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#### Director's Message

With its fireworks, tourists, car shows, swap meets and speeches, July and Iola '84 are past history, and your new set of officers are making plans for the year ahead. The best news of all is the return of Chris Halla as editor of the SPARK. (Actually Chris produced more issues of our newsletter than I did - 12 out of 19.) We will all benefit having him back at the helm.)

All members of the Board of Directors have assured me of their enthusiasm and cooperation, and this should guarantee a good year ahead for WSAH. In this connection your officers are planning some very interesting, entertaining and educational meetings at auto related historical locations around the state, in the coming months. Our membership is expanding both in numbers and in influence, hobby-related publishers and corporations are making substantial financial contributions to our organization, and our affiliation with the State Historical Society has now reached the highest available plateau - Perpetual Membership status.

Vice president, Bob Lichty, in addition to his contributions to this issue, reports that "he has a lot more time now to devote to the Society and a lot more enthusiasm." I can sense this same aura of enthusiasm among our newly elected officers and long standing, loyal members, all of which bodes well for future growth and influence.

Thanks for electing me director. I'll do my best to justify your confidence.

William T. Cameron



## Editor's Notebook

To paraphrase the comedian, Eddie Murphy, your worst nightmares have just come true. For this and an undisclosed number of future issues of the SPARK, I will be returning as editor. But don't cancel your WSAH memberships yet! It might not be all that bad. Together, I think we (all of us, including you) can put out a respectable little journal.

Look at this 20th issue of the SPARK as transitional. In it, you will see much of what you have come to expect from the last seven issues, a little of what you became accustomed to in the first 12 issues and just a hint of what you can expect from future issues.

Yes, that does mean that there will be some changes. Any editor worth his salt will bring to a publication--even a limited circulation historical society publication--his own tone of voice, his own attitudes. Some will do it by chance, others according to a predetermined plan of action. Notice is hereby served that I am part of the latter group.

In order to insure that the best interests of WSAH as a whole will always be served, I have asked that the director appoint an editorial board. The board will provide general support, act as a sounding board, consult on issues best confronted from several points of view and approve, and assist in implementing, any major changes to the SPARK. It is my hope that the editorial board will also direct and oversee the publication of any future WSAH publishing projects. (This last was not part of the original agreement, but it is hoped that you will support this modest proposal and contribute to its success.)

The editorial board will be made up of myself, as editor, Tony Hossain (automotive editor and writer), Matt Joseph (perhaps still our organization's only professional historian), and Ray Scroggins (automotive writer and freelance PR specialist). For the time being, Gary and Linda Busha, of Wolf-song Publications, will be doing our typesetting and spot editing. In addition, WSAH calls upon you to comment, criticize (positive and negative) and contribute. The result of all of our labors will be a more intelligent, more professional and ever improving publication, better than we have ever had before.

What can you look for in future issues? Certainly more of the fine, brief Wisconsin manufacturer histories we have run since our first issue. But, in addition to Wisconsin's automotive history, we should also begin to place an emphasis on automotive history in general, as portrayed by Wisconsin journalists. If the subject is Wisconsin or the author/editor/publisher is based in Wisconsin, we should and must be supportive of the work. Indeed, this is the purpose WSAH was founded for.

What else can you expect? An information exchange, events calendars, organization and membership news, information from experts in the field on history, writing and publishing, book reviews, fiction, poetry and what some have come to call pop histories. Automotive history is more, much more, far ranging than the story of man and his car. Let's recognize, without apology, that the effect of the automobile on American society is a legitimate avenue in the course of study of automotive history.

There are members among us who are capable of detailing the history of the cars themselves, the people involved, the gas stations, diners, drive-ins, billboards, tourist cabins, the roads, pop music,



literature and art, clothing and roads. There are members among us who are capable of de-  
tailing the history of Road America, the Milwaukee  
Mile and several thousand miles of dirt and paved  
oval tracks. There are members among us who are  
capable of interviewing those few remaining pio-  
neers (and their families) of Wisconsin automo-  
tive history.

As long as I am the editor, the SPARK will be  
published on a quarterly--January, April, July,  
October--schedule. This issue reached your hands  
in October. Future issues will be mailed between  
the 15th of the month preceding and the 15th of  
the issue month. January, for instance, will be  
in your mailbox between December 15 and January 15.

With that, you've heard enough from me for this  
issue. Just one final note: you will have noticed  
or heard by now that publication of the SPARK is  
being sponsored in large part by the more than  
generous contributions of automotive related busi-  
nesses in and around Wisconsin. They often cannot  
hope to recoup their contributions from our busi-  
ness, but let's do what little we can to help them  
survive. Afterall, they are doing a great deal  
to insure our survival.

Thanks for asking me back. It's good to be back.

Chris Halla

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### Secretary's Report

The Sixth Annual Meeting of the Wisconsin Chapter  
Society of Automotive Historians took place on  
June 7, 1984, amidst the clamor, noise, crowds,  
dust and charcoal broiled chicken aroma of the  
Iola Old Car Show.

The meeting convened at one p.m. (or thereabouts)  
with members and guests standing in the doorway of  
the Old Car Weekly emporium of antique vehicles  
(someone forgot to provide chairs) very shortly  
moving to a grassy slope on the north, shady side  
of the building.

Matt Joseph, as Chairman of the Election Committee,  
announced the results of ballots circulated among  
members after enumerating several "close calls:"

William T. Cameron - Director

Robert Lichty - Associate Director

Ray Scroggins - Secretary

Robert Gary - Treasurer

Tony Hossain - Director-at-Large

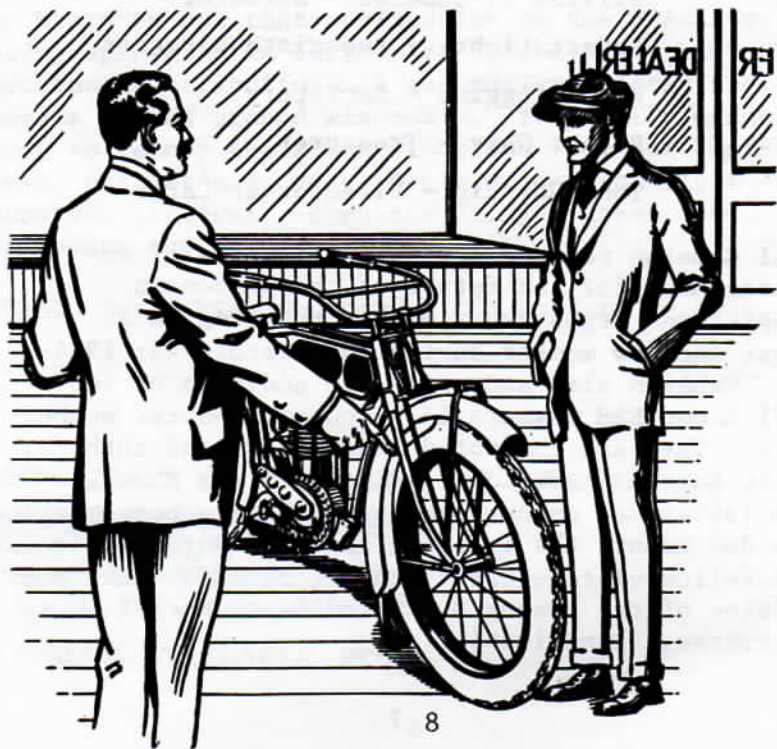
Bill Cameron responded with a few words of en-  
couragement for the future of the Wisconsin  
Chapter and urged every member to bring in at  
least one new member during the fiscal year 1984-  
85. Cameron also announced the addition of two  
well known SAH members to Wisconsin Chapter member-  
ship. They are the noted researchers and authors,  
Henry Austin Clark, Jr. and Beverly Rae Kimes.  
The latter was on her honeymoon, having been married  
the day before the Iola meet to a long time friend  
and fellow vintage car restorer, James H. Cox (pro-  
prietor of the Sussex Motor and Coach Works,  
Matamoras, Pennsylvania).



The highlight of the meeting was an address by Bev Kimes emphasizing the importance of collecting and recording, for posterity, the many contributions made by Wisconsinites to the emerging automobile from early in the century to date. In addition, she told the story of the great steam powered vehicle race from Green Bay to Madison, bringing out some heretofore unknown aspects of that momentous event. Although Ms. Kimes spoke from notes, she promised to "polish" her remarks and present them for publication in a future issue of the SPARK.

Austy Clark was introduced and, with his usual wit and wry humour, complimented our chapter on its accomplishments and its selection of goals for the future.

The meeting adjourned at 2:20.



#### A Request (from Associate Director, Robert Lichty)

In this issue of the SPARK you will find a survey that several officers and members encouraged me to develop and tabulate the results of.

The organization, at least in some members' minds, (including mine) seems to be having a mild identity crisis. Enthusiasm was strong in the early, formulative years, but as some goals did not get reached, and through a lack of push from officers (including me), enthusiasm seemed at an all time low this past winter.

Things look better now. Our brief summer meeting was a very pleasant one. Bev Kimes did an excellent job talking about Wisconsin automotive history, and Charlie Webb's TV commercial show certainly attracted a lot of spectators. It was good to see a nice crowd.

Please return the survey as soon as possible. I'll tabulate the results and we'll get it into the next SPARK. From this, hopefully, we will learn what members want out of the organization, and what they can contribute to achieve all of our goals. So fill out the questionnaire, with or without your name, and send me your honest comments. (Address: Robert Lichty, 460 E. Iola St., Iola, WI 54945).



Continued from SPARK Number 19

COMMANDER  
STILLBORN SCION OF THE OGREN

by  
Keith Marvin

*Continuing SPARK'S reports on Wisconsin built vehicles, this article was published in total in THE UPPER HUDSON VALLEY AUTOMOBILIST. Reprinted by permission of the author and the Automobilists of the Upper Hudson, Inc. We begin where we left off in SPARK 19. . . .*

It became apparent that the time had come to phase Ogren, or the Ogren name at least, out of the picture and strike out for a new image. Consequently, the decision was made to once again reorganize the company--or what was left of it--and attempt to start anew under a new name. Commander Motors was therefore formed to take over the Ogren and build the Commander car. Contemporary promotion played up the fact that the Commander was also designed by H. W. Ogren. It needn't have used the word "also," for the Commander was nothing more than the Ogren car with another name.

Officers of the new Commander Motors, set up with headquarters in New York City and hopefully a new manufacturing site in Chicago. Officers were: Chicago Transportation Co., president, Nicholas Schmidt, active in the bonds and mortgages business of that city; Hugo W. Ogren, vice-president; and Sidney R. Flett, Chicago realtor and Mr. Wilcox's son-in-law, secretary and treasurer. Directors were the four officers and Fridolph Ogren of Chicago. Business address of the firm was 49 Wall Street, New York City, and capital of the new enterprise was set at \$2,000,000.

An elaborate brochure was issued showing illustrations of the phaeton and sedan--both obviously Ogrens, a "driver's eye view" of the controls emphasizing the Whyte Motorcontrol and Mr. Ogren himself. Also included were complete specifications, the usual sales pitch and testimonial letters from various Chicago bankers attesting to the worth of those who would have readers invest in the new enterprise.

The brochure was distributed here and there simultaneously with automobile magazine announcements of the new Commander. These announcements appeared devoid of illustrations because the till at Ogren-Commander had long since been empty. What is of special interest is, that in addition to the pictures of the open and closed Commanders in the brochure, an actual photograph is shown of the touring-car which proves without a doubt that one car bearing the Commander emblem did exist.

But this wasn't any new car at all. It was simply the car which had appeared as an Ogren in the promotional article three months previously, with the triangular Commander emblem located where the Ogren shield had been before. Even in the picture of the Whyte Motorcontrol panel, the Commander insigne had been cleverly sketched into the instrument cluster whereas in June it had been missing. Another oddity in illustrating the Commander was that although the motormeter was, in theory, placed within the Motorcontrol cluster and is shown with this arrangement in the accompanying sketch with the insigne atop the radiator, the conventional motormeter perched atop the radiator is shown in both photographs.

"The Automobile Without an Equal" caroled the cover of the prospectus. "The Most Completely Equipped Car on the Market," it added, and of that we have no little doubt. For the Commander



was truly loaded with luxuries and accessories which were to be standard equipment. Price of the phaeton was \$5,000, so perhaps the purchaser was paying for them after all.

In addition to the bare necessities or even the usual extras one expected in a new car, the Commander included the Whyte Motorcontrol, two spotlights, two tonneau lights, trouble light with a 17-foot extension cord, light under the hood lighting each side of the motor, sun visor, special spare wheel padlocks, front and rear bumpers built into the frame of the car, trunk with patent leather finish and two leatherette fitting suitcases, nickle body bars to keep the trunk from scratching the rear of the car, full set of tools, cushion foot rest, tire pump. Houdaille shock absorbers and special "wind shield cleaner" which I take to mean wind-shield wiper.

In addition, the car featured removable top brackets. "When the top is up," remarked the copy, "these unsightly brackets are removed and replaced with a button, giving a smooth unbroken effect to the side of the car."

All in all, the Commander promised much and, had the Fates been kinder, might even have been an entity of its own for a little while rather than a re-emblemmed and re-hubbed Ogren. "The Commander automobile will climb a steeper hill than any other automobile in the world" claimed the catalogue. Maybe it would. The text didn't explain how or why. The grade the Commander faced in order to survive was just too steep for negotiation. It died without a whimper. Ogren then seemed to rise like a phoenix from its ashes but briefly, and last notice in which it was mentioned as being among the living was

in November, 1922 when Fred G. Smith, erstwhile secretary and treasurer of Ogren and one of its stockholders, was named president and general manager of the corporation, which was going through a reorganization program.

And that was all. Whatever remained on hand as complete automobiles were quietly sold off--and as Ogrens. Presumably if sufficient parts were still on hand, others were completed, also as Ogrens. There may not have even been any Commander emblems lying around anymore. There might never have been any others except that one which adorned the radiator of the one and only car to bear the name. The scattered few cars remaining were sold for what they would bring as 1923 models, although in fact they had been built in 1922 or even as early as 1921.

In November 1923 a receivership petition was filed and with this brief note the Ogren drifted into that limbo of American automobiles that also ran.

In January 1924, a small notice in the trade papers stated that the Ogren company had been "inoperative for the past six months." It would liquidate, it said, adding that most of the tools and equipment had been sold to the Huffman interests of Elkhart, Ind., builders of the Huffman car which itself would throw in the towel shortly after introducing its 1925 models.

A cryptic and sour note in July 1924 announced that "neither stockholders or creditors get anything as the result of the sale of available assets. Tax claims take the entire amount received."

As for overall production of the Ogren, no one can be sure. Harlan Appelquist, a specialist on production statistics of American automobiles, hazards



a guess that 1919 might have been Ogren's top year with some 50 cars produced and thinks that perhaps the figures from 1920 through 1922 might have run around 30 units a year. If this is so, and adding a speculative number of pre-1919 Ogren cars, the total might approach 175 to 200, hardly a respectable run for so fine a motor car over such an extended period.

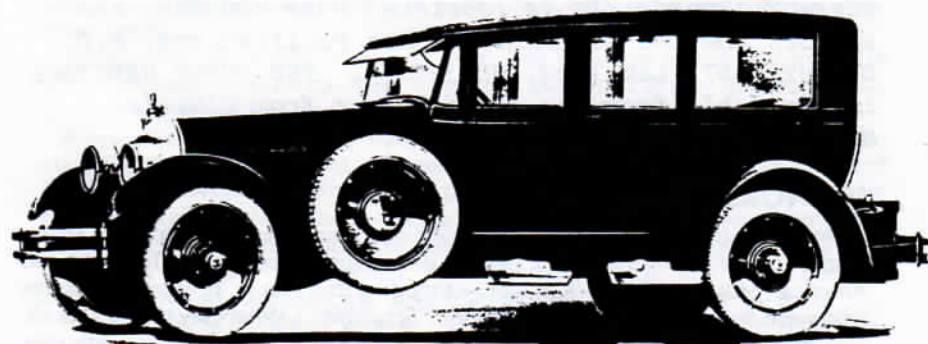
But life is like that. Sometimes one wonders why there have been so many truly poor automobiles made over an even longer period. We'll probably never know the answer to the riddle, but we can always be glad that there were cars like the Ogren and the Commander--the latter but an Ogren with window dressing--to brighten up the otherwise humdrum existence of automotive flotsam and jetsam.

(The Author would like to express his appreciation to Mary Cattie, Louis Helverson of the Free Library of Philadelphia, and Tad Burness of San Jose, California for their assistance with this article.)

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## THE HURST HERITAGE

### Some Wild Machines

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### '69 HURST/SC/RAMBLER

One of the most memorable high performance cars ever was dropped on an unsuspecting automotive world in 1969. It was a surprise cooked up by Hurst and American Motors — the SC/Rambler factory drag/street racer. Few car enthusiasts who were around then have forgotten the "Scrambler." What they may not recall, though, was Hurst's concurrent run of AMX SS race-only cars; and how many ever knew the Hurst had a part in the 1970 Rebel Machine's creation?

Hurst approached AMC with the SC/Rambler idea. American Motors was still trying to shake off the conservative image that thousands of Nash and Hudson buyers had brought to them with the 1954 merger. The Rambler, in particular, had a little old lady image — and not the ol' girl from Pasadena, either. There had been a few AMC 327 drag cars, and the 343 Rogue had startled a handful of street contenders, but it wasn't until the AMX/Javelin program of 1968 that AMC showed real signs of life.

Plymouth had generated a lot of publicity, interest and sales with their Road Runner for 1968. An econo-box racer, the Road Runner was a sensation. Hurst mind-tripped the concept into a \$3000, 390-cubic inch Rambler that would be an F-stock terror at the drags. AMC was in the mood, and gave the go-ahead.

The resulting production car was the Hurst SC/Rambler — known as the "Scrambler," for good reason. Based on the contemporary Rogue 2-door hardtop of 1969, the SC/Rambler weighed in at about 3000 pounds. Under the hood was a 315-hp, 390 cubic inch V-8 pirated from the AMX. A Borg-Warner 4-speed with Hurst shifter tossed the torque to 3.54:1 rear gears with a "Twin Grip" differential. The 315 rated horsepower gave the car a power to weight ratio of 10.03 pounds per horsepower — a very competitive ratio for NHRA's then-current F-stock rules.

The factory claimed in sales literature that the car would turn the quarter mile in the low 14 second range, at 98 mph. *Road Test Magazine's* crew did even better, clocking 14.14 and 100.44 mph with their test car, and pushed the car to 109 mph on an open straight without fully winding it out. Members of the AM Drag Racers Association tuned and modified the Scramblers for years, eventually working them down into the nine second bracket. The SC/Rambler was perhaps the only car built and promoted overtly for a specific drag racing class, and was without parallel in its time.

Image was part of Hurst's sales pitch, no doubt, and the SC/Rambler fairly dripped with high performance detailing. Hurst sat a giant hood scoop, with a high tilted opening, on the hood. Hard acceleration popped open a vacuum-operated

gate, dumping the cooler outside air directly into the big 390's Carter 4-barrel carb. Large diameter dual exhaust pipes terminated beneath the rear bumpers, and were fitted with chrome custom extensions. The exhaust rumble was an not-too-subtle reminder of the car's purpose. Inside, the racer's choice, a real Sun tach, mounted on the steering column, kept track of revs.

Although primarily promoted as a drag car, the SC/Rambler was carefully equipped for excellent all-around handling by the addition of the AMX's complete suspension package. Some did complain that the 20:1 ratio manual steering was a bit slow, but it was light enough that power assist was not needed. Also borrowed from the AMX was a heavy-duty Bendix power front disc brakes up front, and drums for the rear.

SC/Ramblers came with blue five spoke mag-style wheels, size 14x6, with bright trim rings. Original equipment tires were Goodyear's red-stripe Polyglas wide-tread design.

Interior trim was mostly in a quiet grey, with panelling and seats trimmed in vinyl. Carpeting covered the floor. A counter-note was struck by the headrests — done in red, white and blue vinyl, to coordinate with the exterior.

Ah yes, the exterior. Striking. Startling. Exciting. Outrageous. No matter what exclamation was uttered, it was unforgettable. Leaving Kenosha, the Rogues bound for Hurst conversion were finished in a plain white. Soon, however, giant panels of red were sprayed onto the body sides, and big blue racing stripes were painted onto the deck, roof and hood surfaces. Just so no one would be tempted to mail their bills in the "mailbox" hood scoop, Hurst painted "AIR" in huge letters on each side of it. The displacement was advertised in bold color right on the hood.

Initially, 500 SC/Ramblers were to be built. They were snapped up almost immediately, and another run was called for it. The wild paint scheme was attracting all sorts of attention — some not especially welcomed — so the subsequent cars



1969 Rambler Rogue was "Clark Kent" version of SC/Rambler supercar.

AMC



were milder in appearance, with only a lower stripe on the body sides. A third run was also produced. AMC collectors refer to the original paint scheme as the "A" package; and the later color arrangement as the "B" package. Larry Daum, who wrote the AMC part of the *Standard Catalog of American Cars 1946-75*, says that total SC/Rambler production was 1512 cars, of which only the first 500 had the full color-treatment. Logic would suggest that the toned-down cars would be the most evident today, but most of the surviving SC/Rambler we've seen have the "A" scheme — perhaps added during renovation in some instances.

## '69 AMX SS



AMXpress was a popular AMX/SS drag racer, and one of the Hurst conversions.

AMC DRAG CAR

The two-seater AMX is one of the most intriguing cars of the high-performance era, and is a prized collector car today. Hurst worked with AMC to build a very limited run of special AMXs for all-out drag racing. Known as the AMX SS cars, these rare AMXs have begun to emerge from the shadows of competition history in recent years. The few surviving examples are like living legends to AMC collectors.

AMXs destined for Hurst conversion left Kenosha either in plain white paint, or with a tri-color red, white and blue scheme. To comply with then existing NHRA rules, at least 52 cars had to be built in racing trim. AMX SS serial numbers covered a block running from Vehicle Identification Number A9M397X213560 to A9M397-X21613, suggesting that 53 units total were built. A story circulates that an extra car was built in case a car was lost through damage before the certification was completed, but no verification has been made. The AMX SS cars had dash plaques with their sequential AMX build number, as did all AMXs. SS numbers ran from 12,567 to 12,620.

Included in the AMX SS package was a very special "340-HP" 390-cubic inch V-8. A pair of Holley 650 cfm 4-barrel carburetors sat atop its Edelbrock aluminum dual cross-ram intake manifold. Doug's super stock exhaust headers were used. Crane modified the heads — and stamped their name on them — for a 12.3:1 compression ratio. A stock 390 cam was factory equipment, and was presumably tossed immediately after delivery, the racer installing his own favorite grind. An AMX heavy-duty radiator and Power-Flex fan aided cooling.

Some scoff at the idea that E70x14 Goodyear Polyglas tires, on black AMC rims, were standard on the AMX SS. They were, though — and their purpose was mostly for holding the car off the ground during delivery. Individual racers fitted their favorite type of rubber. Rear wheel wells were radiused at the factory. Hurst sent "performance bulletins" — letters and even telegrams in some instances, to AMX SS owners. One stated tersely, "Use the largest diameter tire that will clear the wheel opening."

The bulletins kept owners and drivers current on legal modifications and tips.

A 4.44:1 rear axle ratio in the Twin-Grip unit put the power to the ground. Special, extra-heavy rear axles were required. The rear suspension was also special — patterned on that used in the MoPar drag cars. Moving forward, a Lakewood Hydroformed explosion-proof bellhousing embraced the 4-speed transmission, with a Hurst Super/Stock remove shifter handling the gear changes.

The cars were delivered without many items found on street AMX units. The parts deletions included the grille support, front fender brackets, hood latches, springs and hinges. The front sway bar was left off — presumably the car would be cornering only at the end of drag strips. One horn was deleted, and AMX SS cars have no rocker panel moldings.

Finish of the hood scoop openings, rear wheel cutouts and carpet were left in the rough, for the racer/owner to refine to taste. Some owners recall their cars came without heaters, wipers, carpet padding and other accessory items.

Suggested retail price was a staggering \$5994.00, plus tax. Sticker price was \$5979.00, a lot of 1969 dollars. No one ordered one of these cars with any delusions about its usage, but, still, the sales sheet for the AMX SS stated:

"This car is equipped with a specially modified 390 cu. in. engine (and other special equipment). This car is intended for use in supervised acceleration trials and is not intended for highway or general passenger car use. Accordingly, this vehicle is sold "AS IS" and the 12 month or 12,000 mile vehicle warranty coverage and 5 year or 50,000 mile power train warranty coverage does not apply..."

The warranty disclaimer said it all; the AMX SS was an all-out race car. Most were used up in the heated battles of drag racing competition.

Most of the AMX SS cars ran in AHRA's SS/E class, or NHRA's C/S class. Later, NHRA refactored the horsepower rating to 420, putting the special AMXs in SS/D or SS/C classes. AMC fans today lament that the cars were so competitive that race organizers kept reclassifying them until they were up against monsters capable of whipping them.

A kit was offered to convert the '69 SS cars into 1970 AMXs. New frontal sheet metal was the primary change. Even so, they were disqualified as 1970 production cars and were campaigned as year-old cars.

The AMX SS was a true race car, and its presence lingers to this day. Recently, Ken Freeman, of North Falmouth, Mass., claimed an NHRA C/SS record with his AMX SS, clocking the quarter in 10.13 seconds at 131 mph. That's performance.

