

A Lost Cause Found New Life

By Jules Haper

I'm a sucker for lost causes, and this 1941 Chevy was a pile of junk – rusted out floor boards, top smashed down 10-12 inches, bullet holes and not one fender without a rip, tear, dent or all of the above. The trunk was caved in and the glass was cracked or gone.

A friend of mine started with it, and I welded a Nova sub frame on it for him. He got into it for a while, but then said it was too rough. He bought another '41 Chevy in a lot better shape and said I could have this one for my troubles.

So, I drug it home. I stripped out a 1976 Chevy Caprice Classic for the 350 c.i. motor, 350 transmission, steering column, brake pedal assembly and many other accessories. My oldest son helped me with it for a while and I was hoping that he'd want the car. I didn't need it as I already had a chopped and dropped 1946 Ford pickup truck, but his interests went elsewhere. As a result, it ended up out in a grove for two years.

I sold my '46 Ford pickup at the Back to the Fifties event in June 1999. The following Monday I got my friend Charlie's truck and trailer and we went to the grove to bring the old Chevy back to town. I didn't want any chrome, so I welded up a lot of trim holes, 50 in each door and 46 in the hood. I chopped the top two inches and shaved off anything that could come off. Charlie helped me after work for about six weeks with the mechanical stuff. I bought a new 350 c.i. crate motor. Charlie overhauled the transmission and wired it up with a harness salvaged out of an old Nova he had. I put in the glass, power windows, keyless entry and painted it flat black, dents and all.

My wife Marilyn said I could have her side of the garage to put the Chevy together. That lasted until she had to scrape windows, and then I was working on the car outside so she could park her car in.

We went to Back to the Fifties in June 2000, then out to the Black Hills Rod Run. We took it to Casper, WY, to show my folks and then to Pierre Dam Run and Watertown. We put a lot of miles on it, even though it was basically a tin can with no interior nor working wipers. Some of you know what that's like.

I drove it like that for 3 years. Then in the winter of 2003 I went to work on it again, welding up the few remaining holes and spent a lot of time on the top, trying to make it look like a top again. I louvered the hood and had Lonnie Bucher paint it in the spring of 2004.

It still isn't done. Marilyn says that 6 years is long enough to go without a headliner, and I've had one in the box for 3 years, so this spring I need to address this issue as well as the upholstery.

But while that work is on my agenda, I've also started another project – a 1923 Dodge four-door sedan. Yeah, Marilyn thinks I'm nuts, too,

because that one will probably be a rat rod for another six years. Maybe they're just never completely done.

The '41 Chevy is a driver, not a show car. I've done most of the work on it myself, and I'm a door knob salesman, not a mechanic or auto body man. But I still get the looks and thumbs-up from the people I meet on the road. You would have had to seen what I started with to really appreciate what it looks like now.

