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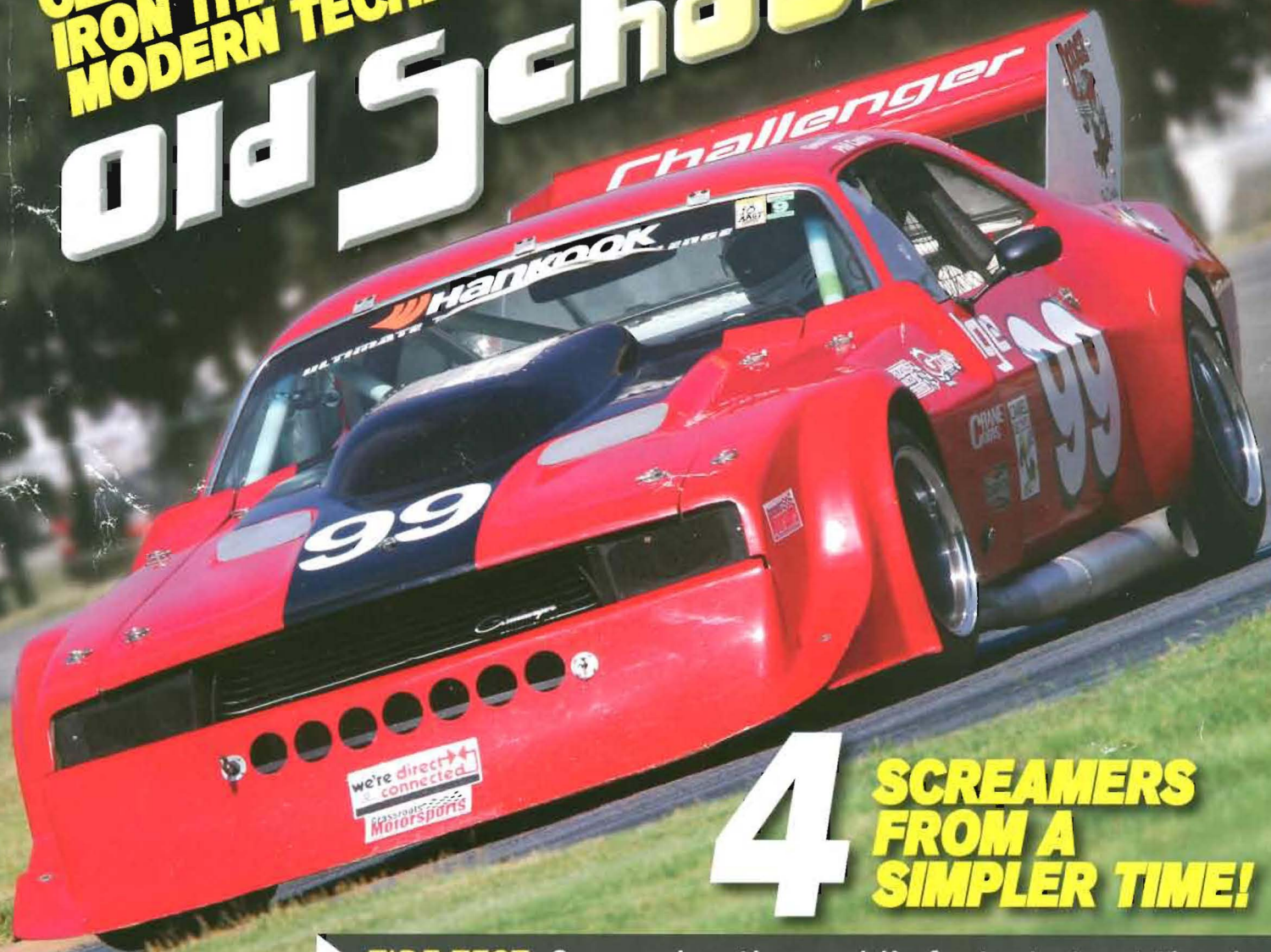
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Mazda MX-5: Building a fast, practical project car.
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On the cover:

Going fast is nothing new. Properly awesome sports cars never go out of style, and this issue features some of the coolest old-school hardware on the streets and out on track. Glenn Bunch's 1974 Dodge Challenger is the perfect example: Shod with bias-ply slicks and packing a monstrous 572-cubic-inch Hemi V8, it beat many modern cars at our 2009 Ultimate Track Car Challenge. Jim Rathbun took our cover shot.



Grassroots Motorsports is the official magazine of the National Auto Sport Association.

HOT PANTS

Proof That the Ford Pinto Can Make a Mean Street Machine

story by mike lovecchio • photos by david s. wallens

The Ford Pinto has been a punch line for decades, and why shouldn't it be? Any car that's as infamous for exploding gas tanks as it is for being photographed wearing airplane wings is bound to incite more than a few snickers.

But like any car, the Pinto has its enthusiasts. For longtime fan Mike Streets, it was a rare and sporty Pinto—one featuring factory-installed stripes and a body kit—that drew him into a half-decade search.

Already a Ford Pinto owner and racer, Mike would occasionally see a vehicle cruising San Leandro, California, that was quite rare, even in Pinto circles: a 1972 Hot Pants edition. This one proved to be elusive.

"I'd never seen a Hot Pants Pinto before," Mike explains. "I heard about them, but I never saw one. All of a sudden I kept seeing this one driving around town. By the time I turned around to try

and catch it or see it to try and follow him home, he'd always be gone."

Hot Pants Pinto? Seriously? Yes, it was a limited-edition run that started in 1972. Essentially, it was a body kit for those wanting to add some sizzle to their Pintos.

Looking to kick it up a notch? At the same time Ford also offered a Boss stripe package—similar to the one that graced countless Mustangs. The two options could be ordered together, although records show that few chose to do so—maybe about 500 total.

Month after month, year after year, Mike chased his white whale to no avail. After not seeing the car for a while and thinking it was either sold or sent to Pinto heaven like many before and after, Mike called off the search.

A Second Chance

Mike has been a Pinto fanatic since 1974, the year he purchased a 1973 wagon.

Many think of the Pinto as a ticking time bomb. Fewer know the car as a safe, capable track platform with a legion of committed fans. Mike Streets's restored example is a rare Hot Pants model, meaning Ford outfitted it with a groovy body kit. The racing stripes came courtesy of the factory Boss option.



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THE PERFECT PINTO: 10 Things to Know Before Going Shopping

Mike Streets has been working with Pintos since they were still available through Ford dealers. He has some tips for those thinking about joining the stable.

1. If you're looking to get a Pinto, search online. fordpinto.com is a great place to start.
2. Ford Pinto production spanned from 1970 through 1980, and many parts—like suspensions, engines and transmissions—can be swapped between different model years.
3. Find out which look you like best. Some prefer the early cars thanks to their smaller bumpers, but the later cars have better parts availability.
4. Many people have grown to hate Pintos, so if you're going to take the plunge, get one that will make you smile every time you drive it.
5. It's amazing how a Pinto can drive with the addition of good shock absorbers and a bigger front anti-roll bar. It's like the car is on rails.
6. Several different Pinto models were available, ranging from the base Runabout coupe to the faux-wood-trimmed Pinto Squire.
7. There are a lot of Pinto race cars still running in oval racing all over the country. Finding speed parts is not a problem.
8. For those seeking maximum performance, here's something to remember: Early Pintos are the lightest.
9. Think this little car is inexpensive to restore? A full restoration job can cost just as much as it would to renew a traditional pony car.
10. We've all heard this fact: Pintos are especially prone to blowing up when hit in the rear. However, according to a paper by Gary T. Schwartz, a UCLA School of Law professor, the Pinto is no more dangerous than similar cars of its day.

This was not destined to be some boring grocery getter, however, as Mike upgraded the shock absorbers and a front anti-roll bar so he could go autocrossing in the Stock-class ranks.

As he saw it, Pintos had the entire package: They looked good, handled well, and could accept more power.

Mike continued to compete in SCCA events across California and eventually purchased a second Pinto for road racing. From 1985 through 1999, he campaigned the car in the Improved Touring ranks.

It wasn't until 2001, after years of hunting, that he spied the elusive Hot Pants Pinto at rest. "I was doing some work in Castro Valley with a friend of mine. I turned down this street and there it was just sitting in this driveway," he explains.

Mike finally had a chance to see the car up close. The chin spoiler, body cladding and rear spoiler further drew his interest—an attraction only a Pinto lover could understand. Mike says that he wanted to purchase the car on the spot, but it wasn't for sale. Acquiring the car wasn't going to be that easy.

"What's It Worth?"

For two years Mike visited the Hot Pants Pinto and chatted with its owner, often inquiring about purchasing the vehicle. Then, in the summer of 2003, his phone rang.

"He called me up and said, 'What do you think it's worth?'" Mike recalls. "I knew it was a Hot Pants Pinto, but I didn't know what it was worth. Finally we negotiated for \$400 and I drove it home."

It was a one-family car originally purchased by the owner's brother and mainly used as a commuter. The Pinto had surface rust and the seats were torn, but there were no major dents or damage. Mike figured it would be a relatively smooth restoration.

With the car finally in his garage, Mike began what would become a yearlong restoration. The seats were reconstructed and returned to the original style—with a little more padding for comfort—while the body received plenty of sanding and paint.

A friend who taught paint and auto body at a local Regional Occupation Program volunteered to take in the car as a project. He matched the paint and got to work.

Along with the cosmetic fixes, Mike made some performance upgrades, too—lessons learned from his autocross and road racing days. He added stiffer springs, Carrera shock absorbers and a pair of Weber side-draft carburetors. The engine was rebuilt with high-compression Venolia pistons, Crower rods and more cam.

I'm a Boss!

After Mike finished the restoration, he got the biggest surprise of all: His Hot Pants Pinto was also a Boss Pinto. Yes, his car was even more awesome than originally believed.



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50th Anniversary



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: As a longtime Pinto fanatic, Mike Streets took this year-long restoration seriously. Under the hood, he added a pair of side-draft Weber carbs and rebuilt the engine with more cam, Venolia pistons and Crower rods. The torn interior was returned to original condition.

A friend of Mike's informed him that the Boss package was responsible for the stripes on the car. "He saw the car after I restored it and was like, 'Wow, I have one just like it,'" Mike explains. "We had always talked, but I never knew his Pinto was a Boss Pinto."

Mike's friend gave him some background on the Hot Pants and Boss option packages. After the cats left Ford's San Jose plant, the ones receiving one or both of these upgrades made a stop at an old truck wash located across the street.

Not a d'LeMon

Since Mike finished the restoration, he has brought the Pinto to several California car shows, including those hosted by Goodguys and Knott's Berry Farm.

The Pinto caught our eye at last summer's Concours d'LeMons in Monterey, a car show for the odd and underappreciated. Despite a well-stocked field full of other unique cars—including a Pinto covered with thousands of mirrored tiles—Mike's Pinto won the *GRM* award.

Mike plans to hit more shows with the car, driving to local events and towing to the ones a bit farther away. As he explains, "How many gas stations have racing fuel at the pump?"

His love for the Pinto has never wavered, and to no surprise his daily driver is another Pinto. He commutes in a '74 Pinto wagon fitted with 15-inch wheels and an '88 Thunderbird Turbo Coupe engine.

Don't expect Mike to jump ship after all these years, either. Pintos may be the subject of punch lines and jokes, but he's devoted to these notorious Fords. "I love everything about them," he admits. "They're fun little cars. If you ever drive one, you'd understand."



1972 Ford Pinto Runabout Boss	
owner:	Mike Streets, 58
layout:	front engine, rear-wheel drive
engine:	2.0-liter inline-4, blueprinted and balanced, Crower rods, Venolia pistons, PerTronix ignition, 2 Weber 45 DCOE carbs, Hedman header, Fram oil filter, Mobil 1 oil
driveline:	stock 4-speed manual, Centerforce clutch, Ford 8-in. differential, Quaife shifter
body:	Hot Pants body kit, Boss stripes
suspension:	Ford upper/lower A-frame, Carrera Racing shocks, 1 1/8-in. anti-roll bar front, 500 lbs./in. Mustang springs, Delrin bushings, 1/2 in. comber, 1/8 in. toe, 3 degrees caster, rack-and-pinion steering
brakes:	Raybestos R-19 pads
wheels:	American Racing Libre 13x7 in.
tires:	BFGoodrich 205/60R13