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# REVIVAL OF THE FITTEST—PART VI



## Project '67 Camaro Z/28

### Body Beautiful — And A Little Color

By Terry Cole

**A**nyone who's ever gone through the motions of reviving an automobile knows that there's one step that makes it all worth while — having new paint applied over a straight, dent-free body. Nothing makes a car look better than fresh color, and no step in the restoration process of Bob Morton's 1967 Camaro Z/28 Trans Am racer has brought it closer to fruition than when it emerged from Brandon Huhtala's Automotive Images paint shop with a shiny blue coat and a pair of white racing stripes.

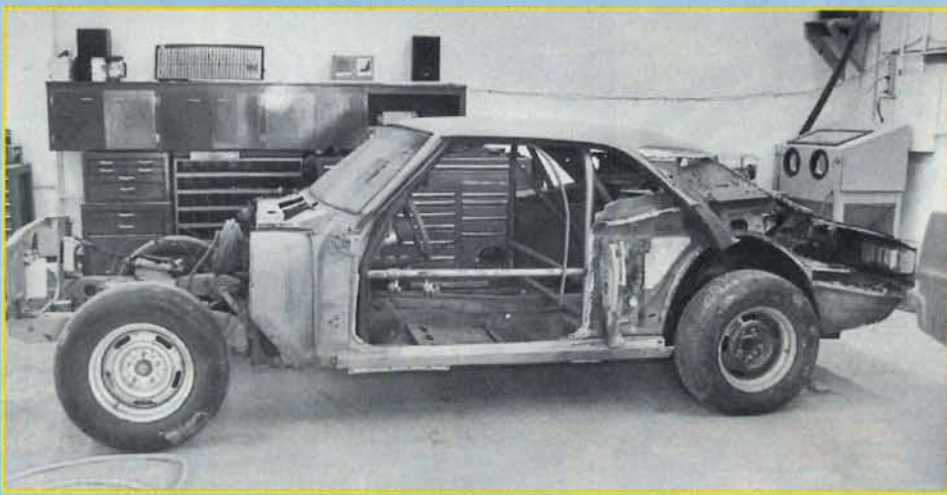
If you've been following our coverage of this meticulous rebuild, you might recall that an earlier attempt was made to rectify sheet metal damage suffered out on the race course during the car's long competition life. Unfortunately, circumstances beyond anyone's control caused that facility to close its doors, leaving Morton's potent pony car in an unfinished state. That's where Brandon came along. His reputation for churning out award-winning restorations — he specializes in Camaros — led us to his door.

Inasmuch as no true perfectionist really wants to finish another individual's work, Brandon actually took two steps back before taking the next step forward. The expert metal worker exten-

sively reworked the seemingly repaired sheet metal to bring it up to his standards before agreeing to preserve the metal in paint. The difference in the two philosophies, for example, is evident in the manner in which the rear sheet metal was repaired. Instead of removing the complete rear quarter panels to replace them with NOS sheetmetal, the former bodyman had simply cut out parts of the old quarters and screwed new skins on in their place. This wasn't

acceptable to Brandon.

So, after the car returned from having its paint walnut-blasted away by Fred Macary at BlasTech, Brandon set out to completely remove the old quarter panels and replace them the same way the factory had 25 years earlier — with genuine GM original parts. This required drilling out all of the factory spot welds and making sure all of the mounting surfaces were in good shape to accept the new panels. And since



*There's no better way to elicit a true sense of satisfaction when restoring a car than to see it emerge from the spray booth with a new coat of paint — or in the case of our '67 Trans Am Z/28 — paint and stripes. However, it doesn't hurt to know that all of the underlying sheetmetal is in great shape, either, so that's why we spared no expense in making sure the body panels were either new or as straight as possible. The car received new quarters, driver's side door skin, fenders, header panel, lower valance and trunk lid.*

the outer wheel housings were smashed and dented, it only made sense for Brandon to replace those, too.

After the old quarters were removed, Brandon went about fitting the new old stock units in place and even went so far as to duplicate the original spot welds rather than laying down an unsightly bead. Contrary to what many people think, even original factory sheetmetal still needs a lot of work to make perfect; Brandon had at least 30 hours in the rear quarters of the car.

One area that required some serious surgery was the floor pans. After many years of competing on various racing surfaces, the floorboards right behind the seats — on both sides of the car — were in dire need of being replaced. The passenger side was the worst, necessitating a full pan (and an extra fabricated piece to go up the side of the hump) behind the seat mounts, while the driver's side only required roughly two-thirds of the area to be replaced.

As for the rest of the car, only the roof, passenger's door, windshield wiper cowl and the ultra-rare fiberglass cowl-induction hood were retained. Every other piece of sheetmetal, including the lower valance, fenders, trunk lid and header panel was a new or replace-

ment part. "It was also necessary to reskin the driver's door," explained Brandon, "because it had taken quite a few hits over the years and there were a couple of dents in it. It was pretty easy, but (the new skin) did require some block sanding and prep to get it straight."

Another area of the '67 Z/28 that received a lot of attention was the trunk lid. Since the original location for the fuel tank in the Trans Am racer was in the trunk, it was natural for the filler neck to protrude through a gaping hole in the lid. Since our project received a new Jaz fuel cell to replace the original in the trunk and a new lid without the requisite hole, it meant that Brandon needed to cut one out. The result was nothing less than a stellar piece of art. What Brandon had to do was mate both the inner and outer pieces of sheetmetal and weld them together to maintain structural integrity, then produce a nice contour integrated between them.

While the hours spent block sanding the primer and paying attention to the small details seem endless, the effort is well-spent when it results in making the final coats of paint look as good as they do on this car. Since Brandon is a strong proponent of painting each part individually (that

includes the base color and then the clear coat) before installing them on the body, you'll find no remnants of tape marks or overspray anywhere, just bright Marina Blue Poly color peeking out from every visible spot on the car (and a pair of brilliant white stripes running the full length of the car).

While the outside sheetmetal was his prime concern during the two months it took to go from fixing someone else's work to producing a show-quality paint job, Brandon also spent some time taking care of a few other details. He sprayed the entire sub-frame and engine compartment (complete with a pair of new inner fenders) with a couple of coats of durable PPG DP-90 semi-gloss black paint to give it a fresh, clean look. And, just to prevent the wind from flowing through the interior of the nostalgic racer, Brandon even replaced the glass, as well.

With the Trans Am restoration looking better than ever, all that remains now before Mr. Morton takes his initial lap around the track is to plug the new engine into its clean new home and button up a few other technical details. Stay tuned; it all comes together next month. **SC**

*Continued on page 70*



As we've found out in past (and current) projects, the best way to apply a new outer look is when all of the underlying coats of paint have been stripped off. So far, we've investigated acid-stripping, soda-blasting and most recently walnut blasting and all have done a fine job at getting it done. For the Z/28, however, we decided to have Fred Macary at BlasTech in Tumwater, Washington, remove the 25 years of paint with a special process that uses walnut shells mixed with a very fine mesh garnet. This procedure, Fred feels, is the most effective way of removing paint, rust and body fillers without causing pitting of the sheetmetal. After taking a look at the final results, we can verify that the surface is free of paint and there is no surface degradation.

*After years of racing under all kinds of conditions, it was necessary to have a full pan spliced in behind the passenger's seat and about three-quarters of one on the driver's side. Sheetmetal wizard Brandon Huhtala, who specializes in restoring Camaros, had to fabricate an extra piece (arrow) for the passenger side since the reproduction panel didn't exactly fit.*



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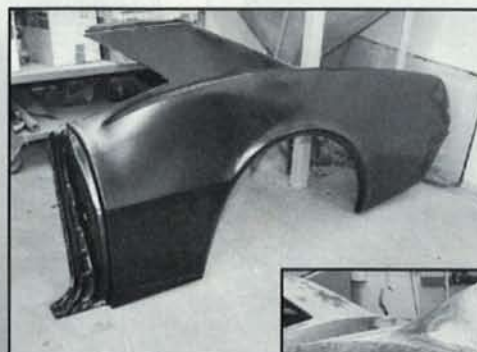
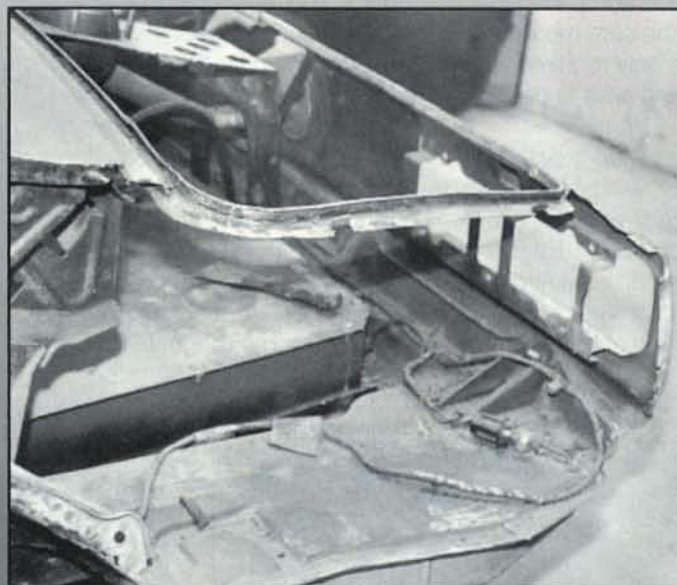
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One of the most delicate surgical operations on the Z/28 involved removing and replacing the rear quarter panels. When Brandon received the Camaro, he had to redo the work that had been started by a previous body shop. This required complete removal of the whole quarter panel and outer wheel housing on each side. A steady hand and the correct tools were needed to make the necessary cuts to separate the old quarters from the inner structure.

Brandon cut a hole around each factory

spot weld then rewelded the NOS quarters in place. At the roofline, Brandon used a low-heat torch to melt away the old lead filler, then used plastic body putty to seam up the new quarter to the existing roof.



Hanging the genuine GM NOS quarter panels and outer wheel housings from Steve's Camaros still required a lot of work to properly align and weld in place. More than 30 hours were spent making sure everything was perfect, including the original-type factory spot welds that Brandon meticulously duplicated.

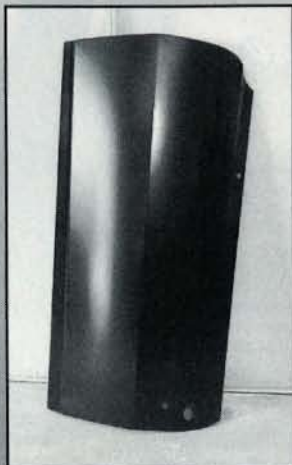


# REVIVAL OF THE FITTEST-PART VI

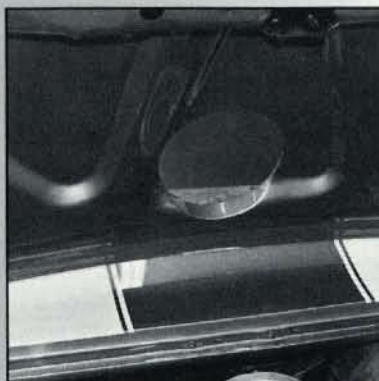
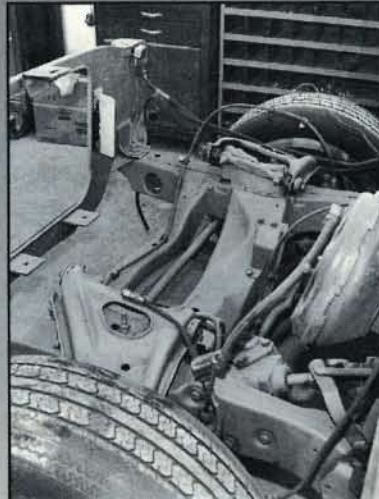
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The cowl-induction hood of our Z/28 is a rare original fiberglass unit that was available over the counter in 1969 and was designed to fit the factory cross-ram induction system. It required a good deal of labor to get into shape, but fortunately, there were no major areas that needed to be repaired.



After the old skin was removed and an NOS one was installed on the dented-up driver's door, it, along with the reproduction front fenders, original windshield wiper cowl and new header panel and valance, were block sanded, primed and block sanded again until everything was as straight as possible. When it came time to apply the color, Brandon painted every part independently and then attached it to the body.



Because the factory Trans Am fuel cell was mounted in the trunk and required an opening in the lid to accommodate the filler spout, Brandon had to cut a large hole in the new trunk lid. This required a lot of massaging to get it perfect, but when it was done, it looked as though the factory had built it that way. Check out the finished radius between the inside and outside layers of the sheetmetal. Here, Brandon welded the two together and smoothed it out. We'd say it looks great!



Since the subframe went through the walnut blasting process and had many years of old paint removed, it only made sense for it to receive a fresh coat of PPG DP-90 semi-gloss black paint. There's no denying how clean an engine compartment looks when it's painted nicely.

Since Brandon likes to spray all of the body parts individually rather than on the car, it makes for an even paint job where the door jambs and trunk and hood sealing areas all look as good as the outer coats of paint. This way, there's no tape marks or overspray and all areas get painted. After all of the painted sheetmetal was hung, Brandon applied the original white stripes over the blue coat.



Stripes, perfectly-aligned body panels and a bright blue coat of PPG paint. Our Trans Am Camaro is really shaping up. It even received a new windshield and backlight glass while at Brandon's shop. It won't be long now before the finished car will be whizzing around the track on the nostalgia racing circuit.



#### SOURCES:

Steve's Camaros  
Dept. SC  
1197 San Mateo Ave.  
San Bruno, CA 94066  
(415) 873-1890

Auto Paint Specialties  
Dept. SC  
628 S.W. 151st St.  
Burien, WA 98166  
(206) 246-9900

Skip Nichols Industries  
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6531 Capitol Blvd.  
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