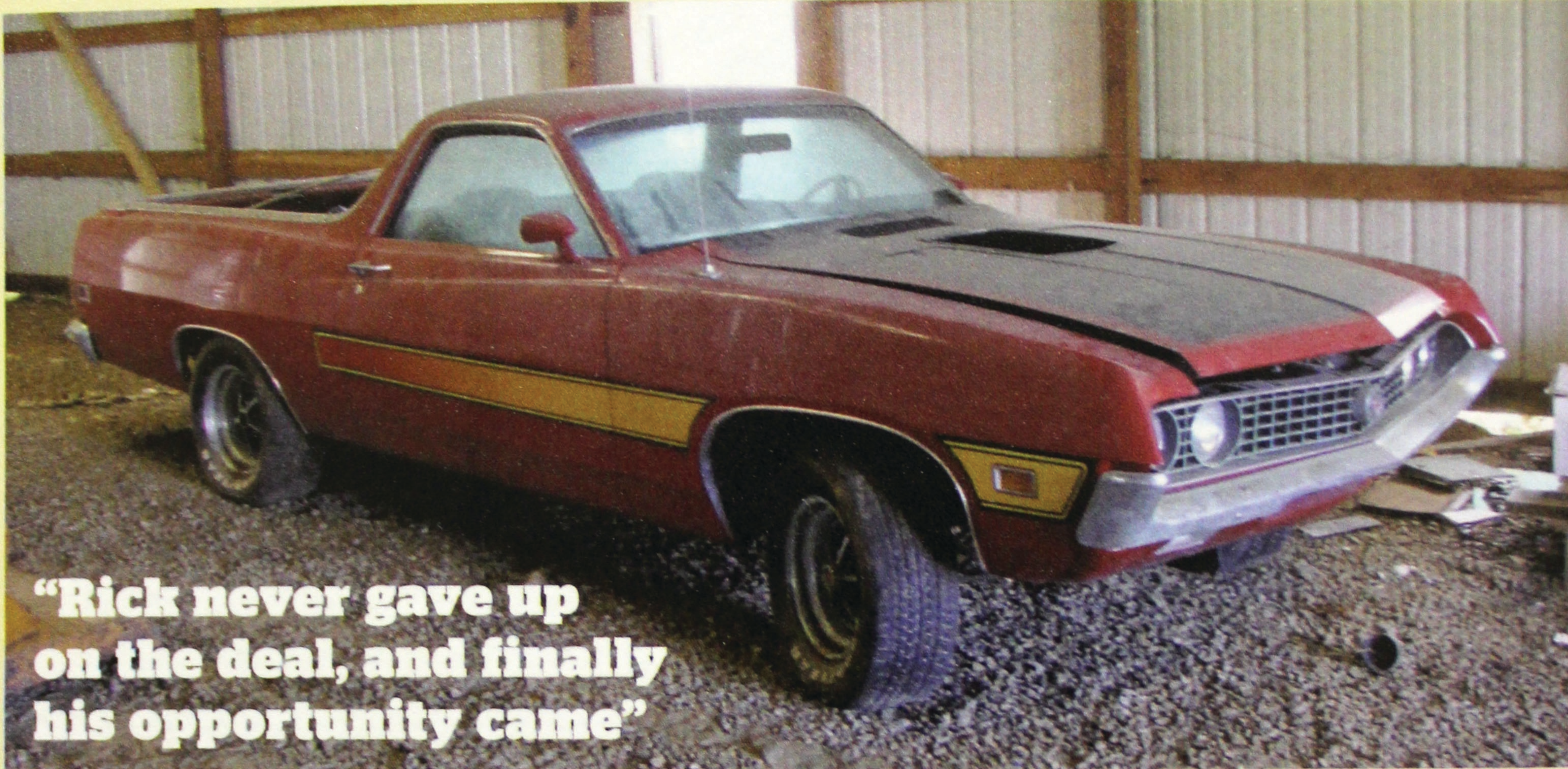


By Jerry Heasley



“Rick never gave up on the deal, and finally his opportunity came”

Four years had passed. Rick Parker hadn't forgotten about the big-block Ford, but visions of that particular 429 Cobra Jet were pretty far in the back of his mind. He told us, “It was a Friday night late last fall when I got the phone call. Dave said, ‘Guess who's standing here in my shop? A Mr. Linn.’”

George Linn owned a very

interesting muscle car, a '70 Ranchero GT factory powered by a 429 Cobra Jet big-block spinning a set of nonlocking 3.50 gears through a Ford four-speed close-ratio manual transmission. The car/pickups with high-performance big-blocks under their hoods have to be among the most curious muscle cars of all time. Shaped like a car at the front, Ford's

Ranchero, like Chevrolet's El Camino, morphed into a pickup truck, with a bed at the rear.

Four years had passed since Rick, who owns Signature Auto in Gahanna, Ohio (near Columbus), got wind of this Cobra Jet, which had been parked for decades in a barn near Centerburg, Ohio. Rick never gave up on the deal, and finally his opportunity came.

“Are you interested?” Dave

Parks asked. He knew his question was rhetorical. He transferred his cell phone to George Linn so Rick could talk directly with the owner. Rick made plans to drive up to George's place in Croton, a little community near Centerburg, the upcoming Saturday.

George got “tied up” on Saturday morning, but he gave his friend Dave permission to



■ The Ranchero sat in this barn in the center of Ohio for 20 years. Amazingly, the body had no rust. The hole in the hood was a real teaser. Was this a ram air 429 CJ? Yes, the Marti Report verified the shaker assembly as stock.



■ The engine was out, but a Ford VIN verifies what was stock under the hood. This Ranchero came from the factory with a ram air 429 Cobra Jet. A Marti Report read, “78 with these engine/transmission codes,” meaning Ford built 78 Rancheros with the 429 CJ and the transmission code 6 (four-speed close-ratio manual transmission).



take Rick to the barn to see the Ranchero. Rick wasn't surprised to find a very dusty Ranchero GT, sans the big-block engine, but what did surprise him was the total lack of rust. Another feature to get excited about was the factory hole in the hood, obviously for a factory scoop. So, was this Ranchero GT a shaker car? Inside, the passenger-side bucket seat held the shaker assembly for ram air.

Next, Rick read the VIN to find a J engine code in the fifth position. Great, *J* stands for the 429 Cobra Jet.

"[George] told me he bought the vehicle—I believe it was 21 years ago—drove it home a long distance, told me how great the driving experience was," said Rick. "But then he got back to Croton and had some power steering issues and some other old car issues."

Rick guesses George towed the Ranchero to a shop, then "the engine got

taken out and the Ranchero has been sitting all these years."

Finally, George was ready to sell. A key part of the deal was getting the original engine. But was the 429 CJ original for this chassis?

Rick said, "I believe it was Wednesday of the next week. I loaded up an engine hoist, my tools, and drove my truck back to Croton to George's house. We drove to the man's shop where the engine was."

Rick was overjoyed when he matched the engine stamping to the Ranchero's VIN. Rick had a rust-free '70 Ranchero GT and the original 429 Cobra Jet engine.

Even though the red paint was not the original color, the body buffed out so well that Rick decided to rebuild and install the 429 CJ and use the vehicle around the shop.

"I put new Magnums on it, Polyglas tires, cleaned it, and we joke around here what a great shop truck to go pick up parts." **MCR**

■ "The original color was Medium Gold Metallic with a Medium Ginger vinyl bench seat," says Rick Parker, the Ranchero's new owner. Somebody repainted the car red with a factory laser stripe and changed the interior to black bucket seats



■ The odometer, which had turned over, registered 2,238.8 miles.

"What did surprise him was the total lack of rust"

■ Inside, Rick found the shaker scoop for the ram air on the passenger-side bucket seat. Notice the Hurst T-handle shifter, stock for the '70 four-speed manual transmission.



Do you have a **RARE FIND** story to share? Contact Jerry Heasley at jerry@jerryheasley.com.