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MEDIA BLITZ

This 20,000-mile Hemi Bee became a survivor by way of a parade lap.

By Jim Koscs

Photos by Bill Erdman

Tim Wellborn vividly remembers the day he accompanied his father to the local Dodge dealer to trade in a 1967 Charger on a 1970 Charger R/T. He was just 13 years old and already counting the days until he was old enough to drive it.

After test-driving a 1970 model, Tim's dad saw pictures of the soon-to-be released 1971 Charger, and plans changed. Father and son both fell for the 1971, which made a dramatic styling statement at a time when Detroit was shifting the battle from "most horsepower" to "my hood is longer than yours." (The Pontiac Grand Prix apparently took that prize.)

Tim's dad ordered a butterscotch Charger R/T with an automatic. It was one of just 3,118 R/Ts sold that year, less than a third the previous year's R/T production. With the Coronet a four-door only model for 1971, the Super Bee became the budget Charger performance model, \$500 cheaper than the R/T and featuring a standard 300-horsepower 383

Survivors like this usually end up as trailer queens. This one gets driven—hard!



MEDIA BLITZ

and 3-speed stick. The 440 Six-Pack and Hemi were options.

Tim was hoping his dad would order the Hemi, but that was a budget buster. Three years later, when people were practically giving away used musclecars, Tim's father finally got his '71 Hemi Charger. Since then, Tim's been collecting Mopars and today owns 35 primo musclecars.

Now, get this—16 of Wellborn's Mopars are Hemi Chargers, including four Super Bees and 12 R/Ts. All have either been restored by Roger Gibson or remain in original survivor condition and detailed by Gibson. That would describe our feature car, a Hemi Super Bee four-speed with just over 20,000 miles that Wellborn recently bought from its original owner.

Chrysler made just 85 Hemi Chargers for 1971, including just 22 Super Bees (13 automatics and nine four-speeds) and 63 R/T's (33 automatics and 30 four-speeds). Do the math; Tim Wellborn is just one car away from owning 20 percent of original 1971 Hemi Charger production. Count how many are left, and it's a different story. "While everybody was going after E-bodies, I was collecting the B-bodies," he says.

But Wellborn, from Alexander City, Alabama, is not into his 1971 Hemi Chargers for the bucks—he says he has no plans to



sell any of them. It gets better—he drives every one of his Mopars, including this Super Bee. "The sound of the Hemi going through the gears and both Carters opening up really takes me back in time," he says. He counts it among his top three or four Chargers and says his favorite driver is the 1971 *Motor Trend* Hemi Super Bee road test car, a 30,000-mile survivor that he bought not long after we ran the article on it two years ago. It's got extra sentimental value, since it's butterscotch, the same color as his now-deceased father's 1971 R/T.



Originally ordered as a low-option car, the pedal dress-up package and cassette recorder/player, plus a number of other options were added after the fact.

Wellborn says it's the tightest, best-built 1971 Charger in his fleet and rightly figures the car received some extra attention at the factory before joining the company's press fleet. "It still drives like a new car," Wellborn says.

The day we interviewed Wellborn, he had just driven the *Motor Trend* Super Bee back from closing a deal on an abandoned Chevy dealership built in the 1940s. He plans to resurrect it (as a Mopar dealership, of course) and put many of his Mopars on display for the public.

Getting back to our feature car, this Super Bee has an interesting story to tell. Well, the car couldn't talk, so Tim told us the story. He bought the Super Bee from its original owner, Marvin Cline, who worked as a mechanic at Palmer Dodge in Indianapolis in 1970-'71. Cline happened to live next door to the dealership, and when he wasn't working, he loved to sit on his front porch and watch the car carriers unload fresh shipments of musclecars. A real social butterfly.

At the time, Cline was driving a pretty hot set of wheels—a triple black 1970 Charger R/T Six-Pack four-speed. He fell in love with the 1971 Charger and decided to order a loaded Hemi R/T. But he was too late. A little after mid-year, Chrysler stopped taking orders for the Hemi option. With just 85 Hemi Chargers built to that point, even a search of other dealerships proved fruitless.

Cline found an alternative hidden away in the back of the dealership—a 1971 Hemi Super Bee four-speed that the dealership owner, Eldon Palmer, had been using as his demo. The car was built on September 11, 1970. Palmer had loaned it for display at the Chicago Auto Show in the winter of 1971. At the time he ordered the Super Bee, Palmer also ordered a 383-powered Hemi Orange Challenger convertible in which he would

make some history the following spring. The Challenger was used as the Official Pace Car of the Indy 500, with Palmer driving.

Many Mopar buffs know that sad story of Palmer crashing the Challenger into the media grandstand, injuring 20 people. He had driven his Super Bee to the track that day. Distraught after the day's events, he drove it back, parked it and never drove it again. His wife wanted to get rid of it and wanted nothing more to do with performance cars. (After the 1973 Arab oil embargo, few buyers did, either.)

Cline was able to buy the Super Bee, but he was not happy with the car's low-option status. He used his 30-percent employee discount on parts to add as many options as he could at the dealership, including 15 x 7" Rallye wheels, rear defogger, cassette player with microphone, headlight washer package, power windows, pedal dress-up, switching the clock to a tachometer, and SE cloth seats with center armrest.

Cline, seeing the Hemi's imminent demise, also ordered a complete set of replacement engine parts, including the carburetors, just in case he ever needed to make repairs. That would not be a problem, as it turns out. Cline pampered his Super Bee, never raced it, never drove it in the rain and stored it in a climate-controlled garage. He put just 20,000 miles on the car, which still has all its original belts, hoses and Polyglas tires. There isn't a scratch or ding on the original R-4 red paint, and the interior is likewise in perfect original condition.

Wellborn first saw the Super Bee 15 years ago. Cline was not interested in selling it at the time, but Wellborn slid a business card into the dash anyway. When Cline found the card in 2003, he called Wellborn.

In Wellborn's hands, this Hemi Super Bee, like his other Mopars, will get plenty of exercise and fresh air. And at Wellborn's own refurbished dealership showroom, there should be plenty of opportunity for Mopurists to visit the collection and relive a little history of their own. ★