

No "Rest in Peace" Rust

By Bob Schmeichel

Anyone who has thought about building an original Henry Ford steel car from the '30s is finding out they are getting harder and more expensive to find today even for the avid hard-core car builders. And if you challenge yourself by wanting a specific year and model, you may wind up getting what you can as a starting point to move forward with your desire. All too often when a car project is found, and if it isn't all there with the picture that a person has in their minds eye, people will usually shy away from the insurmountable attention needed to get to the end result. I have always said it takes a continuous drive, money, and above all, patience if you don't have it to build any car no matter how you do it. Accepting the problems of wanting a very specific body model can take it to another level of stress.

Emery Lee already had a 1933 Ford Cabriolet street rod. It was a really good driving- riding car with all the current trend items, besides great looks, to help it retain its value. The body was a nice fiberglass reproduction of the early Henry Ford model with a chopped top. Even though the car was drop dead gorgeous in every way, Emery has always had a really strong liking to have an original steel version of the same thing. After a few years of driving the glass car and the desire still stronger than ever, he decided to sell the car to fund building the real thing. Finding an original steel car, as I said earlier, can be a challenge as Emery found out over a period of years. Eventually in 2007, he found one on eBay in Alabama that he snatched up right away, and as he told me, probably paid too much for it as he later found out. It was advertised as having light front end damage but was all there. After getting the car back to South Dakota, Emery saw that it was an earlier unfinished '70s built street rod. The small block Ford engine, trans, Mustang II front suspension with 4-bolt wheels and an 8-inch Ford rear end that underlined the build timeframe. But the damage was way more extensive than the owner admitted to Emery over the phone, taking out the front bumper, grill, radiator, hood, front fenders and cowl back to the passenger door. Also because the owner had lost interest after crashing the car, it was left exposed to the outside elements in a grove of trees for years. The longtime exposure left the hulk full of deteriorating leaves and dirt in every nook and cranny of the body creating rust from the inside out like a cancer.

Too often I hear misleading stories people are told about cars they are buying that don't seem to represent the actual image. Distance and not being able to see the car in person seem to leave many problems later for the buyer to work through. Emery took the car to Color Mystique to have Mike and Don Jones tear into the car and work to make the '33 a reality for him. After the mangled junk front sheet metal was removed as well as the engine and trans, it was discovered that the twisted frame was beyond repair and the cowl portion of the body was also heavily damaged. The list kept adding up with too-far-gone, ill-repaired arch welded fenders and because the car sat outside in a grove for so long, the doors, inner wheel wells, front lower rear quarters, rear lower panel and deck lid all had extensive rust and in rough shape.

Emery told me even though the car was a roller and all there, he felt he had bought a basket case with only a salvageable body from the doors on back. So the first thing on the agenda was to order a new frame from the Roadster Shop out of Illinois to give the body a good base to get squared away on. The new frame came with a Heidis independent front suspension, disc brakes, a triangulated suspended 9-inch Ford rear end, plumbed, along with engine and trans mounts, and coilovers on all four corners. Once that arrived, Dennis Slaymaker was called upon for a better cowl portion of the body as a replacement from a sedan body. After Mike Jones massaged the sedan cowl up to the windshield frame portion and the floor of the original cabriolet body, more labor intensive work began. Quite a few areas of the body were replaced with new steel patch panels or complete new panels all together that included all four new steel fenders, new running boards, a new grill, new stainless steel top bows, bumpers, and I am sure the list goes on. Emery did say he had a couple complete hoods he had bought over the years at swap meets, so he didn't have to buy that to replace. After Mike Jones had all the body work back to where it needed to be, the car was blown apart and a beautiful grey Porsche color paint was applied. With that done, the car was assembled back together with a newer LS engine and AOD trans and completely wired. Once all the mechanical work was finalized, the car was handed off to Jeff and Sue Meendering at J & S Upholstery to create an all grey leather interior and trunk area. Jeff and Sue actually installed the finishing touch of a black convertible top, too that really sets off the grey car color with the chrome plated American mag wheels. Everything about the car works great together and visually creates one outstanding ride that could have been lost to time if Emery hadn't brought it back from its would-be grave.



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