



Wheelin' around



by Charlie Moore

The era of the big-engined super car has drawn to a close. The big-mother "Six-Packs", "Boss 429's", "GTOs" and all the other big V8 asphalt scorers are a thing of the past except in name. If you find this hard to believe, drop down to your favourite friendly dealer's showroom and check the option books for performance options. For example, on the 1972 Plymouth Barracuda, none of the options of the big monster V8's like the 426 HEMI, the 440 Six Pack, or even the 383 are still available. The 340 is still offered but it has been watered down into a gutless slug by the substitution of cylinder heads and manifold from the 360 family sedan engine. If you want a car with tire-frying torque and snap-your-neck acceleration this year, you had better start combing the used car lots.

The biggest single factor in the demise of the super-car was rising insurance costs. The price of insurance on these monsters has skyrocketed in the past couple of years and has made owning one prohibitively expensive. The smog n' safety mania has also put these cars into a bad perspective.

Another big reason behind it all is that bad taste cars have come of age. The freaks are into bad-taste automobiles, and when the freaks get into something the rest of us, whether we like it or not, cannot be far behind. Clapped-out Volkswagens, 1958 Monarch station wagons, Studebaker Land Cruisers and beat-up delivery vans that look like refugees from a demolition derby are the "in-wheels" today. The only guys who are still buying Detroit's gaudy

winged wonders are squares who still wear brush-cuts and skinny ties.

The whole bad-taste car thing is a jumble of anti-materialism and economics. The youth of 1972 is not off cars, they are off conventional new cars. The day has come when a 1961 Plymouth Savoy 4-door with a slant six and push-button automatic is so much more "in" than a 1970 "Super B Six Pack", that you wouldn't believe it.

The only new cars that are still "in" are pick-up and panel trucks, vans, jeeps, and super-stark functional little sedans like the Renault 4 or the Austin Mini. In-people who still want performance cars are buying small sports sedans like the Mercury Capri, Vega GT, Toyota Celica, or Mazda R100s and RX2s. In my opinion the Mazdas with their Wankel engines are harbingers of things to come in the performance car world. Wankels put out large

amounts of horsepower in relation to their size and are more easily adapted to the stiffer anti-smog regulations that are to come than con-

ventional internal combustion engines.

General Motors has recently bought a licence to manufacture Wankel engines and there are

rumors that the next Corvette will have a rear-mounted Wankel. But that's another story. Till next week, Keep a' wheelin'.

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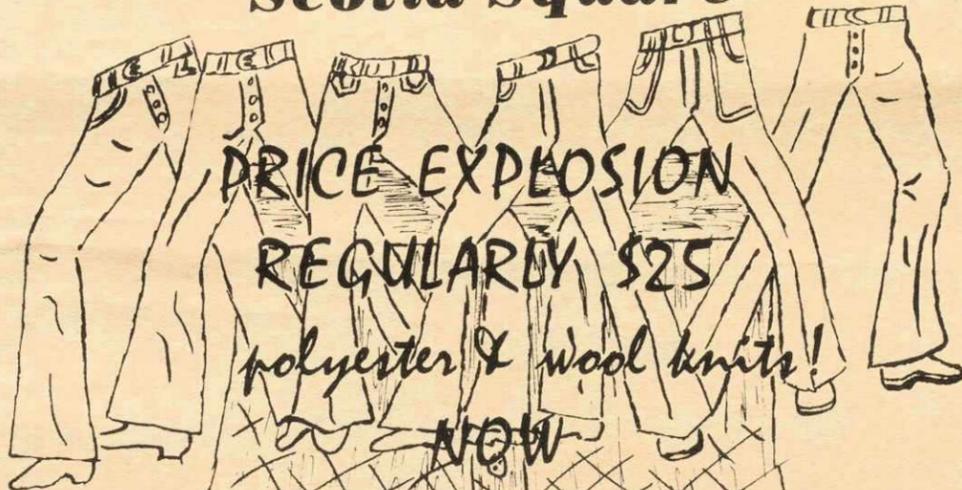
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