

**Joe Corea's
Repros & Retros:
The Master: Chris Mullis**

While I had planned more of a chronological approach to the subject of repro and retro H.O. slots, Rick's impending participation in the H.O. Le Mans (good luck Rick!) pushed up my deadline and caused me to revise my plans. Therefore, the subject of this issue's column is Chris Mullis. Chris makes his cars under the name of H.O. Detroit.

Most hobbyists are familiar with Chris by reputation, however, many may never have seen his work. Chris is both an artist and a perfectionist. A machinist by trade, Chris uses his eye for detail to produce the most exacting cars his side of Aurora; or any side of Aurora, for that matter.

Three years ago Chris was like most of us, a hobbyist in search of odd colored cars both to collect and for he and his friends to race. He discovered that finding odd color cars was difficult, prices high, and available repros not to his liking. Since he was not happy with what he was able to find at the time, he and a friend began to experiment with various mold making techniques and materials available in an effort to make a better product. His love of the T-Jet Willys Gasser lead to his first project. He tried various materials until he came up with a resin that looked much more like the original cycolac plastic used by Aurora (and others) than anything else in use up to that time. The material did not have the characteristic holes and bubbles left by other materials, and his experimentation lead to development of pearl, metal-flake and translucent Willys as well as a rainbow of standard colors. Further experimentation lead to a 'glass' that was both clear and bubble free. Earlier repro glass was easy to identify by the yellowish color and presence of bubbles.

Chris also wanted his cars to have the smooth, almost shiny hard finish of the Aurora cars; a difficult under-

taking. He earliest efforts were amazing. As a hobbyist looking to satisfy his own needs, he was at first surprised with the response of everyone to his cars. Many people had to have as many of Chris' Willys as they could afford, while others saw these perfect little cars as a threat to the hobby!

As I stated in my first column, I have no intention of getting into the repros are good / repros are bad controversy. Chris' first Willys were perfect right down to every mold line. Many even had the characteristic "pinched nose" of the injected original. Some even had the characteristic ding left by the original Aurora clamshell box, with the two molded-in hold-downs. Chris was among the first to realize the potential problem of these perfect replicas, and now marks all of his productions with the letters: HOD inside the body, as an H.O. Detroit production. The early cars, which were not marked H.O. Detroit (Willys and a few others) can be identified by the lack of a mounting post for the glass inside of the roof, and the fact that the glass had to be glued in, since the material used can not be melted by usual means. For the most part, Chris' early Willys and other cars, were in colors Aurora never used (with a few exceptions). Chris did make several black Willys, which could be used by the unscrupulous to fool the uninformed. These Willys can be identified by the glued-in glass and the fact that the screw post reproduction is full length. The real Aurora black Willys were all Speedlines, and had short front posts. Chris made Willys in both T-Jet and Xcellerator styles. An interesting note is that he never made a black one in the Xcellerator style.

Chris worked long and hard on a Willys pickup, which he completed in 1995. Being a perfectionist, Chris only made about 50 of these, as he was not satisfied with the proportions of the pick-up bed. Chris also made a limited number of Xcellerator Vegas in odd colors, but found the thin body walls and the awkward position of

the rear screw post caused extensive production problems, which caused him to quickly stop production (much to the chagrin of his collector following).

To date, Chris has made repros of the following Aurora cars: The '63 Ford Galaxie, Falcon and Fairlane (hardtops only), Dodge Chargers, '65 Mustang fastbacks and hardtops, El Caminos, Camaros, Firebirds, '69 Pontiac GTO, Ferrari 250 GTO, Vibe Corvette in both hardtop and convertible, Vibe '62 Ford pick-up and the AFX Chevy Bel Air. His other original creations include the Willys pick-up and the '49 Mercury lead sled. Colors vary, but all are made of the same material, which can be distinguished from original Aurora by the fact that the chrome and glass cannot be melted on with heat or solvent glues, but rather is attached with one of the following adhesives: cycolac, epoxy or silicone.

Chris' most ambitious project to date is his 1965 Pontiac GTO hardtop. A masterpiece of proportion and finish, Chris has made a limited production of 400 cars, most of which have already been spoken for. Pre-orders were priced at \$75 each, and current orders are \$100 each. The cars are available in any color and come in a clear plastic snap box with a distinctive black and gold label. Other than the labels obvious eye appeal, it has the honor of announcing that this car is a fully licensed vehicle. Pontiac Motor division took Chris through the entire licensing process and found his vehicle worthy of the Pontiac name. If you don't already have yours, Chris has a few left and they are also for sale through N.J. Nostalgia Hobby: 908-322-2676.

Chris' plans for the future include a convertible Mustang and other limited productions. On the drawing board are the 1968 Hemi Roadrunner, '67 big block Corvette, the '70 LS6 Chevelle and the '67 Nova. I wouldn't recommend placing your order for these vehicles yet, as Chris estimated production will take place over the next two years.