

A Hot Rod For The Less Than Speedily Adept or Of Burning Desires and Wide Tires

by *Tim Bongard*
IPMS #16924

Mind Games

Those of you who know me or have read any of the articles and columns I've written know that my interests in building model cars and trucks lie mostly in racing cars and fire apparatus. Hot rods, customs and other forms of street machines have always been an interest of mine, but I've never actually sat down and built one that survived to see the light of the display table. After all, what could possibly be so hard about building a model hot rod? I wanted to do something special and thought that this would be a good reason to try something new, but I kept getting hung upon what to do and how to do it.

Brain cramps don't take very long to set in. They are easy to get and can be had for a variety of reasons. The best has to be unfamiliarity with your subject and while IPMSers have been reviled in the past for being too focused on their subjects, it seems to me that if you are going to build a model of something, you should at least have an idea of what it's all about. Fire trucks, Winston Cup race cars, fighters and tanks are all subjects we can get to know and replicate. Hot rods and customs tend to be a little like sci-fi on wheels, it requires - gads - imagination of the unbridled kind. We're talking free-falling, create-it-in-your-mind stuff here. I suddenly discovered a modeling chasm I didn't know how to cross. I liked the idea of it, I just didn't know how to shift the modeling gears and kept getting stuck.

I can figure out how to make sheet plastic look like a tool cabinet. I can fashion parts from putty, sprue and other bits of junk. But something in my modeling psyche rebelled at the idea of just winging it. (Forgive the pun). I somewhat sheepishly shared this problem with Pat.

"Building customs and hot rods is just so different from what I usually do. I mean, no two customs are ever alike." I said.

"Wait a minute. You build fire trucks, right? Why do you like to build them so much?"

"Well, there is always so much stuff hanging off of them. They are mechanical wonders. The colors and decorations are usually pretty neat and no two are really ever alike." I replied.

"You just described building hot rods and customs. When are you going to start talking about fire trucks?"

The question was laced equally with Pat's southern drawl and a joking bit of sarcasm that underscored that I possessed the solution to the problem all along, I just needed a fresh perspective. Free-form building of any kind simply requires you to let go of what everyone else thinks it should look like and simply build it the way you think it should look. Cinder-bug suddenly looked like a lot more fun. Shoot, this could be more fun than picking on Art Gerber's drawer full of sixty shades of Olive Drab paint!

Picking a target

Having had my hot rod modeling epiphany, I was now aware of the fact that I could build the car of my dreams. All I had to do was decide what I wanted my go-fast buggy to be. Cruising through copies of Hot Rod and Rod & Custom became reconnaissance sorties to find out what's hot and what's not. It was also a great way to discover what look I wanted my dream car to have. There are lots of basic looks I discovered. There are "smoothies" (all the detail chrome has been removed and the basic lines of the car smoothed), "slammers" (what used to be called low riders years ago), there's the fat fendered look, the no fendered look and the hi-tech visitation on old themes which result in cars such as Boyd Coddington's Chezoom and Roadstar. Picking the right look is a little like decorating a room - the final effect lives or dies by how all the parts work together.

Then came the great shopping spree. I had to try to find the vehicle of my dreams and all the stuff to cram into it. Herein also lies a paradox of sorts. Having filled my head with all sorts of ideas and expectations, I now had to go about finding the object of my desires. Many a lad in this situation settles for the first object that runs him over and, before he knows it, he's trying, in vain, to turn a sow's ear into something, anything, else. "Been there. Done that." Wood working projects, old battered vehicles and a few random and senseless relationships later, I'm wise enough to know that sow's ears are rarely anything other than sow's ears and almost never silk purses or silk anything else in disguise. Common sense should be allowed to prevail in situations such as these, and one should select a project that's a little easier than advanced physics or trigonometry if one ever hopes to finish the project. Complicated projects tend to lie dead on the corner of my workbench like beached whales waiting for a tide that never seems to come. Even so, don't be surprised if your "simple" model hot rod suddenly gets complicated in the process of building it.

The final observation about the topic you pick has to do with the idea that whatever you do, it has to be unique. Your hot rod should be something special, something unique. There is this inclination to be sure that it's a one in a million. To me, this seems only a little odd in that by their very nature all hot rods and customs are unique. It need not be oddball or outrageous to work or capture the imagination. It's not like you have to really work at it, it's part and parcel of what a hot rod really is. Every hot rod or custom is a collection of parts and features that when combined give the finished car its character. And as someone once said, "the total of it was more than equal to the sum of its parts." It boils down to a matter of craftsmanship. In order to be any good, it needs to be done well, whatever it is.

With all those thoughts in mind, I decided that my hot rod could be everything I wanted and not venture too far from familiar territory. If nothing else it would get a chuckle from Pat when he finally became aware of what I was working on. So, I picked an old fire truck to hop up and do this hot rod thing to.

Revamping Cinder-bug

Around 1969, AMT released a 1/25th scale kit of an old time fire truck based on a Ford Model "T" which let you build the model as either a stock fire truck (not too bad) or as a hot rod (questionable by today's standards). The kit in it's time was pretty good and actually can be built up to be a pretty decent model regardless of which way you choose to build it. Things have changed over the years though and a few of the old parts would be replaced with more detailed new parts or with different ones all together.

I decided that the truck would look great with a Ford 289 engine from a '65 Shelby GT350 stuffed under the hood. This would replace the Frontenac engine that came in the kit. The rear end in the kit also needed to be updated, replacing the old "T" rear end with a Corvette unit. I wanted a fairly clean and modern look with a few nods to traditional hot rodding, so new wheels were in order as was a slight rake to the ride height of the rig. This meant using a dropped axle front end, a unit that moves the axle spindles upwards and thus lowers the front end.

Other detailing items that would be added included a really nice rosewood steering wheel, new instruments in a reworked dashboard, new floor pedals, gearshift lever and reworked seat.

Items such as the hose tray with the molded in hose would be replaced with home build units using separate components for added realism. While the overall model wasn't bad, the mounting points for equipment such as the fire axe and lanterns were nothing more than plastic pegs. Those would be replaced as well with more realistic brackets. This type of fire truck was known as a chemical pumper which meant it was basically a big soda acid fire extinguisher on wheels. The chemical tank, which sits under the hose tray, would be finished off in a nice copper foil.

To properly set this off, I wanted to finish the truck in a color that would set all these features off without looking totally unrealistic. While a nice candy red seemed the obvious choice, the new Testor's Colors by Boyd line had a neat metallic yellow called Aluma Yellow Pearl that had enough of a lime yellow quality to it to make it look real and funky.

Construction begins

The engine swap however kicked the chocks out from under the wheels of this project and started one of the wilder rollercoaster rides I've ever been on. With a little trimming of the striped area shown in photo #1, the floor pan was able to accommodate the bigger V-8 engine very neatly. The Cobra engine then looked pretty good between the fenders, but didn't fair well in the kit chassis. The

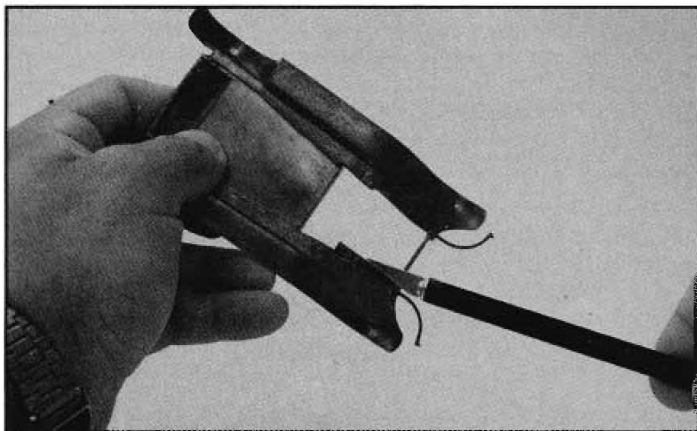


Photo #1

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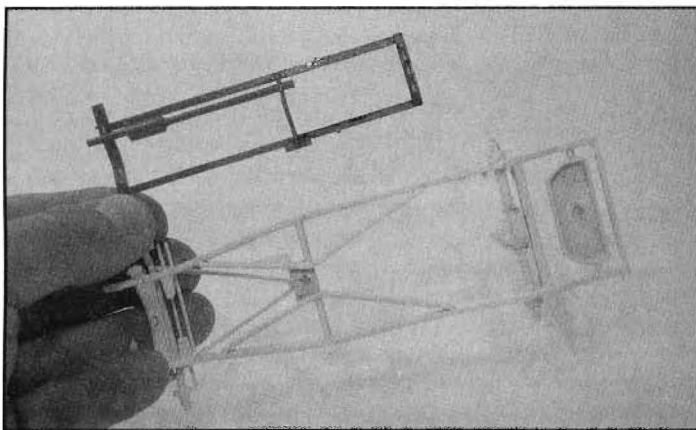


Photo #2

Corvette rear didn't either and made the simple ladder type chassis look anemic. In fact, it underscored what a little runt of a truck this was. While my mind was already screaming "Sow's ear, Sow's ear...", I tried finding a workable solution to the problem. I was robbing the Corvette rear end from a Monogram '37 Ford Hot Rod kit, so I decided to see if I could use the chassis too. (Then again, I could have just built this '37 hot rod straight out of the box, but that would have made too much sense and been too easy.) The only problem is that the '37 chassis required some serious cutting in order to make it fit. (See photo #2.) I started by removing the rear section immediately behind the rearend support. The chassis length was shortened further still by cutting a section of the frame from the middle and splicing the two parts back together again. This "crew cut" version of the '37 chassis fit fairly well under the floor pan, but require a few more adjustments. The frame height over the rear axle was reduced to get the rear end to sit a little lower. I then realized I had to move the engine mounts back about 1/2 inch, so I lopped them off the chassis. Then I realized that in moving them backwards, the chassis widened enough that the mounts needed to be attached to the frame with additional stand-offs so they could reach the engine. A piece of evergreen strip plastic on each side solved that problem as shown in photo #3. I then had to move the transmission support crossmember

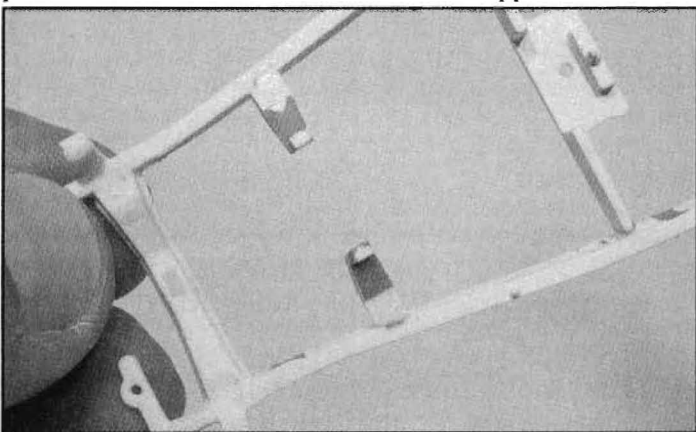


Photo #3

forward 3/16ths of an inch in order to get the new motor to fit right. Photo #4 shows the roughed out chassis with all the changes compared to a '37 chassis straight out of the Monogram box.

The Cobra engine was a fun little exercise in detailing. After assembling the basic engine block from the Monogram '65 Shelby GT 350 kit and cleaning up all the seam lines, I painted the entire unit with flat white paint as a primer. When this was dry, I airbrushed on a few coats of the Boyd's Aluma Yellow Pearl. Yes, I know the engine is supposed to be Ford Blue, but the engine won't fit under the hood

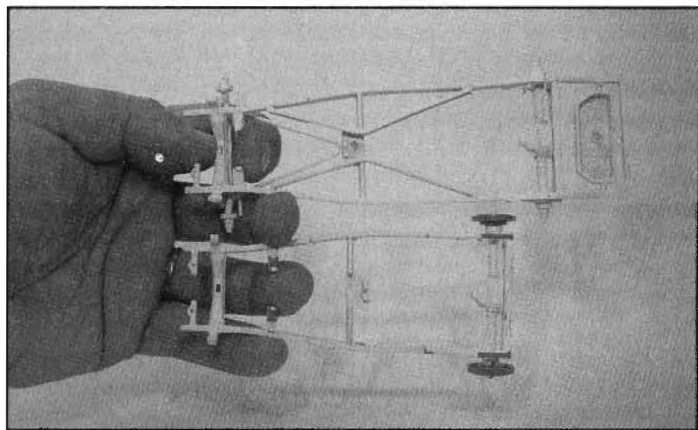


Photo #4

of the truck, carb, air cleaner and all. With it exposed all the time, it would look better painted the same color as the body.

When the yellow was dry, I painted the transmission housing with Polly S Metaline Pewter. The valve covers and oil pan were painted with Metaline Aluminum and the intake manifold received a coat of Metaline Bright Aluminum. I applied a light black wash over the valve covers, oil pan and transmission to add some highlights and then applied the dry parts to the engine block.

I drilled the distributor cap with a #78 drill bit in a pin vise, but used a pin to mark the drilling points first. This kept the drill centered as I went. I also drilled these holes at an angle towards the center of the cap in order to keep the drill bit from breaking through the sides of the cap. When this was done, the base of the distributor was painted with Polly S Metaline Pewter and the cap itself was painted Polly S Desert Tan.

Putting boots on plug wires is easy and adds a tremendous amount of "wow" power to a model engine. First set a plug wire in each of the holes in the distributor. I used Detail Masters plug wire for this, since it comes in a variety of colors. I then find some matching wire or, as in this case, a colored wire slightly different from the actual plug wire. This contrasting wire has to be a diameter slightly larger than the plug wire. For this I used some scrap telephone wire, the kind used to wire phone circuit panels. By rolling a hobby knife over this phone wire, I was able to cut small pieces of insulation free and slid this off the copper wire and onto the plug wire on the motor. With a tiny spot of glue, the boot was held fast in place and appeared as it does in photo #5.

I slid the plug wire looms in place after dividing the wires between the right and left banks of the motor and then drilled the holes in the block for other ends of the plug wires. I then trimmed each wire to a length just slightly longer than what was needed to reach each of the plug holes. Thus prepared to install the plug wires, I then made

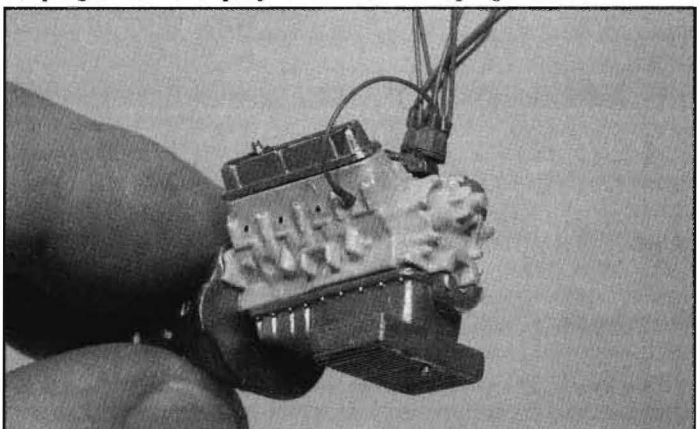


Photo #5

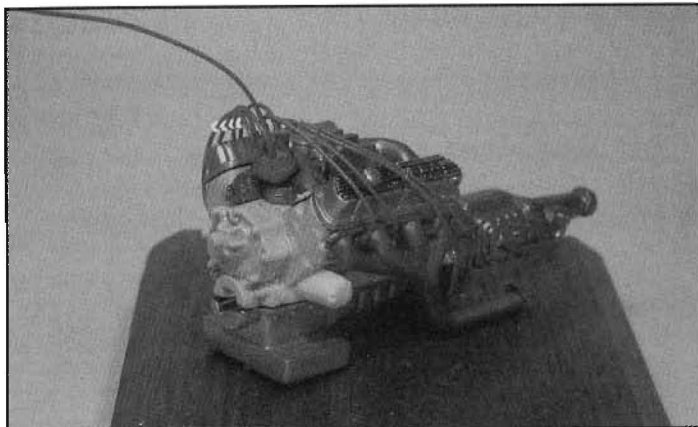


Photo #6

some more boots, slightly longer this time, and slid one on to each of the plug wires, but did not use any glue. Instead, I applied a spot of glue to the end of each plug wire and inserted each in their respective holes, one at a time. When doing so, I then slid the long plug boot into place using the tiny amount of excess glue that was around the plug hole to hold both the boot and wire in place. When this was all dry, I secured the looms in place with the finished results looking like those in photo #6.

That took care of most of the tough stuff. In the next installment we'll finish up this Covert Mission and see what results it will bring. "Till then keep the glue out from under your fingers!"

A special word of thanks to Pat and Dave Von Almen for allowing me to pinch-hit for Pat here in the Journal! **IPMS**

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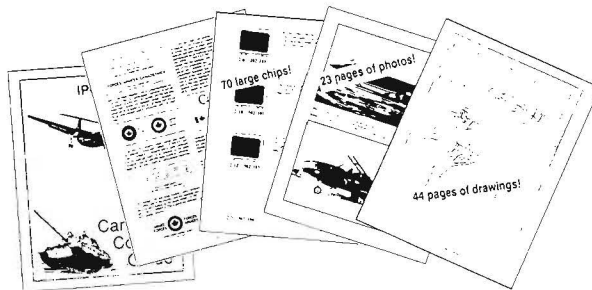
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