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# HIDDEN TREASURE

Story by: Randy Holden  
Photos by: Tim Costello  
Photographed @ MCACN  
Rosemound, IL



**T**his marks our thirty-fifth year of doing Mopar Collector's Guide Magazine, and it marks thirty-five years of going to just about every major Mopar show existent in North America. Big shows, small shows, new car shows, antique car concours events; we've been just about everywhere. From the earliest days of the Mopar hobby, before it could even be called a "hobby," every Mopar enthusiast out there knew there was one pinnacle car that everybody wanted and very few could own, the Hemicuda convertible. We began messing about with Mopars as soon as we could drive in the late seventies, and even then, everybody already knew, Hemicuda convertibles were something special, there were very few to be had, and when one did turn up for sale, it didn't stay for sale long and

the prices they fetched have always been at the top of the Mopar food chain. We've watched, wide-eyed, as the initial lust for those precious few cars turned into an all-out collector obsession, and we watched with equally wide eyes as the prices climbed into the stratosphere. In one of our early issues back in 1989, we reported how the well-known butter-scotch survivor '71 convertible had reportedly traded hands at the Nationals for \$250,000, and we were astounded by that kind of money being paid for a 'Cuda convertible. As crazy as that sounds today, most collectors were surprised by that number then, but it was only the beginning, as we all now know. Since 1988, when we saw our first Hemicuda convertible live and in-person, we've seen them come out of the woodwork, we've seen them gathered for special

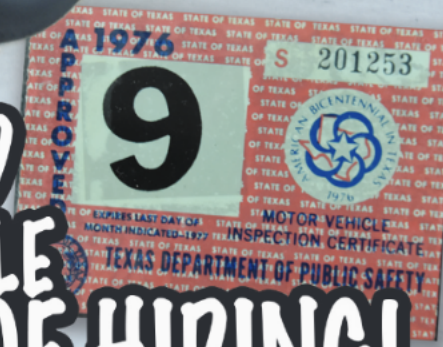
shows and events, and quite honestly, until MCACN 2022, we genuinely thought we'd seen every Hemicuda convertible still existent – we honestly thought we'd seen all of them, and like us, most hardcore show goers thought they had too. With only eighteen built (including the export models) in 1970, and in 1971 another eleven were built (also including the export models), it seemed through the years we had laid eyes on all of them. Then, arguably, the most significant Hemicuda convertible existent pops up out of nowhere at MCACN – a car that nobody has laid eyes on since 1976, and everybody had to stop and process what they were seeing.

## LONG RUMORED UNRESTORED 1970 HEMICUDA CONVERTIBLE SURVIVOR COMES OUT OF HIDING!

This is likely the most improbable and unlikely barn-find car in Mopar collector car history, and it's raised the bar on everything in the world of Hemicuda convertibles. What you're looking at isn't a restored car; this is a survivor by every possible definition, but that's just the tip of the iceberg as far as its claims to fame are concerned. This car is almost completely original, it's the last Hemicuda convertible that was just bought from its original owner, it's the most heavily optioned '70 Hemicuda ever built, it is probably the most expen-

sive (when new) '70 Hemicuda ever built, and it's the only unrestored car that's ever been unveiled at MCACN – all others have been fresh restorations being shown to the public for the first time. This one is now the centerpiece of Darryl Wischnewsky's extraordinary collection in Houston, and Andrew White at APEX Restorations is responsible for making it shine again, but the story on this machine is downright unreal. The original owner of this 'Cuda wishes to remain anonymous, so we'll simply refer to him as "Warren,"

and we can tell you that he lives in Del Rio, Texas, just a couple of miles from the Mexican border. Warren had long been in the car parts business there, particularly alternators and electrical components, and he'd long been a fan of Dodges and Plymouths. When the Hemicuda made its debut for 1970, Warren decided it was time he finally treated himself to a Hemi car, as he'd wanted one since all the magazines had been hyping them since 1964, so he motored down to the small dealership in







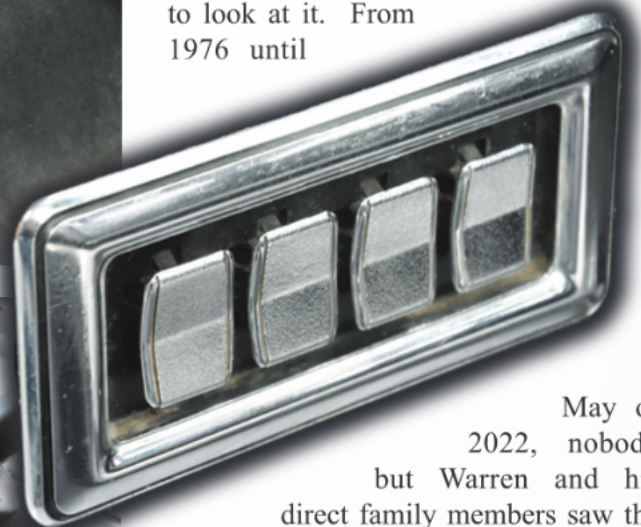
Del Rio and we would've loved to have been a fly on the wall when he pulled out the options book, sat down with the salesman, and created this car. Despite the rather warm climate, Warren's always liked black, so there was no question the car had to be black, and it had to have a black interior, but he went one step further and ordered the deluxe black leather interior. Obviously, the big ticket item was the 426 Hemi, which he hooked to an 833 Hemi four-speed with the Pistol Grip shifter, opting not to get the center console. All of which flows back to a 4.10 geared Super Track Pack Dana 60 rear axle. Warren was just getting started,

however, and he continued to tick off boxes on the order form. Front and rear Elastomeric color-keyed bumpers (rubber bumpers), power disc brakes, power steering, power windows, the Rallye dash with the factory tach, an AM/FM 8-track stereo, dual painted sport mirrors, hood pins, road lamps, the light package, a Rimblow steering wheel, 15" Rallye wheels, a black power top, and to break up all that black paint, he preferred the Shaker bubble be painted Argent Silver. By the time he was done, he'd created a Hemicuda convertible that cost as much as a new Imperial, but being a single fella with no wife at home to veto the idea, Warren plunked down the cash and the order was on its way. Interestingly, he didn't order the black "hockey stick"

stripes on the quarters because he didn't think they'd show up, so it was a stripe delete car, and the only things he didn't order were front and rear spoilers and the pedal dress up kit; other than that, this car has literally everything you could get on a 1970 'Cuda convertible.

After a short wait, the car arrived, and Warren mounted a set of Fenton mags with some larger tires, putting the Rallye wheels and Polyglas tires away in his garage when brand-new. Since the weather is always good in Del Rio, Warren had plenty of occasions to drive the car, but he only lived a short distance from his shop, so from 1970 to 1976, he rolled up a grand total of just over 35,000 miles, maintaining the car





immaculately all the while. And, by 1976, being a man of incredible foresight and already realizing the car he'd ordered was in demand by Mopar fanatics, he drove it into his shop, put it up on jack stands, took the wheels and tires off, put locking lug nuts on all the wheel studs to make it nearly impossible for anyone to break in, slap some wheels on it, and steal it, he covered the car up, and that was the end of that. He went back to the same dealership and bought a heavily loaded '76 Chrysler Cordoba, in metallic brown with a sunroof and "rich Corinthian

leather," and that became the replacement car for the 'Cuda, until he retired it as well about six years later, parking it next to the 'Cuda in exactly the same fashion, and they sat side-by-side, out of view, and Warren continued on with life.

Of course, the Hemicuda convertible crowd is a tightly-knit bunch, and it's a pretty darned exclusive club. As the muscle car hobby exploded in the eighties and nineties, everybody went to work tracking down where all the Hemicuda convertibles had gone, and after a little detective work by the serious

bloodhounds, they'd figured out a black one had been shipped to this little town in Texas, and by the mid-nineties, the man's name was known to a handful of collectors. For the next thirty years, countless collectors made the call to Del Rio offering to buy, or at least begging to have a look, at the machine, and Warren simply wasn't interested in entertaining offers or giving any sightseeing tours. So, while the convertible has been a known entity for quite a while, the exact details of the car weren't known, and Warren never let anybody through the doors to look at it. From 1976 until

May of 2022, nobody but Warren and his direct family members saw the car. As all the other Hemicudas surfaced, the overseas and Canada cars popped out of the woodwork, all the while, this black convert was sitting under a tarp in arid Del Rio, and while a small number of hardcore collectors knew about it, nobody could buy a ticket to even see it! All of which led some to wonder if the car even existed. Maybe it had been junked ages ago? Did this guy really have the thing or not? A lot of collectors gave up on the trail long ago, but the die-hard guys who had spoken with Warren knew he still had it, and while they hadn't seen it, they were convinced it was still there, but it wasn't for sale and never would be. Now, enter collector Darryl Wischnewsky.

We've featured several of Darryl's cars through the years in MCG, and the Houston native is a legit great American success story. Darryl owns a good number of new car dealerships in and around Houston, and his personal collection of muscle cars is now hovering around the 100 vehicles mark, with most of them being Mopars, and some Brand X big dog machines sprinkled in as well.





Darryl's come a long way though, and he's the first to chuckle about it and point that out. His first car, when he was sixteen, was his brother's hand-me-down Slant Six Dart convertible; a car he managed to blow the motor up in the first year he had it! Thanks to his dad having a good sense of humor and a good credit rating, he co-signed for the seventeen-year-old Darryl to buy a '67 GTX, and the teenager's work ethic to pay that car off quickly is largely the same work ethic that's made him such a success. There's a popular commercial on television today that drives home the slogan "never not working" – that pretty much describes Darryl's entire life! The boy gets up early and goes to bed late, and always has. He jokingly told us he and his two best friends all had the same passion for cars and pushing themselves to the limit, and while everybody else was playing football in high school and then going to concerts and going on weekend trips, they had their noses to the grindstone, and all three of them own car dealerships today! Darryl bought his first Hemicuda before he turned twenty, and he's never looked back. His business success allowed him to continue buying the older cars he loved, and somewhere around a decade ago, he first made contact with Warren, down in Del Rio. They talked about the car a bit, and Darryl had enough sense not to make a pest out of himself, as many others had. Eventually, the time would be right, so the good-natured Texas-to-Texas connection was

maintained as the years went on.

If you've been in the hobby any amount of time, you know who Dave Wise is. If not, Dave's the proprietor of MMC Detroit, and for the last thirty years he's been one of the leading authorities on validating and verifying rare Mopars around the world, and he's the guy who set up most of the major car show judging standards we have today, not to mention the author of several books about Mopars. When it comes to Hemicudas, Dave is arguably the foremost authority, and he truly had seen them all, except this one, but that changed in May of 2022.

Through contacts that Darryl and Dave both had, they got word that Warren in Del Rio was thinking about selling due to some health issues. Knowing this was the Holy Grail, Darryl wasn't going to let this chance get away – literally! He got on the phone with Warren to see if it was true, and he was indeed thinking of selling. Darryl put Dave Wise on a plane in Detroit, and the next day Darryl's car hauler pulled out of his lot before dawn heading south. As soon as Dave arrived, they hopped on another jet and flew down to Del Rio! Renting a car at the small airport, the 'Cuda was barely a mile away, and they beat Warren to the shop! That day, with Warren, and his brothers and sisters with him, the cover finally came off, and Darryl and Dave became the first to lay eyes on the long-fabled car, and it didn't take long for Dave Wise to give Darryl an

astonished thumbs-up. The money was wired to Warren's bank account, he was rather astonished by the whole thing, and by the time they got the lock nuts off the studs, the car hauler arrived. From the time they went wheels-up in Houston, to the time the 'Cuda was loaded, scarcely eight hours had passed, and Darryl Wischnewsky had scored a major piece of Mopar history!

The boys flew back to Houston, the car arrived the next day, and making everything even better, Warren had had the foresight to keep every scrap of paper associated with the convertible in a lock-box since day one. The original dealership paperwork is still there and in near-mint condition, the original window stickers, his bill-of-sale, and the original 1970 Texas title issued in his name are still with the car – to our knowledge, this is the only Hemicuda convertible that still has its original title in the name of the original owner. Dave Wise spent about a week going over the car with a fine tooth comb in Texas, shaking his head in disbelief. After they'd dropped the pan and checked everything out (the car hadn't even been started since 1976), they put a little gasoline in her and the thing fired right up! They even found a pristine build sheet still stashed in the back seat. Some guys have all the luck, and some guys make their own!

Since Andrew White, at Apex Autosports, was finishing up on the

restoration of Darryl's black-and-white 1971 Hemicuda hardtop (more on that one in an upcoming issue), which was to be unveiled at MCACN, the convertible was rushed up to Andrew's shop in Wisconsin. The car arrived in June, and with a serious eye on the clock, Andrew and his crew finished the hardtop to perfection (literally) and set about making the convertible look as good as humanly possible while preserving everything they could. The factory paint was buffed to the finish you now see, they cleaned out the gas tank and fuel system, rebuilt the original carbs, installed a couple of new gaskets, made sure the brakes were good and safe, and basically did a major cleaning and detailing job. Talking to Andrew and Darryl, they were astonished at how original and how clean the 'Cuda ended up being. Have a look at this car; that's the original paint, the original interior, the original carpet, the original top is perfect (and it still works flawlessly), the motor's never been apart and runs like a Swiss watch, the original exhaust is still underneath and isn't even rusty, she's rolling on original tires, and the clock even still works! It's little wonder Bob Ashton at MCACN wanted this one unveiled alongside the restored hardtop and broke with the longstanding tradition that only restored cars were unveiled there. Darryl and Andrew even did several hours of Q&A with the crowd about the car, as there were a lot of stunned people standing around this thing, and naturally, everyone wanted to know how it could be so original and where it had been. And so it was that the legendary, and somewhat mythological,

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Hemicuda finally came to light.

By the time you read this, the 'Cuda will be back home in Darryl's collection in Houston, and he tells us it may get out to Carlisle or another show for 2023. For a kid who started with a Slant Six Dart, that he blew up mind you, Darryl's come a long way. Was this the last "undiscovered" Hemicuda convertible out there? If the math adds up, it probably is. And what a finale; a triple black, leather interior, rubber bumpers, heavily optioned survivor

with only 35,000 miles on the clock, and a four-speed at that, one of only five stick cars built. We've seen all the Hemicuda convertibles now (we think), and we can truly say, this one is indeed the Holy Grail. There may be more colorful examples, but for pure originality, condition, pedigree, and history, this one raised the bar quite a bit. Well done to Darryl, and to Andrew at Apex Autosports, for making Warren's dream car look just as good as it did when he first laid eyes on it in 1970. ✘