

# Nine Muscle Car Sleepers

You won't see your twin at every show, and you won't believe the performance of these jokers



1970 AMX: Getting a foothold in collector-car circles

**D**uring the past couple of years, muscle-car prices have accelerated as fast as the cars themselves. Boomers are flapping paddles (or waving 64-oz tubs of Coors) at six- and sometimes seven-figure amounts when choice pieces of Detroit Iron cross the block.

Rather than telling me (again) about how you'd like to have back the '69 Z/28 you sold for \$1,500 in 1980 to finance your wedding reception at the Olive Garden, let's look at where the clever buys are in today's muscle-car market.

You can get style, power, nostalgia, and fun by venturing off the beaten path. These overlooked cars offer great value. They won't get you crowned King of Cruise Night at the local drive-in, but some are better packages than their expensive stablemates. Here are my picks under \$40,000.

## 1970 AMX 360 (\$24,000–\$28,000)

From dearly departed American Motors, I have a few favorites. The two-seat 1968–70 AMX is finally gaining respect and value. Having the 390-ci 4-speed car with the factory "Go Pack" option puts you at the top of the (admittedly small) AMC pecking order, but lesser models could still be your admission ticket to the muscle-car world.

Early cars also came with 290

and 343 V8s, and in 1970 the new 360 was available. I'll take the 1970 Ram Air 360, with 4-speed, and dealer-installed Sidewinder side pipes. Ram Air was standard for 1970 and the front suspension was much improved. Be warned: the short-wheelbase AMX can be nearly as tricky as an early Porsche 930 Turbo in inexperienced hands. Each AMX has a numbered dash plaque, but in true AMC style,

there are gaps in the sequence and cars with duplicate number plates are known to have been built by the factory.

**1971-74 JAVELIN AMX  
(\$18,000-\$24,000)**



The styling of the bulbous second-generation Javelin AMX continues to grow on me; as an added bonus, there's a back seat for kids, dogs, or spare parts. The optional 401-ci V8 was the ultimate AMC ground-pounder—and was even crammed into Pacer and Gremlin dragsters.

**1971 HORNET SC/360  
(\$15,000-\$20,000)**



This is my top AMC choice. There were only 794 of these stodgy-looking two-door sedans built, but with a big factory hood scoop, stripe package, and Rally wheels put onto the Hornet, it looks macho. Well, a little macho, anyway. Don't take anything but a correct car with a 4-speed. You won't see your twin at every show, and the guys you race against at the vintage drags won't believe the performance of these little jokers. Plus, you can pick up parts cars for nothing.

**1967 BUICK SKYLARK GS400  
(\$17,000-\$22,000)**



This was the first year of the 400-ci engine with semi-wedge heads. It's a legendary torque

monster. Contemporary road tests pegged these cars at six seconds for 0-60, not bad even by today's standards. Built on the convertible chassis with a boxed frame, heavy-duty suspension and brakes, and quick steering, this solid Buick ride combines great styling and respectable handling. This is a poor man's Chevelle Z-16, for \$200,000 less. The 1968-69 GS400 (\$20,000-\$25,000) is more of the same, with similar performance in a restyled body.

**1966-67 OLDSMOBILE 442  
(\$20,000-\$25,000)**



In a similar vein, the 1966-67 Oldsmobile 442 is a great alternative to better-known later versions. A 350-hp, 400-ci engine lives under the hood, and delivered high-14 second 1/4-mile times when new. Referred to as a "civilized supercar" at the time, it's very capable with a solid feel. Avoid the 1966 two-speed automatic. The 1967 is preferred by the 442 faithful as it had a Turbo 400 three-speed and was gussied up with a washboard hood and other details to separate it from a base Cutlass. Pick of the litter would be a 360-hp, tri-power '66, but you won't find a real one (clones, as with most muscle cars, are only a parts catalog away) in this price range unless you are really lucky.

**1967 PLYMOUTH BELVEDERE GTX/  
DODGE CORONET R/T  
(\$30,000-\$35,000)**



Over at Camp Mopar, top picks are the 1967 Plymouth Belvedere GTX or her plain-Jane sister, the Dodge Coronet R/T. With a stan-

dard 375-hp 440-ci engine, great styling, more scoops than a box of Raisin Bran, competent Mopar torsion bar suspension, and non-offensive (i.e. bland) styling, both of these cars offer tremendous power and, when properly set up, great road manners.

**1968-69 DODGE DART GTS  
(\$22,000-\$28,000)**



Next choice is the 1968-69 Dodge Dart GTS, the Nova Fighter. With clean styling penned by Elwood Engel, this is a potent 3,000-pound package with bullet-proof 340-ci small block or available 383-ci big block motivation (but you'll have to add an extra \$10,000 to the numbers above). As a car that can actually be fun to drive, I recommend a good 340 GTS with a 4-speed. In contrast, the 383- and 440-powered Darts are nose-heavy and braking-impaired (there was no room for power brakes in the crowded engine compartment).

**1967-69 PLYMOUTH  
BARRACUDA FORMULA S  
(\$20,000-\$25,000)**



Plymouth smoothed out the Barracuda nicely for the second generation, and the 1967-69 Plymouth Barracuda Formula S is one of the most attractive muscle cars. Engine choices include 273-ci, 340-ci, and 383-ci V8s, and the same comments apply as with the Dart GTS. Both fastback and coupe body styles were available for Plymouth's fast fish. But a

Barracuda isn't a 'Cuda; that was a late-1969 option package introduced with the 440-ci-equipped Barracuda and the high-performance package on the new-body 1970-74 Barracudas.

**1963-65 FORD FALCON SPRINT  
(\$18,000-\$22,000)**



The 1963-65 Ford Falcon Sprint with 260 ci or 289 ci and a 4-speed is overlooked and underappreciated. Ford relied heavily on these Falcon Sprints to fly the "Ford Total Performance" banner in 1960s international rallies, and they put on a great show in the Monte Carlo Rally. This chassis was the basis for the Mustang and 1965-66 Shelby GT 350 cars so you know it can be made to work well. Few domestic V8s are as free-revving or durable as a Ford small block. A 1965 289-ci 4-speed Falcon Sprint hard top with a set of MiniLite wheels is a performance package that looks better with each passing year. How cool is that?

With any car, I recommend buying the best you can find and making sure you get the real deal. Check the numbers, verify the tags, study the documentation. A great car is a solid investment, a shoddy one is a guaranteed disappointment.

Of course, if you've got the loose cash, go ahead and buy that '69 GTO Judge RA IV or '70 Chevelle LS6 454. However, by taking a slightly different approach and doing some homework, you can put a relatively rare muscle car in your own garage for a surprisingly small amount of money. And guess what—if you take proper care of it, it will never go down in value.♦

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