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1957 Chevy Pickup Truck - Black Is Beautiful

Ken Rawson's '57 Chevy

By Brad Ocock

Hot rods have always fallen into two categories: home-built and pro-built. For the hobby guys who build in their own garage, being mistaken for a professional build is a badge of honor. It says "People think your work is so good, you should have either paid a professional to do it, or someone should be paying you to do it."



There are still two categories, but things have changed a bit over the years. The first is that a lot more people can afford to have a car professionally built, and the guys who can't afford it seem to have gone the other way and just slap a vehicle together--rat rods and low-detail daily drivers. As a result, most of the really high-end looking vehicles you see today are built by pro shops, not by some dude and his buddies in the garage with a few basic tools. That's why we were so stoked to see Ken Rawson's '57 Chevy pickup.

"I always wanted to do a truck," Ken told us, "and after a search a buddy found it in the back of a guy's shop, for sale due to divorce." A running, driving truck, it pretty much needed everything, and once safely home, Kenny and a bunch of his friends started in. "Bobby Butler and I burned up two sanders while stripping a couple coats of paint and the factory primer off the entire body," Kenny told us. Once they were done, friend Jay Stanley helped install new cab corners, front fender corners, and the three took turns filling dozens of body trim and miscellaneous holes. The bed was smoothed off, with a tailgate and fiberglass fenders coming from Tuckers Classic Pickup Parts in Las Vegas. Once the bedsides were worked smooth, the body was ready for paint by friend-of-a-friend Gary Gidzinski at D&G Enterprises, getting a deep coat of Spies Hecker Black paint--one of the few things not handled directly by Ken or his friends.

A stock Chevy straight-axle hung on parallel leaf springs under the nose isn't known for superior road manners. Since Ken drives his truck all over, suspension upgrades were in order. The rear suspension was brought down to a reasonable height with a pair of 5-inch lowering springs, 2-inch lowering shackles, and a C-notch to clear a 12-bolt the boys filled with 3.73:1 gears, and an Eaton limited slip, and 30-spline Superior axles. Performance driving upgrades include a -inch Ford Bronco sway bar fitted with custom endlinks and late-model Impala SS rotors and Monte Carlo single-piston calipers.



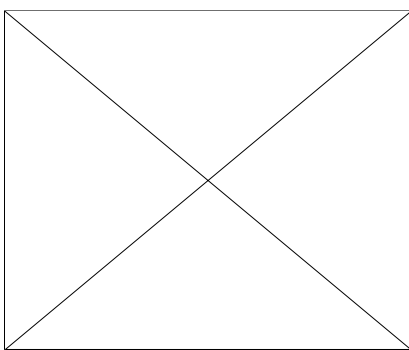
The Sawzall and welder came out for the front portion of the frame, replacing it with a Flat Out Engineering subframe that mounts '90 Corvette upper and lower control arms, spindles, rack-and-pinion, sway bar, 12-inch rotors and 2-piston calipers, damped with Aldan coilover shocks. The result is a ground-hugging suspension that handles like you'd expect Corvette parts to handle, and in fact is so nice to drive, Kenny says the only thing he'd do different is install a matching Flat Out Engineering IRS out back. "Jay handled the fabrication on the frame," Ken told us, "along with custom building the gas tank out back."

Power comes from a Chevy 350 4-bolt filled with an Eagle 383 stroker kit. Internal highlights include 5.7-inch I-beam rods with full-floating pins, Speed-Pro 9.5:1 slugs, and a Crane roller cam spec'ing at 0.508/0.539 lift/228-230 duration. Breathing is by Dart Sportsman II heads with 2.02/1.60 valves, 200cc runners, and 76cc chambers; a Wieland Stealth intake; and 600-cfm Edelbrock carb. Keeping the look subdued, an '89 Chevy serpentine system with wrinkle painted valve covers finish the motor off. A Mallory HEI lights it, and Dynamax ceramic-coated shorties running to Flowmasters exhaust it. Finishing the package is a 700-R4 with a stock Corvette converter and shift-improvement kit by Speedway Transmissions, engaged by a Lokar shifter. Ken uses 18x7 and 20x10 Americans shod in BFG Force T/As to put it to the ground.

For cabin comfort, Ken shaved the head- and armrests from a junkyard '89 Chevy truck seat and had it recovered by a local shop. Friends Robby and Tony helped install the wiring harness and a full set of Auto Meters to keep him apprised of the goings-on under the hood. For a custom steering column, an ididit topped with a late-model Chevy steering wheel keeps him pointed and a Kenwood head unit with speakers under the seat keeps him entertained. Spraying the floor and back wall with Line-X before laying down the carpet and new headliner helps to hold the cab noise down.



Ken finished the truck in about five years with help from his friends and the co-workers from 4Wheel Parts. "I had lots of good times during the build, working on the truck from start to finish with friends, doing what we could ourselves. I'm ready for the next project!"



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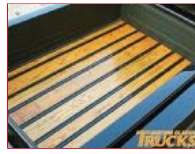
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