



1968 Charger R/T has kept its original owners which have not been restored. The 167,000-mile car, on the other hand, was restored. The only change from as-delivered are road wheels and 14-inch radials.

FAMILY PET

The Ferraras have had this '68 Charger R/T since new. And it sure saves on dog food.

By Jim Koscs

Photos by Paul Stenquist

Ah, 1967. The summer of love. Sgt. Pepper. The Age of Aquarius and burnouts. Good times. For Bill Ferrara, though, even the dawn of transmitting TV images via satellite pales in comparison to one memory from that September. That's when he and his wife, Donna, ordered their dream car, a 1968 Charger R/T. It's a lesson in keeping a marriage strong that you'd never hear from Dr. Phil.

Yes, that's the car you see in these high-quality photos. But the Charger is not a survivor. In fact, it was pretty beaten up and then nearly burned to the ground. But one chapter at a time. Who among us has not fantasized about walking into a Dodge dealer in late '67 and ordering a brand-new second-gen Charger? Of course, most such fantasies involve traveling





Because the Charger was not ordered with disc brakes, the Ferraras couldn't get 15-inch wheels and had to make do with 14s.

back in time with a suitcase full of 2010 dollars to buy like six of them for the price of a 2010 Challenger R/T. And naturally, you'd probably fantasize that you knew someone who worked in the dealership and could pass on a nice discount to you. Our fantasy would have that person looking a lot like Megan Fox, but hey, get your own fantasy!

Except for the "2010 dollars" part, Bill and Donna lived that dream. They were newly married, living in Framingham, MA, and of the same mind when it came to cars. Donna worked in a Dodge dealership and was able to get the Charger at just above dealer cost. Yeah, you do the math and weep.

High-test was 34 cents gallon, and that 375-horse 440 was gonna burn a lot of it. They ordered their R/T for speed and everyday comfort. It's a four-speed with a Dana packing a 3.54 diff. That was about the ideal combination for everyday drivability. The car was optioned with buckets and console for the pearl white vinyl interior, power brakes and power steering, and an AM/FM radio that was a dealer-installed item that year.

The Ferraras did not opt for the front disc brakes and so could not get the 15-inch wheels. The car arrived in December that



Donna, who still worked at the Dodge dealership in '79, was able to score a ton of OEM (dinner-pail?) parts for the restoration.

year. Winter in New England makes a nice calendar picture but a lousy setting for driving a muscled-up Mopar spinning on 14-inch donuts that passed for tires.

Donna was just four-foot-ten and needed to sit against a pillow to get enough leverage to work the he-man clutch. But she and Bill enjoyed every one of the 167,000 miles they piled on to what was their only car. And yes, the car suffered for it. Massachusetts winters are tough, and the salt on the roads is even

tougher. The Ferraras would put on those old-style snow tires and soldier on through the worst of Mother Nature.

After a dozen years of daily grinding, Bill and Donna knew the Charger had had enough. They decided to restore it back to its original glory, but not for the value—this was still a few years before people figured these machines were collectible. It was 1979. Gas had jumped to 80 cents and muscled-car owners were happy to unload



An engine wiring fire notwithstanding, the underhood appearance came out looking sweet.



Equipment and options on this striking automobile include the Inland-shifted 4-speed, 3.54 Dana, buckets, console, power steering and brakes, "wood" wheel, and the dealer-installed AM/FM.

their guzzlers onto hormonally charged teenagers and buy Toyotas. So what if they now have gas pedal, brake, and steering problems—at least the radio works.

Donna still worked at the Dodge dealership and was able to order all the OEM parts they needed. Yeah, that's another fantasy of yours, right? They ordered quarter panels, a right front fender, lots of little trim, trunk pan, etc. The Dodge dealer was going to do all the work for a nice price, and the Ferraras planned to put it back on the road as a daily driver.

Even good fantasies can take a wrong turn. Getting into the resto, the engine rebuild came first. And then came the fire that destroyed the engine compartment. And then came news that, oddly, new wiring harnesses were not to be found.

Bill managed to splice what was left and get the car running, but he drove it just far enough to reach their new house in Milford. Then came house payments, and all the fun that goes into keeping a house going and, well, the Charger sat—for another 25 years.

"I was looking through Hemmings a few years ago and finally saw how much these cars were worth restored," says Bill. So he contacted a body shop, American Classic Restorations in Uxbridge, MA. Coincidentally, these guys specialize in restoring American classics from all decades. They said they could do the work, and were then pretty much flabbergasted when Bill mentioned his stash of NOS parts.

The resto took about a year. The only change from stock was adding the Magnum 500 wheels Bill always wanted, and doing the undercarriage with epoxy paint. The Ferraras resisted modernizing the Charger, changing only to radial tires—still in a tiny F70-14 (equivalent) size.

In an age when musclecar restorations have been known to wreck marriages, Bill and Donna are still happily hitched—and happily lighting the tires in their Charger. That's how it was in the '60s, man—peace, harmony and smoke (tire smoke, that is). H

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