



FENDER TAG FOLLIES DEPT.

VIN-TAGE CHARGER

Rare '71 Hemi Charger has the highest known VIN and is one of two produced.



By Cliff Gromer

Photos by TheBruntBros and the Louis Kanellis archives.

Louis Kanellis was a 16-year-old senior in high school when he bought this '71 Super Bee off Whitmore Chevrolet's used car lot in Ottawa, IL, back in 1976. It had been traded in by Larry Majors, the Charger's third owner, for a Z28 Camaro—a move he probably would regret. Lou forked over \$500 for the Mopar because it was a cool car. The Bee was in good shape and packed a 383 under the hood.

Harry Naple, thought the car was cool, too. He bought it brand new and paid a bit more than \$500 for the Dodge that packed a Hemi under the hood. Harry had fathered a son and a daughter. His son, also named Harry, was the original owner after his father gave it to him. Harry Jr. got into a lot of trouble with the car. That didn't sit

too well with Harry Sr., so he took the car away from his son—but not before Jr. had spun a bearing in the Hemi. The engine was not warranted, so Sr. took the Dodge to Sierra Motors for a cheaper replacement (383) motor. Sierra welded wedge mounts to the Hemi K-member and were none too neat about it. The Hemi went south, but no one knew where. Harry Sr. then gave the car to his daughter for her high school commute.

Lou painted "The Greek II" on the side of his car and ran the wheels off it like any red-blooded American teen would do back then. One day when he was tanking up at the local Standard Oil station, an old Mopar racer named Roger Collins walked over. Roger used to buy original Hemicars, pull the engines and stuff them in Darts to race. So Roger walks over and says "that's a neat old car, neat old car." The 383 sat cockeyed in the engine compartment, but Lou, like any 16-year-old, didn't care. The car was cool, had a pistol grip 4-speed, sunroof, and he was cool driving it.



Lou has owned his Super Bee for 37 years. He's the 4th owner. An original Hemicar, it was optioned with power windows, power steering, power brakes, rear defogger, buckets, console, tach and the rare sunroof.



Lou painted the car himself using enamel. It's buffed to give a better than factory finish. Lou now takes his 'Bee to shows and along with the Mrs. enjoys the fun of local cruise nights.



Wing is factory as are the exhaust tips. The louvered '71 Charger 500/Charger R/T taillights are a point of controversy. A lot of Mo'fans say that couldn't have been factory. Those lights were on the car when Lou bought it. Because it was a late build, the factory might have run short of the correct taillights and threw those on to get the car out the door.



Lou retrieved original parts he had removed 20 years earlier when he converted the Hemi to a tunnelram for some street bashing. He did all the restoration work himself. The block is a replacement from MP. The original block has recently resurfaced in Florida and Lou will check it out (again).



Lou and Tami redid the bucket seat covers on their living room floor, going with covers from Legendary. The 4-speed and Dana are original to the car.

Roger gets a funny look on his face, checks out the engine mounts on one side of the engine and then the ones on the other side. Roger gets all excited and says, "Do you realize what you've got here?" He grabs Lou by the back of the head and pushes it towards the battery, almost busting his head against the negative terminal. "Look at that motor mount. Somebody welded the motor mounts right on top of this K-frame. Did this car come with this engine?" Lou said, "Well yeah..." Roger says, "No it didn't. This car came with a 426 Hemi." Even as a 16-year-old kid you hear Hemi and it's like oooooooh reeeeeeeally. Lou found

THE LAST '71 HEMI CHARGER

The last '71 Hemi Charger produced was this yellow 4-speed Super Track Pak (4.10 Dana) car currently owned by noted collector Tim Wellborn. Basically, it's a survivor with one repaint. The interior is all original. The engine bay is pretty much original but you can see holes in the firewall where an electronic ignition had previously been installed. Still, Wellborn felt the car was too nice to restore. So he didn't.

The Charger originally was shipped to the Mabe-Cartwright Dodge dealership in Welsh, WA. These were the guys that stored a brand-new '69 Daytona for years and years before deciding to put it up for sale as a new car some 20 years later. It was more or less the same deal with this Charger. The car didn't sell initially, so the dealer put it away for some 10 years. Maybe he thought it would be worth some big money someday.

Ron Adair, a noted collector of cars and parts, found this car years ago. When he passed away, Greg Steffes started selling off Adair's vast collection, and that's where Wellborn acquired this Charger. The Dodge hadn't been run for years, and Wellborn sent it to Roger Gibson who rebuilt the carbs, cleaned the tank and fuel lines and



Tim Wellborn's 1971 Hemi Charger is recognized as the last 2G Hemi Charger—and possibly the last Hemifar—produced. This car is an unrestored survivor. (Now where did I put that battery hold-down bracket?)

MANUFACTURER		CHRYSLER	
LYNCH HEAD ASSY		W523-R1A-190774	
COLOR CODE		TRIM CODE	
SHIP TO		D6X9	
MABE-CARTWRIGHT MOTORS, INC.		611-AW-345356	
171 MC DOWELL STREET		52074 43	
WELSH, W.VA.			
MABE-CARTWRIGHT MOTORS, INC.			
171 MC DOWELL STREET			
WELSH, W.VA.			
CODE	DESCRIPTION	MANUFACTURER'S SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	
W523	DODGE CHARGER RT CYCL, 2DR, HARDTOP	3,777.00	
THE FOLLOWING ITEMS OF EQUIPMENT ARE STANDARD ON THIS MODEL—VINYL BUCKET SEATS, CIGAR LIGHTER, DAY/NIGHT EXTERIOR MIRROR, AIR FOAM FRONT SEAT, DUAL HORN, DELUXE STEERING WHEEL, 440 4-BBL V-8 ENGINE W/VALVE TRAIN, TORQUEFLITE TRANSMISSION, EXTRA H.D., RALLYE SUSPENSION W/SHOCK, BAR H.D., FRONT & REAR SHOCK ABSORBERS, H.D. DRUM BRAKES, WIDE OVAL RAISED WHITE LETTER TIRES, GLOVE BOX LIGHT, RALLYE STYLE INSTRUMENT PANEL, MAP & COURTESY LAMP, ASH RECEIVER LIGHT, 70 AMP BATTERY, PEDAL DRESS-UP.			
D6X9	BUCKET SEATS-VINYL	219.30	
A34	SUPER TRACK PAK	57.65	
C16	CONSOL	15.05	
D21	MANUAL TRANSMISSION-4SPEED	746.50	
E27	426 CID ENGINE 8 CYL 274SBL HEMI	15.05	
FV1	HIGH IMPACT PAINT	11.75	
G33	MIRROR MANUAL-RIGHT OUTSIDE	16.65	
H45	MIRROR-LEFT SIDE REMOTE CONTROL	52.70	
N85	HOOD TIE DOWN PINS	66.40	
S97	TACHOMETER	116.25	
V57	RADIO 10 STATE-AM	58.95	
W21	POWER STEERING	63.10	
X62	ACCENT 10 STATE-AM	5,217.40	
Y86	RALLYE ROAD WHEELS -4- STD. SPARE	76.00	
435	TIRES-660 X 15 RAISED WHITE LETTERS		
SUB TOTAL		5,293.65	
DESTINATION CHARGE			
TOTAL		5,293.65	

A 7% FEDERAL EXCISE TAX WAS IMPOSED ON THE MANUFACTURER'S OR IMPORTER'S SALE OF THIS VEHICLE. NOTE: BE SURE THE ENVELOPE CONTAINING THE OWNER'S MANUAL, INCLUDING WARRANTY IS IN THIS CAR. 0730 A12 TOTAL* 5,293.65

*State and/or local taxes, title, license and other fees, and dealer supplied and installed options and accessories are not included.

installed a new fuel pump. The Hemi fired right up on the third crank. The Charger drives and handles like it should with its original suspension. The clock shows 33,000 miles.

Options on this car in addition to the Super Track Pak include high-impact paint, pedal dress up, tach, hood pins, Ramcharger hood, AM radio, bucket seats and power steering. Sticker price was \$5,293.45. This Charger has special collector significance when paired with the first '71 Hemi Charger produced as it gives Wellborn a unique set of "book-ends" in his stable.

At one time, a guy by the name of Charles Cheshire believed that he owned the last '71 Hemi Charger produced (VIN 190771), and he wrote a letter to Chrysler asking them to confirm that fact.

Chrysler wrote back informing Cheshire that his car was the next-to-last

Mr. Chas. L. Cheshire
814 Worcester
Garland, Texas 75040

Dear Charles:

We received your note and have ordered your jackets. They should be shipped by early next week. Congratulations on winning "Best Engine".

In response to your question about your '71 Hemi Charger S/N W523-R1A-190771 being the last Hemi Charger off the assembly line, I'm afraid it isn't. According to our records the build date of your car is July 29, 1971. The last build date of a Hemi Charger is July 30, 1971 and it's S/N is W523-R1A-190774. This was the next Hemi Charger to be built and the last one we have any records of. From this I would conclude that you have the next to last Hemi Charger built.

Good luck with your Hemi's and your new street rod, although I do wish it was a Kapor. Thanks for being a part of the Maxi Nats.

Sincerely,

W. C. Tiaht

W. C. Tiaht
Direct Connection Coordinator
Vehicle Performance Planning

WCT:haz

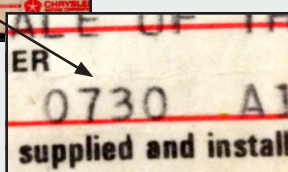
cc: R. E. Maxwell

The letter from Chrysler to Charles Cheshire confirms that Tim's car is indeed the last Hemi Charger built.

'71 Hemi produced; the last one was VIN 190774. The letter was written on Sept. 21, 1976, by W.C. Tiaht, Direct Connection Coordinator, Vehicle Performance Planning. Mr. Tiaht, as well as Charles Cheshire, is alive and well today. He remembers writing that letter and maintains the information is still accurate.

—C.G.

The window (Monroney) is the only real proof of a car's actual build date. The "0730" at the bottom of the sticker indicates July 30, 1971—the last day of 1971 production.

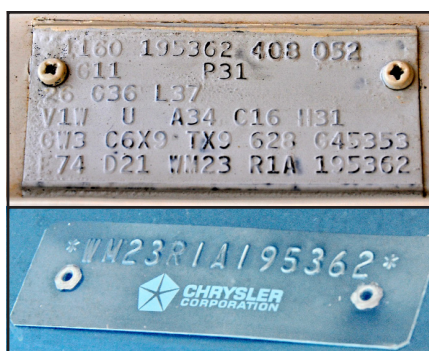


Lou and his wife Tami come up for air on their wedding day in 1981.



another Hemi for the Dodge, of course not date-coded and not correct. It was a '69 engine. He just wanted the Hemi and didn't care. Then he ran the wheels off the car even more, street racing it as he had done with his 383, only notching up more wins. Lou got serious about racing when he pulled off his Air Grabber hood, stock air cleaner and slapped on a tunnelram and headers.

Lou wasn't interested in the car's history back then, or he would have tried to find out about the original Hemi, which did come to him later through a fellow named Daniel Banker. He gave Lou a call one night and said that he got Lou's number and information through Galen Govier and he said he had one dated late '70, which would be a MY '71 block, and it's got a full VIN number—the only year they stamped the full VIN. Usually, they just put the last digits. The engine came from a '71 Super Bee. Lou told him to read the VIN number and it was a spot-on match. Lou went down to look at the engine to buy it because it was the original to the car. But the Hemi had been damaged and raced for many years. It was full of cement, and it had numerous block cracks that had been repaired. It was garbage. It would have leaked and there would be issue after issue.



VIN and fender tags authenticate the claim of highest VIN. There may be some who would pay big bucks for those bragging rights, but to Lou it's no big deal. The car is what important—not numbers.

So Lou passed. It now seems Lou now has another shot at the original Hemi as it recently has resurfaced in Florida.

About 15 years ago, Lou was flabbergasted to learn that his Super Bee was

more than just cool—it was rare. There was a Mopar list published years ago in a magazine that listed production numbers of cars. It said 22 '71 Super Bees were built with 426 Hemis, 9 of which were 4-speeds. That didn't include the export cars, so now there might be as many as 27 '71 Hemi Super Bees out there. Of the Hemi Bees, this is only one of two known with a sunroof. And another thing: This Bee has the highest VIN known of any '71 Charger—WM23R1A195362—a fact that Lou says Galen Govier is documenting in a letter to him (we tried contacting the numbers guru but he never returned our call) and a late scheduled production date: June 28, 1971. Does this make it the last Hemi Charger built? No. (see "Numbers Game" below).

Rather than try and cash in on the car's pedigree of having the highest VIN to those who care about such things and are willing to shell out megabucks for those bragging rights, Lou is more into the passion about the car itself. The VIN and Bee's one-of-two status is just the icing on the cake. The Dodge holds fond memories for Lou. In the late '70s he drove his future wife to the high school prom in it. And in 1981 he drove it to his wedding and has photos of him and his wife sitting on the sunroof on their wedding day. He drove his first two newborns home from the hospital in the Charger. His third child is still mad at him because she wasn't carted home in the Bee.

The car then sat for 15 years in Lou's garage before he had the resources to restore it—something he did by himself, including the enamel paint. He admits there are better restos out there, but he did the

NUMBERS GAME

Lou Kanellis has the highest VIN '71 Charger (195362) So how come Tim Wellborn's '71 Hemi Charger with a lower VIN (190774) is the last one built? The answer is cars aren't built in the order of their VINs. When the factory receives an order from a customer (sold) or they build a car for the sales bank (inventory—unsold) the factory generates a broadcast, or build, sheet. The cars then get a scheduled production date—that date is printed on the build sheet. But cars aren't always built on their scheduled production date (although they are usually built within a week of the scheduled date—but not always).

Several factors may affect the actual build date vs. scheduled production date. All the equipment slated for the car might not be available at the time so the car has to wait past its scheduled build date. Also, sold cars get preference to sales bank



cars, because sold cars mean cash coming in where bank cars do not. Wellborn's Charger was a sales bank car.

When the body goes down the line, just

Unlike some other car manufacturers, Chrysler VINs did not correlate to when the cars rolled off the assembly line.

before paint, the fender tag is punched to match the build sheet and screwed to the fender.

So how do you know the actual build date for a car? There's only one way—and that date is listed on the bottom of the Monroney (window) sticker which is slapped on the window on the assembly line. Repop window stickers, by the way, do not have a build date typed in at the bottom. That space is left blank unless an original was provided. Tim Wellborn's Charger shows a build date of 0730 (July 30, 1971), which is the last day of production for the '71s. We know it's the last Hemi Charger, but is it the last Hemi? We won't know that until there's research into all the other Hemi models produced or documentation (window sticker) to verify the build date.

—C.G.



Back in the '70s, Lou street-warred the Bee with a 383, then a Hemi. He jacked up the rear and slapped on huge rear tires as was the rage of the era. He had "Greek II" painted on the flanks. (Greek I was a Road Runner he had previously owned.) Had he been into computers at the time, the lettering would have read "Geek II".

best he could with what he had. Lou went with a Mopar Performance 426 Hemi block that he stamped himself. His friend still had all the original parts that Lou had stored in his friend's barn 20 years earlier when he had installed the race stuff.

Lou searched out the best parts he could possibly find; there wasn't the wealth of repo part back then as there is now. The Bee still wears its original quarters, its original doors, fenders, hood and decklid. The front and rear spoilers are factory. Only one floorpan has been replaced because when Lou was a young rebellious punk, he was being chased by the cops one night and went through a ditch thinking he was Burt Reynolds in "Smokey and the Bandit." He caught a stump and ripped his rear floorpan wide open. Lou welded in another one, but other than that, the steel is all factory original.

Lou has no intention of selling his Super Bee. While the car may be rare, to Lou it is part of his life. And, you never know if one day, Baby no. 4 may need a ride home from the hospital.

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THE CONTROVERSY

Recently, a '71 Hemi Charger has come out of the woodwork claiming to have the highest VIN and being the last Hemi Charger—and the last 426 Hemi—produced. What is the validity of this claim? For the results of an eye-opening investigation, check out our website for the current issue. Click on VIN-TAGE CHARGER on the contents page and then Investigative Report. Be sure to follow the link to the YouTube video in the report.

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