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# TRENDSETTING MUSCLE!

Fifteen muscle cars from the Las Vegas SEMA Show that you'll want to watch in 2013.



By Christopher Campbell

Photography by Robert McGaffin & Johnny Hunkins • Lead photo by Wes Allison

They say what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas. When it comes to the SEMA show however, nothing could be further from the truth. Every year in early November, the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) holds its annual trade show in Las Vegas at the Las Vegas Convention Center—the crossroads when it comes to all things performance and automotive aftermarket. Vendors, buyers, and automotive media occupy this jewel in the desert for an entire week, catching up on what's hot for the coming year. To show off their wares, companies entice the best car builders with the most creative chops to display their masterpieces under the spotlight. It is indeed a spectacle like no other, and in spite of SEMA being a trade-only affair, you can't blame us or

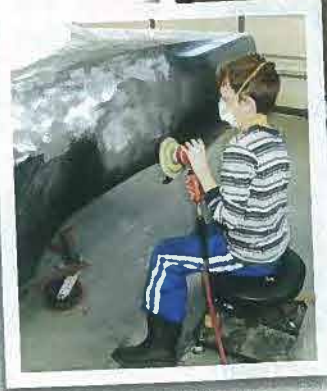
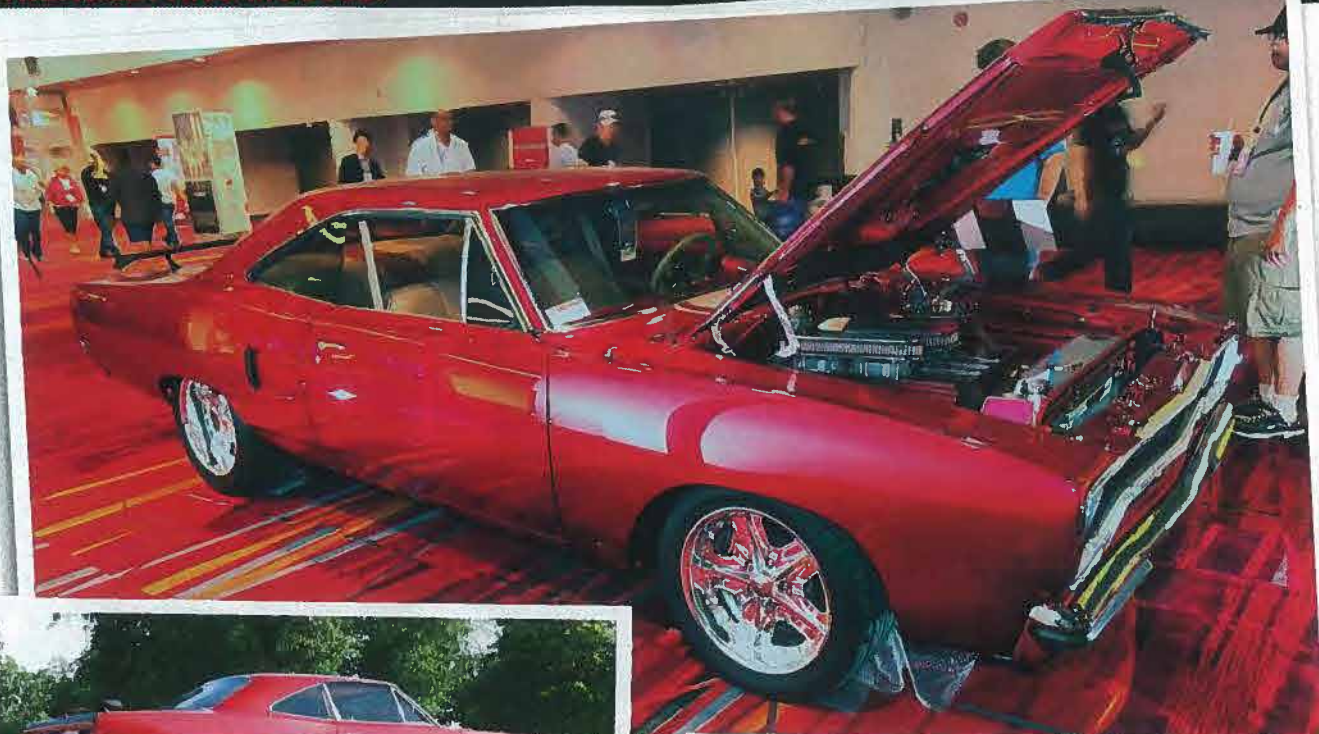
anyone else for telling the world. Nope, the secrets of SEMA are not stayin' in Vegas!

Right smack dab in this trifecta of manufacturers, retailers, and media is a richly diverse group of cars and builders—many of them who specialize in crafting classic muscle machinery. Competition for the limited floor space is fierce, particularly in “hot rod alley,” and shops negotiate with vendors all year long to secure one of those elusive spots. You can bet your bottom dollar that if a car is displayed on the SEMA floor, it is either the best of its breed or a unique animal unto itself.

While high-profile national car shows certainly attract their share of top cars, none of them can quite equal the allure and prestige of being

in the SEMA show. As builders try to outdo each other—as well as their own attempts from previous years—it supercharges the evolution of the breed. Where it comes to emerging car-building trends, the SEMA show floor has no equal in the car show world. It is the place where new hot rodding ideas are born, realized, and refined.

These 15 cars (as well as those found in “The Best of the Rest” on p. 46) represent the best of what you'll be seeing on the circuit in 2013, and we found them all on the SEMA floor. Some are refinements or combinations of existing build styles, while others strike out on their own. Some have styles that will flourish and mature, while others will be a flash in the pan. All of these cars, however, are worthy of being called the best of 2013!



**“BAD BIRD”**

1970 Plymouth Road Runner

**BUILDER:** Rooster’s Rod Shop

**TREND:** High-end garage projects

Historically, garage builds instantly indicated that the car was a more basic and budget-oriented project that you wouldn’t expect to find entered into shows competing with the big boys from big-name shops. Those days are quickly fading away. When Bob Bertelsen’s gorgeous ’71 Camaro entered in our Muscle Car of the Year competition (as well as his previous Firebird known as Code Red) that was the first time we remember thinking the distinction had officially been dissolved. Now what we’re seeing is an evolution of that into super high-end father/son garage builds. The stated mission of this candy red ’70 Plymouth Road Runner from Dennis Rostenbach was to “...allow me to work closely with my 9-year-old son and to pass on the knowledge that I have learned over the years.” There was no cheating either; Rostenbach wanted to show his son that he could learn to do everything end-to-end, so the entire car, including chassis, driveline, paint and body, and interior was completed by the two of them. We can’t imagine a better bonding or learning experience for a young, budding hot rodder. The finished Road Runner was not only on display at SEMA with the best of the best, it caught our eye as one of our favorite cars of the show. That’s saying quite a bit considering the hundreds of cars we spent the week salivating over.

**BY THE NUMBERS**

- Engine:**...6.1L Gen III Hemi with an Imagine Injection system controlled by a FAST XFI ECU, 550 hp
- Trans:** .....4L60E with bellhousing adapter to fit behind the Hemi
- Rearend:** .....Ford 9-inch with 4.10 gears
- Suspension/Chassis:** Reilly Motorsports AlterKation suspension with 1 1/16-inch sway bar and with Viking double-adjustable shocks in front, Reilly Motorsports Street Lynx triangulated four-link rear with Viking double-adjustable shocks in the rear
- Brakes:**.....Wilwood disc, front and rear
- Wheels & Tires:** ..... 17x8 and 10x10.5 Foose Knights with 245/45R17 and 295/45R18 Nitto tires
- Contact:** ..... Rooster’s Rod Shop; 864-487-2238

**“Rostenbach wanted to show his son that he could learn to do everything end-to-end, so the entire car ... was completed by the two of them.”**