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## Texas Heat

**Tony Whatley's LS1tech.com Camaro SS-350 Project Car heats up Houston!**  
all contributors: Geoff Stunkard

The sound is unmistakable: a high-pitched whine of a MagnaCharger blower spinning up as the air-fuel mixture heads toward the cylinders. Almost sinister in tone, we could hear Tony Whatley deciding to get after it on the highway near Atlanta Dragway, and he quickly came past us in the red 1969 Camaro he had built. Powered by an LS6, the fact the sound was emanating from beneath the hood of an authentic SS-350 Camaro in this day of high-dollar muscle car restorations was somewhat surprising, but that was always part of the plan according to Whatley.



"This was the first car I purposely bought as a project vehicle. I wanted an authentic Camaro SS--no clone--though it didn't need to be numbers-matching since I would be removing the engine anyhow. The very first car I ever owned was a red '69 Camaro that I drove during high school but later sold to help pay for college, so I really wanted a red car again, too."



The car is actually the culmination of a lot of hard work and planning, but there are no plans to put the show-quality machine into storage


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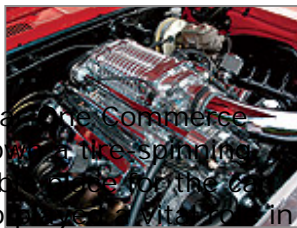


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between shows; Tony admits readily that the plan is to drive this one. Even with only ten miles on the motor when the car debuted at the Year One Commerce Challenge last October, he knocked down the spinning 11.70 best at 122 mph. It was a suitable choice for the car to make its debut, since Year One also has a lot of experience in bringing the LS1tech.com 'Extreme-G' Camaro to fruition.



While not the proverbial needle in a haystack, it took eight months before the right car came up once the 32-year-old petroleum Project Manger knew what he wanted. The car itself was located 1,000 miles away from his home in Houston. After seeing photos and talking with the owners, Tony took the plunge, sent a deposit and bought a one-way ticket to Kentucky, then drove the semi-finished restoration back to the Lone Star State, including a six-hour "un-pleasure-cruise" through torrential rains across Louisiana. Plans were already cemented to use late-model technology, and he began purchasing parts to put the machine back into literally better-then-new shape, using Year One and the used parts forum on www.LS1tech.com, a Web site which Tony co-founded.



We all have seen photos of megadollar restoration shops; during the course of the work he did on his masterpiece, Tony never put the car on a lift. In fact, it was done in the indoor-outdoor garage of a Houston apartment complex supported only by jack stands and determination. As the project progressed over the course of a year, Tony worked on the car almost nightly, doing the welding, fabrication, and assembly himself. With parts in hand six months after the purchase, the car was taken down to the basic body shell, received some minor sheetmetal replacements, and the transmission tunnel was raised 1.5 inches to clear the new six-speed box.



A used 12-bolt rear was set up with 3.73 gearing, restored to stock appearance and installed, while the

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front sub-frame and inner fenders went out for powder coating. In terms of getting the suspension out of the stone age, a 2002 Camaro power rack-and-pinion outfit from Brewer's Restoration & Performance was installed, coupled with tubular A-arms up front and lowering leaf springs in the rear, both by Global West. Shocks are QA1 12-way adjustables in both the front and rear, while Stainless Steel Brakes Corp. supplied disc brake parts for all four wheels. A set of Cal-Trac bars keeps the rubber tight to the tarmac.



Meanwhile, the engine was also coming together. The bottom end is an assembled 2002 LS6 short-block from Motorsports Technologies, Inc. (MTI), also of Houston. It displaces 348 inches but is equipped for forced induction with 9.5:1 compression Wiseco pistons, Lunati billet rods, and a custom-grind MTI cam with .581 lift/230 degree specs. After adding Ferrea valves and Isky springs, MTI's Stage 2 race-ported heads with opened chambers to reduce compression were installed above the cylinder banks on ARP engine studs, then topped with ARE sheetmetal valvecovers. Tony assembled the engine around the short-block package himself, topping it off with a MagnaCharger blower using an air/water intercooled configuration making 8.5 psi boost. Many stock LS6 parts, including the crank, cam rockers, and a ported oil pump, were used as well.

Induction air through the blower is cleaned via a K&N filter, while a pair of Stainless Works headers (1.75-inch primaries into 3-inch collectors) feed the fumes through to an X-pipe set-up and turbo-type mufflers. Everything comes together through the use of a 1998 Camaro computer, an Aeromotive EFI inline pump and regulator, and a Painless Wiring harness that Tony installed at home and MTI then fine-tuned. Behind is a T-56 Tremec six-speed box with a RAM clutch and Pro 5.0 shifter. The result on the chassis dyno at MTI showed that there are now 506 ponies at the back tires. Of course, appearance is part of the final package. Intro Wheels came through with four GT Sport rims, 17x8 (4.75-inch backspacing) up front and 17x10



(5.50-inch backspacing) out back, all shod in Nitto Extreme 555 rubber. Herman's Classic Cars of London, Kentucky, did the paint (1995 Chrysler Radiant Fire), while Year One supplied the hounds-tooth upholstery for the 2002 power front/1969 vintage rear seats, completed by Trendsetters in Katy, Texas. Tony kept the old-school idea alive with Stewart-Warner gauges. Other interior changes were a Covan gauge panel in the dash, custom overlays on the console, and a radio delete! Nothing to hinder the sound of horsepower.

"I built this car to be driven," says Tony. "It's not going to be a show car trailer queen and hidden from possible rock chips. My first goal is to get it down into the 10-second zone, then go for the 9s using a Nitrous Express wet kit; an NHRA legal 6-point cage will be going into the car first."

"This car was built with three goals in mind," he says in conclusion. "It had to keep the classic look inside and out. It had to have the newer engine, driveline, and suspension components. Finally, it had to haul ass. I was getting tired of all these show cars that only focus on appearance. I'm ready to break that show car image wide open with this project."



With over 500 horses at the rear tires already, the sound of such a goal may be just as sinister--and enjoyable--as that MagnaCharger under the 2-inch cowl of Whatley's hood...

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