

TIMELLESS



✍ Jason Reiss 📷 Grant Cox

Hot rodders and automotive enthusiasts have the hook set early in life; perhaps a ride in a family member's muscle machine or from a visit to a local car show where the thunder of horsepower becomes a lifelong resonance, forever to be chased. Oklahoma's Javier Leclerc's first muscle machine was a

1969 Chevrolet Malibu. Cost and accessibility were at a premium at that point in his life, and it was determined that some sort of hot rod was better than no hot rod at all. Although he didn't have piles of money to invest in it at the time, he made small changes here and there to make the car "his," ultimately moving on from the ride as his life progressed.

"Years later when I was able to afford the build of my dream car, I went for it," says Leclerc.

The dream car—the 1969 Camaro you see here—didn't start out in this condition, and required years of hard work, planning, and preparation to become a pristine example of the timeless muscle car. Even then, Leclerc still

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THREE ENGINES LATER, JAVIER LECLERC FINALLY HAS THE MUSCLE CAR OF HIS DREAMS

made many changes along the way to achieve the desired result. When this classic was chosen for the project, it was blue with white rally stripes—a far cry from its final appearance. The engine was blown up but that didn't matter as Javier had big plans for the horsepower department moving forward.

"I decided to start from scratch. My biggest challenge was finding a paint and body guy that could give me a flawless job so I looked for the best body and metal guy in the area, and then the best painter in the area. It worked out perfectly," Leclerc says. The metalwork was performed by Shawn Kitchen, with the Liquid Aluminum PPG paint laid

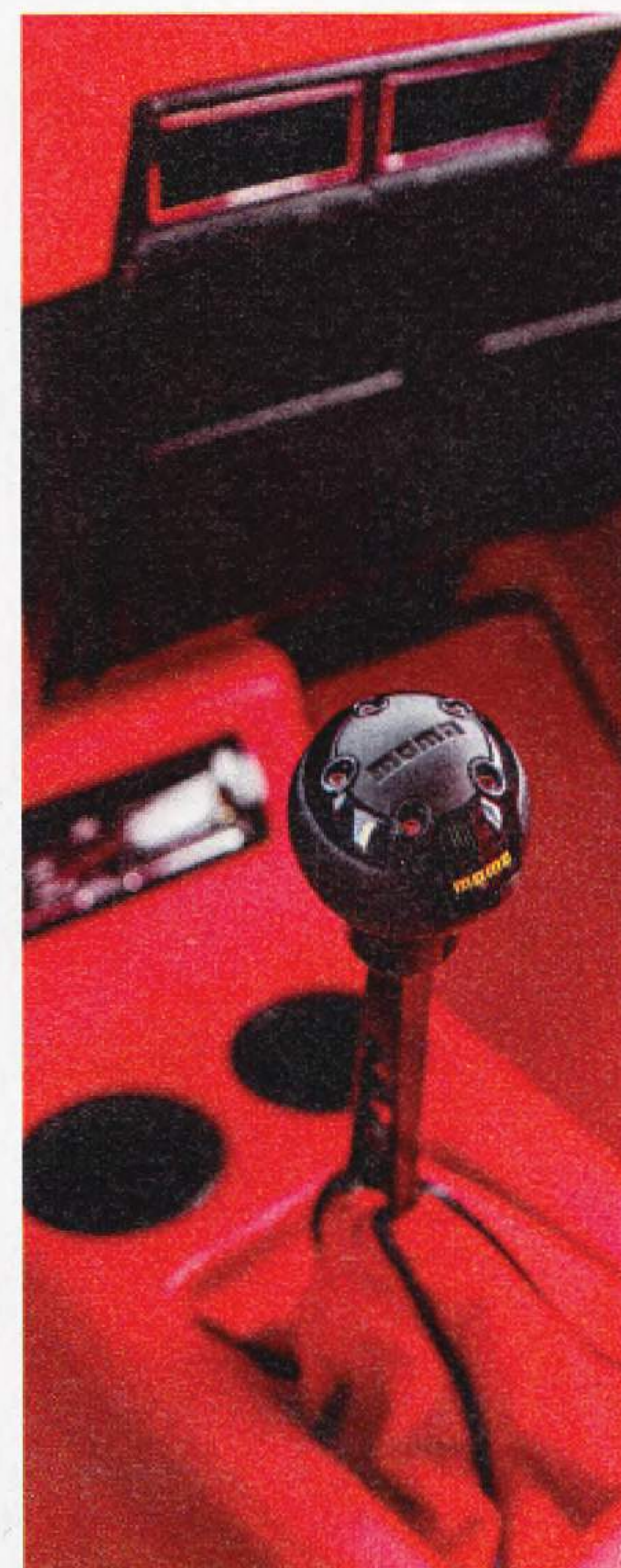
down by Mike Finn at Midwest Classics. "The panel gaps and surface preparation was amazing, and was the preface to a smooth-as-glass paintjob," Leclerc says.

With the hard part out of the way—or so he thought—Leclerc turned his attention to the rest of the car. After all, what good is a hot rod without a pumped-up powerplant? When the



car was originally finished, a cammed LS1 with ported heads putting out 400 horsepower backed by a 4L60E transmission sat inside the engine bay. "That wasn't enough, so I put together a bulletproof 383 LS with forged internals that made 560 horsepower," says Leclerc. This powerplant was backed up by a 4L80E, but he still wasn't satisfied.

"Somehow the car still wasn't right," he recounts. "I realized the car felt too modern, and I remembered why I started this whole project to begin with—to have a 1960's muscle car," he says. And this is where legendary engine builder Scott Shafiroff enters the picture. Currently, the car has a Shafiroff-built 540-cubic-inch big-block Chevrolet engine stuffed between the fenders, and Leclerc is finally satisfied. The balanced and blueprinted bullet uses a 4.500-inch bore and 4.250-inch Scat crankshaft, combined with a set of JE SRP 10.5:1 slugs and a custom Shafiroff/COMP Cams hydraulic roller grind in the camshaft tunnel. On top, a set of Dart Pro 1 aluminum cylinder heads and Edelbrock Victor intake manifold suck the air/fuel mixture in from one of FAST's XFI Sportsman fuel-injection systems, which has been tuned to perfection by Abel Racing. A Ron Davis two-row aluminum radiator, MSD Digital 6AL ignition box, and Kooks 2.25-inch primary long-tube headers combined with Pypes stainless



X-pipe and Black Widow mufflers support the engine's performance. "When I put my foot down the first time with the 700-horsepower 540 big-block, I was in heaven," he says.

Underhood, Leclerc has some of the custom touches that are most important to him applied to the Eddie Motorsports-fabricated aluminum

valve covers and air cleaner housing. "The valve covers and the air cleaner cover are very personal to me," he says. "The artist from Distinct Customs took some of my jewelry and turned it into engraved art, along with a customized \$100 bill," he says.

What good would a stout big-block be without a manual transmission

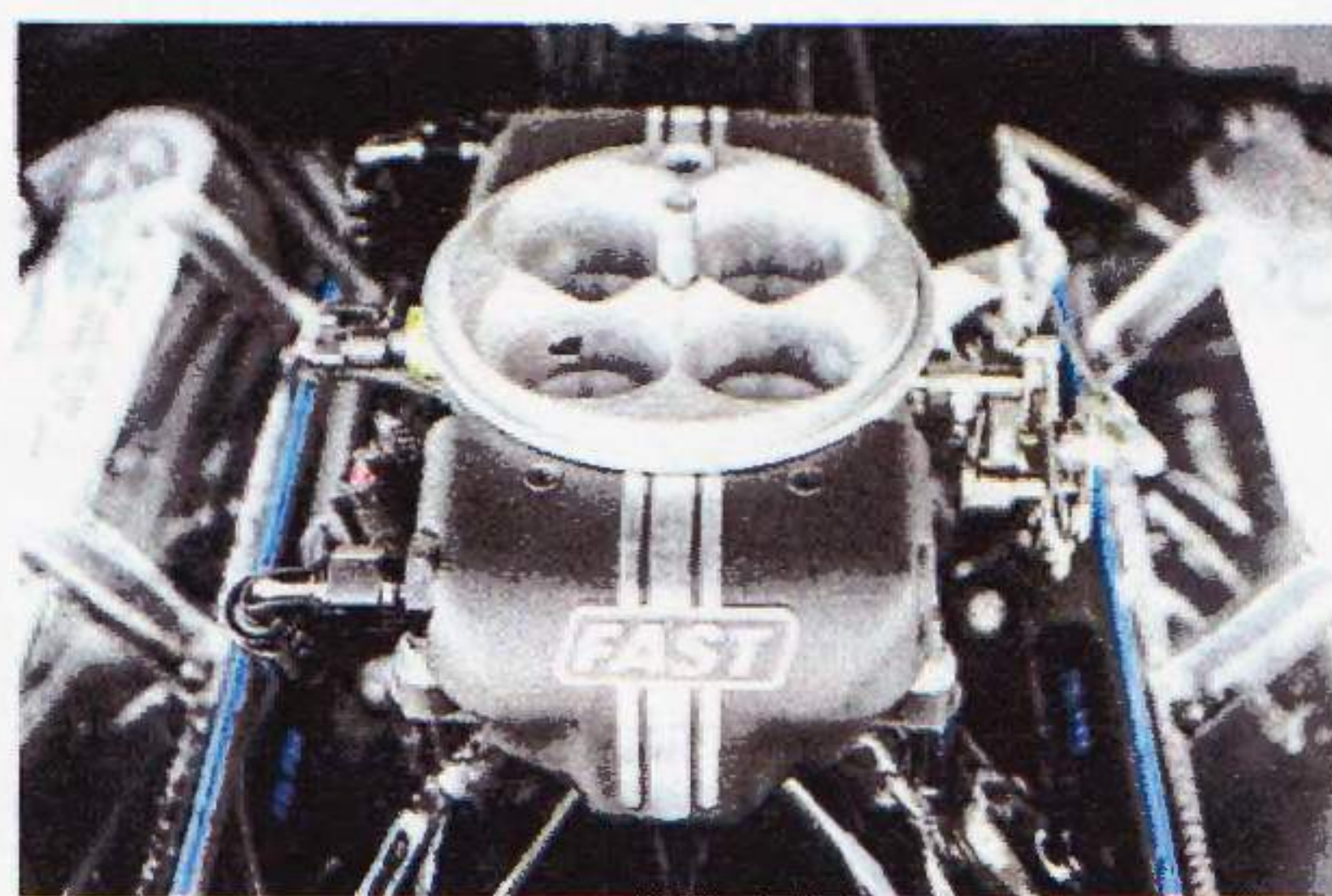
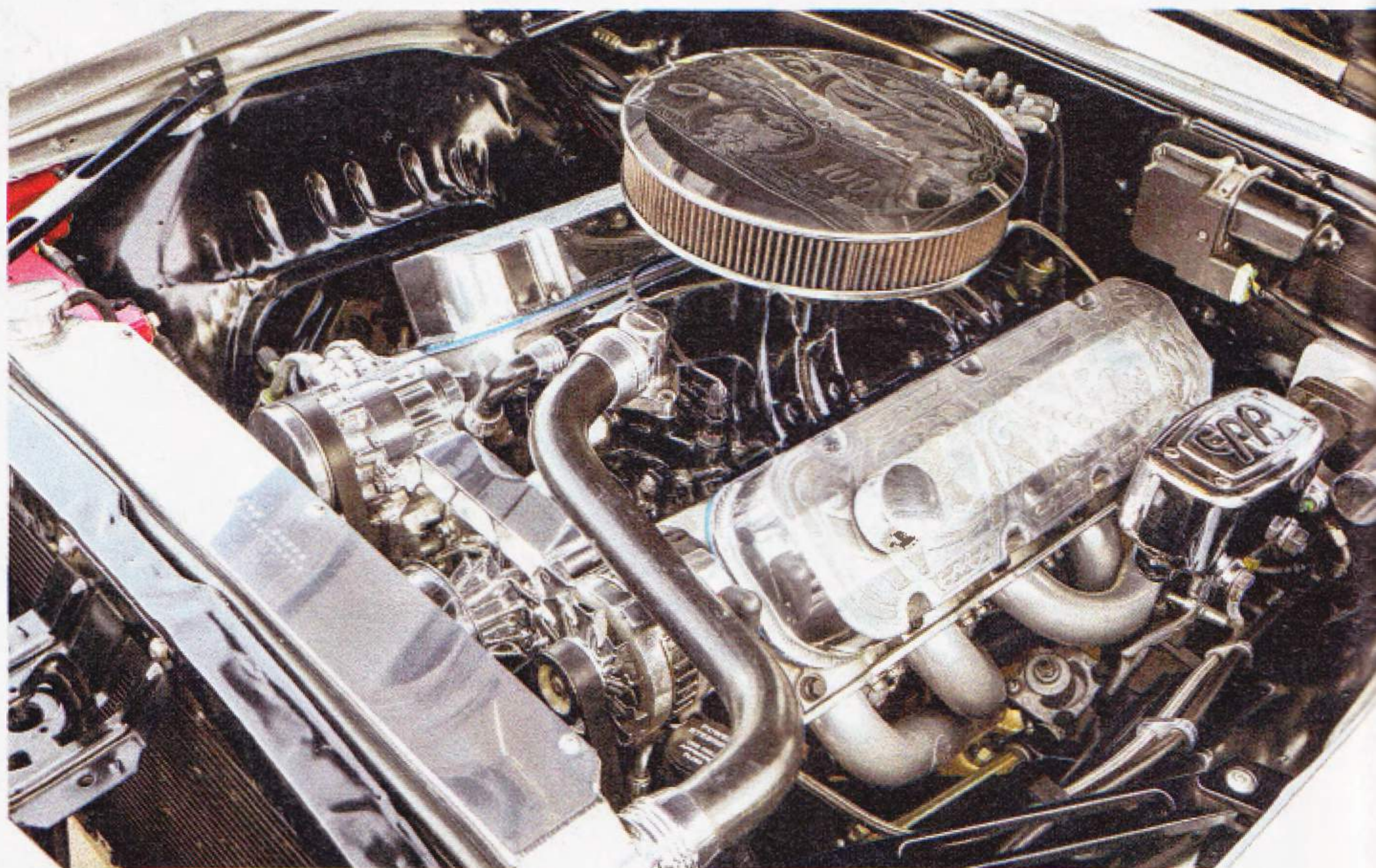


behind it? A TREMEC T-56 six-speed transmission is installed; it's been coupled with a Science Friction twin-disc clutch assembly and a 12-bolt Moser rear axle. Inside the axlehousing, a set of 3.73:1 gears and a limited-slip Positraction differential mean the car simply goes when the loud pedal is mashed to the firewall. Steve Hopkins is the guy who was tasked with ensuring drivetrain compatibility through each of the car's changes, and it appears he's performed each of the changes flawlessly.

Don't think the modifications on this beauty are limited to the drivetrain, though, as Leclerc has put each of the major component systems through a complete revamp with parts designed to provide an exciting driving experience.

With an eye on performance, Global West was selected to provide many of the suspension pieces, from the tubular front A-arms to the lowering springs. A set of AFX Performance 2-inch drop spindles are installed in the front, and there's also a set of 3/4-inch lowering blocks in the rear to finish off the car's stance. Hotchkis subframe connectors tighten up the chassis to help take advantage of the improved suspension capabilities. Bilstein shocks control suspension movement and the car is brought to a halt with a set of Baer C5 Corvette-style 13-inch front and 11-inch rear brakes. Rolling stock consists of a set of 18x8 front and 18x9.5 rear Intro Malibu custom wheels wrapped in BFGoodrich g-Force KDW tires (245/40/18 front and 275/40/18 rear) provide all the stick Leclerc will ever need.

It's not all performance in the Camaro, though, as the interior gear has been suitably upgraded by Distinct Customs in Oklahoma City with a JVC Arsenal CD head unit, Kicker CX



four-channel amp, and a quartet of Kicker QS speakers measuring 6.5-inch in the front and 6x9 in the rear. One place where Leclerc went outside the box during the construction of his masterpiece was when he selected a set of Gen I Dodge Viper seats. Red leather doesn't always work when it comes to appearance, but coupled with the Liquid Silver hue on the car's flanks the red is just perfect inside this Camaro. The Viper seats were covered in red Italian leather and suede by Distinct Customs, who also applied the red leather treatment to the custom console. There's a suede headliner with black piping, a leather package

tray, and even custom black aluminum grommets for the speaker holes. A Classic dash is filled with a complete assortment of Auto Meter Phantom gauges, and a Momo Competition steering wheel rounds out the driver's compartment—and finishes off Javier Leclerc's vision of the perfect Camaro.

"I believe the side profile lines of the 1969 are timeless, and the most incredible I've seen, so I built my dream car over the course of three years," says Leclerc. "I wouldn't change a thing."