1969 AMC HURST SC/RAMBLER
Bargain-Buy AMC

Courtesy of Barrett-Jackson

Good things come in small packages, and this one came at a great price

VIN: A9M097X302642

by Tom Glatch

In 1969, AMC worked with Hurst Performance Inc. to create the SC/Rambler. All cars had a 390-ci 315-hp engine with 4-speed transmission. Painted in its unique "A" scheme of red/white/blue exterior with matching headrest and gray interior. Options include functional Ram Air hood scoop, Hurst shifter, heavy-duty suspension with sway bar, torque links, staggered rear shocks, power disc brakes, and a steering column-mounted Sun tachometer. This car is listed number 290 in the Hurst SC/Rambler Registry.

ACC Analysis *This car, Lot 679, sold for $38,500, including buyer's premium, at Barrett-Jackson's Scottsdale 2015 Auction in Scottsdale, AZ, on January 16, 2015.*

In the 1950s and 1960s, the American automotive climate was dominated by Ford, Chevrolet and Chrysler. In order to make ends meet, smaller companies such as AMC, which had been created in 1954 by the merger of Nash-Kelvinator and Hudson, faced stiff challenges. But AMC survived until 1987 by building great products, and that success always came against all odds.

One way AMC survived was by concentrating on smaller cars. When the U.S. economy hit a recession toward the end of the '50s, AMC was already selling their compact Rambler sedan. As the Big Three rushed to create compact cars of their own, AMC already owned a significant part of that market. The success of the Rambler helped AMC fund further development into the '60s. After Chrysler bought AMC in 1987, Bob Lutz stood in awe of what AMC accomplished, writing, "With almost no resources, and fighting a vastly superior enemy, they were able to roll out an impressive succession of new products."

Kenosha muscle

AMC wasn't a muscle car pioneer, but by the late 1960s, they couldn't ignore the youthful performance movement anymore. So at the height of the muscle car era, AMC introduced two hot cars to the market: the four-seat Javelin, and a unique two-seat version of that car called the AMX. To show the world how good these cars were, AMC hired Land Speed Record holder Craig Breedlove to set speed and endurance

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records in each at places such as the Bonneville Salt Flats. Javelins, too, saw competition in Trans Am and NASCAR Grand American series events. Others were also successfully drag-raced. It was an impressive performance for a company that always struggled to make a profit.

In 1969, Hurst Industries suggested that a special pocket rocket would also do wonders for AMC's image. By then, Hurst had expanded from making aftermarket shifters and wheels to helping create the vehicles that the big automakers did not have the resources or expertise to build themselves. In 1968, Hurst stuffed — quite literally — the famed Hemi engine into a small lot of Dodge Darts and Plymouth Barracudas for Super Stock drag competition. They also created a "gentleman's hot rod" for Oldsmobile, building 515 Hurst/Olds coupes with special paint and trim, packing 455-ci engines from the Toronado. Now it was AMC's turn.

Hopping up AMC's compact

Hurst Industries created the SC/Rambler specifically for NHRA F-Stock racing. Based on that perennially thrifty compact, the American, Hurst had AMC add the 315-hp 390-ci engine, Borg Warner 4-speed, and 3:54:1 "Twin Grip" differential out of the AMX at AMC's Kenosha, WI, plant.

Other components included a large functional hood scoop, Sun 8,000-rpm tach, adjustable Gabriel air shocks on the rear axle, glass-pack mufflers, and, of course, a Hurst shifter. Finally, and most easily seen, was the bold paint scheme, with mostly red sides and a large blue stripe on top over the white body, later known as the "A" scheme. With its bright colors, strictly business components, and light weight, the SC/Rambler made a big statement and had stout performance to back it up.

Five hundred cars were built by AMC, but that wasn't enough. Demand for them caught everyone by surprise, and even some of the staid dealers, who were used to selling basic Ramblers to little old ladies, wanted in on the action — provided the car got a slightly more subdued look. As AMC had a bunch of extra 390-ci engines to use from the AMX program, which wasn't meeting its target order numbers, they expanded production of the popular SC/Rambler by another 1,000 cars. At the same time, they also added a second paint scheme — known as the "B" paint scheme — which was more toned down, with small red and blue stripes running down the lower side of a white body. That new look was used on approximately one-third of the 1,512 SC/Ramblers built.

All SC/Ramblers have the letter M in the third digit and the letter X in the seventh digit of the serial number, along with the letter X and the last six digits of the VIN stamped in the unibody behind the steering box, so identifying a real car is easy.

Bargain performance

The bold, brash little SC/Ramblers caught a lot of attention on the road and in period automotive publications. An "A"-series SC/Rambler was the cover story in the May 1969 issue of Super Stock & Drag Illustrated magazine, and AMC's marketing also cranked up the spin machine, with ads shouting, "It Only Hurts Them for 14 Seconds," and, "A Rambler that does the quarter mile in 14.3." The shocking fact was this was one quick little compact, with one magazine scoring a 12.6-second pass in the quarter mile with a little work. Performance is all about power-to-weight ratio, and at 3,160 pounds, the Bantam-weight SC/Rambler could humble heavier cars with much more power under their hoods. All for a bargain $2,998.

But despite the success of the Hurst SC/Rambler, it remains a niche vehicle from a niche manufacturer.

Little car, big buy

I'm a lifelong resident of southeastern Wisconsin, and SC/Ramblers were common back in the day and I still see them regularly at many shows. But outside the Midwest, AMC products were less well known. So today's values for AMCs will just never reach the levels of top performance cars from the Big Three, even though cars like the SC/Rambler represent AMC's ability to run with, and sometimes beat, the best the Big Three had to offer — including the LS6 Chevelle and Mustang 428 CJ.

Over the past decade, SC/Rambler prices have ranged from around $50,000 to a top near $65,000. Series "A" cars tend to price out a bit higher due to their popularity and mystique. That makes the sale of our feature SC/Rambler a bit of a disappointment, at least for the seller. But on the flip side, this car's new owner got a good car for a fantastic price — a great example of doing more with less. Well bought.

(Introductory description courtesy of Barrett-Jackson.)

Detailing

Year produced: 1969
Number produced: 1,512
Original list price: $2,998
Current ACC Valuation: $35,000–$65,000
Tune-up/major service: $150
Distributor cap: $11.77
VIN location: Plate on the driver's side instrument panel behind windshield
Engine # location: Pad on the right side of the block to the rear of the engine mount
Club: 1512 HURST SC/Rambler Registry
More: www.amazingmuscle-cars.com/1512registry
Alternatives: 1969 Plymouth Road Runner, 1970 Chevrolet Chevelle SS 454 LS5, 1969 Ford Mustang Mach 1 428
ACC Investment Grade: C

Comps

1969 AMC Hurst SC/Rambler
Lot F105.1, VIN: A9M097X223645
Condition: N/A
Sold at $64,200
Mecum Auctions, Indianapolis, IN, 5/18/2013
ACC# 222633

1969 AMC Hurst SC/Rambler
Lot S192, VIN: A9M097X305305
Condition: 2
Sold at $62,010
Mecum Auctions, Indianapolis, IN, 5/15/2012
ACC# 201896

1969 AMC Hurst SC/Rambler
Lot 172, VIN: A9M097X302673
Condition: 2
Sold at $35,100
Bonhams, Portland, OR, 6/11/2011
ACC# 179574