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Feel the Burn

By Travis Noack
Photography by Wes Allison

Fire has to be one of the most powerful forces Mother Nature can unleash. Often occurring in a dry area, once it begins to spread, there is no telling when its raging blaze will cease. Heat pours from the dancing flame licks and singes everything in its way. Back in the '50s, flames started being laid over the hoods of roadsters, coupes, and sedans, and a trend developed that has been burning ever since.



Under the hood, the factory 5.3L engine was massaged with a Magna Charger supercharger, JBA headers, and a MagnaFlow after-cat exhaust system. Helping the transmission keep up with the power demands of the motor is a JET Performance Stage 3 shift-improvement kit.

Today, enthusiasts are still using this timeless paint scheme to give their modern rides a bit of classic flair. Andy Radi, owner and proprietor of Radi's Custom Upholstery in Garden Grove, California, has been involved with custom trucks and hot rods for more than 12 years now, and has built some impressive pieces in that time. His current shop rod is the '01 GMC Sierra glowing off these pages. Andy picked up the truck last year and immediately began tearing into the stock GM platform to create the sizzling hauler we like to refer to as Backdraft. The first step in creating the stunning looks for Backdraft was to ditch the stock stance and bring those 'rails a whole lot closer to the tarmac.



Not one for the airbag scene, Radi opted to keep his fullsize reliable, so he decided to stick with a conventional drop. He called DJM Suspension in Gardena, California, for one of its 4/6-inch Cal Max suspension lowering kits. The DJM drop includes 4-inch lower control arms and a 6-inch rear flip kit with C-section. The truck retains a smooth stock-like ride thanks to the stock spindle and coil spring. Explorer Pro Comp shocks were thrown into the mix for damping chores.



After picking up the DJM Cal Max kit, Radi ripped the truck over to Gaylord's Kustom Trucks in Long Beach, California, where the Sierra was transformed from stock skyscraper into pavement-hugging custom. The crew at Gaylord's sliced into the rear framerails and installed the DJM C-section to provide axle clearance, as well as installing the 4-inch lower control arm to bring down the nose and the 6-inch rear flip kit to cinch down the tail end. To accentuate the slam, a set of Intro Radicali billet wheels measuring 20x8.5 inches up front and 22x10 inches out back were tucked under the smoothed exterior.

Keeping the slick billets as round as the day they came out of the box are Nitto tires measuring P255/35ZR20 up front and P285/35ZR22 in the rear. After the suspension was sliced and diced and the truck had taken on a whole new look with the new Intro rollers and Nitto road cushions, it was time to mix a little performance into the whole custom recipe. In order to smoke those rear 22-inch meats, Radi opted to up the horsepower ante on the factory 5.3L engine by installing a Magna Charger supercharger. Running a mere 4 pounds of boost, Radi's hauler pins passengers in their seat as soon as the blower begins to whine.



A JET Performance shift-improvement kit, JBA headers, and a MagnaFlow 3-inch after-cat exhaust system also gets Backdraft from stoplight to stoplight a lot quicker. An AIRAID intake breathes fresh air into the mill and helps on those long journeys where Radi's foot never seems to lift up off the floorboards.

Now that the suspension and powerplant were styled and dialed, the truck was turned over to friend Nick DiCredico at Wicked Truck & Rods in Garden Grove, whose shop is right next door to Radi's. The factory red basecoat was left intact, and the body was treated to a host of metal alterations that greatly smoothed out GM's original sheetmetal landscape. First off, a Sir Michaels steel roll pan was moved in place of the rear bumper. It is complemented by a shaved and smoothed tailgate, thanks to a Sir Michaels tailgate handle relocater. Nick performed the necessary bodywork to graft in a set of Corvette door handles to replace the bulky stock handles, and topped the powerhouse V-8 with a Goodmark Ram Air cowl-induction hood.

A set of Denali headlights and a custom billet grille spice up the front-end region, while a Gaylord tonneau cover keeps the Line-X-covered bed innards clean and spot-free. The Gaylord lid is locked and unlocked electrically by a



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custom motor from a company called I Know Locks and is operated off Radi's alarm remote. After the body subtractions, additions, and alterations were made, the truck was delivered to Steve Vandemon at Vandemon Designs (formerly known as Absolutely Custom Paint) in Anaheim, California, for the aggressive Aspen Silver flames dancing over the nose and gliding down the fenders and door skins.

The flame style is a tasteful blend of old- and new-school licks, creating a bold finished product. After an intense color-sanding and polishing session, Radi's late-model Bow Tie emerged from Vandemon's shop with a miles-deep paint scheme and looks that make jaws drop.

This contemporary custom has come along way since it rolled off the lot and into the hands of Andy Radi. At the age of 28, this young business owner has built one fine hauler, proving once again that simplicity and good old-fashioned hot-rod taste goes a long way.

Since Radi is a professional upholsterer by trade, we expected nothing but the best inside the cab of this GMC. While the finished interior is not filled with bright vibrant colors and wacked-out inlaid graphics, it does make a bold statement of elegance and class with the use of supple materials and soft colors. The seats were covered in a combination of dark-gray and black ostrich skin complemented by dark-gray suede. Dark-gray wool carpeting lines the floorboards, and up above rests a dark gray suede headliner.

Setting off the dash is a Cadillac Escalade gauge cluster, and between the seats sits a GMC Denali center console. Plans for a 14-inch Intro flame steering wheel are in the works. Audio entertainment is handled by an Eclipse CD head unit, an Eclipse 6-disc CD changer, a set of mids and separates, and a 12-inch Eclipse subwoofer housed in a custom-built box. Built by Xtreme Audio in Anaheim, California, this system punishes the eardrums and will crank the daylights out of Van Halen until you can't take any more.



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