

**INSIDE: 2010 MUSCLE MACHINE OF THE YEAR!**



Hemmings

# MUSCLE MACHINES

THE ULTIMATE ALL-AMERICAN PERFORMANCE CAR MAGAZINE

## THE UNKNOWN BIG-BLOCK CHEVELLE



**INSIDE**

► **BUYER'S GUIDE:**  
1968-'69 CORONET

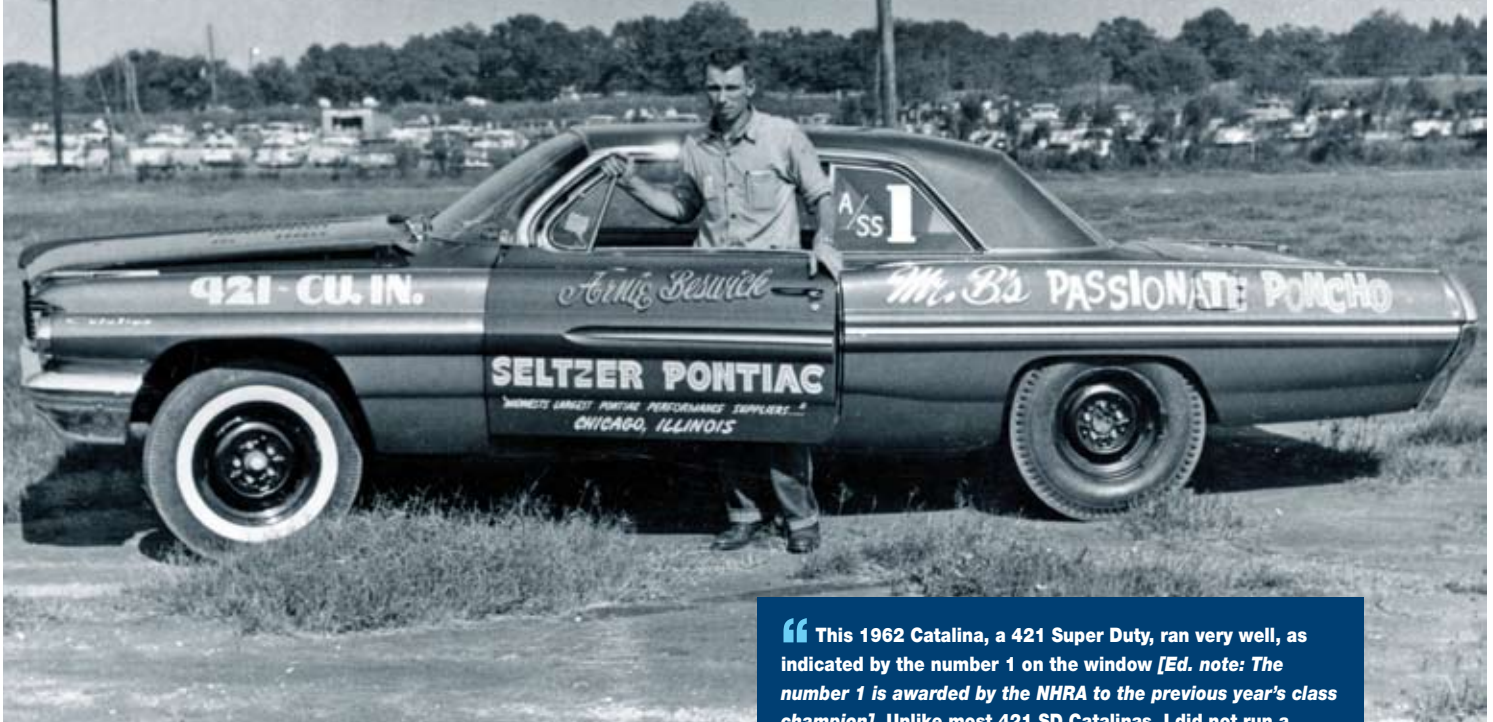


► **DRIVE REPORT:**  
'70 SCJ CYCLONE



# Arnie Beswick

They call me Mr. Pontiac



“ This 1962 Catalina, a 421 Super Duty, ran very well, as indicated by the number 1 on the window [Ed. note: The number 1 is awarded by the NHRA to the previous year's class champion]. Unlike most 421 SD Catalinas, I did not run a hood scoop, but chose instead to lower the stock hood in an attempt to get heat out of the engine compartment. ”

By Jim Luikens

Photography from the Arnie Beswick collection

## Although he's raced an Oldsmobile,

Dodges (twice) and a Mercury, to race fans nationwide Arnie Beswick is, and will always be, Mr. Pontiac. Born in 1930, Arnie drove his 1954 Oldsmobile to a class win at the very first NHRA Nationals in Great Bend, Kansas, in 1955. Yes, he goes back that far, and hasn't let up since—over the years, he has driven more than 40 race cars. During that time, Arnie has also been the victim of two devastating fires. The first, on his farm in 1972, served to knock him out of racing for 13 years. An infamous nitrous-oxide fireball on the track then sidelined him for three more years, beginning in 2004. In each case, he only came back stronger.

Arnie grew up on his family's farm in Morrison, Illinois, where he developed a passion for all things mechanical at a very early age. No matter what the device or machine, Arnie just had to work on it. As soon as he was old enough to own a car, he began to focus all of his attention on making it faster—no matter what the vehicle was, he had to wring all the potential out of it.

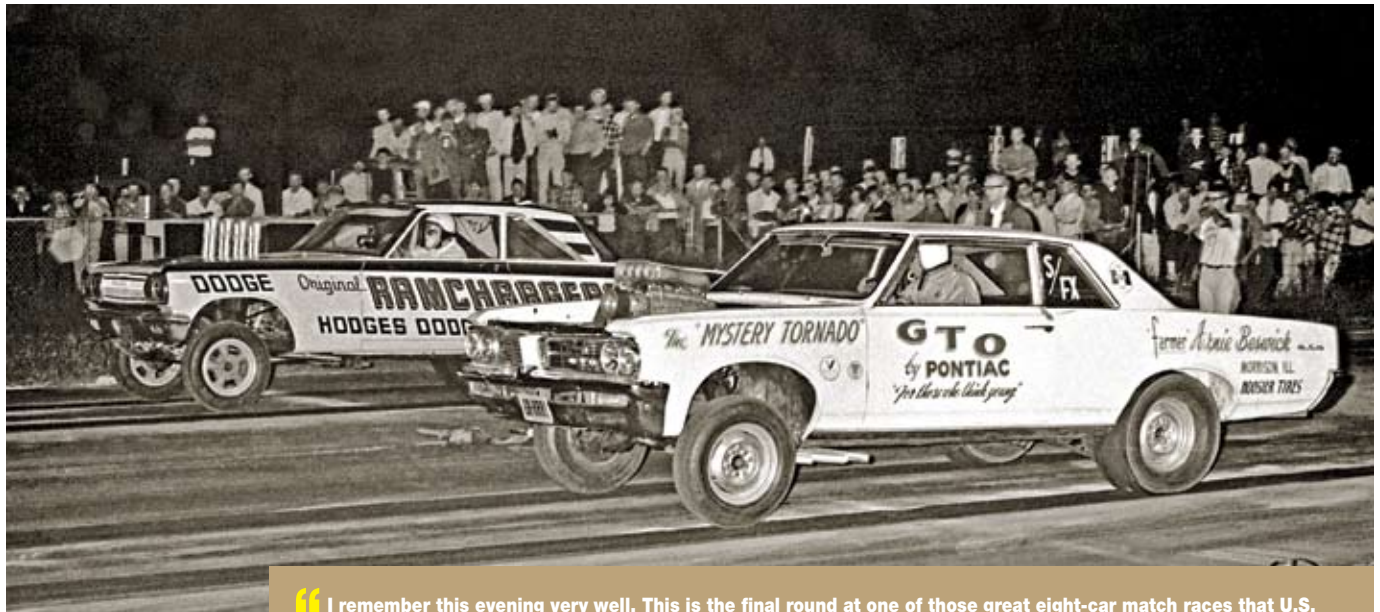
Always in search of the ultimate performance machine, he purchased a new Pontiac Chieftain in 1958 and a winning tradition was started. He was so impressed by his immediate wins in that Chieftain that he ordered a 1959 model as soon

as it was available. That began his love affair with Super Stock and Factory Experimental Pontiacs, one that continued through 1964; Arnie's cars during that period included a succession of Tri-Power Pontiacs and even a Tempest station wagon with 421 Super Duty motivation.

With the debut of the so-called Funny Cars in 1965, Arnie was forced to elevate his game. He pulled pounds out of his 1963 Tempest coupe, moved its wheel centers around, and renamed it *The Tameless Tiger*. Arnie's string of Funny Cars, which had evolved to include fiberglass bodies and tubular frames, continued through 1972, when the shop fire interrupted things.

Thirteen years later, in 1985, Arnie returned with a modern interpretation of his *Tameless Tiger*, now a Pro Mod-style car. Today, he still competes in an updated version of that car, currently clicking off elapsed times in the high sevens at nearly 190 MPH, on the cusp of his 80th birthday. Arnie is never too busy to talk to his fans and enjoys signing autographs during a nine-month racing schedule plus many show appearances.

Editor's Note: The images highlighted here are excerpted from an upcoming book on Arnie Beswick, *They Call Me Mr. Pontiac*, written by Jim Luikens; stay tuned for more information on the book's publication.



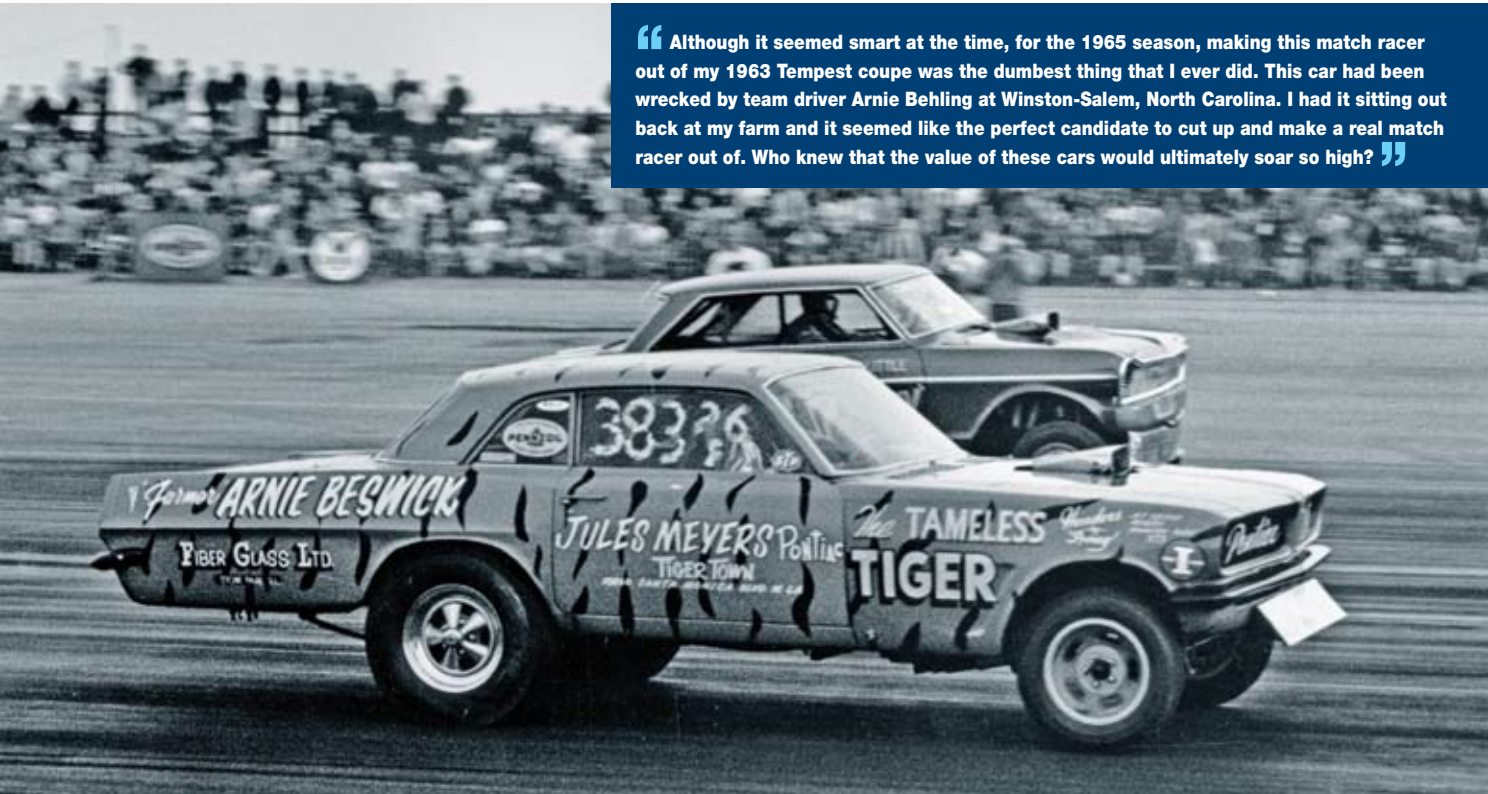
“ I remember this evening very well. This is the final round at one of those great eight-car match races that U.S. 131 Dragway in Martin, Michigan, was so famous for. We all had to weigh 3,200 pounds. I noticed that it took two men to lift the spare tire out of the Ramchargers car before the final; they lost their balance trying to do it. Turns out that the tire was filled with water to add weight for the weigh-in. I beat them with my 1964 GTO, and then they were disqualified for being light, to boot. ” (Photo by John Lacko/www.vintagedragphotos.com)

“ After my shop fire, I spent the next decade plus recovering from the disaster. I was farming full-time, but I missed racing tremendously. I had attended some races as a spectator, but I am too much of a competitor to just watch. My friend Jake Howard had kept up on the racing scene and he kept bugging me to come back. I finally did, and this Tempest was a very successful match racer, particularly at Super Chevy events. ”





“ Mercury approached me about running one of their new 427 SOHC Comets after they saw the success that I had been enjoying with my independent Pontiacs. I was part of a three-car factory team that included Don Nicholson and Hayden Proffit. The idea of being factory-backed, here at the 1965 Winternationals, was very appealing to me after racing out of my own pocket for the previous decade. Leaving Mercury was a tough decision and a sad outcome for what could have been a very good situation. In the end, I had to give the track promoters what they wanted, and that was a blown, nine-second GM match racer and not a 10-second FoMoCo-based factory experimental race car. ”



“ Although it seemed smart at the time, for the 1965 season, making this match racer out of my 1963 Tempest coupe was the dumbest thing that I ever did. This car had been wrecked by team driver Arnie Behling at Winston-Salem, North Carolina. I had it sitting out back at my farm and it seemed like the perfect candidate to cut up and make a real match racer out of. Who knew that the value of these cars would ultimately soar so high? ”



“ I purchased this heavy-duty GMC hauler used from NASCAR team owner Cotton Owens. GMC trucks of the era with V-8 engines were equipped with Pontiac power, so this vehicle was a natural for me. I used it for my 1963 421 Super Duty ‘Swiss Cheese’ Catalina. This photo shoot was done in Southern California for a long-defunct car magazine. I was the only racer to have both a 421 Super Duty Tempest coupe and a 421 Super Duty Tempest wagon. Only six of each were ever made. I bought the wagon from Pontiac and the coupe from Mickey Thompson. ”

“ In this photo, you’ll note that I am running C/Gas with my 1958 Pontiac Chieftain Stocker. Track promoters of the day typically paid more for Gassers than they did for Stockers, and my Chieftain was quick enough to run and win as a C/Gasser in A/Stock trim, with 370 cubic inches and Tri-Power – so that’s what I ran. This car was equipped with a four-speed transmission, the first year that such an item was offered in a Pontiac. ”



“ This was an ambitious endeavor: a three-car, all-Judge team that I put together with the Chicagoland Pontiac Dealers’ Association. I had a matching GTO Judge D/Stocker, a Pro Stock and a Funny Car. All were based on the new-for-1969 Pontiac GTO Judge, and all were painted Judge Orange. Morris Moyer was my mechanic, and we were trying to run an automatic in the Judge Funny Car. It got to the point where we had to change the transmission after every three runs. The Funny Car started out being powered by a Pontiac Ram Air IV engine, but a mid-year switch saw us upgrade to Ram Air V power. ”

