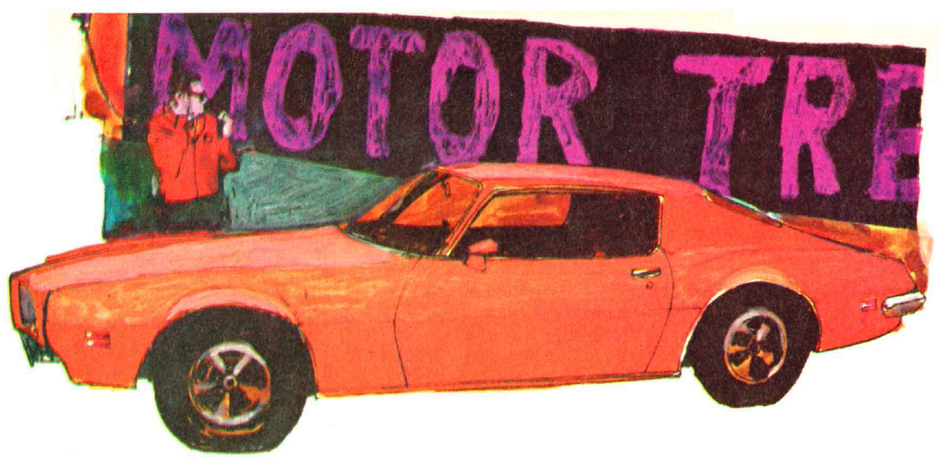

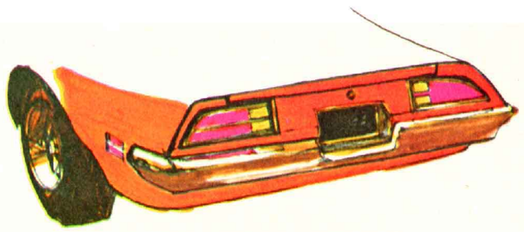

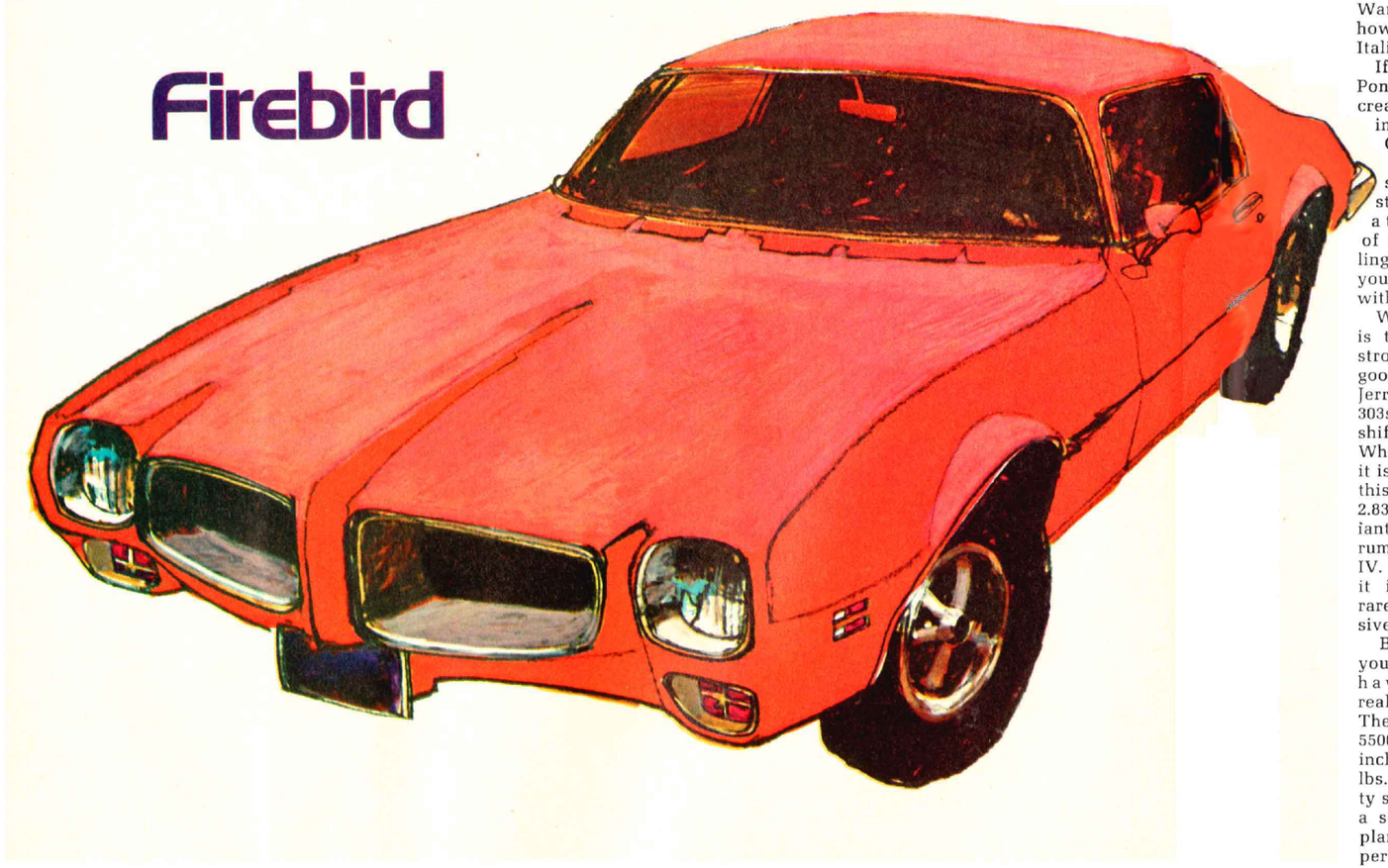

70½ GM Sports Spectacular

It's all right here. Everything else you knew just went obsolete. Like it or not, the shape of the '70s is the shape of the decade's first machines, the Camaro and the Firebird. They are what Detroit iron would look like if Detroit iron was designed in Turin; only it's not. And that's important, because these little rippers are figments of the General Motors dream factory out on Mound Road, just above Twelve Mile in Warren, Michigan. Machines somehow turned real without fumbling the Italian in the translation.

If you ever thought it could happen, Pontiac was the likely spot. Whatever creative demons got loose in their place in 1963, at the conception of the Grand Prix, have run at odd angles to the rest of Motown design ever since. The GTO is one of the better styling exercises around and it is not a terrible shock to see strong overtones of the Tigers' bloodlines in their yearling 70½ Firebird. But overtones are all you get, or need. Identity, unconfused with duplicity.

What you really want to know about, is the tech stuff — the diameters and strokes and bores and ratios. All the goodies that turn handlers into budding Jerry Tituses, kicking their TransAm 303s to seven grand in the 4-3 downshifts. Thank God, the 303 still lives. Whether or not you will be able to have it is another question. The essence of this engine is a short-deck, 4.120 x 2.83 inch bore/stroke variant of the humbling, rumbling, Ram Air IV. Which means it is a very rare, expensive item.

Better you should have the real McCoy. The 370 hp @ 5500 rpm, 400-cubic-inch Ram IV itself. 445 lbs. ft. of torque @ 3900 is plenty strong. And yet, lurking in a seemingly deserted engine assembly plant somewhere, is the ultra-pop, 100 percent, all-torque 455 for those select sportsmen who opt a 2.92:1 final drive-ratio, standard Hurst-handled 3-speed

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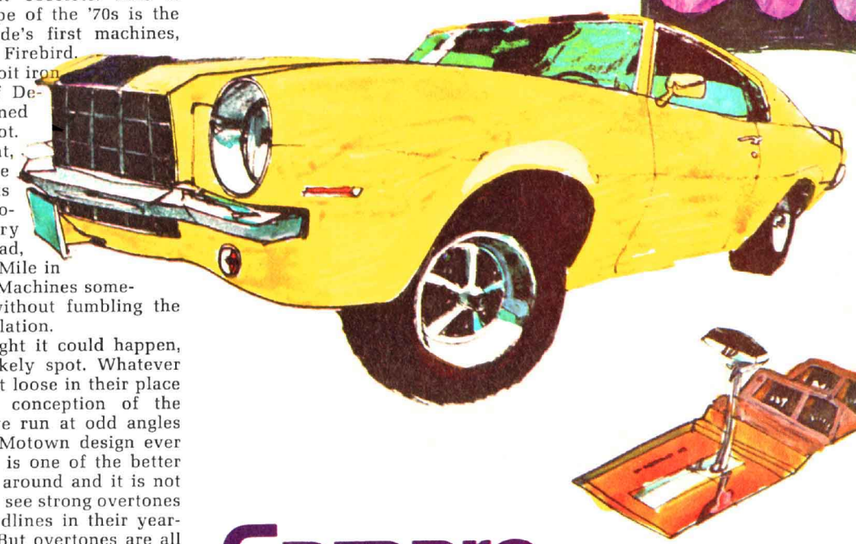
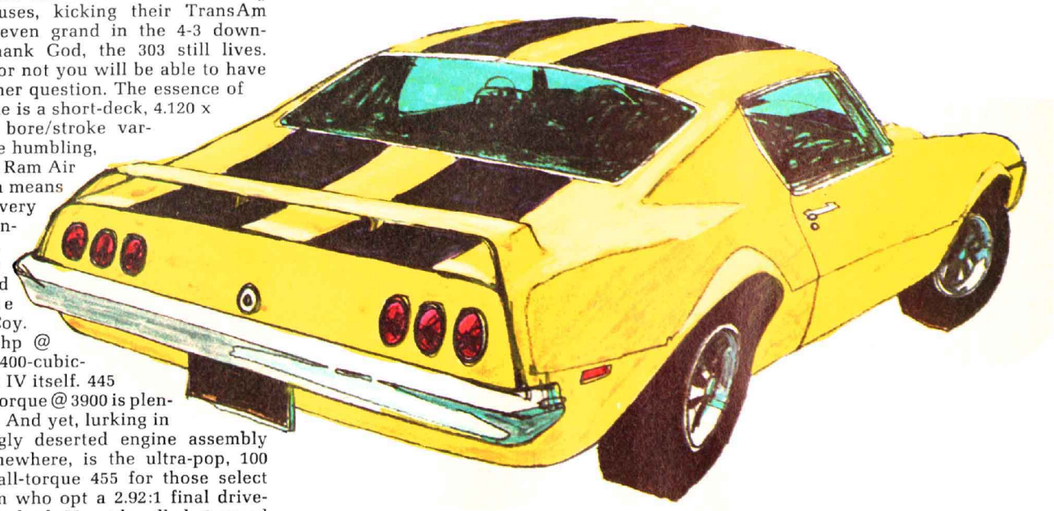
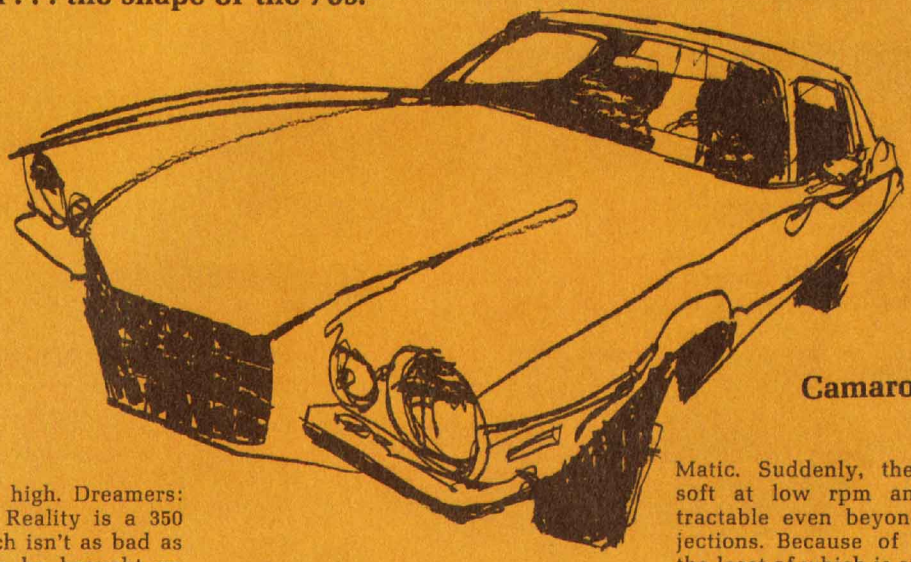


Camaro



"They are what Detroit iron would look like if it was designed in Turin, only it's not . . . they're figments of the General Motors dream factory . . . somehow turned real without fumbling the Italian in the translation . . . the shape of the 70s."



Camaro

continued

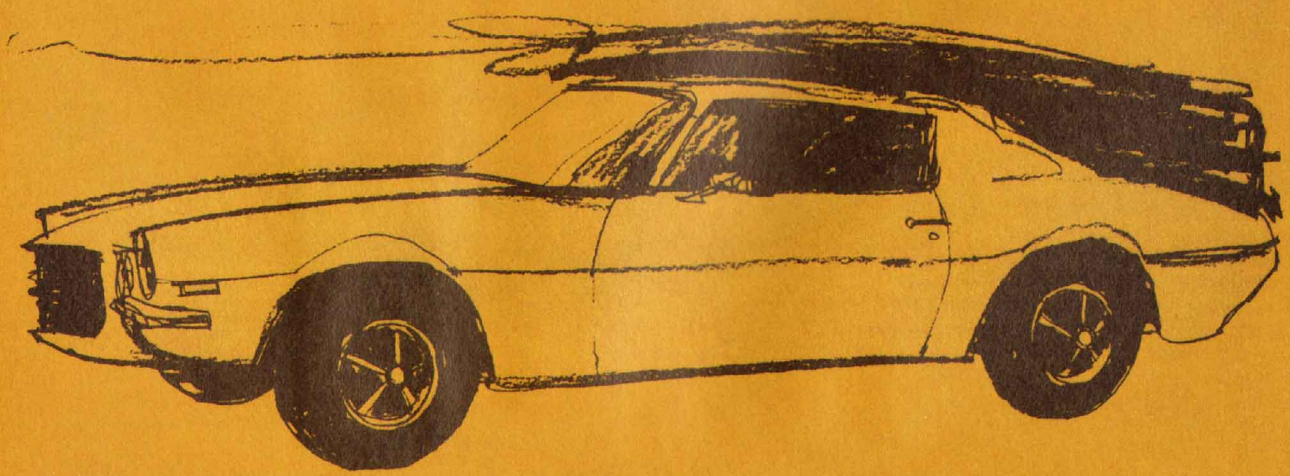
and always keep it in high. Dreamers: the whole lot of you. Reality is a 350 and you know it. Which isn't as bad as it sounds — reality can be brought up to spec with scooped ram-air, trick, declutching fan and the two-tone, push-pull, click-click, select-your-own-decibel mufflers.

With power-train options, you pays your money and you takes your choice. Other things you get, like it or not. For instance, power-assisted front discs are standard. And, fiberglass-belted tires. And a 1⅛-inch diameter front stabilizer bar. Like they say at Pontiac, "We take the fun of driving seriously. Very seriously."

Now, you expected all that from Pontiac, right? Someday you'll turn around in your GTO and the engine will be where the back seat used to be and you'll buzz off without a second thought. Chevrolet, that's a whole other deal. The manager of the old Sports Department, John DeLorean, just kind of stands back there tall and cool in an Italian suit and shatters people's minds with all-aluminum engines. Maybe his tailor had something to do with the Camaro; you can see some Ghia and Maserati in it. But then again, maybe not. Allusions to the outstanding XJ-6 Jaguar would not be out of line. It doesn't really matter. None of that foreign stuff is bad, except that that particular kind of jutting grill isn't especially keen at getting through the air.

Not that it won't have a lot of help. As long as the competition didn't train-length Chevrolet performance, they pretty much honored the corporation's ten-pounds-per-cubic-inch production formula. Hemi Challengers and Barracudas, however, may not be ignored. Stone ponies don't make it in this league. Hence, socko, LS4, 345 hp., 454-cubic-inch Camaros will be only a special order number away and three grand further on, the Z-L1.

Why it is not better to put the hairy-mammoth motors out on waivers and draft, instead, the computer-pulse, revved-up, adagio-nimbleness of the Z-28 is a question known only to straight-minded Americans. They want those big mothers and they get them, and automatically abandon a good 50 percent of what driving is all about. Double the pity this year, the advent of the LT-1, a 48-cubic-inch tempered enlargement of the Z-28 302 that can be had with a high-stall-speed Turbo Hydra-Matic. Suddenly, the machine is not soft at low rpm anymore, becoming tractable even beyond your wife's objections. Because of many things, not the least of which is stratospheric insurance rates, the LT-1 type of car will become the prototype of the '70's — de-escalated horsepower machines that do all their things well; go, handle, stop.

As always, if not from sheer respect for their primordial origins, the Camaro's base powerplant is the 250-cubic-inch, 140-horsepower in-line six, an engine that lives on like the VW. Perhaps, as the insurance forces align with the legislators in dousing the power rating fires, Chevrolet may do something with it — doubtful as that seems. If neither the 250 nor the 302s peak your interest, the House of DeLorean has fifteen other selections on their tunedex-offering, such individual engine tailoring that only a 396, 400, 402 rating scale can allow. It depends on how steep your driveway is.

One final bizzare footnote to the new Camaro and Firebird shapes is that, from the rear aspect anyway, there is a certain passing resemblance to the 1967-'69 vintage Barracudas. A look, ironically, Chrysler spent about three million dollars and two years time to get replaced by the style of the 1967-'69 Camaro-Firebird. Hmm? /MT