



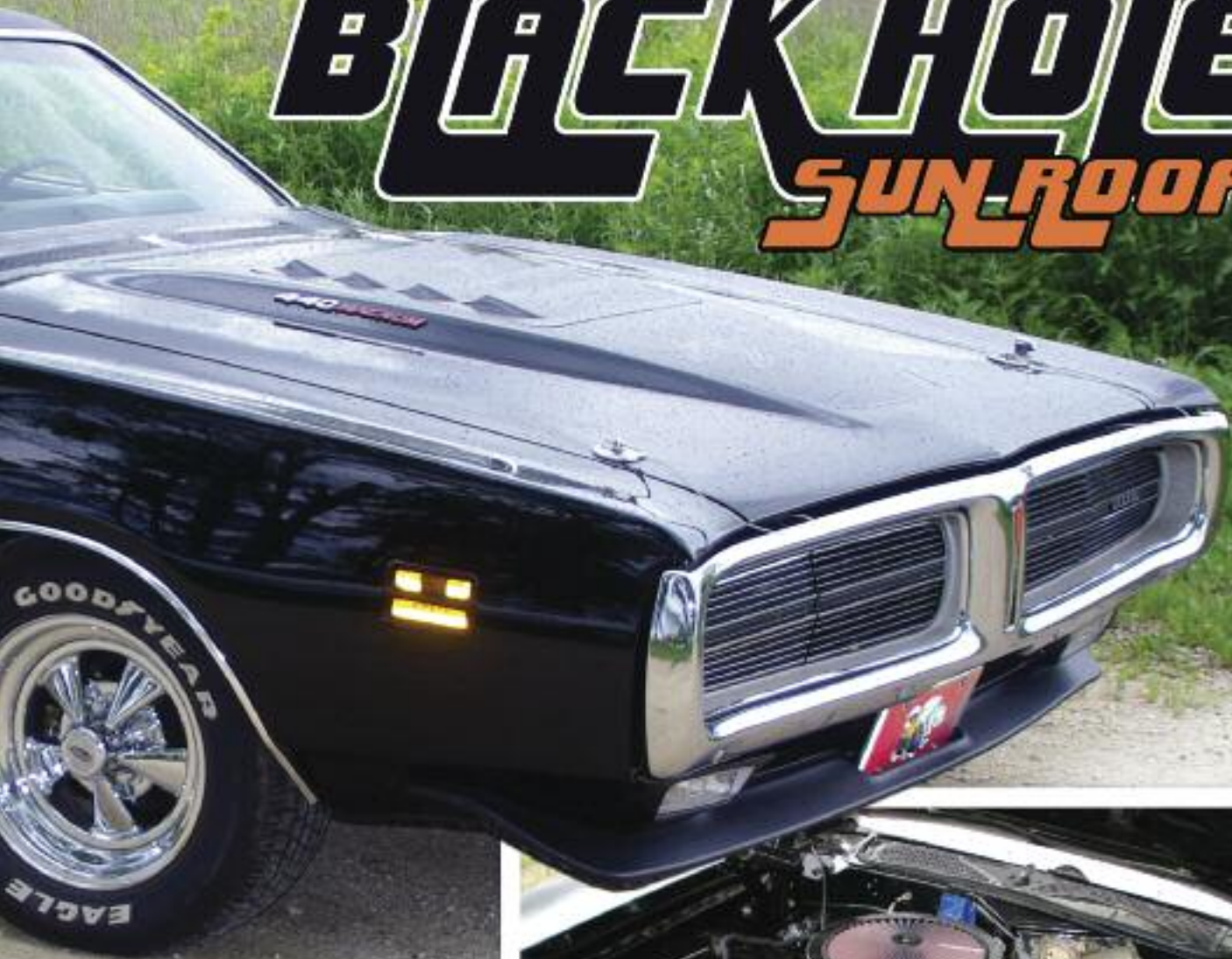
STORY: Randy Holden

PHOTOS: Rob Wolf
Photographed @ Farmington, MN

Troy and Laura Martinson, up in Prior Lake, Minnesota, are perhaps the most die-hard Mopar couple we've run across in quite some time. Granted, there are other well-known Mopar husband-and-wife dynamic duos out there (Gary & Pam Beineke from Massachusetts and Bob & Sharon Malcolm immediately come to mind), but Troy and Laura are relative newlyweds and they've each been on their own separate path toward ultimate Mopar enlightenment ever since they learned how to drive. For Troy, that path started with a silver '69 Charger he bought as a teenager and still owns today. The car's gone through a number of changes through the years, and currently, it's a radical legit nine-second street car powered by a blown Hemi with a four-speed backing everything up! Last year, Troy started his own restoration shop, The R/T Garage in Prior Lake, and his reputation with

BLACK HOLE

SUNROOF



restorations and restifications is spreading rapidly. He's also the originator of the "Rev-N-Nator," as featured in our Oct. 2010 issue. Our story, however, isn't so much about Troy as it is about Laura, and more specifically, about a very unusual black-on-black sunroof '71 Charger R/T that's become her favorite cruiser.

Laura is far from an "average" Mopar gal. We first encountered Laura on the Mopowered Tour, where she broke out her guitar and started singing at several stops along the way - and she was singing and playing darn well! Turns out, she's working on a CD of original tunes and has five songs already recorded and she's been performing and earning extra cash with her musical skills since she was a teenager. Literally, she used to play gigs at clubs and hotels all over the place before she decided to settle down and

concentrate on writing her own music. So, all along the way during the Tour, we were treated to Laura's music, which kinda' reminds us of Heart and Nancy Wilson back in their heyday. That aside, music isn't the only major interest in Laura's life; this lady is absolutely crazy about all things mechanical - especially muscle cars

and vintage Harley choppers. We're not talking about a mild interest; we're talking about a legit obsession just as heavy as we've ever seen with any Mopar guy we've ever met. Want proof? Well, her current fleet of cars consists of about a dozen machines (mostly Mopars), and all but one of



them is equipped with a four-speed. And, she owns a radical custom early '70's flathead-motored Harley rigid frame chopper. If it was made in the sixties or seventies, is fast, and has a rumbling exhaust note, Laura Martinson likes it - a lot!

Laura was born into her affinity for old cars. Her dad and older brother were constantly meddling with old hot rods and muscle cars. Rather than distance herself from their activities, the girl jumped in with both feet and soon knew just as much about these mechanical beasts as the guys in her family. Through the years, Laura's owned everything from Hemi Chargers to Cobra roadsters to GTO Judges, and, as previously stated, she's always had a thing for manually shifted rides. In fact, until the black '71 Charger R/T (shown here) came along, Laura had never owned an old car with an automatic in it. There are darn few Mopar ladies out there more adept at double clutching and barking the tires than Laura Martinson. No offense to all the other Mopar ladies out there we've come to know through the years, but this little lady is just as quick on the stick as some of the real legends of drag racing (such as Shirley Shahan, Judy Lilly, and dare we say it, perhaps even Herb McCandless!).

Our story this month, however, centers on the first collector car (or

car period for that matter) Laura's not having to shift. And, as you would expect from MCG, this story has some very unusual twists and turns. Laura bought this particular sinister black '71 Charger about three years ago from a friend-of-a-friend of Troy's. Troy and Laura weren't married at that time, but Troy's glowing praise of the old Charger was enough to sway Laura away from her normal routine of only buying four-speed cars and the Charger's option list was more than enough to get her attention. Troy's enthusiasm about the Charger wasn't just a knee-jerk reaction to coming across a rare, perhaps one-off, '71 R/T; his involvement with the black machine goes back a lot longer than his involvement with Laura.

Back in the mid-nineties, a good friend of Troy's found and bought this sunroof Charger R/T from a fellow down in Oklahoma. The story on the heavily optioned R/T was pretty straightforward and it was the kind of score B-body guys dreamed about, even back then. This one had been sold new in Oklahoma and was obviously a specially ordered machine. The original owner (presumably) drove his heavily optioned Dodge with quite a bit of enthusiasm, and with only around 37,000 miles on the odometer, the original 440 scattered itself somewhere out on the tarmac, and before the midway

point of the decade, the Charger's days of cruising with the top open were done. The car was stuffed away in a garage, and there it remained, untouched, until 1995, when a buddy of Troy's bought the sleeping B-body and hauled it north to Minnesota. Working in his friend's garage, within the year, they had the Charger completely restored and back on the road, being careful to leave as much of the original car as possible. Since this was a really low mileage car that had been stored in a dry garage most of its life, the original orange-and-black hound's-tooth interior was in remarkable condition, the sheet metal was cherry, and the undercarriage was clean as a pin. All this made for an easy resto. With the addition of a correct period replacement 440, fresh paint and stripes, and a good bit of detailing, this one became an overnight sensation in the B-body realm. Why? Because other than the addition of the chin spoiler, everything else is original equipment, making this one of the more heavily optioned '71 R/T Chargers you'll ever run across.

While the original owner remains unknown, whoever ordered this one assured it would be an attention getter forevermore. This one left the factory triple black - black paint, matte black stripes, and a full black vinyl top. The big dollar option, of course, is the power sunroof, which is



extremely rare on a '71 R/T. Adding to the sticker price, we also have a factory deck lid spoiler, the SE-style orange-and-black hound's-tooth interior (making this a one-of-one car), dual chrome mirrors, hideaway headlights, hood pins, a Rimblow steering wheel, an AM/FM stereo with five speakers, a console shifted TorqueFlite hooked to a 3.55 Sure Grip rear, air conditioning (now gone), the pedal dress up package, and oddly enough, it has power steering, but no power brakes - go figure. Since it was originally an a/c car, that probably explains why the original owner didn't opt for a Ramcharger fresh air hood, which is about the only thing the car's missing (other than rear window louvers). As it is, there are two fender tags filled with codes next to the battery tray, and for a 440 automatic car, that's not an easy feat to accomplish.

Within months of finishing the restoration around 1996, Troy's friend sold the Charger to a prominent B-body collector, who in turn sold it yet again. For the next decade, the car flipped owners in rapid-fire fashion until finally, it again turned up for sale and Troy got wind of it. Laura was (and still is) always on the prowl for unusual old Mopars, so Troy told her everything he knew about the black Dodge, and once again, Troy found himself turning wrenches on the old R/T and Laura had herself a new favorite comfy driver.

Since acquiring the R/T, Laura hasn't done much to the Charger except make it look more period perfect by adding a set of Cragar mags and



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Goodyear Eagle radials. Laura likes her muscle cars to look like they looked back in the day, not like when they rolled off the assembly line, and we tend to agree with her. Mags and fat tires were cheap back then, so the first thing most new owners did was add aftermarket wheels and tires. And, no matter how much of a purist you are, there's no way you can deny muscle cars don't look better with mags and fat tires than they do with factory wheels and skinny tires. And, in keeping with the early seventies theme of the Charger, as of this writing, Laura's having Troy undo those modern touches under the hood. The car's current 440 is a seriously potent, almost five hundred horsepower, brute, but it looks too "new" for her taste. So, by the time you read this, a retro air cleaner should be in place along with old school aftermarket valve covers. Aside from that, Laura doesn't plan to do much else with the old Charger, but, then again, why would she? After all, this thing runs low twelves just as you see it here, it runs cool, it's as dependable as a new Lexus, it still only has 40,000 original miles on it, and with the roof open, her hair looks really cool flying around up there - who could ask for much more than this? All of which begs the question, who's the lucky one here? Is it Troy or is it Laura? We're going to let you guys make the call on that one. ✖

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