

MOPAR PRO STOCK REUNION

FIVE DON CARLTON "MISSILE" CARS TO EXHIBIT AT 11TH ANNUAL EAST COAST DRAG TIMES HALL OF FAME REUNION, OCT. 19-21, 2012

By Gene Yetter

Don Carlton, one of the most popular and successful Pro Stock drag racers of the Seventies, will be honored posthumously at the 11th Annual Reunion of the East Coast Drag Times Hall of Fame in Henderson, North Carolina, on the weekend of October 19-21. He will be named recipient of the Hall of Fame's annual Ronnie Sox Memorial Award during a ceremony at the Vance-Granville Civic Center midday on Sunday. Current owners of the famous *Motown* and *Mopar Missile* cars that he raced, and a Carlton/Hodges "customer car," are bringing them to Henderson for the show phase of the reunion that happens on Saturday along Henderson's main drag, Garnett Street.

The Carlton cars include the '71 *Motown Missile* Dodge Challenger, owned by Arnie Klann of Irvine, California; the '72 *Motown Missile* Plymouth Barracuda, co-owned by Mark Williamson, Canada, and Earra Merritt of Richmond Hill, Georgia; the '73 *Mopar Missile* Plymouth Duster, owned by Ben Donhoff of Melbourne, Florida; the '75 *Mopar Missile* Plymouth Duster (aka, "The Wire Car"), also owned by Arnie Klann; and, the '77 *Macomb Missile* Aspen, owned by Mike Ricketts, Macomb County, Michigan. They will be parked alongside each other on Saturday across from Henderson's historic fire station, with its landmark clock tower, at 205 North Garnett Street. The Dusters and the Aspen feature Carlton's signature black, gold and red colors -- black and yellow for the Challenger. Restoration of the Barracuda is not complete and it will appear as a "body in white."



The turnout for the show phase of the East Coast Drag Times (ECDT) Hall of Fame reunion in recent years has been estimated at around 1700 pre-1976 classics, hot rods, trucks and race cars. More information on the Reunion is available at the Hall of Fame home page (<http://www.eastcoastdragtimeshalloffame.com>). allpar.com coverage of the show last year appears at <http://www.allpar.com/history/auto-shows/misc/henderson/index.html>.

The Ronnie Sox Memorial Award goes exclusively to Mopar campaigners closely associated with Ronnie Sox. Past Sox awardees include drivers and mechanics: R. Jack Ashley (aka Jack Strader), Chick DeNinno, Dave Christie, Herb McCandless, Buddy Martin, John P. "Jake" King Jr. Don Carlton drove a second Sox & Martin car behind Ronnie around 1968-70. In 1970, he was hired by Ted Spehar to campaign Chrysler's Pro Stock *Missile* cars, the 1971 Challenger and 1972 Barracuda, and the 1973 Duster.

A native of Lenoir, North Carolina, Carlton had a busy early career racing Super Stock in his home region. After Chrysler's support for Pro Stock racing was halted in 1973, the company turned to development of Dodge Colt and Plymouth Arrow race cars, and Don participated in that program as test driver. He died in July 1977 after a fatal accident in a Dodge Hemi Colt that he and his partner, Clyde Hodges, had built, which they hoped to campaign in NHRA B/Altered racing. Carlton was named to the International Drag Racing Hall of Fame, associated with the Don Garlits Museum of Drag Racing in Ocala, in 1992; and to the North Carolina Drag Racing Hall of Fame in 2007.

Tom Hoover, who headed Mopar's Pro Stock program when Don raced, will be at Henderson for the Saturday show and Sunday award ceremony. In addition, Carlton's former teammates, Ted Spehar, Joe

Pappas and Dick Oldfield, and his widow, Jonnie, son, Donny, and daughter, Robin, will be on hand during the weekend to chat about the cars and Don. Mr. Hoover and the race team will take part in a seminar about the development of the Missile cars at the Vance-Granville Civic Center at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday morning. The discussion will take up Ted Spehar's engines; chassis, suspension and aerodynamics of the cars, and the teams response to NHRA rule changes between 1970 and 1974.

ECDT extends Hall of Fame honors to racers of Fords, GM's, and Mopars, and to individuals who have made behind-the-scenes contributions to the sport of drag racing. The list of inductees this year includes Bill Barrett, George Eisenhart, Roger Gustin, Harry Hall, Pete Hill, Tim & Beth Hyatt, George Kryssing, Joe Schubeck, Greg Sullivan, Frank Teague and Lamar Walden. Other special awards are the Wally parks Motorsports Statesman Memorial Award, the Woody Andrews Memorial Award, and the Lifetime Achievement Award. They will go this year, respectively, to Marvin Rifchin (posthumous), Eugene Coard and Chase Knight. Past Hall of Fame inductees have included Dave and Susie Koffel, Ronnie Lyles, Wally Bell, Tommy Grove, "Hemi Fred" Ristagno, Arlen Vanke, The Ramchargers, Pat Bilbow, "Bullet Bob" Reed, Roy Hill, Carol "Bunny" Burket, to name a few.

The ECDT Reunion weekend is organized by the Vance County Tourism Development Authority under leadership of Nancy Wilson, Executive Director. The Authority has long-range plans to build a visitor center that will house a museum of drag racing. Ms. Wilson and her husband happen also to own and race three Mopars.

About the Carlton cars:

The first car driven by Don Carlton in NHRA Pro Stock was the 1971 Dodge Challenger *Motown Missile*. Now owned by Arnie Klann, it was recently restored in California under the supervision of one of its original mechanics, Dick Oldfield. It has been exhibited at the Peterson Automotive Museum in Los Angeles. The fifth car in the *Missile series*, the legendary Plymouth Duster "Wire Car" is also owned by Arnie Klann. Former mechanic Joe Pappas writes: "It would have run as a new *Mopar Missile* in 1975. We built the car as an 'A' engine Pro Stocker because of NHRA rule changes that made the Hemi not feasible for further development. It got the most advanced methods of design and construction available at the time, and made extensive use of lightweight titanium and magnesium, with chrome-moly chassis tubing size and placement optimized using computer analysis. Complete less paint, the car was technically way over the top for it's day! But we never got to race it because Chrysler canceled its Pro Stock program late in the year. The car will appear in Mopar Missile livery as was always intended. The restored Challenger and '75 Duster are both fully operational."

The second Carlton car in the *Missile series* was the 1972 Plymouth Barracuda *Motown Missile*. It is undergoing restoration at the George Paul Body Shop in Star, Mississippi, as described in an article in the April 2011 issue of *Mopar Action Magazine*.

Third in the *Missile series*, the 1973 Plymouth Duster, *Mopar Missile*, appeared at Henderson in 2011 and will be back this year. Ben Donhoff bought the car from a former owner after it had been damaged in a track accident in south Florida. He restored and raced it locally for about ten years, then lent it to Don Garlits' Museum of Drag Racing in Ocala, where it was on display for another ten years. In 2008 Ben and a partner, Larry Mayes, of Haines City, Florida, took the car out of the Museum to race again.

Status of a fourth *Missile*, reported by Joe Pappas as a "Dodge D5 Hemi Colt," is unknown.

The *Macomb Missile*, an F-Body Aspen was built by Don and his long-time partner, Clyde Hodges, at their shop in Lenoir, North Carolina, in 1977. It was the last project the two worked on before Don died that year. It was a commissioned build, was never raced successfully and it remained in storage for over 25 years. Present owner Mike Ricketts, living in Macomb County, Michigan, bought it in 2008. He undid modifications made over the years by its original owner, and finally restored it to its condition when it left Don's and Clyde's shop.

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