



Bob Harder's Li'l Red Truck – 'The Adventures Begin'

Some years ago, in 2004 when I had my red 1999 Plymouth Prowler, I was talking with one of the members of our Mopar club, BM (who will otherwise not be named), about the need to have a trailer for my Prowler so I could take it across country to the Prowler gatherings once a year. Bill, I mean 'BM', said I needed to get a good truck to pull it with. What would you suggest I asked? He said I should look for a little red 'muscle truck. What is that, I asked, "I've never heard of one?" BW said, "Go online and you'll soon see exactly what it is."

Sure enough, I went on the Internet and soon found out that the 'little red truck' was, in fact, a Dodge 1978 or 1979 Adventure 100 pickup truck that had been modified by the factory to be a fast muscle truck. Its' official name: 'Li'l Red Express Truck'! It was in a beautiful customized red color, and had oak wood slats for the bed of the truck, oak slats on the sides of the truck, and oak slats even on the tailgate. 'Li'l Red Express Truck were even emblazed on the doors and tailgate! The step-side steps and gas cap were chromed, shining brightly right next to its 'Hallmark' design: two chrome exhaust pipes rising up behind the cab with curved exhaust tips that modeled the classiest 18-wheeler truck that you ever saw. Bill, I mean 'BM', was right: this would be the perfect truck for pulling a Li'l Red Prowler!

A Special Note for 'Mopar Heads': The Lil' Red Express had a special High Performance 360 C.I. 4-barrel small block - engine code (EH1) - which was a modified version of the 360 police engine (E58), producing 225 net horsepower @ 3800 RPM. The package also included Hemi style mufflers with a crossover pipe breathing through 2 chrome stacks located behind the cab, a special 727 transmission, and 3.55:1 rear gearing.

Checking out various websites for Li'l Red Trucks, I found that you could generally get them in running condition anywhere between \$10,000 and \$15,000. Since I was not going to use my truck that often, I figured a \$10,000 truck would be just about what I needed as long as it ran. There were a number of nice trucks available, including some beautifully restored Li'l Red's for \$25-\$35,000. Of course, that is what I would like to get but it just didn't seem to be worth it to me.

And then I found it! A 1979 Li'l Red Truck which had been modified to have a chrome Chrysler hemi engine and other upgrades. There were just two problems: first, the seller wanted \$17,000 for the truck. That seem to be a lot more than I wanted to spend on a casual truck. The second problem: it was in Ohio! I called the owner to talk about the truck and found out that it had been restored in Washington State and then purchased by someone in Ohio some 15 years before. The man who now owned the truck was a doctor (a real car 'novice' he said ... how true THAT turned out to be!) who used to take the Li'l Red Truck to car shows and to the Foster Freeze on summer Saturday nights, and that was all he had ever driven the truck for. Then one day, 10 years before I met him, he parked the truck in his garage and never drove it again. Now he had decided to sell the truck and wanted \$17,000 (which was more than he had paid for it himself). I told him that was more money than I had wanted to spend, that I was looking for a \$10,000 Li'l Red Truck, but he was determined to hold at that \$17,000 price. Disappointed, I thanked him and stopped looking for a truck, since nothing could ever match this beautiful Li'l Red.

A few months later, we were getting ready to travel to Illinois to visit my daughter in Quincy. We made our flight arrangements from the San Francisco airport, packed up, and got ready to go. While waiting at the airport gate for our flight, I got a cell phone call from - I couldn't believe it! The man with the Li'l Red Truck! He said that he had never gotten any other calls of interest for the truck, so, if I still wanted it, he would sell it to me for just \$10,000! I was ecstatic!

It didn't take long to work out all of the details. I said I would pick up a rental car when I arrived at the St. Louis, Missouri airport, and then drive up to my daughter's house in Quincy. After a couple of days, I would drive the rental car and meet him at the airport in Toledo Ohio. I figured that if I decided to buy the truck, I would then be able to leave the rental with the car rental company right there at the airport. My family - hard to believe! - thought that this was a crazy idea! They also realized that, since it WAS a crazy idea, I was going to do it!

Three days after arriving in Quincy, I bid the family farewell and headed to Ohio. On the way, I decided to stop at the Chrysler Museum in Detroit, Michigan to check out all of the excellent Mopar's that were there. And there I saw it for the first time: the very first Li'l Red Truck! It was an original 1978 version in beautiful original condition. I knew I had made the right decision: this truck was 'The Truck' for me!

It took longer to get to the Toledo airport than I had imagined. Finally, as a dusk approached, I arrived at the airport ... and there it was: my soon-to-be-very-own Li'l Red Truck! I met the owner and we started talking about the details of the Li'l Red Truck. He showed me how it was in excellent condition, (at least as far as I could see in the dimming light), and popped the hood to reveal the beauty of beauties: A huge chromed hemi engine! In the cab he showed me the good condition of the upholstery and the many features of the dashboard. The truck even had heating and air conditioning controls right there in the dashboard. He proudly showed me how easy it was to move the heating and air-conditioning levers back and forth. He told me that the only problem with the truck was that it needed new mufflers. Sure enough, he had to use the classic asbestos tape and wrap it around each muffler holding everything in place. Surely I could fix such that one simple problem. What a deal!