

the ramchargers have just whipped up a batch of

ONE OF THE OLDEST organized drag racing groups in the country today is the Ramchargers Maximum Performance Corporation, known informally as the Ramchargers, and amongst themselves as just plain old "Rams." Comprised of a cross section of talented Chrysler Corporation engineers, they began their group activities in the summer of 1958, confining their activities to racing car construction, drag-racing, technical discussions, and family and social gatherings. It wasn't until 1963 that the "hard core" members of the Rams became incorporated, to put the operation on a business-like basis. In-

stock" era of the Ramcharger club activity began. This is when they acquired a '61 Dodge Dart.

During '62, their biggest win came when they captured the SS/SA Eliminator title at the NHRA Nationals, following several regional and divisional wins. In '63, the Rams knocked off all the competition in Mr. Stock Eliminator run-offs at both the NHRA Winter and Summer Nationals along with other major wins and records. The story remains the same throughout 1964 and '65: more wins and more records. From '63 on, they were running both in SS/A and F/X classes, taking their share of



FIBERGLASS CANDY

Initially, racing activity was confined to members' private cars, but by 1959 a club project was underway that was destined to start a change in the appearance of drag machines.

The Ramchargers built a class "C" altered coupe — a '49 Plymouth, powered by a 1956 Chrysler 300 engine. This car established several "C" altered records under NHRA and was really a sight. The car was elevated extra high to raise the center of gravity to gain weight transfer on a wide-open-throttle start. Then it had megaphone shaped exhaust headers poking out between the front tires and fenders, no rear fenders at all, a chopped top and carbs with scoop projecting up out of the hood extending higher than the roof line. This car was finally retired in 1961 and the "super

Dodge Darts are something more than grocery getters once the Ramchargers get through with them. When these guys get done, you've got just about the wildest hemi powered match racer that ever popped out of the "Motor City."

the purses and records. Their cars were still running strong when it was decided to go on a diet and try for a bit more performance.

This is when a completely new car began to take shape. Constructed during the winter and spring of 1965-66, the new Ramcharger race car is an all-fiberglass '66 Dart. Much lighter than their '65 Coronet, the Dart is also different in that it features an all-tube chassis by Woody Gilmore of Race Car Engineering. First they expect to better their own ET mark of 8.91 seconds for the quarter-mile considerably, then they plan to "show the way home" to the leading funny cars around the country.

To accomplish both of these goals the Rams knew they would have to keep big alterations to a minimum. As Jim

Thornton, both president of the Ramchargers and driver of the A/FX car, said, "We could have gotten real 'experimental,' but we don't need all the headaches before and between races that a 'silly' (extra-funny) car can develop. We're out to win races. If the car is light and fast enough and the driver is on the ball, a lot of mechanical tricks aren't necessary. But the ones you do make should count."

Thornton and alternate driver, Mike Buckel, will campaign their new fiberglass Dart for the '66 season. The body is all fiberglass and was specially built for the Rams by B & N Fiberglass in Dayton, Ohio. All of the bolt-on goodies, which include doors, fenders, deck lid, grille and rear bumper, are also fiberglass and the products of A & A Engi-

neering in Atlanta, Ga. The hood, as well as all internal panels, are of aluminum. The reason for going to aluminum for the hood is that just about every car that runs a 'glass one,' with a hole in the same for blower or stacks, ends the season with the hood full of rips, patches, cracked paint, ect. Few of them are rigid enough without internal bracing. The aluminum work on both hood and interior are exceptionally well done, and are the handiwork of Proto Products, in Utica, Michigan.

The chassis under all of these lightweight components came from the shop of Woody Gilmore, owner of Race Car Engineering in Downey, Calif. Renown for building fine dragster chassis, Woody was commissioned by the Rams to build the chassis according to their design. In keeping with their habit of

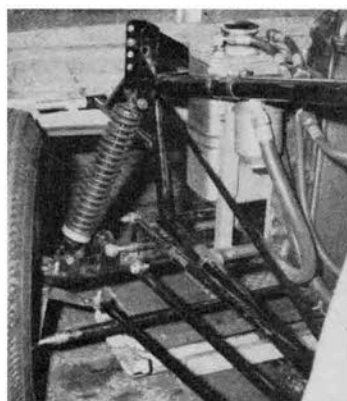
designing both fast and safe cars, the Rams chassis is a one-piece, high-strength "space frame" and rollover structure. It utilizes more than 100 feet of 1-3/4" chrome-moly steel alloy tubing of varying thicknesses.

Due to a rash of serious accidents involving other A/FX'ers and funny cars, both AHRA and UDRA began enforcing a new rule re roll cages in all funny cars: all of these types of cars must have a NASCAR-type roll cage, not just bars. I mention this vital point because the Ramchargers chassis was designed and built months before this rule change, illustrating their "forward" thinking.

A '66 Dart heavy-duty differential fitted with 4.10:1 gears backs up a Torqueflite transmission. Because the

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A set of heavy-duty Armstrong suspension type shock absorbers (with coil springs) support the front end of the fiberglass bodied Ramcharger Dart. Straight tubular axle and steering assembly are by Woody Gilmore of Race Car Engineering, builder of chassis also. The chassis is adjustable at front shocks with respect to height.



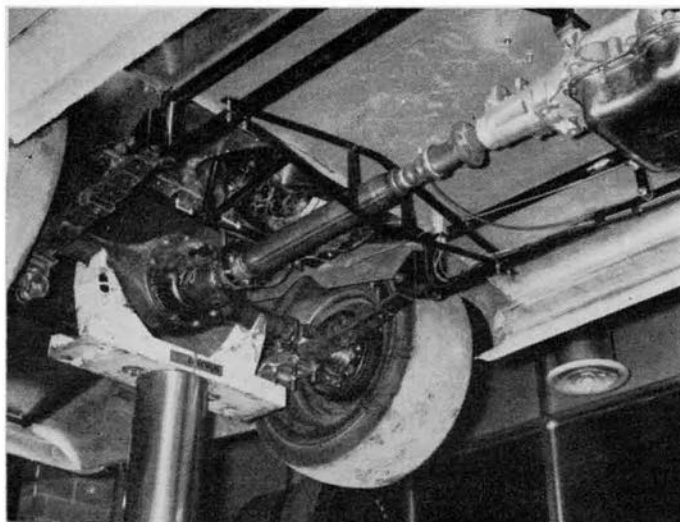
Initial test runs were made in Detroit during early spring months. Wild Candy Apple Red striped roof and white panels is work of Alexander Bros.; with lettering being performed by Horn Sign Co. At time of these runs, though Thornton was not yet used to car, he felt it would be a real "winner" since it felt super-hot.



Powerplant in the Rams Dart is the reliable 426 cubic inch Hemi Dodge. Shown above just before velocity tubes were installed, every part of engine is exposed when the front end assembly is hinged up.

A heavy-duty rear end, lower left, takes a set of 4.10:1 gears, guaranteeing lots of acceleration off line along with margin of safety. Driver's seat protrudes through floor to left of third member.

The entire body, bumpers, doors, etc., are of fiberglass, while the inner body panels and flooring are aluminum. Twin drag chutes attached to an aluminum mount are by Simpson, will assist strong rear brakes.





Here's a glimpse of the first Ramcharger team machine, a C/Altered '49 Plymouth. It looked weird but set records for two years until replaced by a '61 Dodge Dart.

wheelbase was stretched from a standard 111 to 120 inches and the engine was moved back as close to the firewall as possible, it was necessary to use a Dodge A100 truck rear transmission housing which is 4 inches shorter than the standard passenger car model. This allows a longer drive line (greater distance between universal joints). The shortened Dodge drive shaft is now only 32" long, center-to-center.

In a one-of-a-kind class are the Candymatic's dual rear brakes, consisting of two sets: one organic, the other metallic. Organic shoes provide good braking at the starting line, while the metallics take over in high-speed, high-heat conditions. Both brakes are 10 x 2½ inch standard Coronet models, while the rear suspension system is Dodge Super Stock. Wheels are 15" Halibrand mags mounting 10.00 x 15" M & H Racemasters.

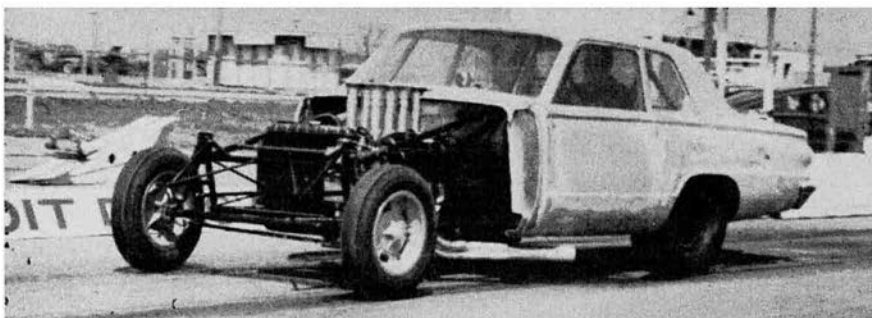
Up front, riding on a Woody tube axle and P-S Machine billet spindles, are Halibrand integral hub magnesium wheels taking new 5.60 x 15" M & H nylon street tires. Armstrong coil spring wrapped hydraulic shocks (suspension units) are the sole means of suspending the front end. A Race Car Enterprises steering wheel guides the front end action through a Saginaw steering unit.

A fiberglass bucket seat is set into the flooring, ala dragster, with the shifting being accomplished through a pushbutton console mounted to the right of the wheel. The only instruments utilized are a Sun tachometer and Stewart-Warner oil pressure and water temp gauges. These are mounted atop a dashless firewall. Suspended above the driver's head, attached to the roll cage, are two D-rings that activate twin 9-foot diameter Simpson drag parachutes, which are mounted on a panel on the rear deck. Simpson also made up the driver harness and lap belt for the car.

Nestled below the fiberglass and aluminum front end assembly, which hinges forward to allow the team to perform maintenance on the engine without damage to body panels or paint,

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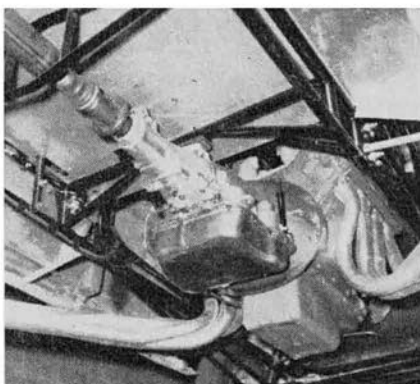
Long respected as "the team to beat" when it came to match racing, the Ramchargers are now going to be rougher than ever.



Anxious to get their new '66 Dart on the strip for a series of match races already booked, the Ramchargers had their car on the track for test runs before anything was painted. Once they felt the chassis functioned as designed, the entire assembly was stripped down for final painting.

Photos by Bud Lang, L. B. Pennington

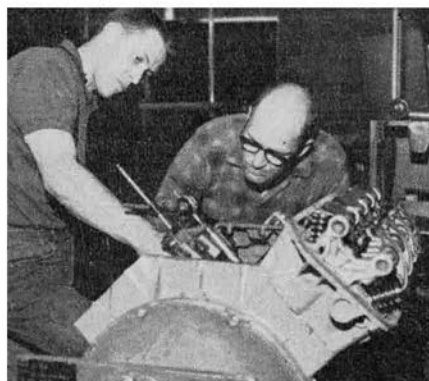
At right Jim Thornton, president of the Ramchargers group and driver of the FX Dart, checks angle on a suspension shock to determine height requirements for its mount. During early construction stages car was just a skeleton under the 'glass body shell. Once all the panels were installed, things really began to look good.



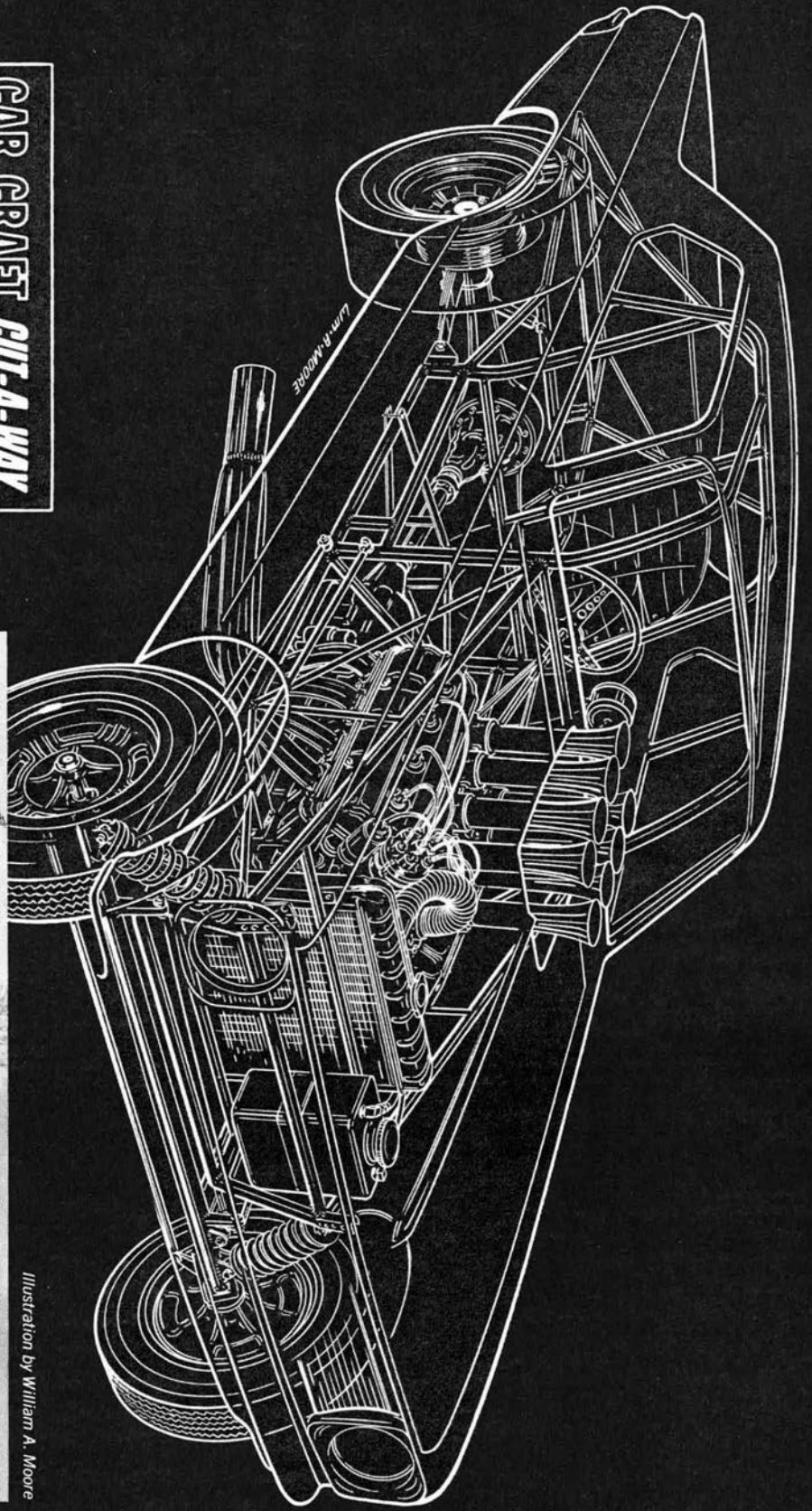
The Torqueflite transmission "hangs" from the frame by an upper support. Headers by Stahl swing out into single collectors.



A day at the drags is as much a team effort as building the car. Whether plugs, tires, springs or gears need changing, a Ramcharger member is there to do the job. Left — Open the right door and it's like an aluminum room. Only necessary goodies are evident; push-button console, steering unit, gauges, throttle and foot brake.



Dick Jones and Tom Hoover work on 426" engine destined for the new '66 Dart. Of stock displacement, these Hemi's are tuff.



**CAR GRAFT
CUT-A-WAY**

The famed Ramchargers Maximum Performance Corporation in Ferndale, Michigan plan to continue their winning ways with an all-new fiberglass bodied 1966 Dodge Dart. Based on a complete tubular frame and roll cage assembly by Woody Gilmore, this beautiful Candy Apple Red and White FX'er is one of the finest match race cars in competition. Power is provided by an Isky cammed 426 cubic inch Dodge Hemi engine, topped off with a Hilborn fuel injection system.

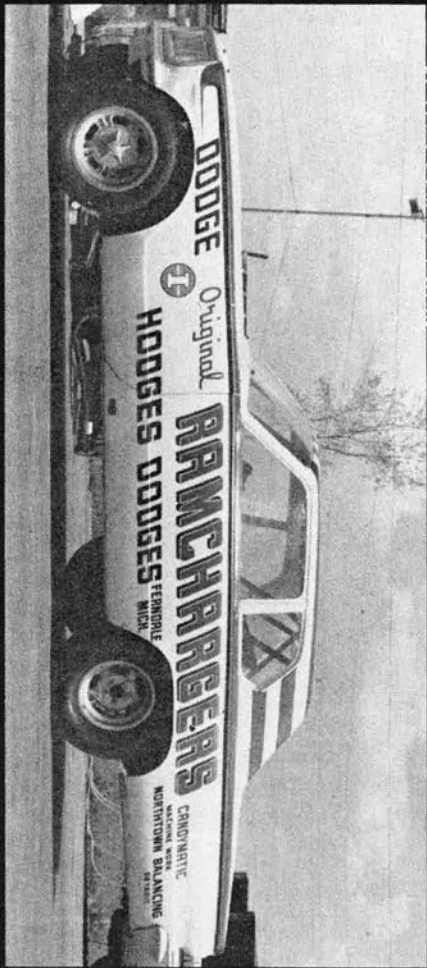


Illustration by William A. Moore

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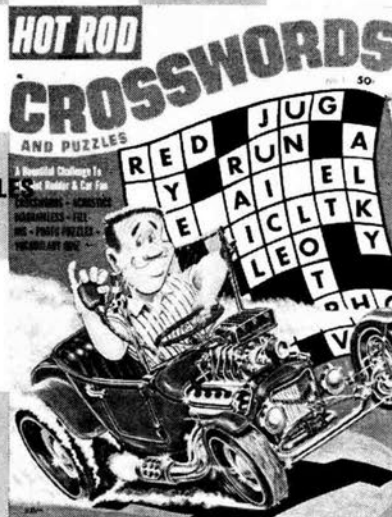
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is a highly tuned 426 cubic inch Dodge hemi engine. A Hilborn injection system equipped with lengthy ram tubes is the first thing to catch your eye. Those eight big stacks work hand-in-hand with an Iskenderian 550 Super LeGerra flat-tappet camshaft of 330 degrees duration in feeding fuel/air to a few hundred hungry horses. Pistons and rods are both stock, though the valve train components are also by Isky. Ignition system used on the Chargers engine is a "Mallory Super Mag," which provides sufficient voltage at high engine RPM. Caring for exhausting of the gases is a set of Stahl headers. Aluminum cylinder heads sport a "competition" valve job, though the ports and passages have only been cleaned up a bit. The oil pan holds seven quarts of oil. All machine work involved in the engine was performed by Pat McCarroll of Northtown Balancing in Detroit. Unlike many funny cars and FX'ers, the Rams radiator is of full capacity. Mounted adjacent to it is a home-made aluminum fuel tank.

The versatile Ramcharger group thinks and acts as one — and everyone involved is a jack-of-all-trades. They are all specialists in their separate positions at Chrysler, but when it comes to automobiles and getting the most of them, that's where individuality ends and teamwork takes the wheel. Each man can build up and tear down a car and nearly all of its component parts, down to the minutest detail. Though each is a white-collar worker during his regular eight-hour shift, you'll see all of them in denim and T-shirts during their "night" shifts and week-ends at the Ramcharger garage. What drives the Ramchargers — the driver, mechanics and technicians (who are virtually all graduate engineers, and most with masters degrees) — is the desire to see their car and company win. With spirit like that, and the accompanying know-how, it's no wonder that the Ramchargers have stuck together over the years, producing one winner after another. Since this newest of the Candymatics was completed right at our deadline, with only a few test runs being made to check out the car's handling, we won't be able to present any performance figures. By the time you're reading this article, however, the car will have appeared at a number of strips and no doubt will have already changed the record books — and brought new consternation to other FX'ers either downed by the Rams new Dodge, or by the fact they have yet to face it in competition. We're not laying odds one way or another, but we're sure this one isn't going to be second best to anybody on even terms.

