

“WOOD” You Believe It? Steve Baldwin’s 1928 Roadster Pickup



My 1928 Model a Roadster pickup is an unusual collection of original parts and a custom built cab. The cab is an exact copy of a 1928 Roadster pickup with one distinct difference; it is made out of wood.

It all started about 13 years ago (2003) when I bought a frame, cowl, engine, front end, radiator shell, and head light from my neighbor, Gerry Doney, who took them off a speedster project he had started. He was disappointed with it and decided to put a flathead V-8 motor in it instead of the Model A engine. The Model A engine I acquired had a lot of speed equipment in it, such as the adapter for a 1939 transmission. I sat on these parts for six years trying to decide what to build. Then I found a 3:54 rear end from another friend, so now I was really fired up to get started. I have previously restored a 1940 Ford, a 1931 Ford Sedan Delivery, a 1931 Ford Huckster, and a 1929 Ford Speedster.

It's true, my wife was not happy that I was starting yet another car project; one that would take years to complete, with many cost overruns, and the suspension of any of her "honey-do" projects. I convinced her that it was a legacy for the kids and grandkids. And really, I already had a lot of parts, didn't I?

The chassis was finished, and I had been lucky enough to find fully restored 1935 wheels and tires from another friend, Rick Ash. Now, what to build? Just by coincidence, my friend, Norm Lee, had a 1928 Roadster pickup which he had restored 20 years ago. He had some spare original rear fenders, seats, a hood, step sills, and top bows. This helped me to decide what to build. I traded some restoration work on a Wayne gas pump for the parts, and now all I needed was a body and a bed.

I am a retired woodshop teacher, so I thought I'd just build the body and doors out of wood. As I contemplated a boxy looking wooden cab, my retired neighbor, Greg Arnold, coerced me into making a copy of Norm's original 1928 roadster pickup cab instead. He promised to help with the engineering and construction, so it was a "go". There were many trips spent back and forth to Norm's to get measurements, pictures, and cardboard templates of the truck. We could have never completed the project without Norm's truck and the parts he gave me.

Once we got started, I found out that the cowl I had was for a truck which was much higher than a roadster pickup. We cut five inches off the top windshield uprights and welded a one inch stainless pipe across the top then put in the snaps to attach the top. Next, we removed the door hinges and installed the correct hinges for a roadster. It wasn't as easy as it sounds. We followed this with new cowl patch panels, sand blasting, and body work. Once that was done, the cowl was ready for primer. It was a lot of work to get to this point!

The same friend that sold me the wheels sold me a trailer that was made from a 1928-29 pickup bed. What a stroke of good luck to find an original bed! I had to cut the wheel axle and the tow tongue off. It was tough, but I knew we could make it look good again.

The body was now our new challenge. Oh boy, here we go. After a lot of drawings, pictures, and measurements we were ready to start. I bought one quality sheet of plywood and one sheet of door skin. I still had some oak from years ago after restoring my Huckster and it sure came in handy. We had the cowl in place, so we could have measurements from the cowl to the back of the body. We called the back of the body the "U" in which the seats fit. We installed the original door sills to help establish the lower shape. Working from the cardboard templates we made a framework out of curved 1" by 1" oak. This framework went from the new hinges to the plywood cab back. The compound curve shape and measurements are as accurate to original as possible. Once the frame was set and strengthened with wood or steel gussets we used a hacksaw to cut the wood frame at the door. The doors could now be opened and removed for adding the original latches and the plywood skin. The aft cab sides were skinned and Greg insisted on adding detail metal strips and even fake rivets. It looked good. All the wood skins got a second inner skin for strength and then were treated with a marine epoxy preservative.

A big challenge was the fenders. The rear fenders were from Norm's '28. The front fenders were from a flea market at one of the cars shows. All four fenders were in worse shape than originally thought. Luckily, I had another good friend and neighbor, Mike Turkal, who worked at a company that could strip rust and paint off in a dipping tank. This was a great help. After the stripping, they were all welded, hammered, and extensively reworked to fit. They are sure lucky to be back on a truck again! The truck bed that had been used as a trailer required several weeks of meticulous body work to get straightened out after years of use



and abuse. The addition of new oak wood and bed rails resulted in a bed far better than we anticipated. It was worth the extra effort to save this original bed from the indignity of being trailer trash.

Now it was time to paint. I decided on semi-black, but I don't know if I would recommend it again. It took a lot of experimenting and repainting to get it to an acceptable and consistent level of "almost flat", not glossy. Even though the painting was more difficult than I had anticipated, we stuck with it and just redid a part if it glossed out on us.



I had Norm's original top bows which were in extremely bad shape. As you might know, the original 1928 Roadster pickup top did not come off or even fold down. Greg figured a way to make the top fold down and/or come off. He engineered aft and mid side hinges so the top of the roadster is fully removable or can be folded back. The sides needed to be extended slightly and the forward attachment engineered to accommodate the cut down cowl. A rear window from a Phaeton, donated by Wayne Lindquist, was installed. It all made for a great new top. The project took three years from the beginning to the end and turned out to be an amazing collection of fully restored original parts, plus a unique, maybe one-of-a-kind wooden cab. I hope to have it parked beside Norm's original 1928 Roadster pickup at a car show someday.

My children and grandchildren are already enjoying being in parades and going to family outings in it. They really love it. It runs and stops great, too. What a fun truck!

NO SMOKING OR TERMITES ALLOWED!!!