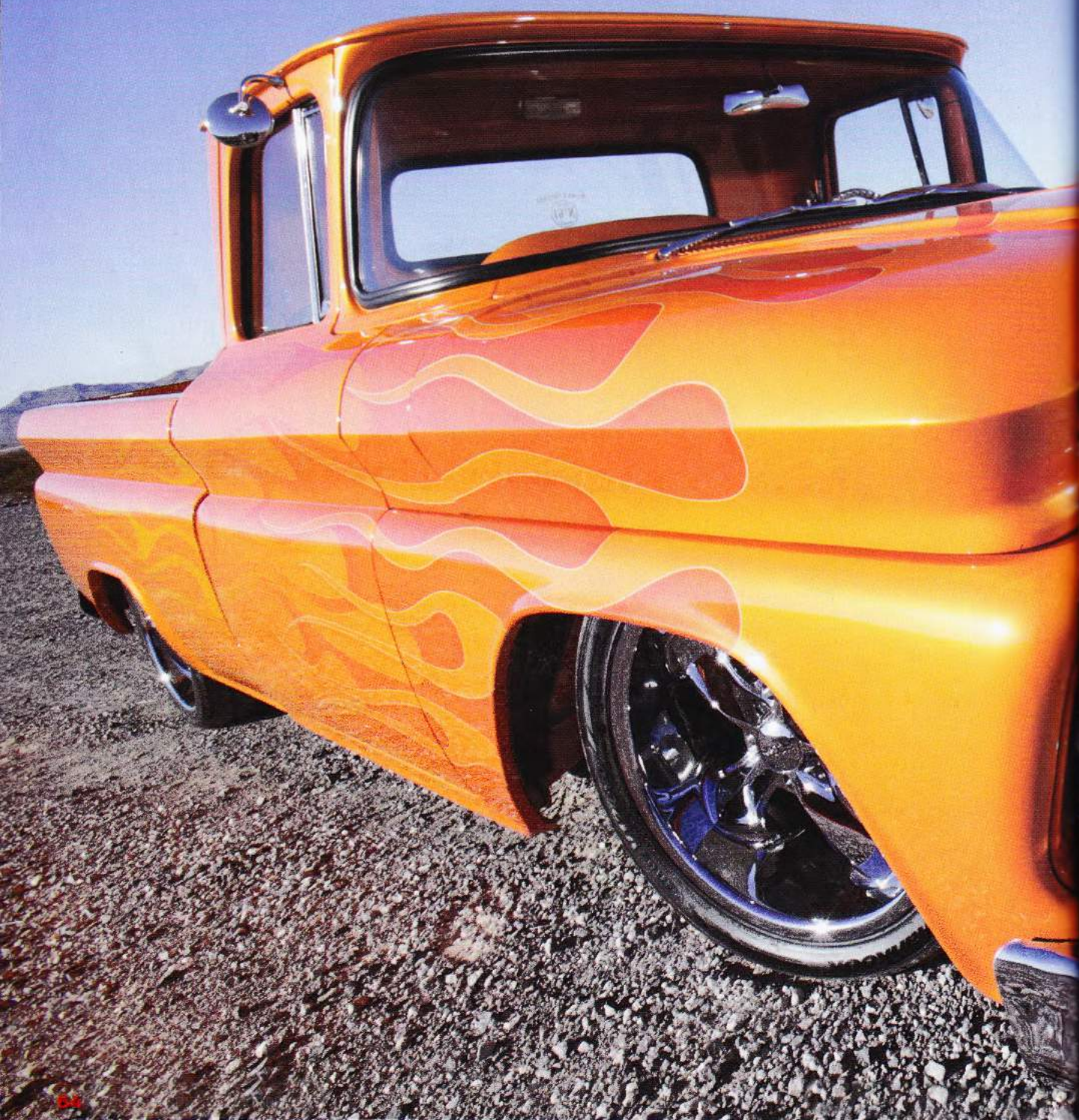


SIDE



WAYS

■ From Tired Old Truck to Show Truck to Work Truck and Back

TEXT BY MIKE SELF

PHOTOS BY SAUL VARGAS



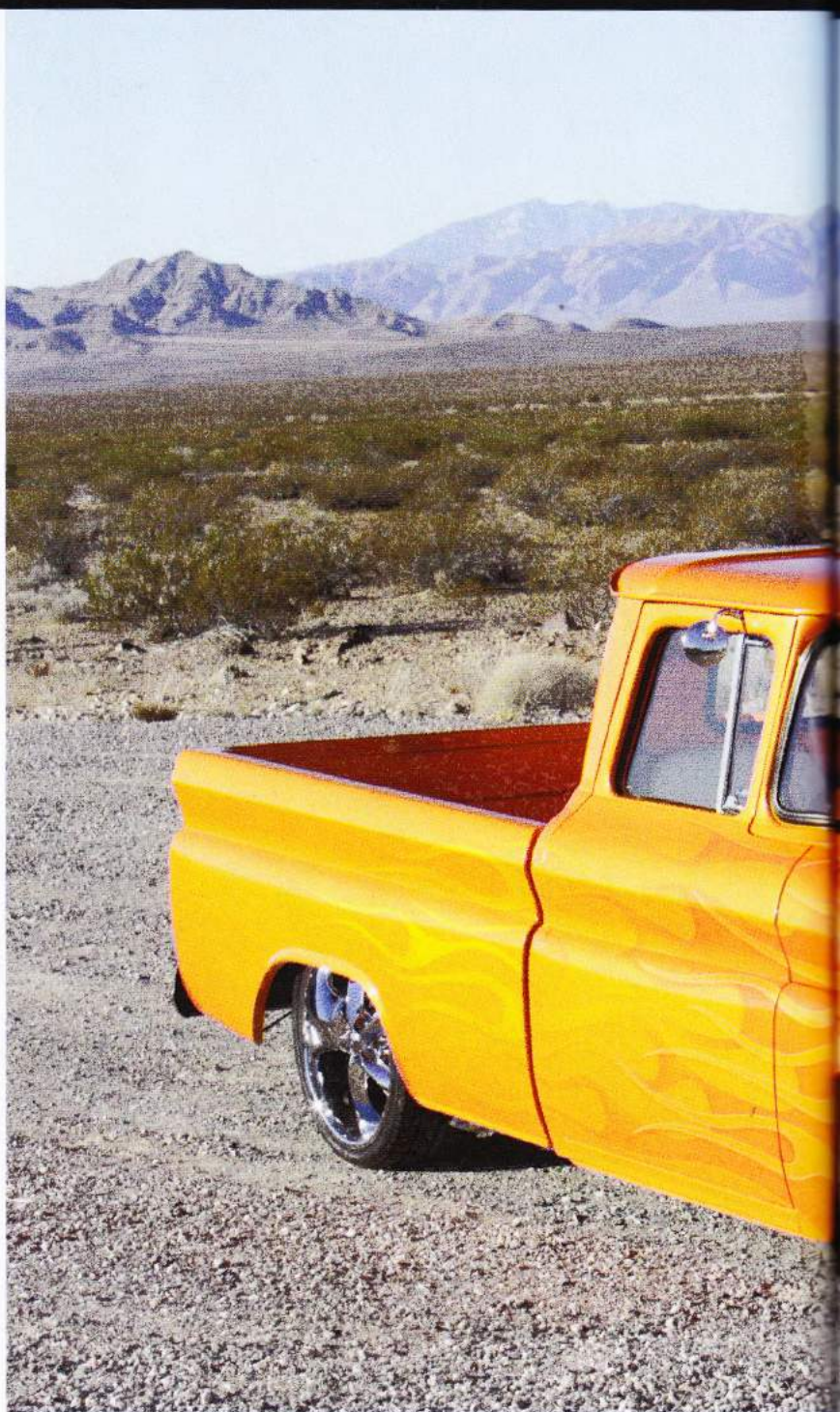
A TRUCK IS MUCH MORE THAN, WELL, A TRUCK. It can be transportation, it can be a tool, it can be a shelter, and it can be a lifelong friend—especially when it has held all of the previous positions with its owner and his family. The story of Tom Patton and his '61 GMC started out the same way as it did for many of us with classic trucks, as someone else's stalled project. At the time (we're talking 1980), Tom really wanted a boat, but realized that a newer tow vehicle was out of his budget. So, the search was on for something that could get a boat from his home to the nearest dock, without digging too deeply into the coffers.

Young Tom was no stranger to turning a wrench. He and a friend immersed themselves in their high school shop class and made great use of their time by building a '58 Chrysler Firepower 392. Tom was willing, ready and experienced enough to put some work into the right truck once he found it.

As luck would have it, Tom quickly discovered that a coworker had been sitting on a '61 C-10 short-box that he and his son never got around to working on. A deal was struck (Tom tells us he paid \$750, which was still a great deal in 1980), and Tom was actually able to drive the truck home from work the following day. We'd like to imagine that a celebratory beer or two was had that evening, with Tom's gears turning while imagining what would be in store for the ol' C-10. Hey, that's how we'd do it.

The first order of business was to go through the drivetrain, but since everything was pretty well worn and in need of a full rehab, Tom had to weigh the pros and cons of rebuilding everything versus replacing it all with new parts. Luckily, the decision-making process was made a bit easier when a friend came across a wrecked '78 truck with a 350/350 combo and a tow-friendly 3:73 rearend. The truck was harvested of its goodies, and Tom's '61 now had a new lease on life. By this time, Tom had also located and installed a sleeker 1963 hood to replace the bulbous 1961 version and a fresh paint job. Remember, though, that all this was taking place before a lot of the aftermarket companies we take for granted today were up and running, so things like the new oak wood bed floor had to be fabricated from scratch, right down to marking and punching the square carriage bolt holes.

Tom's evolving ride quickly became a show truck, and without too many super clean trucks at the time going to shows in the Pacific Northwest, the '61 did pretty well for itself. In time, however, the truck would make an odd appearance at the hardware store and may have even been used to transport a piece of furniture or two. After a few times doing "truck things," it got a lot easier for Tom to get used to the idea that he had a work truck on his hands once again, so it was retired from shows for many years and put back into service full time. At one point, he even had a custom camper shell made for it, giving Tom and his family sleeping quarters during camping and waterskiing trips. Yup, back to pulling the boat. In fact, Tom just started driving the truck every day and did so for more than nine years.



TRUCK SPECS

OWNERS

Tom Patton
1961 GMC Pickup
Redmond, WA

ENGINE

- 1978 Chevy 350 small-block V-8
- Mild street cam
- JE pistons
- MSD distributor
- Edelbrock 600-cfm carburetor
- Spectre Performance air cleaner assembly
- Edelbrock Performer intake manifold
- Finned valve covers
- GM one-wire alternator
- PRC aluminum radiator
- Stainless steel flex hoses
- Be Cool electric fan
- Vintage Air Front Runner serpentine belt drive system
- Hedman headers
- Flowmaster mufflers
- Aluminum fuel cell
- Bowtie Overdrive Stage 2 700R4 transmission
- 1989 Chevy truck rearend

SUSPENSION

- Scott's Hot Rods front IFS
- Rack-and-pinion steering
- Classic Performance Products tubular trailing arms
- Slam Specialties airbags
- Accuair E-Level air management system
- Wilwood brakes front and rear

WHEELS & TIRES

- 18x8/20x10 Foose Legends wheels
- 245/45R18 and 255/40R20 Hankook tires

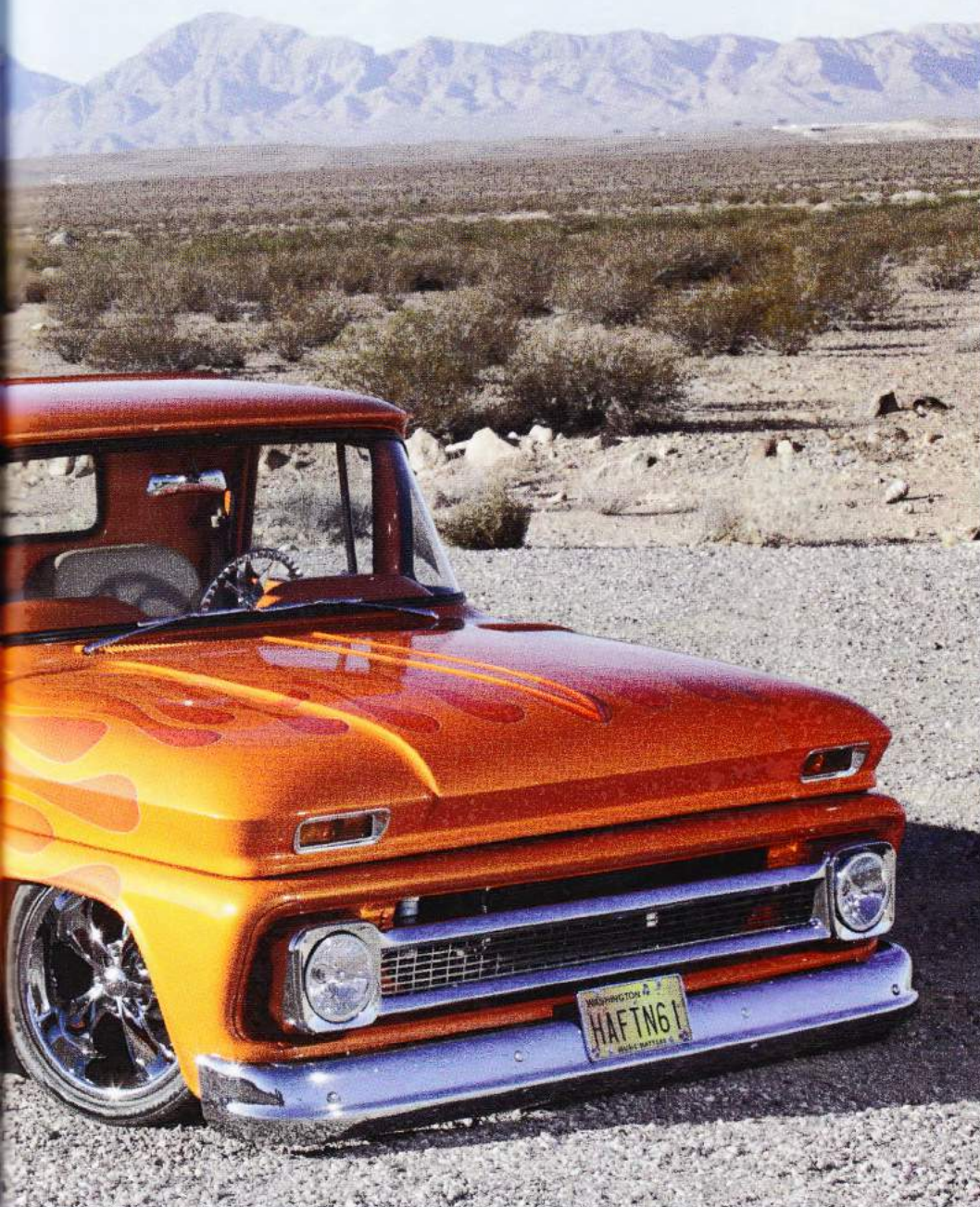
BODY & PAINT

- Shop: Brand-X Customs, Everett, WA
- Shaved door handles, body seams, tailgate chains, gas filler
- Customized steel roll pan with cutouts for factory rear bumper
- House of Kolor Tangelo Pearl paint with Tangelo, Ultra Orange and Sunset Yellow flames
- Pinstriping by Dave Austin
- 1963 Chevy hood
- 1965 Chevy grille shell

INTERIOR

- Shop: All City Convertible Tops and Customs, Kirkland, WA
- Entire interior fabricated from scratch, including center console and door panels
- German velour carpet
- Customized Ford F-150 Lariat bench seat
- Pioneer DVD head unit with Focal coaxials, JL Audio subwoofer and amplifier
- VDO gauge set
- Billet Specialties steering wheel and review mirror
- Painless wiring kit
- Power windows and door poppers by Brand-X Customs
- Vintage Air air conditioning kit

SPECIAL THANKS FROM THE OWNER: Tom tells us he could never have finished his dream of one day driving his truck again without the hard work and dedication of friends Matt Gibson, Chris Ingraham and Brandon Knowles.



DOESN'T THIS INTERIOR JUST SEEM SUPER COMFY? THE MODIFIED FORD F-150 BENCH EVEN FEATURES ELECTRIC LUMBAR SUPPORT, AND THE VINTAGE AIR KIT LOOKS RIGHT AT HOME IN THE CUSTOM UNDER-DASH CONSOLE AND DASH PANEL.





TOM'S C-10 SPORTS PLENTY OF EYE CANDY IN THE BED, WITH CUSTOM TOUCHES SUCH AS AN OAK FLOOR WITH STAINLESS STRIPS, A STAINLESS FUEL FILLER CAP AND A FABRICATED TUBULAR AIR MANAGEMENT MOUNT ON WHICH HANGS A POLISHED AIR TANK AND TWIN VICI AIR COMPRESSORS.

The early '90s was a time of change for Tom and the Patton family. A growing family meant that a single bench seat would no longer cut it for most trips, and so the old truck was given a spot in the barn and covered up in order to make room for a more family-friendly vehicle. It was a sad time to be sure, but Tom promised himself, and his truck, that it would see the light of day again. In reality, it would take another 20 years and an out-of-state move before Tom could make good on that promise. Life, as they say, happens. Now, after owning the truck for more than 35 years, Tom's Chevy has been totally transformed into what you see here, and he chose to debut it at this past SEMA show in Las Vegas. As you can probably guess, you aren't likely to see a boat behind this thing again any time soon, but it will definitely still see the streets.

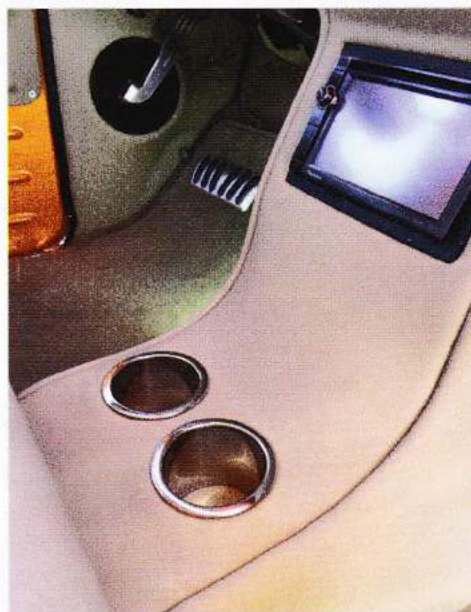
As Tom tells us, "[It's] the same 350 I got from the wrecked 1978 truck. However, it's been rebuilt with a few modifications." To give you the short list, it's been hopped up with a nice street cam, an Edelbrock Performer series intake manifold and a 600-cfm carb topped off with a Spectre Performance airbox to complete the induction side of things. Attached to the machined heads is a pair of Hedman headers.



which drop down to a set of Flowmasters. As great a job as the original radiator had done for all those years, Tom figured it was finally time to upgrade the whole cooling system, so he started by installing a custom PRC aluminum radiator to feed the new OE-style water pump. To get everything working in harmony with tons of style, a Vintage Air Front Runner serpentine belt system, complete with a Vintage Air AC compressor, was bolted on to the front of the engine. When you've taken an engine to the next level like Tom has, you can't just not prep the tranny to take some abuse, so he ditched the old Turbo 350 and dropped in a Bowtie Overdrive Level 2 700R4 that was built for the occasional exhibition of excess power.

With the drivetrain mostly complete, Tom decided to get to work on the chassis and suspension. Being that he was working with a '61, Tom had to contend with the early C-10 torsion bar front end. Rather than going the more popular route of swapping out the torsion bar cross member with a coil spring cross member from a later C-10, Tom installed a complete Scott's Hot Rods IFS with airbag mounts, which also included a steering rack (which he connected to an ididit column). The rear suspension was set up with Classic Performance Products' tubular trailing arms, and Slam Specialties airbags were bolted up front and in the rear alongside matched shock absorbers. An Accuair eLevel manifold assembly controls the air system, and a polished air tank is placed between two Viair compressors on a custom tubular rack in the bed.

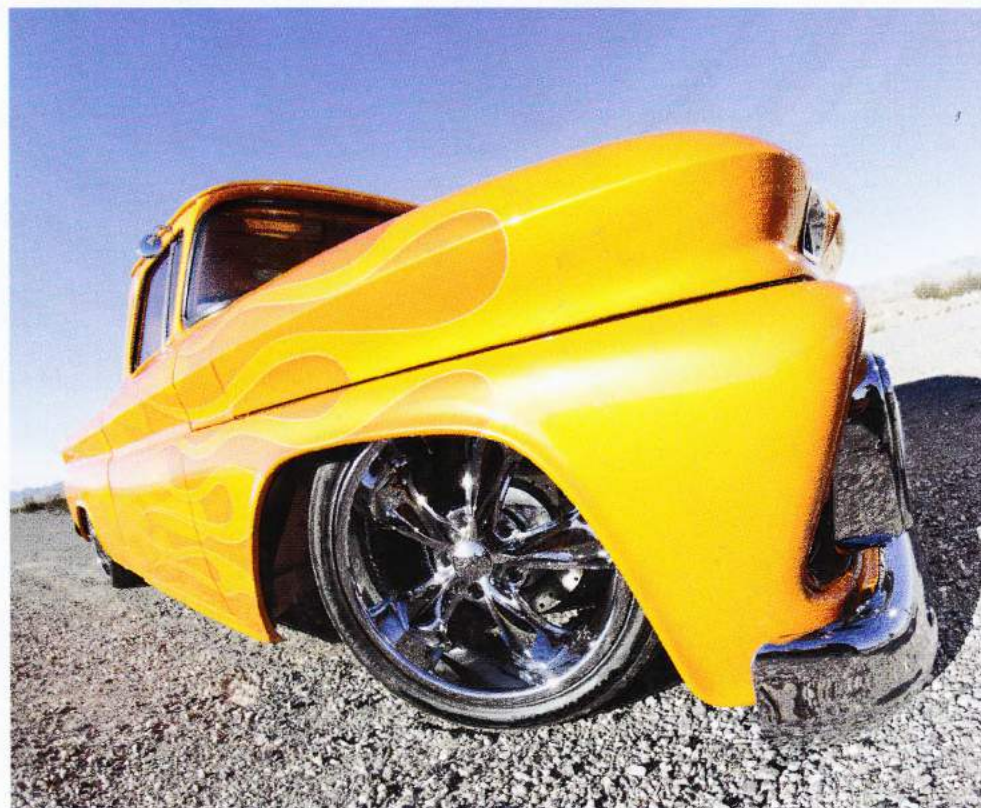
Behind the axle, an aluminum fuel cell was



bolted up to finally get the fumes out of the cabin. The rest of the frame remains essentially stock except for a couple of battery mounts for the dual Kinetic HC1800-PRO cells (one of which is dedicated to the air suspension), but received plenty of detailing and paint. Bringing this round of mods to a halt was a matching set of front and rear Wilwood disc brakes. Once the truck was ready to get off the jack stands, Tom bolted up a set of 18x8 and 20x10-inch Foose Legend wheels with some meaty Hankook rubber to meet the road.

Tom's next round of attack involved getting the cab and bed up to snuff, but this time around he enlisted the expertise of Brandon Knowles of Brand-X Customs in Everett, Washington. Brandon's been around the block when it comes to massaging metal, and there were a few things he wanted to tackle before moving

“WE CAN'T THINK OF A BETTER GIFT TO GIVE A TRUCK THAT HAS BEEN BY YOUR SIDE FOR SO LONG THAN A COMPLETE MAKEOVER AND GLAMOUR SHOTS, TO BOOT!”





on to the custom stuff. After years of daily use, there were a few panels that had seen better days, so Brandon started by replacing the rocker panels, cab corners and various sections of the cab floor, then fabricating new door bottoms to rid the truck of rotted metal.

With the housecleaning out of the way, Brandon could now get to decorating. The whole body was relieved of anything that stuck out, which included the door handles and the tailgate chains, and he welded in a roll pan, which was modified to sit cleanly behind the bumper and add a great look. Once every last inch was straight and block-sanded to perfection, Brandon rolled the truck into the paint booth and laid down some of House of Kolor's Tangelo Pearl paint, then taped off and sprayed a clean set of flames, which were striped by Dave Austin. Dave added pinstriping to the hood

and tailgate, which also received an awesome lettering job and gold leaf.

Before leaving Brand-X, Tom had the shop install power windows, door poppers and new stainless steel vent window frames and glass. Once the burgeoning C-10 was back home, Tom had new glass installed, as well as a brand-new oak bed kit with fresh stainless steel divider strips. The truck was getting ever closer to completion, but Tom still had to deliver the truck to one more shop to finish the build.

Matt Gibson of All City Convertible Tops and Customs in Kirkland, Washington, accepted the task of turning Tom's dreams into reality when it was finally time to tackle the interior. Matt took a 1991 Ford F-150 Lariat bench seat and cut it up to match the contours of the dashboard, even adding an aftermarket electric lumbar support before covering it in two-tone Eurolux leather. Before installing it, though, Matt had some other tricks up his sleeve, including adding tons of sound-deadening material and a custom-sewn German velour carpet set. He continued by fabricating a new center console, kick panels and an under-dash panel in which to mount the AC vents and ducts. Once that was accomplished, Matt took on the door panels, as well as a custom subwoofer enclosure behind the seat, where the factory gas tank once lived. The cab was ready for the final

THERE'S A LOT GOING ON UNDER THE HOOD OF TOM'S TRUCK, INCLUDING A REBUILT CHEVY 350, A VINTAGE AIR SERPENTINE SETUP AND A PRC ALUMINUM RADIATOR. OF COURSE, YOU CAN'T MISS THAT MENACING SPECTRE PERFORMANCE AIR CLEANER SETUP EITHER.



installation of a Pioneer touch-screen DVD/navigation head unit, Focal coaxial speakers, a JL Audio subwoofer and amplifier.

The following few months were dedicated to tying up loose ends and making sure that the truck could run as well as it looked. We were lucky enough to be able to catch up with Tom and his truck and arrange to shoot the truck right after its completion. We can't think of a better gift to give a truck that has been by your side for so long than a complete makeover and glamour shots, to boot!