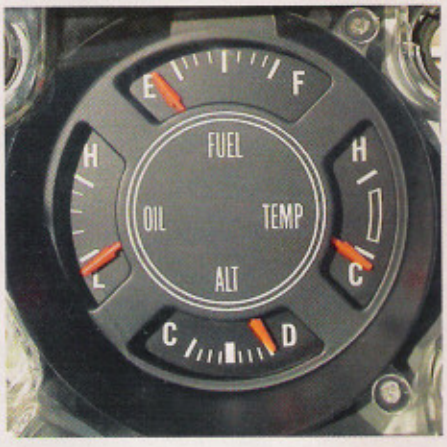
FIRE HAZARD

A SIMPLE FIX TO SAFE GUARD YOUR MOPAR FROM AN ELECTRICAL FIRE!

by Randy Holden



EVIDENCE OF A VOLT TO AMP SWITCH IS ONLY EVIDENT ON THE REAR OF THE GAUGE CLUSTER

There's little in life that can be as horrifying as an electrical fire in your old Mopar. Unfortunately, old Chrysler products are especially vulnerable to this crisis because of a downright poorly designed ammeter setup used in virtually all of their cars throughout the 1960's and 1970's. If you're looking at a stock gauge in your instrument cluster that simply has a "D" on one side and a "C" on the other, with a wavering needle between, that's an ammeter. You will no doubt be familiar with how the needle fluctuates when your car's idling, or when you flip the headlights on, or sometimes it even bounces around in time with the turn signal indicators. That's because the stock ammeter relates its information on your car's charging system by being directly connected to the alternator through a "hot" wire which runs from the alternator, through the firewall, and straight into the back of the gauge. If that wire shorts out, or grounds out, anywhere along the line, or if the gauge itself shorts out (an entirely too common occurrence), you've got problems.

Through the years, we've seen dozens of cars which have suffered dash fires, and the culprit in each and every one of them has been a shorting ammeter gauge. We know one guy who was literally driving down the road, noticed the gauge acting goofy, then glowing chunks of wire started dropping on his feet as the smoke started pouring out of the dash! Quick action and stomping out the burning carpet saved his car, but had he not had relatively loose battery terminals, the situation could have been much worse. As it was, he still melted most of his instrument panel, ruined the carpet, and had to replace all of the wiring under the dash, but at least the car didn't burn. If your ammeter shorts and you're not able to cut the flow of juice to that thing, it can, and will, continue to get hotter and draw its strength from your battery even if you shut the engine off. An E-body we know of locally had its entire interior toasted thanks to the ammeter gauge back in the late 1980's. The car was salvaged