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# COLLECTION CATALYST

## TIM WELLBORNS' FIRST MOPAR

Photos by: Rob Wolf  
Story by: Randy Holden  
Photographed @ MATS Las Vegas



**T**im Wellborn is a name that certainly needs no introduction in the Mopar hobby, so we'll skip ahead a bit and pray that most of you out there already know about his fabulous collection and muscle car museum in Alexander City, Alabama. Much has been written about Tim and Pam Wellborn, and much will continue to be written as the years roll past, and most of you likely know of his particular affinity for 1971 Chargers. That lifelong affection literally stems from his childhood years when his dad bought one new, and it was fueled along the way by

a number of Chargers that came into Tim's life as he came of driving age. Yet, none of those cars along the way can boast a more special place in the entire Wellborn fleet than this particular 1970 Charger R/T. Aside from being an extremely different machine, and likely a one-of-one creation, this one served as the catalyst for what became the entire collection, and it just might've played a larger role in getting Tim and Pam married to each other.

We'd love to tell you Tim Wellborn's obsession for 1971 Chargers was due to him having one as

his first car. Thankfully, Tim wasn't heavily influenced by his first car, because his first vehicle was, amazingly enough, a 1975 International Scout! While not the sexiest thing in the world, nor the most reliable by that point in time, the logic was that the rugged Scout could get the teenager back-and-forth virtually anywhere in Alabama and allow him easy access to anywhere he might need to go in association with the family's timber and lumber business.



That was all well and good, but young Tim longed for something with a little more personality, and in short order, he encountered a Mopar fanatic in South Georgia named Francis Burley, who happened to own a 1970 Charger R/T

that was for sale at a pretty decent price. The year was 1976, and nobody was paying a whole lot for used muscle cars at that time, so the faded dark blue metallic Charger wasn't causing buyers to beat down Burley's door, but he

knew it was a special car, and so did Tim the moment he laid eyes on it. Being a high school kid with a limited budget, his desired muscle Dodge had to meet certain criteria and still be with-



**DESPITE WHAT YOUR EYES ARE TELLING YOU, THOSE ARE THE ORIGINAL FACTORY-INSTALLED VINYL/CLOTH SEATS, PUT INTO PLACE WHEN THIS CAR WAS BRAND-NEW, AND AMAZINGLY, THEY LOOK LIKE THEY WERE MADE YESTERDAY!**



in his price range; and this one did. It was an automatic, it had working air conditioning (which is absolutely vital in the Deep South, trust us), it was in good condition, the mileage was low, and best of all, it had the weird houndstooth bucket seat interior with the buddy seat in the middle and fold-down armrest. That was hardly a feature Tim was hunting for, but speaking honestly today, that was probably the car's biggest selling feature, because he was dating this girl named Pam at the time and that would allow her to cozy up next to him while he was cruising around. Money changed hands, Francis and Tim started a lifelong friendship, and Tim Wellborn had officially bought his first Mopar. While everybody else in the country was obsessed with Jimmy Carter and CB radios, Tim went home to Alabama with his dark blue Charger, clamped on a pair of Thrush mufflers, and immediately began using the Charger as his everyday driver and relied on the Scout for rainy days and occasions when he'd need to go into rugged terrain. About a year later, a little-old-lady 318-powered 1973 Charger SE joined the fold, a triple white car no less, and Tim was on his way to collecting old Mopars. However, the blue '70 Charger R/T remained the daily driver.

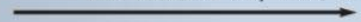
Being a car guy himself, Tim's dad didn't object to his son's fascination with his Charger, nor did Pam, as it was a whole lot better going to the drive-in riding in the R/T than it was being bounced around in an International Scout! The car and Tim became synonymous with one another amongst the local population, and especially with everyone at school. Graduating a little ahead of Pam, Tim informs us he became rather unpopular with the teachers when he would head over to the school, put the R/T in neutral outside of Pam's classroom, then rev the big 440 repeatedly as the blown out Thrush mufflers literally rattled the big plate glass windows! Obviously, you don't stick around to reap the consequences of those actions, but it became something of a fun little thing to do, and it became something of a routine. He meant it as nothing more than flattery for Pam, of course, nothing more than a rumbling, noisy way of saying he was thinking about her (he certainly wasn't showing off the car, if that's what you're thinking), but the school faculty never really saw it that way. Still, the activity served its purpose, as Pam knew he was out there (as did everyone else), and they could look forward to an evening of riding around in the deafen-

ing, but fun, old Charger. So it went. Pam graduated, the dating in the Charger continued, an engagement followed, and they obviously ended up getting married and such. Finally, concentrating on the family business and deciding to be a grown-up family man, in 1985, Tim sold the '70 Charger to a guy named Mike Lindauer, way up in Indiana. This was just as muscle cars were really coming into their own as sought after machines, so the profit margin on this original investment was more than enticing and he figured they'd done about all they could with the car. Besides, the dark blue paint had faded pretty badly, so it was either time to put money into the R/T or sell it, so Tim chose the latter option. He immediately regretted it.

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Still having other cars to play with, and with no internet in those days, like all of us, Tim kept in touch with the network of car guys with whom he continued to make friends. Through the following years, he spoke occasionally with Mike up in Indiana; Mike had repainted the Charger, but wasn't really using it much, keeping it stashed away in his garage most of the time. Thus, mercifully, the Charger was spared the harsh Indiana winters during the only years it spent outside the South. Conversation led to more conversation, and that ended up finding Mr. Lindauer offering to sell their old Charger back to Tim and Pam if they wanted it, because he needed room in his garage for more exotic things. He didn't have to ask twice, and in 1989, the Charger made the trip back to Alabama and the Wellborn garage, where it belonged. Tim and Pam had their high school hot rod back, and this time, they weren't going to let go of it.

The collection they built, of



course, is now world famous. Through the passing of time, some of the premier muscle cars existent have come and gone through Tim and Pam's fleet, with a significant number still residing there in the museum and at their home. Through all of the hunting and gathering, however, the car that started it all remained; at first sitting in their garage for years, then finally being placed into storage at an airplane hangar, along with a number of their other cars that weren't used often or were awaiting restoration. And that's why you've never seen this one before and likely never heard of it unless you grew up with Tim and Pam. A good number of their cars have been in the news and have been featured in magazines around the world, but this one remained tucked away and out of sight; the ember that had started a gigantic blaze was unknown to virtually everyone. Then, Tim and Pam teamed up with Dana Mecum and agreed to sell some of their cars at the Kissimmee, Florida auction in 2015, which, once again, made news around the world. If you recall that sale, only a couple of their cars didn't sell, one of them being Pam's 1971 B7 Jamaica Blue Hemi Charger R/T. That one was a cat's whisker away from meeting its reserve, but she couldn't bear to part with it, so she said no and that car came home

with them. Tim tells us that particular point-in-time set into motion the revival of the '70 R/T, at which you're now looking. The importance of the '71 Hemi car wasn't that it was a rare Hemi car; it was simply because it was B7 blue, and Pam's fond memories of the '70s came flooding back. On the way home from Kissimmee, the decision was made to take the R/T out of storage and have it restored so they could enjoy it again.

With the decision made, the only question was who would fix it up and where? For that, Tim turned to his old ally and restoration wizard, Andrew White, at Apex Autosports in Grafton, Wisconsin. Having worked together on a number of projects, everybody knew each other, and this one was a bit unique in how it was being redone. Having quite enough meticulously restored cars and original survivors, as well, Tim and Pam wanted their old high school Charger fixed up so they could drive it again – and drive it a lot! With over-the-top restorations being his forte, that was a bit different for Andrew, so the project was handled carefully so

it wouldn't get overdone. Arriving at Apex, he cleaned the metal down to the skin, and we're pleased to say, everything you're looking at is the same steel with which this car was built. Having never had any rust issues, only minor dings and nicks needed attention before a show-quality dose of Jamaica Blue Metallic paint went back on top again. A factory "C-stripe" car, the Charger is unusual in not having the R/T rump stripe, but the white stripes along the side accent the dark blue quite well. The factory white vinyl top is still in place, believe-it-or-not, and that is the original houndstooth interior as well, still looking just as good today as it did in 1976 when Tim bought this one the first time. Apex cleaned and detailed the engine and changed the seals and gaskets, but the 440 itself didn't really need any attention, so it's still never been apart since being built new. Since this one is going to be a daily driver once again, they opted for a later model Sanden air conditioning compressor, which tends to work much better than Chrysler's big "V-twin" air



compressors of 1970. With new brakes, lines, wiring, and all the safety features brought up to snuff, and a new exhaust system (without Thrush mufflers these days), the Charger was finished shortly before the MATS show in Las Vegas, so Andrew talked Tim and Pam into letting him debut the car at his booth there. Even though it's not intended to be a show car, the Charger practically stole the show, and even had one eager fanatic ready to write a check for what would've been a record price (as far as we know) for a 1970 440-powered Charger. This one doesn't have a price tag on it, however, and Tim assures us it never will and, having known Tim and Pam for a good while, we can tell when he's genuinely excited about a car, and he's very excited about getting back behind the wheel of this one.

For the number crunchers out there, as for the car itself, it is likely a true, one-of-one machine. Special ordered and sold new in Brunswick, Georgia, the original owner obviously wanted a somewhat luxurious and

comfy hot rod Charger. The houndstooth bucket seat interior is certainly the car's rarest option, but it was also ordered new with the 15" Rallyes, an AM/FM stereo, as well as the aforementioned C-stripe, which was a surprisingly low-production item on 1970 R/T Chargers. With air, power disc brakes, power steering, and this unusual color combo, it's strange to us the owner didn't order the low-dollar passenger's side rearview mirror; perhaps in the frenzy of checking off order boxes, that little detail was simply overlooked. Whatever the case, the way you see it now is exactly the way it was built (discounting the air compressor, of course), and it never left Georgia until

Tim bought it in '76.

By the time you read this, Tim and Pam will have taken possession of the car, once again, and we've no doubt more miles have been added to the 70,000 original miles showing on the odometer when we looked it over. Tim informed us he put most of those miles on the car before he quit driving it in 1985. This one isn't likely to be featured in the museum, we're told, as it's going to be spending too much time on the road with either Tim or Pam behind the wheel. That's all well and good, but we sincerely hope Pam's old school teacher isn't going to be traumatized when she sees this thing rumbling around town yet again! \*

