



## 66 MONACO - Tony Williams

# Constructing a Dream Car

by Tony Williams

I was fortunate to grow up in Winnipeg around Mopar muscle cars in the late 60s and early 70s. I got away from cars when I went to the University of Manitoba in 1973 and went on to become a fully qualified actuary.

But I never lost my interest in Mopar muscle cars and got back into it in 2004 buying a 1971 Duster 340, in parts, that I planned to restore. After not making too much progress on the restoration other than having the engine and transmission rebuilt and getting some body panels, I talked to Terry Levair at the IVR booth at the Calgary World of Wheels in Feb 2008. Terry agreed to restore the Duster and it was finished and ready for the Feb 2009 WoW shows. I also worked with Terry to restore my 1956 Chrysler 300B in 2015. Terry, Joyce, and Josh Levair have become great friends starting with the Duster project in 2008. I also became friends with their dog Sam who was always there to greet me when I visited the shop.

For a few years after the 300B was finished, I was thinking of restoring another Mopar muscle car. I was looking for a muscle car in the middle of the Mopar Era which started in 1955 with the Chrysler C-300 and was coming to an end after 1971 with emissions controls and high gas and insurance rates. Terry let me know his Monaco convertible big block four speed was available.



### "August 2019 - Tony's New Toy"

After talking it over for a few months in August 2019 Terry dragged the Monaco out of the barn so I could look at it, and I could not resist. The big block four speed Monaco convertible was one of a kind. While not as appreciated as some smaller Mopar muscle cars, it was going to be a big, beautiful muscle car. In September 2019 we agreed I would buy the car and

agreed on a process for IVR to restore the Monaco to show level quality. I bought the Monaco and four 1966 Dodge C Body parts cars from Terry in September 2019. Terry had bought the Monaco over 20 years before and had accumulated the parts cars, hoping it he would eventually be able to restore the big muscle car.



The restoration started in October 2019 with Josh and I disassembling the Monaco and the parts cars to prepare for body work. The cars were full of rodent nests, dust, grime, car parts, junk, and dirt. Many of the screws and bolts were rusted solid with time. So Josh and I were happy when that dirty part of the work was done. The main disassembly work was done by November and Josh built a metal cage to support the body.



The body was very rotted in some spots, so care was taken to keep the body aligned on a jig until the structural work was completed. The cage had to be removed to install the replacement panels and re-installed in sections once that part of the work was completed. Work stopped for a few months as IVR worked on finishing cars for the Feb 2020 World of Wheels and the holiday season came up.



## 66 MONACO - Tony Williams

But then COVID-19 hit Canada in early March 2020. While the world was shutting down due to COVID-19, Terry and Josh worked on the Monaco body, selecting the best metal from the parts cars for repairs to the rust.



The four speed transmission was sent out to rebuild as was the differential. The search for small, hard to find parts began across Canada and the US went on through the summer.

Work continued on the body through the spring. Work slowed down at IVR as the country went into lockdown. Since the Monaco was already in the shop, a lot of progress was made. By April 2020, the bodywork was completed and the body was on the rotisserie.



A mint condition floor was transplanted from a parts car. A rust free replacement trunk floor and wheel well assembly was removed from a parts car and transplanted to the convertible. The best quarter panels of all were removed and welded onto the convertible body.

It is important to note here that due to the extent of the rust throughout the entire vehicle that if it were not for the 4 parts cars supplying all the rust free metal and the skill of the IVR crew, this car would not have been salvaged. By May, the body had been primed and was painted. I had to tell Terry and Josh how impressed I was with their skill in piecing together the Monaco to restore the convertible body and fix the metal as good as new.



I rebuilt the heater box and undertook to rebuild the butchered wiring harnesses, since we could not buy any replacement harnesses.

In June 2020, the engine and frame were ready for paint. The 440 engine has dual four barrel carb setup, which was a factory special order option in 1966. The 440 was in good shape and did not need rebuilding. We had parts for an original disc brake setup but opted to install safer more reliable after-market disc brakes.



One of the small details that took a lot of work was the dash emblem. There was a hole in the dash, but we could not tell what went in it from the exploded diagrams in manuals and the dash photos we found. It turns out it was a Fratzog which is a Mopar logo with a light behind it for your high beam indicator. Since we could not locate a used one, Terry fabricated one and fitted it in.

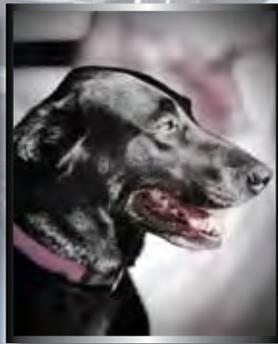
In July 2020 4-stage polishing was complete and assembly began with installing the differential and the front sub-frame, engine, and transmission assembly. There was a lot of exterior and interior chrome and I made lots of trips to Alberta Plating to drop off or pickup.



## 66 MONACO - Tony Williams

By August, the A/C unit was rebuilt and ready to be installed. With some effort it all came together. Terry pressure tested the box and found an O-ring was leaking but after that repair, the system held pressure.

IVR is a 90 minute drive from my home, and I made the trip down #2 and back many times, bringing parts and supplies with me. I enjoyed being on the road - it was a great distraction from the terrible COVID-19 pandemic around Canada and the world. We took precautions, wore face masks, and sanitized often when I was at IVR.

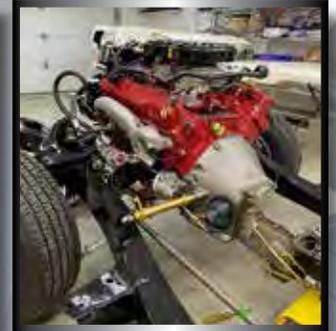


### **"A good friend and companion, Rest In Peace, Sam"**

On September 20, 2020, I got the sad news that Terry & Joyce's dog Sam had passed away. I was incredibly sad to hear that and sent a note to Terry and Joyce: "I had such a good visit with Sam last week when I came to spend the day at IVR to work on Monaco. I noticed she had turned a noble grey; she was almost 13 years old and wondered how much longer she would be there to greet me. She knew my truck and always came over to see me and talk to me (yes, she always talked to me with a stick or something in her mouth) as soon as I got out of my truck. First thing I did when I arrived was to give Sam a pat and a hug, then I could go see Terry. I remember meeting Sam the big black puppy when I first brought the Duster to IVR in the summer of 2008. She never growled at me once - we were instant buddies. I tried to stop her from chewing on bits of metal when she hung around but wasn't too successful."

In late September 2020 I made a road trip to Winnipeg Beach to pick up the seats and interior that had been reupholstered by Sew Fine Interiors. Kerry Gluck showed me his shop and treated me to lunch in Winnipeg Beach before I loaded the interior into my truck for the trip home. I was hoping to stop by and see my friend Lionel Asselstine in Morden. Lionel was in hospital, and they would not allow me to visit due to COVID restrictions, so we had to settle for a phone call from my hotel in Brandon. It was one of the last times Lionel and I spoke as sadly he passed away early February after catching COVID-19 in the hospital. The next morning, I drove back to Calgary from Brandon and that was the day winter hit across the prairies

as I had icy roads almost all the way to Medicine Hat. Final assembly work continued over the fall.



On December 18, Dean Tilleman came over to Terry's shop to lead the engine start up. After figuring out the final wiring connections, the Monaco was fired up for the first time in over 30 years. There was a knocking that had to be diagnosed. Terry figured out the noise was coming from the release bearing and fixed it, so the big block ran well.

In January 2021 Terry installed the power top motor and convertible top assembly as well as getting the power seats and windows operating. He had to work a while to get the top to align with the power windows. But after a few adjustments it all fit together well. The Monaco then went to Cascade for the new top to be fabricated and installed. We waited for a few last parts - the steering wheel which was redone in California did not return until the New Year and the spinners for the Magnum wheels were also late arriving, but Darryl from Wheel Master came through.

We were hoping the Monaco might be ready for the World of Wheels shows in 2021, but once again COVID-19 changed the plans. The 2021 WoW Calgary show was postponed and then cancelled. We hope to show the Monaco for the first time in WoW Calgary and Winnipeg in 2022. For now, it will be stored in my garage until the unveiling of the big white muscle car.

To view the complete file of pictures you can go to the Dropbox link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/5sc6v5xrt126rt/AABV4Kt9ibL0n-PEKlu3Ookua?dl=0>

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

Restoration: Investment Vehicles Restorations, Terry Levaire and Josh Levaire  
Mortech Solutions, Calgary: Neale Felske transmission rebuild Dec 2019 and differential May 2020  
Tirecraft, Claresholm: exhaust Nov 2020.  
Lanny Atkins, Lethbridge: rebuild power steering pump, power steering box and A/C compressor July 2020  
Sew Fine Interiors, Winnipeg: seats and door panels  
Cascade Vans, Calgary: dash pad and convertible top  
Bumper to Bumper, Claresholm: mechanical parts  
Wheelmaster Classics, Calgary: magnum wheels and spinners  
Quality Restorations, San Diego: steering wheel rebuild  
Alberta Plating Ltd., Calgary: stainless and chrome  
Thomas Radiator, Lethbridge: rebuild radiator and air conditioner /heater core



# 66 MONACO 4 GEAR RAG - Tony Williams

# MEGA

# MUSCLE

## 66 Monaco 4 Gear Rag



The January 2022 issue of Northern Mopars included an article about the restoration of my 1966 Monaco Convertible. The restoration is now complete and this article follows the restoration work since the January Article and finally shows some completed restoration photos. But I begin with some background about how I got interested in Muscle cars and Mopars in specific. I have never met another actuary who owns a muscle car (maybe a high-performance Porsche or BMW) or a motorcycle (something about riding having too much risk), so I am an outlier as they say in actuarial talk. Fellow Club Member Mark Hopkins worked with me for a few years and has a great collection of Mopars but wasn't an actuary. I also know some engineers, like Club Member Ken Miller, who own and build muscle cars. But I'm very happy as a retired actuary to own some nice Mopar muscle cars and enjoy the hobby and people I meet through it.



I was 14, but I shifted to Mopars over the next few years and never left although I've owned other brands. My room was full of model cars and slot cars. I worked on lawnmowers and go-carts in the garage and shed. I learned to drive the family car at age 13 and couldn't wait to get my license at 16. I owned my first car, a 1955 Austin at age 14 as well as my first motorcycles, a 1950 BSA Bantam 125cc 2-stroke and 1950-something Harley Hummer 125cc 2-stroke. The factory muscle cars were getting better stereos, cassette and 8 track, but you couldn't hear them over the high flow dual exhaust music anyway – performance was king.



In summer in Winnipeg it was pretty common to see people cruising along Pembina Highway, Portage Avenue, or Main Street in their muscle cars (newer or

modified older cars) looking to race from light to light (without getting a ticket), or just burn the tires because they could.

### 1965 – 1973: WINNIPEG MUSCLE CAR SCENE

I grew up in Winnipeg and turned 13 in 1965, in time to be part of the Muscle Car scene. In the late 1960s it seemed everyone was getting faster cars with more horsepower and radical paint and accessories like hood scoops, wheels, and spoilers. I got hooked on these race cars right from the Chrysler, Ford, and GM factories. Some car dealers adding even more performance as an option. I remember planning to own a 1956 Chevy when

These muscle cars with tons of rear wheel horsepower and bad interior heaters weren't great in Winnipeg winter. Winter was relentless, coming by November and staying and staying until around April. There wasn't much racing done on the ice with frozen bias ply tires spinning on ice at each intersection. Cars didn't start well or heat up in winter unless kept in a garage with the block heater and in-car electric heater plugged in around the clock. Frost shields were needed on windows and studded tires snow tires were common. Muscle cars were better



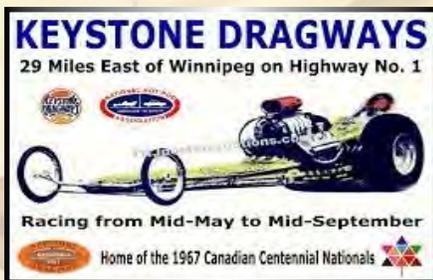
# 66 MONACO 4 GEAR RAG - Tony Williams

designed for the California climate than Manitoba's in winter. This was snowmobile season for those lucky enough to have one (not me). Most cars didn't have garages so winter was miserable for cars - have a snow shovel and some friends ready to push that is if you could start your car and your tires weren't flat-spotted into the ice.

But as soon as snow and ice melted and traction season returned the muscle cars were out in large numbers. You would see a lot of fast Mopars like Duster 340s and Dart Swinger 340s, Cudas, Road Runners, AMXs, and GTXs. There were a few Charger RTs, some with 440s or Hemis. It was like the chase scene in the 1968 movie Bullitt, Charger v Mustang. minus any hills of course. There were lots of Mustangs and Corvettes, Novas, Camaros, GTOs and Chevelles that came out summer nights and weekends, just to name a few. The numbers were: 289, 302, 340, 350, 383, 396, 409 and some 427s, 440s, and 454s. And then there were the 426 Street Hemis in a class of their own at least as far as I was concerned. My Grade XI yearbook quip was "Tony's ambition is to destroy Norm's Dart and get a Hemi". I fulfilled the Hemi prophesy in 2013 when I bought the 1956 Chrysler 300B with an original 354 Hemi in Winnipeg.

There was semi-organized street racing in Winnipeg where muscle car owners would arrange to meet up with other cars they wanted to race in remote areas (no cell phones for quicker communication). I never heard of any bad accidents, but this racing was for more serious owners willing to put some money on the line. I didn't have enough horsepower to get involved.

The nearest drag strip was Keystone (which became Bison) about an hour East of Winnipeg. I used to hitchhike there on Sundays with a friend before I was 16 and had a driver's license. Once our group was 16 there was always someone who could drive us there for the drag races on Sunday. We saw some great racing when front engine dragsters burned the tires the full 1/4 mile in 9 seconds. We saw some great exhibitions there (eg: Hemi Under Glass).



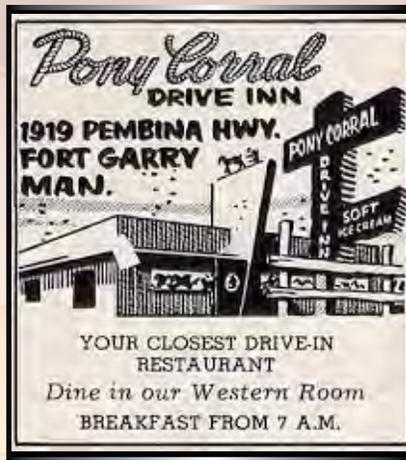
There were lots of local muscle cars and hot rods out to race. Race on Sunday, sell on Monday was the Big Three's moto. It was an interesting time for muscle cars as they were everywhere and were not persecuted too much, although I did get pulled over a lot by the police and got a few speeding tickets for relatively minor speeding. At 18 I looked 14 and they would check if I had a license then find something to ticket me for (I don't blame the police, some of them drove great muscle cars too).



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The family car at first was a 1967 Dodge Dart GT, yellow with black vinyl top, and black bucket seats - but only a 225 slant six and 3 speed automatic under the hood. Nice looking but not very fast. That changed in the summer of 1971 when I was given task (at age 17) of buying a new car for the family. I traded in the Dart and bought a new 71 Duster 340, gold with white stripes, bench seat, and three on the tree (to be practical). This car had what the Dart lacked - V8, 4-barrel, dual exhaust - horsepower. I had been reading about 340s for years and finally had one.

I did my share of cruising drive-in burger joints (The Pony Corral and the Sals at Pembina Hwy and Stafford mostly) and "light to light" street racing in the Duster. We never hit high speeds when street racing. One car would start to pull away and you both knew who had won the race. I felt lucky that I never got ticketed when I really opened up the Duster. I was smart enough to only do that when I was alone, with no passengers that could get hurt (well usually alone), and on remote parts of the Perimeter Highway when the road was empty. Finding long stretches of open road would be nearly impossible today as the roads always have traffic. Like the movie Two Lane Black Top: Modified 55 Chevy vs new GTO across the USA. Or like Vanishing Point: 1970 Challenger R/T 440 six pack 4 speed driven by Kowalski going West, listening to a small-town DJ, chased by police one state line to the next, trying to find freedom, but finding only the end.



These films and stories are impossible now. Sorry Fast and Furious sequels, but the contrived CGI chase scenes can't match the Steve McQueen in 1968's Bullitt chase scene through the streets of San Francisco, or Kowalski crossing desert roads in the Dodge Challenger.



## 1973 - 2004: UNIVERSITY, FAMILY, AND CAREER

When I went to the University of Manitoba to study science in the fall of 1973, I got away from muscle cars. I had no money, and to study hard to catch up. I had less time for my car friends. I sold my 71 Yamaha 350 motorcycle to pay for university tuition, so the bike was gone too. The mid-1970s was also the end of the muscle car era. Gas prices were higher, insurance rates were higher, and emission controls and safety equipment were being required in new models giving them much lower horsepower. In the fall of 1975, my girlfriend Hazel and I got married. We moved to a small apartment near the university. We drove her 1972 Datsun 1200, a reliable car but quite a change from the Duster 340 I had previously driven. It seemed like muscle cars were a thing of the



# 66 MONACO 4 GEAR RAG - Tony Williams

past. In 1980 I sold the family Duster 340. My adoptive father had become disabled and needed a more accessible car. This photo is from the last time I saw my Duster. I loved that Duster and it was a sad day when I sold it.



Hazel and I moved to Calgary at the end of 1983 to raise our family and drove practical cars (eg: 1981 Olds Omega 4cyl automatic FWD). But I always looked for the Mopar muscle cars when we went to car shows. In 1998 I bought a 1979 Honda CX 500 as a project. I really enjoyed getting back to being a bit of a gearhead. I rode that bike until 2001 when I got a Yamaha V Star Classic 1100 and was back on two wheels.

## 2004 TO NOW: DUSTER TO MONACO. COMPLETING THE 1966 DODGE MONACO BIG BLOCK 4SPD CONVERTIBLE

In 2004, Hazel and I went to the Calgary World of Wheels car show. I was in the area by Northern Mopars Club display and IVR when I saw a beautifully restored 1971 Duster 340. Seeing that car hit me and reopened my memories of those great Mopar muscle



cars and my 1971 Duster 340. I had seen the first Fast & Furious movie not long before with my daughter. I was really moved by the scene where the Black 1969 Charger with the impossible blower through the hood is fired up and emerges from the garage to show the Tuners how it's done, old school. I decided on the spot at the WoW Show I had to get back into Mopars and find

a 1971 Duster of my own to restore. That decision led to working with Terry Levar of IVR on my 1971 Duster, which was finished in time for the 2009 WofW Calgary show. After a few years break I bought my 1956 Chrysler 300B in Winnipeg which was restored by IVR and completed in 2016. And as described in the January article I bought the 1966 Monaco in the summer of 2019.

Completing the Monaco was slowed down by the Covid pandemic. The Article in Northern Mopars January Issue talks about the restoration up to early 2021. One of the final parts, the restored steering wheel, came back from the company in California. The final upholstery work was done at Cascade and IVR.

My wife and I moved to an acreage just South of Calgary early August 2021. I was tired of storing my collector cars all over. I only had room for one collector car at a time in our Willow Park garage. The other cars were at Specialty Auto in DeWinton. My car hauler trailer was stored at an RV storage lot out Spruce Meadows Trail. Finally by mid-August we had moved in and had room for my collector cars and the truck and trailer. I brought the restored Monaco from IVR to my garage which I had set up just for the Monaco and my 300B.

We were now expecting to show the Monaco for the first time at the February 2022 Calgary World of Wheels show, so in September 2021 I took the Monaco for show detailing at Personal Touch. When it was done, I stored the Monaco in my garage ready and waiting for the winter shows. But then in December, the Omicron variant of Covid came to Alberta and by January it was announced that the World of Wheels Calgary 2022 Show was also cancelled. The Monaco will have to wait another year to be shown.

Hopefully Covid to be more under control by then. I have developed some serious health issues, but I'm still very committed to have the Monaco in the shows. The big white Mopar muscle car is ready and waiting.

