

but they said they'd put us in 'em right. And they did too—\$5200 with everything but power windows and air conditioning. ("Sheriff Stewart don't believe in air conditioning," one deputy grumbled. "It's about the only bitch I got with this job.")

With that 400-inch engine, they'll run 140, and that's all you're likely to need on the Interstate.

"Do you do much chasing?" I ask.

"Every damn thing in the world hits Georgia here, with 75, 29, 24, I-59, and 64 cuttin' right across it. This is the mouth, and anything headin' south, or north for that matter, comes right on through it. I enjoy to get out and chase every now and then, and that's when you purely appreciate these jewels." A Chattanooga businessman recognizes Sheriff Stewart and stops to kid him about frequenting bars outside his jurisdiction. They trade a few quips, and then Stewart turns back toward me. "We get a lot of robberies to run down on the Interstate. There isn't much that can outrun us. And we know the county roads, so we've got the advantage there. You get to drive the Trans Am. You can about steer it with the gas pedal, so you don't have to crank the wheel around so very much."

Stewart points out that his men get up to seventeen miles per gallon out of their Trans Ams, compared with eight to ten for the highway patrol's big Fords and Chevys, and that they go through fewer tires and shocks. "We could sell any one of those cars after a year and get what we paid out of 'em. We just put the radio in and the markings on the sides and back. We don't mess 'em up with screens, and we don't put gumballs on 'em. I don't believe in gumballs. I kinda like to sneak around, you know."

Each deputy has a car assigned to him and, as the sheriff puts it, "if he shines his ass in it, then he's responsible."

At nine o'clock the following morning, two spotless Trans Ams, one for Humphrey and one for me, are waiting in front of the hotel. Southern hospitality prevails, and deputies Phil Summers and Doug Howell take pleasure in chauffeuring us to Ringgold, the Catoosa County seat. About two minutes from the hotel, we're cruising south on I-75 at what must be close to 140. The speedometer in the Trans Am only reads to 100, but the needle is wrapped all the way back around, hugging the

backside of the peg at zero. Though I'm usually a nervous rider, I feel confident of Deputy Summers' driving, and I realize that at least half the cause of my road-running anxiety, my paranoia of the police, is missing. We pass a Georgia State Highway Patrol car at a speed differential of at least 60 miles per hour, and I ask Deputy Summers if he ever gets stopped for speeding.

"If you were in the clothing business you'd get discounts on your clothes, right? Well, it's kinda the same thing here. You might call it professional courtesy." Suddenly I realize that the last refuge for the true sports-car enthusiast is to become a sheriff's deputy and "to get you a Trans Am."

"Besides," Summers continues, "we got to work with other police departments, so we don't like to hassle each other. The Chattanooga Police Department," he nods his head back toward Chattanooga, "had a chase a while ago. A holdup man called the Continental Kid worked the Interstate, pulling jobs in a big Lincoln, and he finally stole himself a Trans Am. Now the police up there drive big Fords, and they couldn't catch him. Wrecked three or four in pursuit before they finally called us in. We got him."

"Just like in the movies?"

"Sometimes it's a lot like the movies," Summers smiles. "Anyway, the Kid

was a good ole boy. He really was. He'd tell you anything you wanted to know." Summers downshifts expertly as we take the Ringgold exit.

The sheriff's office is in an old two-story red brick building with an overhanging porch. The jail is upstairs. A trustee is out front washing Trans Ams. Through the window of the dispatch room, I can see a large woman, shaped more or less like a Coke bottle, wiping the tears from her cheeks as she argues with her boyfriend through the bars of a second-story window. "She's out there every day," the dispatcher tells me. "She says she's talked to the governor and that he told her to tell us we should let him go."

"There's talk of the truckers' strike. 'I hope they stir up some trouble so we can bust heads and call names and stuff.'" One of the other deputies punches Summers playfully on the shoulder. "I'll bet there's plenty of gas on the peanut farm," Howell chimes in. "I'm sure glad Carter got himself into the White House."

"Oh, yeah?" I'd forgotten this was the home state of our 39th president.

"Yeah. It keeps him out of Georgia."

In the waiting room, there's a framed picture of one of the Trans Ams, drawn, and quite well too, by a local eighth-grader and donated to the sheriff's department in memory of Baxter Shavers,



Doug Howell