



Detroit Muscle: Factory Lightweights and Purpose-Built Muscle Cars

Charles Morris

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The muscle car era, and the era that immediately preceded it, are a unique window in time; it is one that we will not likely see again. Post-war USA was a place where people wanted to move on from the horrors of conflict, to embrace an era of peace, and to pursue, well, all sorts of things. A whole generation was entering a new prosperity, with home ownership on the rise, gainful employment increasing, the building of suburbs, and a new interstate system connecting everyone. That all helped increase our dependence upon, and in turn, deepen our love affair with the automobile.

It started in the 1950s, when automakers realized that if they made their cars more powerful than brand X and won races on the weekends as well, sales would follow those victories into the dealership. Not everybody was enamored with all this new-found performance, however, and throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, a struggle developed between building faster automobiles and appearing responsible and promoting the cause of safety. This led to racing participation on an all-out corporate level, followed by voluntary self-imposed and publicized bans, back-door cheating on said bans, and then investing in performance again.

A byproduct of all this activity was some really fascinating and exciting cars. It began with standard-chassis cars growing bigger and including more powerful engines. Then they graduated to being lighter, putting big engines into mid-size chassis (muscle cars), and building race cars that barely resembled anything on the street. *Detroit Muscle: Factory Lightweights and Purpose-Built Muscle Cars* follows the evolution of the fastest, most powerful, and exciting vehicles of the era, in both drag racing and NASCAR. From early Hudson Hornets, to the birth of the Hemi, to aluminum and fiberglass panel sedans, to lightweight special-order muscle cars ready to race from the factory.

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