

1969 PLYMOUTH GTX CONVERTIBLE

LARRY AND LOUISE GAMMON

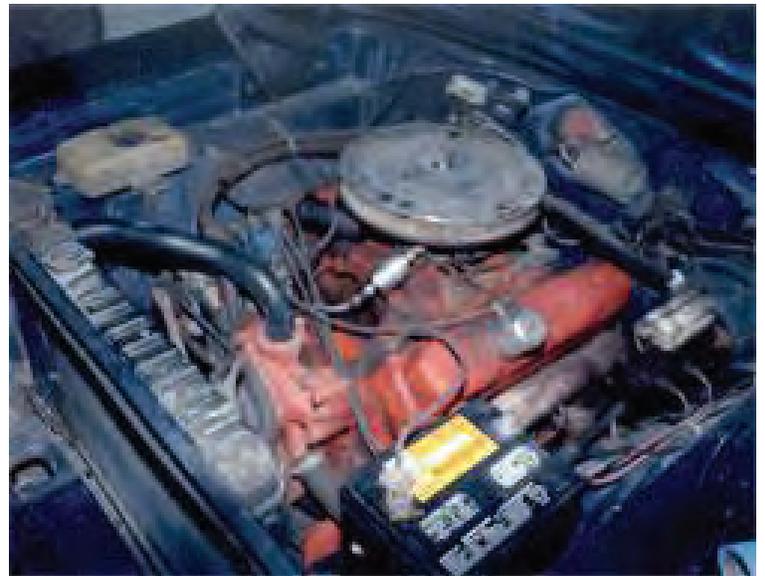
My quest for another Mopar to restore began quite innocently in the late summer of 1998. From another Northern Mopars member, I learned of a red 1969 Plymouth GTX convertible that was for sale in Trochu, Alberta. One Saturday morning, four club members including myself, headed to Trochu in search of this Mopar. We eventually made contact with the owner of said GTX. At first glance it appeared to be a decent driver type convertible in need of a restoration. Red exterior, white interior & convertible top, 440 automatic with buckets & console, it ran & drove. It was mostly all there but the closer you looked, the more there seemed to lurk some pretty serious problems under the shiny red paint and floor pans. It's not that I wasn't interested in this vehicle but I already had restored a big block automatic 1969 Sport Satellite convertible. That fact, combined with his asking price for the red convertible, lessened my desire to own this car! Then came the words that started my heart pounding. "My brother also owns a 1969 GTX convertible, it's a blue FOUR SPEED car!" He didn't know if it was for sale but almost before his garage door was closed, we were heading down the highway a few miles to see the blue FOUR SPEED GTX!



There it was, in all its' bird dung covered glory, inside a dark, dirt floor Quonset on his brother's farm, where it apparently had spent the last ten years without seeing the light of day. We could barely make out the console mounted FOUR SPEED Hurst shifter in the dim light, but it was there alright! Among the garbage inside the GTX was some semblance of white bucket seats & a dark blue carpet. Our host was in a big hurry to leave, so after a far too brief perusal under the hood, we departed from the Quonset, but not before I acquired his brother's name &

phone number!

Several phone calls later, with much debate about whether the car was actually for sale or if the owner might some day restore the GTX, or his brother might possibly some day, maybe, restore it, we agreed that the GTX would be hauled from the Quonset to an open field. This would allow a complete inspection of the pros & cons of this apparently very rare piece of Mopar history! (I had, in the interim, discovered that if legitimate, this vehicle was one of only 178 GTX convertibles equipped with the Hemi FOUR SPEED in 1969). The mind boggles! At our earliest convenience, fellow club member Geoff Pipe & I were back on the farm investigating inside, outside & underneath the car to establish its' credentials. With due diligence



we discovered that all the numbers were correct, including the numbers matching engine & tranny! There were some items missing or incorrect. The original 3:54 Dana rear had been replaced with an 8 ? differential. The radiator, carburetor & exhaust manifolds were incorrect, having been haphazardly replaced sometime during the past thirty years. The block could have been cracked, as apparently insufficient antifreeze caused the frost plugs to blow out when winter struck the unheated Quonset. Under the bird droppings, paint and bodywork was very shabby at best, with huge chunks of the clear coat peeling off like a three day old sunburn. Did I mention MICE? This GTX had served as a condominium for mice during the last ten years, the extent of which I would discover later. The car was now a very dark blue instead of its' original B5 Blue Fire Metallic colour. Come to think of it, this convertible was the exact same exterior & interior combination as my Sport Satellite convertible. Oh, well! Twins were supposed





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to run in our family!

More phone calls ensued! Finally it was established that the GTX was indeed for sale and a compromise price was agreed upon. This rare GTX would soon be mine! Did I mention it was a FOUR SPEED convertible? With the much appreciated help of club members John Kemp & Geoff Pipe, we returned next weekend with Johns' big Dodge truck & car hauler and loaded up my treasure. The cars' owner was out of town for the weekend and even though we had his verbal permission to take the GTX, I felt like I was stealing it, that is until I dropped off the cheque at his relatives' farmhouse nearby. A quick power wash at a Three Hills car wash removed some of the bird crap & the GTX found a new home in my garage in Calgary.



Now the real fun began! At first I thought I would get the car up & running, after removing the trailer hitch, helper springs, ugly after market wheels, leaving the cosmetic restoration for a later date. Wrong! One thing led to another as I discovered dead mice, a mummified mouse in a beer bottle, an unopened bottle of rum, mouse nests & droppings crammed into every conceivable cranny of this once proud vehicle! It just had to be completely torn apart & refurbished after I managed to replace the frost plugs, pre lube & fire up the engine. After blowing out several pounds of mouse dung from one tail pipe, the other pipe refused to function. It was necessary to cut off the offending tube & vigorously pound it against the concrete floor to dislodge the mouse blockage! After that effort the big block sprang to life & purred more efficiently each time it was run. Although I had been told that the engine was rebuilt prior to storage, I tended to be skeptical until now. It ran unbelievably well, with no hint of any mechanical problems or telltale blue vapours.



Fast forward approximately 4 ? years to the February 2003 World of Wheels. There sits the proudly finished product in the Northern Mopars club display! Actually, we were still putting the finishing touches on the car during the show. During that 4 ? year time frame the beast had been completely torn down & sand blasted. Even then, we discovered mouse nests in the stripped down shell, inside the rocker panels. Minor rust spots were repaired and new quarter panels were installed. Both front fenders, one door, trunk lid & hood were replaced with better examples. The underside of the GTX was blasted, scraped of all factory undercoating using a torch & hand scrapers (don't try this at home), epoxy primed, rocker panel coated & sprayed B5 blue enamel while laying under the vehicle. That was one messy project! The inside received much the same treatment but was much easier to accomplish. With help from my friends I did most of the grunt work, including a complete rebuild of the steering & suspension components, adding much larger 11 ?" rotors to the original factory disc brake set up.



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The engine was resealed & equipped with new oil pump, fuel pump and rear main seal. The farmyard dented & welded oil pan was turfed (It must have crushed some mighty boulders in its' day). The proper radiator, carburetor, exhaust manifolds, H-pipes, Dana differential, new XHD leaf springs were installed. Kori Alexander completely rebuilt the 18 spline, Hemi FOUR SPEED transmission. I painted & detailed the 440 engine while adding a Centre Force Dual Friction clutch & pressure plate to the power train, before installing the whole shebang from underneath (just the way the Chrysler factory did it in 1969). The GTX rolls on 15x7 & 15x8 magnum 500 wheels, with radial redline 235/60's in front & 255/60's behind.

Exterior body & paint was left to the award-winning professionals at Investment Vehicle Restorations in Granum, Alberta. My car made several trips to and from Granum



thanks to Jamie Phillips. Club member & I.V.R. owner, Terry Levair, sprayed the base clear paint in its' original factory hue of B5 Blue Fire metallic, after carefully massaging the sheet metal to near perfection (If I said "perfection" you might get a swelled head, Terry).

Special thanks is extended to Northern Mopars members Geoff Pipe, Wayne Harris, Barry Manning, John Kemp, Dave Taylor, Terry Levair, Kori Alexander, Jamie Phillips, Brad Toovey & Paul Desjardins for all their help in restoring my FOUR SPEED 1969 GTX convertible.

