

1967 Chevrolet Stage III NICKEY Camaro

To those not familiar with the documented, dealer-converted supercar market, \$446,250 would appear to be a staggering amount for a lowly Camaro

by Colin Comer



Photos: David Newhardt

Chassis number: 124377N184950

Nickey Chevrolet of Chicago was one of the largest Chevy dealers in America and had big plans for Chevrolet's new pony car in 1967. Working with legendary Chevrolet engine builder Bill Thomas in California, Nickey developed a plan to install the potent 427-ci Corvette engines into the Camaro in late 1966.

Bill Thomas Engineering would convert the cars to be sold in the West and famous drag racer Dick Harrell was brought in to kick off the program in Chicago. It's widely accepted that Nickey was the first to bring this conversion to reality.

The opportunity to purchase a Nickey Camaro comes along perhaps once every decade. Considered by many to be the best known 1967 Stage III Nickey Camaro to exist, this car is one of an estimated 14 Nickey 427 Camaros built in 1967, but one of only three to receive the 427-ci, 435-hp, L89 aluminum head, Tri-Power engine. It is the only car built in the color Tahoe Turquoise.

This car has been featured in numerous magazines and books, including *Chevy SS: 50 Years of Super Sport*, *Camaro, Forty Years*, and the recently released *American Muscle Supercars*. The car was submitted just once for judging at the 1997 Camaro National Show, where it was awarded both Best of Show and Top Gun awards. Finally, the car was selected as the subject of a Lane Collectibles "Exact Detail" diecast model.

SCM Analysis This Nickey Camaro sold for \$446,250, including buyer's premium, at the Mecum Fall High Performance auction in St. Charles, Illinois, on October 5, 2008.

To those not familiar with the documented dealer-converted muscle supercar market, this would appear to

be a staggering amount for a lowly Camaro. In reality, however, it is the cost of entry to this exclusive club.

A cottage industry of dealer-built supercars

In 1967, Chevrolet's new Camaro spawned an entire cottage industry of dealer-built "supercars." Back when the world was smaller, supercar buyers usually stayed within their region—the West Coast had Bill Thomas Race Cars, the East Coast had guys like Yenko and Baldwin, and the Midwest had Nickey (with the backwards "K") Chevrolet.

Outside of ads in *Hot Rod* and other magazines, word of mouth and street cred sold these expensive cars to well-heeled or very credit-worthy young buyers. The entire supercar era is legendary, even though it occupied a brief moment in time. In full swing in 1967 and basically dead by the end of 1970, total supercar production, including every dealership for the entire era, is estimated to be below 1,000 cars. The attrition rate was incredibly high among this group, and few have survived.

The Nickey sold at Mecum is one I know quite well, as I used to own it.

In 1994, this Camaro was for sale in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Painted black, it was a project car with a small-block Chevy underhood. Collector Mike Guarise went to look at the car and was unimpressed. The price was \$9,000, and after a cursory inspection, Guarise passed. Unfortunately, he had only seen the side of the car where the "Nickey" fender emblem was missing, not the one that still had one in place.

Shortly thereafter, the car sold to a gentleman who used the original Nickey emblem to reproduce this rare item, examples of which are still being sold today. The car was then sold for \$17,000 to Joe Lukason of Florida,

Details

Years produced: 1967–69
 Number produced: True figure unknown, 100–200 approx.
 SCM Valuation: \$250,000–\$400,000
 Original list price: \$4,800
 Tune-up cost: \$150
 Distributor cap: \$12
 Chassis #: Plate on driver's side door jamb
 Engine #: Pad on passenger side front of block
 Clubs: The Yenko Sports Car Club/The Supercar Registry; The Nickey Registry
 More: www.yenko.net; www.nickeychicago.net; *American Muscle Supercars* by David Newhardt
 Alternatives: 1967–69 Yenko Super Camaro; 1967–69 Baldwin-Motion Camaro; 1969 Chevrolet COPO L72 and COPO ZL1 Camaro
 SCM Investment Grade: A

Comps



1968 Chevrolet Yenko Super Camaro 427
 Lot# S514, s/n 124878N413680
 Condition 2+
 Sold at \$367,500
 Mecum, Belvidere, IL, 5/25/2006
 SCM# 41778



1969 Chevrolet Camaro RS ZL1
 Lot# S99, s/n 134379N641266
 Condition 3+
 Sold at \$800,000
 Mecum, Indianapolis, IN, 05/18/2008
 SCM# 116954



1969 Chevrolet Camaro Yenko S/C
 Lot# 54, s/n 124379N615166
 Condition 1
 Sold at \$247,500
 Worldwide, Seabrook, TX, 04/30/2005
 SCM# 38493

who believed the car to be a legitimate Nickey-converted 427 car, even though no documentation to support this existed.

Restored as a proper Stage III

Lukason had the car restored as a proper 427 Stage III car with an L89 aluminum-head, Tri-Power engine, based on conversations with people who remembered the car as being originally so equipped. Lukason soon advertised the car for sale in Hemmings for around \$150,000. After nearly two years with no takers, he consigned it to

Mecum's Fall Premier sale in November 2000. Against a \$150,000 reserve (that was obviously lowered on the block), I bought the car for \$67,000, deciding to roll the dice and see if I could prove I had a real Nickey-converted 427 car or just a super nice clone worth about \$15,000.

My first step was to obtain a National Insurance Crime Bureau report showing the VIN to see where the car was delivered new. The initial report was not good. This Camaro's original destination was not Nickey Chevrolet in Chicago. Bummer. However, digging deeper, another file number was found referenced on the NICB report. This number showed a subsequent shipping record—perhaps a dealer trade—to Nickey Chevrolet in Chicago. Bingo!

The next step was to find an ex-Nickey employee with original dealership records or knowledge of the car. I was sent to Don Swiatek, the man in charge of the conversions at Nickey in 1967. After a thorough examination,



he verified specific modifications performed during the conversion that only a Nickey mechanic would even know existed. Don signed an affidavit certifying that the car was a legitimate Nickey-converted supercar.

With this verification and the NICB report in hand, I consigned the car to Barrett-Jackson for the January 2001 sale. It was a no-sale at \$100,000, short of my \$125,000 reserve. In March 2001, I traded the Nickey to Mike Guarise for two cars, with an on-paper value of

\$125,000. Yes, the same Guarise who passed on the Camaro at \$9,000 six years prior.

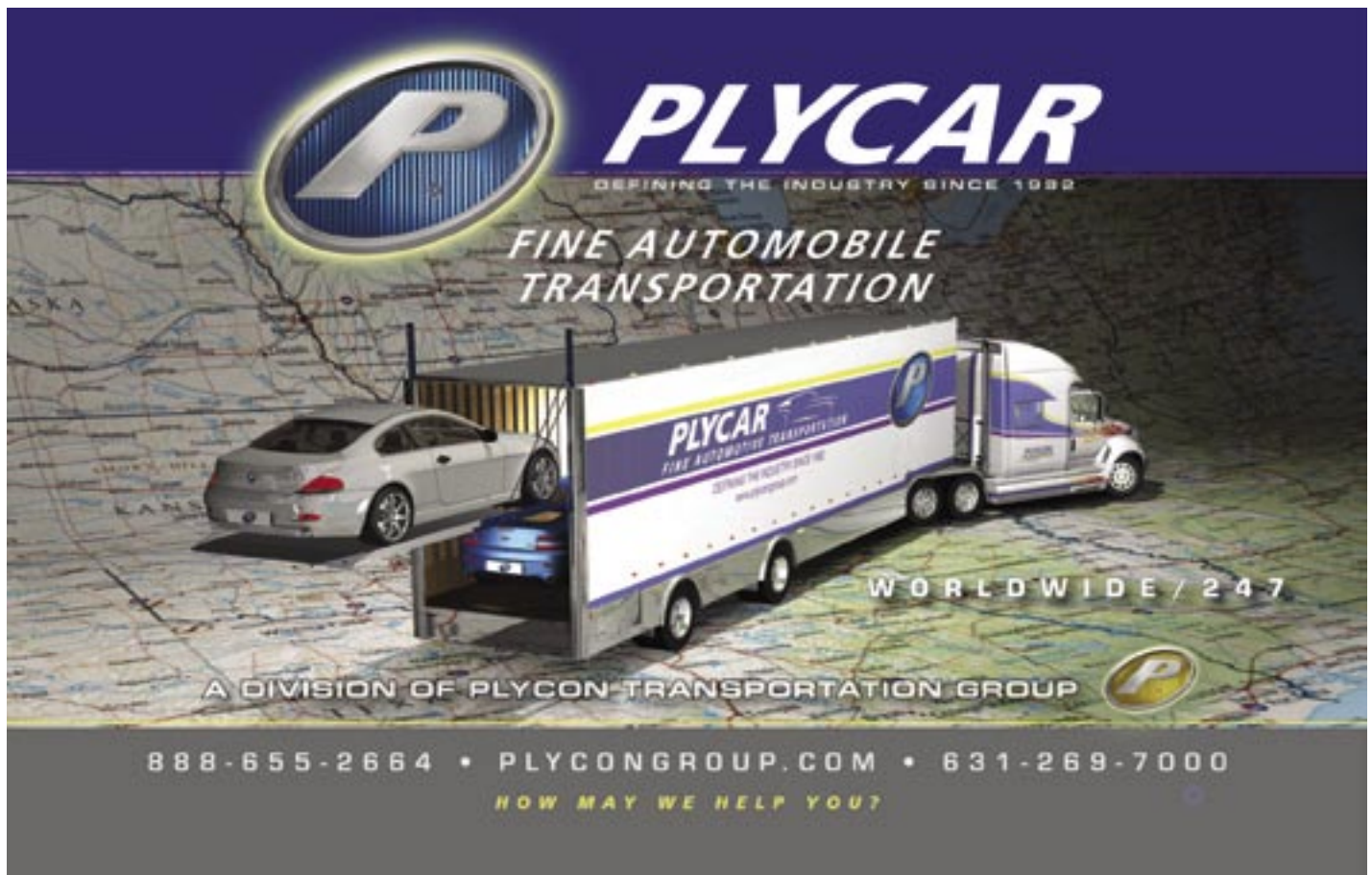
The only Tahoe Turquoise car

Guarise then had another ex-Nickey employee, Dave Delgado, inspect the car for further verification. Delgado remembered the car quite well, verified that it was indeed a 427-ci, L89/Tri-Power car, and recalled that it was the only Tahoe Turquoise car converted. Guarise owned the car until this sale.

While many markets, including collectible cars and especially pedestrian muscle cars, are in a rapid free-fall at the moment, this sale, along with the May 2008 sale of a 1967 Yenko-converted 427 Camaro for \$504,000, is proof that the best cars, and ones that have been out of circulation for a while, can find willing buyers at record prices. This is the highest price for a Nickey supercar to date, and deservedly so.

With fewer than five documented, original Nickey-converted cars of any kind still in existence, they are among the rarest supercars of all. I have a feeling that my 2001 sale of this car to Guarise will not be the last one in this car's history that is looked upon as a very good buy. ♦

(Introductory description courtesy of Mecum.)



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