

1969 Chevrolet Camaro Trans Am Race Car

In spite of its great history, the car was restored as an “East Coaster” with a high-tech small-block and other modern go-fast parts

by Colin Comer



Photos by Pavel Litwinski © 2010 Courtesy of Gooding & Company

Chassis number: 124379N569330

This Camaro is the car that Vince Gimondo drove to a 2nd in class at the 12 Hours of Sebring, 9th overall at Watkins Glen, and 2nd at the American Road Race of Champions (ARRC) at Daytona in the 1969 season.

For 1970, Gimondo drove this car to a 1st in class and 14th overall at the 12 Hours of Sebring; he finished in the top ten in Trans Am events at Lime Rock, Mid-Ohio, and Bridgehampton, placed 11th at Road America, and 21st at Watkins Glen. The following year, he remained competitive, driving to a 1st in class and 11th overall at the 24 Hours of Daytona. After a DNF at Sebring, Gimondo sold the car to Jerry Lipke, who ran it in SCCA SE Division races, finishing 4th in the divisional standings and 6th at the SCCA Nationals at Daytona. Lipke continued to run the car in 1972, selling it in 1973 to Rich Smalls.

Later, the car was converted into a club racer with a big-block engine and was then parked. In 1990, it was advertised as a “possible Sebring racer.” Restoration began in 2001, and then the car was sold again. The new owner sent it to Legendary Motor Car Company, which restored the car to its 1970 Sebring race trim. Legendary incorporated modern technology available to make it competitive in today’s top-level vintage racing series. The Camaro’s 525-hp V8 puts the power down through a custom-made nine-inch rear end and a Tex Transmissions full race gearbox. The work was completed in 2003, and the Camaro was successfully driven by its then-owner in a number of SVRA and HSR events.

A notarized letter from Gimondo testifies to the authenticity of this historic race car, and it possesses a cer-

tificate from the Trans Am Registry. Granted an SVRA Group 6 Medallion, this car is said to be mechanically sorted and eligible to run in a variety of vintage races.

SCM Analysis

This car sold for \$148,500, including buyer’s premium, at Gooding & Company’s Scottsdale Auction in Scottsdale, Arizona, on January 23, 2010.

So is a 41-year-old race Camaro with a seven-year-old restoration really worth as much as a 2010 ZR1 Corvette with a 2010 Camaro SS thrown in for rainy days? Well, on this rainy day in Scottsdale, it was.

Specifics of a vintage Trans Am car

The world of big-bore, production-based vintage race cars is quite vast. However, one of the hottest segments of it is the Historic Trans Am series, a group that strives to compete in era-correct, documented original Trans Am cars from the “golden era” of T/A racing, 1966-72. As posted on the HTA web site:

The intent of the Historic Trans Am Group is to re-create the original Trans Am racing series. Only cars that actually raced in the Trans Am series during those years are eligible to join this group. Proof is required. Every aspect of this re-creation is important. Not only must cars appear as they did in the year of manufacture, they must meet the specifications and rules of the day. Many opportunities exist to modify these cars beyond their original form and many things have been learned by race mechanics over the years. In preparing a car for this series, one must avoid the temptation to upgrade the car. Cars that have been faithfully restored to absolute

Details

Years produced: 1969
 Number produced: 243,085
 Original list price: \$2,624
 SCM Valuation: \$175,000-\$275,000
 Cost per weekend to race: \$4,000
 Distributor cap: \$20
 Chassis #: Tag on driver’s side dashtop
 Engine #: n/a
 Club: Historic Trans Am Group
 More: www.trans-amseries.com
 Alternatives: 1970 Ford Mustang Boss 302 T/A, 1971 AMC Javelin T/A, 1970 Plymouth AAR ‘Cuda T/A
 SCM Investment Grade: B

Comps



1967 Chevrolet Camaro Z/28 Trans Am race car
 Lot 733, s/n 124377N163288
 Condition 2
 Sold at \$324,600
 Barrett-Jackson, Palm Beach, FL, 3/29/2006
 SCM# 41258



1969 Chevrolet Camaro RS/SS NASCAR Pace Car
 Lot F524, s/n 124679N525381
 Condition 2
 Sold at \$258,500
 Russo and Steele, Scottsdale, AZ, 1/15/2009
 SCM# 119214



1969 Chevrolet Camaro Z/28 coupe
 Lot 424, s/n 124379N693672
 Condition 1-
 Sold at \$137,700
 Silver, Reno, NV, 8/2/2008
 SCM# 117752

authenticity will be selected to participate in current Historic Trans Am events.

Many new racing products are available today that were not available when the Trans Am cars were raced. Use of these components to gain a performance advantage is not allowed. The Trans Am period that these cars are from was one of the most exciting race series ever. This Historic Trans Am Group is not trying to improve on it, only to honor it and represent it well.

The HTA group is based on the West Coast, racing at venues like the Rolex Monterey Historics, the Coronado Speed Festival, and the like. The problem with all types of racing lies in the fact that boys will be boys, and they like to go fast and make lots of noise. This has created what are known as "East Coast" cars—big-bore machines that race with the Sportscar Vintage Racing Association, Historic Sportscar Racing, Vintage Sports Car Drivers Association, and other groups. They are cars from the same era that have been preserved, restored, or sometimes even created from lesser cars without significant in-period race history.

This encompasses not just Trans Am cars, but also A/ and B/Production cars, as well as a few other classes. As a result of somewhat loose interpretation (and perhaps policing) of the rulebook, the East Coast gang has "relaxed" their cars to a level of performance simply not obtainable in period. Engines get developed to rev higher and make more power, braking systems use upgraded components, "clutchless" transmissions are the norm, dry-sump engines live where wet-sump ones used to, etc. The end result is much faster cars, ostensibly done in the name of safety or reliability but more for the sheer pucker factor and just good old competition than anything else.

After all, if one guy has 500 hp and is allowed to race, the next race the other 25 cars on the grid will have 500 hp, too. The number of races these cars can compete in during a season is far greater than the HTA group events. In recent years, these other groups have been (thankfully) far more diligent in enforcing the rules of Group 6 cars, and many owner/drivers have actually backdated their cars to get era-correct medallions and



similar accreditations, knowing that the HP wars were getting a little out of hand and far away from the spirit of vintage racing.

Specifics of this Trans Am car

Which leads us to the subject car. Legitimate vintage Trans Am cars, with verifiable race history like this one, are in high demand by the HTA group. When they are restored to period specs, they bring a premium over a car restored to current state-of-the-art vintage race specs, i.e. the East Coast cars. The subject Camaro, in spite of its great T/A history, was restored as an East Coaster with the aforementioned big power, high-tech small-block with dry-sump lubrication, Tex transmission, Ford nine-inch rear axle, modern gauges and steering column, and other items that exclude it from West Coast events by a country mile.

As restored, it would make a great car to continue using in East Coast events where the HTA-legal cars would just get buried in competition, and where they would be unsafe with their era-appropriate safety gear and seating, etc. Personally, I would have restored the car to original under the skin as well as externally. It would have made for a cheaper restoration and a more valuable car in the end—not to mention being a shoo-in for the HTA group, which is a fantastic place to race cars exactly as they did 40 years ago.

Era-correct HTA-legal Camaro Trans Am cars with good history are currently for sale in the \$125k–\$175k range. This car's result of \$148k, while likely below its restoration cost alone, is nonetheless a very strong result for a non-Historic Trans Am group legal car. I would have expected it to sell in the \$100k–\$125k range, just based on its SVRA-spec restoration, and the fact that after seven years it is bound to need some freshening before it hits the track again. The good news is that the new owner can enjoy it in its current configuration for as long as desired, and eventually backdate the mechanicals if he ever gets the itch to race at Monterey. No matter which venue and configuration he may choose, there is really nothing like muscling one of these old warriors around a track in a full four-wheel drift while bellowing out that great V8 soundtrack. I hope to see Vince Gimondo's old mount racing somewhere soon. ♦

(Introductory description courtesy of Gooding & Company.)

