

50TH ANNIVERSARY REUNION 1968 SHELL 4000 RAMBLER AMERICAN

Seann Burgess



On the front cover of the Jan/Feb 2010 AM Spirit newsletter you will find a black and white photo of two remarkable men standing beside one of the three Rambler American rally cars that were factory entered in the 1968 Shell 4000 Rally. The photo was taken in the showroom at the Brampton AMC plant where 4 very special cars were built to take on all comers in a special world class event. The caption pointing to the photo reads "A legendary AMC Rally Car comes back to life" – see Page 5. This marked my introduction to doing something regarding car restoration that did not involve getting my hands dirty...writing about it. Please read the 3 part article that continued with Mar/Apr 2010 "The Story of Old Blue", and May/June 2010 Part 3 of the restoration of "Old Blue", an AMC rally car legend. The 3 part story was thankfully given the club award for story of the year, for which I converted the monetary value into a 3 colour jacket to hang from the coat hook in the car. For new members, or those unable to locate their back copies, I have penned the "Short Story" of "Old Blue" to accompany this article.

Now, ten years (and a bit) have passed and during that time we reached the 50th anniversary of that final Canadian rally in which this team shone. It was coming up to this occasion (2018) that I decided to try and do something special to celebrate the event, that would not only bring as many original team members together, but also "bookend" my caretaker experience as far as "Old Blue" was concerned. Through my racing connections I arranged two weekends, the first being the VARAC Festival and the second being the BARC (British Automobile Racing Club) race in the summer of 2018, both held at Mosport (for us old guys), and CTMP (Canadian Tire Motorsport Park) for the new crowd. Between Ernie and I, we got 4 of the original team members together at VARAC: Ernie Regehr of course (team boss), Hunter Floyd (driver), Walt Mackay (test/chase driver) and Don Colling (mechanic).



Ernie Hunter Walt Don



Carole and I provided the hospitality area for the boys to meet and share their stories about this special time in their lives that seems to revolve more around this blue car than any of the others. All the guys got to boot around a bit in the infield and relive the old days. They were all smiling pretty big driving that car that meant so much to them 50 years ago! The whole weekend was a big success. We all had fun pouring over some of the documentation that Ernie has entrusted me with (hand written build sheets showing every modification done to each of the 4 cars)! And all this done right on the factory floor by enthusiastic workers who thought the project was totally cool! Times have changed.



Whatever hobby you are in, you will find it is a pretty small world, but not as small as the racing world. We had a fellow come down to our site at VARAC and ask "is this Dave Mackenzie's car"? It turns out this kid (back in the late 60's/early 70's) lived in Toronto and the tall skinny guy with the cool blue rally Rambler lived across the street from him. He recognized the car immediately. We had previously tracked Dave down and got him to come up to our place to be reunited with the restored car, then he came to Mosport on the Saturday as well. It was at Dave's family farm near Petrolia where the car was found left for dead in a field.

Dave and his partner Syd Crump were the only two owners of the car "post rally" according to records. Syd bought it from Ernie, then Dave bought it from Syd, who passed away several years ago. Syd was a BARC member (as I was), so when I asked that we do something special for the 50th, the folks at BARC were more than helpful giving us the red-carpet treatment as honorary pace car for the weekend. So, on goes the light bar, a couple of guest pace car drivers, fan and corner worker laps at lunch break, and let me tell you...



this is how to celebrate Canadian motorsport history!

As I close out my caretaker duties with this special car, the car is up for sale and I have placed a "For Sale" ad with the Club. I hope that there is an AMC enthusiast that will "pick up the torch" and share and preserve the history of this unique one of a kind factory built rally car.

I asked Ernie to summarize the reunion weekend, here's what he had to say: *"Until the early 60's, AMC cars were seen as the economy cars, family cars, and in particular, the Rambler American was the*

Grannie car. Then, it was decided that the market demanded something more, and a move to power & pizzazz began with the introduction of the AMX'S, the Javelin, etc. Also an interest in competition, beyond the economy runs, which had been the only participation before.

One result was the sort of half-hearted entry in The Shell 4000 rally, in 1967. It was useful in showing that AMC might have potential in the sport. Otherwise, it did not go well. After a review of what it would take to make a respectable appearance, it was decided to enter a 3 car team again in 1968. A program was approved with budget which allowed for the development of the car and the best qualified drivers & navigators.

The first step was to establish the specifications for the cars and build a "mule", test car, to develop the specs for the actual competing cars. The test car was painted blue and it promptly became known, with affection, and sometimes with awe, as "Old Blue". It was responsible for finding some minor shortcomings and improving handling & power, within the limits of Appendix "J", of the FIA. However, it soon became the favourite of the drivers, who did some of the test work, borrowed it for excursions that, in their free wheeling ways, skirted the edges of disaster and the ire of the law. It also carried Walt & Donny as they accompanied the rally to take care of problems that might come up along the way; again "within the rules of the event."

Old Blue became the beloved "mascot", the symbol of the "devil may care" attitude of the team. It seemed to be a beacon, leading the team in a "let'er rip" attitude, in what ever it took to get the job done. That attitude, plus the talent, experience and dedication, of course, resulted in winning the desired Manufacturers' Team Award, with the lowest penalty score in the history of the event. "Grannie" car indeed!!

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"Big Blue" - The Short Story

Seann Burgess



"Big Blue", a 1968 Rambler American, was AMC's development prototype specially built at the factory in Brampton, Ontario for the 1968 Shell 4000 Rally, and later raced in Canada in the early 1970s. Three works rally cars were based on this car to compete in the Calgary to Halifax rally under the factory banner, finishing in 2nd, 3rd, and 5th place. This car was heavily upgraded during assembly and left the factory with special competition equipment and custom features like an upgraded AMX 390 intake, special crank, 16:1 steering box, 4 piston calipers, bigger rear brakes, and Twin Grip rear end.

I have fully restored the car with an emphasis on originality (with the exception of the unibody from an identical donor), and comes with an extensive documentation file including internal factory documents, race result sheets, FIA approval and period black and white photos. The original drive-train was completely rebuilt, balanced, and blueprinted, and the car has been driven around 5000 miles since restoration. It sounds great, drives great, handles great and is a turn-key, ready for vintage rallying.

The three works cars were white with black hoods, and this car was originally painted Blazer Metallic Blue in which it was faithfully repainted during restoration. Dubbed "Old Blue", it left the factory with several unique touches including tachometer, fire bottle, lap point shoulder type safety belts (sourced from England) & map pockets in both doors. The Shell 4000 team manager was Ernie Regehr, who was the Quality Control Manager at the factory. Now in his 80s, Ernie was very helpful in person and over the phone tracing the history of the car.

First purchased in 2001, a year was dedicated to gathering historical documentation and talking with AMC factory reps and race team members. Once the history of the car was thoroughly researched, I began comprehensive restoration in which every usable original piece was restored. It is now fully sorted and

was restored to look like a cared-for and drivable survivor rather than an overly-done concourse-ready museum piece. Check out the gallery for all the cool Shell 4000 details throughout the car. .

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/batexclusives/sets/72157649429356683/>



The car was extensively tested in 1968 and later served as a chase/support vehicle for the three official works-entered cars. Later sold to a local enthusiast, the car raced in Canada in the early 1970s, including CASC events and the Knox Mountain Hill-climb. Parked sometime in the mid '70s, it remained parked until discovered by a friend and restored by me.



The interior has been restored to its original appearance, and aside from the original glove box door which was retained for its period decals, almost

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