

PROBLEM CHILD

OUR KIND OF PROBLEM



by Louie Mayall

Keith Conifer out of Flushing, Michigan, comes from a family of rodders and he always loved the looks of both early roadster pickups and '40 Fords. Those thoughts hid away in the back of Keith's mind until he saw a clean '40 Ford pickup sitting in the swap meet at the Nationals near a '34 roadster. Once the vision of a '40 Ford roadster pickup with a DuVall windshield entered Keith's mind, he had a problem. He couldn't help but to build the rod. He ultimately drug home a very clean '40 Ford pickup and started working on the rod for the next ten years. Keith, of course, was detoured once or twice with his full life, that included wife (Kim) and kids (Dan, Karen, Sarah), but it was his dogged pursuit of the perfect blending of the two styles that took so long. We think the results speak for them-

selves.

The original plan was to cut the top off and massage a DuVall windshield into place. As soon as the top came off it was obvious that the belt line, hood line and bed line didn't flow into each other at all. The solution was to raise the belt line up to the bodyline that was switched to a single level. The door tops were then rolled to match the contour of the DuVall shaped cowl that also matched the hood. The cab was channeled 1 inch and the bed was raised 1 inch to get the lines perfect. Keith is 6 foot 1 inch so he lengthened the cab 5 inches, which made him shorten the bed 9 inches to keep the proportions just right. After all that cutting, Keith realized the stock hood was now kind

of chunky so it was pie-sectioned 1 inch in the rear to 2 inches in the front. Then while filling up all the extra holes (like door handles and hinges), Keith got to looking and saw that some radiused wheel wheels would just perfect the look. The '40 pickup headlight rings just didn't cut it, so a set of Bob Drake-lit '39 Ford units were installed.

The chassis holding up the goodness that Keith put into the body had to be equally great. The stock perimeter frame was boxed and beefed up. A Heids' Mustang II IFS





with tubular-control A-arms, a Flaming River rack and pinion and RideTech airbags were installed. The rear suspension of choice is a Ford 8-inch riding on parallel leaves with airbag helpers. Keith may have been inspired by Ford stylings on the outside, but he'd been dreaming of a 327ci small-block Chevy wearing double-bump 202 heads, dual quads and ground-smooth Ram horns since high school and that's what he got. He backed up a '63 327 with a Turbo 350 and topped it with a Keith-fabricated air cleaner designed to look like Don Prudhomme's dragster from 1962. The car was then finished off with 15/16-inch American Salt Flats and an owner-sprayed Washington Blue paint job.

Keith took care of the metalwork inside while mom, Karen, did the stitching. The new metal continues on through to the interior with sweet door moldings flowing smoothly into the Auburn-styled dash that houses Stewart Warner gauges in an engine-turned panel, an ididit column on a custom hanger and the original '40

Ford steering wheel. The rest of the interior is roadster simple, with two pedals, a simple tan pleated leatherette bench seat and a ridiculously long shifter. That's it and that's all you really need. The last step was Keith wiring up the '40 with a Ron Francis kit.

Few rods change our perceptions of what a street rod can be. One of the coolest parts of our hobby is despite the millions of dollars professional builders earn every year, at least 15 to 20 percent of rods that are radical come out of home garages across the country. Many of the brilliant homebuilt rods don't really match the pros' quality, but Keith's ride really steps it up a bunch. In many ways, it reminds me of a Brizio roadster (my highest roadster compliment). We thank Keith not only for having the guts to do and redo what his mind saw, but also for putting it all together so nicely that we were inspired.

