Torqueflite. Much like the originals, these are extremely potent vehicles on the track, and they're also great fun if you want to terrorize the kids with their pesky tuner cars on the street. Yeah, old guys (and their old cars) really do rule!

The 1968 Hemi Dart that is the subject of this story is not one of those cars. As we reach the mid-point of the second decade of the 21st century, high performance cars have evolved dramatically from the original 1960's

premise that straight line acceleration was the number one priority. Virtually every one of the original muscle cars that we hold in such high esteem offered extremely capable quarter mile performance, however, nearly all of them lacked the kind of cornering and braking capabilities that are expected from modern muscle cars like the new Challenger.

Mr. Norm has always been about looking forward. During the muscle car era, he was always pushing the envelope, determined to get the maximum performance out of the new Chargers, Super Bees, Darts and Demons his customers were pur-

chasing at Grand Spaulding Dodge. On the track, his top fuel funny cars were feared by competitors, always pushing the envelope when it came to the kind of class leading breakthroughs and creative out of the box thinking it took to be a consistent winner.

When the opportunity presented itself to reprise the 1968 Hemi Dart, simply recreating what had been done over 40 years earlier was not Mr. Norm's goal. The plan was to develop a serious high performance vehicle with the kind of take no prisoner's attitude that was emblematic of the original Hemi Dart, while being able to go wheel

One departure from the Super Stock Darts is the near luxury accommodations in the Mr. Norm's GSS Hemi Dart. If it weren't for the 3-inch racing lap belts, you would never know that this is nearly a full bred racing vehicle.



to wheel against some of the most respected performance cars on the road today. To achieve these ambitious goals, the first key to success for a new incarnation of the Hemi Dart would be keeping the exterior faithful in large part to the iconic original. The second element necessary to meet the objective was more involved, and required a major infusion of modern technology. This would include utilizing the latest suspension, chassis and powertrain components; each a requisite to enable the vintage A-Body to carve corners and stop on the proverbial dime, while mirroring the kind of brutal quarter mile performance that the original Hemi Dart is well known for.

While this approach has been taken successfully with other vintage muscle cars, most notably first generation Camaros and early Mustangs, building a 1968 Dart with these goals has not been the path of choice for mainstream builders.

Mr. Norm was determined to break the mold and build a thoroughly modern performing A-Body that was “virile, vigorous and potent,” to use the quote that G Gordon Liddy is well known for. Or, in the more common vernacular of a gearhead, a Hemi Dart that was street lethal and demanded respect.

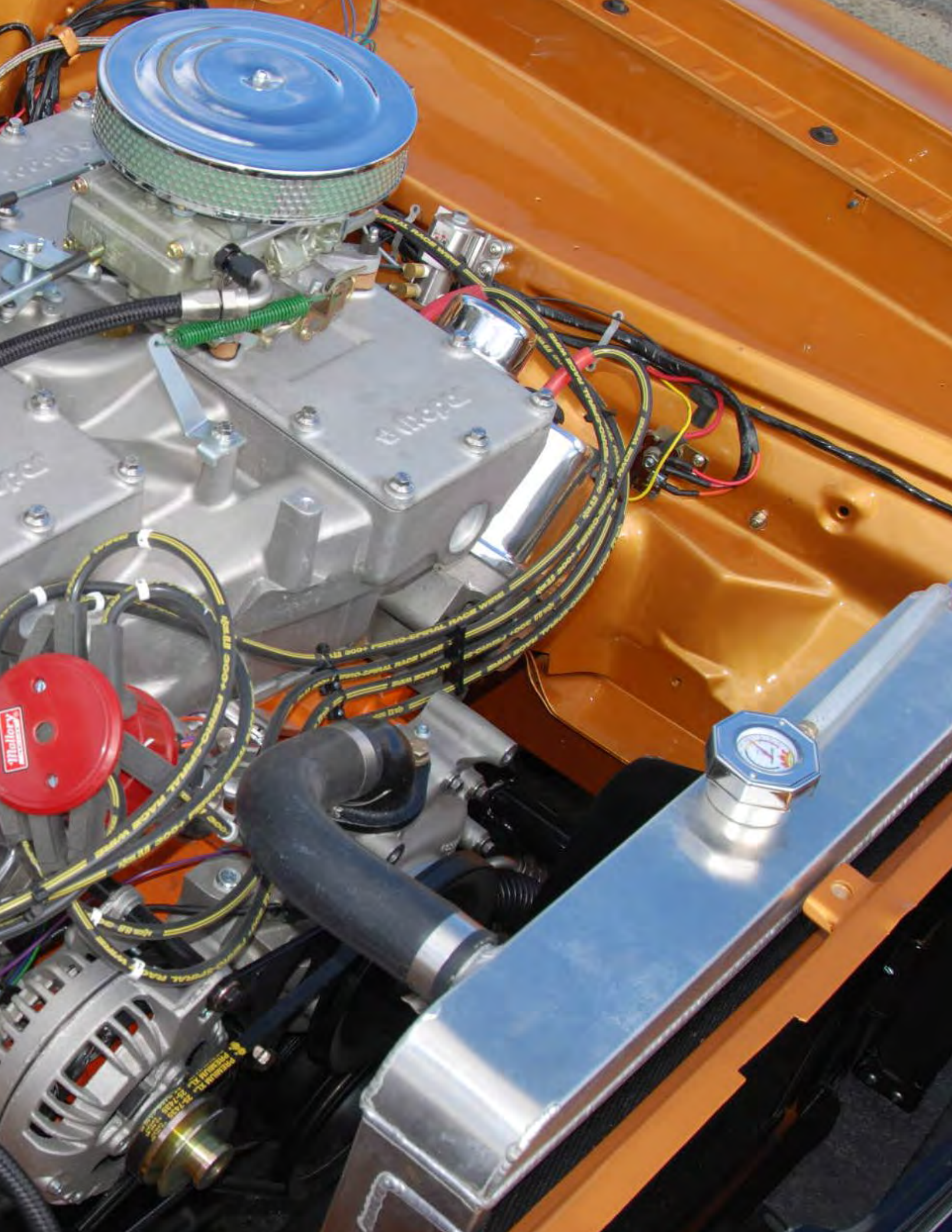
With these parameters determined, the first step was to find a solid 1968 Dart to use as the foundation for the vehicle. As most builders will agree, it's always much easier (and far less expensive in the long run) to start with a good solid body than one that's riddled with rust or has suffered collision damage. And rather than use a rare and highly desirable GTS, it made more sense to look for a lesser model, especially since none of the powertrain would be used in the build. A very nice unmolested low mileage six cyl-



inder Dart GT was located in Wisconsin. It was nearly rust free, had never been in an accident. It was a perfect candidate, so it was quickly purchased and the build was on. After completely disassembling the entire car, the body was put on a rotisserie and every inch of sheet metal was stripped, straightened, unnecessary holes filled and the undercoating



528 cubic inches of pure bred Hemi is the heart and soul of the Mr. Norm's GSS Hemi Dart. Blood brother to the most powerful racing engines the world has ever seen, it pounds out a whopping 727 horsepower in street tune on 91 octane witches' brew, which is what Jim Van Gordon calls the gas in California. Just imagine what the numbers would be if we filled the tank with 102 octane Sunoco 260. I think we're going to need a set of real wrinkle walls....





The GSS Hemi Dart shows off its “Run with the Scat Pack” ‘68 style split stripe. Look closely and you can see the stainless steel fuel tank, the LPW stud girdle on the Strange 60 rear end and the electric dumps.

removed. Fortunately, there were only a few rusted areas on the entire body, and they were repaired or replaced as necessary, followed by hundreds of hours of stripping, sanding, blocking and priming until the body was better than new.

It should be noted that several mods were incorporated during the body resto-

ration prior to paint to insure that the Dart body would be able to handle the extreme performance that it would be subjected to. The first was the obligatory sub-frame connectors that are commonly used to strengthen the unibody structure. Next, Hemi style torque boxes were added, and to accommodate the significantly larger rear

tires that would be required to harness the massive infusion of horsepower, the wheel houses were widened 3 ½” inches and the leaf spring mounts were moved inward accordingly. And in keeping with the original Hemi Dart visuals, the rear wheel openings were slightly enlarged, and a replica of the original Super Stock hood by

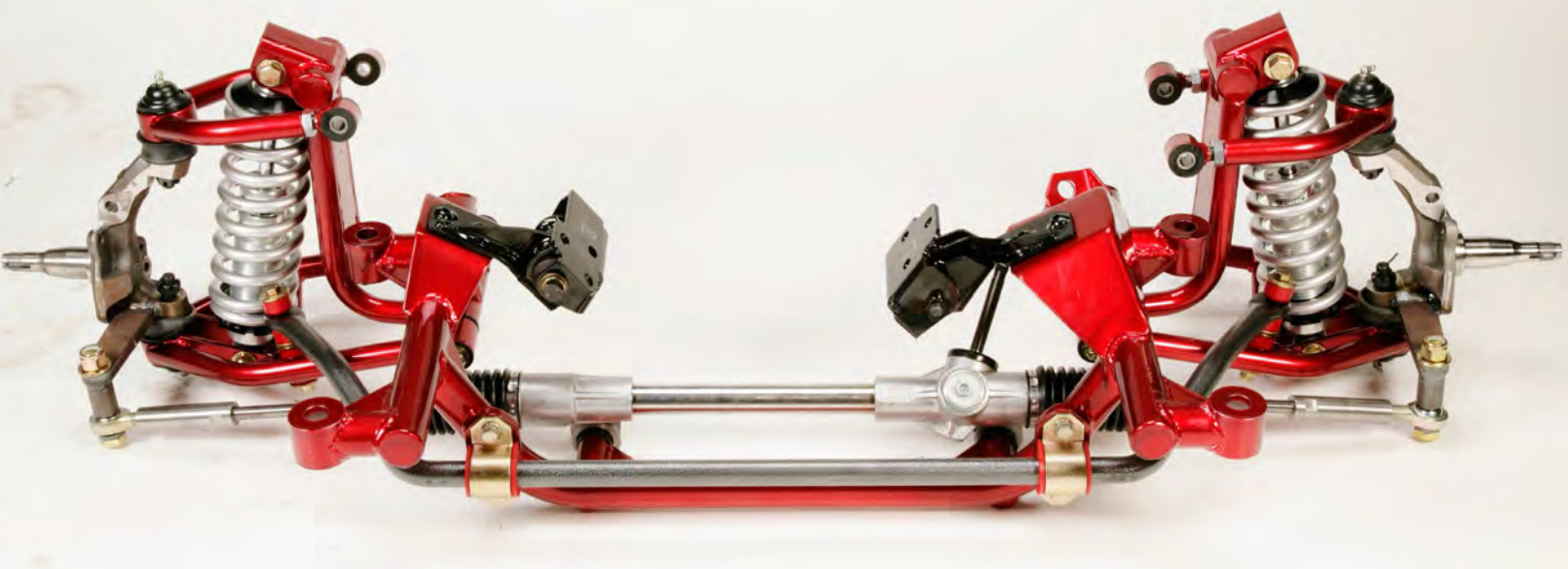


Kramer Automotive Specialties was chosen not only for its traditional appearance, but to provide clearance for the cross ram.

For the engine, nothing less than a killer bullet would do, so the decision was made to have a 720 horsepower 528 Hemi built. Assembled by Van Gordon Racing, this balanced and

blue printed monster is a veritable tour de force. It was built using the best performance parts available on the market, starting with a Mopar Performance Mega Block. Inside, reciprocating parts include a Callies 4340 crank, Eagle forged connecting rods, and Wiseco 9.5:1 forged pistons. Free breathing is provided by a set of

Indy Hemi Legend aluminum heads, with valve actuation provided by a Comp Cams hydraulic stick. The intake manifold is a classic Mopar Performance Cross Ram that has been machined to match the heads. Sitting atop the Cross Ram are Holley Hemi carbs that have been carefully prepped by Van Gordon and installed using a phenolic



Control Freak front suspension features QA1 coil overs, tubular control arms and rack and pinion steering. It is a quantum leap over the original torsion bar suspension and steering.

spacer between them and the intake manifold.

A Milodon oil pan was shortened in the sump area to provide extra ground clearance, while still retaining plenty of capacity for the Valvoline 20W50 racing oil. Dawson Racing Headers bolt up to a 3 inch ceramic coated exhaust system that's equipped with electrically actuated dumps. Flip the switch on the dash and get ready to wake up the dead. Make a mental note to call the writers of "The Walking Dead" and see if they need help getting some real dead-heads! The ignition system is all Mallory and Accel, and a rev limiter keeps things on the safe and sane side at 7250 rpm. A Mallory fuel pump sends the 91 octane fuel to the carbs via a Ricks Hot Rod Shop stainless steel tank through stainless steel hard lines. A regulator governs fuel pressure at each

carb for extra protection.

Everything in the powertrain department of this Hemi Dart is built to "take a lickin' and keep on tickin,'" as the Timex commercials used to say, and the driveline is no exception. Backing up the engine is an 11 inch Hayes clutch, pressure plate and fly wheel that resides in a Lakewood blow-proof bell housing. The transmission of choice for the Mr. Norm's GSS Hemi Dart was Passion Performance 18 spline A-833 4-speed overdrive. With this trans, fourth gear is a .80:1, providing a 20 percent overdrive. Last, but certainly not least is a Strange 60 rear end. Based on the original Dana 60 that was standard equipment on the original Hemi Dart, it's stronger and better equipped to handle punishing drag strip duty than its storied predecessor. Equipped with a Power-Lok TorSen, this differential

is like having your cake and eating it too, since it offers the positive engagement of a Detroit Locker when drag racing, but will also enable you to go around corners without all of the drama and noise of a Locker.

To provide the kind of handling that was another requisite of the build, a Control Freak complete front suspension replaced all of the stock items. The Control Freak package includes a new K-member and cradle that features an extremely robust design. Manufactured from DOM seamless tube, the manufacturer claims that even pulling six inch wheelstands won't faze it. Say goodbye to the stock torsion bars, as they have been replaced with fully adjustable coil overs, along with new tubular upper and lower control arms that have graphite impregnated urethane bushings. Rack and

pinion steering replaces the stock factory unit, with the steering arms up front, so there is no interference with the oil pan.

With all of the go-fast goodies that will be on the Hemi Dart, it would be great if it could stop as well as it could accelerate. Forget the antiquated 9-inch drum brakes that were standard equipment on the Dart back in 1968, because SSBC disc brakes were chosen to replace them at all four corners. Tri Power 3 piston calipers with 13 inch slotted rotors provide the kind of stopping power that will plant your face in the windshield on a hard stop if you're not wearing a seat belt.

A dual master cylinder and stainless steel lines complete the package.

With all of the parts in hand, the next step was to trial fit all of the parts, especially the new components, to insure that when it was time for final assembly, everything would bolt right up. Taking this extra step was time well spent, and insured that the installation of the parts would be smooth and not

require any mods once the body was painted. Speaking of paint, the choice of the color for the Dart was a modern version of the original Hurst Gold, and was created by Sherwin-Williams Planet Color. A tribute to Hurst, the company that built all of the original Hemi Darts, the color gold has been associated with Hurst almost as long as they have been in business. George Hurst loved gold; the show cars he built were gold, the race cars he campaigned like the Hurst Hemi Under Glass were gold, Linda Vaughn, the world famous spokesperson for Hurst always wore a gold outfit at events, and even

Hurst wheels were available in gold.

In fact, the wheels on the GSS Hemi Dart also capture some of the Hurst lineage. They feature a design that was inspired by the original Hurst Dazzler wheels that were introduced in 1965. While the 14 inch originals were incredibly strong, combining a steel barrel with a forged aluminum spider, they were extremely heavy. The new wheels by Oasis are one piece cast aluminum and are significantly lighter than the originals. They're also 17 inches in diameter, allowing the use of modern Pirelli directional radial tires that offer the kind of grip necessary



Mr. Norm's original GSS lettering in black, red, black combination adorn the front fenders and hood, just as they did back in 1968. Rolling stock consists of 17-inch Hurst style wheels by Oasis and Pirelli P-Zero Assimetrico tires. Right behind the wheels are SSBC Tri Power calipers and 13-inch Big Bite slotted rotors. Peeking through the black Super Stock lift off hood are a pair of Holley Hemi four barrel carbs.

for cutting apexes at high speed, unlike the original Hemi Dart that only had to negotiate a gentle turn at the end of a quarter mile pass.

The goal was to debut the Hemi Dart at the SEMA SHOW, so with the clock ticking and a hard deadline approaching, once the multi stage Hurst Gold paint was dry, color sanded and buffed, it was time to kick re-assembly into high gear. By test fitting everything before paint, the Dart went together seamlessly. The front and rear suspension, along with the rear end were installed first, followed by the engine and transmission. The big inch Hemi fired right up after all of the plumbing and wiring were completed, and then it was time to start on the interior.

The interior of the Hemi Dart looks familiar, but has been enhanced with numerous detail improvements. For starters, to insure that the cabin is cool, even on the hottest days with the Hemi just inches in front of the firewall, a Quiet Ride Solutions insulation kit was used to cover every square inch of exposed metal, including inside the doors and the trunk. Remaining faithful to the vintage muscle car look, the original Dart factory buckets and dash were retained. Several subtle mods are easy to spot, such as the stock cluster being refaced in white and a three gauge grouping where the AM radio had originally resided. Of course, it wouldn't be a Hemi Dart

without the obligatory tachometer mounted front and center on top of the dash for easy viewing, and this one is no exception. An Autometer tach and rev limiter is an essential component to insuring a long life for the Hemi, especially in the heat of battle. Another given is the Hurst Competition Plus Shifter that sprouts from the tunnel, standing ready to precisely stir the gears on the A-833 style Passion Performance 4-speed overdrive trans. And yes, just in case you were wondering, the little red button on the side of the Hurst Consistent T-Handle controls the Line Lock, just like on a Super Stock Hemi Dart.

But since this isn't a purpose built race car, it has been endowed with creature comforts that would have been unthinkable in one of the original factory lightweights. The seats, door panels and headliner were all upholstered in pearl white leather, providing the perfect neutral contrast with the Hurst Gold paint. Mr. Norm's GSS logos embroidered on the seat backs and lettered on the white instrument cluster face, providing the finishing touch to the interior and reminding everyone who the inspiration was for this wicked Hemi Dart.

When the GSS Hemi Dart was completed, it was quickly loaded onto an enclosed transport and shipped to Las Vegas for its coming out party in the Mr. Gasket Exhibit at the SEMA SHOW. Joined

by Mr. Norm himself, the car was a huge crowd pleaser at the show, and Norm burned through plenty of Bic pens signing autographs all week. But that was nothing compared to what was scheduled next. Following the SEMA SHOW, the next stop for the GSS Hemi Dart was a place where it would feel right at home; on the dragstrip.

After posing for photos, it was time to put the pedal to the metal. And who better to put the Hemi Dart through its paces, but Jim Van Gordon. Well known for the racing and high performance street engines he builds, Jim is also a very capable shoe, having piloted more than his share of door cars. Currently, Jim is running an 8-second roadster in Goodguys Nostalgia Eliminator II Class, so he was more than up to the task of taking the Hemi Dart out for some passes down the 1320.

Van Gordon started by warming up the big Hemi. He then rolled into the water box to heat up the tires in preparation for some easy shakedown passes with the Dart. To say that Jim made it look easy would be an understatement, and the sound of the un-muffled 528 Hemi was music to our ears. And while Jim didn't try to run any big numbers, as this was more a shake-out session than practice for the World Finals, the Hemi Dart ran perfectly each and every time.

Once the track and photo session was completed, we

put the Dart through some real world driving cycles on the freeway and surface streets. The rack and pinion manual steering was light, the pedal effort required for the manual discs was nothing out of the ordinary, and the handling was unlike any Dart we have ever driven. All in all, this car did everything that was asked of it each and every time, and it kept coming back for more. The only

caveat is that when you drive a 720 horsepower car like the Hemi Dart, restraint is a virtue. It's very easy to blow the tires off the car almost anytime, so it's prudent to consider how much you really want to tip into the throttle. The best suggestion is respect the car and you'll have more fun driving it than you ever dreamed possible.

At the end of the day, we loaded the Hemi Dart back

into the enclosed trailer. It turned out better than anyone expected and over-delivered on every one of the goals that Mr. Norm set. The GSS Hemi Dart is a fitting tribute to Mr. Norm, the High Performance King who sold more high performance Dodge's than anyone during the heyday of the muscle car and continues to be an influence on them to this very day.



Coming or going, the GSS Hemi Dart is all business. Like Super Stocks of the era, it sits a little higher in the back and the wide tires completely fill the stretched wheel houses. Notice the Mr. Norm's Grand Spaulding Dodge emblem on the left side of the deck lid, just like it was back in the day.





The Mr. Norm's GSS Hemi Dart with Jim Van Gordon behind the wheel at the big end of the track after a full pass. It was an effort for the camera car to keep up with the Hemi Dart at over 100 miles per hour to get this shot. Its first shakedown runs were on the track and the Hemi Dart performed flawlessly.

1968 MR. NORM'S GSS HEMI DART

Built by Blue Moon Motorsports

BODY

1968 Dodge Dart GT 2 Door Hardtop
OE steel front fenders
OE steel trunk lid
OE front and rear bumper show chrome plated
GSS correct red, black, red cast fender and hood letters
Hurst Equipped emblem on deck lid
Mr. Norm's Grand Spaulding Dodge deck lid emblem
Kramer Automotive Specialties 1968 Super Stock Hemi Dart fiberglass liftoff hood
Stainless steel hood pins
Rear wheel tubs split and widened 3.5"
Rear wheel openings raised 3/4"
Custom flush mount stainless steel fuel filler
All stock emblems and mouldings removed and holes filled

PAINT

Sherwin-Williams Planet Color Hurst Gold 3-stage paint
All metal work, prep and paint by Blue Moon Motorsports
Hood painted in Sherwin-Williams Planet Color Rally Black
Mr. Norm's GSS logo gloss black split tail stripe

INTERIOR

1968 Dart GT bucket seats
White pearl leather
Mr. Norm's GSS embroidery in gold
3 inch racing lap belts
Stock dash
Custom white instrument cluster face with Mr. Norm's GSS logo in red
Auto Meter Sport Comp Tachometer
Auto Meter oil pressure, water temperature and volt meter
Mr. Norm's Serial Number Dash Plaque
Gold cut pile carpeting
Grant Products three spoke steering wheel
Custom GSS logo horn button
Quiet Ride Solutions heat and sound proofing
Trunk mat

CHASSIS

Control Freak sub-frame connectors
Control Freak Hemi style torque boxes
Driveshaft loop

FRONT SUSPENSION

Control Freak K-Member and Cradle

Control Freak Tubular upper and lower control arms
QA1 Fully adjustable coil overs
Control Freak sway bar
Manual rack and pinion steering

REAR SUSPENSION

CalTracs Split mono-leaves
CalTracs traction bars
QA1 Tubular Shock Absorbers
Strange 60 Differential with nodular iron case
Nodular iron caps
9.750" OD ring gear
360 degree welded axle tubes
Custom mono-leaf spring perches
PowerLok TorSen limited slip unit
4.10:1 Competition Ring and Pinion gears
Strange ST Series 35 spline heat treated axles
LPW Ultimate-60 Cast aluminum competition stud girdle support cover

FRONT BRAKES

SSBC Tri Power billet aluminum calipers
SSBC Big Bite 13" slotted rotors
Hurst Line Lock

REAR BRAKES

SSBC Tri Power billet aluminum calipers with built in parking brake
SSBC Big Bite 13" Big Bite slotted rotors
SSBC dual master cylinder

FRONT AND REAR WHEELS AND TIRES

Front Wheels Oasis Retro 17" x 7" with Mr. Norm's engraved signature
Tires Pirelli P-Zero Assimetrico 225/45/ZR17
Rear wheels Oasis Retro 17" x 9.5" with Mr. Norm's engraved signature
Tires Pirelli P-Zero Assimetrico 285/40ZR17

POWERTRAIN

528 cubic inch Hemi / 727 horsepower @ 6400 rpm on 91 octane fuel
Mopar Performance Mega Block
Callies 4340 Forged Competition Crankshaft with 4.150" Stroke
Wiseco 9.5:1 Forged Competition Pistons
Eagle 7075 Billet Aluminum Rods
Custom Competition "896" Series Tool Steel Pins
Clevite Competition Bearings
Speed-Pro File Fit Competition Moly

Rings

Comp Cams Hydraulic Cam & Lifters
Hemi Billet Double Roller Competition Timing Chain Set
Hemi high volume oil pump with extended pickup
Aluminum Damper
Milodon Oil Pan
Indy Legend Aluminum Cylinder Heads
Intake - 2.250 x .311 Square Lock
Exhaust - 1.940 x .311 Square Lock
Titanium Retainers with 1.54" Double Valve Springs
Hemi Rocker Arm System
Chrome Moly Pushrods
Mopar Performance Aluminum Cross Ram Intake Manifold
Holley Hemi 4 Barrel Carburetors blue-printed by Van Gordon Racing
Phenolic Carb Spacers
Mallory External Fuel Pump
Mallory and Accel Ignition Components
Accel billet distributor
Accel spark plug wires
High torque mini starter
Open element chrome air filters
Polished aluminum valve covers
Dawson Racing 4-Tube Headers with Ceramic Coated 3" Exhaust System
Electric Dumps
Engine built by Jim Van Gordon, Van Gordon Racing, Upland, California

TRANSMISSION

Passon Performance A-833 4 Speed Overdrive
Hurst Competition Plus 4 Speed Shifter
Hurst Consistent T-Handle Shifter
Lakewood Hydroformed Hemi bellhousing
Hayes Competition 11 inch clutch, pressure plate and flywheel
Mechanical throwout bearing
Racing spec driveshaft

EXTRAS

Mocal Oil Cooler
Smiths Aluminum Radiator
Mr. Gasket Company Thermo Cap radiator cap
Ricks Hot Rod Shop Stainless Steel 14 Gallon Fuel Tank
Wiring by Blue Moon Motorsports
Stainless steel brake and fuel lines by Blue Moon Motorsports
Oldies Glass adjusted side glass / San Bernardino, CA
Lil' Louie Pinstriping detail / San Bernardino, CA