We’ve all seen the various makeover shows where someone or something gets remodeled, repaired, or modified throughout the program until the last three minutes or so when they finally show the result. Well, we don’t have any quick-cut video with dramatic music under it as we flip between the before and after views. If you’ve been following this story from the beginning, you’ve already seen all of the before stuff. No, this is the good part and the reward for not quitting. This is proof that an enormous pile of sometimes mismatched parts can be rescued from utter failure and turned into something to be admired.

After all this, you’ve either decided that you can’t wait to get started on a basket case project or you’re completely cured from any desire to buy one. But don’t forget, as we learned back at the beginning, a basket case project doesn’t (and in fact shouldn’t) be a do-it-all-yourself venture. No one person has all of the skills necessary to expertly restore one of these all by himself or herself. The key to successfully pulling off a basket case resto is to know what you can do and what you need to farm out to an established expert. Even Muscle Car Restorations, which has its own team of paint, body, upholstery, and mechanical experts, knows when to utilize the expertise of others, for the frame powdercoating or the stainless trim repair, for example.

Chris Argentieri’s Chevelle likely started out as a driving older restoration that was starting to show its age. Someone began what was intended to be a complete expert resto, and even got a great deal of the metal and bodywork completed (if incorrectly). Unfortunately, for whatever reason, that prior owner was unable to finish it, and, as you’ve seen in each installment, what was left was quite a mess.

The first thing Muscle Car Restorations did when it came into the picture was to inventory all the parts (never believe a seller who says, “I have everything you need to finish the car”) and determine what could be salvaged. This led to a list of items that were needed and a list of parts that would be restored. The next essential step was to plan all the steps that would be taken and in what order. That was followed very closely by a plan to both locate and finance all the parts that were needed and the processes that had to be sent out.

The plan Chris had in mind was to return his SS to factory stock but with a bit more power, improved handling, and whatever could be done to help it live longer on the street, because Chris wants to drive it as often as he can. That plan started with powdercoating the frame and most of the chassis components, since powdercoating is much more resistant to chips, rust, and other damage and is also much easier to keep clean from road debris. PST chassis

"An enormous pile of mismatched parts can be rescued from utter failure"
bushings and parts keep the handling tight, but the ride remains very comfortable. Muscle Car Restorations’ two-stage base/clearcoat paint is already much tougher than the factory single-stage colors, so no change needed there.

Under the hood, the 396 needed a new crank anyway, so a 4.00-inch stroker was used to up the cubes to 434. A little head porting, bigger valves, a custom roller cam, and custom pistons help to get the power up over 500 hp in a package that looks like a stock rebuild with a set of headers. It has lots of big-block torque, yet the mild idle keeps it very easy to drive.

It is rare to get the chance to follow a complete resto this closely for this long, but now you have the insight to bring your muscle car dream to fruition. Yes, it’s the end of the road for our Basket Case Chevelle, but now this is the beginning of a lot of road time for Chris and his now-new 1970 Chevelle SS.

Basket Case Chevelle, Part 12: The Finale

Basket No More

By Mark Ehlen
Photos by Wes Allison
“No one person has all of the skills

Because the 396 that came with the car was its own basket case of worn-out and incorrect parts, we sourced a block with the correct casting number, bored and stroked it to 434 ci, and fitted it with parts that would make the engine powerful but still drivable on the street.

The factory oval-port heads were retained for the sake of originality but really a substantial flow increase with some mild porting and 2.19/1.86-inch valves over their original 2.06/1.72 versions. A set of headers from Doug’s Headers provided a big improvement over the stock cast-iron exhaust manifolds.

The original Q-Jet and iron manifold were also kept for originality, but they didn’t stop this 10.5:1 big-block from grunting out 518 hp and 550 lb-ft of torque.

The Chevelle’s interior was originally red and mostly there, though outside of the seat frames, almost none of it was reusable. So the decision was made to switch to black, which goes much better with the black vinyl top. Legendary and NPD were invaluable in helping to get it all right.

After the frame, rear end, and control arms were all powdercoated, Muscle Car Restorations relied heavily on the chassis experts at PST to provide the correct springs, linkages, and factory-type bushings to tighten up the handling while maintaining a comfortable ride. Brakes are factory-style replacements also from PST.

National Parts Depot and Ground Up contributed exterior trim, emblems, and lighting components to help finalize the Chevelle’s body buildup. Getting these details right makes a huge difference in the car’s ultimate presentation.

AT A GLANCE
1970 CHEVELLE SS396

Owned by: Chris Argentier, Los Angeles, CA
Restored by: Muscle Car Restorations, Chippewa Falls, WI
Engine: 396ci (now 434ci) 518hp V8
Transmission: Muncie M21 4-speed manual
Rear End: 12bolt with 3:42 gears and Auburn Posi
Interior: Black vinyl bench seat
Wheels: 14-inch SS
Tires: F70X14 Firestone Wide Oval
necessary to expertly restore one of these all by himself’

AA-Midwest
702/649-7776
aamidwest.com
Engine block

American Autowire, Inc.
800/482-WIRE (9473)
anamericanautowire.com
Wiring for entire car, switches

Anaheim Gear
714/778-1103
anaheimgear.com
Muncie rebuild

Auto Vision Center
715/834-5277
autovisioncenterinc.com
Windshield and back window install

California Car Cover
800/423-9525
calcarcover.com
Car cover

Classic Performance Products
888/522-8306
classicperform.com
Power steering, steering box, brake master cylinder

Coker Tire
800/251-6336
cokertire.com
Tires

Competition Cams
800/999-0863
compcams.com
Camshaft, rockers, lifters, push-rods, timing sets

CP Pistons
949/567-9000
cp-carrillo.com
Pistons, rings

Custom Autosound
800/888-8637
customautosound.com
Stereo, speakers

Doug's Headers
doughheaders.com
Headers

Eagle Specialty Products
662/796-7373
eaglerod.com
Crankshaft, connecting rods

Energy Suspension
949/361-9395
energysuspension.com
Engine and trans mounts

Extreme Metal Works
exmetalworks.com
330/550-3638
Trim restoration

Federal Mogul, Fel-Pro
662/224-8972
federal-mogul.com
Head gaskets

Flowmaster
707/544-4761
flowmastermufflers.com
Exhaust pipes, mufflers

Ground Up
866/358-2277
6s996.com
Exterior trim and emblems, headlights, taillights, marker lights, parking and backup lamps

Instrument Specialties
401/267-0055
instrument-specialties.com
Dash and gauge cluster resto

Jet Performance
800/535-1161
jetchip.com
Qjet rebuild

Legendary Auto Interiors
800/363-6804
legendaryautointeriors.com
Seat covers, carpet, headliner, sun visors, package tray

Macleod Racing
714/630-2764
macleodracing.com
Clutch parts, bellhousing

Moser Engineering
260/726-6689
moserengineering.com
Rearend kit, carrier, axles, ring and pinion, Posi

MSD Ignition
915/525-2200
msdignition.com
Starter, alternator

Muscle Car Restorations
715/834-2223
musclecarrestorations.com
Project oversight and execution

National Parts Depot
nationalpartsdepot.com
Interior accessories, bumper fasteners, exterior mirrors, trim

Original Parts Group, Inc.
800/243-8355
opgi.com
Windshield, back and window glass, interior small parts, fuel tank and hardware

PerTronix
909/699-5955
pertronix.com
Distributor, coil

Powerhouse Products
800/892-7223
Engine assembly tools

PPG
ppgrefinish.com
Paint

Premiere Powder Coating
608/525-5005
premierepowdercoating.net
Frame and chassis powder-coating

PST
877/226-4101
p-s-t.com
Control arm bushings, steering linkage, brakes, springs, ball joints, tie rods

SoftSeal Inc.
800/426-0902
softseal.com
Door window seals, weather stripping, body mounts

Thermo-Tec Automotive Products
800/274-8437
thermotec.com
Sound deadening, heat barrier

Trans-Dapt
562/921-715
tdperformance.com
Engine sheetmetal

Wheel Vintiques
800/999-2100
wheelvintiques.com
Rally wheels and accessories