

TWO COOL

We've been fortunate enough to know drag car collector extraordinaire Mike Guffey almost from the first days of doing MCG. Near as we can remember, we met Guffey somewhere back in 1989, and by 1990 and 1991, yours truly was having some darned fun misadventures with him and his accomplice in crime, Jim Kramer. Mike is one of those rare renaissance men in the Mopar hobby, as he's spent his life honing in on the things he seriously enjoys. He takes meticulous handwritten notes about everything and, over the past fifty years, he's filled those notepads with tips and stories he's picked up along the way by the hundreds. When we met Mike, he was coming off a period of infatuation with WWII vintage military vehicles: half-tracks, 6x6 trucks,

Jeeps, and things like that, and he was returning to his first love, vintage sixties race cars. He also was building his mega-collector-quality antique toy racing car collection, some of which are museum pieces in their own right.

Mike Guffey's initial fame in the Mopar hobby revolved around his ownership of the first-ever built 1964 Dodge Ramchargers Hemi A/FX car, which initially made its show debut wearing a 1965 front cap and taillights and sporting the expected radically altered wheelbase. All that had been done in 1965 when the car was updated, and since it looked so nice, it was a serious battle of wills to return the car to its original 1964 appearance, but history won out. Since it was the first factory-built Hemi drag racer and the very first factory-built race car with an altered

wheelbase, Mike knew it had to go back to an "as new" appearance. This introduced him to world-class race car restoration artist Eric Lindberg, thus beginning a close friendship between them that has resulted in restoring well over a dozen mega-historic Mopar race cars. Mike will also be well remembered for finding and restoring the famed Dick Landy '65 altered wheelbase A/FXer, Sox & Martin's '65 A/FX altered car, Bill Flynn's "Yankee Peddler" Dodge A/FXer, some rather noteworthy Pferds and Chebbies, and of course, a whole slew of 1962 to 1966 Dodge and Plymouth drag cars. Most historic drag cars have turned up in some downright bizarre



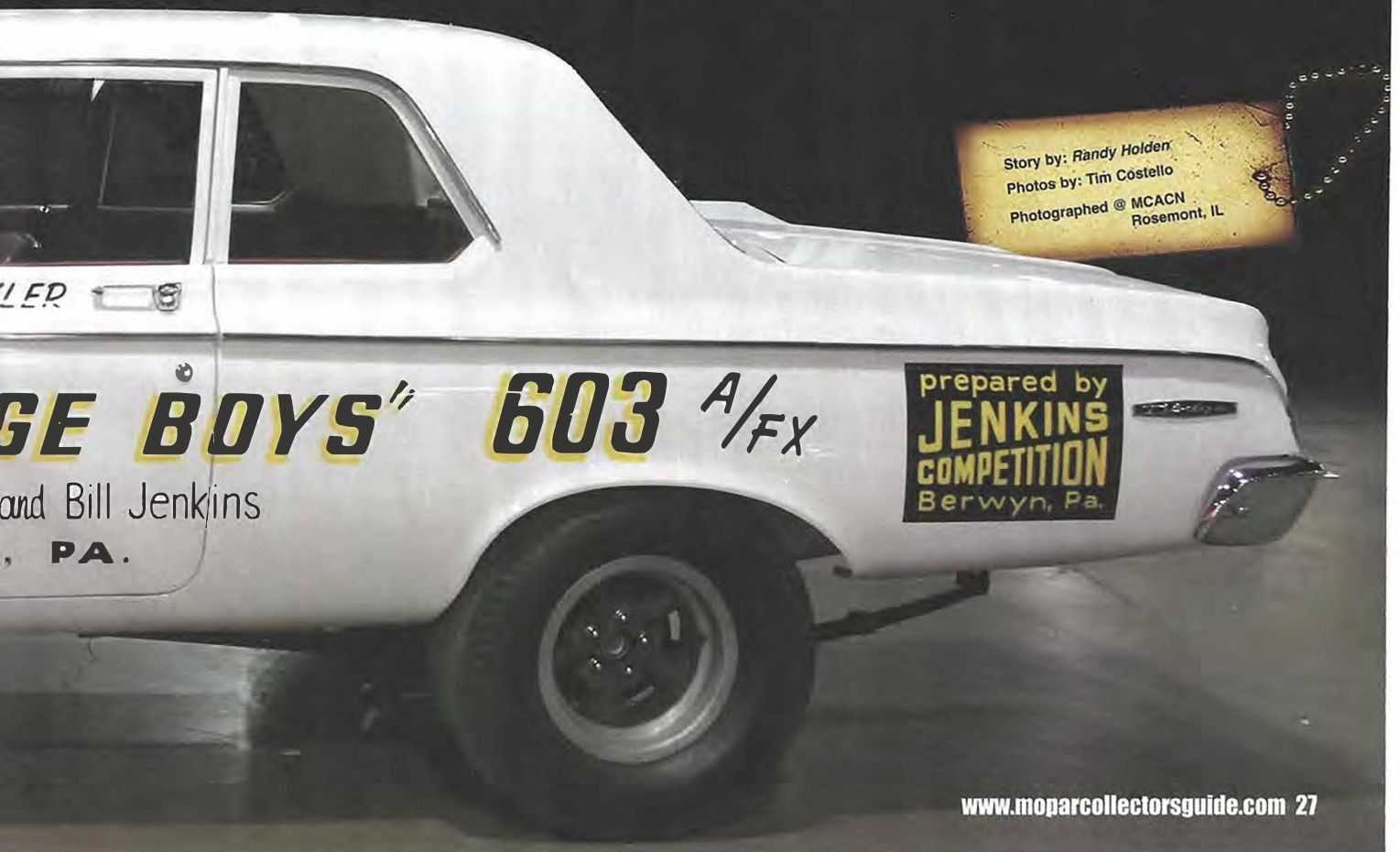
THE SECOND A/FX EVER BUILT

places: alleyways, parked behind old mechanic shops, you name it, but what seems like luck is actually researching and using detective skills that would shame Columbo. Thanks to his aforementioned little black note-taking tablets, Mike often spends years running these to ground before seemingly just discovering them out of the blue.

Guffey's absolute favorite car in his collection is his '64 "2% altered wheelbase car," campaigned by The Ramchargers in 1964. It's known as a "2% altered car" because the front wheels were shoved forward by 2% to get better weight distribution and help the cars launch better. And this slight move, it was reasoned, wou-

ldn't be noticed by most NHRA tech inspectors (and it wasn't). The Ramchargers Hemi Dodge was built on the assembly line using a lot of handwork and Dodge engineers pacing alongside it as it snaked its way down the line. That car rolled out of the shop doors on October 23, 1963. But, making minor changes here and there, there were three other 2% cars built by the factory in 1964 – one more Dodge and two Plymouths. The other Dodge was built on January 6, 1964, and was turned over to the factory-backed racing team of Dave Strickler and Bill "Grumpy" Jenkins. She received some basic lettering and was named "The Dodge Boys." With Grumpy Jenkins being the chief

wrench and all-around bottle washer on the car and Dave Strickler handling all the driving chores, this was a seriously unusual hybrid racer even when it was new. Since Jenkins was accustomed to working on GM products, he swapped out the Chrysler four-speed and converted the car to use a GM T-10 four-speed, mating up to the Hemi with a very unusual steel blow-proof bell-housing. Grump did a phenomenal job tuning the Hemi to within an inch of its life, and he proved to be a wizard setting up the suspension, all of which transferred into this car being one of the most feared A/FX vehicles in the country in the summer of 1964. Capping off a



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very successful season, Dave Strickler drove it to victory at the final event of the year, the U.S. Nationals in Indy, taking home yet another Wally. Then came the first-ever "U.S. Racing Team" recruited to bring the sport of American drag racing over to England and expose all the Brits to the evil ways of going very fast in a straight line. When the season closed here, the team was packed onto a ship and hauled off to England, and among the vehicles that made that inaugural tour was Dave Strickler's A/FX Dodge. Not long into the tour, all hell broke loose, not with the car, but with the partnership of Strickler and Jenkins. What caused their angry parting of the ways remains unknown to this day, but while they were still running in England, Grumpy left the team,

hopped on an airplane, and flew back to the United States, and that was the end of the Strickler/Jenkins partnership.

Dave returned home at the end of the tour and began making plans for the 1965 season, opting to run one of the more radically injected Hemi A/FX cars for the upcoming season. Bill Stiles took over as crew chief and all-around mechanic, and the would-be famous 1964 car was sold off to a man named George Leyland, who initially campaigned the car and named it "Rebel." The Rebel '64 disappeared for a while, and George Leyland reemerged on the track with a 1965 Hemi Dodge wearing different colors that bore the name "Spark-O-Matic" on the flanks, and he continued running that car for several more years. And here's

where we need to do a bit of a time jump to keep the story lined up. Mike Guffey, being one of the world's most detail-oriented guys when it comes to these things, noticed when looking at photos of the car that the roof and quarter panels didn't look right for a 1965 Hemi car – and this was back in the 1980s, mind you. In those glorious days before the internet and all our modern people-finder apps, Guffey ran down where George Leyland was living. He had an unlisted number but lived near Philadelphia, and having a friend in Philly, this guy literally went over to George's house and told him that this fanatical guy in Indiana desperately wanted to talk to him about his old race car – so they called Guffey from George's phone! Guffey asked the questions,



and George confirmed every one of his theories; he didn't have two cars in the 1965/1966 season, he only had the one Hemi Dodge he'd bought off of Dave Strickler. Since he was primarily racing in the new NHRA's drag racing division (long gone now), they had a rule about Super Stock cars being no more than two years old. So, to keep the car legal for competition, he removed the '64 front cap, replaced it with a '65 unit, changed the taillight panel out for a '65 model, altered the quarter panels just a little, and stuck a 1965 deck lid on it. So,

within about a month of the "Rebel" leaving the track as a '64 model, it reemerged with new tin and a new look, was renamed "Spark-O-Matic," and none of the NHRA techs ever noticed a thing. That phone call gave Mike Guffey some invaluable information, however, that nobody else out there had – if the Strickler car was still alive, it would look like a '65 Dodge, not a '64.

A few years passed, and Mike Guffey turned up enjoying the 1992 Chryslers at Carlisle show with his Ramchargers Dodge. And here's

where it's good to have a great combination of luck and hound dog skills combined. A fellow with a '68 Hemi Barracuda told Mike he knew a kid up in Connecticut that had a lightweight Hemi '65 Dodge. No joke, in a few minutes, Mike was sitting in the office at Carlisle talking to the young lad while the show went on around him! The lad on the other end of the line described his car as a '65 Hemi lightweight Dodge that had aluminum doors but no aluminum fenders, which seemed odd to Mike, and he

knew that it had last been raced in the mid-eighties painted burgundy and named "The Royal Coachman." Most of what he said wasn't consistent with the construction techniques of a '64 or a '65, so Mike asked the boy for the VIN number, and jotting it down in his ever-present notepad and staring at that number, Mike Guffey knew he'd found the car since it was a very early 1964 VIN. The "what cha' want for it" discussions lasted for two months, but in the end, Mike Guffey hauled it home to his place in Indiana and became the proud owner of both altered wheelbase 1964 Hemi Dodges.

Having been updated quite a bit through the years, but never seriously having been hacked on, he got hold of the last guys to race it, the Proputnowicz Brothers, one of whom lived in Florida and the other who lived in New England. The brother he'd been gleaming most of the information from ended up dying just

weeks later, but the other brother came forth with a good many photos of the car being raced, some of it wearing a black vinyl top! He still had one of the car's Race Hemis, but Guffey was really after the unique set of Stahl headers that had been on the car, and the brother confirmed they had still been on the car when they raced it. He looked for months to no avail. He had searched everywhere, but he couldn't find the headers. He did, however, ship Mike a number of old parts and a whole lot of photos. Knowing this one was going to need a ground-up, full-bore restoration to put it back in "as-raced" 1964 condition, Mike began opening up his cache of parts and, naturally, Jim Kramer and everyone else who's into the early race cars began searching for pieces/parts stashed away in their rafters. One of the more important pieces to make it to Indiana was one of the ultra-rare factory magnesium cross members that only the four

altered cars were built with. They look much like the factory steel units, but since they're cast magnesium, the whole thing only weighs six pounds! Being such an early car, Mike also needed a very early Race Hemi block. A friend in Detroit came through, putting him in touch with a gent who had two early Hemi blocks he wanted to sell – one had a casting date of April 4, 1964, and the other was cast on October 18, 1963 – the first day of production for 426 Race Hemi blocks! They don't get any earlier than that, so that engine and all the parts he had went over to Eric Lindberg's restoration shop so he could work his magic on this one, just as he had the '64 Ramcharger car. It took five years to put everything back



to being picture-perfect correct, but it looks every bit the same now as it did when the 1964 drag racing season started. The seats are original low-back buckets that Mike had in his parts stash, while Gary Ball remade the door panels. Mike even found the original bell-housing that was likely built for this car in 1964 to mate the GM transmission! The original Corning windshield and rear window are still in the car, while they had to reproduce the lightweight Corning glass for the side windows. This was a seriously exhaustive restoration!

So, thanks to a tip from a stranger at Carlisle, Mike Guffey, after almost a decade of looking, ended up finding the Dodge. Despite the restoration being finished in late

1997, the "Dodge Boys" Stickler/Jenkins car hasn't really been out to any major Mopar events, until MCAACN 2024. Realizing it was a crying shame nobody had enjoyed a good look at this major piece of history, Bob Ashton invited it to be front and center in the Mopar race cars display, and for the first time since 1964, the Mopar public got to see this time machine looking just as it did when it seemingly disappeared from the planet. Naturally, the car was extremely well-received, but these days, it's sitting on Guffey's farm in his toy shed, right next to the Ramchargers' Hemi Dodge – both 1964 altered Hemi Dodges are sitting side-by-side and look just as they did in '64. And scattered around the rest

of the place are several more radically altered '65 A/FX cars and a variety of Super Stockers from that era, but being a history buff, Mike couldn't be happier since he has the two cars that started everything. He's tried to buy the '64 altered Plymouth that still survives, but without any luck so far, and that would give him three of the four cars built, which is as good as it could get because the other Plymouth was wrecked and junked ages ago.

So, enjoy having a good look at this piece of history, and always remember, have your head on a swivel, listen to those tips that usually don't lead to anything, and take a whole lot of notes! If it hadn't been for his previous knowledge of the modifications on the car, Mike probably wouldn't have thought too much about the tired old race car the kid in Connecticut had. Do your homework, folks, and if you need any proof that doing so pays off, just have a look at Mike Guffey's collection! ✖

