

Styled My Way

Howard Tarnoff's 1949 Plymouth Special DeLuxe two-door

BY CHUCK VRANAS

For Howard Tarnoff of Medway, Massachusetts, the fever for a new bicycle during the summer of '59 led him to take on a side job at his Dad's Rambler dealership in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, washing used cars. Being immersed in the late-'50s automotive culture at 10 years old laid the groundwork for his current condition.

He worked on Saturdays, which was the day the service area was closed. The mechanics who punched the clock during the week were able to use the work area on Saturday to wrench on their own cars. While he would hustle in the wash bay, the older guys would be working on their hopped-up roadsters and coupes which ruled the local streets.

Now you'd think that Howard would have attached a fascination to a nasty chopped coupe or a sinfully channeled

Deuce roadster. Not so—Howard's "fire" was a '49 Plymouth coupe running a hot cammed inline six. With dual carbs and an exhaust note that sounded like nothing else it was the coolest car he had ever seen or heard.

Moving forward, Howard became involved in dirt track racing on the Wisconsin circuit and eventually wound up owning his own used car business. He later merged his skills into the software industry, married, and had a family, while still managing to own quite a few cool rides. It wasn't until he relocated to Massachusetts that he got the urge to finally build the car that never left his memories. Howard soon found out that '49 Plymouth coupes weren't as easy to come across as he thought and, after years of searching, he finally located a mint two-owner car on eBay in 2003. With 34,000 miles on the odometer, it would be the perfect base to work from.

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Once the car was delivered, he wasted no time in laying down the miles in it for the first year as he began scouring swap meets and online ads for the various key parts to start the build. In his mind he had built the car hundreds of times since he was in his teens and, with the support of good friends Sam Memmolo and Mickey Lauria as sounding boards, they gave him the positive reinforcement needed to get many of his ideas dialed in.

His first stop led him to Lenny Schaeffer at Chop-Shop Customs in Woburn, Massachusetts, to begin the transformation on the body and chassis. Getting the right stance for the car was a key element for its look and the team at Chop-Shop Customs began by updating the front end with 3-inch dropped spindles from Fatman (combined with fresh springs from Eaton) while also relocating the shock mounts. Out back fresh parallel leaf springs from Posies (along with new tube shocks) gave the car just the right rake. To make sure the coupe would have more than enough braking power, 11-inch discs were added at the corners. Inside they installed a tidy set of pedals from Kugel Komponenten that also incorporates the hidden master cylinder.

Chop-Shop Customs' talented team began the sheetmetal mods on the body by filling the seams of the front fenders. Other mods include the molding of the rear fenders, and benching the headlights, taillights, and antenna. Before the

welder was shut down, they also shaved the body, dumped the parking lights, and filled the license plate recess on the trunk lid. The team then filled and smoothed the chassis.

When it came to the drivetrain Howard looked to George Asche of Oil City, Pennsylvania, to prepare the block and internals, by bumping the original 217ci base to 230ci. This would allow for the installation of Arias 10:1 slug's along with a '52 Dodge truck crank and rods, which would be complemented by a cam and finned aluminum head from Edgy. Once all of the parts were delivered to Xtreme in Slatersville, Rhode Island, it was time for Richard Desautels to start the assembly of the little powerhouse. For induction and spark, a vintage Edmunds two-pot intake was used with a pair of Carter-Weber carbs from Langdon's Stovebolts, who also provided the unique HEI distributor. Dumping the spent gasses through a Fenton split-header to a custom fabricated 2-inch exhaust with electric cutouts controlled by the original radio's volume control shows just a hint of the trickery the team at Xtreme infused into the car.

Richard then rebuilt a '52 DeSoto three-speed manual transmission with R10 overdrive, which links to a Currie 9-inch Ford rear end via a custom driveshaft with an '89 Toyota slip-joint. With the stout little 300-horsepower jetpack in place, Todd Lewis (owner of Xtreme) and his team got busy to prepare the body of the car for its final trip to



To capture the sounds still hanging in his head since '59, Howard decided to keep the original six-banger in place and give it a serious boost in the performance department. Punched to 230ci, the engine was treated to an Edgy finned aluminum head and cam, Arias slugs, and a vintage Edmunds two-pot manifold topped with a pair of Carter-Weber carbs. Combined with a custom cutout exhaust by Xtreme, the car sounds just plain wicked when wide open.



Its all in the details and the team at Xtreme treated the stock dash and steering wheel to Alsa soft-feel paint while also accenting the dash with burl wood. Adding plenty of comfort to the mix, Fred Carello stitched up a winning combination of dark blue and garnet vinyl with just enough dark blue square weave carpeting to make the interior stunning.



the spray booth. Xtreme blended a one-off medium blue pearl hue that master painter Ken LaFlemme laid down, bringing the car to life.

Turning the final corner, the Xtreme team began to design the interior by first breathing life into the stock dash using a burl wood insert combined with gauges from Classic, and just enough Alsa soft-feel paint on the dash and stock steering wheel. More trickery from Xtreme came by way of installing the customized air conditioning system from Hot Rod Air where the stock dash speaker grille would act as the outlet for the icy breeze. To handle the threads for the car, legendary stitcher Fred Carello of Warwick, Rhode Island, worked with the original seats and transformed the business office with a perfect combination of pleats and plush carpet to meld the richness of the exterior to the inside of the car. The finishing touch came from Rudy Desautels who brought the tunes to life with a near-invisible Sony head unit installed in the sun visor while hiding the killer Kicker 400 watt amp and related electronic goodies in the trunk. When it was all wrapped up, Howard took the reigns of the car and lit the fire rekindling the raucous sounds from the exhaust that he remembered as a kid, only this time he did it his way! **SR**



Shaved clean, with the addition of a frenched antenna, complimentary '39 Ford taillights, and tucked bumpers, the rear view of the coupe proves that the car is in a class of its own. Dual exhaust and a right-on rake give it just a touch of evil.

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FACTS & FIGURES

Howard Tarnoff
Medway, Massachusetts
1949 Plymouth Special Deluxe
2-Door Sedan

CHASSIS

Frame / Manufacturer	Stock / Plymouth
Wheelbase	118.5"
Modifications	Filled and smoothed by Chop-Shop Customs, Woburn, MA
Chassis plumbing	Stainless
Rear end / Ratio	9" Ford by Currie (Anaheim, CA) 3.25:1
Rear suspension	Posies (Hummelstown, PA) parallel leaf with tube-style shocks
Rear brakes	'03 Ford Explorer 11" disc
Front suspension	Fatman (Charlotte, NC) 3" dro spindles with Eaton (Detroit, Michigan) coil springs, and relocated tube-style shocks
Front brakes	'78 Camaro 11" disc
Master cylinder	Kugel Komponenten (La Habra, CA) under dash
Wheel covers	'59 Dodge Lancer, modified
Wheel make, size	Wheel Vintiques (Fresno, CA) steelie, 15 x 6
Tire make, size	BFGoodrich (Greenville, SC) Silvertown P215/70R-15
Other chassis items	Custom front antiroll bar with neoprene bushings by Xtreme (Slatersville, RI)

ENGINE

Make	'49 Plymouth
Displacement	230ci (217ci block bored, 100 over)
Machining / Assembly	George Asche, Oil City, PA / Richard Desautels at Xtreme
Crankshaft	'52 Dodge 230ci truck
Rods	'52 Dodge 230ci truck
Pistons	Arias (Gardena, CA) 10:1
Camshaft	Edgy (Santa Rosa, CA)
Alternator	GM
Head	Edgy, finned aluminum
Valves / Springs	Manly (Lakewood, NJ) stainless steel
Manifold / Induction	Vintage Edmunds / Dual Carter Weber
Ignition / Wires	Langdon's Stovebolts (Utica, MA) HEI / stock
Headers	Fenton
Exhaust / Mufflers	2" with electric cutout's by Xtreme / Smithy's
Other engine facts	Balanced, bored, & blueprinted. O'Brien Truckers (Charlton, MA) air cleaner

TRANSMISSION

Make	'52 DeSoto 3-speed manual with R10 Overdrive
Clutch disc	Centerforce (Prescott, AZ)
Pressure plate	Custom by Portland Transmission (Providence, RI)
Shifter	Stock on column
Trans mods	2nd gear from '40 Chrysler fitted
Driveshaft	Custom by Xtreme with '89 Toy slip joint built in
Other Trans Facts	Rebuilt by Richard Desautels at Xtreme

BODY

Body style / Material	2-dr sedan / steel
Body manufacturer	Plymouth
Hood	shaved
Bodywork	Initial by Chop-Shop Customs, final by Xtreme
Paint type / Color	PPG / custom blue pearl by Xtreme
Painter	Ken LaFlemme at Xtreme
Headlights / Taillights	AutoNik / '39 Ford
Outside mirror	LimeWorks (Whittier, CA)
Bumpers	stock, tucked front and rear

INTERIOR

Dashboard	Stock with Alsa (Vernon, CA) soft-feel paint by Xtreme
Insert / Gauges	Burl wood by Xtreme / Classic Instruments (Boyer City, MI)
Stereo / Speakers	Sony / Kicker, Pioneer
Air conditioning	Hot Rod Air (Selma, TX)
Insulation	Dynamat (Hamilton, OH)
Wiring	American Autowire (Bellmawr, NJ) / Skip Radio (Ayer, MA)
Steering wheel	Stock with Alsa soft-feel paint by Xtreme
Upholsterer	Fred Carello (Warwick, RI)
Material / Color	Vinyl / dark blue and garnet
Carpet	Mercedes Benz dark blue square weave
Seatbelts	Juliano's (Ellington, CT)
Other interior items	Power windows and custom Sony head unit installed into sun-visor with Kicker 400 watt amp and 10-CD changer in trunk by Rudy Desautels at Xtreme