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1969 'General Lee' Charger and 'Joker' '11 Challenger. Photos: TheBruntBros and Charlie Lewis

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## MAXIE MANIFOLD MYSTERY

**B**ack in our Feb. 2016 issue, we featured a 1964 426 Super Stock (Max Wedge) Plymouth Savoy owned by Bob Chaves and restored by Mike Mancini of American Muscle Car Restoration. We called this a Mopar Action Reference Restoration with a caveat by Rick Ehrenberg that the exhaust manifolds should have been painted engine color (and not pitted). Mancini insisted that the unpainted manifolds were correct. Ehrenberg remembered seeing a new '62 Max Wedge with orange painted manifolds as well as used ones at swap meets with traces of orange around the mounting flange (the factory paint would have burned off in short order). Not doubting my tech editor, but intrigued by this painted/unpainted question I contacted several well-known Mopar and Max Wedge experts in the hobby. The results were interesting albeit inconclusive.

We do know that Max Wedge powertrain assemblies were mated to the body from the bottom—the usual procedure. But unlike other engines that were installed with exhaust manifolds intact (and painted while bolted to the engine) Max Wedge engines were installed sans exhaust manifolds because the manifolds wouldn't clear the chassis. The manifolds were bolted up after the engine was in the car. Tom Hoover had confirmed this in a published interview.

Dave Wise, who has 20+ years' experience in assembly line engine/vehicle processing, told us the factory used a large metal frame supporting six engines, 3 side by side, to transport big blocks from the engine plant to the assembly plant by truck. This arrangement would not have worked with Maxies if the manifolds were attached, they would have been too wide to fit, and it's doubtful the factory would have had special racking just for them. 'Course, no problem with standard arrangement if the manifolds were off. Wise's brother, also in the same line of work remembers seeing random pallets of unpainted manifolds (he believes they were MW, but can't swear to it) along with pallets of leaf springs—both painted and unpainted—at the assembly plant. Wise believes the manifolds were installed after the fact in an offline "9190" area. If all this is true, how would the manifolds have gotten painted?

Max Wedges were assembled at Chrysler's

Marine & Industrial division, about 9 miles from the Lynch Rd. plant. Would M&I have painted the engines with manifolds and then removed the manifolds? Unlikely, but possible. While most engine plants painted engines with a fogging machine, we don't know if M&I had a fogger or spray booth or whatever. Spraying around the manifolds would have been a problem and probably would have left areas of the block unpainted. Owners wouldn't paint them, most swapped the manifolds for headers and went racing. Most likely M&I painted the blocks sans exhaust manifolds.

Upholding the "painted" side of the picture, we have Roger Gibson who has looked at original

Max Wedge survivors. He says "Depending on condition of the car, most of the time you can find paint around the mounting flanges and nut."

Jim Kramer and Greg Lane go with "unpainted." Ron Mezich who has seen only two manifolds with paint out of the 50 he has handled in the past speculates that the manifolds could have been painted after the fact as during a subsequent engine rebuild.

Factory PR photos show nicely detailed and painted (including manifolds) MW engines that were not typical of production units. Greg Lane supplied us with a B&W photo of a new '63 MW engine compartment. The manifolds are flawless

and quite dark. Possibly paint? Ehrenberg says "definitely new raw cast iron." 'Course there's a lot of speculation in all of this, and this mystery may never be solved until someone steps forward who worked at M&I and/or on the line at Lynch Rd. with factual first-hand experience.

Getting back to Bob Chaves' Maxie, since his was a pilot car with some weird non-production details, including the silvery "natural" (maybe actually bead-blasted recently) color master cylinder cover (production lids were black phosphate) we are gonna have to defer to Mike Mancini in this case. Conclusion: Never say never with Ma Mopar!

'Til next time

Cliff  
Cliff Gromer



Bob Chaves' restored '64 Max Wedge Savoy.



Original new '63 Max Wedge from back in the day.