

DREAM MACHINE

Getting older is an inevitability, God willing; that's something we all have to face. With that, and most of the Mopar hobbyists out there being well on the other side of fifty (heck, seventy for that matter), we now find ourselves in the same position our parents did, especially when they said things were better when they were young. And, of course, we shrugged that off because we knew better. Modern progress brought innovations our parents never dreamed of and

would never embrace or enjoy; cassette tapes, cable television, movie theaters with twelve screens, and video game arcades everywhere; certainly, the advent and evolution of the bikini alone was enough for many our age to be grateful. Our parents had lived in a bygone age largely without air conditioning, color TV, or Pizza Hut – how could they say that was better? Yet, here we are today, talking to our twenty- or thirty-something year old kids, and telling them that life was a whole lot better in our day than they can comprehend, and they think we're absolutely nuts. John Thayer, a boy who grew up in

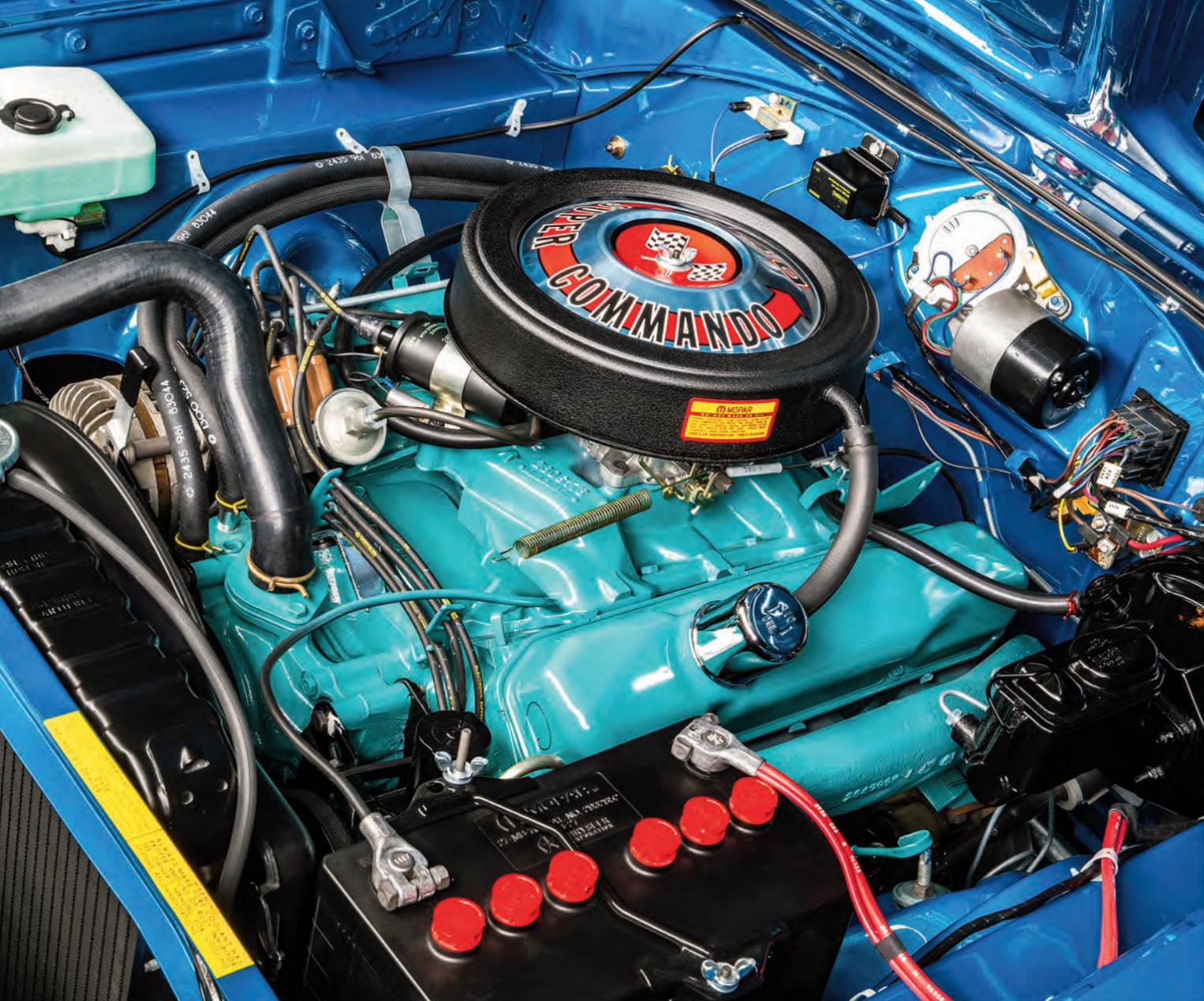
Detroit and then migrated over to Wisconsin, is positive that the world was a much better place back in the sixties.

John's father owned a mechanic shop in Detroit back in the heyday of great American cars, and his dad loved just about all of them. His shop was within walking distance, practically, of three major car dealerships, a Chrysler, a Ford, and a Chevy, so John was surrounded by cars throughout his youth. If he wasn't seeing them in the driveway, he was seeing them at his father's

CHILDHOOD DREAM OF A '68 GTX CONVERTIBLE REALIZED AFTER 56 YEARS



Story by: Randy Holden
Photos by: Michael Mancini
Photographed @ American Muscle Car Restorations



shop, and when not there, they were usually doing something for one of the nearby car dealers. And here comes the huge thing that separates the hectic world of today from the amazingly picturesque world in which John grew up. As hard as it is to believe with today's frantic activity and everybody in the family running all over the place doing their own thing, in the sixties there was an annual ritual in Detroit observed by countless thousands of families – just as much as Easter or Christmas. It was the day the dealerships revealed the new cars for the coming year! Every year, on the same day, the dealerships would cover up their showroom windows, place the new model cars on the showroom floor,

stock up on brochures, promo models, and everything else they could get in the way of promotional merchandise, and then they would have a big unveiling of all the new cars to the local public. John remembers every year quite well, but especially 1967. With his father anxious for the big day every year, the whole family would dress up in their Sunday best (these events usually happened on Saturdays), then they went to the dealerships and stood in line with other families wrapped around the buildings, to see what was new and enjoy the festivities. Every year you hit all of the new car dealerships, as many as you could on the same day, and by day's end you were stuffed full of hot dogs and hamburgers and had bags of pro-

motional loot; everybody had a blast. Can you imagine anything like that happening today? People don't even dress up in their "Sunday best" on Sundays anymore. Regardless, that fateful day in 1967 was a life changer for thirteen year old John Thayer.

Once they hit the doors of Rollie Barrett Chrysler/Plymouth, the building was decently full of people, but sitting right in the middle of the showroom floor was the most beautiful car he'd ever seen in his life; a 1968 GTX convertible in metallic blue with a blue bucket seat interior, a snow-white convertible top, and a blacked-out hood. The color combo itself was enough to get the boy's attention, with the bright white stripes down each side, but looking at it fur-

ther, there was a huge Inland shifter with a black shift knob sticking out of the console, and the partially opened hood revealed a beautiful blue 440 engine with a crazy little air cleaner on top. Dad could see his boy had become enamored with the car, so he let him take his time looking it over inside and out. They left with some of the expected brochures and souvenirs, and there in the new GTX brochure was a photo of the car John had just seen, in the same color blue – he read that thing cover-to-cover like a comic book. They finished the day going to the Ford and Chevy stores, seeing the all-new SS Chevelles and the radically new Corvette, with Ford offering the most ho-hum new cars for 1968. That evening at the dinner table (again, a foreign concept today), Dad asked John what his favorite new car was, as if he didn't already know. The boy immediately exclaimed the GTX convertible and then went on to detail the myriad of reasons why, just as the showroom brochure had explained to him. That marked the end of the yearly ritual visit to the dealerships, which continued for many more years, but John was never again as impressed with any new car the way he was with that GTX back in the late summer of 1967.

Time marched on, however, as John grew up he started messing about seriously with old muscle cars and, in his earlier years, he was drawn to vintage Corvettes, but the Mopar gene had already been firmly placed and while he struggled with all his Chevy and Ford friends, buying and cruising around in the expected typical muscle cars, the urge to find a '68 GTX convertible lingered deep within him. He moved to Wisconsin where he built himself a very respectable garage/playhouse, and that's when his addiction to the cars he remembered from his youth really took flight. One of his early big leaps into the world of Plymouths came in the form of a 1970 Road Runner convertible. It wasn't the GTX of his dream years, obviously, but the car was B5 blue metallic with a white top and a white interior, so it did bring up strong memories of the GTX that started it all so he latched onto the B-body and spent years enjoying it as a cruiser and local parking lot show car. While he was busy enjoying that car, another target of

BRING YOUR PAST BACK...

LOOK TO LAYSON'S

30 YEARS
38,000+ PARTS

For true expertise, support, and lowest overall cost.

Why let "big-box" store mistakes set you back in time and money?

NEW Service Bays OPEN in Washington State

Selling and manufacturing *only* the highest grade, true-fit reproduction, used, and NOS parts with industry-leading restoration services and expertise since 1994. Discover why customers named us the "Men of Mopar"

www.LAYSONS.com [f/LaysonsRestorations](https://www.facebook.com/LaysonsRestorations)

CALL 877-930-4088 M-F: 8am-4pm
to order parts & catalog SAT: 9am-2pm PST

Customer TECH TALKS Saturdays 9-2 PST

Joe's Distributor Restoration

TAKING TIRED, WORE OUT MOPAR DISTRIBUTORS & MAKING THEM NEW AGAIN

JOESDISTRIBUTORRESTORATION.COM • 330-843-0335

opportunity Road Runner popped up in the form of a 1970 "Vitamin C" 440+6 four speed hardtop that was heavily optioned and in really great shape. An older restoration that was just showing some of its age, that Six Barrel car gave him a great combo and he had a cold-weather Road Runner and a warm-weather Road Runner to satisfy his urges. And all the while he had them, he worked tirelessly to improve their condition

and found himself really attracted to the completely factory-correct OEM restoration stuff, which was something he'd experienced with his Corvettes, but not with his Mopars because he'd previously thought of them as more fun, driver-friendly, cars. As we know, Road Runners are built like tanks, so John learned you could have both, enjoy a razor-sharp restoration and still drive it without harm. So, he became a very detail-

oriented guy, which led to studying the cars harder and looking for date-coded correct NOS parts just about everywhere he went, which brings us to the Mopar Nationals in 2013.

John was wandering through the Car Corral and struck up a conversation with a gent from Pennsylvania, and he mentioned he'd been looking for a 1968 GTX convertible for quite a while and hadn't had any luck. Turns out, this fellow knew a man in Erie, Pennsy who had a '68 GTX convertible for sale, and it was even blue! John got the contact information, and he'd already started placing calls before he left the Nationals. Turns out the owner had recently bought the convertible; he was a buyer/seller making extra change off buying cars and flipping them to new owners. Photos of the car went back and forth through the interweb, and John was stunned to see it was blue with a blue interior and a white top, furthermore, it was a four-speed car – exactly like the one he'd seen on the showroom floor back in 1967! There was no question he had to have it, so he sacrificed his blue Road Runner convert to buy it, and in short order, the GTX arrived in Wisconsin and John just stood there looking at it with utter astonishment – this thing looked



Revolutionize Your Ride!



Combining Style, Strength and Performance AME's True Bolt-On K-Member Adds Value Your Build

A true bolt-on K-member for 1966-70 B-body Mopar platform engineered to accommodate original and late-model Mopar/Chrysler engines while maintaining the stock engine location. This easy-to-install unit is outfitted with a three-position adjustable hollow sway bar with adjustable end links to eliminate preload while accommodating high static negative camber angles for low treadwear tires. It's a package that checks all the boxes: Contemporary stance, superior handling and excellent ride comfort.



- Tall forged aluminum steering knuckle, with bolt-on unit bearing, allows for superior camber gain and roll center migration.
- High strength forged steering arms.
- Custom-valved 17.5:1 ratio steering rack provides a modern steering feel and responsiveness.



Visit: www.ArtMorrison.com
Call: 800-929-7188
Email: sales@ArtMorrison.com

 ArtMorrisonEnterprises

**THREE-DAY MOPAR EVENT
NEARLY 3,000 MOPARS
SWAP MEET & CORRAL**

// CARLISLE CHRYSLER NATIONALS



**WORLD'S LARGEST
MOPAR SWAP MEET
AND CAR CORRAL**

This is the largest Mopar event in the world with vehicles from all eras of the Chrysler brand - classic, muscle, and high-performance new models are all showcased at this event. Find new, used, NOS parts, in the WORLD'S LARGEST Mopar automotive flea market/swap meet, and classic to late-model vehicles in the car corral. The gates open at 7 AM Friday through Sunday!



**CELEBRATE 100
YEARS OF CHRYSLER
AND 2025 DISPLAYS**

Come celebrate with us, the W.P.C. Club, and F.B. Rhodes, with special 100 Years of Chrysler displays, guests, seminars, and more! 2025 also brings together the following featured vehicle displays - 55 Years of the AAR 'Cuda & Challenger T/A, 60 Years of the A990 & A864 Hemi Cars, and 30 Years of the Neon.

**CARLISLE
CHRYSLER
NATIONALS**
JULY 11-13, 2025
CARLISLE PA FAIRGROUNDS

**REGISTER YOUR
MOPAR TODAY &
SAVE 10%***
STORE.CARLISLEEVENTS.COM



CARLISLEEVENTS.COM
717-243-7855 //

**1000 BRYN MAWR ROAD,
CARLISLE, PA 17013**

GATES OPEN AT 7 AM FRIDAY-SUNDAY
MILITARY & STUDENT TICKETS AVAILABLE AT EVENTS

KIDS 12 & UNDER ADMITTED FREE
EVENT HELD RAIN OR SHINE

*GATE-N-GO OFFER EXPIRES - 05/20/2025
EVENT INFORMATION IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE
PLAN AHEAD: CARLISLEEVENTS.COM/PLANNER

exactly like the car he'd seen back in 1967. As much as he could've easily thought this was the same car, it wasn't. The popular line of thought with this convertible currently goes back to a practice that Chrysler was known for - building small batches of heavily optioned identical cars for display at dealerships around the country. We've seen that done with a lot of Dodges and Plymouths, and apparently, Plymouth did the same with an early batch of GTX convertibles. Who knows, maybe only four or five of these were built, maybe a dozen? But, with two cars in sepa-

same was true of the clutch and most of the mechanical components, everything was working, but just barely. And, as the weeks passed and he looked at it more, it became obvious the old restoration was hiding a lot of rust damage - the joys of having a convertible Mopar that spent its entire life in Pennsylvania. So, having done some projects with the legendary Mike Mancini and his crew at American Muscle Car Restorations, he contacted Mike and let him know he wanted to do a full show-stopping OEM restoration on the GTX,

rust virtually everywhere. B-body convertibles tend to rust easily (all Mopar converts do for that matter), but this poor girl apparently had taken a master class in eating salt. Nothing is too bad or too overwhelming for Mike and his guys, however, and within a year they had the body looking as good as new inside and out, and from there, they did what they're known for doing; they took an average old Mopar and transformed it into a sparkling masterpiece that is far, far better now than it was when it rolled off the assembly line. Everything you're

not get any better than that! First car show in the toughest environment in the United States, and the car had a perfect score and won the highest awards in the building! All of which only further cemented John Thayer's love for this car!

Since then, the GTX has been to several other shows, but after coming out of the gate winning everything in sight at the pickiest muscle car show in the country, what's left to prove? John mostly shows it now primarily because he just loves showing it to other Mopar fanatics who appreciate it. And no



rate states with very early build dates being identical, that's not a coincidence. What was known of the convert's history showed that it was bought new by a soldier in Pennsylvania, and he owned it for quite a while before selling it to another soldier who was a friend of his. In 1977 the GTX was traded to Fairview Chrysler Plymouth in Erie, Pennsylvania and remained with the owner of the dealership until John purchased the car in the fall of 2013. The convert looked pretty good, wearing an eighties or nineties restoration, but the car was tired, as was evidenced very quickly in his first joy rides in the car.

Being intimately acquainted with big block Chryslers by then, the original 440 in the car was downright anemic - it ran, but that's about the best that could be said for it. The

because it had been his childhood dream car, and he wanted it to be perfect. Mike readily agreed, but since they were seriously backed up with other restorations, the convert had to get on the waiting list, so she spent years in cruiser/driver mode at John's house waiting for an open slot at AMCR. Finally, in 2019, that slot became available and the convert was rushed over to the shop so work could begin.

If you've seen our magazine before, you're no stranger to American Muscle Car Restorations. They consistently turn out some of the finest Mopar restorations in the country, and their resume of success has a very long string of OEM Gold cars in it. John's suspicions about rust were well-founded. As the convertible came apart in Rhode Island, American Muscle found the dreaded

looking at was done straight off the broadcast sheet and fender tag, and when John finally laid eyes on the car again in 2023 2022, he just about cried - he was thirteen again, standing there with his dad and looking at the most beautiful car he'd ever seen. Talk about a serious time machine, you're looking at one right here!

As with most of their top-shelf restorations, Bob Ashton requested for it to make its big debut at MCACN in Illinois that year, and so it did, being front-and-center in American Muscle Car's display. That first time out, this convertible won the highly contested "Platinum Pick Judge's Choice" trophy, and in OEM judging it scored a dead-on perfect 1,000 points out of a possible 1,000 points, earning a "Concours Gold" trophy - it does

matter how stressful or agitating the day can get, all John has to do to unwind is turn on the shop lights and look at this thing. How much is it worth to be teleported back to being a thirteen year old? Pretty much priceless, which is why John is hardcore adamant that he'll have other cars, but this GTX will never leave. "After I'm dead, my family can sell it." That is dedication!

As of this writing, American Muscle Car Restorations is working over John's aforementioned 1970 Road Runner 440+6 hardtop, so stay tuned, you're very likely going to encounter John again in these pages in the next year or two. Hang onto your dreams good friends; sometimes it takes a lot longer than we'd like, but if you stay the course, things work out rather well. ☘



EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO RESTORE YOUR MOPAR...
front to back and top to bottom

**SERVING THE MOPAR COMMUNITY
FOR OVER 25 YEARS!**



- CARPETING
- HEADLINERS
- FUEL TANK KITS
- FAN SHROUDS
- LENSES
- GASKETS
- CLIPS/FASTENERS
- HOOD PADS
- INSULATION
- EXTERIOR TRIM
- INTERIOR TRIM
- SHEET METAL
- OVAL AIR FILTERS
- 4 SPEED PARTS
- FUEL LINERS
- BRAKE LINES
- PARKING BRAKE CABLES
- GRILLES/HEADLIGHT BEZELS

DANTESPARTS.COM
PHONE: 609-332-4194