

Creating An Image

By Bob Schmeichel

When building what you might consider to be a hot rod no matter what your project is, as with life in general, there always has to be a well thought out plan to get to what you might think of as your satisfied end result. Even with all the planning there are always little detours or challenges that come up no matter how focused you thought you were. Over the years, patience, and experience helps each of us push well beyond what we may have had as an accepted standard in our younger years and now is limited only by our imagination. Anything is attainable; we just have to figure out how to create it or where to get it.

In 1985 Vern Jenson, one of my lifelong friends was talking about building another hot rod project. He really wasn't looking for anything in particular but wanted to build a car with a Bonneville looking theme. While attending the Vintiques Rod Run that year and after talking to Randy Gribble in Watertown who had a 1937 Ford coupe body for sale at the time, a deal was made and Vern soon had the body home. Vern said the car body sat beside his garage on his trailer for almost a year while the beginning of his well thought out plan began. First on the agenda since the body was just that, was to locate a frame to mount the body on. After searching the surrounding area Vern located one on a farm west of Tea, South Dakota. When going to pick the frame up at the farm, Vern was also able to cut the front portion of a roof off another 37 Ford car lying nearby. This cut off portion of the roof would be used later in his plan when it came time to chop the top of the body. With the frame home the steps began to get it rolling with adding a Mustang II front suspension along with the addition of an 8" rear end out of a late 60's Mercury Comet with 3.25 gears. Oakleaf Salvage was then called upon for a newer HO 302 Ford Mustang engine with the matching C-4 transmission. Vern told me it took all of nine months to get everything mounted in place on the frame thru the exiting modified "X" member, plumbed with gas and brake lines. Steering and exhaust were mapped out thru the frame with the body in place so there were no surprises at the end to solve. The radiator was mounted with an air conditioning condenser in place and all related lines confined within the small area under the hood making it all look stock as it might have come from the factory that way had they done that.

When Vern initially bought the body home, we were talking about his vision of the car with its color, moon disc hubcaps, its stance, and how much to chop the top. With that information I created an ink and water color painting of what I thought the car would look like finished to hang on his inside garage wall for inspiration. It has been there ever since.

Since the frame was done as far as mocking it up, the body was bolted down solidly on the frame and 4 inches were taken out of the roof height. Anyone who has ever seen the side profile of a 37 Ford coupe knows because of the slanted angles of the windshield and the back of the roof, taking 4 inches out is no easy task. As you bring the picture of the roof down while maintaining those angles the roof needs to get longer. Hence the front part of the roof he cut off the other 37 earlier was used to make it longer with one weld joint across the roof once it was measured a few times and fitted. Which brings up another point. One of the most important tools for anyone building cars is a tape measure. The old adage of measure twice and cut once is very important when you are dealing with something you may not be able to replace. Vern went thru the same process when it came to the doors and all the inside garnish moldings till they all looked like they were made that way. He followed up with removing the outside door, hood, and trunk handles as well as creating one-off hood side panels. Once all the body work was done and in primer to his standard, he took everything apart again right down to the bare frame and painted everything a gorgeous lite silver blue color. It took a good 10 months to get to this point in time. Then the long tedious process of putting it

back together again began, I am thinking at least 6 months. After the glass was installed and the exhaust was put in place, it was taken east of Des Moines for interior work. The car came out looking pretty much exactly like the picture I first painted for Vern then...Fast forward to about 10 years ago. After driving the car for quite a few years it was starting to get rock chips and road rash associated with driving a car on a regular basis which is why we have them. Trying to maintain the appearance Vern repaired the areas with primer and then decided it would be easier to repaint the car the hot rod "Blist Black" than trying to spot paint the highly metallic original silver blue color he had chosen earlier. This was a change he hasn't regretted doing since.

Earlier this summer he pulled the original 302 he had installed so many years ago and replaced it with another 302, but with 450 horsepower. Even though the car looks rather sinister in its stealth black paint, it still looks like it's going 200 mph sitting still!! Ready, aim, fire...coming hard with clearance to land.

