

## *Fearing Nothing Mechanical*

By Bob Schmeichel

After knowing Denny Heidebrink for over 40 years, I have to say he is one of the most intelligent people I have ever known when it comes to mechanical ability and isn't afraid to tackle working on anything put in front of him. Being retired for quite a few years now, he always says if he didn't have something to challenge his brain every day in his garage, he would get bored. And adding after all there is only so much TV you can watch and then that gets old, too! During the time I have known Denny he has built a 1931 Ford Vicky street rod, hand built a couple glider airplanes that he also flew, a 1940 Chevy street rod, a 1951 Oldsmobile Rocket street rod, a 1984 Chevy El Camino street rod, a 1959 Chevy Apache pickup street rod, a small Allis Chalmers tractor, and most recently a bunch of 1960s and 1970s motorcycles. Denny has never gone an easy direction with any of his projects, but always adds his own twists and touches bringing everything he completes into the 21st century with advanced mechanical technology along with keeping a gorgeous fit and finish outward appearance high standard.

In the year 2000, after looking through some Hot Rod magazines the previous winter for some new ideas, Denny decided he wanted to build a pickup with his own ideas with an updated hot rod feel. After checking out all the old vehicles at the old side of Oakleaf Salvage south of Hartford, South Dakota, he zeroed in and bought his '59 Chevy truck for his next challenge. As Denny was stripping the old truck down at home, his ideas about what he envisioned the truck to look like started to happen. He liked the dual headlights, but the small back window in the body had to go and was replaced with a larger window, which was no small feat getting it to look factory. After getting the old body into an acceptable appearance with new patch panels and finished bodywork, a newer molded fiber glass box, later with a cover, was chosen to replace the rusted original. With the new box on the frame, the box side steps were cut, lowered, and remolded to match up with the lower pickup body lines. Denny also designed and molded a piece in the box front on each side to help it flow into the body shape better, along with creating a lower rear rolled pan giving everything a seamless factory look. The rear end along with the front and rear suspension Denny chose to use came out 1996 Camaro mainly because it was already made to handle bigger, wider wheels and tires. Installing and welding the '96 Camaro strut front suspension in the '59 Chevy truck frame and under the fenders to get the correct wheel placement, having alignment ability, along with the correct ride height, happened quite successfully, but not before measuring thousands of times as Denny put it and then adding a tubular support for the strut from the firewall to the frame. Wheels and tires were next on the mock-up agenda to make the truck a roller and when Denny finally decided to get what he had chosen, which were wheels off of a new SSR at the time, no Chevy dealer around the area would sell him any. It's kind of ironic as Denny wound up getting the new SSR wheels he wanted at Nordstrom's. Funny how that works sometimes. Denny also bought a computerized 5.3 and an ADO trans out of a newer Chevy truck at Nordstrom's, too. The engine and trans were pretty much low mileage, so in order to give it a little bit more power and good looks, Denny installed a Magnuson supercharger on the engine and sent the computer for the engine to Magnuson for them to reprogram with this new setup. Having pretty much everything late model under the old truck skin was the goal. To feed the engine, a custom-made stainless steel gas tank with a built-in electric fuel pump was made by Valley Tanks and mounted behind the rear end in the frame. Denny replaced the steel floor that the fiberglass box had with oak wood planks and created some special t-shaped oak wood strips to hold the planks in place where metal strips might have been used before. This wood floor is a neat area that goes unseen because of the box cover with no visible bolts or screws on the top side of the wood. Not having too much room behind the dash, Denny decided to build a combination heat air conditioning unit fitting it behind the seats. The holes dash were welded up and created to hold a '57 Chevy car gauge cluster. He also utilized a Lokar floor shifter combined with a rear view mirror from Dakota Digital with a built-in shift indicator. To help whoa the 4-

wheel disc brake set-up, Denny installed a hydraulic which is powered by the power steering just light foot pressure. This is a sweet set-up their engines and yield little or no vacuum column was added for leg room to get in and out of the truck. Once everything was painted, the truck was taken to Jeff and Sue Mending to make a one-off interior to finish the truck out. Since that was done, the truck has been a driver ever since while averaging 20 to 22 mpg. Coming up behind this truck while driving on the interstate and because of how slick it looks from the back, most people would never guess the 57-year-old Chevy pickup is a 1959 year model recreated by Denny Heidebrink and looks as good today as the day it rolled out of Denny's garage 10 years ago. I am proud to know this quiet and humble guy with so much ability and have him in our car club group.

