

BARN FRESH BIRD

We'll be doing a much larger story on this particular Superbird after its OEM over-the-top restoration is completed, but we had to tease you a little in the meantime. As this is being typed, the car's already been torn limb from limb and new yellow paint has been applied by Mike Mancini and his guys at American Muscle Car Restorations in Rhode Island. The incredible part of this car's story centers entirely around its owner, John Wilson, Jr., in Key West, Florida, who's owned this car since the first half of 1975. John, as it turns out, has had a remarkable automotive journey that all started

with this possibly one-off Superbird. It's 1975, John is seventeen and nearing the end of his high school days and has never owned a car before. His father, John, Sr., saw a classified advert in the newspaper and showed it to his son, saying, "There's a Superbird for sale, cheap, you need to go look at it." John had never heard of a Superbird, he had no idea what the car looked like, but they called the number. The car was still in the hands of its original owners, a gentleman and his wife who'd bought it new at Wilkins Motors in Morgantown, West Virginia (John grew up in West Virginia not far from Morgantown). They went to look it

over, John was very surprised with how it looked, loved the big Pistol Grip shifter, and it drove great, John coughed up the \$1,750 to buy the bird, and the boy drove it home to their farm. This is when John discovered speed. The small, rural backroads around the Wilson house were lined with other farms and people they knew. And a little bit too often, John was seen blowing past in this big yellow beastie at speeds well into the triple digits, which he still readily admits today, "I didn't know I had a lead foot until this car, I had it on the other side of 100 mph quite a bit, and those little winding roads

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really weren't made for that." Three months after buying the Plymouth, John, Sr. sat the boy down and had a serious talk with him, "I don't think you need to be driving that car." And with that, the yellow Superbird became an unintentional time capsule, parked in the summer of 1975 with just over 43,000 original miles on it and everything stone stock except for newer tires. Selling the car was never considered by father or son,

because Dad knew the car was something special even then, and he impressed that firmly onto his son. So, seventeen-year-old John needed a car to replace this one as he would soon be going off to college. Now, bear in mind that Dad didn't like him driving the Superbird because the boy was going too fast in it. One would expect Dad would've wanted his son in something a lot less exotic and a lot more sedate – a

Slant Six Duster or something. Nope, not for this boy. What was the Superbird replacement? A red/orange 1974 Bricklin SV-1! Yes, the ultra-rare Superbird was pushed aside for a darned rare Canadian Corvette challenger with gullwing doors and a 360 four-barrel AMC motor up front! Being that it was less than a year old and finding one then still wasn't an easy task, the sticker

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THE 'BIRD IS COMPLETELY ORIGINAL EXCEPT FOR THE TIRES, AND ASIDE FROM BEING DIRTY, THE INTERIOR IS IN EXCEPTIONAL SHAPE SAVE FOR A FEW SPLITS IN THE SEAMS WHERE SEWING CAME UNDONE. THE BIG TAKEAWAY HERE, HOWEVER, IS THE FOLD-DOWN ARMREST AND BUDDY SEAT BETWEEN THE BUCKETS. HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A FOUR-SPEED SUPERBIRD WITH THIS FRONT SEAT ARRANGEMENT? WE'VE BEEN AT IT QUITE A WHILE, AND HONESTLY, THIS MIGHT BE THE ONLY ONE WE'VE EVER SEEN. HONESTLY, THIS INTERIOR COULD BE SAVED WITH SOME CONDITIONING AND CLEANING, BUT SINCE THEY'RE GOING FOR OEM GOLD, MUCH OF IT WILL LIKELY BE REPLACED.



price was considerably higher, but John came up with the money and became something of a rock star in college with the slick looking car with the hydraulic gullwing doors. (And if

you're curious, yes, he still owns that same car today as well.) After driving it a few years, it too was parked, and it's slated for a full-bore restoration after the Superbird is done. So, in

less than six months in 1975, this teenager bought a Superbird and a '74 Bricklin!

Those cars led John to a life



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to go to if he wanted the ultimate restoration. He got ahold of Mike, waited a couple of years to get the car into American Muscle Cars'

known to exist with a buddy seat up front! And for good reason, with the shifter in second or fourth gear, it's literally sitting just at the front edge of the buddy seat, so anyone sitting there wouldn't have had much fun riding in the middle!

The case could easily be made that the car would've perhaps been better off fluffed, buffed, and

of collector cars coming and going, but many of them came and stayed – admittedly, again, he doesn't like to get rid of his cars unless he absolutely has to. Since '75, Jaguars of all shapes and sizes, older Corvettes, muscle cars built by practically everybody, and more Mopars have come

and gone, but through every move John made, the Superbird and the Bricklin were carefully moved from one garage to another. John's now close to retirement and he's settling down in Key West with his lovely wife, who's come to grips with his automotive addiction. John regularly

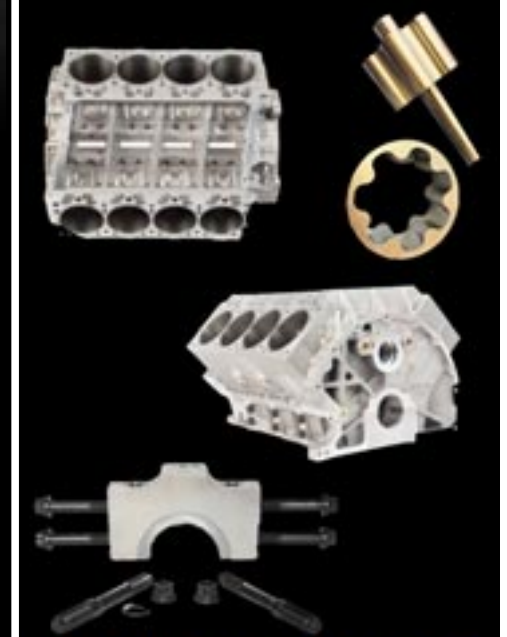
attends the spectacular Amelia Island Concours D'Elegance, and several years ago he met Ray Evernham there, showed him some photos of his Superbird, and Ray, interestingly, told him that Mike Mancini was the guy he needed

shop, and when Mike took possession of the 'Bird in late 2023 he couldn't believe the remarkable state of preservation and the originality of the car. Which prompted him to do a mega-photo shoot with the car in its original state, as this one should serve as a reference car for all Superbird restorations from here on out. And the car has a rather interesting claim-to-fame that John Wilson never mentioned or gave a second thought about – that buddy seat with the fold down armrest between the bucket seats. If you're wondering why you've never seen one before, that's because this wasn't supposed to be an option for Superbirds; you had the choice of a console or no console, a dealer or factory exec had the ability to special order a Superbird in October or November of 1968, but the general public never got that chance. All of which leads us to think this was ordered new as a non-standard option by either somebody at the dealership or perhaps the local zone rep, as this is the only Superbird

had the areas that needed attention redone while leaving most of the car original, but John's been going to the most prestigious East Coast auto show there for many years, and he wanted the car returned to absolute concours condition, so that's what she's getting at Mike Mancini's place. When and where this one will make its show debut is still a matter of debate, but maybe MCACN this year, maybe Carlisle, if the restoration clips along quickly, but wherever it has its coming out party, we'll be there to shoot photos of the finished product and share more of its story. This thing lived a charmed life, and thanks to John being a fanatic about maintenance, Mike tells us they'll be reusing most of the original components during the resto. Congrats to John and his dad for knowing this car was worth shelving and protecting back in 1975. And once this one is finished, John can move on to his Bricklin, and he'll be back in his teenage years again. Stay tuned as there's much more to this story. ✖



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