



# LORD OF THE

Tony D'Agostino's magnificently restored multi-Gold-scoring '69 Daytona boasts the most authentically correct parts of any restored '69 Daytona on the planet.

By Cliff Gromer

Photos by Paul Stenquist

One of the standout cars at this year's Mopar Nats was Tony D'Agostino's '69 Daytona. The car was entered in OE Certification and came away with a Gold Certificate. The big challenge in fielding a correct restoration is parts. You might be able to develop correct restoration techniques but it's all for naught without the right parts. You can redo a restoration technique 100 times until you get it right, but you can't lose or destroy an unobtainium NOS or assembly line part and expect to replace it.

Correct OE restorations should have the same parts that the car

Only two white Daytonas with red wings (two autos, one stick—according to gumbers nuru Galen Govier) were produced. Frank Badalson called this Daytona a "very authentic restoration," while our ballbuster tech editor Rick Ehrenberg awards this car the coveted Mopar Action Reference Restoration recognition.



# WINGS



Daytona packs a wealth of assembly line parts and NOS where there was no variation from the assembly line part. Tony supplied all the parts to Mancini.

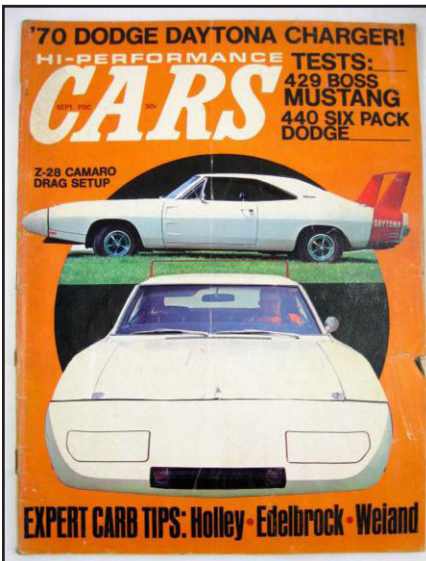


had at the end of the assembly line. These parts can be found on the car being restored, other original cars or offered for sale by line workers who purloined assembly line parts by secreting them away in their lunch pails, hence the term "lunch pail" parts. NOS and service replacement parts often differ from what came down on the line and are relatively easier to acquire. The question is, to what standard do you want to take your restoration.

Tony is in the Mopar parts business. You see his ad in Mopar Action under his company name, Tony's Parts. Tony hits the various Mopar shows scouring the swaps for those hidden gems. While he's in the business of selling parts, over the years he's built up a hefty personal stash of the rare stuff for his own cars and interesting Mopes that might pop up in the future.



To be honest, we think the paint is a little better than what would have come out of Creative.



Cars magazine featured a white Daytona with red wing on their Sept. '69 cover. They mistakenly labeled it as a '70. The fact-checker must've been in the men's room at the time. Actually, the car on the cover isn't a real Daytona, but a mock-up for the press photos. Note the pre-production nose, hood pins in wrong locations and an extra hood pin. Additional photos inside the mag show the rear window is tunneled in, not flush.

Tony first learned about this red wing Daytona in 2005. Jack Rawlings, a customer in Louisville, KY who Tony had become friendly with, called Tony and said that he had an opportunity to buy a Daytona but it was too much money for him to keep the car, so he was interested in flipping it to make a few bucks. Nothing wrong with that. He wanted Tony's expertise to look the car, which had been sitting in a garage since 1974, to make sure it was the real deal and answer a few questions.

Tony turned back the pages of time, the way you turn back the pages of this magazine to ask yourself why you ever bought it in the first place, to uncover the history of the red-tail Daytona.

Back in '72, a guy named Ernie Bingham had a friend named Rusty Cummins who owned a Super Bird. Ernie liked the looks of the 'Bird, so Rusty looked around to see if he could find his friend a wing car. Checking the local ads in a Louisville, KY paper, Russ saw a Daytona listed for \$1200, and he told Ernie who bought it. Ernie drove the Daytona for a couple of years and even had the foresight to buy parts from the dealership every once in a while that were specific to the Daytona "just in case." He figured the factory wasn't going to make those parts forever. Most of the parts Ernie bought were related to the

headlight operating system—the vacuum actuator motors that opened and closed the headlight doors, the vacuum can that stored the vacuum so when you hit the headlight switch it didn't pull the vacuum out of the engine, and related hardware.

'Course, if Kentucky is famous for one thing, it's the Kentucky Derby, and it happened on the eve of the Derby in '74, that Ernie was out enjoying a drive in his



Ernie Bingham bought the Daytona in 1972 for \$1200. He was reunited with the car at the 2012 Mopar Nationals. His comment was "amazing what a good Simonize job can do."



The Daytona in "as-found" condition being extracted from the Quonset hut where it had resided for a number of years. The mice were not happy.

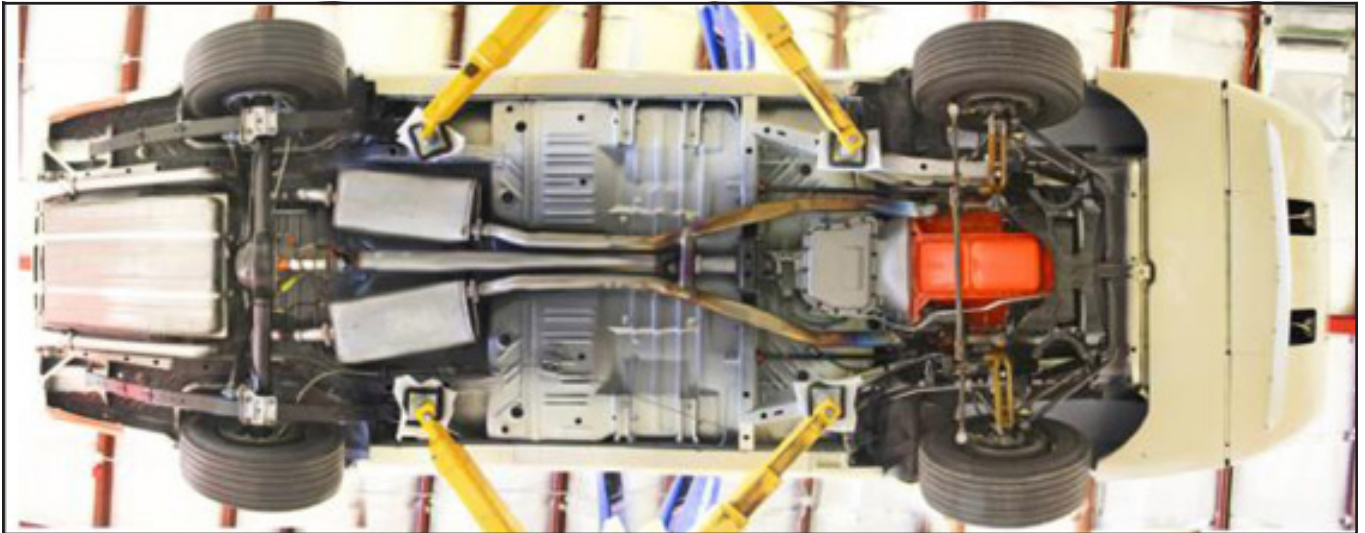


Interior is notable as it is all NOS.

Daytona when a well-oiled fan ran a light and smacked Ernie in the driver's door, right where it met the quarter panel. Then the guy took off with Ernie in pursuit. After a half-hour chase, Ernie closed in on the drunk and got him to stop. The insurance money would have covered the damage, but for some reason, Ernie never had the door fixed. It hadn't been that hard a hit—the glass didn't break, and the door did close, but not the way it should have. We guess the damage dulled Ernie's enthusiasm for the Daytona because he sold it shortly thereafter to twin brothers—Kerry and Larry Denney who took out a loan to buy the car.

The twins drove the Daytona for a couple of years but they never fixed the door. It still closed and they didn't want to spend the money. They ended up parking the Daytona inside a Quonset hut that also housed an

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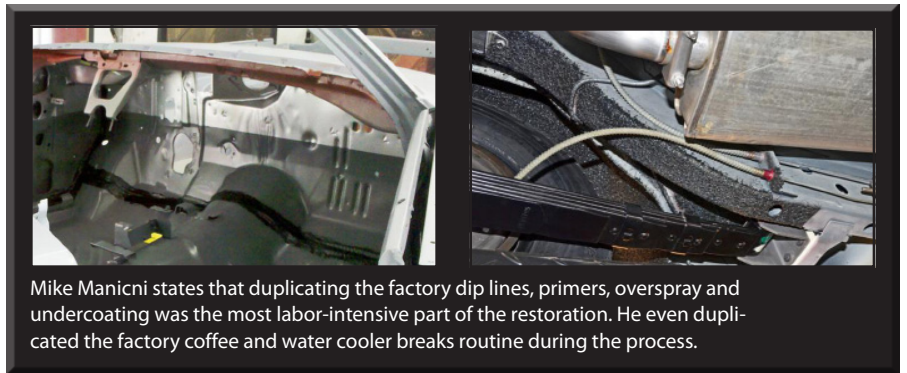


Undercarriage shot by Mancini shows super-rare assembly line mufflers. Lower control arms are NOS and Cosmoline-coated, with correct broken-off Zerk fittings on ball joints and idler arm. The ball joints are the originals that have been restored.

early '70s Chevy van, a '69 Z28 and what looked like a '56 Pontiac Safari wagon. Locals had heard that the Daytona was somewhere in their area but they never knew where it was exactly. A few years after the sale, buyer's remorse set in and Ernie and his wife rode around trying to find the twins and buy back the Daytona.

The two brothers ran into some kind of tax problems with their property and they had to raise some money fast. They sold the Z28 and the Daytona extremely cheap to a guy who really just wanted the Chevy, so he offered the Daytona to Jack Rawlings. Jack was gonna buy the car but he had some questions.

A big question was that the title said "XS" instead of the "XX" that would be correct for a Daytona. "XS" is the code for a Charger R/T. It's common knowledge that



Mike Mancini states that duplicating the factory dip lines, primers, overspray and undercoating was the most labor-intensive part of the restoration. He even duplicated the factory coffee and water cooler breaks routine during the process.

the Daytonas were originally built as Dodge Chargers and then converted to Daytonas at Creative Industries. There, the R/T's nose and fenders were swapped the nose cone

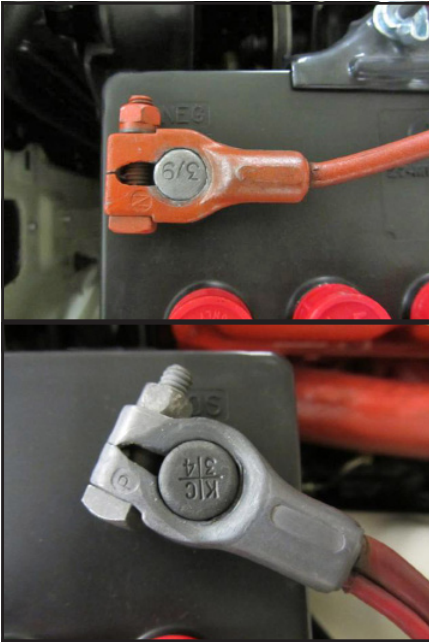


Engine compartment is spot-on. Daytonas did not come with front hood seals although SuperBirds did have them. Correctness here is a result of the intensive research undertaken by Mancini.

and new hood. The only original assembly line paint on a Daytona would be on the doors and the sides of the quarter-panels. The tops of the quarters would have been repainted along with the roof so they could blend it to the rear window plug. The trunk was smaller so that meant a new decklid—also painted at Creative. Tony has learned that sometime the quarters and doors were painted to help maintain a uniform color.

The Charger R/T emblem holes on the rear body panel had to be filled so that was painted as well. The quality of the match depended on the color. Also, the factory paint was oven-baked enamel, whereas Creative hand-sprayed their paint, so the match wasn't great. As far as the "XS" VIN code, Chrysler never changed the MSO on the vast majority of Daytonas. There is a detailed VIN list of every Daytona and the dealership to which it was shipped.

Jack asked Tony what to look for to confirm it was an authentic Daytona. At the end of the phone conversation, Tony offered to buy it from him. Jack said he'd offer the Daytona to Tony, but he first contacted the Winged Warrior club and asked them the same questions he had asked Tony. He told the club that he was interested in selling and they advertised the car for him so they could



Assembly line battery cables shows the correct different-color 2-wire positive cable. Bolts heads on '69s were plain (no markings). Note date stamped into original battery terminals.

pick up a finder's fee from a buyer. Offers came in and Tony had to keep upping the ante to stay in the game, eventually outbidding the competition.

When Tony picked up the car from Jack in 2005, it still had the parts that Ernie had bought back in '74. That helped, along with his own collection of parts and some impossible to find "lunch pail" parts from noted collector Steve Juliano, when Tony decided to restore the Daytona. Checking out the high end resto shops, Tony went with Mike Mancini's American Muscle Car Restorations in N. Kingstown, RI. Tony was impressed with the fact that Mike was very detail-oriented and well versed in OE correctness. Mike had just opened a state of the art resto shop so he wasn't working out of a converted barn or steel building.

The 50K-mile Daytona showed mint quarters, original paint and some rust in the floor near the rear seat. The Daytona had never been apart, so Mike was able to document all the details as he stripped it down for a



All the hoses, such as this upper rad hose are assembly-line original.

# AD



Overspray on undercar rubber seal that was installed between the lower rad yoke and K-member. Original cars show a wide variation in neatness/sloppiness. Mike went on the assumption that the overspray here was done on a "good day."



The gas filler neck inside the trunk had a special hot dip galvanizing plating. On most Daytonas it is rusty due to moisture inside the trunk. When Mancini got the car, the filler neck had been painted black which served to preserve the original plating finish. Daytonas came with two front license plate brackets. The larger one was for the Charger, while the smaller was for the Daytona.

car was painted and undercoated so it would leave the correct undercoat and prime lines that the '69 Charger fenders did when the car was originally built. Duplicating the undercoat and paint overspray dip lines, etc., was one of the most labor-intensive part of the resto. Incredible time was also spent de-pitting and restoring all the bare metal components.

One question that came up was what were the correct tires for the

complete restoration as the original parts were old and worn. Additionally, Mike used factory documents for reference, also photos and documentation of other original unmo-lested Daytonas and conferring with resto gurus in the field when he had questions..

Mike and his crew restored what they could using the car's own parts, installed assembly line parts where needed, and NOS parts that were exact matches to the cars own assembly line parts—all supplied by Tony. Mike said that the hit in the door wasn't bad—just a crease or dent where the door met the quarter so the latch didn't engage properly. Easily fixed.

The most interesting part of research, according to Mike, was the way the front end looked inside the fender wells. Prior to being converted to a Daytona, the car wore the stock '69 Charger fenders. They bolted up to the inner fenderwells differently than the modified 1970 Charger fenders installed by Creative, so they left a different break line where the original undercoating started and finished. The '70 fenders were not undercoated and the original undercoating was left intact.

When Mike undercoated the car, Tony sent him a pair of '69 fenders to install when the

Daytona? Based on original Daytona photos and checking with Frank Badalson who has seen numerous original Daytonas, the most correct choice would be Firestone. Also correct would be Goodyear Polyglas redlines as they were brought in when the Firestones were not available. Frank says the Goodyear Speedway Redlines would not be correct, as those tires were used at Lynch Road but not the Hamtramck assembly plant where the Chargers were being built.

Tony's Daytona was reunited with its original owner, Ernie Bingham at the 2012 Mopar Nationals. After carefully inspecting the Daytona, he turned to Tony who asked him, "Well, whaddya' think. Ernie thought for a couple of minutes then mumbled, "I never shoulda sold it."

After the Nats, Tony entered his Daytona for judging at the Musclicar and Corvette Nationals in Chicago—a show that attracts the top tier musclecars. Tony's car was one of some 40 Daytonas, SuperBirds and Ford aero cars entered. Tony's Daytona scored a perfect 1000 (no deductions). It was awarded "Gold," "Best stock Dodge" and the Tim Wellborn Celebrity Pick. It doesn't get better than this. Check out our website for more details on this outstanding Daytona.

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