

HM Review

Ed Rogala

AutoWorld Legends of the Quarter Mile

So what exactly is a Funny Car?

This product review will showcase a couple of Autoworld's latest 1/18 scale offerings that are new additions to their "Legends of the Quarter Mile" series of spectacularly detailed pre-built automobiles. More about these models later, let me first give you a history of the term Funny Car.

To the uninitiated, the term Funny Car, might imply cars that are silly looking or funny to look at. In all actuality, the term Funny Car does have a "real" meaning. Let me explain the origins of this term. Drag racing has been around in this country since the 1930s. The race involves a short straight course, and has always been a high-speed sprint to the finish. Organized drag racing started in the 1940s and evolved into the NHRA



There are no doors on a funny car. The body tilts open and is held in this position by a brace.

(National Hot Rod Association) and is currently one of the largest motorsports organizations in the United States, with membership encompassing professional racers, amateur weekend racers and drag racing fans.

Funny Car is a division in drag racing that has formally been around since the early 1960s. In early 1964, the Chrysler Corporation gave a Dodge 330 to a drag racer out of California by the name of Dick Landry. Dick entered the car in the Super Stock division of the NHRA. He eventually figured out that he could get more traction if he modified the chassis of the car, moving the rear axle backwards and the front wheels forward. The look of the car was significantly altered, thus earning the nickname of "Funny Car". The first Funny Cars made their competition debut in Phoenix in early 1965 at an AHRA (American Hot Rod Association) event. The AHRA was the first sanctioning body to recognize a formal Funny Car division.



Over the years, the Funny Car has evolved from its beginnings as an altered chassis Super Stock, to a super-charged force on the strip. The division grew in respect and popularity, making sponsors take notice and adding fuel to the promotion of establishing Funny Car drivers as household names with racing fans. The 1970s saw an explosion of popularity of drag racing, which included Funny Cars. Design of the cars had changed slightly, exposed intakes on the hoods as an example, but all of the entries vaguely resembled their cousins sold in every automobile dealership. It is from this 1970s era that the subjects of this product review came from.

Funny Cars are characterized by having tilt-up fiberglass bodies (or carbon fiber in today's era), over a custom fabricated chassis, giving them an appearance vaguely approximating manufacturers' showroom models. They also have forward-mounted engines (the engine is located in front of the driver), as opposed to Top Fuel dragsters which currently place the engine behind the driver. The NHRA has strict guidelines for funny cars. Most of the rules relate to the engine. In short, the



Tilting the body open reveals a detailed chassis and a drivers cockpit that is complete in every detail.

engines can only be V-8s displacing no more than 500 cubic inches (8.19L). The most popular design is loosely based on the second generation Chrysler 426 Hemi "Elephant Engine" manufactured from 1964 until 1971.

Funny car fuel systems are key to their immense power. During a single run (starting, burnout, backing up, staging, 1/4 mile) cars can burn as much as 15 gallons of fuel. The fuel mixture is usually 85-90% nitromethane with 10-15% methanol. Funny Cars have

a fixed gear ratio of 3.20:1 and have a reversing gear. Power is transmitted from the engine to final drive through a multiple staged clutch which provides progressive incremental lockup as the run proceeds. Horsepower claims vary widely, but it is probably around 8000 hp. A Funny Car routinely achieves a 6G acceleration from a standing start.

So now that you have a better understanding of what a Funny Car is, let's examine the story of the two cars being reviewed here. First we'll look at the "L.A.



Both cars include a drag chute which is used to slow the car down at the end of a high-speed run.

Hooker" a 1971 Ford Mustang Funny Car. The L.A. Hooker was driven by Dave Condit, who was a member of Southern California's most interesting racing families and winner of the 1974 NHRA World Finals Funny Car title. Dave campaigned the L.A. Hooker Mustangs with brothers Steve and Bill and cousins Gene and Rich Beaver and was a regular threat at Southern California races in the 1970s. The Condit's are cousins of 15-time NHRA



Even the most experienced modeler would have difficulty painting the bodies to this level of perfection.

Funny Car champ John Force (Gene Beaver was Force's uncle.) Dave Condit passed away in July 2011, he was 64.

The second car reviewed here is Don Garlits' 1971 Dodge Charger Funny Car. Don Garlits is probably one of the best known drag racers in the history of this sport. He is known as "Big Daddy" to drag racing fans around the world. Garlits was a pioneer in the field of drag racing



The front suspension is fully articulated, including the wheels which steer from the driver's position.

and perfected the rear engine Top Fuel dragster design. [Always the innovator, Garlits moved the engine from its traditional location in front of the driver to behind the driver after a clutch exploded during a Top Fuel race in 1970, cutting the car in two and severing most of his right foot — ED]

AutoWorld's model of Garlits' 1971 Dodge Charger Funny Car evolved from the Gold Digger Mustang that came from the short-lived Gary Bolger driven Don Garlits/Bud Richter Charger from 1971. The car was the Mustang rebodied with a Charger shell after Ira Lichte put a deal together with the Chicagoland Dodge dealers.



From the full-blown Hemi motor to the massive rubber slicks in back, the cars are complete replicas.

Dealers were supposed to pay for the body, paint and tin, while Garlits lent his name to the project for a percentage of each appearance. The affair didn't work out too well and following a stormy two month "honeymoon" the deal fell through. The Gold Digger Mustang body went back on the car and the Charger body was sold to Tom Hoover. As you can clearly tell from this brief history, the Don Garlits 1971 Dodge Charger Funny Car was not a long term success.

Both of these models are attractively packaged in window boxes. One really nice feature of this packaging is the clear window on the BOTTOM of the package, which reveals the intricately detailed chassis. The tube chassis is die-cast with many injection molded plastic components. Steering is articulated and the real rubber

slicks and rubber front tires are authentically reproduced — complete with raised Goodyear white lettering.

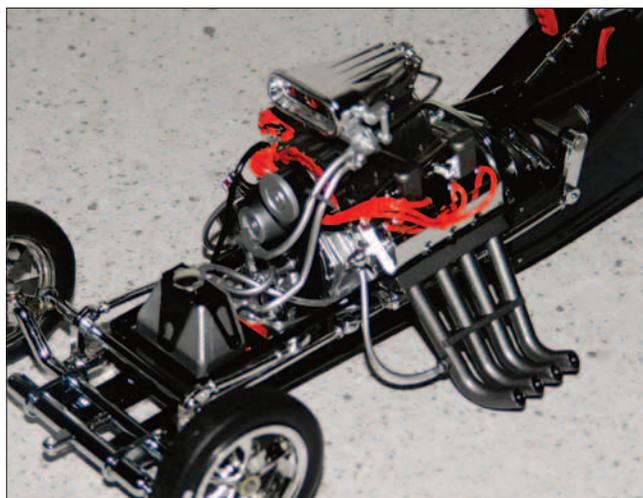
The engines are complete with wiring and plumbing and feature a chrome supercharger air intake and are complete with the throttle and butterfly linkage. At the back of the chassis, the drag chute(s) are present as well.

The interior details are all reproduced too. Fire extinguishers, safety harnesses, dragster-styled steering wheel, shifter and the massive brake bar are clearly visible.

The bodies tilt just like the full-scale namesake and can



Even though his Funny Car career was brief, Don Garlits is one of the best known names in racing. be displayed in the raised position using the body brace, or they can be removed completely, so you can examine and display the chassis separately. To me, the highlight of these models is the beautiful injection molded bodies. The finish on the paintwork is phenomenal and the way the various



Removing the body completely allows for up close inspection of the Chrysler 426ci Elephant Engine.

graphics and sponsor logos are reproduced greatly adds to the perceived value of these collectibles.

Modelers with intermediate to advanced building and painting skills would do well to create a finished product that even begins to approach the finish levels as seen on either of these offerings. These are both great looking, fantastically detailed and well executed examples of collectible models in today's marketplace, and yet they are available at highly attractive retail price points. The L.A. Hooker 1971 Ford Mustang NHRA Funny Car (#AW1106/0) and Don Garlits 1971 Dodge Charger Funny Car (#AW1107/06) are both currently available for inventory. Get'em both and add them to your collectibles department, you'll be glad you did. **HM**

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