



RIDES

SEAN SULLIVAN TAPS THE DREAM BOX

His 1965 Malibu SS is a lot more than low-slung and soothing to the eye

❖ TEXT: **Ro McGonegal** | PHOTOS: **Patrick Lauder**

★**Sean was a lucky lad.** His dad was already interested. To commemorate his eighth grade graduation, he bought him a 1967 Camaro. Sean didn't have an operator's license. He was going to work on the car until the magic day arrived ... and then go and drive the crap out of it.

"We worked on it, off and on, for about five years and finally finished it when I was 17 years old. My dad did all the bodywork and paint. I rebuilt the 327 motor. I put in new suspension, a transmission, brakes, wheels, tires, interior, etc." Then, the hydrogen bomb blew and obliterated any notion of a "nice, well-behaved" street driver. "By the time I was done with my Camaro, it was tubbed and had a rollage, four-link suspension, and a 632. It was more quarter-mile race car than a fun street car," he opined.





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Then, he did a big one-eighty. "When I was younger, the Camaro was the car to have ... but I sold it and started building a 1932 five-window from the ground up." To do this, Sean brought to bear everything he'd learned building the Camaro, from the philosophical to the mechanical. "The car I really wanted was an early square-body Chevelle."

One day, he brought the '32 to the Chevy dealer where he worked. An associate named Pat was there getting his truck serviced. He was a classic car fan and couldn't help but yak to Sean about the coupe. Pat had noticed a 2005 GTO on the lot and asked if the owner would be interested in doing a deal for his four-speed, factory-air 1965 Malibu SS—exactly the car Sean was lusting after. "It didn't have the motor I wanted or even the wheels and tires, but it had everything else right: color, interior, features, and body style."



Sean Sullivan Taps the Dream Box

The dealer wasn't interested in the Chevelle, but Pat wanted more than Sean could justify, \$500 to be exact. It went on for months; neither party would acquiesce. It got to be a hard case and Sean's wife, Jennifer, who wanted him to have the car in time for his rapidly approaching birthday, could abide the storm of testosterone no longer. She paid the \$500 contention but forbade Pat from telling her husband anything about their deal.

She got the Chevelle all right. "The plan was to surprise my husband at work with his new, old car. But I wasn't off the hook that easy—at first I couldn't even get the transmission into First gear! Then it started to rain and the windshield wipers weren't working. I couldn't switch the headlights to low beam ... and the car was out of gas. Eventually, I was able to get on my way."

Sean says this: "Everyone went to see the car, and I was the last one out. I saw my wife get out of it. It took me a minute to understand what was going on, but before I could say a word she tossed me the keys and said 'Happy birthday, I'm never driving it again!'"

He got busy with his potential home-wrecker and except for paint and body, he did all the work. He saved time and money by not changing things that didn't need changing. He got away from the "let's





wipe the slate raw" mentality and concentrated on the critical issue—letting the Chevelle stand out by its own beautiful device.

Sean had it in his mind that the Chevelle would be a high-class driver, not an orange-cone assassin, and gave it world-class equipment that would serve well in any environment. Stance was critical and what more convenient way to adjust body height/rake than with a suspension system that rides on pressurized air. He put all that RideTech stuff under the front end and hooked everything together with Proforged steering parts and a CPP 500 Series steering box. He supported the reworked 12-bolt with QA1 double-adjustable upper and lower control arms and RideTech air springs. The result is a system that drops the car so low it makes ants scream in terror. In the matter of the critical rolling stock combination, Sean absolutely killed it with large-diameter REV 107 Rally wheels slinging 18-inch red line Nitto tires from Diamond Back Classic Tires.

A Godzilla engine would have no purpose where the criteria are reliability, long service life, and a modicum of fuel mileage. Clearly, a mildly modified modern small-block would more than satisfy. Sean

equipped his LS3 with an aluminum intake manifold and a 4150 throttle body capped by a factory dual-snorkel air cleaner. At a glance, the engine appears carbureted, not equipped with electronic fuel injection. Among the salient visual changes: Hooker cast-iron exhaust manifolds and a slick Drive Junky serpentine accessory system. Mission accomplished.

The Malibu's appearance was left to the ministrations of Gamboa's Body & Frame in Rancho Cordova, California. Gamboa slicked the body down and hit it with PPG factory '65 Glacier Gray that they tweaked with a touch of blue metallic. As per Sean, Gamboa maintained all bodywork and trim and took nothing away from the original scheme, one with very long and timeless legs, as in classic. Likewise, the 'Bu's gut has a distinct factory aroma: padded dash insert, SS gauges, AM/FM slide bar radio, SS console, and SS seats.

Sean recounts his two most memorable occasions: "My wife surprising me with the car and then winning an award at the 2016 Goodguys West Coast Nationals. But more than anything else I had to make it my own and take it, in my eyes, to another level." Sean is a lucky lad

TECH CHECK

Owner: Sean Sullivan, Diamond Springs, California

Vehicle: 1965 Chevelle SS

Engine

- **Type:** LS3
- **Displacement:** 376 ci
- **Compression Ratio:** 10.7:1
- **Bore:** 4.065 inches
- **Stroke:** 3.622 inches
- **Cylinder Heads:** LS3, L92-style ports, 2.165/1.590 valves, 68cc combustion chambers
- **Rotating Assembly:** Nodular iron crankshaft, powdered metal connecting rods, hypereutectic pistons
- **Valvetrain:** 1.7:1 rocker arms, OE pushrods, Comp Beehive springs, OE retainers (cam and springs installed by Henry Paschane)
- **Camshaft:** Comp XR275HR13 hydraulic (222/234-deg. duration at 0.050; 0.566/0.576-inch lift; 113 LSA)
- **Induction:** Holley Mid-Rise intake manifold, Holley 4150 1,000-cfm throttle body, factory dual-snorkel with K&N filter element, Tanks, Inc. steel 24-gallon fuel tank, Walbro submersible pump
- **Ignition:** Holley HP control module, MSD primary wires
- **Exhaust:** Holley cast-iron manifolds, 2 1/2-inch system, X-pipe, Black Widow Venom 250 mufflers
- **Ancillaries:** Drive Junky serpentine system, dual SPAL fans, DeWitts aluminum radiator, Powermaster alternator
- **Output (at the wheels):** 467 hp at 6,500 rpm, 423 lb-ft at 5,297 rpm
- **Tuner:** Dave Ehrlich at Autotrend EFI (Diamond Springs, CA)

Drivetrain

- **Transmission:** TREMEC TKO 600, McLeod Super Street Pro dual-disc clutch assembly, McLeod steel flywheel
- **Rear Axle:** GM 12-bolt w/ Eaton differential, 3.73:1 gears, Superior 30-spline axles, 3-inch steel driveshaft with Spicer U-joints

Chassis

- **Front Suspension:** RideTech 2-inch drop spindles, HQ-series ShockWave airbags, RideTech Muscle Bar antisway bar
- **Rear Suspension:** RideTech air springs, antisway bar, Fox RO shock absorbers
- **Brakes:** Baer vented 13-inch rotors, four-piston calipers, front; CPP 12-inch rotors, two-piston calipers, rear; CPP proportioning valve

Wheels & Tires

- **Wheels:** REV 107 Rally 18x8 front, 18x9 rear
- **Tires:** Nitto 555 225/45 front, 255/45 rear (red lines by Diamond Back Tires)

Interior

- **Upholstery:** OE
- **Material:** Vinyl/cloth
- **Seats:** TMI buckets
- **Steering:** OE column, CPP 500 Series box
- **Shifter:** McLeod Slik Stik, 2-inch offset w/ Muncie-style shifter
- **Dash:** Factory w/ padded insert
- **Instrumentation:** OE SS gauges, Auto Meter
- **Audio:** OE AM/FM slide bar, RetroSound 4-inch front speakers
- **HVAC:** Classic Auto Air, factory A/C controls

Exterior

- **Bodywork:** Gamboa's Body & Frame (Rancho Cordova, CA)
- **Paint By:** Gamboa's Body & Frame
- **Paint:** PPG Factory 1965 Glacier Gray (with a little blue metallic)
- **Hood:** Stock
- **Grille:** Stock
- **Bumpers:** Stock