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# HISTORY REPEATS



## THE HURST HERITAGE GSS CHALLENGER

BY LARRY WEINER / IMAGES BY PERFORMANCE WEST GROUP



**HURST. WITHOUT A DOUBT, IT'S THE MOST RECOGNIZED NAME IN SHIFTERS IN THE WORLD, BUT SHIFTERS WERE AND ARE MERELY THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG THAT IS HURST. BY 1964, WHEN HURST SHIFTERS WERE STANDARD EQUIPMENT IN EVERY PONTIAC GTO WITH A MANUAL TRANSMISSION, GEORGE HURST, EVER THE INNOVATOR, WAS ACTIVELY LOOKING TO DEVELOP ANOTHER LANDMARK PRODUCT.**

With his penchant for perfection, he set his sights on custom wheels. "Mags," as custom wheels were called in the early '60s, were all the rage. However, many of the wheels on the market at the time were of marginal or inferior quality. Like the shifters that bore his name, Hurst set out

to, quite literally, reinvent the wheel. The result of his efforts was the good-looking Hurst Dazzler wheel — the first forged aftermarket wheel.

Every product Hurst developed had to exceed exacting engineering standards. In 1968, Hurst made a quantum leap that marked a new direction for the company. They began performing vehicle conversions for Chrysler and General Motors. On the Chrysler side, Hurst was responsible for building the famed Super Stock Hemi Darts and Mr. Norm's 440 GSS Dart conversions. At the same time, they were working with General Motors to upgrade the newly redesigned Olds 442

into a limited edition vehicle called the Hurst Olds.

After receiving a favorable reception for the '68 Hurst Olds, the 1969 featured gold graphics (George Hurst's favorite color), requisite Hurst Olds badging, and a unique hood scoop. Hurst vehicles quickly became known by the moniker "Gentlemen's Hot Rods." They were smart looking and fast.

Over the years, Hurst built many different signature vehicles. In 2008, with the rebirth of the Dodge Challenger, Hurst saw an opportunity to reimagine this vehicle with the kind of classic visual treatment that they were so well known for. The Hurst Challenger debuted at the SEMA



show that year. Production continued until the end of the 2010 model year.

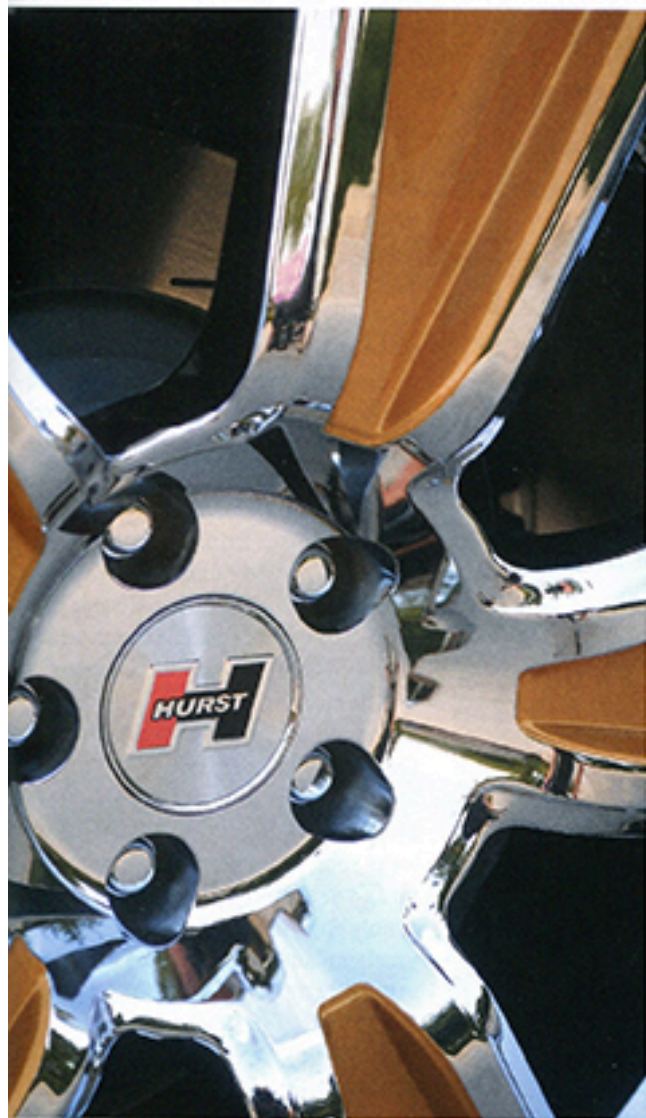
In January of 2015, Mr. Norm's team met with Nate Shelton of Driven Performance Brands, the company that includes the Hurst brand. Shelton mentioned that Hurst would be expanding into offering a wide range of performance products for modern muscle cars, as George Hurst had done back in the 1960s. Given Mr. Norm's history of creating and marketing high performance Dodges for more than 50 years, the new 2015 Challenger presented the perfect platform for Mr. Norm's team to work with Hurst to showcase their new products. In what would be the ultimate role reversal (in 1968, Mr. Norm had Hurst build the 440 GSS Darts for him to sell at Grand Spaulding Dodge), Mr. Norm would build and sell the Challengers as part of a co-branded program with Hurst.

The new car is named the Hurst Heritage GSS Challenger in honor of both Hurst and Mr. Norm's GSS signature model that harkened back the glory days of the original 440 Darts. With input from Mr. Norm's team, a rendering of the Hurst Heritage GSS Challenger was created by award-winning designer Ben Hermance. From there, a new Bright White Challenger R/T Scat Pack was purchased and work commenced on the build immediately.

A wide range of performance parts and accessories were selected, each carefully chosen to infuse the vehicle with the kind of persona that both Hurst and Mr. Norm embraced. From the Hurst camp, upgrades included Billet Plus shifter for the six-speed manual transmission, Stunner wheels, lowering springs, logo stainless steel exhaust tips, logo Katzkin leather seat covers, and embroidered logo plush

carpet mats. Mr. Norm's team added their Speedway rear spoiler and race style front splitter along with functional hood pins and an SRT-8 hood, and decked it all out with custom-painted Hurst gold overlays and matching accents on the Stunner wheels.

The first Hurst Heritage GSS Challenger rolled out of the shop in three weeks and directly into the sunlight of Mopars at the Strip in Las Vegas. The Hurst Heritage GSS Challenger is far more than merely a pretty face, though. It has just the right mix of parts and accessories to distinguish it from a stock Challenger in performance and appearance. It has a look that's part aggressive, part purposeful, yet remains distinctly Hurst, thanks in no small part to the combination of Hurst Gold and Bright White, signature colors that have been associated with Hurst for nearly 50 years.



Like all Hurst shifters for over half a century, the Billet Plus was easy to install. It's far more precise than the stock unit and makes gear changes with the six-speed transmission a real pleasure. The Hurst lowering springs reduce the center of gravity while simultaneously enhancing handling and providing the Challenger with a ground-hugging stance more befitting a muscle car. Further enhancing the handling prowess of the Challenger is the rolling stock. A set of Hurst Stunners and BFGoodrich g-Force Sport Comp II directional tires in a staggered fitment catches the handling up yet another notch. At the front is a pair of 20 x 9 wheels with 245/45ZR20 tires. The rear boasts 20 x 10 wheels with 275/40ZR20 tires for additional grip. To insure that the 3.6L Hemi gets as much cool, fresh air as possible, a Challenger Hellcat cold air

intake and tube was installed, which is an easy bolt-on part.

The Mr. Norm's Speedway rear spoiler was a simple addition as well. The backup camera is removed from a stock rear spoiler and some holes are placed on the underside of the new spoiler to accept it. Adding the SRT-8 hood gave the Challenger a more purposeful look while having the virtue of factory fit and finish. Mr. Norm's functional hood pins and lanyards added a subtle old school touch that fit right in with the theme of the Hurst Heritage GSS, while the Speedway front splitter with uprights and Heim joints add just the right amount of new school to balance out the visuals. The increased height of the rear spoiler, matched with the extension offered by the front splitter, generates additional downforce at speed to the front and rear of the vehicle. The result is that rare moment

in time when form meets function for a great outcome.

The stock cloth covered Recaro style seats benefitted from a complete makeover. Cloth was replaced by glove-soft Katzkin Tuscany leather seat covers made especially for the Challenger. They not only feel more luxurious, but fit beautifully and provide the interior with a custom look that simply cannot be achieved with stock leather. The Hurst embroidered logos in gold on all four seat backs add to the vehicle identity, while further emphasizing the gold theme, along with plush carpet mats that also feature the iconic Hurst logo in matching colors.

Like the muscle cars of the '60s that had so much personality, with one look, you can tell this is a Hurst Challenger from a block away. It's time to take this baby out for a ride.



# HURST

## HERITAGE GSS



Push the Start/Stop button that's accented with a Mr. Norm's logo overlay and the 6.4L Hemi engine immediately comes to life. The sound of the big inch Hemi is impressive. With its active exhaust system, the Hurst Heritage GSS Challenger definitely makes its presence known, especially if you put your foot in it, which we have every intention of doing.

You can immediately feel the increased bite from the BFGoodrich tires and the rock solid stability, thanks to the wide track stance provided by the Hurst Stunner wheels. Making a hard, off camber left onto the freeway on ramp, the Challenger exhibits no lean and simply hunkers down as we accelerate through the gears. Merging into the traffic at a speed commensurate with that of the cars on the freeway was effortless.

The steering inputs are precise, the handling is predictable, and the Challenger tracks like it's on the proverbial rails. Exiting the freeway, we pick up a two-lane canyon road where we're soon clipping apexes, accelerating up and down through the gears, and simply enjoying the drive. The visibility is excellent, and the ride is very acceptable, especially considering the increased spring rates of the lowered springs coupled with the wider tires. While it might be a little firmer than it was stock, the response is so reassuring that we wouldn't trade it for a smoother ride.

Passing on the two-lane road is permitted on certain sections. An opportunity soon presented itself. Downshifting from lumbering along in fifth to third brought the Hemi to attention; the rpm was suddenly in the sweet spot of the curve, and I dropped the hammer as I pulled out into the oncoming lane. The Challenger responded like an angry tiger being unleashed on some unsuspecting prey, and the sound emanating from the exhaust system went from merely muscular to downright brutal. Shifting up from fourth to fifth, the calm returned, but the momentary thrill of running at wide open throttle, speed shifting, and the raucous sound of the exhaust left me looking for more slow vehicles to pass.

Before we knew it, we were back at the shop, but I can tell you with certainty, I'm looking for an excuse to go out for another ride. Who wouldn't? **EB**

# THE MAKING OF THE GSS CHALLENGER



The Hurst Heritage GSS Challenger starts life as a plain white wrapper.



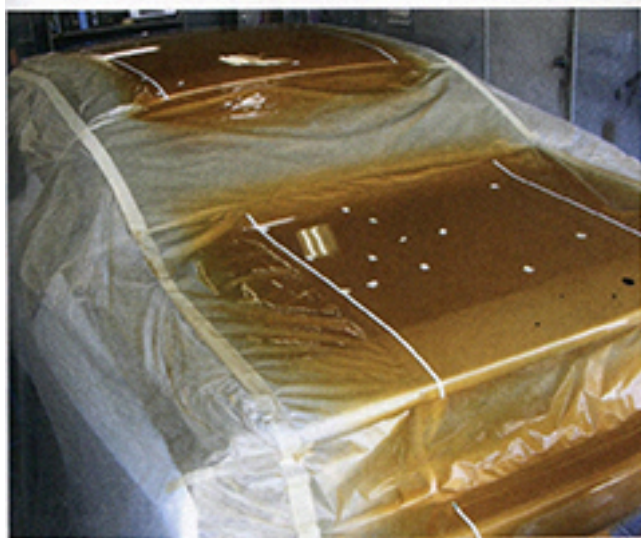
Interior before and after. The talented artisans at Katzkin completely transformed the seats from ordinary (left) to extraordinary.



Since the Challenger was equipped with a six-speed manual transmission, it just wouldn't be a Hurst without a Hurst shifter.



The stock Hurst Stunner wheel in Anthracite is nice, but chrome plated with the fill-in between the spokes painted in Hurst Gold is simply stunning!



The Challenger is in the paint booth with the Hurst Gold applied.



Color sanding the Hurst Gold paint.



## FIRST LOOK



The rocker covers may have started out basic black, but painted Hurst Gold with hand lettering and accents on the ribs, they are things of beauty.



Hurst lowering springs will be installed. They wouldn't be Hurst if they weren't gold!



It's getting close. This car is on the lift, ready to install the Speedway front splitter.



The original rendering by Ben Hermance and the completed Hurst Heritage GSS Challenger are nearly mirror images.