



1973 Camaro Z28

Words: Mike Renaut, Photography: Matt Richardson

Brown Sugar

Alan Faulkner-Stevens' 1973 Camaro Z28 has quite a history, and it's one of the sweetest, most original examples anywhere...

Yes, this Camaro's colour is original and, yes, that colour is dark metallic brown. What can we say, since it was the specific choice of the first owner and got applied at the factory back in 1973? You can't get more original than that. "We call it 'Huggy' – as in Huggy Bear," laughs Alan Faulkner-Stevens, owner of this 1973 Chevrolet Camaro Z28. "I wanted a survivor car – originality, paperwork and provenance was everything." Survivor cars are examples that have been left untouched since being built, original running gear, ideally factory-applied

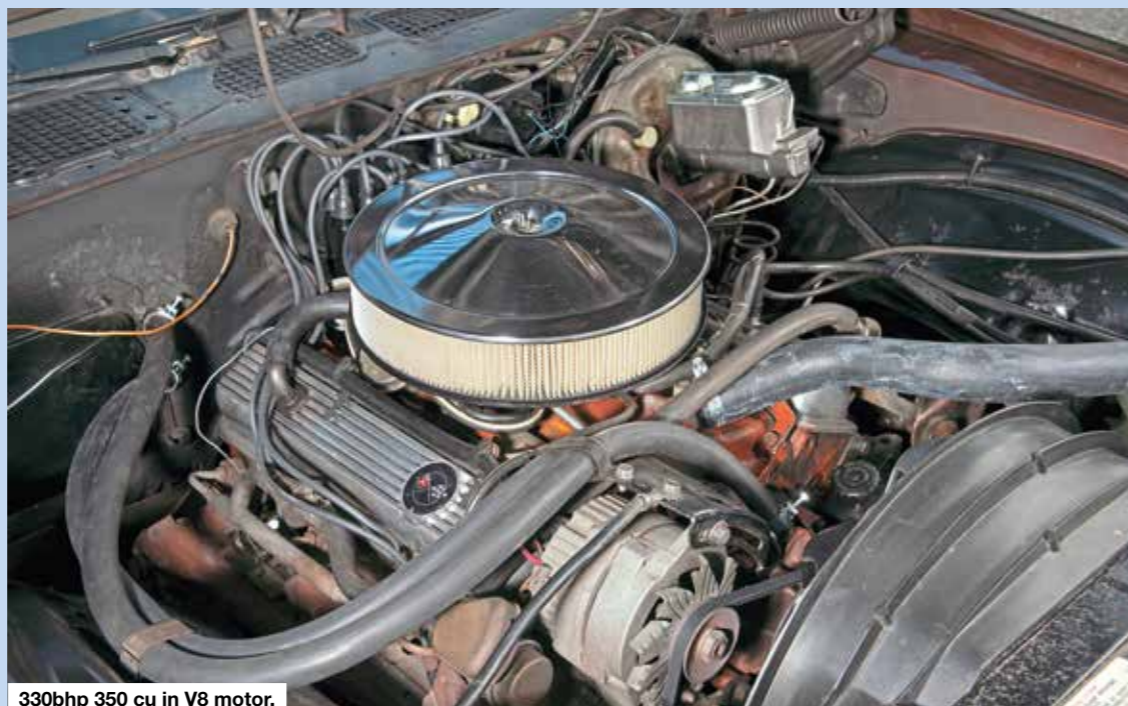
paint, an interior that hasn't been changed. They don't have to be in perfect condition or low mileage, provided the specifications and most of the parts haven't been altered.

This Camaro is in fantastic condition, making it a rare find. "Virtually every part and piece dates from the first two weeks of January 1973," explains Alan. "I've recommissioned the car, but been extremely careful to preserve its originality and authenticity. I restore muscle cars, especially Shelby Mustangs, at Dragon Wheels Restorations (Tel. 01908 551131 www.dragonwheelsrestorations.co.uk) so I'm aware of how careful you need to be. I disassembled the front seats and re-trimmed them since the originals were worn and had started to split along the original seams. That interior is all vinyl, a heavier grade on the seat faces and lighter on the sides, just like the original factory seats." >>

Alan has been around American cars virtually all his life and recently restored a 1941 Willys Jeep along with friend Ken Chapman. "I've been buying cars for over 40 years and back then nothing was ever more than £2500. My first American car was a 1966 Mustang coupe with a 289cu in V8; I paid £500 for it when I was 19. Then I've owned all kinds of American cars since including several Trans Ams. After leaving Aston Martin in 1990 I've restored over 50 cars, including early Corvettes and Cobras. I drove a few Camaros when they were just second hand cars and this '73 has the best feeling of them all. I always wanted a 1973 Trans Am in Brewster Green, but the more I learned about this particular Z28, the more I loved it."

Our featured Camaro was bought new in Washington state in 1973. "The first owner, Ritchie Albert, was stationed in the US Air Force in Germany and ordered the car after returning home to Spokane in late 1972," explains Alan. "His first choice was for green until he saw one painted brown." The Camaro was sold through Anderberg Chevrolet Inc in Rosalia, WA, and assembled at the Norwood plant on January 4, 1973.

Thanks to the wealth of paperwork, we know the retail price was \$2871.70 with a \$211 destination (delivery) charge. As usual, there were a few extra options boxes ticked: Custom Deluxe seatbelts, Soft Ray tinted glass, Color Keyed floor mats, Hide-A-Way windshield wipers, a Visor Vanity Mirror, centre console, front and rear spoilers (\$77), a \$200 four-speed wide-range transmission, power steering, special instrumentation, AM/FM push button radio, rear seat speaker, auxiliary lighting and the Z28 special performance package at \$598. Dark Brown metallic paint with Dark Saddle vinyl seats were a no-cost option making the total price now \$4466.75. Ritchie paid his \$200 cash deposit on November 9, 1972.



330bhp 350 cu in V8 motor.



AM/FM push button radio.



Special instrumentation was optioned.



Alan re-trimmed the front seats.



Unlawful assembly

Alan even has the original build sheet from the Norwood, Ohio, plant. At the time, Norwood was not enjoying its finest hour since labour disputes had been playing havoc for several years. In the mid-Fifties the workers had nicknamed General Motors 'Generous Motors,' such was their pride in working at Norwood. Yet by 1971 strikes over pay, hours and conditions were commonplace.

One day, over 400 workers failed to show up for the afternoon shift alone and assembly lines often ground to a halt. By mid-July 1972 over 1100 cars sat part-finished on the lines, cars that from September 1 would no longer meet new federal standards over flammability and crash regulations. When the 172-day long strike ended in mid-October the government refused to give GM a two-month postponement on implementing the federal standards. Meaning the majority of the 1113 painted, but unfinished, '72 Camaros, Firebirds and Novas, along with over 43,000 mechanical parts – amounting to roughly 36 hours of normal production – were then stacked in the car park and crushed.

Things weren't much rosier in the showrooms, where GM was trying to turn the Camaro from a muscle car into a luxury GT. The trademark double stripes were buried deep in the options list and for 1973 the Camaro Super Sport was discontinued in favour of the luxury image Type LT. If the buyer opted for a Z28 package on an LT all Z28 badging was eliminated, to the confusion of buyers who sometimes refused their new Z28 when it arrived at the dealership.

Panel gaps weren't always great either, one internal audit suggesting that a 'too-wide front fender to door gap' was present on 40% of cars produced. On cars where the wings were correctly aligned around 30% had poor bonnet fit. The reason was often the panels were supplied by outside suppliers and had poor tolerances. A staggering 80% of production was later repaired off the production line, where front ends were realigned with shims. The problem was largely solved with engine bay frames bolted in to

square up sheet metal, then removed before bonnets were attached. However, dealers were still sometimes expected to fix minor issues after delivery.

The Z28 model was headed for the chopping block. In 1972 Chevy engineer Vince Piggins had suggested fitting the existing 400cu in V8 into the Z28 to compete with Pontiac's 455 SD Firebird, but GM executives responded they would rather discontinue the car than have it 'watered down further' by increasing government regulations. By 1973 'performance' was a dirty word, The Z28 Camaro was one of few remaining muscle cars on sale and production of 2575 examples was the lowest ever. Fortunately, there were better times ahead when the stylists managed to incorporate the 1974 model with federally mandated energy absorbing bumpers which otherwise would have killed the car dead. Although engine power was down and the Z28 was technically killed off for 1976, it returned in 1977. The second generation Camaro lasted an impressive 12 years, only replaced by a new model in 1982, one that took seven years to design...

Things still weren't great at Norwood though. On August 26, 1987, the 8,045,750th car rolled out the door. The red fully optioned IROC Z28 was the last car to be built at the plant that had been open since 1923. The Z28 had been raffled off to employee Wendell Spurlock and he rode down the production line in it.

Brown sounds

Back to our brown Z28. Under the bonnet is a Quadrajet carb on a 350cu in, LT1 330bhp Corvette V8 engine with four-bolt mains. A wide-ratio, four-speed manual transmission feeds its power to a Positraction 3.73 rear. Original owner Ritchie bought himself quite a car. "I know Ritchie raced the Camaro because I found the timing slips from the drag strip, when I removed the interior," says Alan, "also, tickets to a drive-in movie from 1975. He sold the car to second owner Edman Lis in 2010 with 35,010 miles. >>



This what 35k miles looks like.

“Ed entered the Camaro into the Muscle Car Nationals in November where it scored 97.7% in their survivor competition – the highest class win at the time. The car was part of Ed’s collection with six other unrestored Z28s and driven just 60 miles more until 2017 when it was sold at a GAA Classic Cars auction. The Z28 then found its way via Hemmings to Leaded Gas Classics in Alabama who paid just \$5 over the price it had sold for at auction. They put a new exhaust on the car and I bought it from them in April 2017. When I saw the Camaro for sale they sent me video of it and all its paperwork, I could see the panel line of the front wing was slightly high in relation to the bonnet – that alone all but proved it was original from the factory, since that almost always gets corrected as part of a restoration.

“It arrived at Southampton Docks in June last year. I put it on a lorry for transportation to Milton Keynes, which was just as well, since all the water poured out of the radiator – after all those years it finally sprung a leak. I replaced all the hoses and the master cylinder since the brake fluid just came out as red goop. I basically recommissioned it just to make it safe and drivable,” admits Alan, “but paid very special attention to retaining all the original parts. I could see from the general panel fit that the car was all-original. I’ve touched in the underseal under the wheel arches, but done nothing else underneath.”

The Camaro still has its original disc-brakes and linings and has only covered 35,000 miles, “you can still see the original factory overspray on the inside of the boot around the lock. The overriders were a 5mph safety feature for 1973, and I’ve kept the smog gear on it too – very few people did that even when the cars were new. I found puncture marks in the original tyres where it had been driven over nails. Ritchie fitted slot mags, but he’d kept these original Rallye wheels.

“I wanted a car with lots of history, but of course it helped it was a Camaro, I doubt I’d have been so bothered if it had been, say, a four-cylinder Mustang II,” smiles Alan. “I doubt many people who see it will ever realise just how original it actually is. I’m definitely conserving this car. I’ve certainly no intention of selling it.” ★



Rear spoiler adds sporty flair.



Alan Faulkner Stevens.

