

Five Years Start to Finish

By Bob Schmeichel

I have been into cars for 56 years, and I honestly believe it is the things that people do to their cars to set them apart from everyone else's that has kept my attention. Weather they keep a nice old car original without touching it, or restore it to better than new or radically modify it beyond all recognition, whatever the direction, has kept my blood flowing. I love seeing a car in the works of being rebuilt or changed along with trends that come into place usually making parts of the car better than it was originally. To me it is just as exciting to see a car as it is being built as it is when finished. With me building over a dozen cars and doing the majority of the work under my belt, I am always looking for new ideas to incorporate into my next car. A lot of the newer car or hot rod trends today, have evolved onto car-build TV shows so most people see only a shortened-up version of how a car evolves to its desired finished appearance and performance. There is

a ton of money and way more hours thrown at these TV show vehicles than people realize. This becomes a very misleading picture when a novice takes a vehicle to a body shop without an open check book. Weather it is a rat rod that is built for shock value, or a turbo charged muscle car running 170mph in seven seconds on the street, along with all the trends in between, they all have my attention connecting me to the people who created them. Even with all the different mind sets, it's the four wheels that connect us to a common thread and having fun in our own way.

Back in the 70s and 80s before any technology-advanced items or TV-based car-build shows, everyone in the area who did anything with cars, did it all themselves or at least the majority of the work. We would read about the trends in magazines and what we couldn't afford to buy, we made or built. The self-taught learning curve with putting mixed car parts together when building a car rightfully continues even today. I guess the challenge and determination are what keep it fun. In the middle 1980s, LeRoy Dyce, one of the better builders in the area, had finished up a black chopped top 1940 Chevy that people drooled over every time it was parked. Denny Heidebrink and myself included, were both heavily influenced by LeRoy's '40 Chevy, also. Both Denny and myself had already built Model A's as well as a couple '32 Fords. But the '40 Chevy had so much more room inside and were plentiful to find yet if you wanted to build one as well as cheaper to buy than other old cars at the time. So, eventually each of us bought one, me building mine in a more resto-rod way and Denny building his in a more radical rod looking way as LeRoy did.

Denny found his 1940 Chevy two-door sedan in Minnesota. Initially it was a complete car that had sat for 20 years. The farmer owner was moving to town with no place to put it, so it was for sale and Denny being at the right place at the right time bought it. After getting it home, he tore into it taking it completely apart right down to the bare frame. Denny had driven LeRoy's '40 a couple times and liked the way the front rode and steered, which led Denny to installing a similar Nova front clip. Denny wanted to improve the rear ride of the car by installing an independent rear suspension and wound up using a unit out of a early 90s T-Bird he located in Minneapolis. Next came the engine and trans. He chose a non-traditional 4.3 V-6 Chevy combined with a 4L-60-E automatic overdrive trans. His reasoning at the time for the combination was for power and gas mileage. Once he had the drive train in place, he threw the body back on the frame and proceeded to chop the roof 3 .5 inches. Bob Shriever, a friend to every car guy in the area, stopped by and gave Denny some advice on how to approach cutting the top to avoid a lot of extra work. He suggested using another top or roof portion to give the added inches needed to enclose the roof. When matching the angles of the windshield area and the rear window being opposite, the roof got longer as it came down. He also suggested cutting the roof to overlap in a big "V" rather than straight across.

Denny made the comment he looked at the rear window area for days before he made the cuts, which eventually made the job a snap as far as welding the roof back together body wise. Then on the other hand he couldn't believe how much work was involved with shortening down the door tops and all the inside window trim pieces. To this day, he kind of wished he hadn't cut quite so much out of the roof as it is hard to see

stop lights in town from a normal sitting position without

bending over in the car. Initially Denny installed air

bags on all four corners of the car's suspension for

ride as well as raising and lowering it for show,

and did it with his own engineering as there wasn't

anything like that available in kit form yet.

Denny did all the extensive body work and

passed it off to a friend to apply the color for him,

which today is one slick red paint job from any

view of the car. I always say a paint job is only

as good as the body work below it, which says

a lot about Denny's standard. After

getting the car together

and the wiring ironed

out, Denny hired

Bill Knox to do

the upholstery

and has been

driving it for

20 years ever

since. So, if you

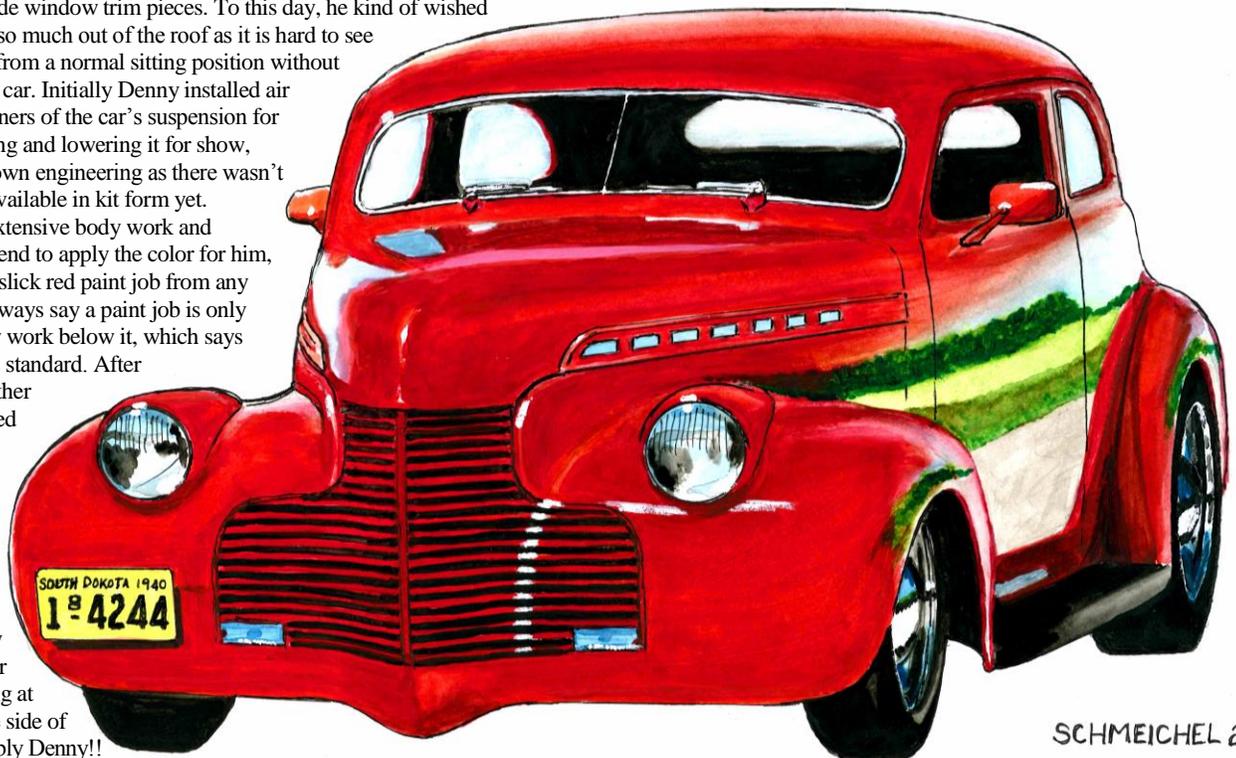
see a red '40 Chevy

with a rather sinister

attitude-look coming at

you on the opposite side of

the street, it's probably Denny!!



SCHMEICHEL 2014