

WILD THANG

This '40 Mercury Is First Class All the Way

In the big competition for the Rider award, it appears more and more cars carry reproduction bodies, and one of the big questions on everyone's mind is this: Can a car that was originally stamped out in Detroit 67 years ago lick a car that is hand-built? The answer is yes, of course it can, but this high level of competition definitely pushes the envelope of design.

Tom Valiquette owns Tom's Classy Customs (TCC) in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and from this small shop he turns out quality cars that are as pretty as a postcard. As a matter of fact, this '40 Mercury should serve notice to everyone that TCC is capable of delivering world-class craftsmanship. Of course, workmanship such as this doesn't come overnight, as more than four years were devoted to building this great package.

Beginning with the frame, Tom's Classy Customs fabricated a frame to support the car riding on a modified C4 suspension front and rear, with Air Ride ShockWaves providing the adjustable stance. Power comes from

427 cubic inches of LS7 power reworked by Street & Performance with one of its signature jewelry-style motors. But don't let the good looks fool you—with all this power underfoot, by the time the push-button-operated 4180E tranny hits third gear, you're in a different ZIP code.

When you're building a great street rod, it is the outward appearance that brings the people to your car, and while the chassis is a thing of beauty, the exterior appearance is, more often than not, a top priority. TCC understands these unwritten regulations, and so it set about designing and building a '40 Mercury convertible that would wow the crowds and the judges. When the car was brought into the shop, it was so rough that the crew actually had to build the car first just so they could modify it. In the process, they incorporated such things as double-panel-insulated floors and firewall, and then the bulk of the body modifications followed.

After the tub was structurally sound, the task of building a modern convertible top

was tackled. Using an '02 Mustang top that was widened 4 inches helped TCC sort out the problems, and by using an '02 windshield, sealing the top from rain and snow was done in no time. The front sheetmetal has an entirely new shape thanks in part to the reshaped custom grille and the modified hood from a '41 Lincoln Zephyr. At first glance, many of the changes may not register with many street rodders, but they certainly know the headlights have been changed. Riding in custom-fabricated rings, the 2002 GTX Subaru headlights monopolize the front view.

Traveling down the side of the car, we find re-arched fender openings, shaved door handles, hidden hinges, filled seams and handmade running boards. The rear view includes rounded hood corners and a rolled pan that carries exhaust ports and the license plate in style. All the plumbing and wiring was neatly routed to proper places, and the panels were finished to perfection. Now it was time for TCC to address the huge decision of color choice, and in the end there was really only one color that would receive their stamp of approval, Candy Apple Red from the DuPont Hot Hues palette. Under the mile-deep candy paint, an American eagle

While the headlights dominate the front view, don't miss the custom-built bumpers and that '02 Mustang windshield that is laid back 11 degrees. Down the side, a ghosted eagle delivers the feeling of speed to this gorgeous custom.

