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Slonaker
Award

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BONNEVILLE
RECORD!



THIS ONE-OFF 1936 WILLYS PICKUP IS A...

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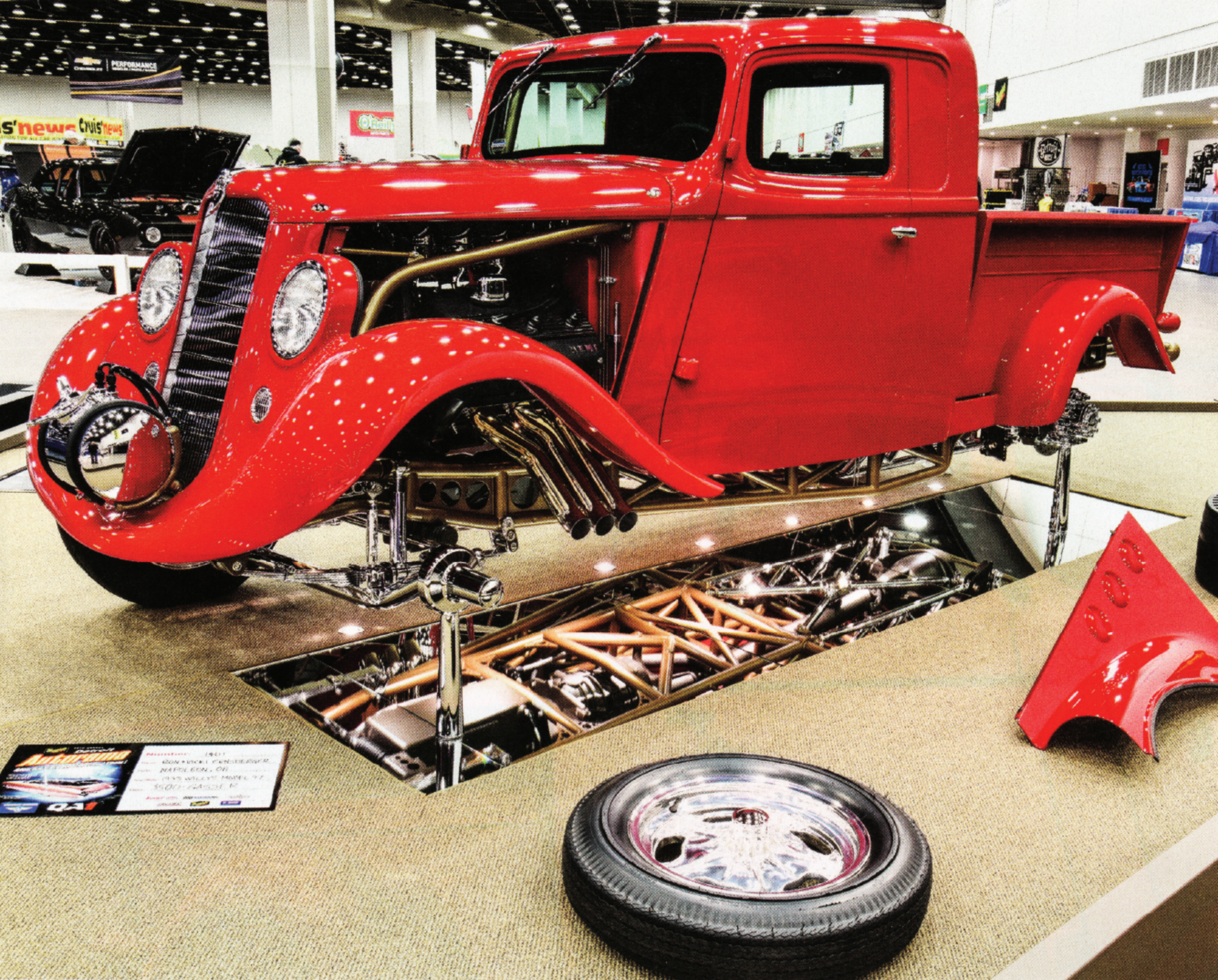
HOT ROD WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

RARE X6

Scratch-built 1936 Willys Runs a Rare 800hp V6 Hemi



✉ Tim Bernsau 📷 Jeremy Cliff



RARE X 6

The big news at the Grand National Roadster Show (GNRS) in January was the revamped Slonaker Award. Named for the man who established the GNRS back in 1949, the Al Slonaker Memorial Award has been presented to the professionally judged best non-roadster at the GNRS ever since 1974. Previously, this prestigious award hasn't received as much attention as the America's Most Beautiful Roadster (AMBR) award, but with a new trophy, new sponsor, and a big cash prize, that's changing.

Like the AMBR award, the Slonaker Award involves a regular-sized trophy presented to the winner, and a larger perpetual award that will feature the names of all winners. Automotive Racing Products is the new sponsor of AMBR and the Slonaker Award. Both awards now include a prize purse of \$12,500.

The Willy Wins

The first vehicle to claim the new trophy is this extraordinary 1936 Willys pickup, owned by Ron and Vicki Ernsberger from Napoleon, Ohio. The truck was built by Brian Limberg and the team at The Tin Man's Garage in Sycamore, Illinois.

Ron has been immersed in hot rodding since he was a grade school kid mowing lawns to earn enough money for the newest issues of *HOT ROD*, *Car Craft*, and *Rod & Custom*. Reading hot rod



RARE X 6

mags evolved into racing hot rods—and Ron has owned and raced a few. He drove his 1949 Hudson at Bonneville, earning a spot in the 150 MPH Club. His 1938 Willys pickup (one of many Willys in his corral) has raced at the historic Famoso Raceway in Bakersfield, California. He bought the 1936 Model 77 truck in 2002 from Bill Fowler, another lifelong rodder and gasser aficionado out of Southern California. Ron says the pickup started out as a U.S. Post Office delivery truck—but fate had more exciting plans for it. Once Ron got the truck back to Ohio, he called Brian Limberg at The Tin Man's Garage.

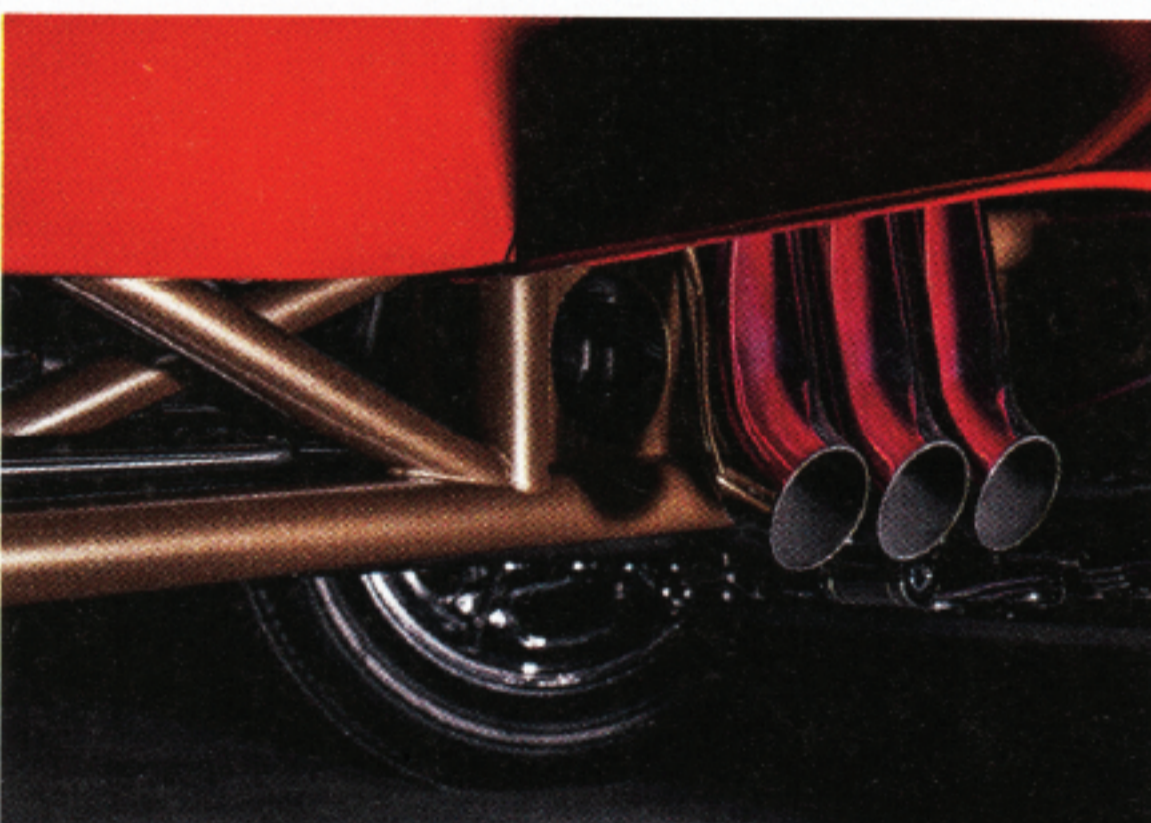
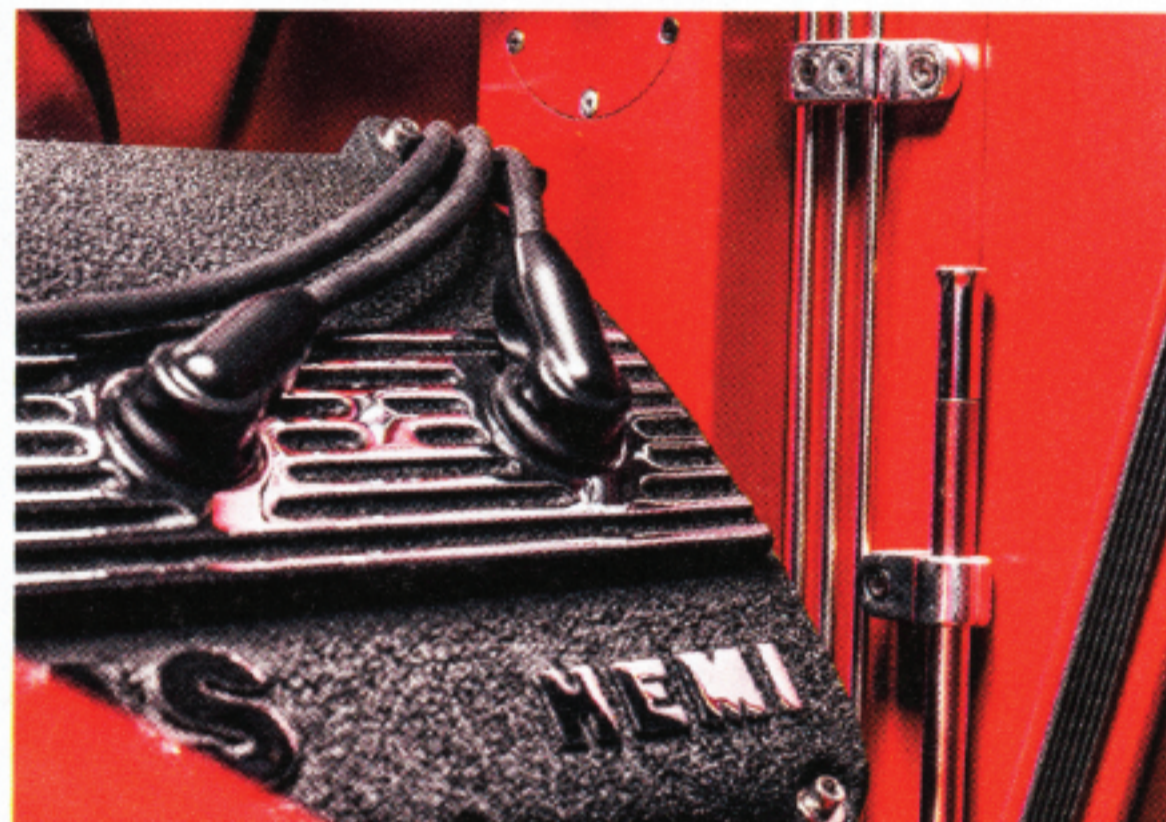
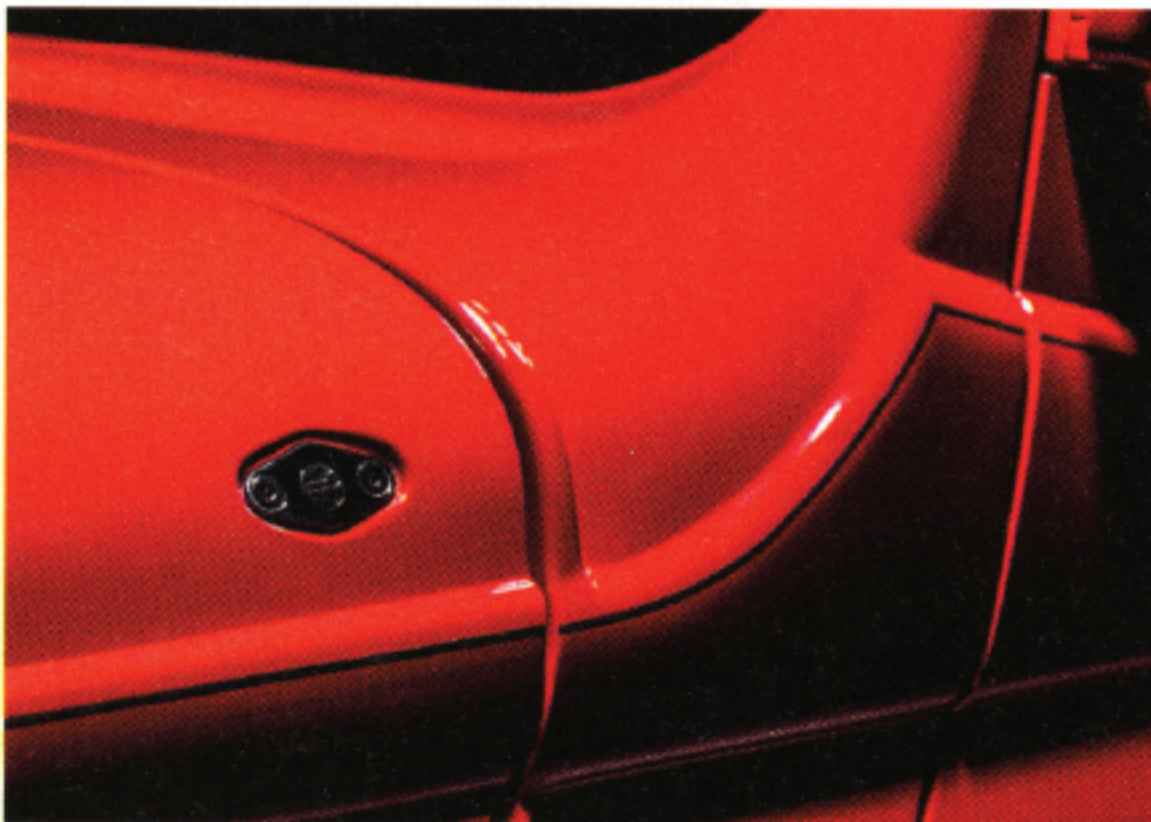
"I bought a 1941 Willys pickup from Brian that a customer of his had given up on," Ron told us. "It is a very impressive work of art, so I wanted Brian to do the restoration on this one, as well." According to Ron, the project was envisioned as a "one-off example of a great traditional hot rod truck, only in an up-to-date format."

When the truck was delivered to Tin Man's Garage, there wasn't much about it to support Ron's optimistic vision. "The truck was in terrible condition," Brian remembers. "It was built on a mail-truck chassis with right-hand drive. It was completely hacked together with a torch and arc welder, with random pieces of metal welded everywhere for brackets. We scrapped the entire chassis."

All-New Chassis

"The design concept for the chassis was to scale everything up to keep the proportions looking correct with all the components," Brian explained. The custom frame is constructed of 0.083-inch chromoly tube. "All the bracketry was designed with a minimalist approach to keep it all looking low-key, yet very strong."

Wheel and tire choice evokes '60s-era drag cars. The spindle-mount 16-inch Halibrand magnesium wheels in front roll on



skinny bias-ply Firestones. At the rear, Hurst pie crust cheater slicks on 16x12 Halibrands pack the fenders.

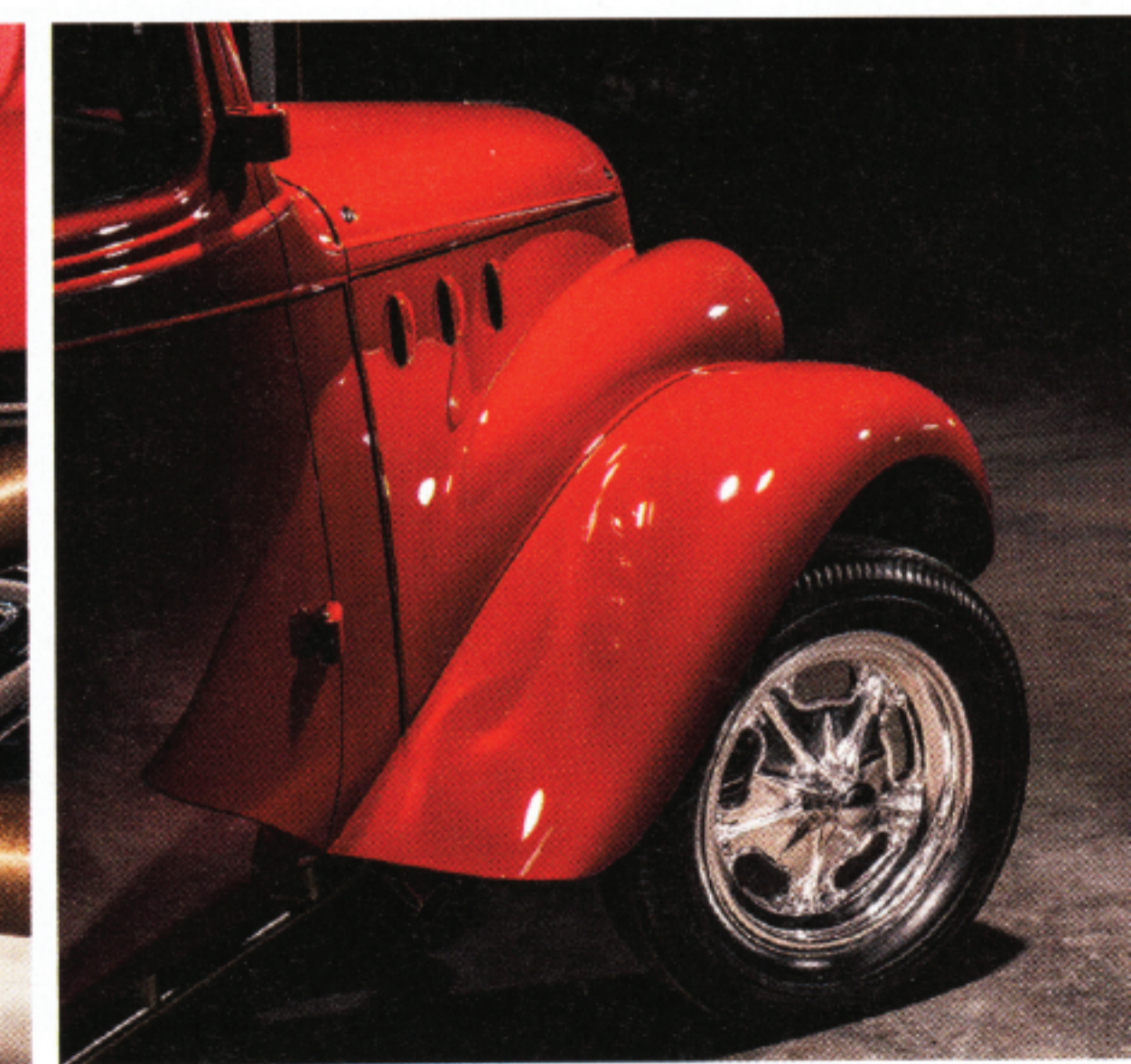
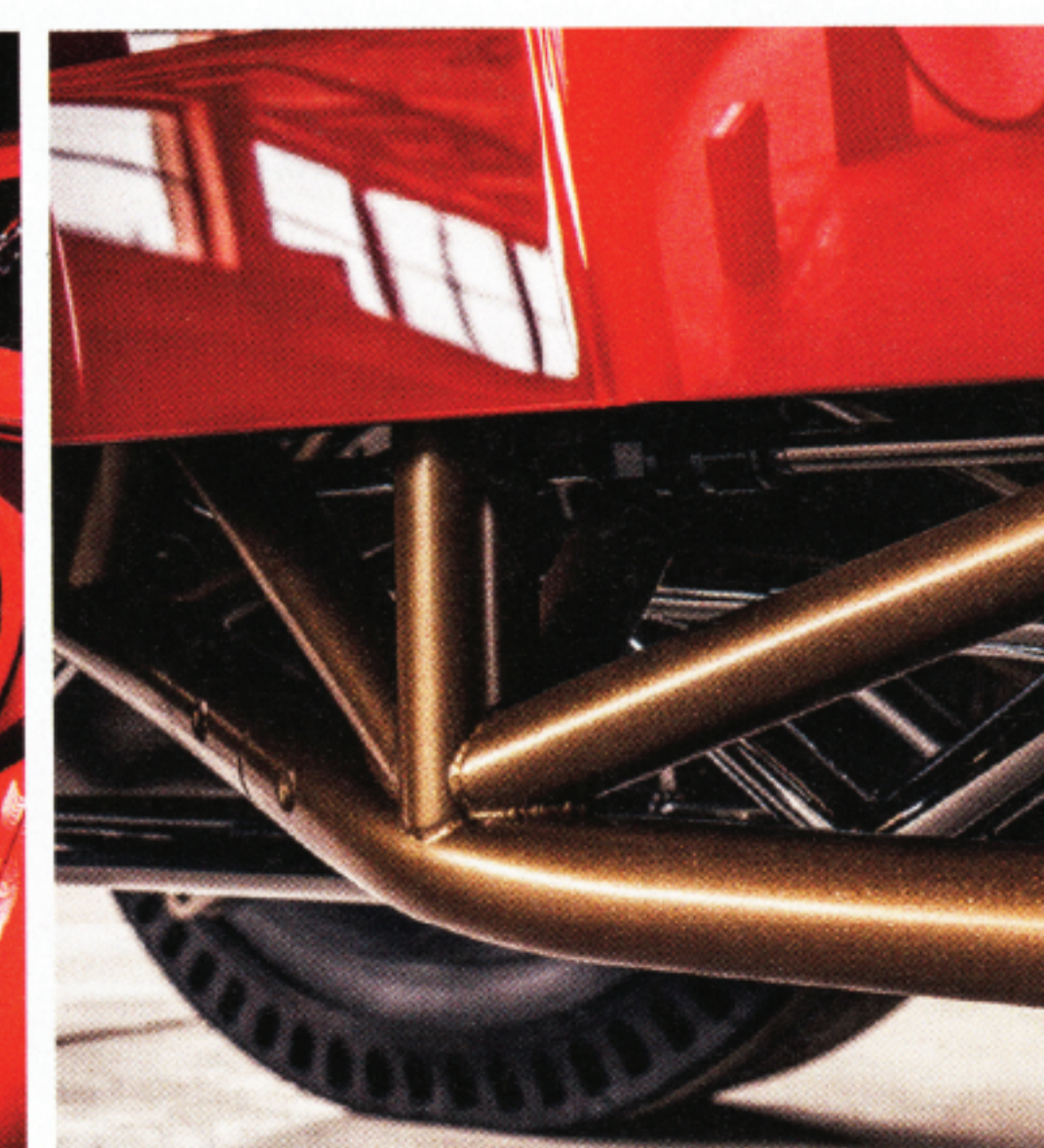
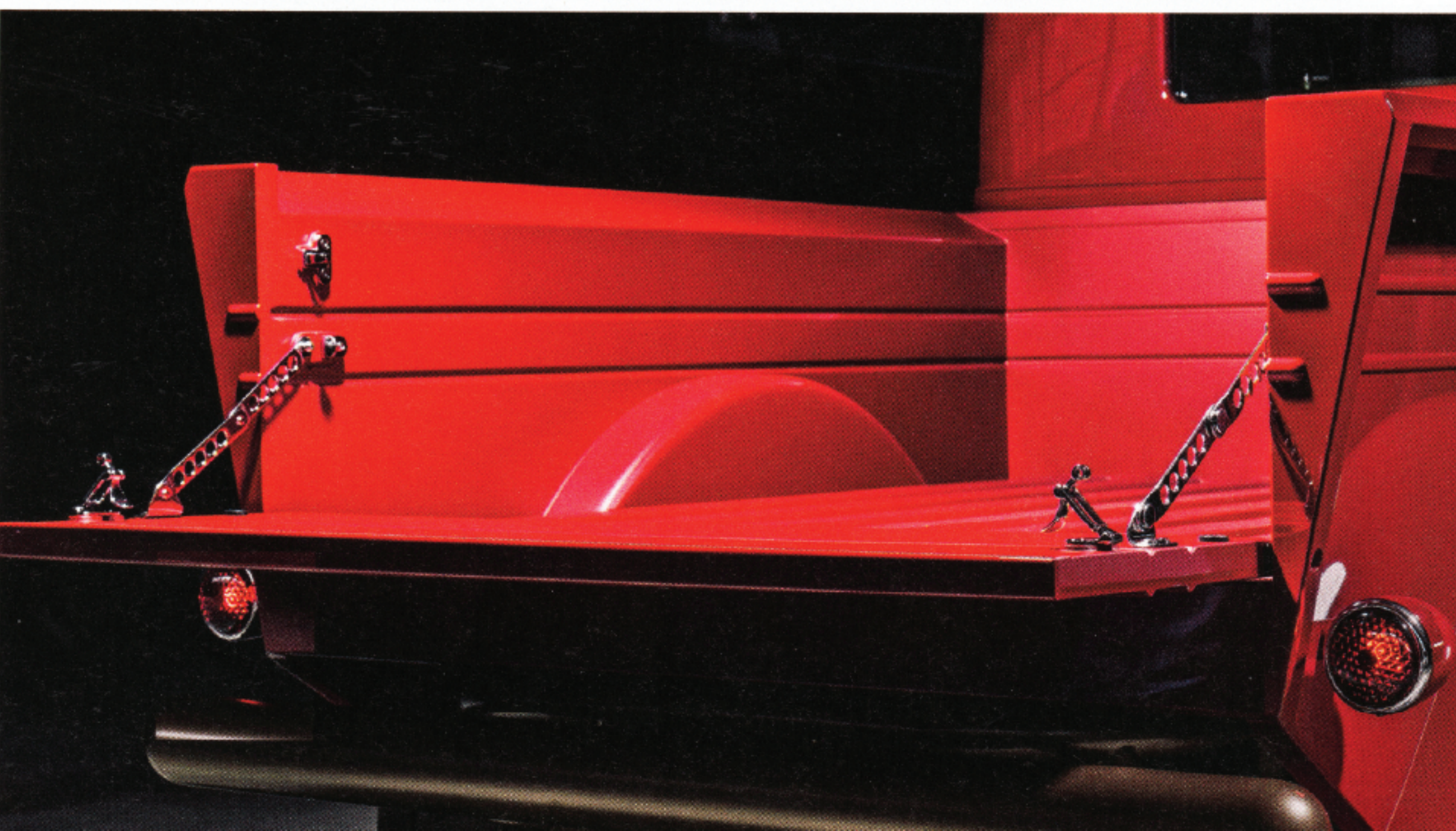
Building a Body From Fresh Steel

Because of the terrible condition of the sheetmetal, a big percentage of the body had to be built from scratch. "I wanted to make the cab and sheetmetal look as if it could have come from the factory—plucked off an original chassis and put on a wild tube chassis that was possibly built by some aviation nutjob," Limberg told us. "We reworked the body and built so much from scratch to make the lines more elegant than Willys ever would have considered. The roof was an opening filled with chicken wire, and the rear window looked like it was stolen from a school bus. There is probably only 35 percent of the original sheetmetal remaining. We redesigned it to give it a modern look while still trying to make it appear original to the untrained eye."

When the repairs and modifications were complete, The Refinery by Adam Krause in Manteno, Illinois, took over to complete the final bodywork and spray the Rosso Mugello Ferrari red paint.

Rare Arias V6 Hemi Engine

The same color, but with a satin finish, continues in the engine compartment. The 498ci Arias V6 Hemi is one of only five ever



RARE X6

manufactured, Brian told us. "Nick Arias Jr. cut down one of his blocks and created a handful of these aluminum Hemis. Nick's experience building engines and developing pistons led to an extremely unique and powerful package. The truck is built around this engine, which was machined and assembled by Missile Engineered racing components. It is wider from valve cover to valve cover than it is long, which led to a ton of fabricated parts to get everything to fit right and be serviceable." The original Hilborn mechanical injection intake was modified for electronic fuel injection. TMG fabricated zoomie-style headers from 2½-inch tubing. The 800hp Hemi is backed by a Tremec five-speed sending torque to the 4.11-gear Dana 70 full-floater rearend.

Modern Meets Classic

The original steel dash was converted from its early days as a right-hand-drive mail truck and reworked with custom switches designed by Tin Man's Garage and CNC machined center knobs. Classic Instruments Hot Rod series gauges fit the retro style while bringing it into the modern day. The Schroeder Interior steering wheel adds Sprint-car flavor. At Schober's Custom Hot Rod Interiors in Norwalk, Illinois, the custom seat was built and upholstered in diamond stitched leather. The same upholstery treatment was applied to the door and kick panels. The cab is protected by a TMG-fabricated rollcage.

Five weeks after winning the Al Slonaker Memorial Award at the 2020 Grand National Roadster Show, the incredible scratch-built 1936 Willys pickup appeared at the Detroit Autorama. Because the truck had already been shown, it was ineligible for Detroit's Ridler Award, but neither Ron Ernsberger nor Brian Limberg minded, as long as they could display the Willys in a front-and-center spot only a few paces from the Ridler contenders, with the billet Slonaker trophy displayed alongside it. 