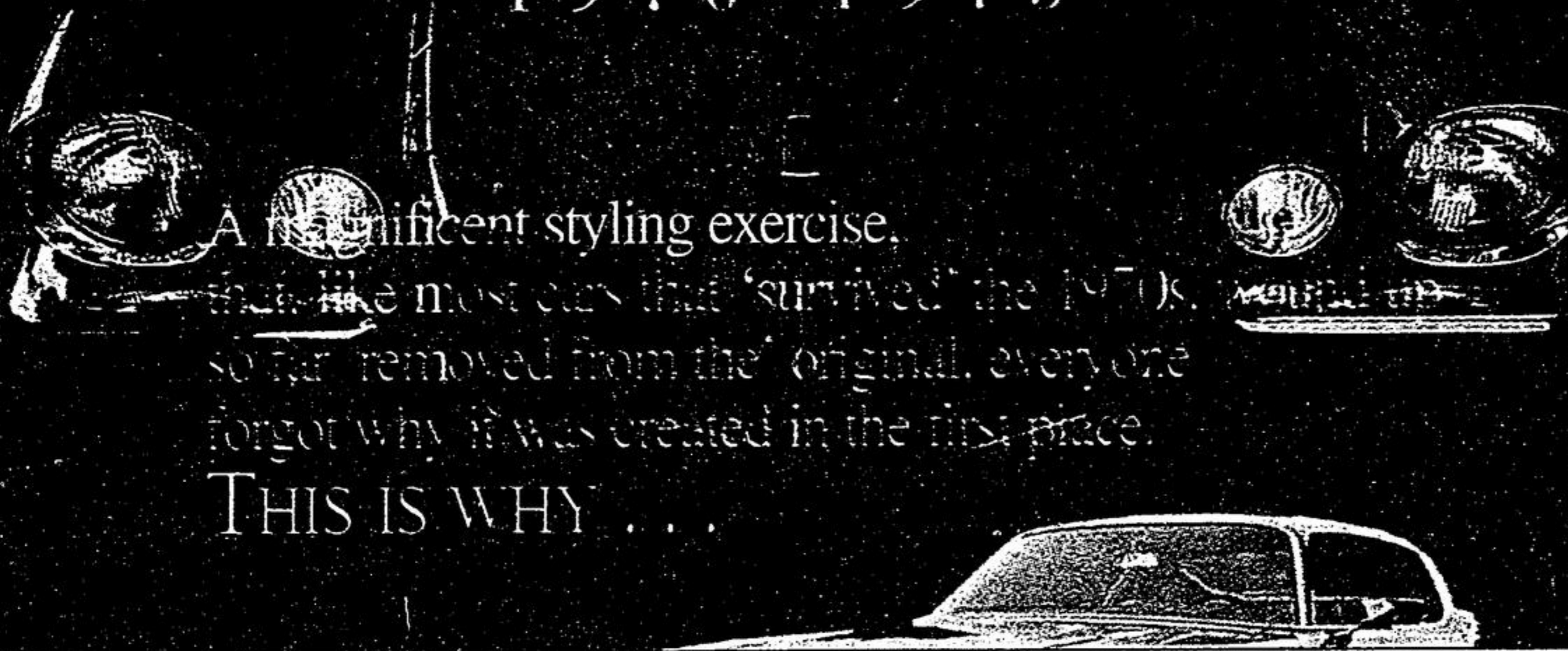


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CAMARO

1970-1973



A magnificent styling exercise, that like most cars that 'survived' the 1970s, so far removed from the original, everyone forgot why it was created in the first place.
THIS IS WHY...

By **OTTO STEIN**
 FOR WHEELBASE COMMUNICATIONS

As the 1970s began, disco music was sweeping across North America and General Motors was rocking to a new beat with the introduction of its second-generation 'Pony Cars.'

During the early part of the decade, 'performance' cars would be hot, although perhaps not as fast or quick as they were at the peak of the Musclecar era in 1970. And by the mid-1970s, it would all be over.

The second-generation Camaro made its debut early in 1970 (production problems delayed the introduction) with much acclaim from the automotive press, a buff new body and an all-new high-performance 1970 1/2 (remember, it was late) Z/28 package.

The first-generation Zs, introduced in the fall of 1966, had carved out their own niche with the famous 302 V8 engines, which made them legal (and necessary) for Trans Am racing. By 1970, a change in the Sports Car Club of America (SCCA) rules allowed destroking larger engines to meet the 305-cubic-inch limit. Not only did it mean Chrysler could make its new 340-powered Challengers and Cudas meet competition guidelines, but Chevrolet no longer needed the high-revving, soft-on-torque 302 on the street. Instead, the Bowtie boys took advantage of the rules change and switched to a new, street-friendlier 350-cube motor (which they destroked for racing) that made 360 horsepower and the Z/28 a lot more fun to drive. The engine (the infamous LT1) was pretty much the same as the one powering the Corvette that year, although the 'Vette made 10 more horses.

It came with a four-barrel carburetor, 11:1 compression ratio, plus all the performance goodies found in the Chevy parts bin — solid-lifter camshaft, heavy-duty radiator, dual exhaust, and, since the Z concept was always as much about handling as it was horsepower, a special performance suspension consisting of larger sway bars and beefier springs.

The LT1 in the '70 1/2 Z/28 made most of the engines in the Chevy lineup green with envy, right down to the 250-cubic-inch inline six-cylinder that found its way into a surprising number of models of Chevy's svelte-looking coupe. The only thing with more moxy (at least in terms of peak numbers) was the 375-horsepower 396, available for '70 only, but not on the Z.

Standard equipment on the Z/28 also included a rear spoiler, a special gauge package, power disc brakes, limited-slip rear axle and a Muncie four-speed manual transmission. And, for the first time, you could get a Z/28 with an automatic.

Compared to the 1969 models, the new car was given a complete face-lift, with a square, egg-carton grille, and a wider, longer footprint. The basic chassis would remain the same through the 1981 model year.

Young drivers fell in love with the car, with its fresh, new look and great handling characteristics. But, storm clouds appeared on the horizon in the form of gasoline shortages and tougher pollution regulations. The days for this hot, little small-block scorcher were numbered.

The very next year saw a reduction in the compression ratios of all GM's performance engines. The Z/28's power dipped to 330. By 1972, GM changed its rating system from 'gross' to 'net' (power with all the accessories hooked up and running) and horsepower sagged to 255, although it was essentially the same engine. The generation gap was beginning to show.

More power-robbing moves lay in store in 1973 as the aluminum intake, the solid-lifter cam and the Holley carb were taken away. Horsepower fell to 245, and the move was on to turn the brash, street racer into a comfy, boulevard cruiser.

To meet tougher U.S. crash-test-legislation, the once sporty Camaro took on a beefier look in 1974, as the car grew in size and weight, but remained with basically the same power. The new look (especially the wrap-around back window that increased rear visibility) was met with lackluster approval and sales suffered. The Z/28 package was cancelled and the once-muscular Pony Car was put out to pasture.

The Z/28 package would return again in 1977 as a full model rather than merely as an option package. But by this time, the car had become a paper tiger. It still had the 350 engine, but power barely scratched the 200-mark. Not until 1993 did the Z/28, with the rebirth of the LT-1 designation, regain some of its fire-breathing glory. By then, Disco was gone, Punk was in, and the whole generation of Boomers had moved on to drive SUVs and trucks.

But, from 1970-'73, the Camaro, especially the Z/28, struck fear in hearts of the competition, both on the track and on the street. And, for the lucky people who owned one of these great machines during that period, a piece of automotive history that will be handed down from generation to generation.

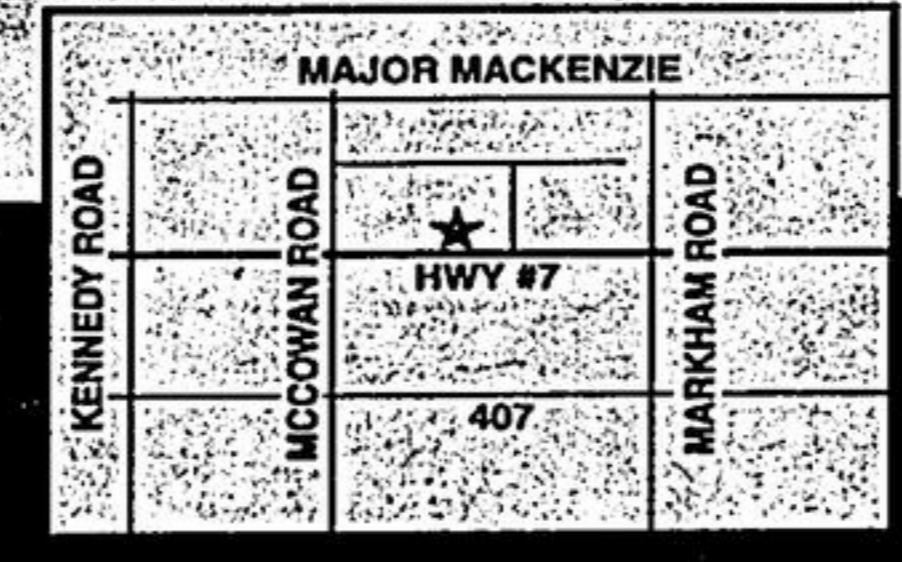
■ **Otto Stein specializes in classic cars as a writer with Wheelbase Communications, a world-wide supplier of automobile news, reviews and features.**

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