

1948 Chevrolet

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SWAPPING COASTS RESULTS IN SWAPPED COLORS FOR THE OLSEN CHEVROLET



Students of hot rod history will recall that when Bob Hirohata originally drove down to the Barris Kustoms shop in 1952, he intended to have his 1949 Chevrolet chopped, but changed his mind when he saw Sam Barris's Mercury and knew he had to have a chopped 1951 Mercury instead.

The resulting Hirohata Mercury has since become one of the most famous and well-recognized customs in the world. But what if Bob stuck to his guns and submitted his Chevrolet to the Barris brothers? Most assuredly, the brothers would have taken a similar approach, not only by chopping the roof, but also by converting it into a hardtop, as they had previously done on the Matranga Mercury; after all, Detroit's manufacturers were then issuing pillarless hardtops, and the Barris brothers wanted to replicate that success.

Renate de James's 1948 Chevrolet custom isn't exactly what would have resulted, but comes rather close.

Of course, the Barris brothers only inspired its build. Harold Olsen originally took the Chevrolet in the early 1980s to customizer Henry "Butch" Hurlhey, then located in Salinas, California.

Hurlhey, assisted by Rod Powell's design talents, started converting the fastback sedan into a hardtop by removing the B-pillar and installing custom glass with the same swoopy shape as the Matranga and Hirohata Mercurys. He chopped the roof a modest amount—about 2½ inches in the front and 3 inches in the rear. To blend that heavy chop with the fastback body's shape, Hurlhey sectioned the deck area by a whopping 5 inches. While chopping the windshield, he had new glass cut for it so

he could V-butt the two pieces of glass.

Taking advantage of the Chevrolet's shared lines with other GM products, Hurlhey reshaped the doors and the rear quarter panels to accept the fadeaway fender sheetmetal from a 1946 Buick. Those fadeaways flow in between front wheel openings from a 1951 Chevrolet and skirted rear wheelwells.

Along with removing much of the trim and shaving the door handles, Hurlhey also took two 1946 Chevrolet grilles, flipped one and merged them both to create this car's grille and added a pair of scoops to the sides of the hood that replicated the lines of the fadeaways. Out back, he relocated the taillamps into the bumper guards.

Hurlhey finished the Chevrolet with an interior by Bob Sipes and a red-to-gold fade by master customizer Gene Winfield; a later repaint by Adolpho Martinez gave it a root beer hue.

Olsen only owned the Chevrolet for a couple years before he died. A successive owner of the car then brought it Back East, where Rick and Renate de James kept seeing it at different car shows. They finally bought it in 1999 and decided to have the Chevrolet refreshed with new green paint with ghost flames, applied by Ted Munsell at Trick Works in Telford, Pennsylvania. At the same time, they replaced the original 327-cu.in. Chevrolet V-8 with a 350 built by Jerry Kratz and had the interior stitched with green highlights by Extreme Interiors in Roslyn, Pennsylvania.

"Wherever we have taken the car it seems to be recognized by many even though the color of the car has been changed," Rick said. "And that's really because of its unusual shape and body style." ☛