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There is one Chevrolet sales and racing group, however, that likes to field very competitive G.M. vehicles. Chicago's Nickey Chevrolet recognizes that sales increase when factory cars are seen running in open competition. Nickey has long been associated with automobile racing, having sponsored a variety of Corvette and Chev-powered sports cars for the past ten years and currently sponsors a pair of Chevy Vinegaroons (a much modified MK 10B Genie sports-racing cars) owned by "Bonanza's" Dan Blocker. Nickey sponsorship also backs match racer Dickie Harrell and the Colson & Wood gas dragster on the nation's drag strips.

With interest in drag racing reaching mammoth proportions, Nickey's Chevrolet recognized the potential market involved and added a complete array of high performance drag racing merchandise to their 20,000 square foot parts area. This addition brought their total parts to more than 140,000 items in stock, ready for any customer whether he was interested in racing or just keeping his stocker running as efficiently as possible.

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The first Camaro had hardly slipped off the transport at the Nickey lot before Dick Harrell, the AHRA professional stock car points champion from Carlsbad, N.M., and now Performance Advisor at Nickey's, and parts manager Ken White got busy measuring the engine compartment. The new 350 cubic inch,

# 427 Camaro



## Nickey Chevrolet and Bill Thomas Race Cars combine to produce the wildest Camaro ever by dropping Chevrolet's biggest engine into the new GM featherweight.



**LEFT ABOVE** — Until Nickey made their 427 Camaro available, the 350 cubic incher was Camaro's biggest engine option. Based on the 283 block, the 350 left a lot of space for changes.

**LEFT** — All ready for a customer, the 427 fits neatly in place of the 350 engine. Simple change jumped horsepower from 295 to 435, adding only 90 pounds. Snorkle was chopped for clearance.



**ABOVE LEFT** — Mike Terrafino installs the big Holly on newly arrived 427 while "old" 350 awaits return to parts warehouse. No internal carb changes were made.

**ABOVE** — Nickey Performance Advisor, Dick Harrell, watches Lou Anzelmo and Terrafino as they shift the 427 into place. Harrell coordinates conversion program.

295 horsepower "SS" engine was nice but it still wasn't the largest powerplant in the Chevy warehouse, so the crew at Nickey's was looking for something more.

To the racers at Nickey's, the Camaro was a natural. It was the same general size as the Corvair with just the right location of axles and engine to make it a hit as a quarter-mile sprinter. The combination was there, so why not drop in the biggest 427 cubic inch mill, one that would put out 435 horsepower in its factory trim? Here could be a car equally at home on the street or strip.

If the 350 engine could be swapped for the 427 with a minimum of problem by using stock parts, Harrell felt that this would be the answer to what the Chevy hot rodders wanted. They might even cause a few desertions from other camps.

Harrell found that by removing the hood, battery, radiator and 350 engine, the 427 assembly slipped right in, even to the exact matching of the engine mounts. No cutting, no bending, no welding in the engine compartment. Pretty slick!

Finding that the 427 would fit the engine compartment, Harrell got busy determining the type of car they could build for a customer and possibly keep it eligible to compete in a drag racing stock car class. Although the National Hot Rod Association doesn't classify anything built outside the basic factory as being stock, the American Hot Rod Association decided that there should be a place in its new Super Stock class for a Chevrolet product. With both Ford and MoPar planning hot engines for their sports-personal cars, General Motors would be clear out of the picture with their challenger limited to under 400 cubic inches. In view of Nickey's planned production, it was determined that Nickey-built 427 Camaros would be eligible for AHRA Super Stock competition. At this writing, these are the only 427 Camaros that will be allowed to run as a stocker.

To meet AHRA's new Super Stock class requirements, the car must have over 400 cubic inches, be stock bore and stroke, weigh a minimum of 3250 pounds, have an unaltered wheel-

base, no engine relocation, run pump gasoline and have no lightweight components other than the hood. It sounds like a good class and should create a lot of excitement.

Looking over the available options and combinations offered by Chevrolet for the Camaro line, Harrell and White discovered that the SS 350 Camaro with heavy duty suspension and radiator, metallic brakes, four-speed Muncie transmission, posi-traction and red stripe tires would be the most economical beginning for a high performance combination street/drag machine. By making the engine swap before the customer took delivery, Nickey would be able to provide the customer with warranties as well as giving them the benefit of using the discarded 350 engine and other non-used items to help reduce parts and installation charges.

The heavy duty suspension includes stiffer front and rear springs, plus a front stabilizer to eliminate high speed cornering sway. With the larger, hard-running 427, Harrell felt the cooling capabilities should be increased so the optional air conditioning radiator, with its extra row of cooling tubes, was installed. The wide ratio Muncie four-speed provides ratios of 3.00:1 in first, 2.20:1 in second, 1.47:1 in third and 1:1 in fourth. For only \$10 more you can have ratios of 2.54:1, 1.80:1, 1.44:1 and 1:1; first through fourth. And for those who prefer the automatic, the standard or super-duty Turbo-Hydratics are available.

Posi-traction axle ratios are available in 3.31, 3.70, 4.10 and 4.56:1, giving the customer a complete variety of gears to cover his requirements for street, the drags, or both. Provided the Camaro is in stock with the ratio desired by the customer, there is no additional charge for any gear combination. If the ring and pinion must be changed, only a labor charge is added.

Chevrolet offers a pair of "427" blocks. The 427 cubic inch, 385 horsepower "economy" engine which comes with hydraulic lifters, 10.25:1 compression ratio and a cast iron intake manifold, and the 425 horsepower mill. Wanting to provide the

(continued on following page)

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*(continued on following page)*

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ultimate in performance and reliability, Harrell chose the generally beefier construction of the 425 horsepower version, which features extra strong four bolt mains and full 360 degree oiling of the rod journals.

Standard with the engine is a solid lifter camshaft with a .517 lift, but a high performance version with hydraulic cam and lifters, providing a quieter, smoother running engine, is available for street use. Other good stuff inside includes forged steel rods, 11:1 compression heads and an aluminum intake manifold which Harrell outfits with a four-barrel Holley (No. 3886091) in place of the factory installed Rochester. By replacing the single four-barrel manifold and Holly with a trio of two-barrels on a hi-riser manifold, an extra ten horsepower can be gained.

To go a step further, a boost to 450 horsepower is obtained with an exclusive Nickey manifold holding two high performance Carter AFB four barrel carbs. Only problem here is that the stock hood won't close. But don't worry, Harrell and White have an answer for that. They have a competition scooped (ala 'Vette) fiberglass hood that fits over the multiple carburetor installations. If you're interested in saving weight, but want the hood to appear stock, Nickey can also provide you with a lightweight 'glass one for the regular carburetion set-ups.

The length of the "427" was the only major difference when compared to the "350." It extends two inches toward the front, ahead of the leading engine mounts.

By attaching the fan directly to the water pump pulley instead of using the spacer of the "350" engine, the fan mounts at the proper location in the shroud. An extra 90 pounds is added over the front suspension by the 427. To decrease weight, plus adding to the overall efficiency of the engine, the stock cast iron exhaust manifold can be replaced with Bill Thomas designed and built headers. When installed at the time of the swap, there is no additional labor charge for these headers as head pipes connected from the exhaust manifolds to the pipe must be made up anyway. The left stock manifold is actually the only engine component that has to be altered when making the switch. By grinding 1/16 inch off the No. 5 exhaust header and a 45-degree angle on the upper inner edge of the steering box casting, they will just clear. That's the extent of the engine compartment modification.

What about installing a 427 yourself? There's nothing to keep you from it. Only problem is, you won't be allowed to compete in the stock classes — you'll go into Modified Production, Gas or Factory Experimental classes, depending upon which association you compete within. If you only drive it on the street, no problem.

Nickey can supply you with a complete kit, depending on whether you install a 427 right out of a crate or one from a wrecking yard. With a wrecking yard engine, the only parts needed would be the two head pipes connecting the exhaust manifold to the exhaust pipe. This is the only place where welding is needed. The complete swap, except for the head pipes, is a simple bolt in operation. All wearing components are stock Chevy items, no more long distance calls or writing for parts.

It is necessary to use a few of the 350 clutch components with the 427 clutch. In order for the Camaro clutch linkage to work, the clutch fork pivot ball, clutch release bearing, clutch fork and rubber dust cover must be replaced by the 350's corresponding parts. With the engine out and while transposing the clutch parts, Harrell drills a one-eighth inch hole in the top of the left frame motor mount pad for the clutch return

spring. Once the engine is in, it's a bit awkward drilling from underneath the car.

The added weight of the 427 lowers the front of the Camaro approximately one inch. To bring it back to stock height, Harrell installs air conditioning spacers under the front coils. By ordering the car with heavy duty suspension the stiffer springs are strong enough to handle the additional weight so that no other alterations are needed.

Recalling the rear axle wrap-up discovered in our Camaro SS Road Test (December CC), we were curious to see how Harrell overcame the mono-leaf problem. He found that by slightly modifying the Chevy II traction bars, by cutting off the Chevy II shock absorber bolt and replacing it with a 7/16 inch bolt in a new location, he could completely eliminate any wheel hop off the line. The shock then mounts ahead of the bracket, keeping it in the stock location.

The Nickey traction bar replaces the spring plate which attaches the spring and shock absorber to the axle housing and extends forward, stopping just behind the spring hanger. Here it clamps to the spring leaf rather than to the body. Mounted this way, the spring wrap-up is completely eliminated without changing the ride characteristics.

The distributor is the only part to get the super tune. Every-  
*(continued on page 72)*



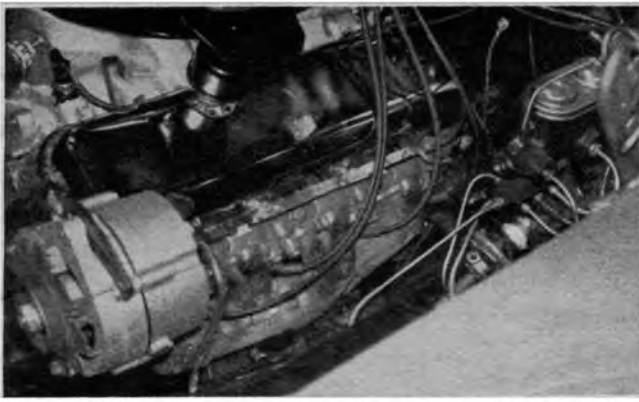
*The 427 exhaust manifold and 350 head pipe have nothing in common, meaning the head pipe must go. Clearance around bottom of engine leaves lots of space for steering linkage to move.*



*Right side of engine shows an even wider gap between exhaust manifold and head pipe. Muffler of Chicago, make up one piece, Nickey has Ced's new tube to splice into system. The 350 starter is used on 427.*



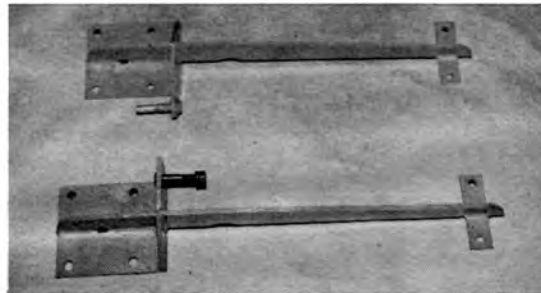
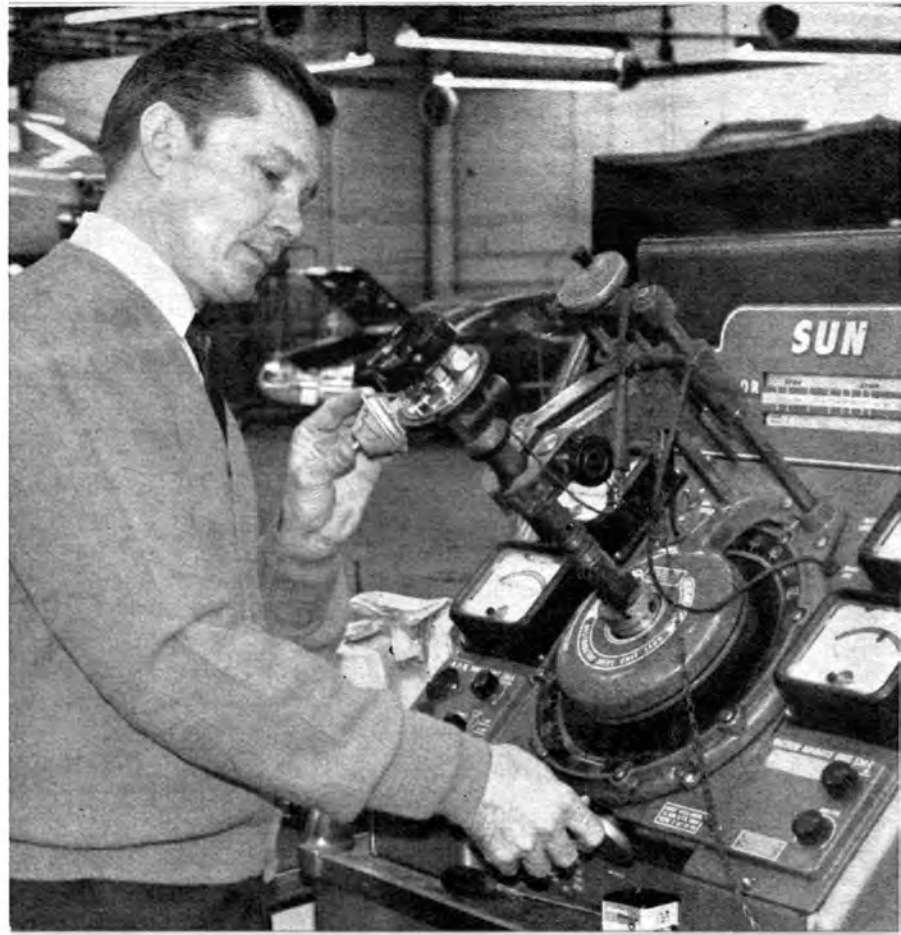
*New section of head pipe is slipped over stock tubing and tack welded; then taken loose for finish welding. Left pipe is designed to allow oil filter to remain in original position.*



Man...like that's a close fit! Although it looks like steering box and manifold touch, there is a 1/16th-inch clearance between the two. Engine torque will pull them farther apart.



ABOVE — Additional 90 pounds of engine caused front of car to drop one inch. Air conditioner spacer is installed under the front coil springs to bring the Camaro back to the stock height. RIGHT — Harrell modifies the single point 427 distributor by installing heavy duty points with their greater spring tension. Advance curve is adjusted for each car's specific use.



ABOVE—Chevy II traction bars are stocked by speed shops and are a must on the Camaro. The lower unit was converted by shifting the shock mounting bolt. LEFT — Number five exhaust manifold header is the only engine component to feel the grinder. Heavy casting easily gives up 1/16th-inch with no ill effects. RIGHT — Steering box gets corresponding "narrowing" by having its upper right corner ground to 45 degrees. That's all that is needed to stop the rattles.



Converted Chevy II traction bars mount in place of the spring plate which attaches the spring and shock absorber to the axle housing. The bars are switched, the right being used on the left and vice versa on the Camaro. That little piece of rubber weather stripping (arrow) is worth an additional 500 rpm. By using 396 distributor weights and six cylinder Chevrolet springs, Harrell can run the 427 distributor to 8000 rpm without misfire.



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thing else on the engine is left completely stock. Rather than go to dual points, Harrell prefers to modify the standard single point 427 distributor by first brazing the vacuum advance linkage to the breaker plate, making it inoperable, and removing any wobble. The standard breaker points are replaced with heavy duty points (No. 1966294) which have a .020-inch thick spring compared to the regular .015-inch spring. Although both are stamped with the same part number the difference can be felt by depressing the breaker points against their spring tension. Harrell uses distributor weight springs designed for six cylinder distributors in conjunction with the regular distributor weights for the 390. He has found this combination will fire accurately up to 7500 rpm. All that is needed to pick up an additional 500 rpm is a piece of foam rubber weather stripping wedged between the floating point and its connector. Harrell then adjusts the advance curve for the type of driving for which the car will be used — drags or street.

For an engine break-in oil, Harrell suggests 20 or 30 SAE Valvoline racing oil combined with one quart of Bardahl. Contrary to popular belief, he has found that the 427's are set up with pretty close tolerances and should accidental overheating occur, there is a good chance of the cylinder walls and pistons getting scuffed. Bardahl has been found to help prevent any scuffing so it's a must for Harrell's super engine.

With all that happiness under the hood, naturally we could hardly wait to give the 427 Camaro a try. On cold mornings it started right up with the automatic choked Holly functioning perfectly. After a short warm up (outside temperature was near 30 degrees during our stay in Chicago), we blasted off down the street. Let me tell you, troops, *that* was an experience!

Almost no foot pressure was necessary to literally paste you to the back of the seat and the engine worked smooth and effortlessly in moving the Camaro through the gears. It's hard to beat the smooth potency of the large displacement stock engine. The manual steering felt completely unaffected by the added 90 pounds of the 427 and had the quick response of a race car, really unbelievable when compared to the production line Camaro.

While the steering was quick and responsive, the suspension seemed just the opposite, giving quick hard jabs as we bounced down a very rough Chicago side street. Unless you live in an area where super-smooth streets are standard equipment, you might find the heavy duty suspension more "heavy duty"


than you bargained for. If it's race car suspension you like, then buddy, this is it.

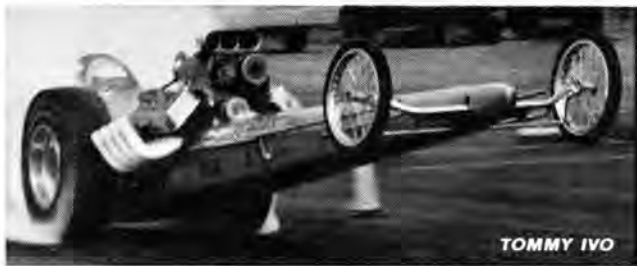
In the corners you had that glued-in feeling, with the Camaro going into them flat and stable with no sway. A little gas and it pulled right through, handling every bit like a racing car rather than a street sedan. There's no doubt about it, that heavy duty suspension really holds the car. The 427 Camaro as a gymkhana machine should be pretty wild.

Not only do the traction bars tie down the rearend on acceleration, but they completely eliminate all bounce when you make a panic stop. The Mono-plate single leaf springs lets the axle housing bounce to a point where it becomes difficult to keep the nose aimed straight. The combination of the metallic brakes and traction bars bring the 427 to an immediate stop in a straight line.

At the strip it was everything you could ask for. Smooth, hard grabbing starts and wailin' runs like an arrow. Several combinations were tried at the Great Lakes Dragway at Union Grove, Illinois, where, in street trim and with muffled exhaust but with the addition of eight-inch M&H slicks on 15x5 rims and 4.56 gears, the Camaro turned in a 11.90 e.t. at 114 mph. This was with the four-barrel Holly carburetor and close ratio four-speed transmission. Changing the single Holly for two Quadrajet carburetors boosted the time to 126 mph in 11.4 seconds.

The potential of this combination seems almost unlimited, leaving a lot of room for experimentation. In street trim the Camaro is a wild, going concern and on the strip it will keep you right in the thick of the competition.

To give you, the customer, even better and faster service, Nickey has recently established Bill Thomas Race Cars in Anaheim, California, as their associate on the West Coast. Thomas will carry the complete Nickey high performance parts line, as well as build 427 Camaros for Western enthusiasts. Like the 427's built in Chicago, the Thomas built cars will carry the Nickey nameplate and will be classified as stock by AHRA. 



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