

Reader's Rides

Suffering From Hemi Overload

Editor's Note: "Reader's Rides" was the brain child of Dan Poremba and will feature classic cars that remind us of the good old days. If you have a car you've loved back to life, or photos of the treasure you should have never sold, send us your story and we'd love to share it.

Juan and Carolyn Grube, JIMCO, Inc., Raymore, Mo.

1953 Dodge Red Ram Hemi Coronet Diplomat

ERE: Juan, you tell us that to understand a car, you have to know the 'why.' So why this car?

Juan Grube: Eveerrybody has a Chevy, a few Fords, so why be the same? The '53 was the first year for the Dodge Red Ram Hemi (241 cubic inches). The little Ram Hemi motor was two inches shorter and over 100 pounds lighter than the Chrysler Hemi. New, the car sold for \$2,361. There were 17,334 of the hard tops built, compared to 197,237 of the 1955 Chevy hard tops.

Lee Petty ran the '53/'54 Dodge on short tracks and a Chrysler on longer tracks. The Dodge two-door hard top was built on the Plymouth wheelbase—114 inches—it was lighter and had good power-to-weight ratio.

A few salient Hemi facts. In 1953, Lee Petty's Hemi Dodge won five NASCAR races and finished second in championship points. That same year, a Dodge

Hemi V-8 broke 196 stock car records at Bonneville Salt Flats. In 1954, Lee Petty won Daytona Beach race in a Chrysler Hemi and the NASCAR Grand National Championship driving Chrysler and Dodge Hemis. And the story continues...

ERE: Is there some personal significance of the particular classic—first date, prom, first drag race, or some similar attachment?

Juan Grube: I had a '54 Dodge in college which could stay with any '55 Chevy in the quarter mile and could run off and hide on the highway. It burnt a hole in a piston the day I got married which was the week after I graduated from college and one week before I was to start work! My stars were not aligned. The car obviously retired to the hedge row in the pasture at the back of the farm. Also obvious is the fact that all this was, of course, Carolyn's fault!

ERE: How did you acquire this classic and what was the restoration process?

Juan Grube: In 1974, I saw this car for sale in *Hemmings Motor News*. Since it was in southwest Texas, it was rust-free. So my brother Jim and I went to Texas and drove it home. I put it in the barn where it stayed for 31 years.

One Saturday morning at breakfast about 18 months ago, I said to Carolyn, "I'm never going to get my Dodge done unless I take it to someone." She made the brilliantly misguided reply, "Go for it." Fortunately for me, she didn't bother to ask how much.

Carolyn Grube: Next time I'll ask,

"How much?" Then I'll know to say, "You've got to be kidding me!" The only consolation is that some women have to fear other women when their men hit the midlife crisis. I can turn my competition off and on with a key.

Juan Grube: I thought my idea, my plan and my Saturday morning statement were totally unique to me. It didn't take long to learn that almost every guy with gray hair has an old car he wants redone—usually one he couldn't afford when he was a kid. In retrospect I think this has turned into an industry instead of a hobby.

Although he did not do the motor or the exterior paint, the bulk of the work on my car was done by a young man named Bob Schumacher. His business, Vintage Fabrication, is located in Independence, Mo. He put in a late model air ride suspension with a nine-inch Ford rear end (4:10 ratio). We used a GM 700R4 overdrive transmission which drops the rpm on the highway.

As a kid, I worked on about every motor that was out there and would have liked to build the motor myself, but didn't. Tony Reynolds of Adrian, Mo. built it for me. Had I built the motor when I was young, it would have had serious power. But after talking to Tony, and having been spoiled by modern cars that start, idle and run smoothly I realized that a real hot rod motor wouldn't fit my current age and driving style. The motor is actually relatively mild performance-wise. Tony

ran it for three hours on the Dyno to break it in and it did a nice 388 horsepower. It moves an old man along real nicely.

There are still a few things that need to be tweaked or finished but I wanted to drive it before bad weather. In a couple of weeks, I'll take it back to Vintage Fab for the final touches.

Carolyn Grube: Juan used to make fun of me when I couldn't make up my mind on something. You have never in your life seen indecision and equivocation such as he displayed in selecting things like wheels, tires, side view mirrors, knobs, etc. And he still hasn't decided on a steering wheel. A steering wheel, for goodness sake! Just pick one!

I will admit it's fun to ride down the road and see heads turn as you drive by. Men, especially will really look it over then give us a thumbs-up. The pride that surfaces almost justifies the cost.

ERE: Now that it's almost finished, will you show it, race it, or just go out to the garage daily and wipe it with a diaper?

Juan Grube: I plan to drive my car to the post office to get the mail and to scare old women and children.





Juan Grube stood watch and answered enthusiasts' questions at the South 71 Cruisers car club show in Belton, Mo. last month.

