



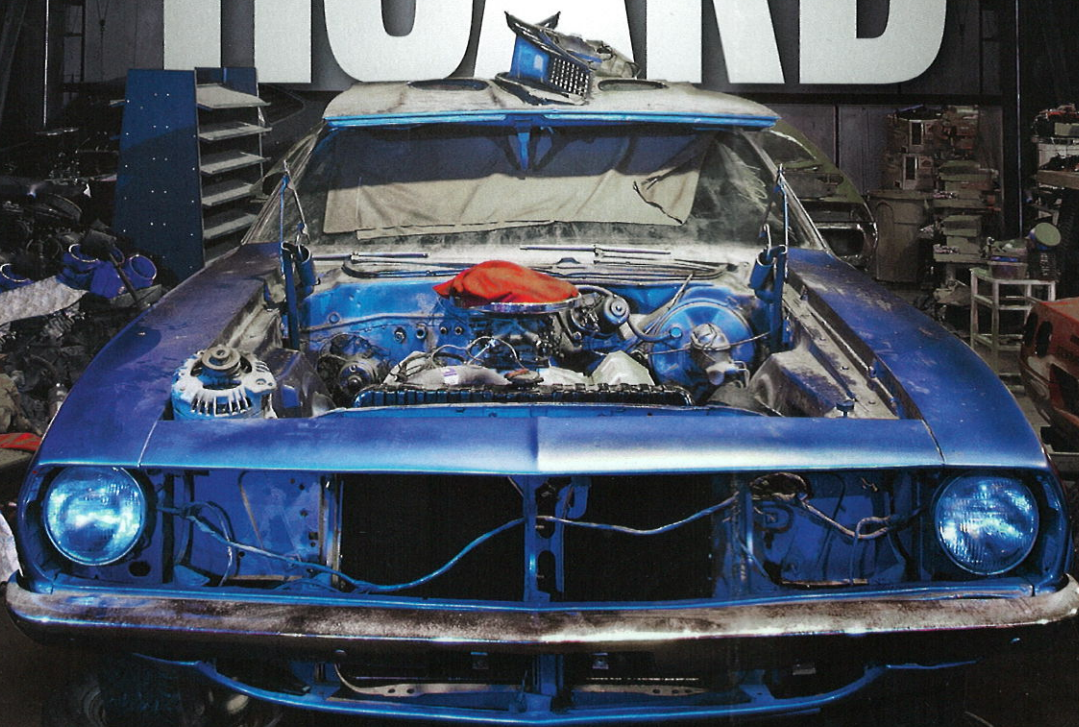
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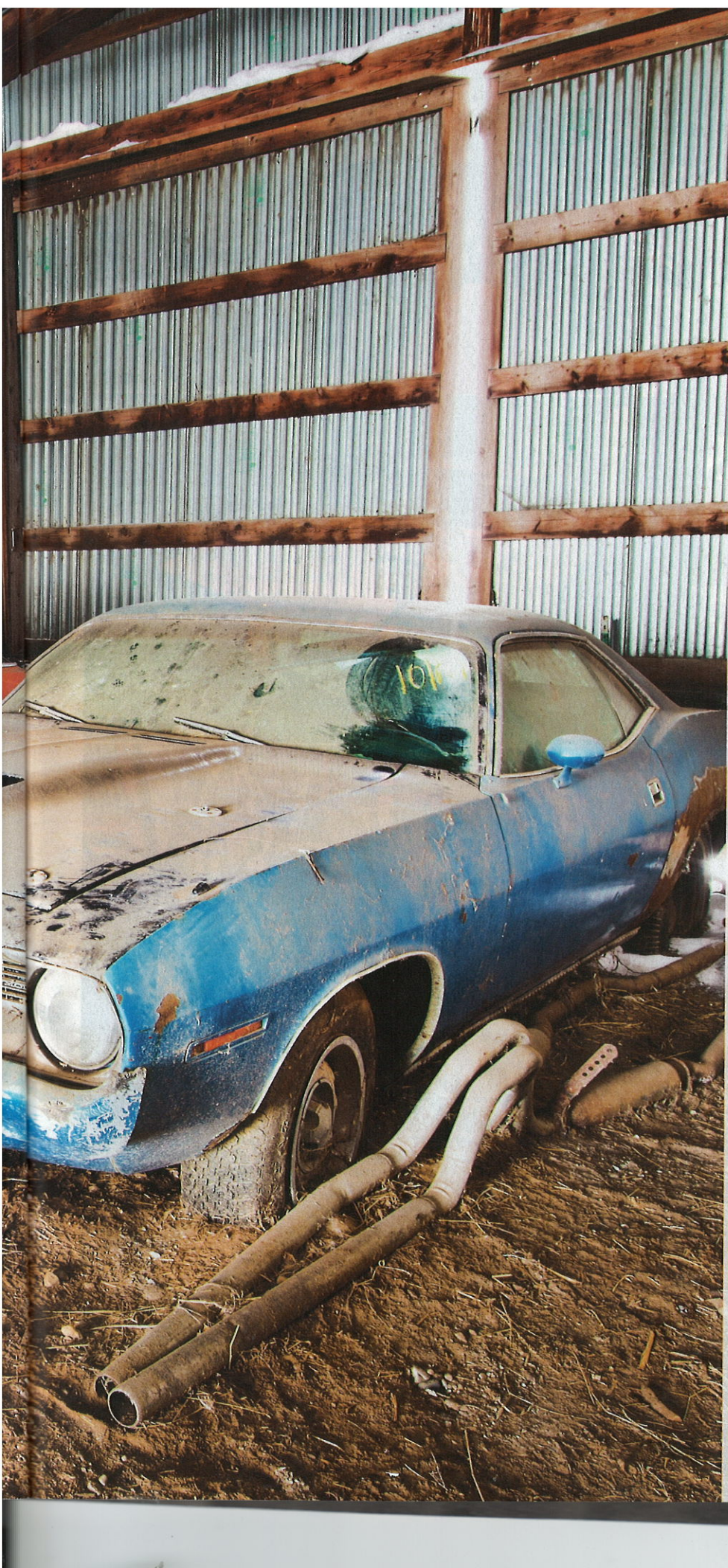
HOT ROD WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

LIFE — IS A — BARN

✎ Johnny Hunkins 📷 John Machaqueiro



[Side by side, tucked away in the barn, these two 1970 E-bodies are from Alan Rietz's time immediately after high school. The Challenger was his first car, and the 'Cuda was purchased some time shortly after it.]

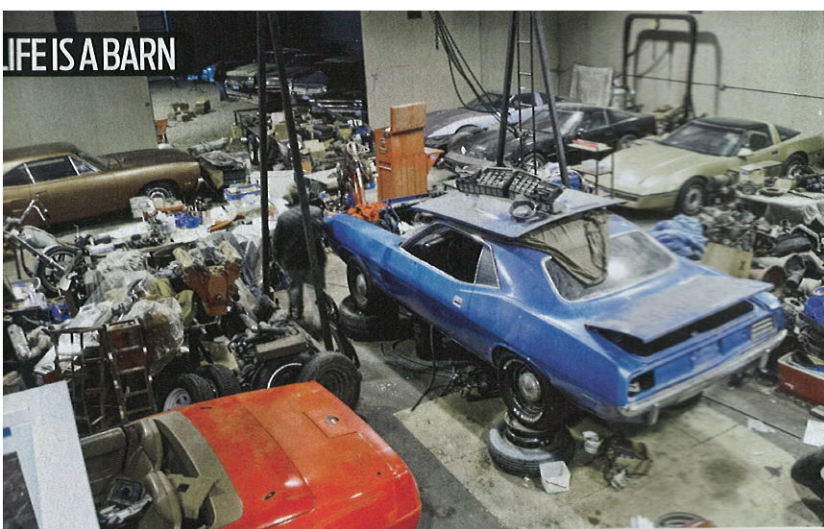


We Sift Through the Mysterious Hoard of Edwin Alan Rietz to See What Hundreds of Auction-Goers Will Soon Discover

► We'll never know exactly what Edwin "Alan" Rietz was thinking as he hoarded nearly 100 vintage cars and trucks over a 45-year period, but there are clues. A look through his collection reveals a dozen or so collectible Mopars, mostly 1970 models, but the majority are what you might call "everyman" cars—stuff like Dusters and D100s. Rietz's favorite machinery was produced by the Chrysler Corporation—Dodges especially—but there is a smattering of C4 Corvettes and Cadillacs on Rietz's 1,100-acre farm. There are no Fords in sight, which is puzzling, but according to relatives, Rietz did own a 1948 Ford in high school—his only known Blue Oval. Alan Rietz passed away September 30, 2017, taking that secret with him.

Rietz's barn find came to our attention by way of the VanDerBrink Auctions website. Unlike auction houses like Barrett-Jackson, Mecum, or Russo and Steele, VanDerBrink auctions are typically held on location. There are no VIP tents, flattering stage lights, or alcohol-fueled bidding wars, just straightforward auctioneering put on by company founder, Yvette VanDerBrink. The auction house was started by Yvette in 2001 when she saw that old cars in salvage yards were being crushed or shredded for their scrap value. As a self-described "car chick," she convinced a few scrapyard owners to let her auction off their old car inventory instead of scrap them. When word spread that Yvette was fetching more than three times scrap value, her auction business exploded. These days, Yvette holds 15 to 23 auctions per year between April and November, many of them estate sales of hoards similar to Alan's. "It's more of a county-fair atmosphere with music and giveaways, T-shirts, and decorations," Yvette says. "It's a celebration of the collection. We want to make it a car-lover's Woodstock."

On June 9, 2018, the Rietz collection will be offered for sale, not on the stage of a Vegas hotel, but on a soybean farm in Mansfield, South Dakota. By then, the deep snow drifts and biting cold of HOT ROD's winter visit will be replaced by the smell of freshly cut grass, fireworks, and burgers sizzling on the grill. Now, however, Alan Rietz's widow,



Linda, sits across from me at her farmhouse kitchen table. It's been less than a year since her husband's passing, and it's obvious she hasn't gotten over his sudden death. She's quick to laugh, but you can tell the pain is just under the surface. You feel her ocean of emptiness, yet she's still eager to talk about Alan, referring to him in present tense. "He likes HOT ROD," she says, laughing while fighting back tears, motioning to the magazine at the bottom of a stack of mail.

Born just nine days apart in 1952, Linda and Alan were acquaintances in high school, but weren't close friends. "Alan was in the jock group, and I was in the nerd group. We sat at opposite ends of the cafeteria," Linda says with a laugh. The year was 1970, and Central High School in nearby Aberdeen, South Dakota, was just across the street from Martyn-Edwards Dodge. On the front line was a nearly new, low-mileage 1970 Challenger SE with a 383 and a Torque-Flite. In case you're wondering, it's the Go Mango orange car in this story. Alan couldn't afford it, but he knew he wanted it, so he kept track of the car's whereabouts, eventually buying it from the second owner in 1976.

By the time Alan and Linda became reintroduced through friends years later, Alan's lone Challenger had grown into a small collection. "By the time I met him in 1980, he probably had 20 cars in his lot. He had a Chevelle, but they were mostly Mopars," Linda says. Today, someone with 20 classic Mopars and a private lot to put them on at the age of 28 sounds like the description of a playboy millionaire, but that simply wasn't the case. The Rietz farm had been passed down through the generations, and Alan—ever the good grandson—had worked on it his whole life. It was hard, punishing labor, but Alan had a knack for it. The farm eventually became his, and the seasonal rhythm of planting, growing, and harvesting provided

01 This 1969 440 Six-Pack Super Bee was one of Alan's favorite Mopars and saw plenty of use throughout the years. It was often taken on long trips and even used during hunting season.

02 Along with a huge amount of engine parts, there is also no shortage of sheet-metal and wheels in the collection. There is an eclectic assortment of factory and aftermarket wheels in the mix, with the sheetmetal parts ranging from early 1960s to mid-1970s.

03 There is no shortage of blocks to pick from in this collection. Most are either Chrysler LA small-blocks or RB big-blocks. There are also five complete Hemi engines that will be going up for auction as well.

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predictable gaps in the back-breaking schedule, giving Alan the precious time to indulge his one passion: cars. "He'd get done with his work or take a break and go to the swap meet," Linda says. "He could spot a car lot in somebody's backyard. He'd hit the brakes, back up, and go down that lane and ask, 'Can I look at those cars?'"

We lean into the freezing wind and trudge through the snow to the larger of two barns. We see familiar grilles and sheetmetal poking through piles of white, but we also notice significant pieces of farm equipment outside, some of it almost new. That's odd, we think. Shouldn't that be inside? We're not even in the barn yet, and it dawns on us that Alan is fanatical in his love for Mopars—enough that his farm equipment sits outside.

What we came to discover is that Alan's hoard is divided into three distinct categories that correspond roughly to three different life periods. The most valuable and

complete cars were gathered first, between 1971 and 1980, in the pre-Linda era. The Go Mango 1970 Challenger SE, a matching 1970 'Cuda, a 1970 big-block Road Runner convertible with a four-speed, and a 1970 440 six-pack, four-speed Super Bee are some from that time. When Alan bought them, cars like this were too fuel-thirsty and could be had for close to scrap value. When muscle cars ticked up in the 1980s and priced him out of the market, Alan switched to parts. "When I first met him, he was gung ho on collecting parts," Linda says. "He would go to Shakopee Raceway Park, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, or Duluth. Most of them came from driving around to the swap meet."

We stamp the snow off our boots and quickly shut the barn door. My eyes adjust to the unnatural orange glow of the sodium-vapor lights buzzing overhead. Cars, parts, engine blocks, and boxes are packed and stacked everywhere. The smell of damp earth, oil, and old rubber envelop us in an

intoxicating cloud. This is not the museum collection of a tech millionaire with a checkbook and a gold fountain pen, but the open diary of a farmer who digs a wad of five-dollar bills out of his overalls while cracking a joke with another farmer.

I try my best to snake through the path that meanders through the trove. My progress is impeded not by the tight space, but by the myriad of cool objects that stop me in my tracks. Cylinder heads, intake manifolds, crankshafts, rows of blocks, wheels, radiators, rearends, you name it—it's all grouped with a fair amount of intuition, like a real car guy would do it. To the untrained eye, however, it's an impossible jumble. We are now inside Alan's universe, where no doubt the exact position of every object was known to him. Alan isn't here, but we feel him.

"In the '90s, parts got harder and harder to find. He had most of the complete cars before I met him," Linda says. And what about the 60 or 70 cars outside in the field? It

[Both of these Dodge trucks look like they are doing some wheelstanding. We're not sure why they are propped up on oil drums, but we suspect that was Alan's way of having a bit of fun.]



turns out, this was the third and final phase of Alan's collecting binge. When parts also became rare, Alan pivoted to rescuing cars that most would deem scrap. "Anything that was mentioned to go to the shredder or the crusher or to the demolition derby, he would buy them so they wouldn't go there."

Unlike suburbanite collectors, Alan had vast room for storage on the 1,100-acre farm, and he worked hard to organize the hulks to his liking. Dodges and Plymouths are lined up like soldiers, sorted by year, make, and model. Some of special interest—an old race car or an A100 pickup—are displayed whimsically in a position of prominence. While these cars aren't as complete or in as good a condition as the barn cars, they provided us with hours of fanciful, immersive discovery.

"He would come home with a carcass on a trailer and park it right on the front yard so that everybody would drive by and look at it," Linda jokes. "On my part of the mowing, from the buildings to the road, I would always have to mow around it for a few times before he would put the car in the lot or in the shop."

In spite of the huge hoard, few of Alan's cars are turnkey driveable. While some of them were at one time, or were fixed just for fun to get them running, Alan was most satisfied by the hunt and the acquisition than the restoration. "He didn't buy them with the intention of fixing them up," Linda says, "but one of his friends might need a bumper, fender, or a hood. He would do a lot of trading. He was bigger on trading than selling."

We move to the back of the barn, where the concrete floor changes to dirt covered with sawdust. We find a 1970 Super Bee, a 1970 Road Runner convertible, and a 1969 Road Runner, but there's also a quartet of 1980 Chrysler Imperials and a pair of Cadillacs that seem out of place. We ask Linda about them: "Those were the kind of cars his grandpa drove." I nod with understanding as thoughts of my own granddad come flooding back. Childhood memories are a potent motivator.

As we interview Linda and capture photos and video of Alan's immense collection, Yvette is there too. She's digging deep into the barn, cataloging cars and grouping parts in her notebook. Yvette has a mountain of planning to do in the next three months to inventory, describe, sequence, and stage pieces for the auction. She is also there—intentionally or not—for emotional support. Her client isn't a business or a dealership, but a grieving widow. Yvette's experience as an auto enthusiast, wife, farmer, auctioneer, and race-car driver makes her uniquely qualified for estate sales like Linda's. We're



Linda Rietz holds a snapshot of Alan and the 1969 Road Runner that is behind her from the early 1980s. If you look at the photo, you'll notice that it's the same car right down to the aftermarket wheels. This Road Runner was in the process of getting a repaint.



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guessing that Yvette's empathy and tact in these situations is just what the doctor ordered. At any rate, Linda seems grateful to have her there.

For all of Linda's grief over the loss of her husband, there is a silver lining. By having the presence of mind to contact Yvette, hundreds of enthusiasts of more modest means will have the opportunity to own one of Alan's 96 cars. Remarkably, Linda and Yvette have found the titles to all but 12 of them. And while a handful of them are valuable collector cars with what we expect will be steep bids, most will be within reach as either project cars or relatively complete parts cars. Likewise, the collection of parts features some rare finds, such as vintage

Hemi engines, but most of it is period-correct speed equipment, engine cores, and body parts.

Collections like Alan's prove that there still are plenty of starter project vehicles out there being saved from destruction. Yvette has proved that her unique approach to car auctions can bring those cars to regular guys without the steep price of over-restoration and speculative investment. But perhaps most important for Alan's auction, an experienced helping hand can bring a degree of closure and comfort to Linda Rietz. At the auction, we hope 96 people out there will think about Alan and Linda as they lay hands for the first time on their future pride and joy. **HR**